

CANADIAN

# SCREENWRITER

SUMMER 2021

**Animation  
Nation?**

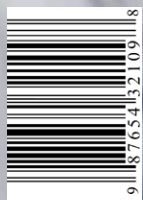
**WGC  
Awards  
Winners**

**Beans  
co-writers**

Tracey Deer &  
Meredith Vuchnich  
talk teamwork

# Joseph Kay

On breaking new ground in Canadian drama with *Transplant*



Writers Guild  
of Canada



MERIDIAN  
ARTISTS



“It wasn’t a straightforward process for Deer to turn her story into a script.”

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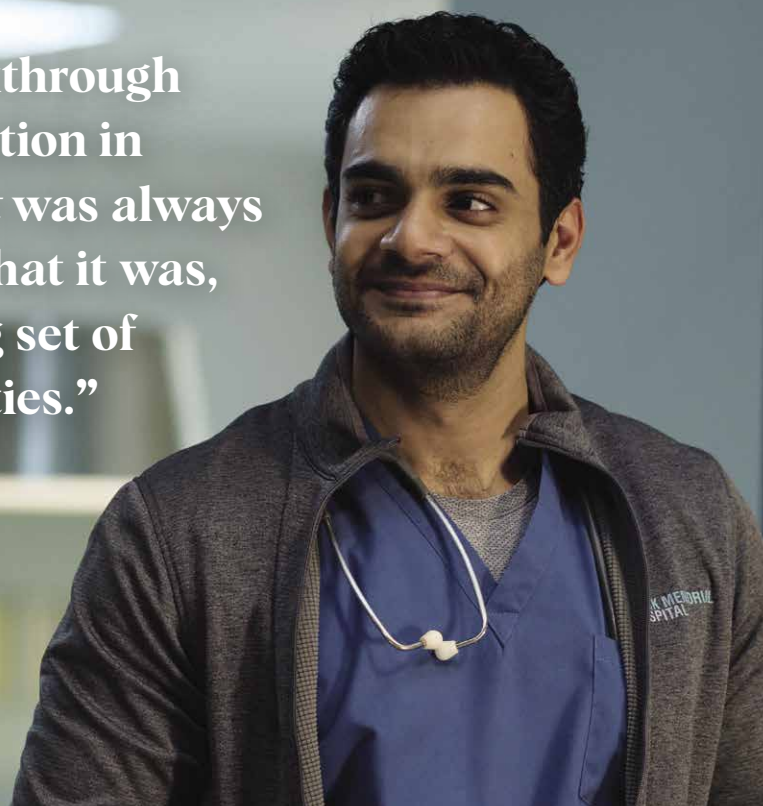
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## **WGC Screenwriting Awards**

It may have been virtual, but the fun, surprise and emotion were very real — hear from the 2021 award winners in their own words.

“The breakthrough representation in *Transplant* was always seen for what it was, an exciting set of opportunities.”

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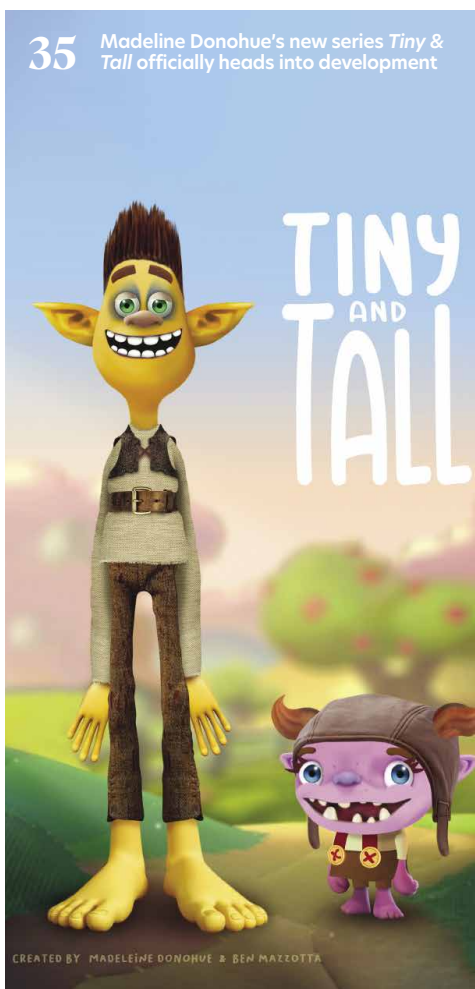
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**Printing**

Vibrant Graphics

Canadian Screenwriter is published two times a year by the Writers Guild of Canada (WGC)

366 Adelaide Street West, Suite 401

Toronto, Ontario M5V 1R9

TEL: (416) 979-7907

FAX: (416) 979-9273

WEBSITE [www.wgc.ca](http://www.wgc.ca)

**Subscriptions** WGC members receive a subscription as part of their membership. Non-member subscriptions: \$20 for two issues.

**Advertising policy** Readers should not assume that any products or services advertised in Canadian Screenwriter are endorsed by the WGC.

**Editorial Policy** The WGC neither implicitly nor explicitly endorses opinions or attitudes expressed in Canadian Screenwriter.

Submissions are subject to editing for length, style and content.

**Advertising Sales**

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Letters to the editor are subject to editing for length. Not all letters are published.



ISSN 1481-6253  
Publication Mail  
Agreement Number  
400-11669

## From the Editor



Well, it's  
been a  
minute...  
okay 16  
months

**W**ell, it's been a minute since you received the last copy of *Canadian Screenwriter* in the spring of 2020. When the pandemic hit, to say that the world entered a prolonged period of uncertainty is an understatement. To help to offset the financial unpredictability that the Canadian TV & Film industry and our members faced, the Guild moved pretty quickly to put a halt to any non-essential expenditures – including this magazine.

Over the past 16 months, production has stabilized somewhat and the country is now re-opening, one restaurant at a time. So, it seemed like the right moment to bring *Canadian Screenwriter* back. And just as we've all changed during Covid (some, namely me, developing a stretch-pants-only policy, for example), so too has the magazine.

Hopefully you noticed some of the changes as soon as you retrieved your copy from the mailbox. It's undergone a stem-to-stern redesign. The focus was on making the magazine a fresh, contemporary and overall visually engaging reading experience to better showcase WGC members' stories and achievements. You'll notice a bigger emphasis on visuals, lots of whitespace and crisp type that will hopefully make you want to dive in.

And content-wise there have also been some changes, starting with my appointment as editor in addition to my role as WGC director of communications. (Thanks again Tom, for the years you dedicated to the role.) The new and expanded Cold Open section aims to catch members up on the news they need to know, while also highlighting the work of screenwriting in Canada and the people who do it. Feature stories, meanwhile, will aim to dive deeper whether they're series profiles or state-of-the-industry pieces.

My hope is that you'll embrace and adore the new *Canadian Screenwriter* as much as I've come to love sweatpants. Seriously, I would love to hear your thoughts on CSW reborn and, of course, keep sending me your news and stories – there's just no magazine without them.

— Lana Castleman

## Contributors



**Kelly Boutsalis** is a freelance writer and she's written about film and television for *NOW* magazine, *Elle Canada*, *Flare* and *POV Magazine*. Originally from the Six Nations reserve, she now lives in Toronto.



**Mauricio Calero** is a Toronto-based photographer specializing in portrait, event and lifestyle photography. When not taking pictures, he enjoys spending time with his wife Amber, friends and family. You can find him on Instagram (@mauriciojcalero).



A longtime contributor to *Canadian Screenwriter*, **Matthew Hays** has also written for *The Guardian*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *The New York Times* and *Vice*. He is also the co-editor (with Tom Waugh) of the Queer Film Classics book series.



**Li Robbins** is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *The Walrus*, *Toronto Life* and on *CBC.ca*, among other publications. Li has also worked as an arts and cultural journalist for CBC radio and online. Follow her on Twitter (@LiRobbins) and Instagram (@liwrites).



**Gary Rusak** is a freelance writer who lives in Toronto. His work has appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *Toronto Sun*, *Post City* magazines, *Ryerson University Magazine* and *Kidscreen* magazine, among many others.

## From the president



# Canadian TV is still under threat. So, what else is new?

**F**or those of you who hibernated through the long dark winter of our pandemic and missed it, I assumed the role of President of the WGC this past spring, after Dennis Heaton stepped down. I served as a Forum Delegate from 2012 to 2018, as Councillor since 2018, as Treasurer since 2020, and I am now proud to have earned the trust and confidence of my fellow Councillors to become your President. My goal is to offer my experience as a screenwriter and as a lawyer to guide our Guild with fair, equitable leadership.

Canadian screenwriters are facing unprecedented headwinds. That may sound like redundant hyperbole — after all, when's the last time you heard the WGC say, "Things are just so frickin' great!?" But as those of you sitting in your home offices writing pitch after pitch and unproduced script after unproduced script can attest, I'm not crying wolf. Opportunities are dwindling. So much so that writers who can, are heading South, or exiting the profession altogether.

More than six years ago, at the 2015 WGC National Forum, we discussed the upcoming technological transformation of the television industry (as we have pretty much every year before and after). We all knew that Netflix was coming for us. That was the year then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared he was 100% against a Netflix tax. I was apoplectic. Didn't he know that Netflix and the like, if left unregulated, would destroy the Canadian television industry?

I raised my quavering voice among the Delegates, Councillors and WGC staff to ask what the hell we were doing about this existential threat. The answer was: We were doing everything we could do — lobbying the government, making loud public statements, allying with other industry guilds, even launching a public relations campaign extolling the virtues of CanCon.

Fast forward to 2021, and our worst fears are coming true. Streamers are luring tens of millions of

Canadian eyeballs away from our traditional broadcasters without paying a (legislated) penny into our cultural ecosystem. Consider this: In 2014, the major broadcast groups produced 715.42 hours of scripted content under the WGC. By last year, that number had declined by a whopping 70% to 214.38 hours.

Bill C-10 was supposed to be our saviour. The bill would have amended the Broadcasting Act to ensure that digital media giants pay their fair share. But after a thrashing at committee on dubious "free speech" grounds, Bill C-10 has now stalled in the Senate. And if an election is called in the fall, as is likely, the bill will be scrapped entirely and any efforts to modernize our system will have to start from square one — including the WGC's years-long, wide-ranging efforts to lobby for these changes.

There is some good news. As the *WGC Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Report* highlighted, we've seen significant gains in diverse representation in writers' rooms through 2019. We have also reached parity in terms of gender representation among writers across many genres. These changes were long overdue, and I, for one, am enjoying the wave of fresh stories and balanced perspectives. There is more to be done, to be sure, but even now initiatives at the funding level are being introduced to address gaps at the ownership level.

But what about Bill C-10, you say? What about that existential threat to our industry? Well, back at that forum in 2015, after my mini-meltdown, we broke for lunch, and Andrew Wreggitt — the veteran showrunner and longtime WGC Councillor — talked me down. He reminded me that Canadian television has always been under threat. As recently as 1999, we'd been reduced to only a handful of shows. To work in this industry, he seemed to be saying, was to live in an uncertain world. To never stop striving. To never give up. Those are wise sentiments, and I'm reminded of them now more than ever.

— Alex Levine

# COLD OPEN

Craft



Industry



Policy



People



## Arrested development: Bill C-10 stalled in the Senate

It wasn't the ending many in Canada's TV industry had envisioned when Bill C-10 was first introduced to the House of Commons in November 2020. The long-awaited legislation that aimed to update the Broadcasting Act suffered setbacks in committee, driven by the contention that the bill would impact free speech in Canada. But bringing foreign streaming services into the system and requiring them to contribute

financially to the production of Canadian content was the chief priority. C-10 did eventually pass a third reading in the House. It then travelled to the Senate, where it now sits, awaiting committee review while Parliament has recessed for the summer. Meanwhile, the WGC and the Canadian TV biz, which fought long and hard for this bill, wonder if they will ever see these much-needed reforms enacted.

