

# CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

FILM | TELEVISION | RADIO | DIGITAL MEDIA

The Beaverton  
is ready for  
its national  
spotlight

Tallboyz  
fast-track  
from stage  
to screen

Brander  
graduates to  
head writer at  
22 Minutes



## The Comedy Issue

Meet the minds behind  
the funniest shows  
in Canadian TV



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**Publisher** Maureen Parker

**Editor** Tom Villemaire  
[t.villemaire@wgc.ca](mailto:t.villemaire@wgc.ca)

**Director of Communications**  
Lana Castleman

**Editorial Advisory Board**

Michael Amo  
Michael MacLennan  
Susin Nielsen  
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**President** Dennis Heaton (Pacific)

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Anne-Marie Perrotta (Quebec)  
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**Design** Studio Ours

**Cover Photo:** Dan Bannister

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## Welcome to the comedy issue

So, this is the comedy issue (our first!), in case the headline didn't give it away.

What you might notice, however, is that two shows aren't featured: *Baroness von Sketch Show* and *Schitt's Creek*. "How could we ignore these two hugely successful comedy series?" you might ask. Well, I could say, "It seemed the Canadian thing to do."

Of course, I'd be wrong. We tried to line up both shows for features in this issue, but sadly, scheduling time with the creators of these hit shows in time to meet our production deadlines wasn't possible. So, it was a success thing, not a Canadian one. And that's a great thing.

Thankfully, there is no shortage of excellent Canadian comedy to explore, which you'll discover in the following pages.

And that made me think of the heritage the current kings, queens and baronesses of Canadian comedy have built on. I then thought it'd be fun to revisit some past successes, and so I offer my take on the top three moments from Canadian comedy's past.

No list would be complete without recognizing *Kids in the Hall's* the Headcrusher. Mark McKinney's recurring character, Mr. Tyzik, found a spot across the series' five seasons and 100 episodes. He would sit and watch as "flatheads" walked by on their way about their lives, peering between his thumb and forefinger as he decided which ones deserved his signature move. He would then squeeze his fingers together as he triumphantly exclaimed, "I crush your head." It's a move still copied today. (At least by this editor.)

Stepping back to the decade before that, the 1980s had *Second City Television* or *SCTV*. Like *KITH*, the show had dozens of hilarious recurring character sketches. But my all-time favourite is Tex and Edna Boyle's Curio and Organ Emporium (or Prairie Warehouse). They rolled out as a series of cheesy faux commercials featuring Andrea Martin and Dave Thomas as the title characters. Tex and Edna were awesome in cowboy hats and western suits and dresses. "We'll put the song back in your heart and a budgie in your cage," Edna would say. And of course, she was referring to the Shetland budgies, the strongest budgies in the world, so you can ride them. (*SCTV* ran in varying formats for 135 episodes from 1976 until 1984.)

Finally and more recently, there's *Trailer Park Boys*. Rush's Alex Lifeson ends up wearing Ricky's clothes at one point, which is really the only thing you need, if you know the characters. Ricky's shirts are pretty amazing considering he can't afford rent at the trailer park and rarely has a real job. Even so, Lifeson wants his own clothes back and works out a deal where he gets them, and Bubbles not only gets to be Lifeson's guitar tech, but has a jam session with Lifeson as well. It's grand.

The great thing is, that if I did this list next week, it might be completely different. *SCTV's* 5 Neat Guys, Bob and Doug McKenzie, Monster Horror Chiller Theatre and others could easily be in there. And then there's *KITH's* King of Empty Promises, Chicken Lady, Dr. Seuss Bible... Yeah. We may lack heat in winter, but I could argue Canada's comedy talent keeps us warm through laughter.

— Tom Villemaire

### Fall 2019

**Cameron Archer** runs the Canadian TV and media site Gloryosky ([www.gloryosky.ca](http://www.gloryosky.ca)) and is also a freelance arts and media writer. He currently lives in Eastern Ontario.

**Dan Bannister** is an award-winning portrait, fashion and lifestyle photographer, who splits his time between Toronto and New York. His work has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *The New York Times* and more.

**Mark Dillon** is a Toronto-based freelance journalist and former editor of *Playback* magazine. He is author of the award-winning *Fifty Sides of the Beach Boys*.

**Matthew Hays** is a Montreal-based writer, author and university and college instructor. His articles have appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *The New York Times*, *Maclean's*, *Toronto Star* and many others. His book, *The View from Here: Conversations with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers* (Arsenal Pulp), won a 2008 Lambda Literary Award.

**Li Robbins** is a freelance writer and editor whose work has appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *The Walrus*, *Toronto Life* and on *CBC.ca* among other publications and websites.

**Diane Wild** is a Vancouver-based writer, editor and health care communicator who founded *TV-eh?* website and gallivants to work on the Olympics every couple of years.



## The carrot and the stick

**Remember how excited everyone was when George Lucas announced a series of Star Wars prequels? Remember our giddiness? Remember how confused we all were when the opening crawl for that first film started with these words: "Turmoil has engulfed the Galactic Republic. The taxation of trade routes to outlying star systems is in dispute."**

If *Star Wars: Episode One – The Phantom Menace* taught us anything — besides the danger of having two subtitles — it's that no one, not even the most revered space opera of all time, can make government policy exciting.

But policy, specifically Canadian cultural policy, is something we writers are always talking about, even if we don't think we're talking about it. That's because any show that is considered "CanCon" — series produced by privately owned Canadian Broadcasters to fulfill their CRTC-mandated annual PNI (Programs of National Interest) spend and retain their broadcast licenses — exists because of Canadian cultural and broadcast policy.

(Now, keep in mind that when I refer to broadcasters, here, it's the corporate entity and not the creative executives who writers engage with to ultimately produce a TV series.)

To put it bluntly, the broadcasters in our country don't like making CanCon. How can I say that? Because the broadcasters say that implicitly every time their licenses are up for renewal and they ask for reductions in their PNI spend. In fact, as far as they are concerned, producing series based on your beautifully nuanced pilot script is an obligation. It's a cost of doing business that they would rather do without.

To the Canadian private broadcaster, we are the stick. We

are more expensive to produce than American content is to buy. We allegedly don't generate nearly as much advertising revenue. And most importantly, so they contend, nobody likes us.

But here's the thing, that's not true. I can guarantee the idea that nobody likes us is just flat-out wrong. You know how I know that? *Schitt's Creek*. *Orphan Black*. *Letterkenny*. *Wynnona Earp*. *Anne with an "E."* *Slings & Arrows*. All of these shows — and many more — are national and international successes, finding audiences and/or critical acclaim.

I can already hear some of you saying, "Sure, Dennis, those are the hits, but what about the misses we've produced? Don't you see that we've produced more misses than hits?"

To that point, I have only one response: "Uh, yeah." There is a formula to making successful television, and it's actually really simple. It's volume — that's it.

Quantity creates quality. That's why the cream rises to the top. That's why we have to look for the diamonds in the rough. No one knows which show is going to hit and which is going to miss. It's all luck-of-the-draw, timing, and every other "hindsight is 20/20" explanation for why a show finds its people.

Our Canadian cultural policy needs to encourage volume production. It's how we'll make enough programs to

provide a training ground for future generations of Canadian storytellers. It's how we'll find out what sticks and what doesn't.

The CMF Early Stage Development Program is an important step in the right direction. Thanks to this program, pilot scripts that might never have seen the light of day will get a chance to be developed into pitchable projects. Will they all succeed? Of course not. And that's the point.

There were complaints at the outset that the market would be flooded with scripts. Great! Flood the market! Give producers and broadcasters a whole swath of projects to choose from. Then flood the airwaves with shows. And when the audience decides which shows they want to invest their time in, we keep making them and go back to the drawing board for new ones.

We need cultural policy that encourages increased development and production. Maybe it's with longer license terms for broadcasters that promise to spend more than their required PNI, or will make more airtime available to CanCon in their primetime windows. That's for Ottawa to sort out with industry stakeholder input.

But one thing's for certain. We need Canadian cultural policy that makes CanCon the carrot, not the stick.

