



Australian Writers' Guild

2016 Annual General Meeting

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The past 12 months have been the busiest I can remember in my time as president, with several major developments, continued consolidation and some big battles being fought.

The major developments have been across the range of our members' craft. Thanks to the incredible generosity of Shane Brennan, we were thrilled to announce the creation of Scripted Inc, a game-changing initiative that will help shape, build and invest in the stage and screen industries in Australia by shifting the paradigm of how writers and their scripts are discovered and developed. For playwrights we produced two major surveys to focus attention on the challenges facing Australian theatre, while in the rapidly expanding field of new media we have led with the establishment of a special whole-of-industry committee to drive progress. I will address each of these in greater detail shortly.

In consolidating our already successful activities, your Board, AWG staff and the various committee members around the country have not stunted. Pathways continues to grow, providing invaluable career development, mentoring and professional skills enhancement. It will be further enhanced with the involvement of Scripted Inc. The AWGIEs once again celebrated excellence in Australian performance writing across all sectors while the National Screenwriters' Conference demonstrated the vital role Australian writers play in the evolution of our industry, both locally and internationally.

Humming away in the background to these initiatives have been innovative developments in our services to members, from contract advice and industrial support, through Guild events in all the states and territories, to a hugely expanded media and communications effort which has kept members up-to-date, and the public as a whole better informed about the indispensable role we writers play.

With so many positives, there are always bound to be a few issues that challenge us and at the same time remind us of the very reason the guild exists, which is to fight the good fight, not only for our members but for the benefit of the wider community. Three issues in particular have been in our sights: the ongoing defunding of the arts by the current government, a Productivity Commission report recommending cuts to copyright protection and, in our view, the failure by Screenrights to protect and represent Australian and international scriptwriters rights.

In the fight against government cuts to arts funding, the Guild has been an active member of a coalition of arts and culture organisations and individuals dedicated to keeping the issue front-and-centre in the minds of the community and our political representatives. The Guild also made a lengthy submission to the Productivity Commission and we will continue to fight any proposals to undermine our members' intellectual property rights. On the third issue, you will know from reading your emails, newsletters and social media posts that our attempts to get Screenrights to

negotiate in good faith a reasoned outcome to our claims for unpaid secondary royalties have finally led to the Federal Court Needless to say, we will continue to fight for your rights keep you advised of our progress.

Membership

The Guild enjoys strong support from its members and that's because we put our members first in everything we do. Our membership (as of end of April) stands at **2,206**, which includes **674 Full Members**, **1396 Associate Members** and **136 Student Members**.

AWGACS too has continued to thrive, with more than two million dollars collected for its members, our best year ever. Our congratulations to Tim Pye, his Board and the AWGACS staff for this outstanding result. Tim addresses AWGACS' activities in greater detail in his report, but I must mention here at least one other significant achievement, Tim being elected to the Writers and Directors Worldwide Executive Committee in November. Australia could not have a worthier representative on our world body.

While still on the issue royalties, I'd like to mention the growing success of the collective licensing campaign. By the end of 2015 we had 50 AWG members; we now have 124, 39 of whom joined up at the National Screenwriters' Conference, the first time Collective Licensing was really promoted publicly. Both working writers and associate members signed up, meaning we're now in a position to launch wider public meetings with the aim of ensuring writers can never be denied their rightful rewards for the ongoing exploitation of their work.

Pathways (June 2015 to May 2016)

The Pathways Program for professional development and mentoring has continued to build over the past year. In addition to running all our ongoing events and competitions, we've added a number of highly successful new initiatives such as The Pathways Big Day In: A mini conference event for NSW Pathways writers, following which Screen NSW agreed to accept Pathways as part of their eligibility requirement to access development funding, as does Film Victoria. We also partnered with RMIT on a Writer's Residency at McCraith House on the Mornington Peninsula, and inaugurated five playwrights into the program thanks to a partnership with the Ensemble Theatre and a gift from our Emeritus President David Williamson. This resulted in a new writing commission, *The Plant*, by Kit Brookman, which has been guaranteed a production under this new and exciting partnership.

Scripted Inc

Scripted Inc has been described as an attempt to kick-start a new era for Australia's film, TV, stage and interactive sectors. It is a not-for-profit but commercially focussed organisation that will work with the AWG's successful Pathways program to handpick high-potential scriptwriters, nurture talent and bring successful projects to the global marketplace.

