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Meet the 2023 Participants



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Serving 100 participants annually—and nearly 600 to date over the course of the program—[the Netflix-BANFF Diversity of Voices Initiative](#) offers a professional springboard for underrepresented creators and producers from across Canada.

The goal of the initiative is to jump-start and accelerate individual careers and help projects at all stages move forward by providing a gateway to the global film and television industry through the [Banff World Media Festival's](#) renowned conference and marketplace. Over the long term, the festival aims to foster a legacy of greenlights and international sales for the program participants and the partners who work with them.

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Pitch Program Participants



Angela Onuora

Director

This Naija Girl Studio

I am an award-winning filmmaker and interdisciplinary artist, director, producer, writer, actor, TV host, music composer, and concept developer based in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

I am a current MFA student in Film at the prestigious York University, a 2019 graduate of Conestoga College from the Broadcasting Performance and Digital Media Graduate Program; founder of The RISE Class - a crash course in video production designed to empower the most underserved and underrepresented in the community; an Equity, Diversity & Inclusion advisory committee member to The Region of Waterloo Arts Fund; a film production mentor at the COVE/COVOX Arts Incubator.

My recent film is a historical documentary titled "Operation Lights Out - The Story of CANAIRELIEF", which tells the little-known story of the Canadian humanitarian effort during the Biafran War in Nigeria, fifty-two years ago. The official selection at six film festivals and winner of "Best Documentary" award at Toronto International Nollywood Film Festival & Lake International Pan African Film Festival; Special Recognition Award at Silicon Valley African Film Festival; Special Recognition award from the US House of Representatives; Recognition of Outstanding Achievement from The State of California Senate; and Special Jury Prize at 2022 Eastern Nigeria International Film Festival.

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Asis Sethi

Producer | Director
Fly Away Films Inc.

An alumni of Women in Director's Chair and a former Playback Magazine's 10 to Watch, Asis Sethi is a South Asian Canadian filmmaker who graduated from Humber College where she currently teaches film and television directing. Her career in broadcasting spans over 15 years as a producer and a host on lifestyle shows. Her REMI Award winning short on menstruation, 'A BLOODY MESS', was screened at 30 film festivals. Her 16-episode documentary series on Sikh shrines in India, 'DARSHAN DEKH JEEVA', was funded by the OMNI Documentary Fund. Asis directed a documentary on post 9/11 effects on turban wearers in North America titled 'THE COLOURFUL CROWN' which premiered on OMNI Television nationally. Her short film on postpartum depression titled 'ROCK THE CRADLE' was funded by the Canada Council for the Arts and will start the film festival run in 2023.

Asis is an alumni of CineFAM's Limitless program through which she developed a proof of concept for her feature 'SLAM DUNK, SEHAJ!'. It was supported by the CFC/Netflix Calling Card Accelerator and also won Caribbean Tales' The Big Pitch at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2022.

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Sepehr Samimi

Producer | Cinematographer
Understory Films Inc.

Sepehr (he/him) is an Iranian-Canadian documentary cinematographer and producer (BFA film production from SFU). He specializes in filming on the frontlines of urgent social and political movements across the world: In 2017 he shot *If I Was To Retain You*, a feature doc about the umbrella movement in HongKong. In 2018 he worked on *Magnitude of All Things*, Jennifer Abbott's hit NFB documentary featuring global climate movements. Sepehr has filmed and currently co-producing *Standing with the Ancients*, a feature doc about Ada'itsx (Fairy Creek) movement, the largest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history. In 2022, he was among 14 filmmakers selected for the Doc Accelerator program at Hot Docs festival. When not engaged in key creative roles on independent docs, Sepehr works in the Vancouver film industry in the camera department of feature films and TV productions.

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Jordan Molaro

President

Nu Media Films Inc.

Jordan Molaro is an Anishinaabe/Métis writer, editor, and director. Born and raised in the North End of Winnipeg, he was introduced to filmmaking at the age of thirteen when he was cast for a lead role in the film, "The Fragile". After receiving a scholarship to the Manitoba Theatre of Young People, he was inspired to pursue creative writing and he enrolled in the Film Studies program at the University of Manitoba.

His credits include award-winning short film "The Sacred Seven" which screened at numerous film festivals around the world. In 2012, he co-founded and launched the Nu Media Education program which works with indigenous youth on and off-reserve. This hands-on "all things film" program gives the opportunity to the students to create short films and be exposed to the film industry. These student films have screened at many international film festivals. The Nu Media Program was profiled by CBC National News, Netflix, Vice Media, Huffington Post, and most recently the Hollywood Reporter in 2022.

In 2015, he produced an Indigenous We Day entitled, "Ignite Your Spirit" which took place at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. He also had the opportunity to work on the national television series entitled, Taken: The Series. The series profiles cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

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Lu Asfaha

Writer | Director

Defar Media

Lu Asfaha is an award-winning Toronto filmmaker whose films cross genres to externalize the internal. And she's had a busy year. In 2022, her short horror film FRESH MEAT premiered at Inside Out Film Festival, as well as screening at historic Black film festivals Pan African Film Fest and BronzeLens. It then won Best Canadian Short at Regent Park Film Festival and was broadcast nationally on CBC's Canadian Reflections. Lu was BlueCat Screenplay's 2022 Feature Winner and took home their Fellini Award for best international script. She is a recent graduate of the CFC's 2022 Norman Jewison Film Program Director's Lab. Lu directed 3 episodes of the East African-Canadian comedy series VIRGINS! which was released on CBC Gem. Yep, in 2022.

Lu has written and directed 4 other short films; the CBC short documentary FREEDOM SUMMER, the fantasy short PALADIN, and the dark comedy DEAD END. Most recently, she made short body horror SIGHT about a woman so consumed with envy she undergoes a horrid transformation. She was previously a Reelworld Emerging 20, a Hot Docs Film Festival Doc Accelerator Fellow, a ScreenCraft finalist, and won the RBC Emerging Director Award at Regent Park Film Festival. Lu also has 8 years of experience as an editor and assistant editor, working on Critics Choice-nominated series SHINE TRUE and the CSA-winning documentary MR. JANE & FINCH. Whether it's horror, comedy, or documentary; writing, directing, or editing - as Lu always says "the story is king."

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Ambrose Okundaye

Producer | Director

Dlite Pictures Entertainment Inc.

Ambrose Aibi Okundaye is the Producer, Writer/Director and driving force behind Dlite Pictures Entertainment Inc, a new film production outfit dedicated to the productions of inclusive Afrocentric independent Canadian films.

He directed Goldilocks and the Three Dreads, a 35mm short film, and Ripples, with financial supports from City TV, a division of Chum Television. Both films were broadcast on City TV and other Chum stations across Canada in 2004 and 2007 respectively. He later co-produced and co-directed First Day a short film in 2012.

As Co Production company, Dlite Pictures Entertainment is currently in post-production on a horror feature film production, titled The Wiccan Girl, directed by Austin Odigie. The film was shot in Ottawa in August 2022.

Feature films script written by Ambrose A. Okundaye entitled Boiling Point, Boiling Point 2, Abuja Heist, Blinder's On, and Dawn of Light are currently on Dlite Pictures Entertainment Inc development slate.

Boiling Point is in development with Telefilm Canada and creative BC.

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Gavin Seal

Director | Writer

Loaded Pictures

Gavin Seal is a South Asian Québécois Canadian filmmaker whose mission is to dissolve otherness using the universal language of cinema.