## Streaming into Canada?

As the fate of Bill C-10 hangs in the balance, many of the streaming giants it seeks to regulate seem to be trying to get ahead of the game. Several of them are appointing Canadian-based executives to scope out and commission original content from Canadian creators.

Amazon Studios was the first out of the gate in May with the appointment of former Comedy Network/Bell Media exec Brent Haynes to the role of head of scripted, Canada. Not surprisingly, he'll be looking for comedy-driven projects first. Not to be outdone, Netflix has finally committed to a Canadian HQ in Toronto and at press time was looking for a Canadian content executive to oversee development and commissions here for the global streamer.

And in late June, ViacomCBS-owned streamer Paramount+ posted an opening for director, content programming & strategy to be based in Canada to "lead the creation and execution of the Canadian content strategy (SVOD Services) using ViacomCBS content assets, global acquisitions, international originals, and local original productions."

It remains to be seen whether or not this flurry of appointments will help WGC members realize significantly more opportunities to get their projects made here. But Amazon Studios has put some of its Bezos billions where its proverbial mouth is. A new *Kids in the Hall* series is currently in production in Toronto — contracted under the IPA.



## It's not you, it's Canadian TV

Talk of an uptick in international investment aside, looking at the domestic broadcasting landscape, it is getting increasingly difficult for resident Canadian creators to get their projects off the ground and land work in writers' rooms.

According to the WGC's own data, 808 episodes of live-action television were made under WGC jurisdiction in 2015. That number dropped by almost 45% to 447 episodes in 2020. Moreover, the major broadcast

groups produced 715.42 hours of scripted content under the WGC in 2014. But by 2020, that figure stood at 214.38 hours — that's an eye-popping 70% drop. (Nope, not a typo.)

Looking at the recent network upfronts, you can see the trend continuing. For example, Rogers Media announced just one Canadian original scripted series — a fourth season of cop procedural *Hudson & Rex*. Corus Entertainment, for its part, unveiled only two Canadian-created dramas for the fall (and they were previously publicized) — *Family Law* and the second season of *Departure*.

So, if you were thinking there's a lot less work out there, it's not you, it's Canadian TV.

## WGC publishes its first EDI report

In April, the WGC and its Diversity Committee published the first of what will be an annual *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Report* as part of the WGC's efforts to work towards addressing issues of historic underrepresentation in Canadian television. The report provides an overview of the composition of the WGC's own membership from 2013 to 2019, and diversity in writers' room configurations and writing credits earned by diverse writers working on scripted live-action and animated Canadian TV series. ICYMI: the full report is available at [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca).

## Script of the Month 2021

Congratulations to all on your successful scripts!



January

**Texas Troy**

A half-hour single-camera comedy created and written by Nile Séguin



February

**Lonesome Whistle of a Far-off Train**

A feature film written by Brier Sanderson



March

**Shooting the Talent**

A half-hour comedy written by Alejandro Álvarez Cadilla



April

Half-hour dramedy **jocKWEENS**

written by Scott McGuirk



May

**The Pros and Cons of Killing Yourself**

A short film written by Ravi Steve Khajuria



June

**REP**

A half-hour dramedy written by Maryan Hays



## The Craft

# Penny Gummerson on scene

Penny Gummerson is modest when asked to talk about scene writing for *Canadian Screenwriter's* new column The Craft. She says, with a laugh, "It's just that I'm not an expert." But her impressive track record would have it otherwise — *Trickster*, *Cardinal*, *The Order*, *Heartland*, *Strange Empire*, *Arctic Air*, *Blackstone* and *Moccasin Flats* are among her TV writing credits. Not to mention she's also the 2021 winner of the WGC Screenwriting Award for Drama Series.

By Li Robbins



## What are the necessary elements when it comes to writing a powerful scene?

At this point for me it's an organic process. But in the early days, I'd follow what the screenwriting books said — that every scene has to have conflict, one character wants something the other one opposes it, that kind of thing. It was great to read those things but kind of painful for me trying to fit every scene into that kind of box. I'm not a technical writer, I try to write from my heart not my head. And I actually don't think every scene has to have conflict. Some scenes reveal something about the character, some hint at theme. If anything, the big questions I ask myself are: What am I trying to say here? What information am I trying to get across? What is at the heart of the scene?

## What kind of scene do you find tough to write?

Well, right now I'm working on something based on the life story of a residential school survivor, an incredible man. I feel very honoured to write his story, but I also feel a huge responsibility to get it right, not just for him, but also for all residential school survivors. How can I speak the truth without retraumatizing survivors? How do I honour the story? How do I tell the story so that audiences will be able to sit through it? I've written some pretty intense scenes over the years involving trauma, about things like drug addiction or suicide, but something about it being someone's real-life story just got me. The beautiful part is that it's also a story of hope and healing — he comes through it.

## What kind of scene do you most like to write?

I love writing character scenes. Especially two-handers where you have an opportunity to really fill the scene with subtext and moments of character an audience can relate to. I come from a

playwrighting background, so I love dialogue. But I also was a photo journalist at one point, and love writing visual scenes, especially when the land or the world becomes a character unto itself.

## Is there a scene in your 2021 WGC Screenwriting Awards-winning script for *Trickster* you think may have contributed to its success?

One comes out of a sequence where Wade [the trickster father of teenage boy Jared, also a trickster] leads his son to the lake to kill him. His mother Maggie rushes in to save her son — by shooting an arrow through his heart, since she's been told only a trickster can kill a trickster. She takes his body to her ex-husband's, hoping and praying the ancients were right, and pulls the arrow out of his chest. Beat. He comes back to life. As soon as she's on her own, reality takes hold, how close she was to losing her son. All the pain and grief and fear she's kept buried in order to survive comes out in that moment.

## Do you have any scene-writing advice for newcomers?

For me the thing that distinguishes one writer from another is the voice. Find your voice. Trust in it. Bring it to every scene you write. And read a ton of scripts! I think I've learned more from reading scripts than any class I've taken. And it's by doing, right? Writing and writing and rewriting. ✨

*This interview has been condensed and edited.*

# CBC focuses on year-round development

The pubcaster's executive director of scripted, Trish Williams outlines her new team structure and their priorities for drama and comedy

By Lana Castleman



Williams joined the CBC in 2019, and in February helped to oversee the creation of separate Development and Current Production departments



Jennifer Shin (left) is CBC's director of development, comedy, and Lea Marin (right) is now director of development, drama — both are new roles

Bell Media wasn't the only major Canadian broadcaster to overhaul its development team (see "Who and how to pitch at Bell Media now," p. 15) this past winter. In February, CBC made moves to split its development and current production functions into two separate departments. The idea being, says Trish Williams, executive director, scripted, that "we can now focus on development year-round, at the same pace that we do when we're not in production." She notes that development tended to take a bit of a back seat during heavy production seasons when one department was responsible for both activities.

Former NFB producer, Lea Marin, and ex-head of content at Banger films, Jennifer Shin, were appointed directors of development, drama and comedy, respectively. Now, reporting to Williams, they oversee scripted development efforts for the CBC. And all three executives have refocused the distinct department on building projects around creators' "passion projects."

"We want the talent — creators and writers — to come to us and tell us what they are most passionate about," says Williams. "We want Canada's best talent to come to us and say, 'This is the series that I think should be on Canada's public broadcaster' — and that includes Canada's established and emerging talent."

For drama, specifically, Williams says the CBC is focused on finding content that attracts its target audience of 25- to 54-year-olds on its linear network and streamer, CBC Gem. But more importantly, she and Marin want stories that dive into deeper themes that are relevant to modern-day Canada. "People come in and want to pitch a crime procedural, for example. And the first question we ask is, 'What is this really about? What is the distinct POV of the storyteller and what makes it feel special and different?'" says Williams. She points to ongoing series, Floyd Kane's *Diggstown* and *Coroner* (created by Morwyn Brebner), as great examples. "Those series do take inspiration from current events and integrate them into their episodes. And what makes them special is the tone and the voice behind each series."

Turning to comedy, Williams notes that CBC's comedy series are known

for "having inclusive values at the heart of them, for celebrating diverse voices and for being warmhearted." And given the recent success of series like *Schitt's Creek*, the pubcaster won't be deviating from this recipe. What writer-creators should keep in mind is that CBC is looking for that specific comedic voice and POV shaping the project to be combined with a concept that conveys powerful universal themes. "*Schitt's Creek* will be something we point to for a long time because it really did that magically and beautifully."

In terms of its new comedy slate, Williams singles out *Sort Of* as a great example of that magic. Co-created by playwright Bilal Baig and TV veteran Fab Filippo, the half-hour series centers around a gender-fluid millennial who feels like they're in transition in every aspect of their life, from gender to love and sexuality to family and career, and stars Baig in the lead role.

The CBC has also increased its programming diversity commitments, mandating that a minimum 30% of key creative roles (writers, director, principal performers) in their drama, comedy and kids live-action series of six episodes or more, must be held by people who self-identify as Indigenous, Black, People of Colour or Persons Living with Disabilities. The 30% threshold applies to each category of writer, director and principal performer for each series being produced. "It's for each category and for each individual series. It's not an average across all roles and all series," Williams clarifies. (Full details of the new program will be posted to the CBC's independent producer online portal, [cbc.ca/ip](http://cbc.ca/ip).)

Finally, for screenwriters looking to pitch their scripted projects to the CBC development team, Williams advises that they don't necessarily need an agent. But they are encouraged to have an independent producer attached.

"We like the teams to come to us whole," she says, adding that she's found that it makes for a stronger project when there's a like-minded team already in place. She also notes that Marin and Shin are taking all pitches, and inquiries can be emailed to CBC scripted development manager, Micah Kernan ([micah.kernan@cbc.ca](mailto:micah.kernan@cbc.ca)). 🍁

## Welcome new members

(Jan. 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021)

