

CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

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FILM | TELEVISION | RADIO | DIGITAL MEDIA

Mini Rooms

*The Good, The Bad
And The Ugly*

Born To Binge

A Travelers' Tale

Bletchley Circle

*From Code
To Crime
Solving*

Breaking Anne

Canadian Classic
Gets A Makeover

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A new universe to explore

When I was a kid, I liked drawing scenes of events or stories I'd read or stuff I just wanted to make up.

Any scrap of paper would do, but what I really wanted was an endless supply — or at least a really, really big piece of paper.

A friend of the family's worked at the local newspaper and one day he brought home what was called a roll end. It was the nub of a newsprint roll. Nub isn't really fair. Roll ends could have dozens of yards of paper on them.

And this one was all mine.

Up until that point, I'd been scribbling away on little scrap pieces of paper. Sometimes — if I was especially lucky — I'd get a whole sheet of eight-and-a-half by 11, clean on both sides.

Now I'd been given a monstrous galaxy in which to create — a seemingly endless roll of paper. Faced with that opportunity, I took a bit of time to adapt to the new space. At first my drawings remained cramped and scaled to those smaller worlds I'd been used to creating. But eventually my drawings — and my horizons — expanded.

It turned out to be an object lesson.

As an adult writer and editor, let me rephrase that: As an adult and a writer and editor, I've had to move from newspapers (both broad-sheet and tabloid formats) to magazines, sometimes in the course of a workday. Each type of publication has its own framework and rules. And once you know those frameworks and rules, you can break them or bend them, and adaptation is easy. Sort of.

Similarly, many screenwriters are working with bigger sheets of paper than they've had in the past.

For traditional television series, they have to work within the confines of a 30-minute or 60-minute episode (usually with breaks for commercials). And those episodes have to be either standalone episodes, or be written with the idea that they'll be shown in order and one week (or more) apart. The networks have generally wanted nice tight packages that are easy to syndicate.

And if the show is good, you don't even notice you've been watching for hours. Sure, if it's a long one you might be shocked at the time when it's over, but you're not bored. And binge-watching is a regular occurrence, which can change the way a series' stories are told.

So the framework and the rules have changed. And screenwriters are meeting the challenges of adapting to that.

Look at Brad Wright's *Travelers* or Moira Walley-Beckett's *Anne with an E*. Both are stellar examples of using every bit of story-telling space available — and not gratuitously.

It's worth noting that Wright and Walley-Beckett are both seasoned veterans. They've learned to use what they already know not just to adapt to a new framework and rules, but also to embrace and even advance the changes.

So the new rules aren't just for the young. If you understand them, it's your universe.

— Tom Villemaire

Fall 2018

Cameron Archer runs the Canadian television/media website *Gloryosky* (www.gloryosky.ca), and is also a freelance arts and media writer. He currently lives in Eastern Ontario.

For over 15 years, **Greg David** was a television critic for *TV Guide Canada*, the country's most trusted source for TV news. A former member of the Television Critics Association, he currently runs *TV, eh?*, a website devoted to covering the Canadian television industry.

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*, *The 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.

Emma McIntyre is a staff entertainment photographer with Getty Images currently based in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in many publications including *Rolling Stone*, *SPIN*, *The New York Times*, *PEOPLE*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *US Weekly*, *GQ*, and *Pitchfork*.

Heather White is a Halifax-based freelance writer who has a passion for storytelling as an expression of culture. Her story includes a stint at *TV Guide* (Canada) magazine, and film festival bingeing.

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



Canadian Screenwriters have it good, but it could be better

There were many responsibilities I assumed when I became the president of the Writers Guild Of Canada. One such responsibility is the annual ritual sacrifice that keeps the demon-possessed puppet of Casey from Mr. Dressup in his hellish slumber. The other is to attend the annual general meeting of the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds and the World Conference of Screenwriters, held once every two years.

During these two events, held this year in a surprisingly balmy Berlin, Executive Director Maureen Parker, WGC council member Anne-Marie Perrotta and I met with executive directors and Guild presidents from around the world: From Israel to Ireland, from South Africa to South Korea, from New Zealand to Spain.

We shared information on policy, producers, and process. We shared war stories from our writers' rooms, or discussed the lack thereof. We discussed ongoing issues around representation and diversity, and shared ideas on how we could increase the volume of everyone's voice.

And after four days, I came away with this: on a global scale, as an industry, Canadian screenwriters have got it pretty good. Not only do we have a collective agreement, we have the right to collective bargaining (We are just one of three countries that has collective bargaining). Our IPA ensures us decent front-end salaries as well as back-end opportunities... and we enjoy government protections to ensure there's a marketplace for our stories.

Can we do better? Of course we can, and as a Guild we are

always looking for ways to improve the opportunities for the Canadian screenwriter. And we can make those improvements as long as we maintain the foundation that our careers are built on: Our Independent Production Agreement.

But the privileges we currently enjoy because of our IPA are tenuous at best and could be lost at any minute.

Imagine the new NAFTA, a.k.a. the USMCA (United States, Mexico, Canada Agreement) if a different kind of Canadian government were at that negotiating table, a Canadian Government that didn't consider the cultural exemptions of the original NAFTA to be sacrosanct.

The Scriptwriters Guild of Israel didn't have to imagine any such nightmare. They lived through it when the Israeli government threatened to shutter their public broadcaster. In the end, the SGI prevailed in keeping the public broadcaster both public and broadcasting, but it was a hard-won fight that involved coordinated public protests and a hunger strike.

To date, a WGC fight has been waged with well-researched policy papers and even-keeled

negotiation. Led by the intensely well-informed Maureen Parker, our WGC staff works tirelessly to defend our rights as writers. And they make it all look so easy. But behind the scenes, they are engaged in preventing the almost daily attempts to chip away at the terms our IPA.

I am proud of the way Maureen and the staff defend our rights and privileges with their arsenal of logic, reason, and data. They make it look easy, and historically, they have never asked more from us than for the occasional letter to a member of parliament. But make no mistake; there are fights looming on the horizon that may require more than an organized letter-writing campaign.

Which is why I believe my primary responsibility — not just as your president, but also as a Guild-member — is to defend and, wherever possible, improve the provisions of the IPA our Guild has fought so hard to create. Not just for my own benefit, but also for all members: past, present and future and in any way necessary.

I hope you feel the same way.

— **Dennis Heaton**

Success: The WGC, the CRTC, and PNI

The WGC, along with other industry groups, appealed to the Cabinet of Canada in 2017 regarding a flawed CRTC decision, one which would essentially slash private broadcaster's minimum spending on Canadian programs (specifically "programs of national interest," or PNI) by up to 40 per cent. The cabinet appeal was a success, resulting in the decision being sent back to the Commission for reconsideration. Another success: in August 2018 the Commission's reconsideration ensured that Canadian broadcasters must uphold their financial contributions to the creation of original Canadian programming. This is an important victory for creators of Canadian programming, due in no small part to the diligent efforts of WGC members, council, and staff in raising awareness of the significance of this issue.

Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society Turns 20

Back in 1998 the WGC set up the Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) to collect authors' levies owed to writers under the national copyright legislation of certain countries, levies arising from the secondary use of authors' works. Creating the CSCS was an auspicious decision, as WGC members have since benefited to the tune of over 16 million dollars. Today, CSCS continues its mission to get otherwise inaccessible money into the pockets of Canadian screenwriters.

WGC Members in the Spotlight

WGC members have been in the spotlight in recent months, including at the Guild's own Writers



Killjoys writers Julian Doucet, Vivian Lin (front row); Anusree Roy, Derek Robertson, Adam Barken (back row)

Talking TV series, with *Wishfart* creators Dan Williams, Lienne Sawatsky, and John Hazlett chatting with host Mike Kiss, and at the Guild's "Killjoys Screenwriter Panel" at Fan Expo Canada. *Killjoys* showrunner Adam Barken and writers Julian Doucet, Nikolijne Troubetzkoy, Andrew De Angelis, Julie Puckrin, Vivian Lin, and Derek Robertson met fans and took part in a lively discussion moderated by Jeremy Boxen. The Guild was also pleased to sponsor a panel at the Reelworld Film Festival in October called "The Showrunner," featuring Marsha Greene, Ins Choi, and Samantha Wan.

Script Registration Discontinuation

WGC council has approved the discontinuation of the Guild's intellectual property registration service. This means that new digital registrations or renewals will no longer be accepted. (The service will continue for any registrations which are active and have not expired, and registrants who provide

the appropriate documentation may continue to withdraw registrations.) The decision to make this change was because few members use the service, and the costs to build a registration application for the new WGC website (launching soon!) were prohibitive. Contact the Guild at info@wgc.ca with any questions.