Shane Brennan should know. Dubbed "the hardest working man in Hollywood" he is one of our most illustrious members. As executive producer and showrunner of NCIS: Los Angeles and NSCIS, he has returned to Australia to drive this new model based on the understanding that critical and financial success springs from the writer's vision.

Working hand-in-hand with the AWG, Scripted Inc. will incubate and accelerate quality Australian scripts – to the tune of a million dollars a year – and then showcase them to production companies, broadcasters and investors, and assist in brokering commercially and creatively successful partnerships.

AWGIES and other awards

The 2016 AWGIE Awards attracted almost 500 entries across 26 categories, with special awards to Tim Pye for his outstanding service to the AWG, Bill Harding for his contribution to Australian Comedy and posthumously to Alan Seymour for his contribution to the profession. The AWGIE presentation ceremony at Doltone House, Hyde Park in Sydney drew 317 attendees including industry leaders, sponsors and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Tanya Plibersek.

Other competitions organised or co-partnered by the AWG attracted large numbers of entries – **936 in total!** These included: What Happens Next?; Platform X; INSITE; Think Inside The Box; the John Hinde Prize Unproduced and Produced; Ensemble Theatre Commission, the Bill Warnock in WA and Off the Page in SA.

National Screenwriters' Conference

A record 307 delegates from around Australia attended NSC 2016 on Phillip Island, Victoria. There were 59 speakers in total, headed by our distinguished international guest Alexa Junge, the highest number of speakers we've ever had at a conference. Many of the high profile and knowledgeable members of the industry who came to speak stayed for the duration of the event, taking part in the 82 micro-mentorships that were held, and making themselves available for discussion, advice and interaction with other participants during the breaks and special events at the conference

The Scripted Inc initiative mentioned earlier was announced, with Shane Brennan declaring it a watershed moment in the history of the Australian screen industry. It will be officially launched later this year. The Guild and Foxtel also presented the Inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award to Laura Jones, doyen of Australian screenwriters whose long list of credits includes *Oscar And Lucinda*, *Angela's Ashes*, *An Angel at My Table* and *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Other Events

All the state and territory committees of the AWG held events during the year. Many were sell-out successes and while it would be unfair to single out any in particular, it is worth noting that events that were strongly branded through social media attracted increasing attendance, from both members and participants from the wider industry.

Theatre surveys

The AWG conducted two surveys into playwrights and the Australian theatre sector during the year. The surveys not only informed our professional development efforts but also served to strengthen our lobbying and advocacy work on behalf of our playwright members.

The online playwrights survey was conducted from August to September 2015 and 136 playwrights responded. This survey reinforced the importance of understanding playwriting as an art form and the role playwrights play in contributing to Australia's cultural cannon.

The other major study for playwrights was the **National Voice 2016** report of trends in Australian theatre programming. Disappointingly, it revealed a decline in Australian drama and plays by women in the nation's major theatres, between 2015 and 2016. The AWG will continue to run surveys such as these across areas affecting our membership and we're committed to bringing some often-unpalatable truths into the light of day, for as long as it takes in order to improve the landscape for all playwrights and Australian theatre in general.

The e-Guild

The AWG continued to expand its involvement into new areas of performance writing, most notably in the interactive and digital spheres.

One of the highlights of the past year has been the establishment of the AWG Games & Interactive Advisory Committee (GIAC). At its inaugural meeting on 31 March 2016, it began planning for a number of events such as panels and workshops to cross the divide between legacy and new media and to further the craft of interactive writer/developers.

Chaired by AWG Board Member, Teresa Crea, the Committee reflects the growing importance of independent Australian interactive and games developers, who are receiving international attention. The AWG hopes it can contribute to the interactive industry just as it has supported screen, stage and radio for the past 50 years.

Communications and media

The Guild has invested considerable time and effort into building our communications capacity as an organisation, in both traditional and new media. We've taken a more pro-active role in getting our message out to members, to the wider industry, to Australian society and internationally. Our communications and media work ranges from emails to individual members to international campaigning with overseas partners and organisations, such as Writers and Directors Worldwide. The Guild has a fresh new presence online, with a national Facebook page and pages for each of the state and territory committees. We have relaunched on Twitter and Instagram to great reviews and member involvement.