<b>Byron Abalos</b> Toronto ON	<b>Atefeh Khademolreza</b> Newmarket ON
<b>Brishkay Ahmed</b> Vancouver BC	<b>Mazi Khalighi</b> Burnaby BC
<b>Daniel Aigbe</b> Brantford ON	<b>Billy Kimball</b> Los Angeles CA
<b>Aba Amuquandoh</b> Toronto ON	<b>Jason Kitts</b> Calgary AB
<b>Ho Che Anderson</b> Toronto ON	<b>Neha Kohli</b> Toronto ON
<b>Taylor Annisette</b> Toronto ON	<b>Mark Jordan Legan</b> Los Angeles CA
<b>Gillian Bartolucci</b> Toronto ON	<b>Megan MacKay</b> Toronto ON
<b>Shane Belcourt</b> Toronto ON	<b>Manny Mahal</b> Vancouver BC
<b>Kevin Bjerkness</b> Vancouver BC	<b>Dusty Mancinelli</b> Toronto ON
<b>Matt Boren</b> Maplewood NJ	<b>Paolo Mancini</b> Burlington ON
<b>Bridgette Burgess</b> Los Angeles CA	<b>Rabiya Mansoor</b> Whitby ON
<b>Sebastien Chabot</b> Montreal QC	<b>Monique Matthews</b> Culver City CA
<b>Lorraine DeGraffenreidt</b> Baltimore MD	<b>Brandon Mohammed</b> Toronto ON
<b>Madeleine Donohue</b> Stratford ON	<b>Paul Moncrieffe</b> Hamilton ON
<b>Veronica Dymond</b> St. John's NL	<b>Peter Mooney</b> Bloomfield ON
<b>Thomas Edgerton</b> Toronto ON	<b>Aidan O'Loughlin</b> Toronto ON
<b>Esi Edugyan</b> Victoria BC	<b>Enuka Okuma</b> Los Angeles CA
<b>Qaseem Fazal</b> Surrey BC	<b>Steven Price</b> Victoria BC
<b>Daniel Fernandes</b> Toronto ON	<b>Justin Rawana</b> Toronto ON
<b>James Gilbert</b> Toronto ON	<b>Zalika Reid-Benta</b> Toronto ON
<b>Josephine Green Zhang</b> Los Angeles CA	<b>Michael Reisz</b> Burbank CA
<b>Isabella Gutierrez</b> Seattle WA	<b>Ron Rubin</b> Toronto ON
<b>Michael Hanley</b> Toronto ON	<b>Lori-Ann Russell</b> Orangeville ON
<b>Karen Hawes</b> Toronto ON	<b>Ben Sainsbury</b> Oakville ON
<b>Sasha-lee Henry</b> Hamilton ON	<b>Desmond Sargeant</b> Brampton ON
<b>Mona Hersi</b> Maple ON	<b>Hahzinak Schultz</b> Agassiz BC
<b>Steve Hoban</b> Oakville ON	<b>Kat Sieniuc</b> North Vancouver BC
<b>Masooma Hussain</b> Toronto ON	<b>Madeleine Sims-Fewer</b> Toronto ON
<b>Lisa Jackson</b> Toronto ON	<b>Moir Stevenson</b> Mahone Bay NS
<b>Maisie Jacobson</b> Toronto ON	<b>Taneka Stotts</b> Glendale CA
<b>Aliya Kanani</b> Toronto ON	<b>Zac Thompson</b> Vancouver BC
<b>Graham Kent</b> Toronto ON	



## Remembering Margaret Collier

Canadian screenwriters lost one of their true champions on April 11, 2021. At the age of 88, the WGC's first Executive Director Margaret Collier passed away in Toronto. Margaret leaves behind a legacy for which our members will be forever grateful.

A tiny, elegant woman who cast a huge shadow, Margaret brought her flinty intelligence to bear on the task of ensuring that Canadian screenwriters were properly valued for their work. Her fight for screenwriters began in 1977 when she became the leader of the newly formed Toronto Writers Branch of ACTRA. She later served as National Executive Director of the ACTRA Writers Guild until 1991. She worked closely with former WGC President, Jack Gray. They always operated as a team, and among their biggest achievements was establishing the production fee formula as part of the WGC's IPA. Its importance to Canadian screenwriters can't be underestimated.

"She was a tireless champion for the creative and financial rights of Canadian screenwriters," notes former WGC Councillor, Fred Yackman.

In 1991, Margaret and Jack achieved another significant goal in establishing the WGC as separate from ACTRA. She became its first Executive Director and then retired in 1994. "Margaret gave her life energy to lead the separation of our WGC from ACTRA," says WGC Executive Director, Maureen Parker. "She was devoted to screenwriters and she knew their rights would be best served in an autonomous Guild. We thank you, Margaret."

Her legacy lives on in the Canadian Screen Awards' Margaret Collier Award, presented annually to a Canadian screenwriter in recognition of their outstanding body of work. RIP Margaret. 🍁

## In memoriam

<b>Matthew Cope</b> Westmount QC	<b>Daniel David Moses</b> Toronto ON
<b>Steve DiMarco</b> Toronto ON	<b>Jim Purdy</b> Toronto ON

# Doctors within borders

How creator Joseph Kay and the *Transplant* writing team are breaking new ground with the Canadian medical drama and ratings hit

By Matthew Hays

*Transplant* creator & showrunner Joseph Kay says the election of Donald Trump – and rise of the anti-immigrant and -refugee rhetoric that came with it – inspired him to make the series with a heroic Syrian refugee at its centre



Photo: Mauricio Calero

Joseph Kay begins our conversation with a bit of philosophical wisdom that perhaps only a screenwriter could conjure up.

“You work as hard on the things that nobody sees, as you do on the things that people do sees. So, it’s very rewarding when people see the things that you do.”

As luck would have it, his latest project is providing lots of rewards. *Transplant* — the CTV medical drama he created and has served as showrunner on for two seasons — premiered to that dreamed-of combination of strong reviews and solid ratings in Canada in the spring of 2020. And then, the disruption in TV production caused by Covid-19 presented the show with a bit of inadvertent luck when NBC began broadcasting the show stateside last September.

Buoyed by glowing reviews (*The Wall Street Journal’s* John Anderson said it would “make its debut as the best medical show on American television”), *Transplant* achieved simultaneously stronger-than-expected ratings in America and on its home turf. And as the season unfolded, word of mouth kicked in, meaning audiences grew. Then came the 2021 Canadian Screen Awards, where it netted several statues, including Best Writing for Drama for Kay’s pilot episode and Best Drama Series. For his part, Kay says he knew the show had really left its mark when it became the subject of a *Jeopardy!* question. Not surprisingly, both CTV and NBC have signed on for season 2, with shooting now wrapping up.

The show, produced by Sphere Media in association with CTV and NBCUniversal International Studios, is turning out to be as resilient as its central character. *Transplant* stars Hamza Haq as Bashir “Bash” Hamed, a Syrian refugee who is trained as a doctor but can’t practice in the Canadian hospital system because he wasn’t schooled here. That all changes in the pilot, when the restaurant Hamed is working in is hit by a truck, which causes a devastating accident. Though seriously injured himself, Hamed leaps into action and saves several lives, including that of a doctor at a Toronto hospital. This harrowing first episode is both a trial by fire and an audition of sorts for Hamed, as the doctor whose life he saves champions him and insists he gets hired to work in his hospital. Despite the legal barriers, Hamed is hired to work in the emergency ward at fictional Toronto hospital, York Memorial.

*Transplant* is noteworthy for various reasons: It is a taut medical drama with a distinct ensemble of characters, but it is being singled out in particular for its representation of a Syrian Muslim refugee as its protagonist. Kay says the idea came to him in 2016, when the election of Donald Trump had brought numerous issues to public consciousness, including anti-refugee and -immigrant rhetoric.

“At the time there was a lot being written about the Syrian war and Syrians in Toronto,” Kay recalls. “We wanted to collaborate on a medical drama. The one that had been airing on CTV, *Saving Hope*, was coming to a close, and we liked that format.”

Kay was also keenly aware that many refugees, even those who are highly-trained in professional fields like medicine, had trouble securing work once they arrived in Canada. “It’s very difficult for doctors who are trained overseas to get a residency,” says Kay. “In confluence with all of these other things in the air — the number of Syrians who were coming to Toronto specifically — things came together as a concept. No one had done a drama like that — with someone who had been a qualified doctor somewhere else and needed to start again — at the centre.” He admits that it just seemed like a topical, human character-rich thing to explore and the show became a journey of “who this guy was and how to tell his story.”

Kay set about writing the award-winning pilot, which he saw as a dramatic launch to the series. But that episode was quite literally so explosive, it created a dilemma for the episodes that would follow. How could the writers maintain the momentum, while remaining true to the show’s roots? Subsequently, Kay has likened the pilot to an action movie, while the entire show is more of a drama.

“I’m always reading pilots and trying to study them and figure out how the great ones do the things they do,” he says. “A pilot presents a story, then the series continues to retell that story, and in a very elegant way. It’s really hard to figure out how the writers did that: How are they retelling the story? How are they continuing to touch on the pilot in the series? How did the pilot become the premise statement for the series? Figuring that out was a long process. You see [Hamed] take bold action in the first scene, and then he gets the opportunity in the pilot, and you figure out how to continue to tell that story narratively.”

The key for the writing team of *Transplant* is the exploration of Hamed’s multi-faceted character. He is a Syrian Muslim doctor, but he’s also a refugee who fled a war-torn country, so he is suffering through significant trauma while also parenting his younger sister, who has escaped to Canada with him. At the same time, he’s got a strong, resilient personality. So, for Kay, the challenge is making sure that strength is present all the time. “How can we keep him a really interesting character, not simply becoming just a doctor by episode two? Over the first season, we learned to do it.”

Several consultants and writers who identify with Hamed’s character, in terms of ethnicity, culture, religious beliefs and lived experience, were on-board to craft the series. Sami Khan served as a story editor and co-wrote one script in season one, and in season two, he serves as consulting producer and has written one script. “Unless the character was specifically Arab and a practicing Muslim, I wasn’t sure what made the show different,” says Khan. “And Joe [Kay] agreed. So, I would annoy him and pitch him and persuade him that if we don’t see an episode early on where he prays, we probably weren’t going to see that, so we needed to do that early on. I think that was important to Joe. For a Muslim creative, that’s what you want in an ally.”

Khan says the breakthrough representation in *Transplant* was always seen for what it was, an exciting set of opportunities.



Carmine Pierre-Dufour has written on S1&2 and was the on-set writer for much of season 2



Consulting producer and writer Sami Khan has been on-board for both seasons of the series



Co-EP Rachel Langer has worked on both seasons of *Transplant*, writing several scripts



Consultant Ahmad Meree helped to make sure the show's depiction of Syrian refugees is accurate

# Who and how to pitch at Bell Media now

Many a writer (and their agent) was left wondering who and how to pitch at *Transplant* commissioner Bell Media following January's news of a major restructuring of the company's upper echelons. Some significant players involved in the original programming team were let go, including Mike Cosentino (president, content and programming) and Corrie Coe (SVP of original programming).

Wonder no more. Carlyn Klebuc, as GM of original programming, now oversees the English-language original programming team. And VP of content development & programming, Justin Stockman, is now in charge of programming strategies for acquired and original programming and original content across Bell Media properties. Klebuc, who has a degree in film studies from Queen's University and her LL.B. from the University of Saskatchewan, has been with Bell Media since 2008, previously in the role of assistant general counsel, Canadian and in-house productions.

Klebuc says that there are opportunities across all of Bell's properties (CTV, CTV Sci-Fi Channel, CTV Drama Channel, CTV Comedy Channel and Crave), and when it comes to originals, the goal has not changed.

"Our focus remains on strong stories and interesting characters Canadians can relate to. Content that is authentic and high-quality — with a hook that makes it instantly engaging. We're looking for a wide-range of ideas and storylines."

Klebuc's team includes Rachel Goldstein-Couto, head of development, and Sarah Fowlie, head of production. Goldstein-Couto is the first point of contact for submissions and is charged with finding new projects to take into development. Fowlie's team, meanwhile, shepherds greenlit series through the production phase. Scripted series inquiries can be directed to [scripted@bellmedia.ca](mailto:scripted@bellmedia.ca), and details on submissions are available at [BellMedia.ca/producer-guidelines/](http://BellMedia.ca/producer-guidelines/).

Looking ahead to 2021-22, Klebuc says that greenlit originals include "outstanding and exciting new series ... with dynamic and affecting stories being told by diverse



Carlyn Klebuc now oversees the English-language original programming team at Bell Media

voices." She adds that her team is now in a position to make decisions "more quickly," and is looking for new series to join the development pipeline.

The upcoming slate of 2021-22 programming includes WGC members' projects: comedy *Children Ruin Everything* (CTV) from Kurt Smeaton, *Transplant* season 2 and the third season of *JANN*. As well, viewers can see the inaugural season of the supernatural series *SurrealEstate* (CTV Sci-Fi Channel), a fourth season of *Corner Gas Animated* and a *Letterkenny* spinoff called *Shoresy* (Crave). Also on Crave, is the six-part limited series *Little Bird*, a multi-generational family saga about the Sixties Scoop, co-created by Jennifer Podemski and Hannah Moscovitch.