— Dennis Heaton

## WGC Members Take the Stage

WGC members have had a busy few months enjoying the spotlight, starting with our very own Writers Talking TV series. *Mary Kills People* co-showrunners Tassie Cameron and Marsha Greene reflected on the final season of the groundbreaking series with moderator Noelle Carbone in front of a sold-out crowd.

At Fan Expo Canada in August, “Creating hair-raising horror” was the name of the game as moderator James Hurst led *Slasher* creator Aaron Martin, *Van Helsing* EP Jackie May and *Slasher* writer JP Larocque through a frighteningly good discussion for more than 150 fans.

And in October, the Guild sponsored a ReelWorld Film Festival panel that featured members Aaron Bala (*Cardinal*), Vivian Lin (*Hudson & Rex*) and Alejandro Alcoba (*Another Life*) dishing on “How Writers & Agents Build A Strong Relationship” along with agent Sohrab Merchant.

Finally, in November the WGC is sponsoring a script reading and conversation around member Yung Chang’s feature film, *Eggplant*. Vivian Lin will be joining him as moderator to lead a discussion about the script-writing process of the film along with a live script reading.



Noelle Carbone (L), talks TV with Tassie Cameron and Marsha Greene (R)

## New IPA Available Online

The Guild closed a successful round of bargaining with the CMPA at the end of May. Our members voted to ratify the new IPA that went into effect July 1 and will expire on June 30, 2022. To recap, among the most significant changes to the agreement is the removal of the digital section in favour of platform neutrality — there is no longer a distinction in the agreement between high-budget digital series produced by SVODs (like Netflix) and similar series made for traditional broadcasters. Live action script fees will also see a 3% increase each year, for the next three years, while animation script fees get a 4% bump this year and a 5% one for each of the two following years.

Our freshly updated IPA (2019-2022) has all of these details and more. It is now available in the Collective Agreements section of our website ([wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)), along with updated rate sheets. If you want an old-school printed copy, please send an email request to [reception@wgc.ca](mailto:reception@wgc.ca).

## Writers, Buyers Mix it Up

The Guild held a Writer-Buyer Mixer at the end of September in downtown Toronto, the first initiative of its kind put together by the WGC Diversity Committee. Broadcasting and production executives from various companies — including Bell Media, CBC, CBC Gem, Corus Entertainment, eOne, Fresh TV, New Metric Media, Sinking

Ship Entertainment, Sphere Media Plus and Temple Street — met with 16 WGC members who self-identify as diverse.

In all, 91 eight-minute pitch meetings were held in just over 72 minutes, with pitches and pitchers expressing how valuable they found the experience. A success by all accounts!



A whole lot of meet-and-greets took place as attendees like (L-R) Jinder Oujla-Chalmers, Vivian Lin, CBC’s Karen Tsang & Nicole Mendes and Marsha Greene mingled



## Service Production vs. True CanCon

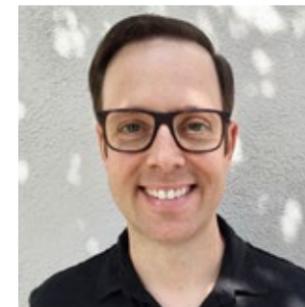
A few weeks ago, several Canadian media outlets were reporting that Netflix said it had exceeded its promised \$500-million spend on production in this country in just two years. It may be the case that Netflix has spent that money earmarked for productions in Canada. But we need to underscore the fact that a significant portion of that content spend has been on “foreign location and service” productions creatively driven from Hollywood that don’t tell Canadian stories and rarely, if ever, put Canadian screenwriters and directors in the top jobs.

Shows that dress up the streets of Toronto to look like Anytown U.S.A. just don’t qualify as true Canadian content — as much as it’s implied that they do.

Service production is thriving, thanks to healthy Canadian tax credits and a low dollar. What we’re missing are opportunities for our world-class talent to tell our stories. And now that the federal election is over, with parties holding the balance of power that have pledged to make OTTs contribute to the system from which they benefit, we’ll be advocating for those changes to be made sooner rather than later.

## Diversity Script of the Month 2019 Finalists

Created in 2018, the WGC Diversity Script of the Month initiative is designed to help emerging screenwriter members from diverse backgrounds move forward in their careers. Here are our remaining five finalists of 2019. Congratulations everyone!



### August

#### Ethan Banville

Ethan’s one-hour historical drama *Lady Luciano*, about a young mother who takes a second job on a cross-border train to earn money for her son’s medical treatments, won the committee over for August.



### June

#### Sara Beth Edwards

Her winning one-hour drama *impregnation* focuses on a young social worker who doesn’t want kids, but is pulled into an all-consuming case.



### September

#### Richard Young & Vas Saranga

The pair’s half-hour comedy *Kandu Attitude* finds American-born Arun Kandu begrudgingly recruiting his Indian immigrant parents to help him run his new artist talent agency.



### July

#### Carmine Pierre-Dufour

The committee selected Carmine’s one-hour family drama *Privileged* for July. She is currently working as a story editor on new CTV drama *Transplant*.



### November

#### Brier Sanderson

Her feature film script, *One Night*, closes out our list of finalists for 2019. ■

# From Prartfalls

In honour of our all-comedy issue, CSW lined up some of Canada's most successful comedy writers to identify the funniest scenes they've created and why they worked. And because comedy is the flipside of tragedy, we also got them to talk about the ones that fell flat or just never made it to the screen. So, read on. You'll laugh. You may even cry. But you'll definitely gain some great insights into the craft of making 'em laugh.

# to Flat Falls

By Diane Wild

*Our panel of comedy writers includes (from L to R) Jen Goodhue, Nelu Handa, Kevin White and Jeremy Woodcock*



### Catherine Reitman

(Creator/showrunner, *Workin' Moms*)

**Funniest scene:** I wrote a scene based on an experience I had in a Mommy & Me group in which there was great confusion over what words were acceptable to say in front of your child. The mothers said you couldn't use the c-word. They meant 'can't.' I misunderstood and said practically the same word with one different vowel. In real life, everybody moved on. In the scene I wrote, the characters continued to confuse words such as the n-word (no) and so on. I believe the scene works because it is not only relatable, but also has an inherent game set-up in its premise.

**The one that fell flat:** Scenes that make us scream with laughter in the writer's room on the day will fall flat. What cracks you up when you're sitting around a conference room table doesn't always have legs once grounded in the real-life world of the characters. The comedy should always come from the truth of the characters' reality.

**The one that got away:** Every season I flirt with a few ideas that excite me. Sometimes those ideas push the envelope in the right way. And sometimes those ideas are simply indulgent and an opportunity to flex as a writer. I've been lucky enough to not only have been protected from the indulgent moments, but also encouraged to explore the envelope.



### Jen Goodhue

(*Baroness von Sketch Show*,  
*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*)

**Funniest scene:** I wrote a sketch where a character insists that her guests relax at the cottage, but also gives them a set of rules that make it impossible to relax at any given time. It works because the premise is simple, brilliantly executed by the Baronesses, and it's based on how I behave at my own cottage. It's relatable. We've all met a controlling person who wants to be seen as easy going and fun. (If you've met me, this is especially true.)

**The one that fell flat:** I'd just finished *Second City* and one character I enjoyed performing was a sweet little seal. I'd pull a turtleneck over my head and drag myself around the stage. So, when I pitched the character for a TV show, I kept telling them, 'Trust me. This kills on stage!' After my costume-fitting I knew I was in trouble. I had failed to understand how a live performance doesn't always translate to TV. What's worse is, I was so confident it was going to work, I didn't listen to anyone's advice. Hubris!

**The one that got away:** I wrote a horror genre sketch about a person who brings donuts into the office. A woman refuses to eat one because she's off sugar and the donuts start following her from room to room, stalking her, taunting her. I liked it, but it's A LOT of production. Like, a lot. I think I'd written that donuts came out of the photocopier? Honestly, it was a short film. And it's definitely the most expensive sketch I've ever written.



### Gavin Crawford

(*The Gavin Crawford Show*,  
*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*)

**Funniest scene:** During *The Gavin Crawford Show*, we found this awful bowl-cut wig, so Kyle Tingley and I wrote a sketch about this unfortunate but plucky teenager running for class president solely because his mom told him to. It was just the right mix of painful and funny. My favourite line, delivered from inside a locker after he's been dragged away by bullies, was 'You never know, I could win. I mean, like, this is politics; it's not, like, a popularity contest.'