Pacific Screenwriting and Screen Nova Scotia Programs

Two new screenwriter training programs have been launched in Canada with the Guild's input, including the Pacific Screenwriting Program, created with strategic guidance from the WGC and ongoing input through the PSP board, which includes WGC members Rachel Langer and Rob Cooper, and WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker. As well, Screen Nova Scotia consulted with the Guild in order to set up the SNS Screenwriter Internship Program, aimed at connecting Nova Scotian screenwriters with top Canadian showrunners via internships in writers' rooms.

The Do's and Don'ts of Diversity* Hiring

The WGC diversity committee has created a list of “Diversity Hiring Do's and Don'ts” as part of its ongoing efforts to promote the voices of Indigenous people, people of colour, LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities within the Guild, as well as to increase members’ understanding of the challenges faced by diverse screenwriters and to address issues of diversity-based discrimination in conjunction with the Guild and its council. Adam Barken, showrunner of *Killjoys*, notes that when reading the do's and don'ts some may react with a mix of “Hey cool, I've done that” and “Oh crap... I've done that,” pointing out that we're in a transition period in both our culture and industry. “It's been too long in coming,” says Adam, “and it's probably

going to take more time than any of us would like to get there. Change is hard. And we're going to screw up sometimes. Take that as a given and keep trying to do better. In the meantime, let's also be grateful to have the WGC diversity committee, who wrote this list to help point out some basic do's and don'ts on the way to a richer, more inclusive world.”

So, you're working in a room that includes Indigenous, POC, LGBTQ+, or people with disabilities and it's never happened before. Don't panic! Here are a few tips to make things less awkward. (Notwithstanding, of course, that most writers are just inherently awkward).

DO ask us what our opinions are. Start with opinions on lunch, because we're writers first. Then build to more culturally sensitive topics.

DO listen and believe what we say about our lived experiences. Think of it like this — you wouldn't hire a medical consultant and then refute their expert knowledge.

DO treat writers who check the diversity box as actual people outside of that box. Because spoiler alert — we are!

DO check in to see how we're doing and reiterate that our difference in opinions and perspectives are valued.

DO flip the script! And ask the CIS, white, able-bodied writers what living with those privileges has been like.

DO attempt to tell rich, nuanced stories with the help of your shiny new diverse writers room.

DO acknowledge how much richer the stories are with more diversity in writers' rooms, on screen, and on set.

DO hire more than one of us in the room. You'll find the depth and breadth of conversation can go deeper and be more nuanced for your characters.

DO create space for the conversation. Provide the ACCEPTANCE and allow the SILENCE so a new voice can be heard. Voicing a diverse opinion from the most vulnerable seat in the writers' room requires security and opportunity.

DON'T only ask us to weigh in on our “diverse specialty.”

DON'T expect us to be an expert on every race, sexual orientation, or disability. Or to speak for an entire race like it's a monolith. Just like you wouldn't ask a neurosurgeon about the weird rash on your butt. Or if all butts are the same.

DON'T say things like, “I don't see colour.” Unless you're talking to your eye doctor.

DON'T ask us to bring the ethnic food to the wrap party.

DON'T get hyper defensive when talking about race. If a writer is talking about an uncomfortable experience with your race, they're not saying it's your fault.

DON'T be disheartened when you can't cure inequality with your show. Or one episode. Or in a six-minute B plot.

DON'T expect cookies for doing so. But maybe cupcakes, if craft services is good.

DON'T complain that white men can't get jobs anymore. ‘Coz they still do!

DON'T be afraid to ask questions or make mistakes. It's a great opportunity to learn.

**We may contain multitudes, but no single person is diverse. The definition of diverse is “showing a great deal of variety.” It is not the token person in a room; it is the combination of different people in a room. It is including voices different than — but of equal value to — your own. It is bringing together a group of people that better reflects our society.*



Sherold Edwards, Kathryn Borel, Moira Walley-Beckett, Jane Maggs, Naledi Jackson and Amanda Fahey.



ALL ABOUT ANNE

Some thought the CanLit classic was untouchable. Then came *Anne with an E*. The all-women writers' room discusses the breakout success of the show as they embark on season 3

By Matthew Hays

The idea sounded so crazy it almost tips over into parody. Take one of the most beloved characters in the CanLit canon, *Anne of Green Gables*, and retell her story, but through a decidedly contemporary lens. Add a dose of realism — this is a story about an orphan in the 1800s, after all — toss in a black character and a gay one, and illustrate the gritty scenario that an actual orphan might face in that moment in history.

For broadcasters the CBC and Netflix, the risks involved have turned up serious dividends. *Anne with an E*, now in the midst of its second season, has garnered positive reviews and ignited a new fan base whose online enthusiasm for the show is contagious.

Hired to write the pilot and the entire first season was Moira Walley-Beckett, who earned great renown as co-producer and a writer on the landmark *Breaking Bad*. *Anne with an E* seemed a good name for the show, she surmised, as “I wanted to signify that this was something that had not come before.”

The show has definitely upset the cheerful apple cart that was the sheer innocence of the ‘80s miniseries, *Anne of Green Gables*. The new Anne faces down abusive situations, feels the agony of being an orphan and has gay and black friends. “I think with *Breaking Bad* and *Anne with an E*, you can see the kind of projects I want to engage with,” says Walley-Beckett. “I like deeply complicated stories about flawed characters. I wanted to handle this material with tremendous sensitivity, but I also wanted to do something entirely new.”

Walley-Beckett adds that Jane Campion’s *The Piano* was a source of inspiration, another film about a woman protagonist who must face down trauma and hardships and somehow endure and survive.

If not everyone warmed to Anne’s reinvention (like the *New Yorker*’s Sarah Larson article, *How Not to Adapt Anne of Green Gables*), the indispensable online industry site *IndieWire* certainly did. “Although the source material still provides some inspiration,” Hanh Nguyen raved, “the new storylines offer more adventures, more ways to develop character, and more insights into the time period that are relevant to issues faced by youth today.”

Since writing the first season, Walley-Beckett has taken on the role of showrunner, assembling a writers’ room for the second season, and now the third. The writers and commissioning producer spoke to *Canadian Screenwriter* about the challenges of taking on *Anne*, working in an all women’s writing room and the joy of modernizing a Canadian classic.

First encounters with source material

Moira Walley-Beckett: “I devoured the books as a teen. Reading them now, it strikes you just how much she endured as a child. It was the Victorian era. She was an unwanted, unloved child. She was an orphan and that was not easy in that time. That’s inherent in the book. That opened up certain questions: what are the forces that formed Anne? How is she a survivor? Why did she need her imagination so badly? Lucy Maud Montgomery said in interviews that Anne was abused and that the orphan asylum as a horrible place. We put that on the screen. I think that makes us love her even more.”

Kathryn Borel: “Anne was one of two proto-feminist icons that I grew up with, the other being Pippi Longstocking. My sense of home was quite nomadic, so I could relate to them. Whenever we would move, the books were a constant in my life. Anne was important because I could relate to her vivid imagination.”

Naledi Jackson: “I had never read the books nor saw the show as a kid. I got a call from my agent about *Anne*. I thought, ‘There’s no way I’m going to like *Anne of Green Gables*.’ But I read the books and was in tears! I loved it. I called my agent and said, ‘Yeah, I’m in the game.’”

Borel: “When we wrote about Anne having the hair dye job go wrong [Anne, trying to dye her hair black, instead dyes it green], that’s all in the book, of course. For me, that was a joy: Anne is this guileless, fearless character, who can metabolize pain and turn it into wisdom. You can forgive her for occasionally sticking her foot in it. There’s a lot of possibility in writing Anne, because she’s such a strong character.”

Jane Maggs: “Anne is an amazingly strong character. One of the things that is very clear is that she did not come from a place of privilege.”

Being in an all-women writers’ room

Borel: “We begin each season with a few pages of notes from Moira, including several stories she wants to tell during the season, who the new characters are and what the story arcs are. We expand on the ideas and go over each one carefully. Moira runs a very democratic room — everyone is invited to chime in. I think it means we’re coming from a place of intuition. The show is very character-driven. The more we talk about an idea, the better it gets. The room I was in before was a cartoon on Fox. There were 21 men and one other woman. *Anne with an E* was far more positive, and a far more sincere room. It felt far less competitive. It was more relaxing, and I felt a lot of generosity in the room.”

Jackson: “They’re all like sisters to me. I feel a level of safety and also radical openness. This has been great, to tell the story of one girl’s coming of age; I feel like no one has been holding back.”