As to the ongoing success of *Transplant*, Klebuc feels it resonates with viewers because it is "authentic and timely."

"It's got that hook we're looking for. Through the framework of a medical procedural, *Transplant* explores issues of immigration and displacement, as well as working to establish a new life. It's fresh with a lot of heart — but it still delivers satisfying medical cases. We're really excited about where things are headed for season 2, and the incredible writing and creative team led by Joseph Kay have crafted some really wonderful and interesting new stories to tell." — Li Robbins

*Transplant* star Hamza Haq gets ready to bring Bashir Hamed to life for season 2 of the hit series





**“For me, there was no point in writing this character unless he was explicitly Arab and Muslim...”**

—Sami Khan, writer & consulting producer

“There are the important identity elements for me, but also, no one’s seen a character like this before, so from a storyteller’s perspective, we could be bold, we could break ground. So, why not go for it? Why not see a Muslim character pray? Why not make it have nothing to do with terrorism or violence?,” says Khan. “He’s a doctor that you might see at a hospital in Toronto or Montreal. For me, there was no point in writing this character unless he was explicitly Arab and Muslim.”

The Muslim themes in the show included an Eid episode, in which Hamed observes the festival and its rituals. “This allows us to deeply follow his journey,” says Khan. “And this has opened more up for us in season 2. It means revealing deeper layers, not just about his psyche, but about his experience. The conflict in Syria, the civil war and the atrocities of the Assad Regime give no shortage of things to draw from. I’m not Syrian, but we feel a responsibility to make sure that we’re staying true to the experience of Syrians, for the suffering they’ve had to endure, not even just recently, but for many decades. Our character is dealing with trauma on an ongoing basis.”

“The challenges of writing a show like this seem like ones you’d face on most shows,” says Carmine Pierre-Dufour, who wrote for both seasons of the show and also serves as a story editor. “It’s about finding a voice, and a rhythm. But the refugee and Muslim elements meant we were being especially attentive to detail. Writing and shooting during Covid, of course, also presented very distinct challenges. The usual writing-room process was dramatically shifted, much of it happening on screens.”

Keen attention to accurate details led to bringing Kitchener-based playwright Ahmad Meree on board, who is a Syrian refugee. “This presented us with challenges, but for me, it has also been an incredible responsibility,” notes Meree. “I knew that many thousands of people, perhaps millions, would be watching the show. Some of them would be refugees, like me. I wanted them to see themselves presented accurately in the series. I knew also that there would be many people watching the show who would not be Muslims, or not know any refugees. They might be people who have very negative attitudes towards refugees or immigrants. A show like *Transplant* might change their ideas about that Syrian neighbour they have, or that refugee who works in their local store.”

Meree’s notes on scripts were very specific. “In some episodes, Hamed’s younger sister attends ESL [English as a Second Language] classes,” Meree recalls. “In the original draft, the sister is taking a class that has children and adults in it. But I know from my own experiences taking such classes that adults and children are taught separately. They changed it. It might sound like a minor point, but I felt it important to stick to how it would really play out.”

Meree also contended that Hamed’s sister’s English was too good. “I pointed out that it was okay for her English to be rough. Her English should sound more like someone who is still learning it. They also had a different last name for the central character, but I suggested Hamed, as the one they had didn’t sound like a common Arabic last name.”

Sphere Media VP of development and EP for *Transplant*, Tara Woodbury, says she knew the show would have appeal due to its genre, but that she also liked that the show had its own distinctive edge. “Procedurals are so popular in Canada,” she notes. “We knew we wanted to reach as many viewers as possible. But accuracy being key, that meant giving the writers a lot of space. That can be tough, as there’s pressure to get things done on a tight schedule. But if the writers needed more time to work on something, we made that space and time. It was about making that time for the writers.”

The other thing that was key for Woodbury was that the central figure would be a hero; not perfect, but not someone with a dark sinister secret. “Obviously, recent trends in hit TV shows are that the protagonist must be an anti-hero. There’s got to be some terrible thing the person has done or is doing,” she observes. “We consciously worked against this pattern. We wanted audiences to root for him. We have a responsibility to think about the impact of the stories we tell. Some might argue a Muslim lead character is a risk. But it’s why I wanted to do this show. I’m so proud that audiences have embraced it.”

Khan also liked the idea of a Muslim Arab central character who did not reflect stereotypes. “I know that Joe really values writers, consultants and directors who don’t think conventionally, those who have different approaches and have followed different paths. Stereotypes are just bad writing. If you want to be a good writer, whether you’re Black, brown, Asian, a woman, queer, you want to get away from stereotypes. The push for better representation shouldn’t be seen as any kind of threat, it’s actually about becoming a better writer. It’s about including those perspectives.”

While the writing team was mum about story-arc specifics for season 2, they did say that events in the news did have an impact on their writing. When the show was first conceived, Canada was being held up as a kind of multicultural paradise, in part because of its reception of thousands of Syrian refugees. One *New York Times* story in particular praised Canada effusively for its open arms (“Refugees Encounter a Foreign Word: Welcome,” read the June 30, 2016 headline). But on June 8 this year, a Muslim family in London, Ont. was struck down by a man in a truck, in what police reported was a premeditated hate crime. Four members of the family were killed. The story made headlines around the world. As Muslims of colour, both Khan and Meree say they were deeply shaken by the attack.

“Even before that attack, we had talked about making sure we didn’t present Canada as a perfect place for immigrants and refugees of colour,” Khan says. “We wanted to keep it real. Americans often see us as this paradise, and I think sometimes Canadians then delude themselves into believing that. Canada has done a really good job of selling itself to the world, and selling itself to its own citizens. I don’t think we’re any better or worse than the United States.”

“I’ve had people say racist things to me on the street, and it wasn’t very pleasant,” recalls Meree. “London isn’t that far from Kitchener. People have to keep in mind, refugees didn’t choose to have a war in their country. It wasn’t a choice. Many of us were fleeing for our lives. Maybe a show like this can help to change their minds.”

For everyone involved in *Transplant*, it was important that protagonist Bashir Hamed be a true hero, who in no way reflected Arab Muslim stereotypes



**“Much of Canada is tolerant. But there’s also intolerance here, and that’s something we explore in the show.”**

—Joseph Kay, creator & showrunner



“Canada has long had a reputation as a tolerant place,” says Kay. “And I think much of Canada is tolerant. But there’s also intolerance here, and that’s something we explore in the show. We have raised those issues in season 1, and we have found ways to continue it in season 2. There are no direct references to the London attack though, as it happened quite late in the shooting of this season.”

Finally, those involved in the show’s writing say they are impressed with how many different levels *Transplant* manages to work on. “It’s a medical procedural, and it’s about a Muslim refugee,” says Co-EP Rachel Langer, who has written several episodes. “Each episode sets up a series of the best kind of challenges. How are we going to explore what the characters on the show are going through? Yes, it’s about medical emergencies, but it’s really about the emotional truths of the characters. The first season was about

finding out how we would write the show. Now it’s about finding something new to explore. I would say this is the most involved I’ve ever been on a show I’ve worked on. I realize it’s not just about the words we’re putting on the page, it’s about giving those experiences the justice they deserve.”

Langer pauses, as I ask her about the success of *Transplant*. “The feeling of us working together, all of us, has been tremendous. A writers’ room has been created where we can really delve into these issues. Awards are lovely, but when people say that they’re affected by something you’ve written, there’s nothing like it.”

“I’ve tried to keep the writers’ room a very open place,” adds Kay. “We’ve shifted gears a bit in the second season, but keeping things authentic has been really important. We have tapped into a lot of our writers’ own personal stories. I think that’s why the show has reached so many people.” 🍁



The script unlocked when Deer and Vuchnich realized it had to home in on Beans' (played by Kiawentiio) POV, leaving exposition about the crisis to archival footage incorporated into the film

Photo by Sébastien Raymond.

# Through the eyes of a child

Tracey Deer and Meredith Vuchnich talk challenges and their ultimate success on scripting Deer's personal experiences of the Oka Crisis into the award-winning film *Beans*

By Kelly Boutsalis

**F**ace to Face — that now-iconic photograph taken during the 1990 Oka Crisis that depicts an Indigenous land defender and a Canadian soldier, standing toe-to-toe, eyes locked, tension permeating the atmosphere — has come to embody that violent 78-day standoff in one image. Of course, as the crisis unfolded between July 1 and Sept. 26 that year, much more was at play and it affected the lives of not only the adults living in and around Oka, Que., but also their children. But that story, told from the perspective of a child caught up in the crisis, was nowhere to be seen. And it's here that we find the centre of the award-winning feature film *Beans* — a coming-of-age film rooted within the extremely personal story of Mohawk writer-director Tracey Deer's lived experiences as a young girl during the Oka Crisis.

As it turns out, it wasn't a straightforward process for Deer to turn her story into a workable script.

Told from the point-of-view of a 12-year-old Mohawk girl, Tekehentahkhwa, known as Beans, the film's main character is just trying to figure out who she is, what her outward image should be, how to deal with crushes, and look cool, amidst the historic act of civil resistance being carried out by her community.

Beans, her younger sister Ruby, and parents Lily and Kania'Tariio, are thrust into the 1990 conflict between the Kanasatake and Kahnawake Mohawk people and the town of Oka. The Mohawk community made a stand to defend a forested area known as The Pines that included a cemetery, to stop it from being developed into a golf course and the conflict ensued.

And eight years ago, Deer embarked on the screenplay, starting initially with an outline. Going it alone, while reliving her childhood trauma in vivid detail, however, proved to be just too much.



Tracey Deer

Photo courtesy of EMA Films

### Turning to TV techniques

"It was difficult for me to revisit those memories," recalls Deer. "The magnitude of telling a story that took place during Oka was a lot, and I would get stuck in a creative spin loop. I'd feel a ton of resistance and fear, with a lot of my own self-sabotage going on."

Deer credits *Beans'* producer Anne-Marie G  linas, founder of EMA Films, with guiding her out of that bad place. During one meeting, G  linas asked Deer how she could help her get out of that loop. Looking at her experience co-showrunning APTN's *Mohawk Girls* at the time with Cynthia Knight, Deer suggested she would benefit from hiring a story editor.

"I was enjoying that partnership of two brains brainstorming and throwing ideas off of each other," says Deer, so for *Beans* she thought a story editor could serve that role. She'd met her eventual co-writer Meredith Vuchnich about five years prior, and she was Deer's first choice to join the project.

In 2015, Vuchnich started on *Beans* as story editor, and a year later, Deer asked if she would co-write the film with her. Deer, based in Kahnawake in Quebec, and Vuchnich in Toronto, would talk over the phone to discuss big issues and themes like: What is it to be a mother? What would Lily be afraid of? What is *Beans* feeling here? Then they'd hash everything out, which reminded both of them of their TV writers' room experiences.

"We had talked it all out, so by the time you're writing it, it's easy because we've talked about this beat, and this beat," says Vuchnich. "You make discoveries as you write, but you're not making it all up, it's been in the talking of it."

### In a time before zoom...

Each writer would work in their Final Draft file, and when Vuchnich finished her scenes, she'd pass them along to Deer, and vice versa, so that each

**"The magnitude of telling a story that took place during the Oka Crisis was a lot, and I would get stuck in a creative spin loop."**

would take a pass over the other's scenes. Deer held the master document that had both of their eyes on it. She laments the technology available now, eight years later, that facilitates co-writing from afar. "Describing our process now sounds basic and a bit cumbersome," she says.

