

CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

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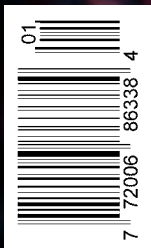
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Publisher Maureen Parker

Editor Tom Villemaire
t.villemaire@wgc.ca

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Lana Castleman

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Design Studio Ours

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366 Adelaide Street West, Suite 401
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TEL: (416) 979-7907
FAX: (416) 979-9273
WEBSITE: www.wgc.ca

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Guild is the solution to power dilution

Power is a beautiful thing.

You don't realize how beautiful it is, until it's gone.

This winter, we had a wind/snow storm to beat all storms. It was a life record for me. The house, which seems solid the rest of the time, was shaking and the roof — well, I was sure at one point it might be pulled off or suffer severe damage.

And to cap it off, the power went out for 12 hours.

While we were involuntarily off the grid, it made me think about power, the lack of it, the importance of it and the different ways we have and don't have power. Not just electrical power, of course.

For example, let's look at the issue of the concentration of ownership in the English-Canadian television market. I want to cite part of the submission of the Canadian Media Producers Association, only because they use the word oligopsonistic. A fancy pants word, if there ever was one. How often do you even see that? Not often, believe me, and if you want to base your estimations of an editor's column solely on the number of times you see the word "oligopsonistic," well, you are probably about to read the very best column of your lives.

Here's part of the CMPA's submission to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review (BTLR) Panel. "Given the substantial vertical integration and consolidation of broadcasters in Canada, the oligopsonistic nature of our domestic market, the information asymmetry between producers and broadcasters, and the resulting significant buying power yielded by broadcasters, there is a real risk that ownership concentration will reduce the programming options and the number of distinct creative and editorial voices available to Canadians."

If you haven't looked it up yet, oligopsonistic means a market in which there are few buyers and many sellers, which results in buyers having the power. And if the producers feel that way, imagine how screenwriters feel about the dilution of their power. That's just another reason — maybe the biggest reason — the Writers Guild of Canada is so vital and important.

There are so many key issues to address right now, including fair pay and ownership of work, and even schooling the fine folks who buy your words about the need to help cultivate a healthy environment in which screenwriters can also flourish.

If Canadian screenwriters don't thrive, Canadian stories get short shrift and our culture starts to wane.

The Guild has had some pretty big victories over the last few months. That's thanks to members' efforts and the leadership at the front. (We all know who they are and they know who they are and I could list them here, but space is limited and oligopsonistic takes up a lot of room.)

But as the market becomes more concentrated, the need for screenwriters to maintain a unified voice to express their concerns and their perspective only becomes more important. There's strength in numbers; some might even say there's power. And power can be a beautiful thing.

Oh, the lights are back on!

— Tom Villemaire

Spring 2019

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

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*, *Macleans*, *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*.

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.

Kendra Wong is a former journalist in Victoria, B.C. She has a bachelor of arts from Simon Fraser University and a certificate in journalism from Langara College. She has worked at newspapers through BC, including *Metro*, the *Tri-Cities NOW*, *Smithers Interior News* and the *Victoria News*. She currently works in communications.



Negotiating: When to compromise and when to draw a line in the sand

I don't actually remember my first negotiation, but I've decided that it went something like this: I needed one last Star Wars trading card to complete my collection. It wasn't even a great card — let's say it was the Jawas — but maybe the picture on the back completed the second picture puzzle. And. I. Simply. Had. To. Have. It.

In this scenario, a classmate has a duplicate. I start out with a straight “onesie” trade offer. This hypothetical kid isn't having it. He wants five of my doubles and two stickers. Unheard of. But he has me over a barrel. I give in, ensuring I only ever complete one set of Topps 1977 original Star Wars cards. And the next day, I get that same card in a new package. Twist ending!

But I bet I would have learned this valuable lesson about negotiating: Even when something seems like the only option, there's always another one.

Because I know you all read every email blast and newsletter from the Guild, I don't have to tell any of you that it's currently preparing for a new round of bargaining with the CMPA (Canadian Media Producers Association).

For several months now, Executive Director Maureen Parker and our Guild staff have been working tirelessly to canvas the membership in a variety of ways: From writers' room visits to membership meetings and consultation with Council. They've been compiling information and stats, thanks to member contracts and a recent survey. In short, our Guild is going full bore preparing for negotiations, while still maintaining their day-to-day responsibilities of managing our Independent Production Agreement (IPA). When do they sleep?! At night. That was a trick question.

What you may not realize is that this could shape up to be one of our biggest negotiations ever.

It's the first time the Guild and the CMPA have sat down at the bargaining table in five years, having mutually agreed during the last round to hold off bargaining while we waited for a response to our CRTC petition to keep up PNI spends by private broadcasters at historic levels. (We won! And we'll always be grateful to then Minister Mélanie Joly for that great victory.)

The expectation was that we would resume negotiations when there was a little more stability and certainty for our industry. Oops.

We are currently in the midst of one of the entertainment industry's greatest-ever upheavals — or “disruptions,” as the kids call it. Technology, social justice and Federal leadership are all major factors in reshaping the Canadian — and global — entertainment industry. Every player — writer, director, actor, crewmember and producer — is trying to define their place.

Sometimes our interests align. Sometimes they diverge. This is why the IPA is the cornerstone document of our Guild. It establishes our place in this industry and confirms our great worth to the process of creating entertainment.

And this is why the Guild goes to the lengths it does to nurture it through these ongoing cycles of negotiation. Because negotiating isn't

solely about protecting the IPA, it's about facilitating its evolution. The IPA is a living, breathing document that must change to reflect the change in our industry.

It's easy — maybe too easy — to treat these negotiations as an antagonistic process. After all, we're storytellers. We know the anecdote about the worst negotiation we ever engaged in is infinitely more entertaining than the one about the even-keeled conversation where both sides respected each other's stance, and listened to what they had to say, before making a counterproposal. But as my father never said, “If you walk into a room expecting a fight, you're partially responsible for ensuring that there is a fight.”

That's why — when it comes to any negotiation — there are two things I like to keep in mind. One: The people on the opposite side of the table aren't against you, they're for themselves. And two: A negotiation isn't complete until both sides are unhappy.

I believe in the importance of compromise. And I believe in the importance of listening. But I also believe that there are hills we do have to die on, and lines in the sand that we do have to draw. And that's when someone tries to treat our IPA with less than the respect it deserves. Because, at the end of the day, the IPA is us.

— **Dennis Heaton**

WGC Weighs in on the Future of Canadian TV



The WGC made its formal submission to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel (BTLR) in January. The Panel is tasked with making recommendations to the federal government on potential changes to the Broadcasting Act, the Telecommunications Act, and related legislation that could shape the future of Canadian television.

The Broadcasting Act is the foundation for the regulation of broadcasting in Canada, and supports more than \$2 billion in financing to English-Canadian domestic production annually. Roughly \$500 million of that sum is being spent on the production of the drama, comedy and animation series that are predominantly worked on by WGC members. Needless to say, broadcast regulation is critical to these productions. The movement of viewers — and revenue — to unregulated Internet-based streaming services is threatening that support.

In our submission, we contend that:

1. New legislation must clearly bring both online video

services and Internet service providers “under the tent” of broadcast regulation — their contribution is crucial to creating a robust and sustainable Canadian content production business.

2. Canadian creators — particularly Canadian screenwriters and showrunners, who provide TV productions with a distinct Canadian authorial voice — must be at the core of a 21st-Century Canadian content ecosystem.
3. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Wireless Service Providers (WSPs) must contribute to the system, just as traditional broadcasters do now, to ensure and improve the financial health of the Canadian television industry.

