

# Protecting and Extending WGA Jurisdiction

## ORGANIZING EFFORTS

Every writing job in the industry should be a WGA-covered job. This principle guided the Guild's renewed efforts to organize Animation, Nonfiction, Reality, and other non-covered programs over the last year. The Guild Organizing Department works with member committees in each targeted work area to tailor the strategy to the market conditions unique to each type of program. The emergence of so-called reality programs has been particularly visible this year, with the presence of these programs in primetime network time slots continuing to grow. The focus in the past year has been on market assessment and strategy formulation. A number of key series have been successfully covered by Guild contracts.

## INDEPENDENT FILM PROGRAM

The Guild's Independent Film Program, in conjunction with the Independent Film Writers Steering Committee, encourages screenwriters to use WGA contracts and join in the community of Guild Writers. In 2004 the number of the Low Budget Agreements (for theatrical films budgeted below \$1.2 million) grew to nearly 60 and four of these pictures were selections at the Sundance Film Festival. The program also signed side-letter agreements with a dozen companies. The Independent Writers Caucus (IWC) continues to grow and now numbers 175 members.

Outreach efforts to reach and promote the interests of emerging and established independent and low-budget screenwriters continued. This included participation in over a dozen film festivals and markets in addition

to concentrated efforts at our cornerstone festivals, the Sundance Film Festival and Los Angeles Film Festival. In-person educational outreach has also taken place at Sundance and IFP Screenwriter and Producer Labs, as well as at academic institutions including USC, UCLA, and Columbia College, among many others, and through Guild-hosted panels. Co-sponsorship agreements were brokered with the Sundance Institute, FIND-Film Independent (formerly Independent Feature Project/L.A.), Filmmakers Alliance, American Pavilion, Slamdance, and IndieProducer.

## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

The WGAw Organizing Committee's mission is to bring all the companies employing writers in animation, nonfiction, basic cable, new media, and reality programming under the WGA umbrella, so that writers in those areas can enjoy the benefits of a Guild contract.

## ANIMATION WRITERS CAUCUS

The mission of the WGA Animation Writers Caucus (AWC), is to advance and protect the rights of writers working in animation. Celebrating its 10th anniversary, the 600-mem-



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ber caucus is an important voice within the Guild. The AWC holds monthly networking events, sponsors informational panels, and issues its own newsletter, as well as hosts a annual reception at the Comic-Con convention in San Diego. The AWC sponsors the WGA TV Animation Award for excellence in TV Animated Writing. The caucus provides direction to the WGAw Organizing Department with the goal of winning contracts for writers working in animation.

The WGA continues to represent writers on every current network primetime animated TV show, including *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*. Over the past year, the WGA has secured Guild coverage for six new television animated series and two animated feature films in development.

#### **NONFICTION WRITERS CAUCUS**

In the Spring of 2003, the WGAw Board of Directors approved the launch of the Nonfiction Writers Caucus and since that time, membership has steadily grown. The caucus was formed to enhance and protect the rights of documentary filmmakers, writers writing basic cable nonfiction programs, and writers writing network reality programs (The Bachelor, Survivor, etc.) The WGA Nonfiction Writers Caucus, along with Daily Variety and The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, has sponsored two widely successful all-day Nonfiction Forums that featured representatives from the Sundance Film Festival, IMAX Corp., GRB Entertainment, and PBS, among many others. In the Fall of 2004, the WGA continued its sponsorship of the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival. These sponsorships, along many other outreach events, have raised the WGA's profile in the world of nonfiction filmmaking.

In addition to the creation of the Nonfiction Writers Caucus, the WGAw Board of Directors also approved a basic cable nonfiction contract designed to help writers working on low-budget documentaries on basic cable. Since its launch in the spring of 2003, the WGA has covered programs on networks like Discovery Channel, National Geographic Channel, Animal Planet, VH-1, and the History Channel. Within the caucus, there is a steering committee that gives direction to the WGA Organizing Department with the goal of covering a greater number of nonfiction programs.

#### **NEW MEDIA**

The WGA continues to sign dozens of Interactive Program Contracts (IPCs) each year. These contracts offer writers writing video games and other electronic media the opportunity to continue to earn their pension and health benefits, as they would writing live-action projects. As the technology develops and games become more sophisticated, companies like Atari and Electronic Arts (both signed IPCs this year) will look to WGA writers for more intricate storylines.

The WGAw New Media Committee is hard at work enhancing the visibility of writers in the world of Electronic Media. Together with the WGAw Organizing and I.T. departments, the committee has created an online directory to give prospective employers access to WGA members working in the field of New Media. In addition, the New Media Committee has launched a New Media Caucus to attract electronic media writers and educate them on the benefits of a union contract. The New Media Committee also facilitates the WGA presence at various trade shows and industry events.