And since Vuchnich came into the project a year into her recovery from back-to-back concussions, she had limitations on how much she could work, or even look at a screen.

"It was so old-school that I would send her a scene, her husband would print it, and she would do a paper edit," says Deer. Vuchnich's husband would then enter the edits into the software. For the scenes Vuchnich was working on, she'd write something in the morning in long-hand, and then rest. Her husband would again enter it into the computer.

"I'm working on stuff alone right now, and I miss the partnership and bouncing ideas off each other — it keeps the ball moving," says Vuchnich.

Deer, who has directed films and television series, says her writing style is rooted in her experience as a director.

"I know where they're gonna go, and how *Beans* is going to show that she's sad versus the way [another character] would show it," she says. "I'm a functional writer, but I've read some writers who just make it sing on the page."

Vuchnich similarly approaches screenwriting as the creation of a map. "You don't say, 'The camera moves here,' but you do have to see it."

For the tougher scenes that Deer was having a hard time with, Vuchnich would offer to write an "ugly first pass," putting characters and geography in place, and describing the scenes so that Deer could just go in and make it more genuine.

"There was a lot in it I related to from my own life, but it is not my story," she says. "I always brought as much as I could, but Tracey had last pass and could change anything to make things authentic."

### Eye on the child

Eventually the phone calls turned into in-person gatherings when the screenwriters participated in the TIFF Studio Program in 2017, bringing Deer to Toronto on a regular basis. In TIFF Studio sessions with Oscar-nominated screenwriter Christina Lazaridi, the feedback inspired the screenwriting duo to become brutal, says Deer, killing off characters, scenes and a lot of exposition about the Oka Crisis.

A big breakthrough during the writing process, for Deer, was when she connected back to her 12-year-old self and remembered that she didn't have a full understanding of what was happening around her at that age, so the same would be the case for the Beans character.

"Once we realized this is a story about a little girl, and we want people to live it through her eyes, then it's not as important to explain every single thing going on in the adult end of things," says Deer.

As a former documentarian, Deer made the decision to use archival newscasts to provide enough context for the audience about the Oka Crisis, instead of fictionalizing it. It was an important decision that she hopes has a real impact on the audience.

"I think if we stayed in the world of fiction the entire way, it would have been very easy for audiences to dismiss some of the ugly parts," says Deer. "I did not want to let audiences off the hook, I want them to leave the theater uncomfortable."

It was a decision that was questioned often at the script phase, having multiple funders and other people weighing in, who either insisted that it was a bad idea, or thought it was unnecessary.

"Over and over again, I just said, 'trust me.' We didn't go through the archival for the writing process, but I knew what existed and we wrote in placeholders, and I knew it was challenging to read it in a script and understand how it would work [on screen]," says Deer.

Everybody who'd been unsure of using real archival news footage, saw how it worked within the film in the screening of the first cut. It illustrated the journey the crisis underwent in the media's coverage of it. The archival footage from the early days of the resistance had a very different tone to when the conflict escalated, as neighbouring non-Indigenous communities turned violent and began doing things like throwing rocks at the Mohawk men, women and children.

Meredith Vuchnich



"That was another story we're telling, because we never broke POV," says Vuchnich. "Beans is in every scene, except to go to those archival moments where we gave a whole lot of information. And people never lost their emotional connection to Beans, because those pieces were so emotional in their own way."

Making the voice of their 12-year-old protagonist authentic meant that the two adult women writing her had to channel different sources for that voice. For Deer, it entailed recalling the voices of her 12-year-old self and other kids, and people from her childhood. The people in Beans' world aren't based on specific individuals, but Deer says that she would remember how the older kids talked, and how she was afraid of them, but desperately wanted to be like them.

Vuchnich says that while writing the film, her daughters were around Beans' age, and that personal experience played into a lot of the scenes between Beans and her mother Lily. And where the film starts out with Lily and Beans visiting a potential private school, Vuchnich says that the same situation played out in her own childhood, visiting a private school with her own mom.

In one memorable scene, Lily has to discipline Beans in front of her crush and her new friend, during an increasingly stressful situation.

"We wrote it a million times. At the core of it is a mom who needs her kid to know how high the stakes are, but you also don't want to unleash all your worry and grief on them. But sometimes you do – and that's mothering," says Vuchnich.

### Getting representation right

In terms of the parameters for what Vuchnich, a non-Indigenous writer, could or could not write in the script, Deer says that nothing was explicitly set out. She knew, just as with *Mohawk Girls*, which had number of non-Indigenous writers, that she'd have eyes on everything. So, whenever there was something that didn't work in terms of realistic dialogue or the way characters would move in her community, she would be able to correct it.

"Meredith was completely open, and those were never conversations that we debated," says Deer. "The world has specific rules to it, and I happen to come from that world, so I know what those rules are."

**“I miss the partnership and the bouncing ideas off each other—it keeps the ball moving.”**



## Star quality

*Beans* has met with universally glowing reviews since hitting the festival circuit at TIFF in 2020. These are just some of its accolades to date. Distributed by Mongrel Media, it launched at theatres in Que., Toronto and Vancouver in July.

### **2021 Canadian Screen Awards**

John Dunning Best First Feature Film Award, Best Motion Picture

### **2021 WGC Screenwriting Awards**

Best Feature Film

### **2021 Vancouver Film Critics Circle**

Best Supporting Actress in a Canadian Film - Rainbow Dickerson  
One to Watch - Kiawentiio

### **2021 Berlinale, Generations Kplus**

Crystal Bear - Best Film

### **2021 Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival**

Audience Choice Award, Nextwave Global Features

### **2020 Vancouver International Film Festival**

Best Canadian Film

### **2020 TIFF**

Emerging Talent Award - Tracey Deer  
Rising Stars Award - Rainbow Dickerson  
Canada's Top 10

### **2020 Directors Guild of Canada**

DGC Discovery Award





Photo courtesy of EMA Films



The relationship between Beans and her mother is a central part of the film as the family is thrust into the crisis (left); Deer in director mode, shooting *Beans* on location (bottom)



Photo by Sebastien Raymond.

An example that Vuchnich points to is a bullying scene that takes place at the beginning of the film. She took a crack at it, but Deer told her that it wasn't true to how it would happen. "There was definitely no question that I didn't have the authentic voice, it is definitely Tracey's community," says Vuchnich.

But it was extremely beneficial for their working relationship that Vuchnich built scenes and created dialogue, as Deer said she's better at editing than building from a blank page.

"That feels way more attainable and less scary, frankly, to have something to respond to, and say, 'this works,' or 'this doesn't work,' or ask, 'how do we up the stakes on this?'" says Deer.

She says that her writing on a lot of first drafts is very "Pollyanna, very afterschool special" and she'd send them to Vuchnich, who would ground them and remove the "cheese factor."

In that first draft, they were building out from the outline, and when Deer was too busy working on *Mohawk Girls*, Vuchnich took the notes they'd received and would make a stab at the second draft.

It was also helpful having two people for the notes process, says Vuchnich. "I have found in my career that people give notes because they see themselves in your work, which is amazing, but then they try to shape it into something that's more their experience," she says. "When there's only one of you, you can get bowled over and doubt yourself."

She says while they were both open to taking notes and making the script better, that Deer had a quick gut reaction, and knew which notes they should apply and which ones wouldn't work.

### A world ready for Indigenous storytelling

It took a long time for *Beans* to move from page to screen. But for it be completed at a time when Indigenous news has never been more prominent, is fated, says Deer.

"I do think that the world, and Canadians in particular, are now open to receive this story. Whereas, if we had finished it and put it out five years ago, I don't know if people would have been ready and open to take in this message."

She's also encouraged by the future for stories like *Beans*. "There's an explosion happening in the most wonderful way in terms of Indigenous cinema and Indigenous storytelling in the TV medium," says Deer. "I am seeing so many emerging filmmakers and storytellers, and the talent coming up is so exciting."

Deer contends that a thread running through her career is that the fictional 12-year-old girl at the centre of the film, as well as her 12-year-old self, just needed to be seen, heard and understood. That's something that was at the core of that Indigenous resistance, and those past and current Indigenous expressions of it. "If those things were there, I don't think that the violence that was put upon us would have happened," she says. "I realized recently that all of my work is in pursuit of building these bridges, so that something like the Oka Crisis never happens again."

She wants non-Indigenous people watching *Beans* to be active allies to Indigenous people, in making this country a better place for Indigenous kids.

"This was my coming-of-age story, and it led to a very dark adolescence that I almost didn't come out of," says Deer. "That is not how our children should be learning about who they are, and understanding what their future can hold for them. I want us to do way better for our kids. I want safety, opportunity, hope and dreams for our kids, just like all other Canadian kids have.

"We as a people, so much of our energy is focused on surviving, and I want our energy focused on thriving," she continues. "That's what I want a non-Indigenous audience to get from it, but everything I do is for an Indigenous audience, as well. And I hope that by sharing this story of this little girl, we all feel seen and heard." 🍁



# Suspended animation

For writers and indie producers, toon commissions from Canadian broadcasters are at a standstill

By Gary Rusak



The WGC was asked to take a hard look at the state of domestic animation production in Canada and a perceived significant decline in the number of Canadian broadcaster commissions. It turns out that perception is reality in this case. Just as with scripted live-action commissions from Canadian-owned broadcasters, there has been a marked decline in the number of original Canadian-commissioned animated series that employ WGC members.

Big decreases in CanCon requirements for specialty channels made in 2015, broadcaster mergers and the emergence of powerful U.S.-owned streamers that want to own the full copyright on their animated series, and don't qualify for or need public funding, are the main factors contributing to this decline. The current climate has left indie producers re-thinking their approach to financing and drastically changing the way they staff series. Consequently, Canada's internationally recognized animation writers are increasingly being forced to look to the U.S. for the work that not long ago was so plentiful at home.

### Less regulation, fewer players

To some in the industry, the big shift in the economics behind Canada's animation biz felt like it happened overnight.

"Five years ago, it just dropped off precipitously," says Sean Jara, a veteran writer whose credits includes *Paw Patrol* and *Mysticons*. "You could see that [Canadian broadcasters] were just not commissioning like they once did." The drop was sharply felt throughout the industry.

So, what happened, you're asking? The substantial drop-off in commissions that fall under WGC jurisdiction can be traced back to two things — deregulation and conglomeration. In 2015, the CRTC slashed Canadian content requirements for specialty channels owned by our commercial broadcasters, which encompasses the kid-targeted animation-buying channels. (There's Wildbrain's Family Channel and Family Jr., but Corus Entertainment dominates this space, owning YTV, Teletoon, Treehouse and the Canadian versions of Disney Channel, Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon. It is the 800-lb. gorilla of kids commercial TV in Canada.)

CanCon exhibition requirements for specialty dropped from 55% to 35%, and broadcasters were given more flexibility on where they could spend their money — meaning they did not have to spend what they had been on original animated series or children's shows. Additionally, Corus-owned YTV's condition of licence that required it to commission 90 hours of programming per year from Canadian indie producers was eliminated outright.

"That had a major impact," says Ken Faier, founder and president of Toronto-based Epic Story Media. A stalwart in the Canadian production scene, Faier's latest project *Piper's Pony Tales* is a short-form preschool series that is currently building an audience on its own dedicated YouTube channel. (WGC members including Claire Dunn, Jadiel Dowlin, Shelley Hoffman and Robert Pincombe have written eps for the series.) "Corus in particular spent a ton on Teletoon [productions] when they had to meet the 55% requirement," he says, "and then that was just gone."

