

WIDC

Women In the Director's Chair



2019-20 Annual Report

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PO Box 34575, 1268 Marine Drive
North Vancouver, BC, Canada V7P 1T2

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WIDC Annual Report

Year-end March 31, 2020

Women In the Director's Chair (WIDC) is a Canadian screen industry initiative that is the main activity of the national non-profit organization, Creative Women Workshops Association (CWWA). CWWA is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors made up of alumnae directors, Mary M. Frymire (secretary treasurer), Nikila Cole, Patricia Harris Seeley (Alumnae Reps), ACTRA representative, Heather Allin, and WIDC co-creator and CWWA co-founder, Dr. Carol Whiteman.

WIDC at a glance... (as of March 31, 2020)

- 274 WIDC alumnae directors across Canada (1997 to 2020)
 - 33% BC and western provinces; 33% ON; 33% QC, Atlantic and Territories
 - 24% ACTRA (incl. UBCP ACTRA) members
 - 19% DGC members
 - 27 % Black, Indigenous, Women of Colour (BIPOC)
- 256 Acting Ensemble alumnae from across Canada (100% ACTRA and UBCP-ACTRA members)
- 73 feature films directed by WIDC alumnae (1997 to 2020)
 - 78% of alumnae-directed features were Telefilm-funded in last five years (since 2015);
 - 63% of alumnae-directed feature were Telefilm-funded in last 23 years (since 1997)
 - 10 feature films have been supported by the WIDC Feature Film Award
- 10 feature films funded and readying for production in the coming months
- 8 network TV (fiction) series created by WIDC alumnae (CBC, CTV/CBS, Global/ABC, APTN)
- **20 feature films directed, and 175 awards and nominations earned by WIDC alumnae in 2019 alone!**

During fiscal 2019-20, WIDC continued to offer professional leadership and story development, awards and production support for Canadian women screen directors. Engaging the talents of professional ACTRA actors, IATSE DOP's and other industry executives and experts, this past year, 26 Canadian women / gender minority directors have directly participated in WIDC program offerings. All director participants and WIDC award winners are selected by peer jury process. Here are some highlights of this year's WIDC activities.

STORY DEVELOPMENT

Story & Leadership (S&L) supporting the development of 8 directors (**Laura Adkin, Camille Hollett-French, Sarah Galea-Davis, Monique Hurteau, Nimisha Mukerji, Susanne Serres, Lana Slezic**), and their fiction feature films and TV series. Part 1 of S&L was delivered in Vancouver with lead mentors Siobhan Devine (Mentor Director), Linda Coffey (Mentor Story Editor) and Lori Triolo (Mentor Actor), Jungian expert Dr. Carolyn Mamchur (Instructor), Guest DOPs Amy Belling, CSC and Thomas Billingsley, CSC; and UBCP/ACTRA actor/filmmaker Garwin Sanford who led an action and fight choreography workshop. An acting ensemble of 13 ACTRA and UBCP/ACTRA members including (in alphabetical order): Reese Alexander, Sarah Corrigan, Zena Daruwalla, Andrea Davis, Chattrisse Dolobaille, Em Haine, Jaylee Hamidi, Lara Gilchrist, Julie Lynn Mortensen, Troy Mundle, Justin Rain, Jamie Robinson, Sangeeta Wylie workshoped the original scripts with the directors.



Part 2 of S&L, WIDC Whistler Film Festival Industry Immersion, offered director participants festival passes to attend the summit, screenings and the festival signature women's networking breakfast and facilitated access to 10 more industry experts including producers, directors, CBC, Telefilm Canada, Telus STORYHIVE, Independent Production Fund, and distributor A-71. S&L concludes at the end of March 2020 as the directors receive up to 6 hours each of Follow Up individual consultations including Part 3 (story polish) with Mentor Story Editor, Linda Coffey, and Part 4 (career coaching) with Dr. Carol Whiteman.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT MODULE

