
Protecting and Extending WGA Jurisdiction

ORGANIZING EFFORTS

The goal of the WGA is to represent writers and storytellers in every part of the entertainment industry. In order to achieve this objective, the WGA has greatly increased the resources devoted to organizing and strengthened our organizing department with an emphasis on improving our research and campaign capacity.

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 2005, the number of the Low Budget Agreements (for theatrical films budgeted below \$1.2 million) grew to 86, with 32 agreements signed within the year. This agreement enables both member and nonmember screenwriters to request partial or total deferments of the screenplay purchase price, first rewrite and publication fee, while ensuring Guild protections and benefits. The program has also signed side-letter agreements with over a dozen companies. The Independent Writers Caucus (IWC) has grown to 254 members, an increase of 31 percent since this time last year.

Outreach efforts to reach and promote the interests of emerging and established independent and low-budget screenwriters continued. These included participation in more than 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 Film Independent Screenwriter and Producer Labs, as well as at academic institutions including USC, UCLA and Columbia College, among many others, and through Guild-hosted panels and events. Co-sponsorship agreements were brokered with the Sundance Institute, Film Independent, Filmmakers Alliance, Slamdance, and Indie-Producer.

REALITY TELEVISION CAMPAIGN

The campaign to organize reality storytellers has made significant progress during the past year. More than 1,000 writers and editors have signed cards seeking WGA representation, and demands for recognition were sent to all the major producers of reality television. Actions have included bringing our message to industry public events in Hollywood and New York, creating viral videos and holding press conferences on the issue of product integration, and filing class action lawsuits against production companies and networks for their violation of California wage and hour laws. Through these and other methods, we are bringing pressure to bear on the employers, in order to convince them to meet our demand that reality storytellers be covered by a fair collective bargaining agreement that provides portable health insurance and pension, decent minimums, credit arbitration and residuals—in other words, a WGA deal.

BASIC CABLE ORGANIZING

We have begun to bring together writers on basic cable television and to build the kind of writer-directed organization that can win

WGA representation on the shows, channels and networks of basic cable.

ANIMATION WRITERS CAUCUS

The mission of the 600-member WGAw Animation Writers Caucus (AWC) is to advance and protect the rights of writers working in animation. The AWC holds monthly networking events, sponsors informational panels and hosts an annual reception at the Comic-Con convention in San Diego. The AWC sponsors the WGA TV Animation Award for excellence in writing for television animation. The caucus also 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*, *Family Guy* and *King of the Hill*.

DOCUMENTARY FILM AND NONFICTION WRITERS CAUCUS

In early 2006, the WGAw Board of Directors and WGA East Council unanimously passed an agreement called the WGA Documentary Screenplay Contract, which modifies the Minimum Basic Agreement while meeting the demands of the theatrical documentary film market. The purpose of this new contract is two-fold: Writers of feature-length documentaries largely work without the benefits of a union contract. This agreement affords writer filmmakers the opportunity to make these low-budget films under WGA jurisdiction. Additionally, a large section of filmmakers, largely unfamiliar with the WGA, will have the opportunity to become a part of the membership. Because documentary filmmakers often rotate making independent films with

working for nonfiction outlets such as the Discovery channel, PBS and HBO, this agreement aids the Guild's larger organizing efforts. In the six months since its debut, the number of theatrical documentaries produced under WGA jurisdiction has more than doubled.

Since 2002, the number of documentaries released in the U.S. has increased by approximately 85 percent. During that time, the number of documentaries with writing credit has also grown substantially. In 2005 alone, the number of documentaries distributed in the U.S. containing writing credit rose 45 percent from the year prior. One of the contributing factors to the increased writer recognition has been the WGA Documentary Screenplay Award, which has attracted international attention since its creation in 2004. The WGA Documentary Screenplay Award was established to honor the writer's role in documentary film. Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* won the first award, presented in 2005, and Alex Gibney won in 2006 for *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*.

The award and the contract were championed by the WGAw Nonfiction Writers Caucus, a group comprising Guild members and non-WGA members who are documentary filmmakers, writers working in nonfiction basic cable, PBS writers and reality TV writers, producers and editors. The caucus has more than 200 members and has been an active presence in the nonfiction community by sponsoring numerous events, panels and seminars.

The WGAw has stepped up its nonfiction presence at film festivals including Sundance and the Silverdocs Film Festival. In addition, the WGA has a strong relationship with the International Documentary Association, a Los

Angeles-based organization that advocates on behalf of documentary filmmakers around the world.

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 earn their pension and health benefits as they would writing live-action projects. The technology has now developed to the point that game publishers and developers are turning to WGA writers for more intricate storylines. WGA members are actively seeking to get WGA deals for the writing of video games and to cover writing for the Internet. In one case, the three writers of the Family Guy animated series withheld their finished script for a video game until the game publisher agreed to a deal that included pension and health, credits and recognition of backend obligations.

SHOWRUNNER TRAINING PROGRAM

The WGAw launched its first-ever Showrunner Training Program in January 2006. The program, agreed upon in the 2004 negotia-

tions, was designed to help promising writers develop successful showrunning skills. The Showrunner Training Program Committee comprised prominent showrunners as well as two company representatives. More than 100 applications were received from writers, all of whom had been recommended for the program by either a current or recent showrunner or a creative studio or network executive. Twenty-six writers were chosen for the inaugural program, which ran every Saturday for six weeks. The curriculum included an overview of the showrunner culture: philosophy and time management, running a writing room, pre-production, production, post-production, the pilot experience, and assembling a writing staff. More than 20 guest speakers and instructors included a virtual Who's Who in the showrunner world, all of whom were more than generous with their time and expertise. The program received universally positive response from the participants. In addition to the flagship program, the Guild offered a half-day seminar of the highlights of the program for those who applied but were not accepted into the inaugural program. The Guild looks forward to offering additional programs next year.