Shernold Edwards: “Depending on the gender breakdown of the room, you tailor your conversations. There’s a level of comfort to an all-women’s writers room. After a few days I stopped wearing lipstick and mascara.”



Shernold Edwards and Naledi Jackson.

“There’s a level of comfort to an all-women’s writers room. After a few days I stopped wearing lipstick and mascara.”

Maggs: “It’s amazing how much this room full of women gets to exorcise our own demons through a character living in 1888. We don’t have to work that hard to make the connections. Moira is very open to ideas. She wants to tap into the brain trust. The room is very safe and non-judgmental. We all felt a great sense of freedom.”

Jackson: “As a woman, as a black woman, as a less experienced writer, you shrink down a bit. Not in this room.”

Thoroughly Modern Anne

Walley-Beckett: “When I thought about it, the books were full of topical, relevant themes. I was excited to revisit now, and for it to become a global conversation about gender parity, feminism, bullying, identity and inclusion. I think those things are built into the book. Those issues are all there — we’re still talking about them in 2018. The trick was to talk about them within the world of Anne.”



Moira Walley-Beckett and Kathryn Borel.

Jackson: “Anne is amazing to write, because she’s so unique. She has known hardship but has a generous, open heart and she sees things through the lens of optimism. As long as we stick to the truth of who Anne is, we can expand in other areas like racism and gender equality.”

Maggs: “She actually feels very modern. Anne is a natural feminist. She’s actually an extremely contemporary character.”

Borel: “It has made me so happy to be part of a writing team that is expanding the world of Anne. Nostalgia is often about wanting to go back when things are white and straight, and about people who are too lazy to write from other perspectives. We get to imagine Anne dealing with things we know existed then but couldn’t be talked about.”

Introducing black and gay characters

Jackson: “I could relate to the Trinidadian character, Bash, through my Mom’s story, as she came from South Africa. With a few women of colour in the room, we can bring our own experiences of otherness and inclusion to the stories.”

Edwards: “It was so thrilling to be writing the first black character in Anne’s universe. There were black people living in PEI since the 1700s. We were able to talk about racism in Canada, and even issues of consent. I hope people will watch it with their children, because it’s important to start these conversations at a young age.”

Maggs: “At times there is surprise at the way we have strayed from the source material. Why would you go back and do something exactly the same way as it’s been done before? Our intent was to do an Anne that was very relevant to now. While writing it, it was important to keep in mind that we were appealing to the next brave generation. It’s an opportunity to give voice to young people.”

Walley-Beckett: “Why add a black or LGBTQ character? Because those people existed back then. Montgomery was not able to write about those things. Why wouldn’t we include those things, given how diverse Canada is?”

Amanda Fahey: “There were gay people like Cole back at that time, we just didn’t get to see them. I hope that audiences are excited to see themselves

“Why add a black or LGBTQ character?
Because those people existed back then.
Montgomery was not able to write about
those things. Why wouldn’t we include those
things, given how diverse Canada is?”

reflected in Cole. And it makes perfect sense, because Anne is a very open-minded person. She’s about treating people with kindness.”

The Real Thing

Walley-Beckett: “I wanted it to have a documentary-level of real. Nighttime lit by candles, scenes of rain shot in actual rain, mud-stained dresses to be stained with actual mud. This was a salt- and wind-blown life in the Maritimes in the 1800s. There is no make-up on the actors — other than some enhanced freckles on Anne. I wanted it to look and feel like it actually was, and for the audience to share in that and be able to be immersed in it.”

Maggs: “It has been a challenge to balance the darker elements, to represent the reality of what those things must have felt like. And we’re also definitely writing for a family show at the same time. You want to delve into the real, gritty version of it, but you have to balance that with the kind of show we’re making. She had a hard life, but there’s also joy in her life.”

Edwards: “The reality is, Anne was an orphan. And if we’re going to be realistic, being an orphan in that time was horrible and traumatic. We needed to bring that to the screen.”

Responding to the responses

Walley-Beckett: “It’s an adaptation, which means we’ve taken certain liberties. We wanted to use the full scope of our imaginations. Some people feel betrayed, but others find it invigorating. You can see it on social media: the outpouring of emotion surrounding this show is off the charts. Young people love the messages of inclusion, and the importance of chosen family, friendship. *Anne of Green Gables* is a classic; it’s also a foundation for conversation. It remains relevant. That’s delightful.”

Jackson: “I was never that worried about failing the traditional Anne audience. I think it’s very natural to want to explore new storylines, to give a classic like this new relevance. I guess some Christian evangelicals don’t like what we’re doing. I couldn’t give two shits about that. Young audiences are on board, that’s what’s so important.”

Sally Catto, General Manager, Programming, CBC: “I gave the show the green light. After reading the pilot, all we could really say was, the best thing is to give no notes. The depth of the backstory, the pain she had been through and the contrast of that with her passion for life, that brought Anne to life. The calibre of talent in that writers’ room is amazing. It’s like lightning in a bottle — you want to keep it as long as you can. As well as its success on the CBC, it’s the fourth most-binged show on Netflix in the world. I’d love to see the series continue, and Anne continue to grow.” ■

BORN TO BINGE

***Travelers* makes sure viewers aren't going anywhere**

By Diane Wild

“Are you still watching?” That’s the on-screen prompt Netflix binge-watchers either dread or take as a point of pride, and *Travelers* fans have collectively answered it with a resounding “yes.”

The time-travel sci-fi series, created by Brad Wright of *Stargate* fame, was the seventh most-binged Netflix original show in 2017. (Fellow Canadian show *Anne with an E*, created by Moira Walley-Beckett, was also in the top ten at number four; see our cover story.) Netflix will soon air the third season exclusively worldwide, following two seasons where Showcase was its home in Canada.

Netflix defines a binge as more than two hours of the same series watched in one day. But, as those of us who have been nudged with “Are you still watching?” know, that’s just the start. CEO Reed Hastings once joked (joked?) that Netflix’s major competition is sleep.

From the earliest days of Netflix original programming, bingeability has been the streaming service’s mission. By default, new episodes continue before the credits have finished rolling on the previous one, and entire seasons are usually dropped at one time instead of doling out weekly episodes.

Given how much data Netflix has at its disposal — not just ratings based on small sample audiences, but exact viewing habits of its subscribers, down to whether many of them tune out after a particular

scene — it’s easy to imagine they would have detailed formulas for showrunners in order to maximize binging. In fact, Wright’s experience is the opposite.

“The data from Netflix’s algorithms is almost too powerful, and they don’t abuse it,” says Wright. “They believe in letting showrunners tell their stories. Even though they know that data, they don’t tell me or hold it over me.”

Travelers centres around a group of humans from the future sent back to the 21st century to avoid a global catastrophe. Actor and producer Eric McCormack stars as the team’s leader, who inhabits the body and life of an FBI agent. Mysteries large and small are baked into the premise, helping propel the stories while keeping audience members glued to their couches. So far, so like a tradition television show. But Netflix differentiates itself in that audiences *can* binge, instead of waiting a week for the next episode. So audiences do.

Before Netflix became an original content producer in a big way with the launch of *House of Cards* in 2013, cable television especially had long gone all in with serialized programming. *The Sopranos*, *The Shield*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad* became masters at compelling viewers to subscribe, join the virtual watercooler, return the next week, and/or binge on DVD set boxes. Netflix has adopted that model as its own, with the benefit that no viewer has to wait for the next week ... unless sleep calls.



BOTTOM PHOTO: BRYAN BELANGER-DIAZ

Travelers creator Brad Wright (above) and writer Ashley Park (below)

“They like you to think about your series as 10 hours of a story versus 10 episodic moments of a series”

“They like you to think about your series as 10 hours of a story versus 10 episodic moments of a series,” Wright says.

Learning how to make a Netflix show for Wright meant finding the “Netflix moment” at the end of each episode — not necessarily a cliffhanger instead of a resolution to the *Travelers*’ current mission, but a final hook that would move the viewer’s thumb away from the “stop” button.

Wright gives the example of one character seeing a list of people destined to die soon and recognizing one of them. The resolution to that moment — the “but who?” — isn’t addressed until a few episodes later. “It’s still enough to make a viewer watch the next episode.”

“It’s something we talked about a lot,” agrees *Travelers* writer Ashley Park about binge-friendly writing. “TV today is different from TV even just a few years ago.”

She highlighted a type of stinger that felt like a natural element of the series: having the “creepy kid messengers” sent by the travelers’ director drop information about a new mission in the last 30 seconds to cue up the next episode, after the current crisis has been resolved. Call it the series’ built-in “play next episode” button.

The past

The first season credits read like a who’s who of the Canadian Film Centre’s Prime Time TV Program class of 2014 ... because they are.