The statistics clearly show the impact of these regulatory changes. According to WGC data, in just three years between 2017 and 2020, the number of half-hour episodes produced under WGC jurisdiction dropped by 92%. At its 2021 upfronts, Corus announced just six original animated series across its entire portfolio of animation-buying channels. To put that in perspective, in its heyday, Teletoon was commissioning dozens of series per year from Canadian indies, staffed by WGC members, by itself. This year, not one of the six series was even designated for Teletoon.

And the CMPA's most recent *Profile* report stated that the value of domestic Children and Youth's programming (a sizable portion of which is animated) dropped by \$165 million, losing 30% of its value in 2019/20.

Another factor is the conglomeration of broadcasters that's left two behemoth telecoms in Canada, Bell and Rogers. And apart from Bell Media's *Corner Gas Animated*, they don't make animated series. And the one that commissions the majority of them, Corus, is ordering a mere fraction of what it once did. (The Wildbrain-owned channels do make some commissions, but they never reached the volume that Corus did.)

And producers and series creators are feeling this lack of doors to knock on in Canada acutely. They are still making original series here, but it's becoming increasingly tricky to finance them.

Producer Michelle Melanson, a 25-year veteran of Canadian's independent production scene and co-founder, along with her husband and showrunner Ken Cuperus, of Toronto-based prodco Headspinner, notes the change. "Previously, we were able to finance 100% in Canada," she says. "We were able to get a good licence fee from a Canadian broadcaster, tap into the CMF [Canada Media Fund] and maybe even get a small distribution advance and retain rights. That has all changed now."

"The Canadian broadcasters' budgets and envelopes are really shrinking," says creator and showrunner Diana Moore, whose new animated series *Denis & Me* has been picked up by Wildbrain's Family Channel. "I remember 10 years ago, you could easily generate a healthy budget for a show entirely in Canada with broadcasters, the Shaw Rocket Fund and the CMF. Now, that is just not the case."

"There are just fewer players now in Canada," says Anne-Marie Perrotta, an experienced animation writer based out of Montreal. "As a result, it has become a lot trickier for producers."

### Backing into Canada

In order to get shows off the ground in this environment, Canadian prodcos have been forced to reimagine their approach to financing.



Animation writers (L to R) Sean Jara, Anne-Marie Perrotta and Lienne Sawatsky all point to the need to pursue work in the U.S. due to the drop in commissions from Canadian broadcasters

"It used to be a jigsaw puzzle," says Faier. "Now, it's more like a Rubik's Cube. Every time you rotate it, the colours move along, so every little thing has an impact."

That said, the new strategies haven't cut Canadian money entirely out of the picture, but it has changed the scale and impact of those dollars. "While we still count on Canadian money, we back into it now more than anything," says Faier. "Now, our first focus is on finding international co-production partners." Epic Story Media is also looking at other potential financing opportunities. Increasingly, that means private equity firms. Of course, the prodco is not alone in mining this relatively new source of investment.

"We are taking on equity investors more now as opposed to licensee fees and CMF," says Headspinner's Melanson. "So, we are giving away that equity. Raising funds to make the production is difficult, and this way we are able to make our show and still retain some small back-end." And it's worth noting that unlike the CMF and Canadian tax credits, private equity firms don't require a Canadian broadcaster, Canadian producer ownership or staffing up projects with Canadian writing or production talent in order to access funding.

For many projects, the route now to building a viable deal includes casting a wide net for financing, including international co-producers, toy and gaming companies and private equity, and then "circling back" to access Canadian tax credits, the Shaw Rocket Fund or CMF money, if feasible.

Melanson says that while Headspinner, which is producing Moore's *Denis & Me*, is still tapping into domestic funding, it has to do so with lowered expectations. "We are still relying on Canadian money," she says. "But now it's so we can produce [short-form content] to drum up U.S. interest."

Cuperus also feels that the CMF's role in production financing has moved away from its original intent to finance series commissions made by Canadian-owned broadcasters through the envelope system. That pot is shrinking. "At this point, the CMF [money] allows us the opportunity to make a [U.S.] sales package," says Cuperus. "We would rather just make more shows in Canada," he adds. "It seems more like a Band-Aid, rather than a solution to what is becoming a major problem."

### Runnin' down a stream

One of the fundamental changes that has greatly contributed to what Cuperus identifies as a "major problem" in the Canadian funding

"It used to be a jigsaw puzzle. Now it's more like a Rubik's Cube."

— Producer Ken Faier on the current shape of series financing

equation is the mass migration of kids' eyeballs to SVOD platforms like Netflix, YouTube, Disney+ and Amazon Prime. The emergence of these new powerbrokers and their unrivalled spend on animation has changed the game. The streamers' eagerness to fund entire productions from tip-to-tail (in exchange for owning the series outright) has made a reliance on Canadian tax credits and small domestic licencing fees as antiquated as a printed *TV Guide*. Not only are the foreign streamers ineligible for CMF funds, as the copyright owner of the series must be Canadian-owned to qualify, they also do not need Canadian funding and they're making their shows wherever they want.

"Netflix built an animation studio overnight," says Jara, reflecting upon the power of the relatively new production players. "They hired all the best animators, creators, directors, writers and board artists, and put them all in one building in L.A. and said, 'have at it.'"

And what that also translates to are shows written by U.S.-based writers in L.A. Sure, just as with live-action TV & film service studios in Canada, this production boom has translated into a lot of foreign service work for Canadian-based animation studios. But it has left Canadian indie prodcos that seek some equity in their shows — and Canadian-resident writing jobs — in the lurch.

Additionally, Faier says that streamers that demand all global broadcast rights have forced prodcos to reevaluate the importance of landing a Canadian broadcaster. It then disincentivizes the hiring of Canadian writing talent. "Now, if you have a Canadian network, sometimes it can



Diana Moore's latest series *Denis & Me* has been picked up by Wildbrain. She contends that Canadian animation writers need to become creators and showrunners to thrive

get in your way," he says. "We look at Canadian broadcasters more as an opportunistic acquisition as opposed to commissions."

Melanson sees the same situation and has accordingly adjusted Headspinner's approach to financing. "We aren't pitching Canada first anymore," she says, "because if an SVOD is attached, in all likelihood they require those Canadian rights. It used to be a positive to attach a Canadian broadcaster, but not anymore."

So, despite their solid international reputation, Canadian writers are often swimming upstream when trying to land a job on a series that is fully funded by a U.S.-based SVOD.

Melanson recalls a recent experience with a prominent streaming platform where she tried to staff up with Canadian talent only to be rebuffed. "I submitted a list of who I consider the top Canadian writers to the producers and none were approved," she says. "The work goes to those who have been around for a long time versus giving someone new a chance."

And the high-profile, big-budget productions from U.S.-based SVODs tend to stick with writers with U.S. credits over their Canadian competition. It's a problem that has given some veteran Canadian writers a slightly sour sense of *déjà vu*.

"We're in this position where we feel like we are breaking in again to the U.S. market," says longtime writer and showrunner Lienne Sawatsky, the co-creator of Teletoon series *Wishfart*. "It's like all the experience we have is not worth much because it's not recognizable enough to U.S. companies."

## Red, white and very blue

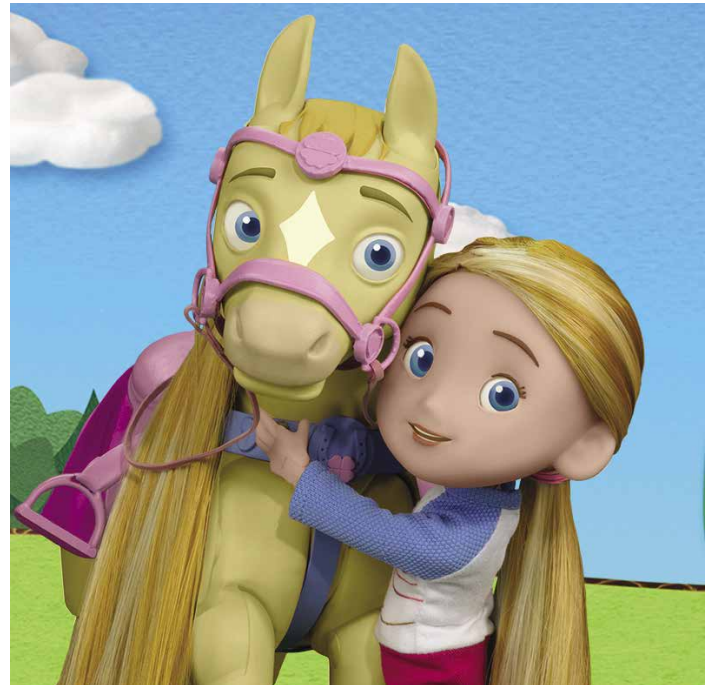
The current dearth of Canadian-based work is raising some tough questions for the country's animation writers. In fact, many believe it is a now nothing short of a necessity to look towards L.A. for the solution.

"I can't tell you how much it hurts me to give that advice," says Jara. "I'm a very proud Canadian, but the reality is that you now have to have one foot in the States and one foot in Canada to survive."

Perrotta, for her part, stresses the benefits of U.S. representation. "I have had a U.S. agent for 15 years," she says. "It really makes me more attractive to Canadian producers, too." She adds that her L.A.-based agent was able to line up work on big U.S. productions such as *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, and helped her stay tapped into the Hollywood production scene. "There are a lot of credits I wouldn't have right now if I only had Canadian representation," she says. "There is a lot of value there."

Sawatsky has also had U.S. representation for the last five years, but she says that simply having an agent down South is not enough. "Getting U.S. representation is, of course, good advice, but it also comes down to the need to hustle more than ever," she says, describing an increasingly competitive and borderless market for writers. "An agent is great, but how much are they going to push you in L.A. if you aren't there yourself?"

Moore believes that now more than ever it is imperative for animation writers to become showrunners and producers on their own



Epic Story Media's *Piper's Pony Tales* was written by WGC members, but is looking to YouTube to build an audience – not a Canadian broadcaster

creative projects in order to thrive. "You have to become creators," she says. "If it hadn't been for my own projects to work on in development, I might not have had much work at all in 2020."

## The circle is small

While the Canadian animation industry finds itself at a crossroads, there is some hope that Bill C-10, an updating of the 30-year-old Broadcasting Act, could provide a measure of much-needed relief. The bill would broaden the scope of the CRTC's jurisdiction to include foreign SVODs, and give the regulatory body the power to enforce domestic content requirements across these popular platforms, levelling the playing field in the Canadian industry. However, even as the bill currently languishes in political limbo, the expectation is that if it does eventually pass, it may not significantly ameliorate the challenges that homegrown animation production – and the writers that are its heartbeat – are facing.

"We need help right now while the dust settles," says Sawatsky. "It would be great to have some support over the next few years so our writers here can keep working."

Faier also believes that eventually passing Bill C-10, or some like-minded legislation, would be a step in the right direction. "I'm glad they are trying to do something," he says. "Focusing on commissioning Canadian voices is really important right now."

*Paw Patrol* writer Jara echoes these sentiments, but also realizes, as most do, that no piece of legislation can turn back the clock. "When I got into animation there was tons of work," he says. "It was fantastic, just booming. But now, there is just not enough work to go around, especially for those just starting out."

It hasn't always been easy, he admits, but it has also never been this hard. "I don't think we'll ever not have an industry here," he says. "But it's not going to be what it used to be." 🍀



# WGC Screenwriting Awards 2021

## WINNERS

in their own words\*

It may have been a virtual ceremony, but the surprise, joy and emotions of the night were very real.