His work as a writer/director includes the fiction films, "Followers" (Fantasia, Reelworld) and "Case Claus'd" (Montreal International Black Film Festival, CBC Short Film Faceoff finalist), as well as the documentary, "Good Luck Have Fun" (NSI, Just for Laughs). Gavin has also served as a segment director for the Canadian Screen Award-nominated TV series, "Interrupt this Program" and as a producer on films such as, "The Long Way Home", commissioned by Hot Docs and directed by Oscar-nominee Ariel Nasr and Aisha Jamal.

Gavin is developing his first feature film, "Laughing with God" with support from the TIFF Filmmaker Lab, FNC Nouveau Marché, and Berlinale Fiction Toolbox Programme at EFM. The film is adapted from his own short film screenplay, "Do Not Resuscitate" which won the Writers Guild of Canada prize at SODEC's Sprint for your Script competition.

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Shirley CheeChoo

Writer | Director | Producer

Spoken Song Production Inc.

Shirley CheeChoo (Cree) was born in Eastmain, Quebec on the eastern shores of James Bay. Shirley is the Founder and Artistic Director of Weengushk Film Institute. She is an accomplished and awarding winning artist, actor and filmmaker, and has been working in the Indigenous community for over 30 years. She is the proud recipient of numerous awards both for her own work and for recognition of her profound contributions to arts practice throughout Ontario. This multi-award winning filmmaker is the first person from a First Nation to write, produce, direct and act in a feature length dramatic film in Canada, entitled *Bearwalker*, which had a market screening at the Cannes Film Festival in France.

Shirley began directing films in 1998, after working as a playwright, actor and director of notable plays. Her directorial debut is the award winning short film *Silent Tears*, in which she chronicles the events of one harsh winter trip with her parents to a northern trap line when she was eight years old. It was screened at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival, and was also awarded the Telefilm Canada and Northern Canada Award for Best Canadian Aboriginal Language Program.

Shirley's play, *PATH WITH NO MOCCASINS*, gave her an opportunity to speak about her life and the struggle to retain her identity and Cree heritage. She continues to teach drama workshops to Indigenous youth and young learners across Canada. In 1984, Dr. CheeChoo founded De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group, located on Manitoulin Island, and this touring company has become one of the foremost and respected independent Indigenous theatre companies in the world.

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Dayana Stanislaus

Producer

Sunrays farmstead Inc.

Dayana is an author, marketing strategist, producer, director, TV/Radio host, actor, and a fashion model. She is also a recipient of International Women Mentor, Community Ambassador and people's choice awards. In 2023, Dayana was accepted into the Banff Diversity of Voices Fellowship. She was a 2022 CMPA Diversity Producer Mentee working on the Documentary Ray of Hope produced by Ryan Singh Productions Ltd and Sunrays Farmstead Inc. Dayana is also the owner of Daya Films and TV Productions and Distribution Ltd and a member of the DOC Canada.

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Amar Wala

Producer

Scarborough Pictures

Amar's work traverses a range of style and form. Starting with a scripted background, Amar brings that same visual, story-driven approach to his documentary work. His debut feature, *The Secret Trial 5* ('14), established him as a daring new voice in Canadian cinema and was named one of the Top Ten Docs of the Decade by Realscreen in 2020. He is a recipient of the prestigious Vanguard Award from the DOC Institute. Amar is also the founder of Scarborough Pictures, a Toronto based production company that makes vibrant, powerful content across film, television, and digital platforms that acts as a hub for BIPOC creators.

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Tai Grauman

Creator

Tai Grauman and Heather Hatch Productions

Tai Amy Grauman is Métis, Cree and Haudenosaunee from Ardrossan, Alberta. She is an actor, playwright, director and producer. Tai is an artistic associate at Savage Society and completed her thesis for her MFA in theatre practice at the U of A in 2023 with a focus on her artistic research of 'Metis women's love stories'. In her artistic practice she focuses on telling the stories of her ancestors, all the Callihoo women who came before her with a specific focus on their love stories. She was named the Métis Nation of Alberta's outstanding youth of 2020. Her play *You used to call me Marie* toured Alberta and Saskatchewan to Batoche Days, Métis Crossing as well as many other Metis communities. And is playing the National theatre in 2023. This past year she adapted her upcoming play *Wiwimaw* into a short film alongside Filmmaker Heather Hatch. She also recently adapted *Mary's wedding: A Metis Love story*. At the Citadel theatre. Selected Acting Credits include: *Mary's Wedding: A Métis love story*, (Citadel Theatre), *Honour Beat* (Grand Theatre), *Thanks for Giving* (Arts Club). *You used to call me Marie* (Savage Production Society). Upcoming: Tai is working on a narrative scripted series called *Metis Love stories: a scripted adaption of her play You Used to Call me Marie*. Tai was a cohort in the whistler indigenous film accelerator program for the winter of 2022.

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Navalik Tologanak

Owner

Tolok Productions

I am a proud Inuinnaq from Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. I am a journalist and emerging filmmaker. I am a residential school survivor. Sent away to Inuvik and Yellowknife for 12 years, I lost traditional skills and my language. I fought hard to relearn Inuinnaqtun and graduated from the Indigenous Languages Program from the University of Victoria in 2019 at the age of 65. I began my journalism career in 1995, writing for Nunavut news. I've been photographing and documenting events in my community in Inuinnaqtut for 27 years. I dedicate much of my time to community service. My experience on the NWT status of women council, the Pauktuutit Inuit women's association of Canada, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has made me intimately aware of the legacy of residential schools in Canada from direct personal experience and as a journalist and activist. I am honoured to be one of the Inuit committee members for the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Sharing Circle. 29 July 2022, I was one of the residential school survivors who attended a private meeting of survivors with Pope Francis. I also spoke at the 2nd National Truth and Reconciliation Day ceremonies in Ottawa, 30th September 2022.

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Helena Morgane

Director | Writer | Actor

Gold Water Media

Helena Morgane is an Afro-European Filmmaker-Actor/multidisciplinary creative based in North America, committed to the craft of complex intersectional storytelling.

She is an alumni of the BIPOC TV & Film x Warner Bros. Episodic Writers Lab, The Barrow Group and Black Women Film! Canada. Her work has screened at international festivals.

A prolific creative and polyglot, she works globally, having collaborated with organizations such as Interscope, T.D.E., Shopify, NIA Centre for the Arts, and artists like Kendrick Lamar and Drake.

Helena was a TEDx Speaker Coordinator, and as the Associate Programmer for TIFF Rising Stars 2020, she had the pleasure of hosting mentorship sessions with David Oyelowo, Tantoo Cardinal and the Casting Society of America.

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Raghd Charabaty

Writer | Director
Charabaty Films

Raghd Charabaty is a Lebanese-Canadian filmmaker and writer based in Toronto. Their films have won prizes at TIFF: Canada's Top Ten, Festival du Nouveau Cinema and the Starfish Art Awards.

Raghd was recently selected for the 2022-2023 BIPOC TV & Film x Warner Bros. Discovery Access Canada - Writers Lab.

Raghd is a recipient of SSHRC Award in Honour of Nelson Mandela 2018. Their work can also be found in the permanent art collections at the Anna Leonowens and SMU Art Galleries. Raghd holds an MFA in Film Production from York University and a BFA in Film Production and Art History from NSCAD University.

Raghd is also an experienced editor, compositor and sound designer, working with clients ranging from wildlife filmmakers, to the Canada Council for the Arts and Snoop Dogg music videos. As a synesthete, their work often features magical realism, vibrant colors and intricate soundscapes. Their personal films deal with revolutionary joy, curiosity, and desire as spectacle.