For Wright, the invitation to be that year’s showrunner in residence came at the perfect time, and not just because he was keen to get to know more emerging writers. He’d been pitching the idea for *Travelers* in Canada and the United States and thought he’d sold it in the room a few times, only to have the not-in-the-room decision-makers turn it

down. He decided to write the pilot on spec, and had almost finished when the invitation came.

He treated his nine students like they were a working writers’ room. With his pilot and the pitch document to guide them, they broke the first season and episodes together, then each student was assigned to write an episode.

“We had a very clear road map of where the season would go and what the character arcs would be,” says Park. “The hard part was parcelling out the big moments.”

For many, that class assignment became their first on-screen writing credit. When Wright sold the series soon after, with nearly a season’s worth of developed scripts, he preserved those credits as he promised his class he would.

Park entered the CFC as a huge sci-fi fan, but didn’t discover until after her acceptance that Wright was leading that year’s class. “I think I screamed at the phone,” she laughs. “I was a big fan of *Stargate* growing up.”

“Brad set the tone from the beginning, saying ‘I am not a teacher. Don’t think of this as a class, think of this as work.’”

When it came time to staff the series post-greenlight, Wright hired some of those same students, including Park, Pat Smith and Jason Whiting, all of whom are still with the show in season three. Tara Armstrong, another participant in the program, was on his list too, but she was a little busy post-CFC, already committed to the show she’d created, *Mary Kills People*. “It’s a little unfortunate she was so successful that I couldn’t even work with her,” Wright jokes.

“For an emerging writer who had never had a real job before, it was incredible,” says Park. “It was another ‘are you serious?’ phone call. Brad took a chance on fresh blood, and it was probably a big risk.”

“That’s how you get a start, right?” says Wright. “Somebody has to give you a break.”

The show caught its own break when Netflix decided to continue with a third season after Corus's Showcase withdrew. Meanwhile further continuity came about when Robin Neinstein, a Corus executive in charge of original content — such as *Travelers* — happened to move to the streaming service's physical production team, focused on productions filming in Canada — such as *Travelers*.

Though episodes sometimes had to be trimmed with ad breaks added for Showcase, audiences won't likely see a difference onscreen in season three. "I was always making a Netflix show," Wright says, pointing out that Netflix contributed by far the larger audience — in 189 territories around the world — as well as the larger percentage of the budget.

"Not a lot of people my age have cable, so my friends didn't know what *Travelers* was," Park says about the days when Canadians weren't part of the Netflix audience. "There was such a disconnect between the international response and the Canadian response."

The present

Making a Netflix show brings freedom from the constraints of the traditional TV sweet-spot demographic. "They don't care how old you are or what products you buy," Wright says. "A subscriber is a subscriber."

Though they also don't care about hard act outs to lure audiences back from commercial breaks, the first two seasons did air with ads on Showcase. In any case, Wright points out that "plays are written in acts. It's the structure of a sound story."

Most of the current writing team has been together since the beginning, so they are all very aware of how to honour and develop the characters. Then "story happens," according to Wright, who was the inaugural winner of the WGC Showrunner Award in 2007.

He or another writer might come into the writers' room with the idea for an episode, and the writers will spin it out together. Once they have a solid idea and stakes for the characters, they work out the beats on the whiteboard. The next day, they'll start with a blank board again because "writing it out again makes you rethink," says Wright. They repeat the process until they face a whiteboard that feels right.

From then, given the trust they've built with their executives, the episode writer can go to script. "The trick to being a staff writer is finding the same voice as the showrunner, so the actors are reading the same character off the page no matter who wrote the script," says Wright, who does at least a final

dialogue polish. "Sometimes it takes a while to find that voice, with the same patterns, rhythm, and attack of scenes. But generally over the course of seasons people get closer and it's far more likely I'll get a weekend off."

One benefit to having a diverse writing room that includes early-career writers is the ability to inject authenticity into a diverse range of characters. "The closer I get to 60, the harder it is for me to write a 25-year-old woman with any sense of believability," says Wright. "Having a 25-year-old writer in the room is helpful."

Working with younger writers reminds you of the present, he said, "and you have to evolve as a writer. I started my career in the '90s. We don't write the same way today."

"And it's not just about being younger," says Park, one of the twenty-somethings. "Many of the CFC class were in their thirties and forties. It's about different voices, and people with different backgrounds."

Those voices are Canadian voices, even if the series is set in the United States. Wright notes the Vancouver-shot series is almost accidentally all-Canadian. He had initially intended to make a 6/10 series according to Canadian content rules, believing he'd want access to actors and directors from the United States as well as Canada. Instead, he found everyone he needed for a 10/10 Canadian production north of the 49th parallel. He credits the efforts of casting agent Maureen Webb, as well as his luck in nabbing McCormack and Patrick Gilmore, who he had in mind for their roles when writing the pilot.

"Getting rooted in Canadianness can make it parochial for an international audience," he says. "Everything in art is imbued by the people who create it. I'm Canadian, therefore it's Canadian. Our cast is Canadian, our writers are Canadian, our directors are Canadian. I don't need to write in a maple leaf to make it more Canadian than that." One wink at the series' heritage is that the travelers, as we find out in season two, come from Canada themselves.

The future

Binging may be the new normal for audiences, but it takes some getting used to as a writer. "It's six months for you, millions of dollars in production, being consumed in an afternoon over popcorn and cheezies. And then they turn around and say they need the next season," Wright laughs. "The flip side is you don't have to wait for it to air again if you need to catch up. It's there. It will be there in 10 years. I think that's cool." ■

BRINGING A BRIT WHODUNNIT ACROSS THE POND

Writers on *The Bletchley Circle: San Francisco* discuss reviving a U.K. series in North America

By Mark Dillon

It's not every day an outsider convinces a production company to spin off one of its own shows, but that's exactly how *The Bletchley Circle: San Francisco* came to be.

ITV aired the original miniseries *The Bletchley Circle*, created by Guy Burt, in the U.K. in 2012. It follows a quartet of female Second World War veterans of Bletchley Park — the Brits' codebreaking headquarters — who reassemble in 1952 to try to catch a London serial murderer. The story arc is spread over three one-hour episodes, and when the series returned two years later, a pair of mystery tales were told over four episodes. It was not renewed for a third season.

And that might have been that, if not for Laura Good.

Good, then manager of drama development at Vancouver's Omnifilm Entertainment, was intrigued by the historical truth the series brought to light: that an estimated 8,000 women worked at Bletchley Park. She pitched Omnifilm exec producer Brian Hamilton on the idea of reviving the concept in an American setting.

"There wasn't a lot of information on American women involved in codebreaking," Good recalls. "There were tiny pieces about one or two women who had made significant discoveries. We had no idea there more than 10,000 women codebreakers in North America during World War 2. San Francisco was a codebreaking hub and I found evidence of three of these women and thought that's enough for a show. All this information came out as we were working on it, so I felt validated."

Omnifilm brought the idea to World Productions' Jake Lushington, who produced the original series. Impressed, he asked Good to write a pitch to take to broadcasters. The series was eventually commissioned by BritBox, marking the first foray into original content for the SVOD service backed by BBC Studios and ITV. BritBox makes the series available to U.S. viewers, while ITV broadcasts in the U.K.

Hamilton reached out to *Bitten* creator Daegan Fryklind to write a pilot, which she was more than happy to do.



Cracking good time solving crimes with Julie Graham as Jean McBrian, Crystal Balint as Iris Bearden, Chanelle Peloso as Hailey Yarnier & Rachael Stirling as Millie Harcourt in The Bletchley Circle: San Francisco.

"I had watched *The Bletchley Circle* seasons one and two, and for me it ticked all the boxes: strong female characters, mystery, period, and the fact you could tell a story over a couple of episodes. It's procedural but not contained to 42 minutes, so it's not all plot-driven and you could have character moments," Fryklind says. "Omnifilm had me write the pilot to reassure the broadcasters that they were getting the same tone and feel as *The Bletchley Circle*, but also so they could see on the page what this new element of San Francisco would feel like."

In this new iteration, which has moved forward to 1956, original-series characters Millie (Rachael Stirling) and Jean (Julie Graham) travel to San Francisco to investigate a couple of murders that bear a striking resemblance to the unsolved murder of their colleague Claire (Lydia King) during the war. Fish out of water, they team up with codebreaker Iris (Crystal Balint), a wartime contact, and her eager-beaver colleague Hailey (Chanelle Peloso). Millie and Jean later decide to stay and pool their talents with the others to solve crimes.

Good pitched Canadian broadcasters and was joined by Fryklind once she was on board. Rogers Media took Canadian rights for Citytv, which triggered local funding incentives and tax credits for the Vancouver-shot show.