*\*Winners' acceptance speeches have been edited for length and clarity.*



### WGC Showrunner Award

Presented to

## Morwyn Brebner

When I first started working in TV ... I became very competitive, and that goes to the ethos of making TV. You suck it up. You work until you drop. And you rise. Terrence McNally the playwright said everyone in this business is a killer. And that's true. If you're able to keep going in this business, then there's something of a shark to you. And I include myself in this. At a certain point, if you're a shark, your only companion on your journey is going to be a remora. If we go through the world in that way, not seeing other people fully and not letting them fully be themselves, or letting ideas that are new express themselves in new ways, we're going to be fucked. Either everyone is a person, or no one is.

I used to prize my own journey and success. I've come to think of this very differently. I've come to believe deeply that representation matters. Anyone who's got privilege, you can use it bring someone up. I believe in having a safe writing room. The streets aren't safe for our BIPOC brothers and sisters. The air isn't safe. We need to be safe for each other. And yet our Canadian industry is contracting, apocalyptically. The streamers are coming in with their giant invisible hands to shake up our little Christmas tree. We are no longer making enough episodes of Canadian TV to sustain our ecosystem. Even so, I believe we have to fight to get our junior and mid-level writers into prep and on-set. We need to bring up and promote the next generation of diverse showrunners ... We need to continue to fight for each other with solidarity even as a scarcity mentality sets in and we agitate for our own futures. As writers, we are flowers. We eat the sun. We make something out of nothing — out of vibrations that only we can see. As screenwriters we hope to have many jobs, but our jobs are not our work, which is to meet the moment with whatever we have, and grow. Thank you for this beautiful, beautiful honour.



### Comedy Series

## Schitt's Creek "Happy Ending"

Written by Daniel Levy

I wanted to thank in particular, David West Read, Rupinder Gill and Winter Tekenos-Levy for their work over the past six seasons on the show, and doing such a damn good job of helping to steer this ship with me. Thank you to the Writers Guild of Canada for championing our show and thank you to all of you for watching. Here's hoping that we can continue this adventure we're all on and continue to bring Canadian talent, Canadian writers into the spotlight in a bigger way and celebrate all that we have to offer — because we do have so much to offer.



### MOW & Miniseries

## Gourmet Detective: Roux the Day

Written by Becky Southwell & Dylan Neal

This is fantastic. We would like to thank Michelle Vicary and Randy Pope at Hallmark and Joe Rice and Michael Prupas at Muse Entertainment. We've worked with those four people for six to seven years now... and we just had a really great run with the *Gourmet Detective*. This is our second nomination for that franchise. We really appreciate this. And I have to thank my beautiful and talented wife, who is the brains behind the operation. I'm just really riding on her coattails.





Preschool

## *Dino Dana* "The Sound of Dinosaurs"

Written by J.J. Johnson

**Christin Simms on behalf of J.J. Johnson:** Thank you to the Writers Guild, fellow nominees and everyone who voted for J.J., not for me, but that's fine. I just wanted to say that *Dino Dana* is a show that was created to challenge the representation of girls in kids TV. This is a show for girls who don't let anything stop them. And I want to say a big thank you to the cast and crew, TVO Kids, especially Marney, Amazon, Yoopa, Shaw Rocket Prize and everyone at Sinking Ship for helping us make a show about fearless and unstoppable girls who love action-adventure, dinosaurs and science. Dinosaurs are for girls too!



Tweens & Teens

## *Utopia Falls* "The World is Yours"

Written by Joseph Mallozzi & R.T. Thorne

A big, big shoutout to the WGC. Thanks for this recognition and an equally big shout-out to my brother in arms, Joe Mallozzi. I thank you, brother. I learned so much from you. And thank you for helping me to build out this universe, it's pretty incredible. I also want to definitely thank our entire amazing writers' room. Sonar Entertainment for taking a shot on a wild hip-hop sci-fi idea like you did ... It's an incredible honour to be able to tell stories of marginalized young people in the future, so that they can see themselves now and know they're important. Thank you so much for the honour. I appreciate you all.

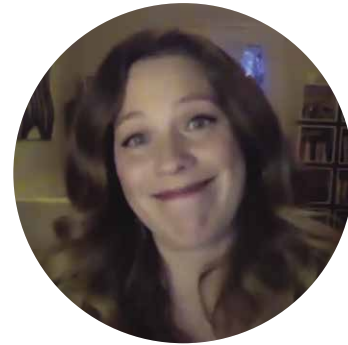


Children's

## *Odd Squad* *Mobile Unit* "Slow Your Roll"

Written by Mark De Angelis

This is my first ever WGC Award. I'm flattered and honoured. Thank you to the WGC community. I'd also like to thank my fellow nominees. Tim and Adam, the creators of the show, all the writers who worked on the show and Sinking Ship for supporting us. And in a weird way, today is the one-year anniversary of my grandmother's passing, and I know that she would want you all to know that she had everything to do with this! Thank you.



Sondra Kelly Award

Presented to

## Kate Hewlett

Thank you so much. This is also fulfilling my lifelong dream of bringing my cats to an award show ... I wanted to thank the WGC for choosing this project and not the one I submitted last year, which was quite awkward. I am prouder of this one. I'd like to thank Sondra Kelly, who I never met, but she sounds like a truly amazing person. And I recently learned that she wrote on two shows that my brother did, so she must have been extremely patient. I wanted to thank Lara Azzopardi and Larysa Kondracki, who have written me letters for every time I've applied for this award. This story, *Everything is Funny*, is based on my oldest sister and I asked her permission to speak about her tonight ...



Jim Burt Screenwriting Prize

## *Magnificent*

Written by Travis McDonald

Thanks to the jury and Jim Burt and his legacy. I'm very honoured to be getting this prize. This is a story I've had with me since I was a kid. I vividly remember having a conversation about it with my dad when I was about 10 years old. It's not a personal story, but the telling of it has been personal, and it's a way for me to spend time with my dad, so many years after losing him. And I'm just very touched and sincerely appreciative of the recognition.

**Drama Series**

**Trickster**  
**“Episode 105”**

Story by Michelle Latimer and Tony Elliott and  
**Penny Gummerson**, Teleplay by Penny Gummerson

I’m humbled and honoured to be recognized by my fellow writers. And to the nominees, I’m in awe of your talent. It’s a truly a privilege and an honour to be able to tell stories for a living. It’s a privilege to sit in a room full of writers who would generously share their personal stories, some funny, some painful, to help make the stories we’re telling on-screen that much more real and authentic. I recently talked to an elder who calls our personal stories and memories our knowings, and that landed deeply for me. So, thank you for sharing your knowings. To be able to work on a series that invites viewers into a world of family and love, a world of heartache and healing, a world of Indigenous culture and language and humour – it was a true gift ... to the young writers out there, especially young Indigenous writers, our stories matter, your voice matters, share your knowings with the world. Don’t be afraid to write who you are.



**Documentary**

**Still Standing**  
**“Rankin Inlet”**

Written by **Jonny Harris**, Fraser Young,  
 Graham Chittenden, Steve Dylan

Thanks so much. We were just thrilled. This was our first WGC Award and nomination and we were all pretty thrilled when we got the word. It’s wonderful to be recognized by peers who know how great and grievous it can be to write content for television ...



**Feature Film**

**Beans**

Written by Tracey Deer & Meredith Vuchnich

**Tracey Deer:** Thank you so much. This is an incredible honour... I want to give a big shout out to Kanesatake and Kahnawake, who exemplify resilience and strength and really inspired this whole story. And to Meredith Vuchnich, my cowriter, who made it safe for me to be vulnerable and made it possible for this story to come to life.

**Meredith Vuchnich:** I’d like to thank my agents who introduced me to Tracey 10 years ago ... the WGC for fighting for writers and sending us to the dentist, in equal measure ... And finally, Tracey Deer. Thank you for trusting me enough to put your heart open and tell your story and let me help you bring this into the world. I’m so proud of you and so grateful to be part of this project, and I can’t plead with you all enough to go see this movie when we can gather again.



**Shorts & Webseries**

**Try to Fly**

Written by Simone Swan  
 & The Affolter Brothers

**Thomas Affolter:** Thanks so much to the Writers Guild for this award. A big shoutout to CBC, Sheila Peacock and Paige Murray, they brought it to life. It wouldn’t have happened without CBC funding and now it’s on Gem. This was supposed to be a personal story where we poured all of our insecurities and anxieties on screen, and hoped that because it was personal to us, it would be relatable to other people.

# WGC member news

**Byron Abalos** and his wife Andrea Mapili's play *Through the Bamboo* is being published by the Playwrights Canada Press this month. It's focused on 12-year-old Philly, who is literally pulled into an action-packed adventure while mourning the loss of her lola when she opens an old book and finds herself tossed into the fantastical land of Uwi. This unique Filipinx-Canadian tale inspired by Philippine mythology shows the value of keeping memories alive and explores how families deal with loss.

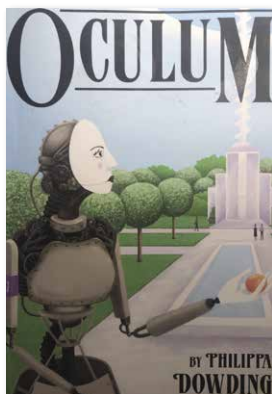
Telefilm Canada awarded screenwriter/director **Leslie-Ann Coles** two script-development grants for the feature screenplays *Soiled Dove* and *Love in Vein*. The Canada Council for the Arts also has awarded Coles a production grant for her short film *The Curtain*, which she wrote and will direct in fall 2021.

**Sonja Bennett** is currently a supervising producer on *Family Law* season 2. She has a family drama called *The Surrogacy* in development with Boat Rocker Studios. Alicia Silverstone is attached to star and executive produce. She also has co-created a single-camera half-hour comedy, *Daddies*, with Kamal Al-Solaylee that is in development with eOne.

A reading of **Steve Galluccio's** latest play *At The Beginning of Time* was live-streamed by Centaur Theatre Company in Oct. 2020 and is slated for production either spring 2022 or fall, depending on Covid restrictions. Over the spring, Steve penned the English adaptation of the Québec sketch comedy *Entre Deux Draps*, which will air as *Pillow Talk* on Crave and CTV. The series will be shot in Montreal this summer.



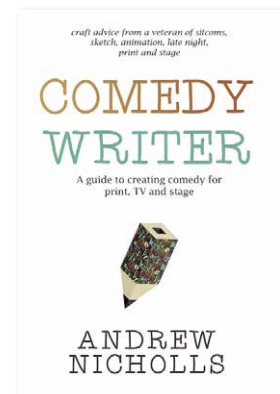
The feature film based on **Kate Hewlett's** play, *The Swearing Jar*, (starring Adelaide Clemens, Patrick J. Adams, Douglas Smith and Kathleen Turner) wrapped at the end of May. Kate also served as co-EP/writer on CBC/BYU's *Overlord and the Underwoods*, which is currently shooting in Kleinburg and Orangeville. In April, she won the WGC's Sondra Kelly Award. "And I had a goddamn human baby named Georgina Mary Hewlett-Hawco," she adds.



**Larry Bambrick** has adapted the Canadian novel *Oculum* into a TV series for Saloon Media. He's also written his first movie, *The Lion in Winnipeg*, for Buffalo Gal Pictures and Copperheart Entertainment.



**Colleen Curran's** novel *Out for Stars* was on the longlist for the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour and she's now writing season 2 of her web series *Colleen Curran's Kitty Calling*, starring Debra Hale and Lorna Wilson.



**Andrew Nicholls** has a new book, *Comedy Writer*, on techniques and habits of mind for writing humour. Nicholls was also head writer of *The Tonight Show* starring Johnny Carson.

**Carolyn Bennett** received a 2020 Toronto Arts Council literary grant to work on *Going In A Different Direction*, a collection of short stories. Bennett is also developing a screenplay based on her experience working in a seniors' home during the 2020-2021 pandemic.