**The one that fell flat:** I wrote a monologue of this young gay character talking about Gwyneth Paltrow's privilege while ordering increasingly expensive cocktails. It came across as bitter and audiences were not on board, although that was in 2000 and I feel somewhat vindicated as I suspect it might work better now. Timing really is everything.

**The one that got away:** More than one episode of *Gavin Crawford's Wild Wild West*, which never happened due to a combo of budget cuts and risk-averse executives.



### Dan Redican

(*Four on the Floor*, *Sunnyside*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, *Kids in the Hall*)

**Funniest scene:** In a scene from *Four on the Floor*, I played a character who has been going into the same restaurant for years, always ordering the same meal, but when he asks to be served his 'regular,' no one knows what he's talking about. This scene worked as something we can all relate to — the desire to be remembered — but this small desire is elevated to a life-and-death obsession and becomes funny when we realize the absurdity of anyone demanding that people remember him.

**The one that fell flat:** I wrote a scene where a husband is shocked that his wife doesn't like her birthday gift, which is a soggy cardboard box filled with mouldering coal. 'You didn't like the bag of ants I gave you last year or the dry rot in a jar the year before. There's just no making you happy.' In my mind, the husband was the brunt of the comedy, but I suspect the audience thought I was making fun of the wife. Of course, the problem could also have been that the husband was too absurd for the audience to follow.

**The one that got away:** I wrote a scene for *Sunnyside* about a middle-aged woman who doesn't get service at a restaurant because of ageist waiters. She realizes she's completely invisible and ends up walking up to the cash register and robbing the restaurant. But a sketch designed to show the curse of ageism was nixed because the network refused to hire older actors.



### Kevin White

(Co-creator/Co-showrunner *Kim's Convenience*, *Dan For Mayor*, *Corner Gas*)

**Funniest scene:** One that comes to mind [for *Kim's Convenience*] is when Janet scolds her parents when she finds out they've been having regular sex in her roommate's water bed. Janet is normally pretty patient and respectful, but here she loses it on both her parents who know they are guilty and have nowhere to hide. The staging of it by director Renuka Jeyapalan also made the parent/child role-reversal that much funnier and apparent.

**The one that fell flat:** There was a cold open from this year that didn't come together as hoped. It featured Appa and a friend discussing painful medical procedures — kidney stones — when they are quickly upstaged by Umma talking about childbirth. A fun premise with good performances, but in the end, you could see it coming. It probably could have used a more surprising turn. Ins [Choi] and I blame the writers, who in this case, were us.

**The one that got away:** It's Appa's dark night of the soul. We imagined him sitting on the roof of the store smoking a single cigarette, contemplating his place in the universe, or at least on Queen Street, as the moon carved out his silvery silhouette. While it seemed a funny image, it's never translated into any kind of scene. It's pretty outside the show. But maybe ... season finale?

"I once performed a monologue I wrote as Malala Yousafzai to the wrong crowd."

- Nelu Handa



### Nelu Handa

(*JANN*, *Baroness von Sketch Show*, *The Beaverton*)

**Funniest scene:** My writing partner Amish Patel and I are working on our pilot, and we're pulling from our own experiences as first-generation Indian-Canadians. It's a scene with adult children explaining the world they live in to their unmoved immigrant parents. I think it'll appeal to the audience for its truth and nuances.

**The one that fell flat:** I once performed a monologue I wrote as Malala Yousafzai to the wrong crowd. Hot tip: Know your audience.

**The one that got away:** For *JANN*, I wrote a showdown in a spa between Jann Arden and Michael Bublé. I guess we couldn't do it because it was too hot for TV. And he wasn't available.



### Mark De Angelis

(*Bill & Sons Towing*, *The Ron James Show*, *Odd Squad*)

**Funniest scene:** In *Bill & Sons Towing*, the guys decide to make a 'progressive' bikini calendar featuring a range of body types. When a young amputee (played wonderfully by Courtney Gilmour) shows up, they don't quite know how to deal with it. I think the scene worked well because at its heart, it's about an awkward encounter, which is something everyone can relate to.

**The one that fell flat:** I wish there was a playbook that could tell you *why* things don't work, but every scene is a bit like a chemistry experiment. Obviously, you need great writing, but I've also seen things fall flat because the performances didn't quite hit the right tone, or the editing wasn't punchy enough, or because I took a network note and made all my nightmares come true.

**The one that got away:** I wanted to do a sketch based around an intense SWAT-team operation where silence must be maintained, and the captain forgets all the tactical hand signals. The sketch ended with pretty much every cop getting shot because the captain kept giving them the wrong hand signals. The week after I pitched it, two cops were shot by a sniper-like gunman during a shootout. And that was the end of that.



### Monica Heisey

(*Schitt's Creek*, *Baroness von Sketch Show*)

**Funniest scene:** I think 'Private Vagina', a sketch for *Baroness von Sketch Show* that I wrote with Meredith MacNeill, works largely because of factors beyond my control; it's filmed naturalistically and on location, and the acting is grounded — all four Baronesses are amazing in it, especially Aurora Browne as the pharmacist. She's saying ridiculous, vulgar things with such an imperious, calm demeanour, and then Mer is trying to keep it together as the Every Woman With A Yeast Infection. It doesn't spin off into some wild place, that's just how ridiculous it actually is to be a woman trying to buy some goddamn cream for an itchy vag.

**The one that fell flat:** I spent most of *Baroness von Sketch's* season three in the writing room plugging away at a sketch called 'Two Women Turn Into Trees While Waiting for Their Boyfriends to Stop Talking About Music.' I think a big problem was that distaste for conversations about music is not an especially widespread phenomenon. In general, spending that much time on a sketch is a waste, and I knew that. But I just kept trying. If you've got a clear premise, the writing should flow fairly easily because all you have to do is honour the premise, escalate it, maybe twist it at the end and you're out.

**The one that got away:** I really wanted Moira Rose to injure herself and spend an episode using one of those extendable reaching claws. This didn't work because, as I'm sure the rest of the room pointed out, it's what's known in the industry as 'just a funny image,' and 'absolutely not a storyline.'

PHOTOS OF KEVIN WHITE AND NELU HANDA: DAN BANNISTER



### Scott Montgomery

(*The Beaverton, Cavendish, Young Drunk Punk*)

**Funniest scene:** There's a scene in my *Cavendish* episode 'The Coven' where Andy Bush tentatively reads a poem. He's an objectively terrible writer, and the poem is like something out of a particularly dismal first-year creative writing class. It's utter nonsense about a guy drinking from a cold stream, but it's also about his father and includes the phrase 'gelid moist.' It works because Andy is a very funny actor who plays neediness about as well as anyone ever has or could. Every word of that poem is a cry for help, just not in the way the poem intends. Of course, the small-town witches are utterly transported by his terrible writing. Andy's quiet, deeply touched reaction to their approval suggests it's the best moment of his life. Which is very sad. And, to me, funny!

**The one that fell flat:** Oh boy. I've worked quite a bit in sketch so there are a few of these. I usually blame the audience, then cry myself to sleep.

**The one that got away:** Years ago, I wrote a scene called 'Copnotist.' It was a mock documentary about a 1970s stage hypnotist who was given his own show, a gritty police procedural focused on a maverick cop who solves and prevents crime through the power of hypnosis. Unfortunately, that particular show got canceled before we could do it. It's too bad. I sensed a spin-off.



### Jeremy Woodcock

(*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*)

**Funniest scene:** It's about a guy who can't come up with catchphrases. I think it works because it's structurally tight — it relies totally on the comedy rule-of-three for each joke — but that never dawned on me while I wrote it, so it somehow doesn't seem forced either. I was just thinking that way from doing so much comedy at the time. It also depicts an entire lifetime in a couple of minutes, which I never thought about being overly ambitious, because it was just amusing me to think of. It's one I wrote almost entirely in my head before typing — maybe that was the key.

**The one that fell flat:** I wrote a King Solomon scene for a live sketch show (obviously everything I've been paid to write for television has worked perfectly and you should hire me to write for them). I was really excited about it, but realize now that I never communicated to the guest host what I found so funny about the sketch. He's brilliant, and really ran with it and played with the structure, which was great. But

"It's one I wrote almost entirely in my head before typing — maybe that was the key."