Fryklind also wrote episode six, but otherwise could not go forward with the project as she was knee-deep in development on a series for The CW titled *Project 13*, based on characters from DC Comics. She suggested to Omnifilm that Michael MacLennan, with whom she had worked on *Bitten* and *jPod*, would make an ideal showrunner.

Part of that, MacLennan indicates, has to do with his experience as co-creator and showrunner on *Bomb Girls* (2012-13), which told the story of World War 2 female munitions workers.

"*Bomb Girls* is set 10 years earlier, but it's also a modestly budgeted Canadian series that delves into themes of women's empowerment in a period setting," he says. "*Bletchley* is in a completely different genre, but it's allowed me to pick up on so much of the thinking, research and thematic terrain I had at the ready."



Laura Good (above); Daegan Fryklind (right); Michael MacLennan (opposite)



Before accepting the gig, MacLennan outlined to the producers his vision. “I was trying to make sure I was the right fit to run a show that’s already a beloved series. I didn’t want to be disappointing anybody by going off in the wrong direction,” he recalls. “But I said I wanted more character, humor and diversity. And it turns out that was exactly what Jake Lushington had in mind.”

The writers’ room included Damon Vignale (*Blackstone*), who wrote episodes three and seven, Rachel Langer (*This Life*), who wrote episode four, and Good, who cowrote the episode eight finale with MacLennan. The latter also wrote episodes two and five.

Good says she wasn’t expecting to be hired on as writer/story editor.

“My hope was just that we would get the opportunity to tell this story of these amazing women,” she says. “I was just doing my job. But my passion came through. After Daegan read my pitch, episode outlines and character profiles, she called me and asked, ‘Are you a writer?’ I just brought something I loved to the table and it unfolded the way it did.”

Good left Omnifilm to complete the Canadian Film Centre’s Bell Media Prime Time TV Program

in 2016, and gained experience working on the CBC series *Burden of Truth* and CTV’s *Cardinal* before *The Bletchley Circle: San Francisco* was greenlit. MacLennan considers her presence in the room a great asset.

“It was a very different role for her once it became about writing on the show,” he says. “She walked with grace and balanced being custodian of the heart and genesis of the show with understanding, as was the case with all of us, that she was playing one part on the team putting it together.”

Fryklind, meanwhile, was able to be in the room for the first week.

“I came in to bring everyone up to speed on the work Laura and I had done,” she explains. “When I came on, I absorbed all of Laura’s research and really just changed the focus of the pilot to introduce San Francisco as a character. Each of the murder mysteries goes into a specific community at that time, and I wanted to start with the big, bold San Francisco of the Fillmore District.”

Carrying over an approach he used on *Bomb Girls*, MacLennan had all the writers research separate subjects and report back before they began breaking stories.



“I was trying to make sure I was the right fit to run a show that’s already a beloved series.”

“I would ask them to talk about the geopolitical or cultural terrain of the time,” he explains. “I had Laura look into forensic criminology to understand what might have been considered new technology. We created this kind of collective knowledge with areas of expertise within the room, and only then did we get into the facts of what each story would be.”

He says they worked hard to deliver bullet-proof scripts to strengthen this new U.K. partnership. The first step was for the writers to provide notes on each other’s work, and then they would hear from Hamilton and Lushington, who were their go-betweens with ITV. The script notes from the U.K. revealed a bit of a culture clash — which also happens to be one of the series’ themes.

Good says that in ITV’s notes “they wanted their act outs to be more muted, whereas U.S. broadcasters are very much into cliffhangers and action. ITV wanted those to be character beats and a little quieter. They weren’t as excited about Americanized violence.”

MacLennan, whose credits include *Queer as Folk* and *The Fosters*, worked enough in Los Angeles to feel comfortable writing *Bletchley*’s American-set characters and stories, but to please the U.K.

broadcaster he received valuable insight from Lushington, whom he calls the production’s “Brit whisperer.”

“He would know what would excite and what would alarm ITV,” MacLennan says. “There usually weren’t more than a handful of notes, but they were all very good and he was always right. Whatever he recommended was always bang-on in terms of what ITV would want.”

BritBox and ITV launched the series in July, while Citytv debuted it in September. The Canadian channel, which came on later in the process, did not provide script notes. At the time of this writing the producers awaited word on a second-season renewal.

It might seem like an unusual production model — a British streaming service commissioning a show produced in Canada, but there are other similar examples, particularly in the science fiction genre. *Wynonna Earp* and *Dark Matter* were both commissioned by Syfy in the U.S. but shot in Canada and picked up for broadcast here by Space.

But, as Fryklind points out, Canadian broadcasters can be first to greenlight a show that goes on to figure prominently on a U.S. channel. Such is the case with *Bitten*, which was an original for Space before Syfy came on board. There are currently, according to estimates, nearly 500 scripted series on North American TV, and the abundance of broadcasters willing to fund content produced in Canada, regardless of their country of origin, is good news for writers.

“As long as there’s a dog wagging, I don’t think writers care who wags the dog,” Fryklind says. “They just want work and make good TV.”

SECOND JEN'S SECOND LIFE

An almost 24-month delay didn't derail Omni's comedy

By Greg David

After an almost two-year absence, season two of *Second Jen* returned to Omni Television in August.

The sitcom, co-created by Amanda Joy and Samantha Wan, tells the comedic experiences of best friends Jennifer “Mo” Monteloyola (Joy) and Jennifer “Jen” Wu (Wan), two second-generation millennials who observe, reflect, and react to the world and the people around them.

New for the second season was Carly Heffernan taking over as showrunner and head writer, with Joy as a writer and story editor, and Wan as story editor and co-director.

Some could have viewed the almost 24-month broadcast hiatus as a major step backwards for *Second Jen*; a loss of momentum. Not Heffernan, Joy or Wan, who instead saw it as a rare, refreshing opportunity.

“It kind of felt liberating from a storytelling point of view,” Heffernan says. “We didn’t have to be so beholden to what came before. It was a bit of a fresh start and that re-energized the whole season just from sort of inception to completion.” Heffernan, who has written for *Royal Canadian Air Farce*, *The Hour* and season one of *Second Jen*, moved into the showrunner role and had what Wan described as “assignments” for herself and Joy: the pair were tasked with devising plot ideas. These ideas were written on cue cards, which were matched up to create A and B stories for six episodes.

“Once we had those, we picked our favourites,” Wan says. “We had six [episode ideas] and added a couple of extra ones to pitch to the broadcasters to see which ones the broadcasters said yes to. From there

we talked a little bit about what we wanted to happen in the episodes, and Carly and Amanda were doing most of the writing this year because I was directing.” Wan, who co-stars alongside Cindy Sampson and Jason Priestley in the upcoming third season of *Private Eyes*, praises Heffernan for being able to break story into small bits so it didn’t seem overwhelming. Spit balling in the room came easily and nothing was precious. If it didn’t fit, it was gone.

Among the season two storylines is episode four, “Like a Girl.” It finds Jen donning a skimpy outfit to work in a bar, where a patron makes overt sexual comments about the way she’s dressed. Meanwhile, Mo attends a sexual harassment seminar and ends up schooling the men in attendance, including the facilitator. Written by Joy and directed by Wan, the instalment is alternately funny, scathing and cringeworthy.

“We had to assume that a lot of [harassment] comes out of ignorance,” Joys says. “And comes out of not really understanding the female perspective or what it’s like for women at work. Not knowing the proper protocol, not knowing how actions can come off.” The plot assumes the men want to do the right thing, but don’t know how. It makes the plot accessible, relatable, funny and educational.

Diversity on both sides of the camera has been a large part of *Second Jen* from Day One. The trio agrees it was a conscious decision and an integral part of the storytelling. And it wasn’t to fulfill a quota.

“When you have diverse creators, diverse director and diverse heads, we naturally are a bit of a tribe that



Second Jen's main cast includes Lovell Adams-Gray (left), Samantha Wan, Lily Gao, Amanda Joy and Nile Séguin.

know and end up working with other diverse artists,” Wan says. “We didn’t hire them because they were diverse, we just naturally work with a lot of diverse people because we try to support each other.”

Has the revamped, culturally-diverse *Second Jen* struck a chord with viewers? At the time of publication, television ratings weren’t available, but Heffernan has a mental picture of who she hopes has been tuning in.

“It’s for young cool people who wear leather jackets and drive red cars,” she says with a laugh.

“I would say the tone of the show is for a younger, a savvy audience. These girls are quick and they’re smart and so it’s a bit of a reflection of them. It’s also a show for my 70-year-old parents who live in Brighton, Ontario and they can’t get enough of it. I swear my parents called me after every episode would air.”