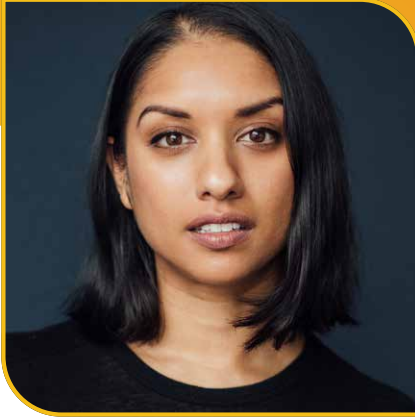
Raghd's hobbies include excessive propagation of their houseplants, sewing but not using patterns, and negotiating couch space with their unyielding dog, Tofu.

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Preeti Torul

Actor | Screenwriter | Comedian | Filmmaker

Preeti Torul

Preeti Torul is an actor, screenwriter, comedian and filmmaker represented by Grand Wave Entertainment. Preeti started out at The Second City Toronto in 2013 and was cast as a writer and repertory player in the inaugural Bob Curry Fellowship in 2015. Since then, she has performed stand-up across North America. Her first televised stand-up performance at the 2019 Winnipeg Comedy Festival, is now streaming on CBC Gem.

Preeti's on screen credits include 'Bria Mack Gets A Life' (New Metric Media/Crave), 'Note To Self' (CBC Comedy), 'Odd Squad' (PBS), 'Nine Films About Technology' (FXX/Hulu) and 'Wedding Season' (Netflix). Preeti has written for CBC's 'Air Farce' and 'TallBoyz' Season 3. Her original one-hour scripted dramedy, 'DEMONS', was selected for the 2022 Emerging 20 Reelworld Film Festival Screenwriting program and is currently in partnership with Archipelago Productions to pitch to international markets.

Preeti's screenwriting work has been shortlisted for the 2021 Sundance Episodic Lab and the 2022 TIFF CBC Screenwriter's Award. As a filmmaker, Preeti has directed and edited for film and television. Her first short film 'Where You From?', premiered at the 2018 Toronto Sketch Comedy Festival. Preeti has edited various shows for Canadian television: Season 1 for 'Bit Playas' (CBC Gem), Season 3 of 'Second Jen' (Rogers) and Season 1 of 'Abroad' (Rogers). Being in front and behind of the camera has given Preeti the ability to create 'DEMONS' for a diverse audience.

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Alexandra MacLean

Actor | Writer | Stunt Performer

Born and raised in Halifax, Alexandra MacLean is a proud African-Nova Scotian actor and writer, as well one of the only Black female stunt performers in the entire province. Alexandra recently played the Principal Role of Fallon on Season 4 of CBC's Diggstown and performed as Stunt Tanna in the upcoming Hulu TV Mini Series Washington Black.

As a graduate of the 2022 BIPOC TV & FILM Writing for Kids TV Intensive, Alexandra was 1 of 6 pitch competition winners for her original pilot, and has been selected to the 2023 WildBrain Writing Summit Initiative.

In addition to her 12 years of film & television experience, Alexandra has also earned a Double Major Degree in Accounting and Management with Dean's List First Class Honours from Mount Saint Vincent University.

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Patrick Shannon

**Director
Innonative**

Patrick (also known as Nang K'uulas) is a Haida award-winning film & television director, social entrepreneur, and university instructor from Haida Gwaii, BC. Selected as young Entrepreneur of the Year by the BC Aboriginal Business Awards, Patrick has founded over a dozen start-ups, social, creative, and non-profit initiatives that resulted in him being selected as one of the top 15 Emerging Innovators in Canada by Ashoka Changemakers, and one of the top 50 Young Cultural Innovators in the world by Salzburg Global Seminar.

Inspired by his cultural upbringing, Patrick endeavours to use technology, media, and education to empower locals in addressing the social & cultural issues within Canada's remote and Indigenous communities.

With over 15 years of experience working within the Vancouver film, television and photography industries, Patrick currently operates film production company InnoNative, Indigenous modelling agency Supernaturals, and a media training and production initiative called the Haida Gwaii Media Collective.

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Anish Bhalla

Writer | Producer

Kavalry Productions

Anish Bhalla is an accomplished writer and producer, whose work with Canada Basketball and the Toronto Raptors organization has earned him a seat at the table amongst the top creatives in Canadian basketball content. Anish's biggest project, "Bhalla", which won the Just For Laughs ComedyPro Pitch Contest, has just been picked up by Wind Sun Sky productions.

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Patricia Chica

President | Producer | Director
Flirt Films Inc.

Patricia Chica has produced over 60 hours of content and significant experience producing, directing and creating award-winning films and television programs for major networks and clients in North America, France and the UK. Exceptionally adept at overseeing all aspects of the storytelling process from conception to production. Chica has completed her auteur-driven film MONTREAL GIRLS, that she co-wrote, directed, and produced. It is scheduled for release in North in 2023. Her TV concept SOLEIL & LUNA (a Queer/ LatinX dramedy series) has garnered significant momentum in the past year, getting interest from OUT TV and receiving development funding from the CMF. Chica is an alumna of the TIFF Filmmaker Lab, The Gotham's First Look, US in Progress, Netflix-Banff Diversity of Voices, BIPOC Showrunner Bootcamp, Reel World Producers Program, and a recipient of the Share Her Journey grant offered by the TIFF Film Festival. Patricia Chica divides her time between Los Angeles and her hometown Montréal.

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Camille Beaudoin

Writer | Director | Producer

Mosaic Entertainment

Camille is an Indigenous Producer, Writer, and Director with over 20 years of experience in the film, television, and interactive media industry. She has spent the last sixteen years as Producer at Mosaic Entertainment guiding the creative of world class screen content including three feature films, three mobile games, countless hours of online video, and over 100 episodes of scripted TV. She worked closely with Writers, Directors, Department Heads, and Post Production team to make award-winning scripted productions including the winner of Kidscreen's Best Teen Movie #Roxy starring Booboo Stewart (Disney Descendants) and Danny Trejo (Spy Kids, Machete), and four seasons of Tiny Plastic Men (nominated for Best Comedy Series at the Canadian Screen Awards three seasons in a row and listed on Vulture.com as one of Canada's top 25 essential sitcoms).

Now focused on building her career as a Writer / Director, Camille recently directed six episodes of the series Couleurs Du Nord for Lopii Productions (TFO) and wrote and directed nine episodes of the series Bears' Lair (APTN). She also had the pleasure of co-writing a revised audio track for Pocahontas called Finding Matoaka for Chiefs of Ontario, and is slated to direct the interactive feature film Inheritance based on the Governor General's Award Finalist play of the same name.

Camille is mixed blood Cree, Haudenosaunee, Métis, and French Canadian. She is an alumnus of the National Screen Institute and Banff Centre for the Arts, Founder of Girls In Film and Television, and Advisor/Facilitator for the Whistler Film Festival Indigenous Filmmaker Fellowship.

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Hisham Kelati
Comedy Writer

Hisham Kelati is a Toronto-based stand-up comic and comedy writer, known for his vivid and engaging storytelling.

As a writer he's written on hit CBC shows TallBoyz and Run the Burbs and was a winner of CBC's Creative Relief Fund program and a finalist in the 2022 JFL/CBC Comedy Pitch program.

As a stand-up, he's performed on multiple festivals including Just for Laughs Montreal (New Faces Canada 2019 and the Hannah Gadsby Gala in 2022), headlining at Just for Laughs Toronto and featured at Sled Island Fest, Toronto Sketchfest and CBC's Accent on Toronto.