The Panel is currently wading through 2,200 submissions made by interested parties, including other key guilds and orgs like the DGC, ACTRA and the CMPA. It has not made these submissions public, causing a bit of a kerfuffle amongst

industry commentators (for more on that see, “Bringing Home the BA-CON,” p. 28). A “What We’ve Heard Report” is expected to be delivered by June 30, with a final report, complete with recommendations to government, due by Jan. 2020. We’ve got our eyes trained on the process and will make further comments, on behalf of our position, if and when the opportunity arises.

The Guild also filed a submission to the CRTC about its upcoming Production Report, specifically looking at what information should be collected for this critical industry data. The WGC was particularly pleased to see that the CRTC is proposing to collect information on showrunners, and was seeking feedback on a definition of the term based on our own Showrunner Code. We clearly support the CRTC’s recognition of this crucial role in the creation of Canadian television, and commented on its definition, as well as on a number of other issues related to accurate and effective broadcasting data and reporting.

Women Sweep WGC TV Comedy & Drama Noms

As we prepare to hand out the hardware at the WGC Screenwriting Awards ceremony on April 29, we wanted to make mention of a competition milestone. For the first time in the Awards’ 23-year history, women writers have taken all the nominations in the TV Comedy and TV Drama categories.

Scripts from drama series *Cardinal* (Jennica Harper, Sara Dodd), *Killjoys* (Julie Puckrin) and *Wynonna Earp* (Caitlin D. Fryers), along with those from comedy series *Letterkenny* (Sonja Bennett), *Schitt’s Creek* (Rupinder Gill) and *Second Jen* (Amanda Joy) are in the running.

Interestingly, this set of nominations may be pointing towards a larger shift in the Canadian TV industry. According to The TV Junkies recent study, “Women Behind Canadian TV: 2019,” while the number of scripted Canadian shows (2017-18) run by men is holding steady at approximately 63%, a survey of those series’ 273 episodes revealed that a full 49% of them were written by women. Onward and upward. And congratulations to all 2019 WGC Screenwriting Awards finalists!

WTTV with *Baroness von Sketch Show*



(Left to right) Baroness writer Monica Heisey, showrunner Jennifer Whalen, writer Jen Goodhue and host Jeff Biederman

Speaking of a group of talented female screenwriters, the WGC was pleased to host members of the writing team from CBC series *Baroness von Sketch Show* at its latest edition of Writers Talking TV, held on March 6 at the TIFF Bell Lightbox in Toronto. Fourth-season showrunner, co-creator and cast member Jennifer Whalen was joined by longtime *Baroness* writers Jen Goodhue and Monica Heisey. Fellow WGC member and journeyman screenwriter Jeff Biederman moderated the informative — and hilarious — conversation before a theatre packed with fellow writers and fans.

The trio gave attendees real insight into the construction of the 100% female writers’ room, how they approach writing their particular brand of comedy and what they’ve learned about the process of production over the past three seasons. Whalen, for example, stressed how important it is to read comedy scripts aloud, then go back and refine them, as so much changes between how it reads on the page to how it’s delivered verbally. She concluded that it’s made her a much better, more concise writer. And Goodhue noted that most of the sketch ideas emanate from the writers asking just one question: “This thing is weird for me. Is it weird for you?” Drilling down on the answer, she said, usually reveals a relatable truth that can be spun into comedy gold. We couldn’t agree more.

Diversity Script of the Month Finalists’ Recap

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. In 2018, writers and scripts selected for the program were:

July—Nadiya Chettiar, current executive story editor on CBS sitcom *Life in Pieces*, for her half-hour comedy *Love Marriage*.

August—Ryan Spencer, a writer on Boat Rocker’s tween drama *The Next Step*, for his one-hour drama, *Westlake High*.

September—Jagjiwan Sohal, who’s written for kids series like *Dino Dana* and *Nina’s World*, for his half-hour comedy *Seven Deadly Sings*.

October—Nile Seguin, who has made his name as a comedian, for his one-hour drama *Deep Water*.

November—Gillian Muller, whose writing credits includes *Travelers*, for her one-hour drama *The Blue Division*.

Our second round of submissions closed at the end of November, and we’re happy to announce our first recipient of 2019. In March, Sabrina Sherif, with writing credits on upcoming Netflix sci-fi series *Another Life*, was selected for her supernatural drama script, *Something Wicked*. Congratulations to all!

WGC at Kidscreen Summit

More than 40 WGC members descended on Miami for the global kids entertainment industry’s largest gathering, Kidscreen Summit, which took place from February 11 to 14. Making a return to the event were the WGC Suite, which was chock-a-block with writer-scheduled meetings, and the WGC Writers Room. Both were well-received by WGC members and suite visitors alike.

Additionally, Director of Communications Lana Castleman, with the tag-team of Quebec Region Councillor Anne-Marie Perrotta and member Lienne Sawatsky, participated in roughly two dozen individual meetings. They met with creative executives from some of the world’s largest content commissioners, including Apple, Amazon Studios, Hulu, Netflix, Disney, DreamWorks Animation, Hasbro, Mattel and Sesame Workshop, to talk up the WGC Member Directory and the Guild’s amazing talent pool of animation and kids & family screenwriters.

On the subject of the Member Directory, don’t forget to update yours, asap! It will make it much easier for execs from these types of companies to find and hire you. Just login at wgc.ca to get started. Remember, the more detail you provide in your directory entry, the more search results in which you’ll appear. A win-win for everyone.



On the set: Michael Konyves took on the role of showrunner for the first time on Bad Blood

A Family. Murder. Revenge. The Mob.

***Bad Blood* was a Canadian mafia tale waiting to be told. How writers Michael Konyves and Simon Barry turned the epic true crime story into a hit series.**

By Matthew Hays

It's not every day that a writer wakes up to learn that Snoop Dogg has tweeted high praise for their show. *Bad Blood* scribe Michael Konyves says he'll never forget it. "I couldn't quite believe it," he recalls, sounding like he might still be in shock. "We were certainly glad for the additional attention it brought the show."

That social media hit led to more attention for *Bad Blood*, the series about Montreal's legendary Rizzuto Family and the evolution of the city's 1990s mob scene, with all its associated assassinations and incarcerations. The show, currently in its second season, has proven to be a slow burn, launching in 2017 on Citytv in Canada and FX in the U.S. to solid reviews and respectable numbers. *The Toronto Star's* Tony Wong even went as far as to liken it to *Cardinal* and *The Sopranos*. That's definitely not shabby company to keep, but it wasn't until Netflix began streaming it last December that *Bad Blood* started gaining real momentum — the aforementioned Snoop Dogg-attracting momentum, to be exact.

Simon Barry knew the Rizzuto Family story was meant for the screen when production company New Metric Media approached him with the idea. It had purchased the rights to the acclaimed book *Business or Blood: Mafia Boss Vito Rizzuto's Last War*, penned

by journalists Antonio Nicaso and Peter Edwards. The pair had covered the trials and investigations into Montreal's extensive mob violence and activity.

Barry loved the idea of bringing the epic mafia saga to the screen, but he didn't necessarily have the bandwidth to get it going as he was occupied by writing duties on sci-fi series *Van Helsing* at the time. He turned to Konyves for help, who also immediately recognized the incredible possibilities such a concept presented. As Konyves points out, any Montrealer who lived in the city during the reign of the Rizzutos knew it was an astonishing story. And the book provided a crucial roadmap to the first season. Barry scripted the pilot and then handed the reins over to Konyves, who served as showrunner on both seasons.