- Jeremy Woodcock

he wasn't building on my central joke because I hadn't communicated it adequately, so it got very fuzzy and was about too many different things. Don't be afraid to say what you consider the crux of the scene.

**The one that got away:** A *Romeo & Juliet* parody for *22 Minutes*. Coming from live sketch, I know you can do a lot just with suggestion, but sometimes you want to see the whole package. On a non-stop weekly show, that can be tough to cobble together, and without all the scenic accoutrements and costumes, this one wouldn't make sense. We didn't have time to make it look authentic, but still wanted to do it, and so kept paring things back until the joke got confused. You wouldn't have known it was taking place in that world, and better to cut it than half-do it.



### Sonja Bennett

(*Kim's Convenience, Letterkenny, Preggoland*)

**Funniest scene:** In *Preggoland*, I think one of the funniest moments is when Ruth's co-worker calls her out on lying about being pregnant and to prove it, he punches her in her (fake) pregnant belly. I think it works because the image of a pregnant woman being punched in the belly is shocking, but the audience knows she's faking and so is in on the joke. The delicacy with which we treat pregnant women, juxtaposed with the violence of Danny Trejo throwing a punch, works.

**The one that fell flat:** In one webisode of *Sunnyhearts CC*, the community centre program manager has to pacify Linda the Elliptical Lady who likens a body builder's grunting to sexual harassment. Linda mimics his grunting, which leads to a groaning tennis match between the two, leading to some serious hate-arousal. It was in bad taste then and it hasn't aged well.

**The one that got away:** Both in *Kim's Convenience* and *Letterkenny*, Appa and Wayne, respectively, take a child to task for being an asshole. In both these instances, scenes were tossed or altered because they ran the risk of causing the audience to be concerned for the child character or for the actor playing the child. That said, in *Preggoland*, a character inadvertently clocks a child in the face with a baseball bat while trying to help bust open a stubborn piñata. I think it works because the damage was done by accident and the assailant was duly horrified afterwards. Aaaand... now that I've answered this question, it's become disturbingly apparent that this is my specialty. Sorry screenwriters, I've got comedic violence against children cornered in Canada. ■

# Fake news. Real laughs.

**The *Beaverton* continues to expand its audience with an ever-sharpening satirical take on Canada and the world**

By Matthew Hays

**F**ake news — no, not the legitimate but unfavourable reporting loathed by many politicians these days — but the biting satire based on daily events, is something of a growth industry right now. In the vast media landscape where people get their information, the news-comedy industrial complex has emerged as a pivotal force in shaping public opinions and perceptions. There are countless U.S. shows and the cultural institution known as *This Hours Has 22 Minutes* in Canada, but breaking through the clutter is *The Beaverton*. It has ascended from a web presence to a full-fledged half-hour series, drawing national and international praise for its distinct brand of news parody in just a few short years.

With its third season, the series moved up from cable net The Comedy Network to full national broadcast on CTV in July. Channel owner Bell Media also made *The Beaverton* available globally on CTV's official YouTube channel. (New episodes were uploaded to the web channel day-in-date with the CTV broadcast.) Clearly on a roll, with its growing success and audience reach, it's particularly noteworthy that the *Beaverton* brand has not lost its bite or edge — propelling it through that aforementioned clutter.

"The network has made one thing very clear," says *Beaverton* co-showrunner Jeff Detsky. "They told us they wanted us to maintain the spirit of the website and early episodes. They weren't interested in us pulling any punches." Co-host and series writer Emma Hunter adds that "the network has thrown itself 100% behind us. It feels like the show is their first born."

*The Beaverton* website was launched in 2010 by Alex Huntley, the late Laurent Noonan, and Luke Gordon Field (who is co-showrunner of the current series). Inspired in part by the American satirical newspaper/website *The Onion*, the site featured the popular formula of creating fake headlines that could plausibly be real, despite their absurdity.

"The site really came up on my radar in 2014," says Detsky. "*Beaverton* stories were popping up on social media feeds everywhere. Lots of people were sharing them. It really was crying out for a TV adaptation."

After two seasons on The Comedy Network, the show and website's reach continued to grow, with positive critical notices, more social media shares and the gold standard — people falling for joke news items as the real thing. (In 2016, *The Hamilton Spectator* cited a *Beaverton* article about the entire NDP



Series writers Miguel Rivas and Emma Hunter do double-duty as the show's hosts



Beaverton writers assemble on the set of the show's Election 2019 special. From L to R: Jocelyn Geddie, Callum Wratten, Scott Montgomery, Wendy Litner, Michael Balazo, Megan MacKay, Samuel Smith and Jess Salomon

caucus wearing neck braces to Parliament after the elbowgate brouhaha as though it was genuine.)

### Satire in the age of Trump

Of course, now there's an epic elephant in the room with which all satirical news must deal, even though most real news stories written about him play out like a comedy of errors — the current President of the United States, Donald Trump. It puts a Canadian show like *The Beaverton* in a slightly tricky spot. There's no way to ignore the man, but you can't put Trump at the centre of every joke, despite the obvious allure for comedy writers.

The Trump Factor “cuts both ways,” notes co-host and writer Miguel Rivas. “He is obviously funny, often every day. But he is also often so ridiculous that it's hard to know how to spin it. It is undoubtedly non-stop fodder for jokes, but there's no real nuance to pick up on.”

He adds that “there's a tendency on the part of some of us to think that things can't get zanier than Trump. But let's keep in mind, we had Rob Ford. We

had a no-one's-going-to-believe-this politician before America did.”

“I think it's important not to give our politicians a pass, just because they're not Trump,” adds *Beaverton* co-founder and co-showrunner Luke Gordon Field.

“Not being in America does make for a different comedy,” says Hunter. “The leader of our country isn't as bombastic or incompetent as the leader of the U.S. I think we have room to make our comedy more gentle. America is in a hard place; people are so full of anger. Comedy has a different feel here. There really isn't much that's subtle about Trump. I think that here you have to work a bit harder to get to the joke.”

Detsky confirms the show's Canadian niceness. “We really avoid punching down. We're also diversifying our writing team. Some stories are too sad — we don't trade on tragedy. And the show went down for a few months so one of our hosts could take mat leave. We weren't about to replace someone.”

Ironically enough, it was Trump's surprise victory that brought *The Beaverton* a good deal of immediate exposure and praise. The first edition

“We're not the news. We're commentary on the news. The balance of our show is fun — we don't want it to feel like homework.”

- Jeff Detsky

of the show was an election special, and was to air the day after the 2016 U.S. election. They shot three versions: One where Hillary won; one where Trump was the victor; and a third where they didn't talk about the election much, in case the election was like the 2000 Bush-Gore scenario, in which precisely who became President wasn't determined until weeks after election night.

“So many didn't think the Trump episode would ever see the light of day,” says Detsky. “But we had prepared the show, just in case, and as a result we were the first comedy show that had prepared material on Trump. It was basically ‘The Funeral for America,’ and that put us on the map.”

### How The Beaverton team gets it done

Since then, *The Beaverton* has had to change its production model to remain timely. The creative schedule sounds as frantic as, well, putting on a news show. Each episode starts up about seven or eight days prior to its air date. “We write the show backwards, starting with the least topical stuff,” says Detsky.

“What are people talking about this month? It could be the wellness industry, or Chernobyl. As the days go on, the writers get more and more topical. Since the show airs on a Tuesday, we spend all weekend chatting about what the big stories are.”

The writers then assemble at 8 a.m. on Monday to talk about the four main topics that arose over the weekend. “We share our various jokes, and a narrative begins to form from them,” says Detsky. The meeting ends at about 11:30 a.m., when the script has to be finished. “Ideally, we want the show to feel like it was written on the day it airs.”

Then the script is vetted by the legal department, where lawyers ensure nothing could lead to a lawsuit. This is where the Canada-U.S. divide can be felt

most distinctly. “In America, the first amendment in the Constitution is very clear,” says Field, himself a former lawyer. “In Canada, we have very strong defamation laws.” So, getting into the personal lives of Canada's politicians isn't something *The Beaverton* is going to be touching anytime soon.