Hisham has also opened for comedians like SNL's Chris Redd, WTF Podcast host Marc Maron, and Letterkenny's K. Trevor Wilson, and can be seen on CTV's The Stand-up Show with Jon Dore and CBC's The New Wave of Stand-up.

He was nominated for Best Taped Performance at the 2019 Canadian Comedy Awards, won Host of the Year at the 2019 Toronto Comedy Awards, his food podcast Bites & Bits won Best Art Series 2022 at the Canadian Podcast Awards and his debut comedy album "Tigre King" was nominated for a Juno for Comedy Album of the Year 2022.

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Moniquea Marion

Writer

Reallife Pictures Inc

Moniquea Marion is a Saskatchewan based Metis actor, comedian, writer and director. She's a graduate of the Second City Conservatory in Toronto and the Upright Citizen's Brigade Theatre in NYC.

Marion was a 2019 BANFF Netflix-Diversity of Voices selected participant, a selected participant for the 2019 Reelworld Emerging 20 program, and a 2018 selected participant for the Women On Screen Web Series Incubator.

Marion is a twice nominated contender for Best Female Improviser by NOW Magazine in 2014 & 2015. Marion's responsible for creating and starring in 3 successful web series', Moniquea Marion 365, Food Porn, and Fuel Up.

Marion has written, produced, and starred in 2 successful one woman comedic Fringe shows, Glorious Loser in 2018 and Mumsical in 2015. Additionally, Marion is a veteran performer of the Toronto and Montreal Sketch Comedy Festivals, The Big City Improv Festival and the SheDot Festival.

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Kat Khan

Creator | Director | Actor | Writer

Second Adolescence Productions

Kat Khan is a mixed race creator, director, actor, and writer based in Toronto, Ontario. Kat holds an BFA in Acting from York University (2020) and she was a 2022-23 resident of The Canadian Film Centre CBC Actors Conservatory. She is the co-founder of Second Adolescence Productions inc, where her projects are centered around amplifying underrepresented voices in the coming-of-age genre. Kat's work is inspired by her experiences navigating identity, personal development and vulnerability, all things she values and is driven by. Kat won the 2022 IPF/CMF Development fund for her series Fan Club, where she works as the creator, director, showrunner, and executive story editor alongside Jahnelle Jones.

Kat is currently developing her debut feature film. On screen, Kat can be found as a main cast member on Gay Mean Girls (KindaTV). Other selected screen credits include: Verona (KCFF), The Handmaid's Tale (Hulu), Ghostwriters (Apple TV), Fear Thy Roommate (Discovery ID), TallBoyz (CBC), and Better At Texting (Reel World'22)

Kat is passionate about telling stories that prioritize people of colour, queer folk, and young women and hopes to create work where BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ people can see themselves in lenses that are vulnerable and loving.

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Srishti Jaiswal
Writer | Creator

Srishti Jaiswal (she/her) is a South Asian writer, production coordinator and mom to a massive Maine Coon cat. She has coordinated on shows like Zokie of Planet Ruby (Nickelodeon/Teletoon), Best and Bester (YTV/Nickelodeon UK). Currently, she's writing and coordinating on Nelvana's new CGI show - Millie Magnificent.

She has also written on shows like Tiny & Tall (TVO/Knowledge) produced by Little Engine Moving Pictures and an upcoming series at Wildbrain. She's story edited on short-documentaries Mudder's Hands and Dancing in the Cold, that are now flourishing in the festival circuit. She is also co-creator of an original tween live-action series which is in development with Take the Shot Productions (Son of a Critch, Frontier).

Srishti immigrated to Canada from India 4 years ago to pursue her dreams of writing in TV. She's a graduate of Humber College's Television Writing and Producing program 2021, and alumnus of BIPOC Film and TV's Kids Writing Workshop, 2022. She likes to tell nuanced stories that reflect on the intersectional experiences of queer, South Asian immigrants for all audiences - including preschoolers, for whom she puts them in rhymes.

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Viveka Melki

Producer | Director

Melki Films inc

Viveka Melki is the founder and owner of Melki Films, a Montréal-based production house focusing on the visual arts. She is a Producer, Director and Screenwriter who identifies as a racialized settler to Turtle Island. She was born in The Gambia to a Lebanese and Indigenous Brazilian family before completing her education in the UK, and then immigrating to Canada, her adopted homeland. Melki brings her experience of having lived and worked in repressive regimes to her storytelling, often incorporating feminist themes and perspectives. Her productions take an investigative approach, and she has been nominated for her original research, tackling the current narratives of history, often questioning and revealing new information.

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Professional Development Participants



Elad Tzadok

Director | Producer
Scopitone Films Ltd.

Elad is an award-winning director (DGC) producer and editor. Born and raised in Israel, he moved to Vancouver where he graduated from the Film Production Program at UBC and later co-founded Scopitone Films. He has worked internationally with brands like The Michelin Guide, Lululemon and Canadian Tire and has experience working with agencies across Canada in various roles .

Elad is a graduate of the 2018 TIFF Filmmaker Lab and the 2021 Whistler Documentary Lab. His directorial work includes 'Unarchived' (VIFF, ALFF, KDocs) for the NFB which examines historical erasure and the portrayal of diverse histories in our archives and museums, and the narrative short 'Run', which won various awards at the Leos as well as other festivals. As an editor, recent work includes: 'Corrective Measures' (Tubi) featuring Bruce Willis and Michael Rooker, 'Portraits from a Fire' (VIFF, CIFF, EIFF) which garnered him a Leo for Best Feature Editing, 'All Joking Aside' (Cinequest), 'Broil' and 'The Shipment' (TriBeca) as well as 'She Who Must Burn' (Fantasia) for Canadian director Larry Kent. Elad has produced various short form, commercial, documentary and narrative content including the upcoming Heritage Minute 'Paldi - A Place for Everyone'.

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Faran Moradi

Director

Nova 9 Pictures

Iranian-Canadian filmmaker, born and raised in Ontario, best known as a Telefilm Talent to Watch recipient for his feature film, "Tehranto". After having made numerous films during his studies at Sheridan College, Faran went on to direct and edit on Emmy Award winning TV shows including "Odd Squad", and write and direct the award winning short film "Blackpowder and Guilt". His most recent credits include four episodes of the Hulu series "Holly Hobbie", and director observing on the CBC show "Moonshine". Faran is currently in development on two upcoming feature films, as well as an Iranian mob dramedy series.

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Kyle Schmalenberg

Director

Wrapped Productions Inc.

Kyle Schmalenberg is an award-winning director, writer, and producer. His work includes many genres including commercial, dramatic, and documentary—broadcasting on television, streaming platforms, and in high-level international discourse spaces like the United Nations. His work often deals in a hopeful way with aspects of justice, unity, and humanity. Most recently, “Braided Together” (short, 2022), which he wrote and co-directed, won Audience Choice Award at imagineNATIVE and Vox Popular. His award-winning feature doc “Glimpses Into The Spirit of Gender Equality” premiered in 2020 at the Commission on the Status of Women and won 4 festival awards. He is presently packaging a feature he wrote and will co-direct, “Tenaya”, and is producing “The Painting” (doc series). He participated in the Banff/Netflix Diversity of Voices program (2022) and is a recipient of the Rogers x BSO script development fund with the series, “Girlcott”. He was co-creator and facilitator at the Native Film & Storytelling Institute (2017) and Creative Sovereignty Lab (2022). He is also a licensed psychotherapist in Toronto.

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Farhad Pakdel

Writer | Director | Producer

Mise En Abyrne Inc.