Both seasons of Second Jen can be seen on Omni’s website.

MINI-ROOM WITH A (CREATIVE?) VIEW

Smaller writers' room are becoming commonplace in the U.S. Could they work in Canada? They're budget-friendly, but are they bad for creativity?

By Greg David

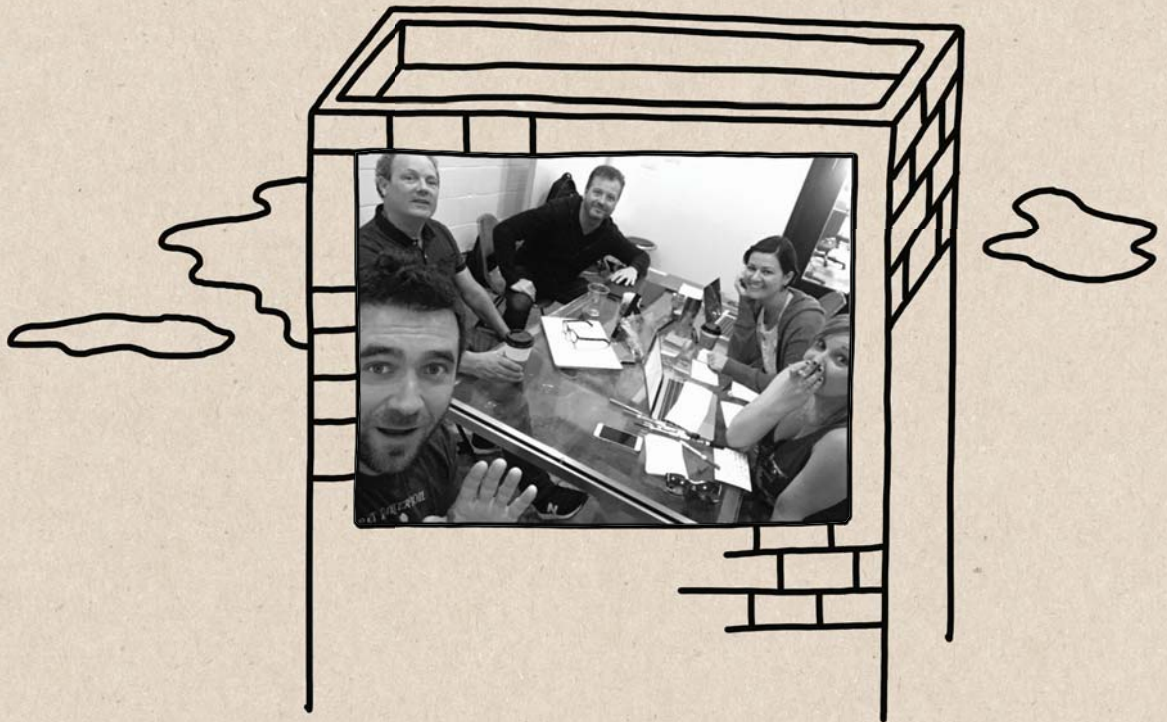
When I think of a writers' room, a pretty clear picture pops up in my mind. It's a square space (possibly windowless) with industrial carpeting (a little threadbare) with three or four tables surrounded by mismatched chairs. A white board or two take up the real estate on one wall. The board is festooned with dry erase marker scribbles and a blizzard of sticky notes. A group of at least eight writers and a showrunner are in that room, yelling out ideas, making jokes and snacking on things that probably aren't good for them.

Now imagine another room with just three or four writers in it. Total. That could very well be the everyday model of television writing in this country.

Earlier this year, *Vanity Fair* published an article called "Is This the End of the TV Writers' Room as We Know It?" It gave the description of a mini-room to mean "fewer writers, a shorter time frame, or both." For smaller American networks like Starz and AMC, the allure of the mini-room is two-fold. It not only enables a network to bring a small group of writers

together to determine whether or not a series can be created, but it does so before production budgets, casts, and locations are even considered. There is no expectation that a whole series is going to get written. And, instead of spending millions on a cast and crew for a pilot of a series that might not go forward, executives fund a less expensive writers' room in which a small number of writers generate scripts and a detailed story arc.

"I see the logic in [having] a lot of scripts before you even start [production] to see if it has needs," says Adriana Maggs. "The truth is, this stuff goes in trends all the time and then sometimes people will order a season based on pitch page. I always think that's such a bad idea because I think writing a glowing pitch page is a totally different skill than writing a season." Maggs, who has written for CTV's *Rookie Blue* and *Saving Hope* and CBC's *21 Thunder* and *Caught*, does see an economic value in a mini-room, but relishes the creative process and collaboration that naturally occurs in a room with more people.



Television series Caught, screenwriters in a mini-room that has held Allan Hawco, Perry Chafe, Julia Cohen, John Krizanc, Adriana Maggs, Garth Sexton and Lisa Moore.

Maureen Parker, executive director of the Writers Guild of Canada, acknowledges the trend, but isn't sold on it.

"My take is cautionary. It has always been the WGC's position that spending more time and money on script development upfront before production is a very wise investment and makes for much better production. This is the best time to determine if your show has legs before you have casting and other costs. But the mini-room is also a response to mini-show orders. No more 22, 18, 13 or 10 but now six episodes in a series order. So, it's a mini-room room for a mini order."

But can the mini-room work in Canada? Depends who you ask.

Chris Roberts, a writer and producer on ABC's *Ten Days in the Valley* and Space's *Orphan Black*, experienced the mini-room first-hand earlier this year on a project called *Memoria*. That enterprise wasn't picked up, but Roberts found it to be helpful.

"I thought it worked quite well," he says.

"Having a smaller room does tend to make things fairly efficient." With only two or three in the room, he says a pilot for *Memoria* was broken in a shorter amount of time and everyone stayed focused on the task at hand.

"If you could get two or three writers together before anything is put down, before you have a budget, or you have casting, and you just break the show and figure out whether or not there's a show here," Roberts says. "You can probably run a tighter, more efficient writing room that way. You'll still have people throwing all kinds of stuff out and you'll have all the creative stew, but ... it could potentially be a lot more structured." With the showrunner model in place there is still one person in charge and their process, Roberts explains, tends to dictate how the room functions. In the end, he imagines it could mean three people in a room for six months writing or six people in a room for three months. It evens out.

James Hurst had a similar experience to Roberts in a mini-room earlier this year. One he participated



Adriana Maggs and James Hurst.

in led to meeting new writers, some of whom he hired when he took over showrunning duties on CBC's *Frankie Drake Mysteries* for season two. He recalls that smaller group to be full of energy and exuding a positive feedback everyone fed on.

"It was really, really exciting," Hurst says. "You are, of course, hopeful you're going to get a show. So, I was really trying to form a team quickly and get everybody excited about this vision and communicate what my vision is for the show. What's funny is I would think you would be doing that every day or quite often, but in many ways you don't."

Again, the obvious advantage of the mini-room is sussing out story arcs in advance, which means cast, locations, sets and other expensive necessities can be plotted out ahead of time so there are fewer surprises. Even so, the reality is you can't just shutter a writers' room for good once production is underway. There will, inevitably, be changes to scripts. And Parker finds the trend of reducing the story department to one or two writers going into production disturbing.

"This is purely a cost cutting exercise. There are always script changes required going into production, regardless of how prepared you are. Script production demands are falling to fewer people — meaning less pay and more pressure on screenwriters. Not a good

industry development. Now writers and showrunners are more rushed and over-worked during crazy production schedules. Without a doubt, the reduction in production orders and size of story rooms and the length of time in those rooms will have a negative impact on the size and experience of the talent pool."

Hurst also thinks this is a big worry for Canadian screenwriters.

"I think it's bad for writer development," Hurst says. "It's not bad for the industry at all. It's probably great for the industry, but just in terms of writer development, it means just such limited opportunities. You have to write a script, you have to fall on your face. You have to learn."

Parker underscores Hurst's concern with another. "By shortening the writers' participation during production, not only will writers be doing more for free but I fear it is another way of denigrating the title of the writer," she says, adding that it's a way of the industry saying, "Production is not the writers' domain, and that writers just rewrite and anyone can do that. Not true! And we must fight that all the way. And it will not make screenwriters better storytellers but rather, it's a 'put you in your place' move."