“We work with the lawyers, who are on our side and are protecting us,” says Field. “We say everything we want — we just might have to change our terminology or the language we use. I can't think of a single segment that died this year due to a legal issue.”

As *The Beaverton's* audience continues to grow, the creative team behind it recognizes a certain responsibility that comes with conveying the news — even in a comedic style. It's not the news, but it is presented to a broad audience. And in a fitting twist, the move to CTV means the show gets taped in a studio right across the hall from where the actual national news is broadcast. “We don't have the journalistic responsibility,” Rivas says. “We talk about the entire zeitgeist, but avoid ever being condescending or didactic. We don't present ourselves as some kind of moral authority.”

“In last season's finale, we did *The Beaverton's* guide to spotting fake news,” says Detsky. “We were having fun while teaching media literacy. We're not the news. We're commentary on the news. The balance of our show is fun — we don't want it to feel like homework.”

Hunter says she has ambitions for the show. “Ultimately, I'd like it to lead to me becoming the Prime Minister. Nah. Actually, that's not true. I think mainly I'd like for us to bring some happiness and relief into living rooms in the evening on issues that are often really hard to process — a little light in a world that often seems so dark.

“If we can do that, I'll be happy. Also: Money, power and world domination!” ■



Standing 25' 2" tall in total are the Tallboyz — co-creators and stars of Canada's newest sketch comedy series. From L to R: Franco Nguyen, Guled Abdi, Tim Blair and Vance Banzo

# The Long and the Short of it

Writing tinged with absurdist humour and real heart fast-tracks sketch troupe Tallboyz from stage to TV

By Li Robbins

**T**ake three short years and add four tall guys — that's the setup for the story behind sketch comedy troupe Tallboyz' leap from stage to screen. Success has come fast for the quartet. They got together in 2016 in time to enter The Toronto Sketch Comedy Festival that fall, and by September 2019 their eponymous eight-part series premiered on CBC Television, with Bruce McCulloch of *Kids in the Hall* (*KITH*) fame as showrunner and EP. For the record, Tallboyz are as advertised — there's Guled Abdi (6' 8"), Vance Banzo (6' 5"), Tim Blair (6' 1") and Franco Nguyen (5' 11" — and a half!).

While *Tallboyz* sketches include moments of height-related physical comedy, (for instance, "Tall in the Club," where forehead-meets-exposed-duct work for some slapstick guffaws), most of the laughs are reliant on sharp writing. (Even in "Tall at the

Club" the duct work is credited to architect Frank Gehry, in an endearing aside.) But it's *Tallboyz'* thematic material that seems to have clicked with critics seeking something fresh. Among other things, Tallboyz write about male body image, masculinity, friendship and vulnerability — not the most typical fodder for men in sketch comedy.

"I think we do explore some uncharted comedy," says Vance Banzo. "I haven't really seen much sketch talking about the insecurity of men and masculinity. We were all raised by single mothers, so we're definitely in touch with our more sensitive sides, and we're not afraid to be vulnerable."

They're also in touch with issues of race and racism, with sketches reflecting their real-life experiences as "a diverse group of comedians being diverse diversely," as their Facebook page would have it. In the sketch "I Know Canada," for example,

Banzo (who is Saulteaux/Cree) plays a game show host quizzing a white guy on the differences between an Indigenous person and a Canadian penny. It's an absurd premise, but one that quickly gets to the heart of the discomfort many non-Indigenous Canadians experience when talking about Indigenous issues.

But while race and notions of masculinity provide plenty of inspiration, the group has no rules about what it chooses to write about, as Guled Abdi explains.

"When we're writing, we just bring up any idea. When we have the most discussion, it's about sketches connected to race. We want to make sure we're as thoughtful as possible, and we try to make the ideas clear and powerful."

The troupe's members, who all knew each other from Toronto's improv and stand up scene, began as Tallboyz II Men, but some combination of concerns about trademark and online searchability meant calling the CBC series *Tallboyz*. And yes, they do have a boy-band sketch, revolving around one group member's reluctance to take off his shirt, and it concludes in a manner that can only be described as surreal. (No spoilers: See episode one, streaming on CBC Gem.)

Their live shows were always written as a group, honing the sketches in response to audience reaction. But once CBC saw the pitch (scored live, complete with sound effects, which was McCulloch's idea) and greenlit the show, the way they wrote had to change. For one thing, there was a schedule. They wrote the show from Nov. 2018 to Feb. 2019 (the writers' room was in an empty bar), which meant having to work faster than they were used to. They also incorporated other writers into the room, and had McCulloch's notes to consider.

"Collectively we had almost no TV experience," says Abdi. "And we were used to writing as a committee. But when we got to the show, we were told it would slow down things dramatically to work that way. So, we had pitch sessions, and did some writing individually. If we hit a wall, we'd bounce the ideas off of each other."

Franco Nguyen underscores the challenges they faced. "Our training is in funny. We've had a lot of practice being funny in front of live audiences. But the speed at which a TV show comes together is way faster. And the speed at which people process visual information [via a screen] is much faster, too. We've had to learn to write in a more concise way."

McCulloch, who first encountered Banzo and Tim Blair while guest lecturing at Humber College's Comedy: Writing and Performance program, proved a hugely helpful mentor.

"Bruce gave us lot of tips and tricks on what's

required for a script in TV," says Blair. "Lots in terms of structure, and things like how much detail is needed so that the humour comes out, and what makes it flow so that an idea can be clearly understood."

The sheer breadth of McCulloch's experience inspired and motivated all of them, as Banzo recalls.

"Bruce talked a lot about his time in the KITH [troupe], and about being a writer on *Saturday Night Live* before Kids got their show. Also, when it comes to writing, he's a lot like myself. Procrastinating, mulling things over. But the one thing Bruce kind of drove into us is that if you have an idea just write it, because you don't know where it's going to go. You could have three ideas done by the end of the day, so just keep working, keep going."

Abdi echoes Banzo, commenting on McCulloch's "vast knowledge of comedy" and his motivational skills when it came to getting the members of Tallboyz to stick with a sketch even when it could go to "eight or 10 drafts."

"He could see the funny in ideas we were sometimes unsure about," says Abdi. "He had a different eye for the stuff. He was so generous with feedback and really tried his hardest to let this show be the show we wanted it to be."

It's tempting to look for signs of *KITH* in *Tallboyz*, but McCulloch is on record as saying Tallboyz' brand of humour is a little "kinder and sweeter" than *KITH*'s, also less sexual and more political. When McCulloch first saw Tallboyz live he was impressed by how "original, surprising and sweet" they were, as he said in the CBC press release announcing the show. As for Tallboyz, *KITH* has become an influence, but they didn't all grow up watching it. At 23, Blair says his first experience of *KITH* was when he was still in middle school, watching the reunion special *Death Comes to Town*.

Where *KITH* and Tallboyz as writers do cross over is in their mutual penchant for the absurd. *KITH* had its oddball cops who would do things like consider the property values of houses during a shoot-out. *Tallboyz* has its hapless Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) special constables; out of shape, bumbling, and in one sketch, carrying pepper spray because they can't carry guns. ("This isn't America," is the winking line to the camera.)

But police play a more troubling role in a *Tallboyz* sketch premised on two men in a car being pulled over by a pair of cops for no reason. The car's driver says that because he's "a black man in a car," he knows exactly what the cops will say when he lowers the window. And he does know. Literally. The scene unfolds with the driver mirroring both police officers' lines, word for word. Words, it must be noted, that ring so true some might find the sketch almost painful



With promising raw material, but little experience writing for TV, comedy heavyweight Bruce McCulloch got the call to serve as showrunner and EP on Tallboyz, guiding the troupe's transition from stage to screen

to watch. The twist is a revelation about the origins of police racism though, moving the whole thing to a deeper level of social commentary. But then, just when you need them to, the TTC special constables show up.

Abdi says he's "very proud" of the pull-over sketch, which the troupe's members spent a lot of time writing before they even took it to the writers' room. But the members of Tallboyz say they never can predict what will resonate with the audience. The TTC constables have been an unexpected hit, for example. So has "I Could Have Met Drake," in which everyone and their dog and their dog's cousin shares a near-brush with the rap star. It ends with a solemn, PSA-style warning: "Every day, one in three Torontonians will claim they met Drake. You don't have to be one of them."