Farhad Pakdel is an Iranian Canadian filmmaker whose work explores identity (de) construction, liminality, absence, place, and memory. He holds an MFA in Film from York University in Toronto and an MA in Cinema from the University of Art in Tehran, where he experimented with film form and taught film courses. He has written, directed, and produced several short films that have screened internationally. Farhad is an alumnus of the Canadian Film Centre's Producers' Lab. He is the founder of Mise En Abyrne, a production company based in Montreal that aims to produce innovative content by diverse creators, amplify the voices of underrepresented groups, and tell fresh stories that are socially conscious and philosophically aware of the human condition. Farhad is currently developing his first feature film as a writer and director: *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, and his feature as a producer: *The Tears of Things*.

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Sean Smith

Writer | Director | Producer

Stingray Pictures

Sean Smith is a Film & TV professional working as a director, cinematographer, and editor. He has recently performed all three of these roles on three seasons of APTN's "Red Earth Uncovered" and has worked in these departments on several award winning documentaries, music videos, commercials, and television specials. His short film about his Metis roots "Mary Mackagonne", which he wrote and directed, was an official selection of both the 2019 Calgary International Film Festival and the 2020 Edmonton International Festival of Winter Cinema. Sean's passion for filmmaking extends to writing for film and television. He is currently developing a dramatic television series titled "Athapescow" which is based on his short film. Sean is Red River Métis and is a proud member of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

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Justin Neal

Writer | Producer

Holy Crow Productions

Justin Neal writes offbeat narratives that weave comedy with high-stakes drama, creating uplifting tales of personal transformation.

Neal's screenplay *The Skins Game* received Telefilm development funding in 2021. His original series *Boundary Bay* and his feature *The Traveller*, were awarded development grants from the Indigenous Screen Office & Creative BC.

Prior to focusing on dramatic writing, Neal juggled his career as an editorial and marketing producer in San Francisco and NYC with amateur theatre at night. He earned a Joint MFA in Creative Writing and Theatre from UBC in 2015, near his family's Skwxwú7mesh territory.

Neal is alumni of the CFC's Norman Jewison Film Program Writers' Lab (2022). He is represented by Rena Zimmerman, Great North Artists Mgmt, Toronto.

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Anand Pavamani

Writer | Producer | Director
Paixtriot Inc.

Anand Pavamani is a South Indian – Canadian Director, Writer, Producer and Composer based in the Greater Toronto area. He founded Paixtriot, a Media Company aimed at producing content with social impact. Having produced a handful of short films that have premiered at various film festivals, he is currently leading Paixtriot's slate of projects that includes two animated films, children's programming, a video game and experimental shorts. Anand has a B.Sc in Computer Science from York University, and is a founding Board Director of the Racial Equity Screen Office and Chair of the York Region Arts Council.

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Andrea Martinez Crowther

Writer | Director

Weeping Willow

I am a Mexican-Canadian writer-director who recently moved to Toronto after having developed my career in Mexico. I have four feature films under my belt (three completed with theatrical releases and one in post-production). My first feature (Insignificant Things) was selected in the Sundance Screenwriter's Lab as well as the IFP Director's lab under the mentorship of Rodrigo García (Things You Can Tell Just by Looking at Her) and was Executive Produced by Guillermo del Toro. The film premiered in San Sebastian. My most recent film Tare stars renowned Mexican actor Tenoch Huerta (Black Panther Wakanda Forever) and is set to be released early next year. I recently released my third film Birdwatching - a low budget drama about a writer with Alzheimer's- in Mexico. I am currently developing the Canada-Mexico co-production Labranza, as well as the romantic comedy, Smitten, and am in the process of writing Beulah and Willemina, a love story with dementia.

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Mitra Knight

Producer
1844 Studios

As an Iranian-Canadian Bahá'í, who has lived and travelled extensively in the Caribbean and in Africa, Mitra has gravitated towards international stories which resonate with Canadian audiences. A Project Director by trade, Mitra brings a highly efficient, strategic personal approach to filmmaking as a producer at 1844 Studios.

With a distinguished record in business leadership and project management, Mitra has served in various leadership roles globally. She holds two Masters degrees in management and leadership from the Schulich School of Business at York University in Canada and Landegg International University in Switzerland. Mitra has over 20 years of experience working in private and public sectors.

In 2013, Ms. Knight assumed the role of Project Director of a 31.062 Million CAD project in the Caribbean funded primarily by the Canadian Government. The Strengthening Distance Education in the Caribbean (SDEC) project increased employment and income generating opportunities for Caribbean citizens by improving the institutional capacity of the Open Campus of The University of the West Indies to offer increased access to post-secondary education regionally and abroad, through enhanced programmes and learning sites.

As one of the Producers of 1844 Studios, Mitra has served as a producer on several projects, notably MY LYRIC I NEVER KNEW (narrative short); PRECARITY (documentary); WHEN I WAS GEORGE (narrative feature), UNDETONATED: WOMEN IN TERROR (documentary series).

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Ian Nsenga

Producer

Visionary Productions Ltd.

For over a decade Ian Nsenga has worked in both the film and music industries of Canada, United States, China, Taiwan, and Europe. His passion for creative arts has helped shape quite a diverse career from acting to writing and running his own production company. Born in Nairobi Kenya with Rwandan roots Ian moved to Hamilton, Ontario in 1993 and to Vancouver in 2005 to study Film & Communications at Trinity Western University. His work has been featured on Amazon Prime Video and festivals in the USA and Canada. With his company Visionary Productions ; he aims to create creative and original content.

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Tanner Zurkoski

Producer

Two Hounds Media

I am a Cree / Métis filmmaker based on Vancouver Island, I've paid the bills working on TV movies and feature documentaries as a coordinator, then as a PM and now an occasional line producer.

I've always been a passionate storyteller, and was able to merge that with my work on language revitalization in my last creative project *ʔiil̓tuup* (Whale). That film was shot entirely within the Nuuchahnulth Community of Esowista in Tla-o-qui-aht nation territory and featured non actors in every role. The film cemented my desire to work within the indigenous communities I am connected with and tell these stories, now more than ever.

That has been my focus since, lately I've been working in animation production along with live action children's television with Loretta Todd and a documentary project for Crave focused on the last living captive southern resident killer whale, while developing my own personal documentary project around the Houlthee (unseeded territory) of Ahousaht.

I hope to be able to continue developing my creative work as my passion lays there, and I feel that the concepts, scripts, and pitches that I have been working on have each been a definitive step in that direction.

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Jim Compton
Producer

Jim Compton, award-winning journalist, director, producer, writer and host. Compton has shared these gifts of story with the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network as its Founder, Executive Producer, Host, and Programming Director. His spirit has given rise to a myriad of archetypal, Indigenous programming, from in-depth documentaries, to dramas, to talk shows, to feature films.

Wahbung – Anung in Anishinaabe Means the Morning Star. It illuminates the dawn of a new day; a time when the Thunderbirds rise, dance bestow gifts to the people and guide them. These Gifts guide the Anishinabe, through the seven sacred teachings. Sacred Teachings told by Nanabooshoo, our spiritual teacher sent down to us by the creator to guide us through trying times with sacred legends.