**Boon Collins** is happy to announce the upcoming release of *Centurion*, a family picture about a dancing Stallion shot in Napa Valley, California. He's also currently working with Rob Schneider on *Cabjacked*, a comedy set to start shooting in Feb. 2022.

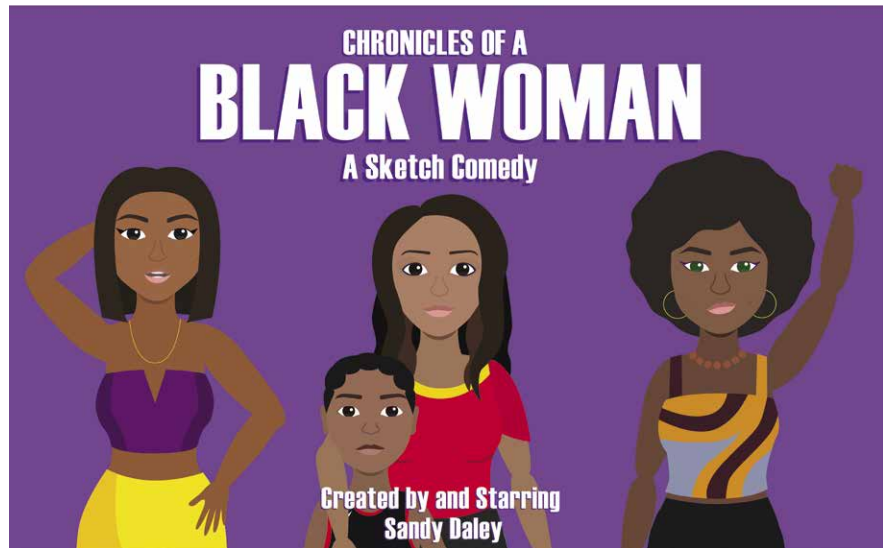


**Karen Moore** is thrilled to be returning to CBC's *Workin' Moms* as a co-executive producer and writer on the 6th season of the hit comedy.

**Suzette Couture** and **Pauline Couture** have launched BlockFilm.io, a groundbreaking platform providing new opportunities for writers and producers to connect with investors. BlockFilm allows producers to issue their own digital security tokens. The co-CEOs aim to raise \$175 million for productions from Canada and around the world by the end of 2022. BlockFilm is supported by the Canada Media Fund.

**Madeleine Donohue** is the writer and co-creator of *Tiny & Tall*, an animated-hybrid preschool series, which recently entered official development with Little Engine Moving Pictures and a yet-to-be-announced Canadian public broadcaster.

**Lisa Hunter** is now the principal writer for Compulsion Games (an Xbox first party studio) and is also working on personal projects for the post-pandemic era.



**Sandy Daley's** play *Chronicles of a Black Woman: A Sketch Comedy* is part of the 2021 Toronto Fringe lineup. The fully animated digital play will air during the Fringe Festival, July 21-31.

A movie adaptation of **Lee Goldberg's** novel *The Walk* is being made by Constantin Films, based on his screenplay. He also has a new novel *Gated* launching on Oct. 26 and he's the co-creator (with Robin Bernheim) of Hallmark movie series *Mystery 101*.



Claude Guilmain

**Claude Guilmain's** play *AmericanDream.ca* was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award this year. His film, *Sur La Corde Raide/High Wire*, produced by the NFB, won the 2020 GÉMAUX for Best Documentary Program or Series: History and Politics. He's also working on a novel set in 1969/2019 Toronto.

**Gorman Lee** has wrapped principal photography on *The Imperfects* (Netflix), where he penned two episodes and served as co-producer. Wrapping with him were showrunner and co-creator **Dennis Heaton** and writer **LA Smith**. Also in the writers' room were co-creator **Shelley Eriksen**, and writers **Steve Cochrane**, **Kor Adana** and **Kim Garland**. Additionally, Gorman's first feature film, *Golden Delicious*, has entered post-production, targeting a fall 2022 premiere.

**Paolo Mancini** and **Thomas Michael's** screenplay, *The Baker*, lensed in the Cayman Islands this past April and is currently in post-production. The cast includes Ron Perlman in the lead, Elias Koteas and Harvey Keitel.

Pandemically trapped in his house, **Tom Mason** developed two series for Splash Entertainment, and created "Katie's Coronavirus Diary" as both a PSA for Top Kids' Entertainment and as a comic book story for the anthology *The Covid Chronicles*.

**James Motluk** is currently developing *Magpie*, a one-hour science fiction drama set in Sault Ste Marie. Framed against the little-known but true history of Canada's internment operations during WW1, the series is produced by Guerrilla Films and has received development funding from the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund and the CMF Predevelopment Fund.

**Anne-Marie Perrotta** (still speaking about herself in the third person – that's what isolation does to you) is currently story editing and writing for the animated preschool series *Momolu & Friends* (TVO/SRC/YLE/ITV). And her preschool series, *By Bunny*, co-created with children's book author and composer Judith Henderson, was optioned by Sardine Productions.

WGC Lifetime Member **Peter Rowe's** new book, *Ablaze – Ten Years That Shook The World*, will be published in September. Additionally, Rowe's book, *Music vs The Man*, was published in October of 2020, and is available at all online booksellers.

**Natasha Semone Vassell** is co-producing a Scandinavian feature film with (Norway, Sweden) titled *RUN*. Both leading characters are of Afro-Canadian and First Nations origins and the project is proudly supported by Eurimages and the Indigenous Screen Office.

Web series *Chateau Laurier's* second season co-written and co-produced by **Emily Weedon** and **Kent Staines**, went to camera in Hamilton on June 21. Season 1 was nominated for WGC and CSA awards, and garnered many international web fest awards.

The pilot for *Anomaly*, a new sci-fi narrative fiction podcast, premiered as part of the 2021 Tribeca Festival's inaugural podcast slate. It follows 17-year-old Queens native Kory Hernandez who, after an earth-changing event causes civil war along the east coast, is sent to live with a host family in a small Illinois town battling the impact of climate change. WGC member **Heather Taylor** co-created *Anomaly* with Hillary Nussbaum as part of a partnership with the creative studio Cereal Made, and Red Hook Media Lab.



Photo credit: Adam Bouska

L.A.-based members (and married couple) **Daniel Vaillancourt** and **David A. Lee** are back as sole writers for the second edition of *Love in Action*, a telethon benefiting the Los Angeles LGBT Center. This year, the show will air live from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. PST on August 14 on KTLA-5, concurrently streaming at KTLA.com and [lalgbtcenter.org/watch](http://lalgbtcenter.org/watch). Five-time Emmy award winner Jane Lynch will co-host with KTLA anchor Cher Calvin. Celebrities confirmed to participate at press time include Barbra Streisand, Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Sia and Adam Lambert.



**Janine Albrecht** has a kids book in the works called *Lenny Peed on That!* And her dog Lenny has been working very hard on it. The book is about a funny un-trained puppy who pees on everything and a little boy, Andi, who realizes he should wash his hands frequently as, "Lenny peed on that!"

Wearing his art director hat, WGC member **Jim Goodall** recently won a Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Art Direction For TV Series for his work on *Endlings*, which is produced by Sinking Ship Entertainment and broadcast on CBC and Hulu.



**Nathaniel Moher** is currently pitching his kids animated show that's been in development with Alibi Pivotal Kids. He also recently wrapped shooting the short film he wrote, *Quarantine Fling*, after being chosen as one of two projects through the DGCBC Greenlight fund.

**Donald Martin** had two films launch in the U.S. on the same weekend in June. His feature comedy *Queen Bees* was among the top-10 releases, and his Lifetime movie *Secrets of a Gold Digger Killer* was a ratings hit.



**Louise Moon** avoided the outside world this year by visiting Eagle Creek to write adventures for *Luna, Chip & Inkie*, Knowledge Network's new preschool series based on their owl, beaver and octopus mascots. And her work on *Paw Patrol* special *Jet to the Rescue* was nominated for a 2021 Leo Award.

The primary director of *The Big Bang Theory* is now attached to direct **Sean O'Byrne's** new project *Red Carpet Burns*, on which serves as writer and EP. The limited series is slated to be shooting by the end of 2021.



**Meredith Ralston's** new book, *Slut-Shaming, Whorephobia, and the Unfinished Sexual Revolution*, "examines the common denominators between the #MeToo movement, the myths of rape culture, and the pleasure gap between men and women." It's published by McGill-Queen's University Press.

# \$ 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

a.unrau@wgc.ca

1-800-567-9974 ext. 5270

**Jake Frye** *Top Cops II*

**Peter Verner** *Littlest Hobo*

**Warren Easton** *Odyssey II*

**Agy Polly** *Friday's Curse*

#### NFB contact Aaron Unrau

a.unrau@wgc.ca

1-800-567-9974 ext. 5270

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

**Janos Szanyi** *Revolution's Orphans*

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

**Peter Vogler** *Ernie's Idea*

## 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/screenwriters/cscs](http://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.*

## Unfair Engagers

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

#### 3620425 Canada Inc.

Principal: Louis-Philippe Rochon

#### All I Want Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

#### Battered Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

#### Christmas Town Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

#### FOTP Productions Inc.

Principal: Richard Rapkowski

#### Guardian Films Inc./En Garde Films Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

#### H & S Films

Principal: Nicolas Stiliadis

#### Hiding Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

#### High Seas Rescue Productions Inc.

Principal: F. Whitman Trecartin

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

Principal: Philip Jackson

#### Justice Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

#### Kangaroo Court Productions Ltd.

Principal: Robin Payne

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

Principal: Andre Belanger

(not affiliated with Spectra Animation Inc.)

#### Lester Beach Entertainment

Principal: Jeff Lester

#### 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.

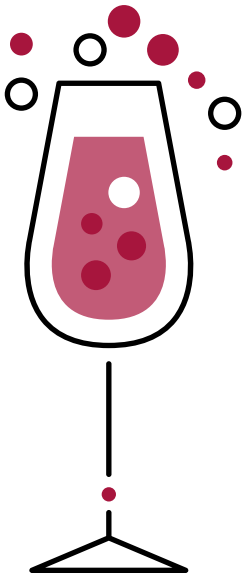
Principal: Kirk Shaw

#### T Man Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

#### Zolar Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw



“It’s only Canadian Content if it was written by a Canadian, otherwise it’s just “Sparkling Service-Production.”

-National Forum delegate **Jason Filiatrault**'s thoughts on the crystal-clear definition of CanCon



“Sci-fi and fantasy dwell in the world of possibilities. They’re about hope — what could be, instead of what is. Canada is a progressive country. We’re not perfect on queer rights, feminism, diversity, social justice, but we’re trying.”

-**Emily Andras** in conversation with Johanna Schneller on her 2021 Canadian Screen Awards writing nom for *Wynonna Earp*

“Canadian producers are scrambling to find outside partners, and Canadian screenwriters are scrambling for work...”

-WGC President **Alex Levine** on the shape of the industry, *The Globe and Mail*, Apr. 15, 2021

**“I’m not making comedy for my mom.”**

-Co-creator **Tim Blair** on *TallBoyz*'s writing influences at WGC Writers Talking TV: *TallBoyz* (check it out on the WGC YouTube channel).

“I love writing stuff that gets you in the heart, but also gets you in the funny bone”



**Susin Nielsen** discussing her new series *Family Law* as heard on CUT TO: A WGC Podcast, episode 1

See you at the <sup>26<sup>th</sup></sup>~~25<sup>th</sup>~~  
WGC Screenwriting  
Awards!

APRIL 25  
2022



CELEBRATING  
CANADIAN  
SCREENWRITERS