"A lot of the critics have thrown around the word Shakespearean when describing the show," says Konyves. "Everything is Shakespearean! And frankly, everything is a soap opera. You're writing drama, and that's what you have: Everyone needs something. Everyone wants something. Someone and something is standing in their way. This story provided plenty of conflict like that to work with and build on."

The writers set about breaking down the key events of the saga — Vito's arrest, the murder of his



Simon Barry knew the Rizzuto Family story was meant for the screen and worked with Konyves to bring it to life

“Bad Blood needed to be done, and it needed to be done in Canada, by Canadians — and I’m really glad [Rogers and Citytv] took the chance.”

- Simon Barry

son, the murder of his father, the collapse of the gangland truce in Montreal and the fallout from that. Those key historical markers were all there in the book, and they provided the structure for the first six hours. Vito’s arrest and his death were the key focal points. It also led Konyves and Barry to stray from a strict linear storyline, as there was a lot of room for flashbacks.

Barry met with the book’s authors early on and listened to the various anecdotes they had left out of it, omissions made in many cases for legal reasons. “I wanted to get more anecdotes from them,” says Barry, “knowing full well that we would probably never use them. But those stories can often give you a greater idea of how that world works. We didn’t have that spicy flavour of how that world worked yet. I knew they had a wealth of knowledge. I asked them to share these stories. The details were not event-based, but they gave us a much greater idea of who these characters were.”

For example, the authors told them about Vito having one of his bodyguards spy on one of his mistresses, in an effort to confirm that she wasn’t fooling around on him. That’s something that never

came up in court, but it gave Barry and Konyves a better understanding of how the characters actually operated in their business and personal lives, and how the two intersected. It was about behaviour, they point out, not just facts.

Writing about true crime was fascinating, but it presented unique challenges. “When you’re writing about that, you have to comply with the law in the place where you’re producing the show,” explains Konyves. “The American laws are actually much looser. In a U.S. show, the writers have more license. We had a lot of stuff we had to pay close attention to. Things had to be vetted by lawyers. And that was sometimes tricky — I was actually making changes to some scripts the day before production for legal reasons.”

Konyves notes that you have more dramatic license with dead subjects. They’re not going to come after you, after all. But they couldn’t talk about Vito’s still very much living wife, for example. “You can’t make any implications,” he says. “It is on the record that he had mistresses. There’s a woman sitting next to him that you assume is his wife, but other than that, we didn’t depict her.”



Bad Blood's all-star cast includes Paul Sorvino (left) and Anthony LaPaglia

As they mapped out the various plot points, Konyves and Barry realized *Bad Blood* wouldn't just be a show about the mafia. Indeed, the gangsters were hardly the only bad guys. The show features a world rife with corruption. The police, the government, the mafia — everyone manipulates everyone else if they can, making the lines between bad and good extra blurry.

As Barry and Konyves exchanged ideas and possible scenarios, one question hung over the creative process: Since Vito spends an extended period in an American prison and out of the action, from whose perspective would they tell the story? The solution was to create a fictional character, Declan, who was placed high up in the Rizzuto clan, but was not actually a blood relation — like Robert Duvall's character in the first two *Godfather* movies. Declan became a composite of several real-world characters that evolves into the observer. For the writers, Vito is the headliner, but Declan is the tour guide for the story.

"Obviously, I was very excited to write a really entertaining gangster show," says Konyves. "There are all the expectations around shows like that, which I thought would be challenging and fun to meet. But

I also wanted it to have a lot of heart and emotion." He refers to a scene that takes place later in the first season, where Declan meets his father in a trailer and the audience learns that dear old dad is a junkie who abandoned his kids to foster care. "And Declan says, 'I'm here to make you suffer,'" recalls Konyves. "That was a scene I envisioned right from the beginning," he adds. The show is about Declan's pain and suffering and it's why he can do the things he does. "This is why he can betray his father figure, Vito, because of the pain of his own story," says Konyves. "That's what the whole first season is about. Even when you reveal things much later in the story, it covers everything in hindsight. Once I could tap into that, many other things fell into place."

Writing for a traditional TV network created a couple of immediate challenges. It meant that the language used by the series' characters had to be much, much cleaner than that of their real-life counterparts. "These guys use the F-word a lot," says Konyves. "We couldn't have them speak that way." And as a Canadian series, *Bad Blood's* budget was extremely tight. "In Canada, you're always writing

“You’re fleshing out those scenes quite literally with the actors. I’ve said to them on set, ‘You are the ones who own these characters now.’ If they read the lines with a different rhythm than you’d imagined, that might bring something new to a character...”

- Michael Konyves

around budget,” he contends. “The average hour in Canada is shot for significantly less than in the U.S., so you’re always factoring that in. But I find that kind of enjoyable. If you have too many characters, you have to cut that down. Location is always a big thing. We had to limit the number of locations and we were telling the story through characters more than action.”

In fact, writing dialogue-heavy scenes was part of the challenge and fun for Konyves. “I love great dialogue, and what I write tends to be very talky. Scenes are often short in TV, but I like shows like *The West Wing* that are dialogue heavy. I like scenes where they’re going about their business, but also talking about three different things at the same time. That’s action. That’s movement. And you get to know a lot about character through that.”

Konyves says conversations with actors during rehearsals and on set also really helped with the writing process. “What a brilliant cast we had!” he exclaims, which included Anthony LaPaglia (Vito), Kim Coates (Declan) and Paul Sorvino. “I needed to know the characters’ psychology,” Konyves continues. “And that is helped along by talking it through with the actors. For Declan to turn on Vito is a big fucking deal. So it’s got to be something I can believe in. You’re fleshing out those scenes quite literally with the actors. I’ve said to them on set, ‘You are the ones who own these characters now.’ If they read the lines with a different rhythm than you’d imagined, that might bring something new to a character you hadn’t originally thought of. Then you get on set with them and might even end up rewriting things a bit. They may have a question for you about motivation and you have to figure it out. I love that part — it’s part of working with great actors.”


As someone who got thrown into writing a series in season one and then showrunning for the first time on both seasons, Konyves does have advice

for fellow writers. “I know taking network notes can be frustrating,” he concedes. “But take a big breath before receiving them and try not to take it personally. As writers, we’re getting criticism all the time. Read the notes and try to find a point. Even if you don’t agree with it. Maybe they don’t know how to properly articulate it, but they are pointing to something that they find problematic. Try to see it as another person giving you a perspective. A good idea can come from anyone.”

And in technical terms, Konyves is blunt — get a second camera and make sure you have rehearsal time booked prior to shooting. “I’ll never do a show without two cameras again. You will get into a budget argument over the second camera, but it saves you so much time and headache in the editing room. If you’ve got six days instead of eight to do an hour-long episode, the second camera gives you that extra coverage.” He also insists upon rehearsal time to get the actors comfortable with the rhythms of the dialogue and main scene points, and it also provides the opportunity to answer any questions that come up. “You have to set the table so the actors can do their best work.”

Ultimately, Konyves describes running a writers’ room as a lot of fun. “Working with Simon, Patrick Moss and Alison Lea Bingeman, we were exchanging ideas, throwing around dialogue, it was a blast,” he says. “The fact that Snoop Dogg liked us was an unexpected bonus.”