In other words? "Do not work for free, writers during the production stage to get 'your show made,'" counsels Parker. ■



Julia Cohen

Being freed from a cell phone world

By Cameron Archer

Julia Cohen's recent screenwriting work in Canada was as an executive story consultant and writer for period crime drama *Caught* (Take The Shot Productions), a five-episode limited series that aired from February-March 2018 on CBC Television. Cohen's career includes writing on shows like *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *Being Erica*, *Bitten*, and *Bomb Girls*, and she currently works on the first season of *A Million Little Things* for ABC. Cohen has also worked on *Damnation* for USA Network, and *Riverdale* for The CW. As well, Cohen was a consultant on the first season of Marvel's *X-Men* film series spin-off *Legion* for FX.

What made you decide to become a writer, and how did you break in?

I took drama at Etobicoke School of the Arts, but quickly realized I was far too neurotic and insecure to pursue a career in acting. Thankfully, the school had a playwriting class which suited me far better. Writing my first play was the most creatively rewarding experience of my life, but by far the most difficult — so much rewriting and angst. I remember thinking that anyone

who'd want to pursue a career as a professional writer must be nuts. Knowingly signing up for that self-loathing? Of course, I eventually found my way back to it, and once I realized that in television you at least get to do it with a bunch of other self-loathing, insecure writers...well, I had found my people.

I was lucky enough to start with a writing partner, the very talented Lara Azzopardi, which made the whole process of launching a career in television much less daunting. Together, we had the right combination of ignorance, confidence and contacts in the entertainment industry. We went to L.A. with our very first spec script and ended up signing with an agent, barely understanding what it meant to be a writing team. Shortly thereafter, we sold *Throwing Stones* to the CBC, which we developed with Sally Catto and Tom Hastings. Though it didn't go to series, it was a great first experience.

You were executive story consultant for *Caught*. What were the challenges in adapting Lisa Moore's book as a limited series?

I only got the job a few days before the writers' room started, so I

must admit I read the book very quickly. I soon realized that not being as intimately familiar with the book was a useful perspective in the room. As with any adaptation, it was necessary to use what worked and lose what didn't.

What were the challenges in maintaining period continuity on *Caught*? The show is set in the late 1970s. Things like home taping makes it harder to fudge details when the time period is relatively well-documented.

The biggest challenge was making sure our police work was consistent with the technology available at the time. Trying to craft a surveillance sequence based on 1970s technology required a bit of research, which definitely allowed for some good procrastination in the form of re-watching movies like *The Conversation* and *Three Days of the Condor*. Luckily, I'm a sucker for 1970s conspiracy thrillers. That said, it was incredibly freeing to have characters living in a world where modern technology wasn't readily available. I'm certainly not the first to say it, but the advent of cellphones may be the worst thing that's ever happened to storytelling. ■

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.

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 Garge 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.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Spiritual Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

System Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

T Man Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Zolar Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

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:

www.wgc.ca/cscs/hot_news/index.html

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**

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.



Nadiya Chettiar

The best thing you can offer

By Heather White

Originally from Grand Falls, New Brunswick, Nadiya Chettiar is currently working in Los Angeles as a writer for the CBS sitcom *Life in Pieces*. After graduating from Dalhousie University in Halifax with a theatre degree, Chettiar moved to Toronto where she worked as an actor, then to Vancouver, ultimately turning her hand to writing. Chettiar's credits include *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, *The Best Years*, *Some Assembly Required*, *Package Deal*, *Workin' Moms*, and *Kim's Convenience*. Her pilot, *Love Marriage*, was the first script chosen by the WGC diversity committee for the WGC Diversity Script of the Month initiative, whereby the WGC solicited original scripts from Guild members who self-identify as diverse. (The program gives members whose scripts are chosen the opportunity to have that script read by industry leaders with real decision-making power.) A half-hour comedy, *Love Marriage* follows three mixed-race sisters entering adulthood as they discover who they are through explorations of love, sex, and arranged marriage.

Why did you switch from acting to writing?

I moved to Vancouver for love and my acting career did not follow, so I was bored. Also, I had worn a headscarf for 80% of my acting career — I'm half East

Indian — which was wonderful but didn't reflect an experience I knew. There's a disconnect in the way that people who look like me appear on television. I didn't want to be a stereotype. That was a big motivator for me to start writing. Once I discovered writing I never looked back. I did more schooling through Humber College, Langara College, and UCLA Extension. I'm not a great self-learner. I like having teachers, so that worked out for me.

How did you get to *Life in Pieces*?

My Canadian agent sent the script for *Love Marriage* to people in the U.S. — that's how I got a U.S. agent, and things went from there. My boss at *Life in Pieces* read *Love Marriage* before he met with me, so there's a direct correlation there. In Canada, when the script was sent out to various producers and writers, [as part of the WGC Diversity Script of the Month initiative], I got several responses from people offering support. Unfortunately I'm not in Canada now so I haven't met with any of these people, but I feel like I've broadened my network.

You've said that your L.A. agent believes that having a "diverse room" will make TV better.

What do you think she meant? You need a lot of different ideas, and you get a greater variety of ideas from a greater variety of

backgrounds. That's why we write television in the collaborative style of having many writers come together and discuss and discuss certain ideas before they get executed. You want a show to reach a broad audience, but if everyone is always agreeing, then we're only going to get one kind of story. Within the category of diverse experiences there are many different experiences. I think we're moving to a future where there's not just one blanket diverse thing.

What hashtags would you use to describe *Love Marriage*?

Here's a fun fact. I've never had a social media account of any kind! At first, I was in between the age groups, and as time went on it just didn't appeal to me. At this point I'm a socially motivated person IRL (in real life). There's already enough noise in my head.

Did you write yourself into the script?

Absolutely: I'm a piece of all the characters. I wanted to write about love and relationships — the idea of an arranged marriage is a different take on relationships and helps me bring in my own diversity. There's value in telling our own stories and I love that that's happening in television. Sharing our lives is connecting, and that's the best thing we can offer. ■

News from WGC Members

Penelope Laurence is writing on Digital Dimensions' wordless animation, *Take it Easy Mike* and Apartment 11's extra wordy, *Word!* She's also moonlighting as a professional patient, with nine appointments for a root canal and crown. She's grateful for her AFBS insurance

David Schmidt wrote and executive produced season one of the sci-fi web series, *NarcoLeap*, which is now streaming on CBC's TV app, Telus Optik On Demand TV, YouTube, and at www.narcoleap.com. David is also a writer and story editor on season two of the Paralympian docu-series, *Mind Set Go*, for AMI TV.

Peter Meech has written, directed, and produced *Around Robin*, a psychological thriller starring Clementine Nicholson, Ann Pirvu, and Torrance Coombs. Grammy-nominated cellist, Tina Guo, performs the score. The film will be released in 2019.

Lisa Hunter is in production on a new TVO kids' series (title TBD) that she co-created with **Claire Cappelletti**. Another show she co-created, *Big Top Academy*, airs this fall. Lisa also co-wrote the recent video game *We Happy Few*.

Nadiya Chettiar has joined the writing staff of the ratings hit, *Life in Pieces*, for CBS. Chettiar made the leap to L.A. after working on CBC hits such as *Workin' Moms* and the CSA award-winning second season of *Kim's Convenience*.

Writer/director **Corey Surge**'s short film *Stuck* had its world premiere at the HollyShorts Film Festival and is currently playing at festivals worldwide. Corey's pilot script, *Chasing Losses*, is a finalist for Best Comedy at the Oaxaca Film Festival.

Jerome Simpson started a new monthly event called "Writer PD Days," which combines the best aspects of writing workshops, support groups, networking, and day-drinking. First person to marry someone they meet at Writer PD Days wins a 10% discount on Final Draft.

Robert Geoffrion's first novel, *Dead by Night*, a family drama and murder mystery, has just been published in London, England.

Jennica Harper is currently showrunning *JANN*, a new comedy series for Jann Arden. The show will premiere in spring 2019 on CTV.

Ashley Good's debut feature-length comedy, *Pity Party*, is to be released on Amazon Prime in October. Synopsis: "There's no worse time to experience a mid-mid life crisis than during the end of the world."

Donald Martin's adapting Agnes Bristow's book *Dancing Through the Shadow* into a screenplay for producer Leif Bristow. It's the story of ballet dancer Tia Zhang, who left Communist China for Canada, and taught at the National Ballet School.

Greg Nelson is spending the year in New York and L.A. working on the NBC series, *Manifest*, as writer and co-executive producer.


Mike McPhaden wrote an episode and served as consulting producer on the debut season of *JANN*, a new comedy series starring Jann Arden, produced by Project 10 for CTV.

Don Kurt, the executive producer of the new Spielberg TV series, has optioned **David Rotenberg**'s three novels in *The Junction Trilogy*. Jane McLean has optioned David's *Shanghai*, *The Ivory Compact* novel — both for TV.