*Tallboyz* has been airing on CBC back-to-back with *Baroness von Sketch Show*, and in some ways, it seems almost like its flipside. Not surprisingly, *Baroness* has its admirers in Tallboyz. (Abdi notes "they pack so much into such a short amount of time, which is so impressive.") But whether the multiple seasons that *Baroness* has landed are also in *Tallboyz*' future remains to be seen. Clearly the troupe is hopeful, and they're already hard at work. Banzo describes his days as pitching, writing and going home, then doing it again the next day — all the while keeping in mind the underlying values of the kind of comedy Tallboyz is committed to making.

"We've had discussions about it," says Banzo. "We really want a positive, fun, and caring show — we all care about each other so much. We want to bleed that into the paper and hopefully to the screen." ■

# The Graduate

Heidi Brander moves up to head writer of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* at a juicy time in Canadian politics

By Mark Dillon



The timing couldn't have been better for Heidi Brander's debut as head writer on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. Not only was there a federal election campaign going on, but it was proving to be one for the ages.

"We came back on air at the perfect moment," she says on the line from Halifax, where the politically focused CBC satire and sketch series is shot. "The news has been fantastic."

Nothing provided more fodder than the revelation of photos of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in blackface and brownface.

"That was the craziest day I've had on this show," adds Brander, in her seventh year on the series. "We had a whole show planned, then that happened and we just threw everything in the garbage and had to start from scratch. It was fun and exciting but intense. We thought, 'Oh my God, what an idiotic thing for him to do!'"

In that episode, co-host Trent McClellan, who is a person of colour, introduced himself as Trudeau. Co-host Susan Kent confessed to an earlier sketch in which she also appeared in heavy makeup — as Trudeau. McClellan and co-host Mark Critch traded barbs about the scandal, with the latter noting, "Blackface is [Trudeau's] go-to costume. It's his 'sexy cat.'"

That quip is pure Brander, who favours pop-culture allusions. "The show calls for everything to be tied into politics, but my sense of humour is a bit sillier," says the stand-up comic. "Making those kinds of references is more my style."

Staying relevant is key to the longevity of the series, now in its mind-boggling 27th season. Show creator and original cast member Mary Walsh returned in this year's third episode to interview youth at Montreal's climate march, in a piece summing up the show's delicate balancing act: Appealing to longtime fans while courting a new demographic. Shaking up the writers' room is one way to keep fresh.

"We have some cool young stand-up comics on staff and we're trying to let them get their voices heard as much as possible," Brander says. "If there's something going on in the news that might target a younger audience, we usually get them to write up something, even if it's just a parody of a new song."

The writing staff this year includes Adam Christie, Kevin Shustack, Sophie Buddle, Brandon Hackett, Aisha Brown and Jon Blair with contributions from Dean Jenkinson and Bob Kerr. Former head writer Mike Allison has been promoted to showrunner, taking over from Peter McBain.

The four cast members — including Cathy Jones, the sole original one — contribute sketches, but Critch is the only one who gets a writer's credit. "He's a powerhouse," Brander says. "In any given week, if you see a sketch and think it's the best one, chances are Mark wrote it."

Critch, for his part, appreciates Brander's steadiness. "She has an amazing temperament," he tells *Canadian Screenwriter*. "I don't think I've ever seen her angry. She can take whatever pressure the grind puts on her with style and grace and she delivers every time."

It was Allison who chose Brander as his successor. "Heidi has been a joke machine, delivering funny sketches and desk material week after week," he says. "She works hard and is a positive force in the room. We've worked side by side for several years, so offering her the head writer position was the easiest decision I had to make."

While Allison is charged with the show's overall vision, Brander describes her role as "managing the writers, making sure everything is in on time and taking a final pass at the script."

The group convenes Tuesdays — the day after shooting — to pitch ideas, mostly, Brander explains, "to make sure that if two writers have the same idea they're not stepping on each other's toes and maybe can collaborate." Newbies sometimes need to be told that their ideas, while funny, don't fit the show.

Each one writes four or five sketches, then Brander and Allison pick the best 25 to 30, which make it to a table read, and then the eight or nine that get the most laughs go to camera. The live shows film up to two hours, during which Brander sits at the back of the audience to gauge response to help her and Allison decide what will make the final 22-minute cut.

As with other writing gigs she's landed, Brander first heard about the opportunity at *22 Minutes* through her stand-up network and sent in a package. Her first scripting job was on variety show *MTV Live*, followed by appearances on *Video on Trial* mocking music videos. She later wrote for web series *Just Passing Through* and CBC's *Still Standing* and *Baroness von Sketch Show*.

She studied film at Queen's University after spending her high school years in P.E.I. and her childhood divided between Nova Scotia and Ontario. She still considers her claim to fame as the time she beat Ryan Gosling in a lip-sync competition while in Grade 4 in Cornwall, Ont.

"He was the big-deal performer kid at my school," she recalls. "He did a number and everyone was saying, 'Oh, he's going to win because he's Ryan Gosling.' Then I did a song and came in first and he came in second. I had a crush on him — I still do — and I thought, 'Is he mad at me because I won?' I didn't want to piss off my crush."

Her biggest comedy crush is another fellow Canuck — Samantha Bee of *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* fame. "She's my hero and main comedy influence," Brander gushes. "I recently went to L.A. and did a comedy show there and afterwards the host said, 'You've got such a Samantha Bee vibe.' It was the nicest compliment anyone's ever given me." ■



Rosen (L) and Lorette  
in character

# Kayla Lorette & Evany Rosen

Mining '70s utopias for laughs  
*in New Eden*

By Cameron Archer

While Kayla Lorette and Evany Rosen have worked together in the theatre with 2015's *Network Notes*, the pair's most ambitious project to date is true-crime documentary send-up *New Eden*. The show went into production for Bell Media's Crave this past summer, and follows the New Eden community as it deals with issues related to communal living, alien goddess worship and murder — of course. Among other credits, Rosen is a writer, story editor and actor for CBC's *Baroness von Sketch Show*, and was a member of sketch comedy troupe *Picnicface*. Lorette is currently best known as Dree Davis on *Kim's Convenience* (CBC), and is a voice-over artist for series like *Gary and His Demons* (CBC Gem/VRV) and *Cupcake & Dino: General Services* (Teletoon/Netflix). Shoving three decades into eight episodes, *New Eden* debuts in November 2019 on Crave.

**Where did the idea for New Eden come from? How did your past writing experiences inform the creation of the series, and how did you come to collaborate on it?**

**KL:** Evany and I are both fans of true crime and have always had

a deep interest in cults. The idea that a group of people could be manipulated into following the doctrine of a strange leader is so endlessly fascinating.

**ER:** The idea for *New Eden* evolved over many hours of discussion, and one self-appointed "voluntary work trip" to Ottawa where we spent the weekend brainstorming. We really liked the idea of working with both true crime and the intricacies of female relationships.

**KL:** We always knew the comedic core of *New Eden* would be the characters. I believe our history as improvisers helped develop dialogue that felt grounded and natural to fit the documentary style.

**How did you prepare background research for New Eden? Did you examine the stories of past, failed Canadian utopias like Major William Kingdom Rains's attempts on Lake Simcoe, or the Kalevan Kansa in Sointula, B.C.?**

**ER:** No, but I'll be sure to look those up!

**KL:** We read a lot of feminist works from that time, but also looked to all past and present

female communes to see how they differ from ones led by men. How do matriarchies function, and how do they crumble when their leaders are foolish or egotistical?

**ER:** Our research was more focused on communal living movements that emerged in California and on the West Coast in the 1960s and '70s. I remember we had already done a deep dive on the Rajneeshees, and then *Wild Wild Country* came out. We were both like, 'Oh no, people are gonna think our show is based on this doc.'

**KL:** The women in our story were all pushing back against the sexism they were facing, and wanted to define their own rules for living.

**How hard was it to establish a place like New Eden and keep it believable, but keep the satire sharp?**

**ER:** The world of New Eden itself — which is all found footage from a 1970s cult — was the most organic, I think. In that realm, we were working from a pure space of character — not only our own, but also all the women who populate New Eden. The comedy and pathos there felt natural and easy.