Three separate cohorts of Directors meet with industry experts during a full week of facilitated roundtables and one-to-one sessions during each of the three international women's film festivals in Canada (St John's International Women's Film Festival; Female Eye Film Festival, Toronto; Vancouver International Women in Film Festival), with 3x 1-hour sessions of follow up coaching towards strategic career plans. Since attending the CAM, as of March 31, 2020, Penny Eizenga has attached producers to her feature ECHO (aka A Far Cry, also developed at Story & Leadership); Jessica Petelle has become a DGC member and is slated to direct on a series (Safe Haven) and 2nd Unit direct on a feature film; Lora Campbell has earned Harold Greenberg Fund support for a film she is producing (40 Acres).



CAM Directors: October 2019, St John's: (left to right) **Molly Flood** (ON, ACTRA), **Renee Hackett** (ACTRA NL), **Penny Eizenga** (ACTRA Toronto), **Kerrin Rafuse** (NL); Mentor Directors included Lulu Keating and Jordan Canning | November 2019, Toronto, seated: **ZhiMin Hu** (ON), **Lora Campbell** (ON), **Jessica Petelle** (ON), **Ashlea Wessel** (ON); Mentors, Deborah Day (Innovate by Day); Mina Shum, Gloria Ui Young Kim (Mentor Directors) | March 2020 Vancouver, Directors, **Hayley Gray** (BC), **Anaisa Visser** (BC); **Monica Mustelier** (ON/ACTRA), **Nauzanin A Knight** (AB), **Sarah Deakins** (ON/ACTRA), **Anita Abbasi** (ON), and Mentor Director was Marie Clements. Industry experts included Telefilm Canada (Lori McCurdy, Dan Lyon, John Dippong); A-71 (Susan Curran); CBC Films (Mehnaz Lentin); Harold Greenberg Fund (John Galway, Alan Bacchus); Ontario Creates (Kelly Payne); Creative BC (Arika Kumar); TELUS (Smita Acharyya, Kristy Assu); Digital Media Strategists and Mentors, Annelise Larsen (VERIA) and Deborah Day (Innovate By Day).

WIDC AWARDS

WIDC Feature Film Award:



2019 Winner:

Presented at the Whistler Film Festival to **Pamela Gallant** for her debut feature drama, **Monica's News**. This award provides in kind support valued of up to \$200k in services and rentals. A WIDC mentorship and executive producing services are also part of the award. Set in 1974 rural Nova Scotia, Monica's News is the story of CASEY, a nine-year old girl who learns hard lessons about justice when her beloved cousin is murdered, and no one will listen to her claims about who committed the brutal crime. Gallant offers an adept expression of Casey's first glimpses of what it means to fight bravely and alone in a world not yet awake to the value of female voices. The film will be shot in Nova Scotia.

Previous WIDC Feature Film Award Winners:

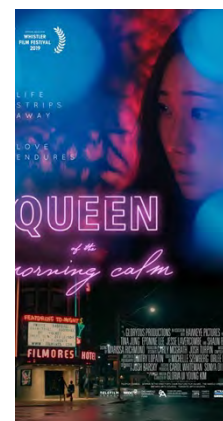
Marie Clements', Red Snow had its world premiere at the Vancouver International Film Festival. The film had a highly successful Northern Canada tour, has won multiple awards including Best Canadian Feature at VIFF and EIFF. An original soundtrack featuring co-stars Mozahdah Jamalzadah (pictured at right with co-star Asivak Koostachin) was launched ahead of the theatrical release March 13, 2020 (A-71). The theatrical run was halted due to COVID-19. A VOD launch on iTunes is planned for May 15, 2020. The film has already earned nine awards and 12 nominations and will air on CBC September 19, 2020 at 9pm.