Barry recognizes that Rogers and Citytv took a leap of faith in commissioning the show, but he thinks it’s paid off. “They don’t do a lot of dramatic shows, and they took a risk,” he admits. “*Bad Blood* needed to be done, and it needed to be done in Canada by Canadians — and I’m really glad they took the chance.” ■



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GETTING LIVELY

Cavendish co-creator Mark Little talks about moving from writing for kids animated series to live-action comedy — they have more in common than you might think

By Kendra Wong

Some people may question what a kids animated series could possibly have in common with an adult-targeted supernatural comedy/mystery show. But for Mark Little, they are one and the same — at least in how he goes about creating stories for them.

Little's formula is simple: Have a character, or a group of characters, propose a ridiculous idea or a series of ridiculous ideas, then introduce a voice of reason to balance things out. Sprinkle in a hint of conflict, come up with an exciting climax, and top it off with a heart-warming lesson — et voilà, you get the laughs you were looking for.

"It's super-basic Comedy 101, but I really get a kick out of the one person who is the voice of reason, or flip that, have a group of people who are the voice of reason," Little says. "Whatever the combination is, I find that contrast, which is the foundation of so much classic comedy, funny."

In fact, it's the same formula Little and Andrew Bush used to write their new original comedy series, *Cavendish*. Produced by Boat Rocker Media's Temple Street Productions, the duo are the series' co-creators, showrunners and executive producers.

Cavendish premiered on CBC in January and revolves around brothers Mark (Little) and Andy (Bush) Tennesen, who have returned to their P.E.I. hometown after almost 30 years away to care for their ailing father. However, the pair quickly realizes that

Cavendish is not like other towns. Everyone there is obsessed with the local legend of a wolf-like beast that preys on people at night. Soon Mark and Andy become embroiled in many misadventures in this strange place.

For Little, who also portrays Xavier Academy science teacher Simon on the CBC sitcom *Mr. D*, *Cavendish* represents his transition from writing animated to live-action comedy. But it hasn't been a simple move from one genre to another.

Little's foray into comedy started in high school in New Westminster, B.C. He was involved in improv before participating in sketch and stand-up comedy, including being part of a Halifax-based sketch comedy group called Picnicface, where he met Bush.

Whereas most people go to school to study scriptwriting and the art of crafting a narrative before trying to break into the industry, Little did it in reverse. "With stand-up, sketch, narrative storytelling and movies, it was all cart before the horse," he says.

After working on a genre parody called *Roller Town*, in which the skeleton of the story was completely secondary to the jokes and insane moments, Little realized how much he didn't know about writing a cohesive narrative. But he quickly realized it was a skill he would need to master.

To learn more, Little began reading books like *Save the Cat!* by Blake Snyder, while simultaneously juggling other projects, such as *Dad Drives* and *Space*



*Mark Little takes a live-action turn as
co-creator, co-showrunner of new
CBC comedy Cavendish*



Little (left) and Cavendish co-creator Andrew Bush in a scene discovering just how strange their new hometown is

“I still write jokes that I would laugh at, I hope. I still try to write jokes for me.”

- Mark Little

Riders: Division Earth. In addition, he soaked up as much comedy as he could, and participated in online communities to learn how to implement storytelling practices in his own work.

Little finally got that opportunity while writing for kids animated series *Winston Steinburger and Sir Dudley Ding Dong*. During the stint, he discovered that he had an aptitude for writing kid-friendly 11-minute episodes. “You really want it to go, go, go,” he says. “But you also want to weave in elements of heart, growth and especially jokes, usually in an adventure-based storyline.”

And after writing, producing, acting and directing many projects over the years, his hard work really began to pay off in 2018. It was a breakout year for Little. He created and sold adult animated comedy *Gary and His Demons* to CBC’s Gem streamer and several international broadcasters, also serving as showrunner. With an

overall rating of 8.1 on IMDB, the tale of aging and cantankerous demon hunter Gary, who longs to retire after spending 30 years doing a job he never wanted in the first place, is striking a chord with critics. He also wrote eps for kids animated comedy *Cupcake & Dino: General Services*, which made *The New York Times* list of “Best TV shows of 2018.”

Then came *Cavendish*. It was a simple trip to Canada’s East Coast that sparked the idea for the series. Bush, who is from Nova Scotia, travelled to the real town of Cavendish for family vacations while growing up.

Situated on the north shore of P.E.I., the small town is a summertime tourist hotspot primarily known as the site of L.M. Montgomery’s family home and the inspiration for many Anne of Green Gables stories — not quite an historical theme park, but close. “I never went to Disneyland when I was a kid, so this was my Disneyland,” Bush laughs.



Animated series Gary and His Demons helped creator Little hone his comedy chops

After returning from *Cavendish* with his family six years ago, Bush proceeded to tell Little all about his experiences. “He just started describing the town to me and it sounded amazing. It was weird, idiosyncratic and interesting. I got excited just hearing him talk about it,” says Little. “We thought we should honour that excitement. Clearly this world is speaking to our sense of fun and we thought we should pursue that.”

The show started off as a seed of an idea, before eventually transforming into the half-hour supernatural comedy series that it is today. “We inserted more *Twin Peaks* and *Scooby-Doo*, to the point where it’s not really *Cavendish*,” says Bush, who notes that although production takes place in N.S. and P.E.I., the show is not meant to provide an accurate depiction of the town, but instead should be seen as an ode to the Maritimes.

Ultimately, the pair is trying to write the funniest show they can, but let’s face it — comedy is tough. From the outset, they tried to stick to the basic formula for a classic sitcom, which included a main plot (story A), as well as one or two subplots (stories B and C). They excelled at coming up with adventures for their main characters. However, Little and Bush struggled with transitioning the story to secondary characters. According to Little, in the end, they couldn’t justify adding scenes and

storylines to fit the classic sitcom formula. It just slowed down the momentum of the overall narrative too much.

That’s when it dawned on Little. Why not apply the same approach he took in writing kids animated comedies to *Cavendish*? After all, comedy is the same across genres, he notes. “In a kids show, you don’t want to shy away from that size of storytelling — taking a small thing and making it massive. You’re telling what sometimes feels like 90-minute movies in 11 minutes,” he contends. “We kind of wrote *Cavendish* like 11-minute kids cartoon episodes. It was getting comfortable telling these stories in 11 minutes. That made it much easier to do it in 22 minutes.”

At the heart of his work on both animated and live-action comedies is the desire all comedians have — to make people laugh. It’s a feeling he says is hard to describe. “The raw feeling of it feels good. There’s a science to how you arrive at it, but once you’re in it, it feels like magic,” Little says of finding that comedy sweet spot. “I still write jokes that I would laugh at, I hope. I still try to write jokes for me. I never try to write down to a perceived audience, ever.”

Cavendish is currently available for streaming in Canada via the CBC Gem app. ■

PITCH PERFECT?

Experienced showrunners weigh in on how to nail that first pitch meeting — and how to keep the faith if it all goes pear-shaped

By Diane Wild

Brad Wright's worst pitch experience was also his most successful. Not long into his pitch for *Stargate-SGI* to the head of Showtime, the fire alarm went off, and Wright found himself continuing to make his case in the parking garage with the building's evacuated occupants milling around. "I don't remember much of what I said, but when the alarm stopped, he told me I didn't have to come back up. It turned into a 44-episode order."

"There's no such thing as a perfect pitch," he says. "The perfect pitch is one that gets bought."

From writing and memorizing a verbatim pitch script to being prepared enough to improvise in the room, there are as many ways for writers to pitch their series concepts as there are personalities in a writers' room.

"As long as you love the story you're pitching, you'll be fine," Dennis Heaton says. "You need to be passionate about the story, because that creates an energy in the pitch."