"We want to make a funny and interesting series, one that challenges conventional structure ... We also want to show complex and flawed female characters."

- Kayla Lorette

**KL:** We talked a lot about women and how they function in large groups — the tenderness and care of sisterhood, but also some of the darker elements of female communication. Evany and I spent a lot of time exploring so many details of New Eden, a lot of which never made it to the screen. We took a lot of care in the world-building so that it would feel real to us. Once that world was built in our minds, it felt easy to inject any satire or absurdity without losing the soul of the show.

**ER:** Once you step back from that world, knowing all that footage is filtered through the lens of a 1991 documentary that sees our characters through their trial and into a life behind bars, it becomes more of a juggling act in terms of tone. The world and the story gets so much bigger, and so much more absurd, but it has to walk this familiar real-feeling line. 'Wait, do I remember that news story from the early '80s?' is the question we want our audience who were alive in the early '80s to ask.

**What separates New Eden from true-crime mockumentary series such as Netflix's**

**American Vandal and NBC's Trial & Error?**

**ER:** The first thing we always say when people ask us about those shows is that we are not a mockumentary, but a fictional documentary. We were always fascinated by the idea of the documentary lens as a vehicle for story, but not as the butt of the joke. We wanted our doc to feel authentic, and for the characters ... to have their own story going on.

**KL:** It was very important to us that our show had real stakes and real drama. We wanted to see how far we could take the serious elements of their story without losing the comedy. We also took a lot of care in crafting our fake documentarians. We wanted to know exactly what intention was behind each lens so we could explore the ideas of male gaze and media perspective. That last sentence doesn't sound all that fun, but I think it gave us a rich extra layer to play with.

**ER:** In a lot of other true-crime mock docs, the stakes are really low, but they're treated like they're high through a parody of the format. We wanted to make a comedy where the stakes

were actually high — people get killed, people get brainwashed, people go to federal prison. The characters themselves are so absurd, and at times ill-equipped to handle the extraordinary situations they find themselves in, that all the darkness somehow ends up being funny.

**What are your goals for New Eden, both comedically and commercially? What do you plan to achieve with the series?**

**ER:** We certainly hope that people will discover something new with *New Eden* and discover not only a unique format, but a new balance of comedy and drama that they maybe haven't seen before.

**KL:** We want to make a funny and interesting series, one that challenges conventional structure. We are interested in playing with moments of drama and seeing how far we can push that. We also want to show complex and flawed female characters.

**ER:** Honestly, we'd just be jazzed if people watch it period. That'd be great. ■

## Unfair Engagers

The Guild has declared the following engagers “unfair” for failing to abide by grievance procedures or the decision of a joint standing committee. The WGC’s working rules prohibit members from working with unfair engagers.

**3620425 Canada Inc.**

Principal: Louis-Philippe Rochon

**All I Want Productions Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

**Battered Productions Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

**Christmas Town Productions Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

**FOTP Productions Inc.**

Principal: Richard Rapkowski

**Guardian Films Inc. / En Garde Films Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

**H & S Films**

Principal: Nicolas Stiliadis

**Hiding Productions Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

**High Seas Rescue Productions Inc.**

Principal: F. Whitman Trecartin

**Ice Planet (1) Canada Ltd.**

Principal: Philip Jackson

**Justice Productions Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

**Kangaroo Court Productions Ltd.**

Principal: Robin Payne

**Les Productions les Plus Belles Routes du Monde Inc.**

Principal: Andre Belanger  
(not affiliated with Spectra Animation Inc.)

**Lester Beach Entertainment**

Principal: Jeff Lester

**Mikisew Keemiwan Productions, Ltd.**

Principal: Norman Champagne

**Nikolai Productions**

Principal: Cindy Lamb

**Norfolk International Ltd.**

Principal: William Macadam

**Numb Productions Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

**Perfect Stranger Productions Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

**Prospero Entertainment Group Inc.**

Principal: John Lambert

**Richard Lowry Productions Inc.**

Principal: Richard Lowry

**She Productions Inc.**

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### Please Help Us Find These Writers!

The CSCS is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for writers

The Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for a number of writers and uncredited productions. As CSCS does not have a current address for these writers or the productions do not have complete credit information we have not been able to forward any monies to the entitled writers. The complete list of writers and productions is available on the CSCS website at:

<https://www.wgc.ca/screenwriters/cscs>

If you have any information that would allow us to contact any of these writers or their agents, or if you are a credited writer on the listed production, please contact:

**Marisa King** at [m.king@wgc.ca](mailto:m.king@wgc.ca)  
or call (416) 979.7907 ext. 5231 or  
1.800.567.9974 ext. 5231.

*Please note that CSCS may require writers to furnish contracts in support of their claim. According to CSCS regulations, if a writer does not claim his or her monies within two years of being posted on our website these monies revert to the operating expenses of CSCS.*



# Help Producers Find and Hire You



Update your **Member Directory** profile.  
It's easy. Login at [www.wgc.ca](http://www.wgc.ca) to get started.

### Questions?

Contact Terry Mark ([t.mark@wgc.ca](mailto:t.mark@wgc.ca))



Writers Guild of Canada

# News from WGC Members

**Larry Bambrick** is back in Toronto after six sunny months in Los Angeles working on the new Hallmark series *When Hope Calls*. He is now developing a show for eOne and Counterfeit Pictures – and another Canadian-Irish co-production with Hoodwink Entertainment.

**Alejandro Alvarez Cadilla's** short script *Abyssal* has made the finalist list for Best Short Script at the Pittsburgh Shorts Film Festival taking place in November and will be read by actors in front of an audience at the Southside Works Theatre.

**Mika Collins** has recently returned from Cape Town, South Africa, where she wrote several episodes for Syfy's new feminist space opera, *Vagrant Queen*, now in production. Her award-winning sci-fi web series, *Deep Six*, (co-created and co-produced with Davin Lengyel), about the first astronauts in deep space, just launched on YouTube. It's now available after a successful festival run, winning Best Web Series at the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival, Hollyweb Festival, and the London Independent Film Festival.

From January to July, **Kate Hewlett** served as a writer and co-EP on the BBC/DHX Media (now WildBrain) co-pro, *Malory Towers*. Additionally, her two episodes of *Corner Gas Animated* aired on The Comedy Network over the summer.

**Gemma Holdway** is currently adapting the comic book series *The Spire* for BOOM! Studios and Blue Ice Pictures.

**Edward Kay's** primetime drama, *Get Happy*, has been optioned by *Diggstown* producer, Circle Blue Entertainment. His preschool series, *Let's Roll*, is in development with Boulevard Productions, one of the co-producers of the CBC series, *Addison*, for which Edward was showrunner.

**Donald Martin** has been commissioned to adapt the Nora Roberts novel *Brazen Virtue* into a movie for Netflix.

**Peter Meech's** debut novel *Billy (the Kid)* will be published in February 2020 by Sentient Publications.

**Karen Moore's** directorial debut short film *Volcano* had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in

September and will continue its festival run over the coming months before being broadcast nationally on CBC's *Canadian Reflections*.

**Greg Nelson** is spending the year in Los Angeles as writer and co-executive producer of the new CBS/CTV series *All Rise*.

**Jennifer Podemski** and **Derek Diorio** (*Hard Rock Medical*) have created and are now writing a 10-ep half-hour drama series called *Unsettled* for TVO and APTN. Production begins in February in North Bay.

Publisher Routledge has just published English and French versions of **Isabelle Raynauld's** book, *Reading and Writing a Screenplay: Fiction, Documentary and New Media*.

**Carolyn Saunders** wrote several episodes of the web series *Tokens*, a comedy about last-minute diversity casting. The series is doing nicely on the festival circuit, winning Best Comedy Series at the Minnesota Webfest.

**Corey Shurge** is currently working in Los Angeles as writer and executive producer on the new scripted podcast series, *Solve* (iHeartRadio). His short film,

*Stuck* (Prime Video), recently became a viral hit, garnering more than 300,000 views online. His new film *Lughead* will have its world premiere at the Austin Film Festival.