Wahbung – Anung is drama: “Amplify” a 13 part Indigenous Music series; “Urban Native Girl” a 13 part doc series with Lisa Charleyboy, searching for her identity through the passion of fashion and Indigenous Arts; Heritage Minutes; on Treaty 9 and Charlie Wenjack; “13 Stories About Love” (drama series for CHUM/TV); “Cowboys and Indians” (CBC/APTN M.O.W.); “Skins” (2004 Feature Film with Chris Eyre); over 300 hours of T.V. product (CHUM, APTN, Craig Broadcasting & CBC); “Lost Dreaming” (APTN/TVNZ/Maori TV); “Wassa Inabidaa – We Look In All Directions” (APTN/PBS, winner of 5 Emmy Awards); “Kitohcekiw – One Who Makes Music” (APTN, Aboriginal Music Award doc winner); “Sparkle – An Evening with Andrea Menard” (APTN, Gemini Nominee 2011); “Path of Souls” (2012 Feature Film); “Kaha:wi – The Cycle of Life” (APTN, in production); and “Frenchie” (Original Feature Film -Script Ready).

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Kathryn Fasegha

Producer

BalminGilead Movie Productions (Canada) LTD

Kathryn is an award-winning filmmaker based in Calgary, Alberta. Her first feature film "Treacherous Heart" Premiered at Cineplex Chinook Centre, Calgary in 2012. Written and directed by Kathryn, Treacherous has been screened at various cinemas and venues across Canada, as well as in festivals like Black Women Film Festival Atlanta and Reelworld Film Festival, Toronto. The film was nominated for awards in several categories at the Nollywood and African Film Critics' Awards (NAFCA) in 2012 and won the award of "Best Drama in Diaspora".

Kathryn's second feature film "2 Weeks in Lagos" premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2019 and screened at the Pan African International Film Festival, Los Angeles and the New York African Diaspora International Film Festival, New York. "2 Weeks in Lagos" opened in Cinemas across West Africa in February 2021 and made its Netflix debut in July 2021. "2 Weeks in Lagos" was nominated for an AMAA (Africa Movie Academy Awards) 2020 award for "Best film by an African Living abroad". Kathryn has a feature film "2 Weeks in Calgary" and a TV comedy series "NAICANA: My Nigerian Father" currently in development.

Kathryn is an Alumni of the OYA Black Arts Coalition (OBAC) Scale Up Business Bootcamp Program 2022; the Alberta Producer Accelerator program 2022/2023; and currently participating in the BSO - DGC Black Women Directors Accelerator Program 2023

Kathryn is a Theatre Arts graduate who started out writing and directing drama for television in Nigeria's entertainment industry of the late eighties. She is the Film Coordinator for African Women Acting (AWA), Toronto, Canada; She is also a member of Film Fatales Canada; the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers (CSIF), Women in Film and Television Toronto (WIFTT), Women in Film and Television Alberta (WIFTA) and the current president of Black Actors and Film Guild Canada, Alberta chapter. Kathryn received the "Global Woman of Vision" Award from Global TV, Calgary, in June 2012.

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Atefeh Khademolreza
Filmmaker

Atefeh Khademolreza is an award-winning writer and director born in Iran and living in Toronto, Canada with over fifteen years of experience making films internationally. She studied under the late maestro, Abbas Kiarostami before immigrating to Canada. Atefeh's films have been screened at prestigious film festivals around the world, including the Berlin International Film Festival, Busan International Film Festival, and the Vienna International Film Festival. Atefeh is the 2021-2022 Filmmaker-in-Residence at the Toronto International Film Festival's (TIFF'21) Micki Moore Residency. She is also an alumnus of the Berlinale Talent Campus (2006), the Asian Film Academy (2008), the Serbia Interaction Film Camp (2006, 2016), and Reelworld E20 (2019). She also served as a jury member on multiple festivals including the Oscar-qualifying Tehran International Short Film Festival and TIFF'22's Micki Moore Residency selection committee. Atefeh is driven to tell stories about women, immigration, and identity. Her work explores the experiences of disorientation and reorientation, both culturally and socially. Atefeh holds a Master's Degree in Film Production from York University (2019) and she is a member of the Writers Guild of Canada and a member of the Iranian Short Film Association (ISFA).

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Sibel Guvenc

Director | Writer | Producer

Kybele Films

Sibel Guvenc is an internationally acclaimed Turkish director, writer, and producer based in Toronto with over thirty film awards and nominations at international film festivals including the 2019 Humanitarian Award Honourable Mention. Sibel immigrated to Canada in 1998 from Turkey. With a unique background in visual arts and music, Sibel has an MFA in Film from York University, an Honours BFA in Integrated Media/Film from OCAD University, and High Honours BFA in Statistics. Sibel is a TIFF Filmmakers Lab, and WIDC Director Alumna (Women In the Director's Chair). Her environmental feature drama project, LOYA, received Telefilm Canada production funding in 2023 as well as development funding in 2021 and was shortlisted to 100 original independent feature film projects amongst 10,000 applications for the NETFLIX Canadian Pitch Day. With LOYA, Sibel was selected for the Telefilm-supported 2021 JETS co-production market that takes place at Berlinale, the 2020 Whistler Film Festival (WFF) Producers Lab and WFF Power Pitch presented by NETFLIX in association with Telefilm, Creative BC and CMPA. Sibel's short film, End of the Rope (2020), premiered at the world-known 38th Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival. In addition, it received Best Sci-Fi Film awards at festivals from Beverley Hills to Houston with additional screenings from San Francisco to Moscow. Turkish Mesir Macunu (2019) was officially selected, awarded, and nominated in international film festivals in Canada (7 nominations), Chile, Turkey, India, Romania, and the U.S. among others. In her futuristic dramas and absurd comedies in film and TV, Sibel Guvenc explores social justice issues, women empowerment, and the future of science and the environment.

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Rouzbeh Heydari

Director | Writer

Culture and Cinema

Born in Iran, raised in Canada, Rouzbeh Heydari has been directing, producing, writing, and editing award winning content for over a decade. His latest feature film Neon Lights, starring Sons of Anarchy star Kim Coates was released by Entertainment One and is available on NETFLIX in the US and Canada. Rouzbeh has written and directed 5 short films that have all screened at many international film festivals and have won various awards. Rouzbeh's first full length fiction film, Together Again was filmed in Iran and had incredible box office success inside the country, but due to its sensitive/social-political subject matter was not allowed by the Iranian government to be screened internationally. A Hundred Lies is Rouzbeh's next film starring Rob Raco (Netflix's Riverdale), Humberly Gonzalez (Netflix's Ginny & Georgia) and Brandon McKnight (The Flash) is currently in post production. Rouzbeh also just directed two episodes of A Ghost Ruined My Life created by Eli Roth, being released on Discovery+ in 2023.

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Sina Sultani

Producer

Photocell Productions

SINA SULTANI is a writer, director, producer with selections from the Oscar-qualifying LA Shorts Fest and the CSA-qualifying Reykjavik International Film Festival. He recently participated in the Whistler Film Festival Producers Lab, CMPA's delegation to the EFM in Berlin and was just selected for Paul Feig and Sameer Gardezi's Break The Room initiative. Serving as a Production Manager on films including Guardians of the Galaxy: Volume III and Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse demonstrates his studio level script-to-screen experience.

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Bruce Thomas Miller

Writer | Director | Producer

Inc.nation

Bruce Thomas Miller is an Anishinaabe Cree from Matachewan First Nation in Treaty 9 territory. He was raised in various Northern Ontario communities but is now based in Calgary, Alberta on Treaty 7 territory.

Bruce is a writer/director/producer and participated in the imagineNATIVE Originals commission program in which he created his short film "Conviction" which had its world premiere at imagineNATIVE in October 2022. The film has since screened at Red Nation Film Festival, American Indian Film Festival, Garifuna Film Festival and Whistler Film Festival. The short "Conviction" is a proof of concept for a feature and has since received a development grant for the first draft, which is currently in progress. Bruce is in pre-production for his next fiction short "Skylar's Comet" which is funded by TelusStoryhive's 2022 Indigenous Storytellers Edition. The film will be going into production this spring and will be released in late 2023 on the festival circuit, then available on the Telus cable channel late 2024.