Conversely, Sheri Elwood completely scripts her pitches, down to every joke and pause, because

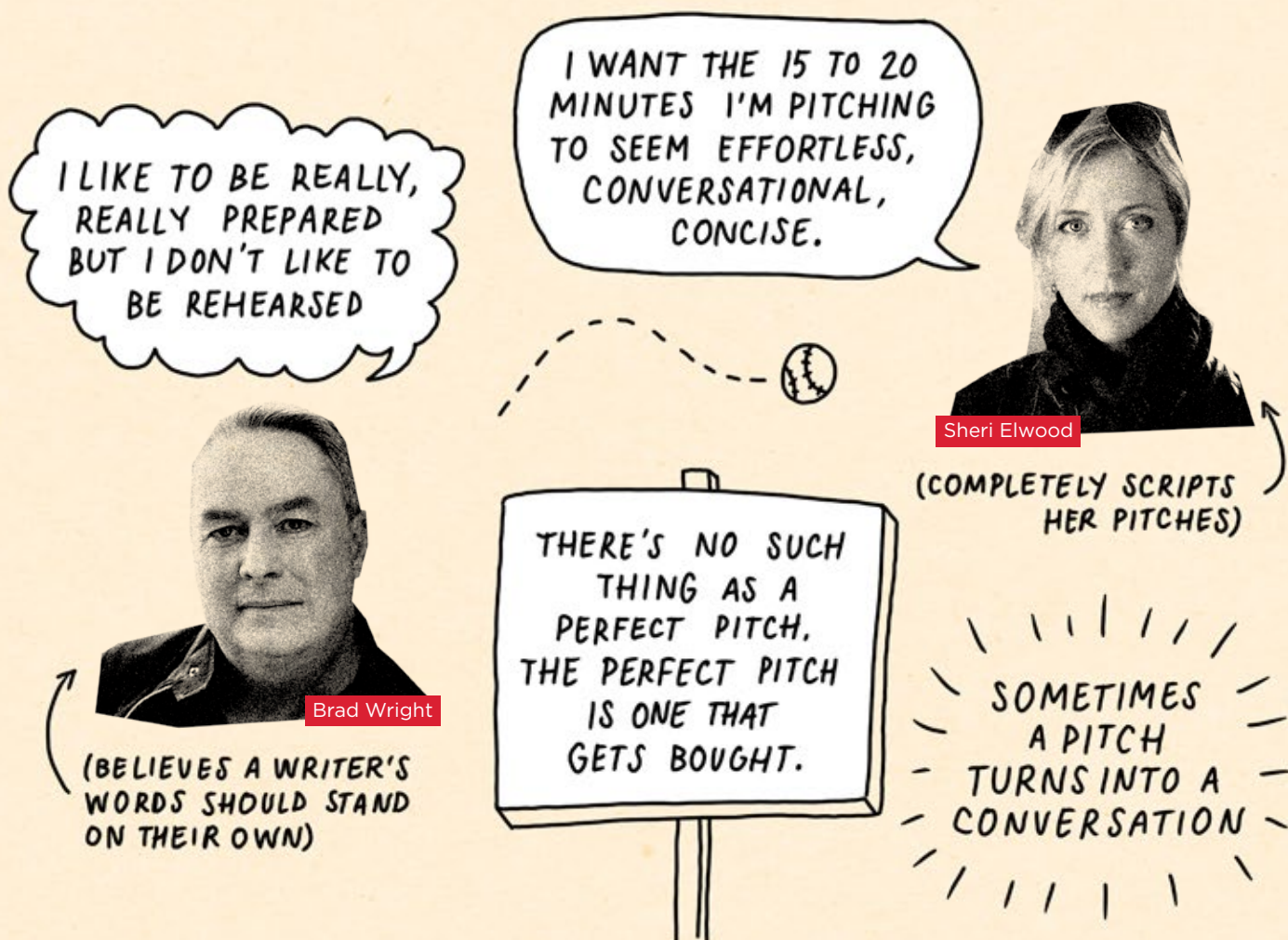
"I'm not a great performer." Even then, "I want the 15 to 20 minutes I'm pitching to seem effortless, conversational, concise. I've put in two months crafting the pitch then getting off book. It can be fun once you know your own material — you have space to riff in the room."

"Read the room," says Sarah Dodd. "Sometimes a pitch turns into a conversation. You don't want to be 'stuck on send.' If your audience wants you to stop, listen and discuss, then go with the flow. You don't always need to hold fast to the pre-rehearsed pitch you prepared."

"I like to be really, really prepared, but I don't like to be rehearsed," Wright says. "You want them to want to be in business with you as a person, as well as your idea. I think that's what a lot of people get wrong — being too rehearsed and not being themselves enough for the buyers to know who they're working with."

Structuring the pitch

Wright often writes the script first, and even sends it before the pitch meeting. "To understand my



characters, I need to write them, to give them dialogue, have them interact. I learn more about my characters in the writing process than anything else.”

Heaton also prefers to write the full story. “Either a full script or an outline or even just an expanded episode pitch,” he says. “Just so I can make sure the concept will actually result in a full story.” After that, he writes a five- to seven-page pitch document, a five-page verbal pitch script, and lastly a logline.

“A verbal pitch always starts with an explanation of an idea’s genesis and why it’s important to me,” says Heaton. “Then I give the logline and then launch into the pilot story, describing the characters as I introduce them in the story. I end the pitch when I get to the end of the story and get back to a conversation as quickly as possible.”

A Netflix executive once told Dodd that Canadians are the only writers on the planet who lead with place, which she does not advise. “Instead, think about the global audience and why this story has themes that will resonate with the largest possible

audience.” She starts with her own connection to the material, the premise, and painting a picture of where the story begins.

“It’s challenging sometimes for a writer not to fall into a laundry list of plot points,” says Dodd. “After a really cinematic introduction, it’s time to focus on a broader middle and end to the pilot, teasing the listener with a few juicy twists and turns and emotional moments.” She then moves on to the first season’s broad strokes and an indication of the story engine for seasons to come.

“The most important thing is making the pitch personal,” Elwood says. “I like to start with an anecdote about what inspired me to write it, why I was drawn to the material. There are only so many original ideas, but what makes it special is the lens you filter it through.”

Call Me Fitz, for example, was loosely based on her brother, a car salesman. “I was out to lunch with my grandmother back in his playboy days and she said, ‘That boy needs to have a stiff drink with his conscience.’ It became a buddy comedy about a car salesman and his conscience.”



Sarah Dodd

Elwood organizes her pitches into an introductory anecdote about why she relates to the material, what the concept is, and then she rolls into the location and core characters. “For a drama, I often pitch the whole cold open,” she says. “I give a rough flow of season one, even if it’s ‘We’ll begin with X and at the end of the season we’ll find out Y.’ For comedy, I’ll set up episode ideas, just one line each. ‘This is the one where Fitz turns the local daycare into a brothel.’ For a drama, I might give character arcs instead.” After about 20 minutes of specificity, she wraps up by bringing her pitch around to why the concept is universal, relatable and compelling.

“Never leave materials [printed or otherwise] behind,” Elwood cautions. “You’re a writer: Those are your words, and there’s a monetary value to that. Leave the pitch in the ether and leave them wanting more. And if they want more, they can buy it.”

Judicious use of props

“I usually bring visuals,” says Elwood. “I might show actors to give the tone of a character. I might bring location photos to give a flavour of the setting. I bring an iPad to flip through the photos, and that’s a good job for the non-writing producer.” For *Bagel Nation*, she came with bagels and cream cheese. For an *L.A. Story* adaptation, she brought a cartoon map of L.A. with character faces stuck on particular locations.