While exploring a script library recently, **Jerome Simpson** accidentally unearthed a long-forgotten *Forbidden Transition*.

Now the monks sworn to protect this secret are hunting him with crossbows. In a desperate attempt to save his life, Jerome will publicly reveal the *Forbidden Transition* here: RHOMBUS-WIPE. Use at your own peril!

The German and world rights (excluding the U.S. and Canada) to **Wiebke von Carolsfeld's**

first novel *Claremont*, recently published in Canada, have been sold to publisher Kiepenheuer & Witsch in Germany.

**John Walker** has optioned Linden MacIntyre's recently released non-fiction book *The Wake*. With funding from the CMF Early Stage Development Program, he is planning to adapt it for the screen. ■

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Writers Guild of Canada

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## Money for Missing Writers

The Writers Guild of Canada is holding monies for the writers listed below. The WGC has been unable to locate the writers and forward the money to them. If you have any information that would help us reach these writers (or their agents or estates), please contact the staff member indicated below. These writers would thank you.

**IPA** - contact Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext. 5270

**NFB** - contact Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext. 5270

**Dawn Cumberbatch** — *Top Cops*

**Elana Devine** — *Student Bodies*

**Warren Easton** — *Odyssey II*

**Joe Flanigan** — *Stargate*

**Gerald Fourier** — *Littlest Hobo*

**John Hollard** — *Littlest Hobo*

**Laszlo Gefin** — *Revolution's Orphans*

**János Szanyi** — *Revolution's Orphans*

**Gilles Toupin** — *Cycling: Still the Greatest*

**Peter Vogler** — *Ernie's Idea*

At the Calgary Distinguished Writers Program, I came to feel a connection to the artistic life of a city unlike anything I have experienced before. People want words to do so many different things! To tour and talk through this kind of variety has been a profound and enriching experience.

— **Nick Thran**

2015-16 Canadian Writer-in-Residence

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[ucalgary.ca/cdwp](http://ucalgary.ca/cdwp)



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
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Calgary Distinguished Writers Program

## Welcome (May 8 – October 28, 2019)

**Alejandro Alvarez Cadilla** Montreal QC

**Elyse Applebaum** Los Angeles CA

**Emily Ballou** Glasgow SCOTLAND

**Ronald Bass** Los Angeles CA

**Phillip Bastien** Toronto ON

**Shem Bitterman** Los Angeles CA

**Joie Botkin** Oakland CA

**Susan Brightbill** Minnetonka MN

**Lisa Codrington** Toronto ON

**Ashley Cooper** Toronto ON

**Adam Countee** Studio City CA

**David Curtis** Dawson City YK

**Amber-Sekowan Daniels** Toronto ON

**Tim Fontaine** Toronto ON

**Michael Foulke** Burbank CA

**Mary Galloway** Winnipeg MB

**Meredith Hambrook** Vancouver BC

**Duncan Hay Jennings** Toronto ON

**Keith Hodder** Toronto ON

**Lauren Holly** Oakville ON

**Mathias Horhager** Toronto ON

**Jono Howard** Surrey BC

**David Iserson** Los Angeles CA

**Vicky Jones** London ENGLAND

**Frances Koncan** Winnipeg MB

**Caitlin Langelier** Toronto ON

**Monique LeBlanc** Bouctouche NB

**Margaret Lester** Mississauga ON

**Bret MacDonald** Saint-Lazare QC

**Megan MacKay** Toronto ON

**Michael Mariano** North Hills CA

**Steve Marmel** Sherman Oaks CA

**Jennifer McAuliffe** Toronto ON

**Jessica Meya** Toronto ON

**Sally Nemeth** Los Angeles CA

**Amish Patel** Brampton ON

**Madeleine Patton** Toronto ON

**John Christian Plummer** Cold Spring NY

**Tamara Podemski** Toronto ON

**James Schultz** Toronto ON

**Rob Shapiro** Toronto ON

**Michelle Shaughnessy** Toronto ON

**Akash Sherman** Toronto ON

**David Shohet** Montreal QC

**Carley Smale** Peterborough ON

**Laurie Smith** Toronto ON

**Ashley Spires** Delta BC

**Jason Stone** Toronto ON

**Kirstie Swain** London ENGLAND

**Jill Turner** Fishkill NY

**Garth Twa** Altadena CA

**Michael Vogel** West Hollywood CA

**Anna White** Los Angeles CA

**Callum Wratten** Toronto ON

## Our condolences

**Andrew Dalrymple** Toronto ON

**Leon Marr** Toronto ON

**Joe Wiesenfeld** Palm Desert CA



# Penelope Laurence

She's written for everything from YTV sitcom *Family Biz* to doc-style *Bomb Hunters* and preschool toon *Toopy and Binoo*, all under the influence of Tarantino.

**Who is your greatest influence when it comes to screenwriting?** Tarantino — when I first watched *Pulp Fiction* as a teenager, I realized he was a screenwriter's wet dream. He writes dialogue not just to advance story and reveal character, but for the simple joy of saying cool things. • **What TV writers' rooms do you wish you had been in?** *Six Feet Under*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Being Erica*. • **If you had to listen to one song on repeat until you finished your next script, what would it be?** "Sunny" by Bobby Hebb. It makes me feel that no matter what the challenge in front of me, everything is going to be all right. • **What are your preferred snack foods for a writers' room?** A fine red wine. In vino veritas after all. • **What is one of your favourite**

**TV series of all time?** *Six Feet Under*. • **What is one of your favourite TV series right now?** *Sharp Objects*. • **How do you overcome procrastination aka writer's block?** Just do it. By that I mean, put something on the paper, anything. No judgement. Get it all out. Do the vomit pass, then polish that turd into GOLD. • **What is the most over-used plot device in a script?** "...and I woke up to discover it was all a dream." • **What one do you think will never disappear and shouldn't?** The rule of three. It's as sanctified and omnipresent as the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. • **Who are your favourite writers?** Tarantino, Alan Ball, Douglas Coupland. • **What are you reading and listening to right now?** I just reread *All Families Are Psychotic*

by Douglas Coupland. When I read it in my 20s it wasn't one of my favourites, but in my 40s, I now recognize what a kickass character he's created in the matriarch of the family, Janet Drummond. • **What are you obsessed with right now?** This list. I keep waking up in the middle of the night and remembering another snappy answer, then I wake up and discover it was all a dream. • **What is your most treasured possession?** My television. Like all good scriptwriters, it raised me. • **If you weren't a screenwriter, you would be a \_\_\_\_\_?** Olympic skier or a doctor. These are my two other dream lives. Of course my sporting skills and grades at high school ensured scriptwriting was the only realistic choice. ■

## November

- 7 - 15 — Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival [reelasian.com](http://reelasian.com)  
 14 - 24 — Montreal International Documentary Festival [ridem.ca](http://ridem.ca)  
 27 — Writers Talking TV [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)

## December

- 1 — Deadline — WGC Screenwriting Awards Nominations [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)  
 4 — WGC Quebec Member Holiday Party, Montreal [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)  
 4 - 8 — Whistler Film Festival [whistlerfilmfestival.com](http://whistlerfilmfestival.com)  
 6 — WGC Pacific Region Member Holiday Party, Vancouver [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)  
 12 — WGC Central Region Member Holiday Party, Toronto [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)

## January

- 29 - 31 — Prime Time in Ottawa [primetimeinottawa.ca](http://primetimeinottawa.ca)

## February

- 10 - 13 — Kidscreen Summit [summit.kidscreen.com](http://summit.kidscreen.com)  
 22 — ACTRA Awards in Toronto [actratoronto.com](http://actratoronto.com)

## March

- 23 - 29 — Canadian Screen Week [academy.ca](http://academy.ca)

## April

- 27 — WGC Screenwriting Awards, Koerner Hall, Toronto [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)



MERIDIAN ARTISTS

### Toronto

349 Carlaw Ave., Suite 303  
 Toronto, ON M4M 2T1  
 416-961-2777

### Los Angeles

1664 Greenfield Ave.  
 Los Angeles, CA 90025  
 310-479-2777



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**Visit [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca) to submit entries.**

**DEADLINE: Sunday, Dec. 1, 11:59 p.m. EST**



**The 24th Annual WGC Screenwriting Awards  
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