WIDC Feature Film Award (continued)



Sonia Bonspille Boileau's Rustic Oracle world premiered at the 2019 Vancouver International Film Festival and played a near sold out closing night at the St John's International Women's Film Festival. It played at ImagineNATIVE and the film earned Best Actress (Lake Delilse) and Supporting Actress (Carmen Moore) Awards at the American Indian Film Festival in San Francisco, will be released by Seventh Screen (picture above center Carmen Moore with Lake Delilse). The film has earned two awards and three nominations and will air on CBC in fall 2020.



Gloria Ui Young Kim's Queen of the Morning Calm, starring Tina Jung (Kim's Convenience), premiered at Whistler Film Festival, (pictured at world premiere above right with cast, Zahra Bentham, Gloria Ui Young Kim, Tina Jung, Samora Smallwood, Robert Ifedi), will continue its festival tour in 2020.

Shelley Thompson (Dawn, Her Dad & the Tractor) received Telefilm funding to go to camera summer 2020. Due to COVID-19 production plans are pending. Shelley also earned additional script development support through the Meryl Streep Nicole Kidman Women writers program, as well as an opportunity to pitch for international funding / sales at Through the Lens in Cannes. Shelley's short film Duck Duck Goose was featured in competition on CBC Short Film Face Off.

Garnering subsequent successes...

Siobhan Devine (The Birdwatcher) directed multiple episodes of Kim's Convenience, Gabby Duran & the Unsittables, and two MOWs (Always and Forever Christmas, Matching Hearts). She earned a Leo Ward for Best Direction on Kim's Convenience and a Leo Best Direction Nomination for the MOW Christmas Pen Pals.

Kathleen Hepburn's (Never Steady, Never Still), her second feature co-written and co-directed with Elle-Maija Tailfeathers, The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open was picked up by Ava DeVernay's ARRAY Releasing and has won multiple awards including the Toronto Film Critic's \$100k prize.

Jordan Canning (Suck It Up) directed multiple episodes of Schitt's Creek and Baroness Von Sketch Show and earned 2020 CSA nods for her work on both series.

Talent to Watch Nominee Mentorship Award:

Each of the nominated projects are receiving a 2-year WIDC mentorship to support the further development of their projects.

2018-2019 Award:

Meeshelle Neal, (BC) feature film, **Sweet Release**, a magic realism drama about a modern-day alchemist who stops death to save her daughter);

Paige Boudreau, (AB) feature film, **Just Off Main Street**, a coming of age drama about a young woman returning to her small hometown to find closure after her parents' death;

Ana de Lara, (BC) web series, **Best Friend Me**, a comedic exploration of the faces of depression and anxiety told from the POV Sam, a woman living with her alter-egos, Neg and Best Friend Me. Selected for funding by Telefilm.

2019-2020 Award:

Hayley Gray (BC) feature film, **Dry Year** is about ALICE (40's) whose family home is blazed by BC interior wildfire and her struggle to grieve and heal from her losses through her art.

Sarah Deakins (ON) web series, **Happenstance** explores human interconnectedness as we follow the lives of seemingly random people in a neglected part of Toronto's downtown core.

WIDC Short Works Award:

2018 (Kamloops) winner, **Cjay Boisclair's** short film **Stood Up** sponsored by TELUS STORYHIVE and starring Jason Burkart, Rekha Sharma and Tracey Powers world premiered at the St John's International Women's Film Festival and has been accepted into over 40 festival around the globe and has won or been nominated for 21 awards.

WIDC CBC Talent Development Award:

Announced at the 2019 Whistler Film Festival the \$10,000 story development prize supported by CBC Films will cover Story & Leadership program tuition plus a fee for a story consultant. The 2019 winners of this important new development prize are Winnipeg-based Cree filmmaker **JJ Neepin** for her feature film script, **Luminous**, Neepin's debut feature film about an Indigenous woman who has the power of second-sight; and BC-based **Meeshelle Neal** for her feature script, **Sweet Release**, about a modern-day alchemist who attempts to save her daughter's life by stopping death for the entire world. Neal and Neepin will be matched with story consultants to help them take their scripts to the next draft.