Wright has paid for graphics to be created by a production designer in order to convey an idea, though he believes a writer’s words should stand on their own. “If you’re good at your job, the words you’re saying are going to paint pictures in their mind — possibly better imagery than you can afford at the pitch stage.”

“I think some form of visual proof of concept is great,” says Heaton. “But it should be shown either before as an amuse-bouche to get the room excited, or after a pitch to prove that the crazy idea you’ve just pitched can actually be pulled off.”

Keep the faith

“I’ve had pitches that I didn’t think went well not get bought and pitches I thought were home runs that didn’t get sold,” says Wright. “Sometimes you did a great job, the people in the room wanted to buy it, but they went down the hall and the boss said, ‘Meh.’”

“I really had to learn how to be a successful pitcher,” says Elwood. “In the early days, I’d have my crunched-up pages with my notes. You don’t ever want to be reading from a script.”

“Before one meeting I took a Xanax and almost fell asleep during my own pitch. That’s frowned on,” she laughs. “It should be noted that I did not sell the Xanax pitch, but I have used that scene in another show. Self-humiliation is an excellent selling feature.” ■

YOU NEED TO BE PASSIONATE ABOUT THE STORY, BECAUSE THAT CREATES AN ENERGY IN THE PITCH.



BEFORE ONE MEETING I TOOK A XANAX AND ALMOST FELL ASLEEP DURING MY OWN PITCH. THAT'S FROWNED ON.



Dennis Heaton

(ALWAYS STARTS WITH AN EXPLANATION OF AN IDEA'S GENESIS AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO HIM)

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS MAKING IT PERSONAL

YOU HAVE THIS GREAT, DETAILED IDEA AND SOMEHOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE DISTILLED INTO ONE SENTENCE?

TO LOGLINE OR NOT TO LOGLINE?

Loglines, it turns out, are a controversial topic. While some writers enjoy coming up with a winning description, others do not — at all.

"A likable but socially awkward teen struggles through the trials of adolescence with an unusual source of advice, inspiration and commiseration: Her future self. This was the logline for *Out of Touch*, about a genius teenager named Abby who starts getting calls from herself as an adult over a Skype-style time-phone she invents 20 years into the future."

—Dennis Heaton

"*Bagel Nation* is a single-camera, dysfunctional family comedy inspired by my family's own Middle East crisis. When I was 14, my crazy Lebanese

father traded in the family home to buy an inner city deli, even though he knew nothing about running a business, restaurant culture — or Orthodox Jews. This series is Neil Simon on crack. A more-diverse *Shameless*. The tale of a clueless narcissist who never gives up hope that no matter how many times he screws up, easy street is just around the corner and failing that, family will be always be there to blame."

—Sheri Elwood

"I hate loglines. I let my assistant write them. You have this great, detailed idea and somehow it's supposed to be distilled into one sentence? Never give them too much to say no to."

—Brad Wright

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Questions?

Contact Terry Mark (t.mark@wgc.ca)



Writers Guild of Canada



Marsha Greene

Reality background gives Greene's writing fresh view

By Cameron Archer

Transitioning from the production side of reality television, Marsha Greene's screenwriting credits include Global's medical drama *Remedy*, limited-series drama *Ten Days in the Valley* for ABC, and the first season of Global's detective drama *Private Eyes*. Greene also earned BravoFACT funding for her 2015 short film *In the Room*. But it's Cameron Pictures/Entertainment One's *Mary Kills People* with which she's most closely associated to date. She was a writer and co-producer for the series' first two seasons, moving to executive producer and co-showrunner in the third season of the Global medical drama/black comedy that debuted in 2017. The third season is set for Global's spring 2019 schedule.

You moved from producing reality series like *Big Brother Canada* and *Hello Goodbye* to scripted dramas. How do the genres differ and what skills did you take with you from the world of reality TV?

There's not a lot of crossover between the two worlds, and you're usually entrenched in one or the other. Working long hours in production made it difficult to even find time to write. The

turning point for me was going to the Canadian Film Centre. After four years of working in production, I made the decision that I'd step away from it — even though I was making a good living — and focus on becoming a writer.

I'm grateful for my experience in reality shows and feel they've helped me be successful as a writer. On *Big Brother Canada*, I learned the importance of finding transitions in and out of scenes. On *Hello Goodbye*, I got to hear amazing stories from around the world, which were all about character. The most transferable skill I learned from production is how to work with different people. It might not seem important for a writer, but it's incredibly important for a showrunner.

How do you avoid getting too formulaic with procedural dramas like *Private Eyes* and *Mary Kills People*?

On *Private Eyes*, I wanted to figure out the formula. I felt like it was the key to making the show a success. On the other hand, we wanted to play with cop-show formula, so we made a decision to limit the number of dead bodies and look for different kinds of cases, like identity theft. We are constantly tasked with

finding new and inventive ways for the characters to find clues. When we don't, we get the note, 'It feels too easy.'

With *Mary Kills People*, it was completely different. I remember once thinking, 'How would this play out in a medical drama?' Then I would make a conscious choice to do the opposite. We always wanted Mary to be an anti-heroine. We had a mandate to be surprising, not formulaic. We would always ask ourselves, 'What's the craziest thing that could happen?,' then find a way to make it grounded and authentic to the show and our characters.

How does a short-season model, as used on *Mary Kills People*, differ from the more traditional model of *Private Eyes*?

For me, the big difference is the length of the writers' room. I found it as difficult to break six episodes of *Mary* as it was to break 10 episodes of *Private Eyes*, but on the latter, the room lasted at least eight months. The *Mary* room was roughly two months and ended before production began. The bulk of the heavy lifting is left to the showrunner. That becomes challenging once you're shooting, still prepping and likely still rewriting. ■

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:

<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

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.



Kathleen Phillips

Phillips living what she's writing

By Mark Dillon

It's only fitting that Kathleen Phillips is pacing the floor, bouncing her cooing three-month-old as she discusses *Workin' Moms*. The Toronto writer/performer and mother of two has brought real diaper-changing experience to creator and star Catherine Reitman's CBC comedy about friends balancing career, friendship and motherhood.

Phillips co-wrote one episode for season two and wrote two for season three, which launched in January. These add to an eclectic list of credits including sketch comedy *The Ron James Show*, live-action kids show *Odd Squad*, animated series *Scaredy Squirrel* and *Cupcake & Dino: General Services* and offbeat comedy-drama *Crawford*. Her range is no surprise given her background as a character comedian, which led her to writing and performing a wild assortment of roles on sketch series *Sunnyside*. And while attending to her little one, she talked to *Canadian Screenwriter* about real-life influences and spending quality time with characters.

Both you and Catherine Reitman are working moms. What kinds of discussions do the writers have?

We talk about our strengths as mothers, but ultimately about our experiences as women. A lot of it is just talking about people we know and little anecdotes from our lives. Drawing from real life makes for the best comedy and most authentic storylines. Also, it's a heavily serialized show and there are a lot of moving pieces. It's a bit of a Rubik's Cube because things change as you're writing 13 episodes, so it's about keeping track of all the moving parts and a lot of problem-solving.

You got to play opposite your husband Chris Locke on several episodes of Mr. D, and in season eight you participated in the writers' room. How were those experiences?

That was a lot of fun. We played Ted and Emma Terdie, a swinging couple. Season eight was the last season, so it was bittersweet. I was in the room during development. I knew everybody, so it was nice having that history, knowing the characters so well and coming up with stories with them. We were hashing out what the final season was going to look like, what [star Gerry Dee] was going to get up to and wrapping up everybody's relationships.