Some of the statistics:

We had 79 AWG related stories in the e-bulletins – these included industrial issues, members' successes, announcements and much more.

In social media, we now have 3,867 Twitter followers. During the last six months we've averaged 78 new followers a month and approximately 20,000 tweet "impressions" a month - how many times our content has appeared in the Twitter stream of an individual, an indication of how much exposure our Twitter content receives. During March - when we had the NSC, the Screenrights case and the Scripted Inc. launch - there were 62,600 tweet impressions, 2,582 profile visits and 94 new followers.

Our Instagram account was re-launched at the 2015 AWGIEs and we now have more than 400 followers, growing every day.

We rolled out our campaign for a fair deal from Screenrights for screenwriters using social media as an important tool. In the first three days following the public announcement of the Screenrights case (from 6-8 March 2016) there were more than

80 different tweets, overwhelmingly supportive and many re-tweeting IF, Fairfax or ABC articles.

Industrial advice

Our industrial support services to members continue to grow, reflecting both a more engaged membership and a higher profile of contract, royalty and employment concerns generated by issues such as the Screenrights campaign. **The number of inquiries increased every quarter, from 158 twelve months ago to 311 in the most recent quarter to the end of April 2016.**

The matters dealt with included rates and contracts for film, TV (under the negotiated agreements SASA, MATA and CTA), theatre, script editing, new media, short and low budget films and documentaries. This also provided general advice on copyright and contract law, credits, residuals and co-writings. Feature film rates and options are consistently the most popular inquiry, followed by the SASA, then general legal advice (usually about contract law and copyright law, with a good portion deferred to legal counsel). We had an increasing number of queries about moral rights, including collecting society payments and web series.

Some of the most notable matters addressed during the year included: development of minimum rates and descriptions of roles for in-house script development (TV); approval of short-form contracts for optioning novels and the development of relationship with the US Dramatists Guild and acquisition of their contracts for theatre and musicals to aid in the re-drafting of our own. With our help, members consistently disputed the inclusion of "work-made-for-hire" clauses in Australian contracts

In conclusion

It has been a very good year. The challenges keep coming but as history will show, our determination to fight for what we believe in will never diminish. Never forget: the strength of the Guild is you, the members, writers with a common cause and shared ideals. Be assured, the Australian Writers Guild will continue to fight for your rights, and to ensure you get the respect you deserve and with it, the rewards for the ongoing exploitation of your work.

This fight would not be possible without the great effort and dedication of our passionate and dedicated staff, led by the fearless. Jacqueline Elaine. They include, Miriam Katsambis, Olya Booyar, Lindy Crozier, Annabel Davis, Karen Johnston, Anna Burela, Shannen Usher, Carolina Pye, Oliver Woodman, Olga Nowicka, Pete Valentish, Robbie Gadsbey, Zac Naoum Louise Ridlen; in our WA office, Melissa Callanan; Sabiene Heindl and Bruce Pulsford, TInzar Lwyn and Natasha Ferguson.

At this time of year we also offer special thanks to our board members who have given so much of their time and effort to the Guild – Roger Simpson, Mac Gudgeon, Ian David, Jacquelin Perske, Katherine Thomson, Alana Valentine, Chris Corbett, Michael Harvey, Teresa Crea, Shayne Armstrong and Barbara Connell. It is also the time to pay tribute to those that ended their terms on the National Executive Committee. But we never say goodbye, because we know they'll be back. Kelly **Le Fever** has been an absolute warrior, fighting the good fight for writers continuously for well over two decades now. Starting with the Victorian committee in the early 1990's, Kelly became chair, then joined the NEC in 2005. She has been a vice president of the Guild as well as the chair of our flagship event the National Screenwriters Conference. She has served tirelessly on countless committees and

campaigns over the years with passion and such fierce dedication for the writer's cause that we have much to thank her for. The AWG never lets you go far, or for that long, and we know she'll be back. Kelly was recently appointed to the board of Film Victoria where she will no doubt continue to be the valuable and vital voice for writers at the table we've always known her to be.

Jan Sardi – AWG President

26th May 2016