WIDC ALUMNAE UPDATES:

Additional feature films by alumnae directed and or screened at festivals in the last 12 months include:

- **Valerie Buhagiar** (It's Hard to Be Human)
- **Shelagh Carter** (Into Invisible Light, 9 awards and 17 nominations)
- **Carolyn Combs** (Bella Ciao!)
- **Nicole Dorsey's** (Black Conflux earned TIFF Top Ten, plus six nominations)
- **Danishka Estherhazy** (Level 16) aired on CBC
- **Deanne Foley** (Christmas Reservations, MOW; An Audience of Chairs aired on CBC)
- **Ruth Lawrence** (Little Orphans)
- **Sharon Lewis'** (Brown Girl Begins went to VOD)
- **Shelley Niro** (The Incredible 25th Year of Mitzi Bear Claw)
- **Melanie Oates** (Body & Bones)
- **Rama Rau** (Honey Bee)
- **Frances Anne Solomon** (Hero – Inspired by the Extraordinary Life and Times of Mr. Ulrich Cross);
- **Madison Thomas** (Ruthless Souls)
- **Alison Reid** (The Woman Who Loves Giraffes opened in the USA, January 2020; Alison also directed an episode of Good Witch, MOW, and multiple episodes of Hudson & Rex and Murdoch Mysteries);
- **Jude Klassen's** sophomore feature Stupid For You! received Telefilm funding; developed at Story & Leadership; Seven days into her 15-day shoot production had to be halted due to COVID-19

Feature films in post production include:

- **Patricia Harris Seeley** (La Llorona)
- **Elizabeth Lazebnik** (Be Still, Talent to Watch, 2018)
- **Reem Morsi** (Hysteria, Talent to Watch 2018)

Celebrated documentaries that also screened at festivals in the last 12 months include:

- **Annie Bradley** (I'm Going to Break Your Heart, aired on CBC)
- **Leslie Ann Coles** (Melody Makers)
- **Mary Margaret Frymire** (Takaya: Lone Wolf) Mary was also nominated for a 2019 CSA
- **Rama Rau** (The Daughter Tree)
- **Tamara Segura** (Becoming Labrador)
- **Shannon Walsh** (Illusions of Control)

Television and web series include:

- **Mary Bissell** co-executive produced the award-winning mini-series Surviving R. Kelly
- **Leah Cameron** web series went to camera on her Talent to Watch 2018-nominated The Communist's Daughter. The series was funded by Independent Production Fund and CBC Gem.
- **Nikila Cole** directed 2 episodes of The Next Step (BBC Kids)
- **Ana de Lara's** web series Best Friend Me received Telefilm Talent to Watch 2019 funding;
- **Kate Green's** web series Narco Leap is negotiating a second season.
- **Tara Hungerford's** Scout & the Gumboot Kids (CBC) aired another season.
- **Winnifred Jong'** web series Tokens also funded by Talent to Watch 2017, earned 3 awards and 18 nominations. Jong has also directed episodes of Nurses, Coroner and Mystery 101: Dead Talk (MOW)

- **Michelle Latimer's** Trickster (CBC) went to camera. Michelle directed the series' 6 episodes. Michelle also directed on the series, Burden of Truth.
- **Stephanie Morgenstern** directed episodes of Burden of Truth; Hudson & Rex; Nurses
- **Nimisha Mukerji** directed 2 episodes of Gabby Duran & the Unsittables, plus the MOW Fashionably Yours
- **Sherry White** directed episodes of Burden of Truth; Nurses; My Perfect Landing; Little Dog

Short films directed and or screened at festivals and earned accolades include:

Jessica Bradford (SOUZ-E-Cue, COLLIDE, music video); **Annie Bradley** (The Set Up); **Eva Colmers** (The Suburbanight); **Ana de Lara** (Good Girls Don't); **Deanne Foley** (Radical); **Sibel Guvenc** (End of the Rope); **Monique Hurteau** (The Truth Sharing, podcasts); **Christina Ienna** (Handmade Film); **Veronika Kurz** (20 Minutes to Life and Flow); **Karen Lam** (Sandra Oh, doc); **Meeshelle Neal** (Sweet Release, short); **Wanda Nolan** (Always Going, Never Gone); **Juanita Peters** (No Regrets, podcast); **Chris Ross** (Swimmers); **Alayna Silverberg** (B-Side); **Michelle Wong** (Return Home, NFB doc).