How was the transition from sketch comedy to kids shows and half-hours?

Everything has its learning curve. I was keen to do the half-hour stuff because I like to spend time with people. With sketch comedy it's mostly about the gag and you really don't get to spend too much time with any one character. I like getting to the meat of a character — finding all their little quirks and nuances. That's more interesting to me beyond just jokes.

As a performer, do you act out the roles as you're writing?

If I'm really enjoying a scene I'm writing or a new character appears, I read it back to myself out loud. That helps me see if I got the voice right. I perform it a little bit for myself to make sure it sounds right and the jokes have just the right amount of words and the timing is all there.

You've been busy with a new baby. How's 2019 looking?

I am going to be pitching some stuff and trying to get my head back in the game. It's been a big break, but the wheels have been turning. I have a lot of ideas and would like to get back to my computer to work on them. I've spent so much time with babies and little kids I need to work out my intellect. I also have to remind myself to just soak up this time with my kids because it's hard to come by when you're working. ■

News from WGC Members

Larry Bambrick is writing the pilot for a globetrotting procedural with eOne and Counterfeit Pictures. He's also scripting the pilot for an international coproduction with Hoodwink in Canada and Underground Films in Ireland that — he hopes — will force him to make a research trip to Dublin.

Carolyn Bennett's darkly comedic debut novel *Please Stand By* is set for release in October 2019 by Vancouver's NON Publishing. She was also part of the 2017 Thousand Islands Playhouse Unit, where she developed *The Monarchists*. She missed the deadline getting this news in, obviously.

Currently working on *The Murders* season two development for Muse/Citytv, **Sonja Bennett** is also writing *Letterkenny* for Crave/Hulu. Additionally, she is developing her one-hour drama *Celebrity Worship* with Tilt 9 and her limited series *The Surrogacy* with Temple Street/Boat Rocker.

In March, HarperCollins Canada will publish **David Bezmozgis'** fourth book, *Immigrant City: Stories*.

Peter Blow has written (and directed) a crowd-funded documentary feature called *Last Beer at the Pig's Ear*. It was the closing gala film at the ReFrame Festival in Peterborough in January.

Claire Cappelletti is in post-production, story editing the new TVOKids series *The Wacky Word Show* that she co-created with **Lisa Hunter**. Claire is proud to be a 2019 CSA nominee for Best Writing Children's or Youth, along with fellow nominee **Penelope Laurence** in the same category, for TVOKids' *Finding Stuff Out*.

Jinder Oujla-Chalmers and her producing partner Omni Films have landed a further development deal for *The Komagata Maru* miniseries for CBC. She is also putting the finishing touch on a biography, *Seeing The Forest For The Trees*, which will be published in late 2019 by Harbour Publishing.

Dane Clark and **Linsey Stewart** have been hired to adapt the critically acclaimed YA novel *Ms. Bixby's Last Day* for Gunpowder & Sky and Walden Media.

Richard Clark's chapter book, *My Best Friend Is a Secret Agent*, illustrated by Rich Murray, has been published by Indigo Press and Wattpad and will be available exclusively at Chapters/Indigo this spring. He has also completed a rewrite of the feature *Ocean Odyssey* for Forward Thinking Films.

David Cormican co-created, wrote, executive produced and was showrunner for season one of family-drama series *Northern*

Rescue, which started streaming all 10 episodes on CBC Gem and Netflix March 1. He is also executive producing the upcoming adaptation of Mark Sakamoto's novel, *Forgiveness*, for the CBC.


Co-writers **Tracey Deer** and **Meredith Vuchnich** won the TIFF-CBC Films Screenwriter Award for their script *Beans*, the story of a Mohawk girl who learns to be her own kind of warrior during the 1990 Oka Crisis.

Tricia Fish, and her best friend/engineer Brenda Patterson, are in talks to develop an original one-hour character dramedy series called *The Freyda*.

After a successful three-week run in London, England, **Christine Foster's** play *Four Thieves Vinegar* (a black comedy about the Black Death) will run in May and June at the Brighton Fringe Festival.

Elyse Friedman recently won the TIFF-CBC Screenwriter Award **Jury Prize** for *Better Now* — a dark comedy that is currently in development with Darius Films. She was awarded \$1,500 and an Industry Pass to the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival.

Collin Friesen's feature directorial debut *Sorry for Your Loss*, starring Justin Bartha and Bruce Greenwood, played the Just for Laughs Film Festival in Vancouver in February, after



debuting at the Whistler Film Festival. It will be available on Crave TV this spring and is currently running on Showtime in the U.S.

Lee Goldberg's new novel *Killer Thriller* was released in February. It's a spy novel, but also a satire of the TV & film business. He also has another novel, *Lost Hills*, being published this fall.

Derek Harvie is showrunning his half-hour live-action comedy *Bajillionaires*, which he created, for DHX's Family Channel and NBC Universal Kids.

WGC president and pacific region councillor **Dennis Heaton's** Netflix series *The Order* premiered on March 7. Helping Heaton create all of that entertaining carnage are **Shelley Eriksen, Rachel Langer, Jennica Harper, Penny Gummerson** and **Jason Filiatrault**.

Matt Holland is co-writing, with Micheline Lanctôt, feature film comedy *La tour de Basile*. The French-language script is co-produced by Jessie Films' Patrick Huard (*Bon Cop Bad Cop*) and has received development funding from SODEC.

Edward Kay's newest book, *Stinky Science: Why the Smelliest Smells Smell So Smelly*, has been receiving positive reviews, notably in New York-based Kirkus Reviews, which

said it is "certain to hook reluctant scientists (and readers) with its yuck factor."

James Motluk and **J.B. Sugar** are currently developing *Mezcalero*, a one-hour crime drama series with OUTtv. Based on the novel by Canadian author T.E. Wilson and produced by No Equal Entertainment, the series would be a Canada-Mexico co-production and has received development funding from the CMF and Bell Funds' Slate Development Fund.

Diana Moore has just optioned her first original animated preschool series to Guru Studio and is partnering with Headspinner Productions on a new animated/live-action series with popular kids gaming YouTuber Denis.

Christina Ray is thrilled to be working with showrunner **Ron E. Scott** again, writing for his new series, *Tribal*.

Darrin Rose wrote and directed the short film *Love After Anne*, which was picked as an Official Selection at both the Vancouver Just For Laughs Film Festival and the Toronto International Short Film Festival.

Shelley Scarrow has been commissioned by No Equal Entertainment to write a pilot script based on **Robert J. Sawyer's** novels, *Wake, Watch* and *Wonder*. Sawyer and **J.B. Sugar** (*Bitten*) are executive producers.

Kafka's Ape, **Guy Sprung's** stage adaptation of Franz Kafka's novella, *Report For An Academy*, has played over 140 performances, just finished a third tour of Montreal and has been invited to play in Tokyo and Beijing in April.

Kim Thompson has adapted her fantasy novel *Eldritch Manor* into a stage play to be produced by the StageCoach Theatre School on Salt Spring Island in April. Kim is currently writing a YA novel about D.W. Griffith and the early days of silent movies.

Eric Weinthal was hired by Serendipity Point Films, Broken Head Pictures, screenwriter **Stephanie Fabrizi** and producer Melissa Coghlan to story edit a new screenplay they have in development.

Writer/director **Megan Wennberg's** first feature-length documentary will premiere at Hot Docs in April. *Drag Kids* follows four children, who are drag queens, as they pursue their passion for drag, culminating in a group show at Montreal Pride. It was produced by Erin Oakes and Edward Peill of Telltale Productions.