Bruce entered the film industry years ago but due to a lack of support and opportunities he was deterred from pursuing his career aspirations of being a filmmaker. He worked as a front-line social worker at Canada's largest homeless shelter for the past 15 years. The lessons he learnt during this time have made him a better person and will be used in every aspect of life moving forward. He wants to make heartfelt stories that will resonate with all people while building opportunities with his productions and bringing more diversity to the film industry.

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Jerry Wolf
Writer | Director
Cinethetica

Jerry Wolf is a filmmaker of both Waywayseecappo First Nation and Vietnamese heritage. He is known for his imaginative and thought-provoking stories that explore themes of survival and resilience. His visual style is characterized by dreamlike and surreal imagery, often with a hint of the macabre.

Jerry is the founder of CINETHETICA, a boutique production company that specializes in producing short films, webisodes, and music videos that showcase the talent of a culturally diverse group of young actors. With over 20 credits to his name as a writer and director, Jerry is establishing himself as an up and coming creative force in the industry.

Jerry was invited to speak at the Indigenous Screen Summit in 2022. He is currently working on two feature film projects, both of which he plans to direct, and has received funding support from Telefilm Canada and the Indigenous Screen Office.

His films have been screened at the Skoden Film Festival, Asinabka Film & Media Arts Festival, Caribbean Tales International Film Festival, and the Reelworld Film Festival.

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Sheldon Shaw

Film Producer

Potential Films Inc

Producer/Director, Sheldon Shaw, created his production company Potential Films Inc.

His international success with the documentary This Is For Toronto was distributed to AMC Networks and streamed on ALLBLK formerly known as Urban Movie Channel.

Drawn to implementing a sense of a story when producing and directing various commercial projects for racially diverse brands, Sheldon pivoted to developing unscripted and scripted personal stories that represent diverse voices.

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Stephen Young-Chin

Producer

Cricket Nation Production Ltd.

Producer/Director Stephen Young-Chin is a York University Film Production graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours degree and with over 30 years of experience in the film and television industry. Stephen has worked in post-production as an editor, an Avid Certified Service Representative, a non-linear editing consultant, and a facility owner. In post-production, Stephen has delivered over 1,000 hours of programming for demanding clients including Mercedes Benz, Sony, Kraft Foods, CIBC, TrizecHahn Corporation, Barrick Gold, Wunderman Advertising, CBC, IMAX, Miramax Films, Walt Disney Studios, Paramount Pictures, Lionsgate, Alliance/Atlantis, HBO, Bravo, Turner Broadcasting, Entertainment One and Showtime Networks.

Stephen has produced and directed films for Canadian broadcasters such as Rogers Broadcasting. Stephen is currently producing an unscripted series based on his short film, "Hurricane Loggers", that he wrote, produced, and directed. He has experience working with Canada's most significant funding agencies and has recently received development funding from Telefilm Canada and the Canada Media Fund to complete a feature-length film project.

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Adrian Neblett

Actor | Producer

Adrian Neblett Productions

Born in Montreal, to Claude and Pamela Neblett, who had emigrated from Barbados in the late 60s, Adrian has been a Vancouver-based actor and producer for over 10 years. His acting credits include Snowpeircer, Riverdale, Supernatural, Fringe, and more. His first short film as a producer, Wytch Craft, was accepted into over 40 film festivals around the world. Since then, Adrian has produced a number of short films that have punched way above their weight class. Adrian champions both stories of those with similar origins to himself, and other marginalized peoples to celebrate the humanity that binds us all.

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Jennifer Holness

President

Hungry Eyes Media Inc.

Jen Holness is a happy workaholic. She writes, produces, and directs. She is the first Black woman to win a Canadian Screen Award (Gemini) for best writing and is the 2021 Indiescreen Producer of the Year award-winner. She was also awarded the prestigious WIFT Award of Creative Excellence in March 2022.

Her feature documentary, *Subjects of Desire*, premiered at SXSW, followed by Hot Docs where it was a Top Ten Audience Favourite. It also won a Best Documentary film award at SFBFF, DCBFF and Tallgrass. SOD aired on Starz in the US and TVO in 2022. It is a TIFF 2021 Top Ten Film. Jen co-created the doc series *BLK: An Origin Story for History and Global* that tells epic stories of little known Black Canadian history that premieres February 26, 2022.

She also co-produced *Stateless* (2020 Hot Docs Special Jury Prize). Her narrative feature films that she produced include *Home Again* and *Love, Sex and Eating the Bones*. Both films have won numerous festival awards, including the Best First Feature Film Award at TIFF for *Bones*.

Jen is a Founder of the Black Screen Office and Co-Chair of CISF. She's a CMPA board member and Co-Chair of the REDIAC Action Committee for the organization.

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Carmen Bachez
Producer

Carmen Bachez began her career in 2012, after graduating from the Digital Media and IT program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT). Since then, she's worked on 5 seasons of television including, the award-winning drama series BLACKSTONE (APTN/CBC/NETFLIX/AMAZON PRIME) and the procedural crime drama, TRIBAL (APTN/CBC/WILDBUNCH).

She was recently nominated for Best Web Series at the 2022 Alberta Film & Television Awards and was winner of Best Cinematography at the 2014 24/One Edmonton Film Festival. She is a member of the Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA) and Women in Film and Television – Alberta (WIFTA).

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Vanessa Mitchell

Producer

Madden & Mitchell Media Inc.

Vanessa Mitchell is a producer, creator and the co-founder of Madden & Mitchell Media Inc. who regards art as activism. Her background in advocacy, youth mentoring and supporting underserved racialized families; propels Vanessa to develop content that authentically represents these diverse stories and communities.

Vanessa is currently producing and developing three projects on MMM's slate. In co-production with Hungry Eyes Media, a limited drama TV series THAT LONESOME ROAD explores the largely untold stories of Black Canadian Freedom Fighters; Viola Desmond and Carrie Best writing by award winning author Lawrence Hill. Her second, BAKED GOODS is a serialized drama/comedy that dives into the impacts of marginalization and legalization of cannabis on a racially diverse community in Scarborough. Her third project is a mystical realism feature film, A FARM ON BLUE MOUNTAIN.

Vanessa is an alumnus of the Reelworld Producers and E20 programs, Banff Spark and OYA Scale Up Business Bootcamp.

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Neha Kohli

Screenwriter | Actor

Company

Neha Kohli is an Indian-Canadian screenwriter, actor, improviser and ex-accountant. Her original comedy-drama, *The Magnificents*, is in development with WildBrain. Recently, Neha was a Staff Writer on season 2 of FloQast's PBC (with Danny Trejo, Kate Flannery and Creed Bratton). Neha was selected as part of the 2023 Warner Bros. Discovery Access Canada Mid-Level Writers Room and has written for shows in development and production by companies like Shaftesbury, BBC Kids, Epic Story Media, WildBrain and Cartoon Network. She has performed sketch comedy for TEDxToronto and also co-wrote and co-starred in the critically acclaimed Toronto Fringe Show *Woke 'N Broke*. Neha will appear in the upcoming feature *Suze* starring SNL alum Michaela Watkins. Although she quit her job as an accountant to pursue her dreams of not being an accountant, Neha is passionate about financial literacy and recently designed a course for Toronto Metropolitan University called "Financial Management for Creatives".