Books Published:

- **Jules Koostachin**, "Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths"
- **Shandi Mitchell**, "The Waiting Hours"
- **Meeshelle Neal**, "Betwixt: The Call of the Void"
- **Dr. Rita Shelton Deverell**, OC, "American Refugees: Turning to Canada for Freedom"
- **Katie Tallo**, "Dark August" (launches June 30, 2020)

Special Awards, Accolades & Recognition:

- **Marie Clements** won a 2019 Birks Telefilm Women in Film Award
- **Dr. Shirley Cheechoo, OC** won a Lifetime Achievement
- **Martine Blue** won Most Promising Writer at the PEI Screenwriters' Bootcamp
- **Lori Lozinski** was nominated for the CMPA Producers Award for senior producers
- **Madison Thomas** was named one of Playback's 5 to Watch
- **Heather Allin**, producer ACTRA advocacy comedy short, Reel Women Seen won Best Foreign Short Film at the 2019 Artemis Women in Action Film Festival. The film has screened at 40+ festivals and won 4 other awards
- **Nikila Cole** (Serpent Queen) won Best TV Pilot Screenplay at the Oaxaca Film Festival, Mexico
- Five Alumnae were selected for the 2019-20 Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television Women Director's Program:
 - **Kim Albright, Melanie Oates, Rama Rau, Sonia Bonspille Boileau, Madison Thomas**
- Seven Alumnae projects earned 2019/20 Harold Greenberg Fund development support:
 - **Barb Briggs** (The Side of the Road); **Jordan Canning** (Oddly Flowers); **Danishka Esterhazy** (Your Life is Mine); **Sophie Jarvis** (Invasions, developed at Story & Leadership); as writer, **Kathleen Hepburn** (Out of Barren); as producers, **Lauren Grant** (Places In Between); **Lora Campbell** (40 Acres)

POLICIES

In 2015, the Board of Directors drafted a safety policy that focused on anti-harassment and anti-violence. This policy had been spoken about at the start of every workshop, and once it was formalized, it was quickly embedded into every WIDC contract, posted on the home page of the WIDC.ca web site and. In March 2020, when COVID-19 hit, the Board incorporated a health component to this policy. Since the 2019 AGM, the Board has carefully engaged in reflection, sought out further guidance and is in the consultation process of drafting meaningful, actionable policy that reflects WIDC's abiding commitment to inclusion and zero-tolerance for racism.

IN CLOSING...

On behalf of the Creative Women Workshops Association Board of Directors, we are uncommonly proud of the accomplishments of WIDC alumnae this past fiscal. We are also extremely grateful to all of our sponsors and collaborators for their continued financial and inkind support. We are looking forward to celebrating more of their successes this coming fiscal, developing more talent and holding space for authentic voices to be heard, as we enter a new phase of working safely together - apart.

Women In the Director's Chair (WIDC) - Creative Women Workshops Association (CWWA) Board of Directors

President & CEO, Carol Whiteman | Secretary / Treasurer, Mary M. Frymire | Alumnae Reps, Nikila Cole, Patricia Harris Seeley | ACTRA Rep., Heather Allin

PO Box 34575, 1268 Marine Drive, North Vancouver, British Columbia CANADA V7P 1T2
1-778-809-0747 | 1-877-913-0747 | www.widc.ca | enquiries@widc.ca | www.facebook.com/widc.ca | www.twitter.com/widc_ca



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