Darrin Rose is writing on the new CBS sitcom *Happy Together*. He cowrote the second episode of the season with fellow Canuck **Rebecca Kohler**, in which lead actor Damon Wayans Jr. wears an "Oshawa Lions" jersey. The Shwa!

Alex Pugsley's work is included in the forthcoming *Best Canadian Stories 2018*. His fiction was previously collected in *Best Canadian Stories 2017* and *The Journey Prize Anthology*. His feature film, *Dirty Singles*, can be found on iTunes.

Kristal Clear celebrated its U.K. premiere as part of Raindance Film Festival. Created by **Amanda Fahey** (writer/supervising producer, *Anne with an E*), the entire first season is available to stream now on Amazon Prime Video.



Charles Tidler's latest stage play, *Seventy Seven: found micro dramas*, will be produced by Theatre SKAM, Victoria B.C., in February 2019.

Nathaniel Moher recently wrapped on an animated series where he made a Unicorn talk and a live action series where he made puppies talk. He's now hoping to work on a series where he makes humans talk.

Steve Galluccio's fourth feature, *Little Italy*, was released in August, co-written with **Vinay Virmani** (*Dr. Cabbie*) and directed by Donald Petrie. *Little Italy* grossed over 1.2 million dollars and was the number one Canadian movie two weeks in a row. *Little Italy* was released in the U.S. in September.

Pierre Larouche and **Sid Zanolin** are cowriting the horror feature *Santa Clara* for producer Victoria Sanchez-Mandryk and Just Believe Productions, and the financial support of SODEC makes it all that much sweeter.

Jinder Oujla-Chalmers is currently working on a CBC miniseries development deal based on the real-life story of the Komagata Maru with Omni Film Productions in Vancouver. Jinder's novel, *Seeing the Forest For The Trees*, is being published by Harbour Publishing.

Matt MacLennan joins Sony/AMC's *Preacher* as supervising producer.

Throw Mama from the Boat and other Ferry Tales is **PJ Reece's** latest short story collection. Arthur Black (R.I.P.) called it "Kafka-esque with a touch of Yann Martel thrown in." *Throw Mama* will be available (despite objections from BC Ferries) in November.

John Davie's feature script, *The Lady Made of Light*, was the Script Development Program winner at the recent Atlantic International Film Festival. As part of the award, John received funding from the Harold Greenberg Fund.

Morrie Ruvinsky has a new collection of short stories released in the U.S. and Canada called *The Heart and Other Strangers* — find out more at theheartandotherstrangers.com.

Kirsten Hansen is currently adapting *The Goodbye Bride*, pitching a mystery series, producing an indie feature, and live tweeting the *Chesapeake Shores* season three finale. Her tearjerker MOW *Return to Christmas Creek* airs in November on Hallmark Movies & Mysteries.

Richard M. Dumont's (*Deadly Hope*) latest screenplay, *Radio Silence*, has just completed principle photography in Montreal and will air by Christmas on the Lifetime Channel. His comedy road-trip, coming-of-age script *Ticket To Ride!* was recently optioned.

Gillian Muller was selected for MPAC's Muslim TV Drama Lab,

hosted by Wise Entertainment in Santa Monica, California.

Aaron Gingrich is now co-chief creative officer for the Iocus Film Fund. The Liechtenstein-based fund has been established to focus primarily on original scripted content for film and television.

Tom Mason is currently writing his 21st *Captain Awesome* book for Simon & Schuster, and wrapping production as co-story editor on the second season of *Bat Pat* for Atlantyca.

Christine Nielsen is nominated for a 2018 Wildscreen Panda Award with Sir David Attenborough and Stephen Dunleavy. The documentary, *Attenborough and the Giant Elephant*, was co-produced by Humble Bee Films and Toronto-based Infield Fly Productions.

The writer/filmmaker **Nicholas Kinsey** has published his third novel, *Shipwrecked Lives*, based on his six-hour screenplay. It tells the story of the government inquiry into the sinking of the *Empress of Ireland* and the survivors of the tragedy.

BBC Studios has acquired the original pilot, *Lady Macbeth*, written by **Svet Rouskov**, and is developing an ambitious returning series based on the real-life woman who inspired the most famous and captivating of Shakespeare's characters, Lady Macbeth. ■

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
1-800-567-9975 ext. 5270

NFB - contact Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9975 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*

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Chris Walsh Glendale CA
Becky Wangberg Valley Village CA
Patrick Whistler Toronto ON
Adam Wilson Los Angeles CA
Melanie Wilson La Bracio Los Angeles CA
Richard Young Toronto ON

Our condolences

Harlan Ellison Sherman Oaks CA

Peter Jobin Toronto ON

When your Moral Compass doesn't point True North

By Denis McGrath

Excerpted from a commentary by Denis McGrath, first published in CARTT, July 13, 2016

In 1983 Doris Roberts and James Coco appeared in an episode of the freshman season of the groundbreaking medical drama *St. Elsewhere*. The episode, “Coco and Arnie,” would eventually net both actors Emmy Awards for their portrayals of an aging homeless couple. But the impact went far beyond the red carpet. Coco and Arnie caused shockwaves, sparked conversations, and helped to launch a shift in how people thought about the problem of homelessness. It’s no surprise that TV influences social policy.

Though there is a very vocal cohort who love nothing better than to deride it at each turn, Canadian TV has not been immune to this phenomenon. *Intelligence* dealt with privacy issues, drug policy and Canada’s relationship with the U.S. in a compelling way. *DaVinci’s Inquest* showed the side of Vancouver that hasn’t been seen before. *Prairie Giant* and *Trudeau* explored our political history, *Slings & Arrows’* loving portrayal of Stratford not only made high art a royal romp, it attracted worldwide remakes, including one that was one of Brazil’s highest rated shows.

There was a fascinating survey released by Abacus this week that illustrates why all of this is important. Abacus polled 1500 people to create a map of the

“moral compass” of the population in both Canada and the United States. The results are startling. Canada emerges as profoundly more secular, progressive, and — surprisingly — libertarian than the United States. Canadians are more accepting of same-sex marriage, drug use, assisted suicide, and pornography than those in the U.S.

But we’re also way more sanguine about having a baby out of wedlock. And abortion is a settled issue. Why is that important? Because, in addition to sparking social conversations, TV programs have the ability to reflect a society, and thereby strengthen common values and community.

A Canada that does not make space for its own storytellers and programs is a country that reflects issues or attitudes that are not in step with the people. In short, you’re inculcating people with narratives that are at odds with what society thinks. It’s profoundly alienating, and potentially distorting.

Everyone says that they’re not influenced by media, though study after study seems to demonstrate otherwise. But on a more basic level, the philosophical question I have is simple. What GOOD is it to give over the vast majority of your broadcast timeslots and media space to programs that don’t reflect an accurate moral compass of your people?

Considering that a well produced Canadian show can now routinely draw over a million

viewers, why do we blindly accept that this is the way it has to be? Canadian-produced TV is under dire threat.

Not only are we opening our country to things like watching a Canadian story rewritten to minimize or eliminate our part in it (see: *Argo*); we’re importing attitudes about guns, abortion, and a host of social issues that simply don’t correspond to everyday Canadians’ experiences.

It’s not all bad news. Canadian creatives, shut out of press and coverage that could spark prosocial conversation, engage with their fan bases online. The blackout in legacy media is mitigated by tweeting and blogging that quietly underlines the social values reflected in the Abacus survey — values that seem increasingly divergent from the fear-based path that emanates from our principal cultural supplier to the south. The Abacus survey puts Canadians as 26% more likely to support physician-assisted dying than Americans. That’s a huge difference. Lo and behold, next year you’ll be able to watch a Canadian TV drama about it, *Mary Kills People*, from Tassie Cameron (*Rookie Blue*). I wouldn’t hold your breath waiting for the sympathetic American version. But it does make you wonder how else we could change the conversation if we were making even more shows that spoke to our values, instead of forever chasing the U.S. or foreign sale. ■

November

6 - 7 — **Scripted** scriptedsummit.com

8 - 16 — **Reel Asian Film Festival** reelasian.com

8 - 18 — **Montreal International Documentary Festival** ridem.ca/en

29 — **Writers Talking TV** wgc.ca

28 - Dec. 2 — **Whistler Film Festival** whistlerfilmfestival.com

December

2 — *Deadline* — **WGC Screenwriting Awards nominations** wgc.ca

January

30 - Feb. 1 — **Prime Time in Ottawa** primetimeinottawa.ca

February

11 - 14 — **Kidscreen Summit** summit.kidscreen.com

21 — **Writers Talking TV** wgc.ca

March

25 - 31 — **Canadian Screen Awards "Canadian Screen Week"** academy.ca



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