The CMF has kicked in funding for the production of the second season of **Emily Wheedon** and Geneva Film's web series *Chateau Laurier*. The show also won for Best Costume Design in a Web Series at the CAFTCAD Awards. ■

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*

CANADIAN SCREENWRITERS ARE...

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Bringing home the BACON

By Jeremy Woodcock

Despite an earlier pledge to publish submissions, the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Review Panel (BTLR) won't be issuing any public statements until June. A Panel "member" weighs in...

Hello writers, showrunners, producers, agents, hangers-on, and last but not least, producers. Allow me to introduce myself.

My name is Don Danielson, and I am but a humble member of the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel, or BACON for short — with a name that long you can honestly just pick and choose which letters are the most fun to highlight.

We have been getting a lot of feedback on our handling of the recent submissions to our panel on behalf of many individuals, organizations, corporations and even producers. We've been receiving plenty of powerful feedback on our relative languidness (How's that for a word for you writers to enjoy? Means being slow, but not necessarily pedantic, by the way.) in making the submissions publicly available, even though we said we would do just that. Lots of feedback on all of this.

And honestly, we're thankful for all of it. That's what makes it feedback, actually.

(Let me explain this statement, as a quick aside. Yes, a lot of the feedback to our idiosyncratic and downright taciturn response to the submission has been negative. I don't have my head in a panel of sand. I know it's been very critical. But that's why I'm thanking you for this feedback. And when you need to pretend that you're thankful for criticism you didn't want — and do not intend to follow — you call it feedback.)

But back to the matter at hand. We've talked about the feedback as a panel. (Far more than we've spoke about the submissions, to be perfectly honest.) Our panel is a good panel. I'd put it up there with some of the better panels — I mean, it's no committee, but it's a darn good panel, usually up to the task.

I must confess, though, that we don't quite understand why people are so hot-and-bothered about our decision not to engage in a transparent process on this matter, and not to go blabbing about what these submissions "contain" and what "interested parties" and "powerful players in the broadcasting game" want from "the government."

But the way I see it, the best thing that can happen to these submissions is that you never find out what they say. Isn't that the dream?

As long as you never see them, they can be any kind of submission you imagine! There could be a submission specifically asking the government for permission to give you, (your name here), a cheque for one million dollars, no strings attached. Sure, it's not likely, but until we tell you that it didn't happen, it *could* have happened.

Do you really want to hear what Rogers has to say about the future of broadcasting? Is that likely to improve your life? Ask yourself the same question I ask before I research whatever rash or illness I currently have on WebMD: Do you think this information, no matter what it is, is possibly going to make you happier than you currently are?

At the very least, look at it in this sense: As long as the submissions are not revealed, they could be everything you want or nothing you want — and are in fact both at once. Schrodinger's Submissions. They are *The Sopranos'* final scene in submission form. While I'm at it: Yes, we did say that we would make these submissions publicly available after the deadline. No question about it. Not sure why there are any hard feelings on this point.

Here I feel we are merely having a very professional disagreement regarding the definition of the word "after."

"After the deadline" could be one second after the deadline passes. It could be 200 years after. It could be 500 years after. It could — and you may feel I'm being silly here, but I am just trying to make a point — it could be 500 million years after.

These periods of time are all "after," correct? Surprised you writers aren't more understanding of the many possible interpretations of a word. Seems like an important part of storytelling, non?

Perhaps you can get to work on that and we'll get back to work panelling. After all, we all have our responsibilities.

I'll tell you what ours are after.

Don Danielson, Panel Member
BRATISLAVA
(Got bored with
BACON in the eight weeks it took
me to compose this letter.) ■

March

25 - 31 — Canadian Screen Week academy.ca

April

17 — National Canadian Film Day canadianfilmday.ca

25 - May 5 — Hot Docs Festival hotdocs.ca

29 — WGC Screenwriting Awards wgc.ca

May

4 - 5 — Toronto Screenwriting Conference torontoscreenwritingconference.com

23 - June 2 — Inside Out Toronto LGBT Film Festival insideout.ca

June

5 — WGC Presents Writers Talking TV wgc.ca

9 - 12 — BANFF World Media Festival banffmediafestival.com

25 - 30 — Female Eye Film Festival femaleeyefilmfestival.com



MERIDIAN ARTISTS

Toronto

349 Carlaw Ave., Suite 303
Toronto, ON M4M 2T1
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Celebrating
Canadian
Screenwriters

WGC Screenwriting Awards 2019

Congratulations to this year's finalists!

BEST NEW SERIES SCRIPT

The Bletchley Circle: San Francisco
"Presidio"

Written by **Daegan Fryklind**

Cupcake & Dino: General Services
"Growing Pains"

Written by **Joel Buxton**

Little Dog "Round One"

Written by **Joel Thomas Hynes**

Little Dog "Round Five"

Written by **Christopher Roberts**

CHILDREN'S

Chop Chop Ninja "In Charge"

Written by **Paul Stoica & Alexandre Riendeau**

Cupcake & Dino: General Services
"Christmas is Cancelled"

Written by **Mike Girard**

Odd Squad, Season 2 "Saving Agent Orson"

Written by **Mark De Angelis**

Wishfart "I Wear This Hat Ironically"

Written by **Josh Sager & Jerome Simpson**

Wishfart "Litterfools Ain't Cool"

Written by **John Hazlett & Lienne Sawatsky & Dan Williams**

DOCUMENTARY

Catwalk: Tales from the Cat Show Circuit

Written by **Michael McNamara**

The Fruit Machine

Written by **Sarah Fodey**

Jumbo: The Life of an Elephant Superstar

Written by **Christine Nielsen**

FEATURE FILM

22 Chaser

Written by **Jeremy Boxen**

The Grizzlies

Story by **Graham Yost**/Screenplay
by **Graham Yost and Moira Walley-Beckett**

Splinters

Written by **Thom Fitzgerald**

MOW AND MINISERIES

No One Would Tell

Written by **Caitlin D. Fryers**

Odd Squad: World Turned Odd

Written by **Tim McKeon**

Separated at Birth

Written by **James Phillips**

SHORTS AND WEBSERIES

Chateau Laurier

Story by **Emily Weedon**/
Teleplay by **Kent Staines & Emily Weedon**

NarcoLeap "Unintended Consequences"

Written by **David Schmidt**

We've Come to the End of Our Time

Written by **Alex Epstein & Lisa Hunter**

TV COMEDY

Letterkenny "A Letterkenny Christmas:
The Three Wise Men"

Written by **Sonja Bennett**

Schitt's Creek, Season 4 "RIP Moira Rose"

Written by **Rupinder Gill**

Second Jen, Season 2 "Like a Girl"

Written by **Amanda Joy**

TV DRAMA

Cardinal: Blackfly Season, Season 2
"Kevin"

Written by **Jennica Harper**

Cardinal: Blackfly Season, Season 2
"Red"

Written by **Sarah Dodd**

Killjoys, Season 4 "Baby, Face Killer"

Written by **Julie Puckrin**

Wynonna Earp, Season 3 "When You
Call My Name"

Written by **Caitlin D. Fryers**

TWEENS & TEENS

ReBoot: The Guardian Code, "Identity
Theft"

Written by **Todd Ireland**

Star Falls "The Bachelor Auction"

Written by **Cole Bastedo**

Star Falls "The Camping Trip"

Written by **Jennifer Daley**

**The 23rd annual
WGC Screenwriting Awards**

Hosted by: Gavin Crawford

Written by: Kyle Tingley

Winners announced

April 29, 2019

At Koerner Hall in Toronto

Ticket information:

www.wgc.ca



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