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Abdul Malik

Screenwriter

Fae Pictures

Abdul Malik is a Canadian-Pakistani screenwriter based out of Toronto and Edmonton. He dropped out of film school to pursue the political, spending his twenties working in the labor movement, participating in worker struggles across Canada as an organizer and photojournalist. Abdul returned to the film industry, starting as the co-writer of the Telefilm-funded PEACE BY CHOCOLATE, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Recently, Abdul's written on Season Three of CTV's TRANSPLANT, the upcoming Telefilm-funded feature QUEEN TUT, and was Co-Executive Producer on the upcoming Super Channel digital series STREAMS FLOW FROM A RIVER, which was one of 14 selected for 2023's Canneseries. He recently signed a first-look deal with Neshama Entertainment and has a bevy of projects in development with companies such as Counterfeit Pictures, Shaftesbury, Husk Media, Lark Productions, and Circle Blue Entertainment. Abdul is a member of the Writers Guild of Canada and recent graduate of the CFC's Bell Media Prime Time TV Program. He freelances as a journalist covering the intersection of sports and politics, with work carried in publications across the world.

Abdul is represented by META Talent Agency in Canada, and Rain Management Group in the United States.

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Brishkay Ahmed

Writer | Producer

Digital Warriors Productions Inc.

Brishkay Ahmed is an Afghan-Canadian writer and producer. She began her narrative career writing and directing episodic drama for Tolo TV and RTA in Afghanistan. In Canada, she's recognized for her Reelworld 2021 Outstanding Feature winner - *In the Rumbling Belly of Motherland* - and the Canadian Screen Award-nominated short *Fatima In Kabul*. Brishkay Ahmed is an alumnus of the Canadian Film Centre's 2022 Writers' Lab.

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Richard Young

Writer | Actor

Off2Kali Media

From a South Asian (Indo-Caribbean) background, Richard Young is a Canadian Screen Award nominated screenwriter and actor based out of Toronto. Writing credits include "Overlord and the Underwoods" (CBC/Nickelodeon), "Dino Ranch" (CBC/Disney+), "16 Hudson" (TV0), "Sudden Master" (OMNI) and "Maternal" (CBC Reflections). His sci-fi thriller "Exalt" was optioned by Frantic Films, and his writing accolades include Coverfly RED List, ScreenCraft Sci-Fi and Fantasy Screenwriting Competition Finalist/Honorable Mention, JFL ComedyPRO Pitch Finalist and Austin Film Festival Screenplay Semifinalist.

Richard's screen acting credits include "Transplant" (NBC), "Jett" (Cinemax), and "Kim's Convenience" (CBC). His stage acting credits include "Network" (Citadel/Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre) and three productions of "The New Canadian Curling Club" (Thousand Islands Playhouse, Western Canada Theatre, Alberta Theatre Projects). He serves as an AFBS Governor and served as the ACTRA Toronto Treasurer, focusing on diversity and inclusion. Before disappointing his immigrant parents by pursuing the arts, Richard earned a BSc. (Honours) in Psychology (Queen's University) and an MBA (York University: Schulich).

Richard's Artist Statement: I exist in the in-between: A brown guy who grew up in Canada's white suburbs, earned a BSc. and MBA before becoming a screenwriter/actor, and writes both comedy and speculative fiction because of how these genres critique society. As a way to meld my disparate parts, I love writing characters forced to navigate two worlds, be it different cultures, workplaces or even planets. By writing stories that remix "marginalized" with "mainstream" narratives, I strive to create unique yet relatable concepts, pulling viewers in to open their hearts and minds.

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Ebonie Roberge

Producer

Nomad Production

After participating in The Amazing Race Canada, Ebonie quit her job and left her hometown in Quebec to create her first web series: Génération Nomade (Nomad Generation in French) This gave her the opportunity to learn on the spot and combine her passions of traveling, directing, and storytelling. She met nomads from across the world and was trying to showcase how it was possible to travel and make the world our playground instead of being chained to a desk. The series grew into an instant success and generated over 3 million views. The series was self-produced and Ebonie became an expert at landing major sponsorship deals. Recently, she produced her first snowboard movie: Night Riders in collaboration with Moment Factory. This is the first snowboard movie made entirely in the dark and backcountry in Quebec. the film premiered at the IF3 International Mountain Film Festival in October 2022. Her mission is now to create an English version of Nomad Generation for a TV format instead of the web.

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Christine Rodriguez

Screenwriter

Productions La Tigresse

Christine Rodriguez is a screenwriter from Montréal who creates from a mixed-race, Afro-Trinidadian perspective as a means to explore identity and self-expression in an ever-changing, multicultural world. She's the recipient of two Rogers – Black Screen Office development grants to write TV pilots. Her debut short film, Fuego, which she wrote, directed and produced in English, French and Spanish, was an official selection at festivals in Toronto, the US and France including the 2021 American Black Film Festival. The film earned her a nomination for Filmmaker of the year by Gala Dynastie. She also earned a coveted spot in the first cohort of the Warner Bros. Discovery Access x Canadian Academy Writers Program to write a feature version of Fuego. Christine is an award-winning playwright whose most recent work, Simone, Half and Half, was published in October 2022 by Playwrights Canada Press. An alumna of the Norman Jewison Writers' Lab at the Canadian Film Centre, Christine also holds a Certificate of Professional Screenwriting from UCLA and an MBA from McGill University.

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Sean Kalra

Director

Festic Films

Sean Kalra is an award-winning Indian-Canadian filmmaker whose career as a visual effects artist features work in the academy-winning film *Dune* (2021), the *Star Wars* series, *Obi Wan Kenobi* (2022), and as on-set VFX Supervisor for upcoming *Dark Horse* series, *Grendel*. His latest project in a writer-director role was met with acclaim for 'Just Break Away,' winning awards at multiple festivals, including Gold at the 43rd Annual Telly Awards, and official selection at the Berlin Commercial Festival.

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Maia Jae Bastidas

Creator | Actress

Maia Jae Bastidas

Maia Jae Bastidas has worked as an actress in the entertainment industry since the age of 3. In 2004, Maia landed a lead role in "Superbabies: Baby Geniuses 2", alongside Jon Voight. Maia's career expands to film, television, commercial and voiceover for major networks.

As of 2023, Maia will star in Keifer Sutherland's new thriller series "Rabbit Hole" for Paramount Plus and on the Emmy-Award nominated "The Boys" spin-off series for Amazon Prime titled "Gen-V". More recent credits include Lucianna Rodriguez on CBS's "Ransom", Amber on Apple TV's "In the Dark", and a Guest Star role in Taylor Sheridan's drama series "Mayor of Kingstown" for Paramount Plus starring along Academy Award nominee, Jeremy Renner.

In 2016, the Toronto International Film Festival's NextWave Showcase premiered Maia's short film "Thumbs" highlighting emerging directors and creators. Maia has worked as a Production Coordinator for Canadian Screen Award winner and nominee, Michelle Melanson and Ken Cuperus at Headspinner Productions. In 2021, Maia was named the winner of the Youth Media Alliance Andra Sheffer Scholarship and acted as a jury member for their renowned Youth Media Alliance awards. She was also a finalist to the HXOUSE - LIFE program. In 2022, she was selected into BANFF World Media Festival's Spark program celebrating trailblazing women in the business of media. In 2022 Maia was also given the "Best Performance" honorable mention for her lead role in the short, "Wildflower" at Vancouver Short Film Festival.

Maia is a recent graduate from Ryerson's RTA Media School, with honors on the Dean's list, a major in Media Business, and a minor in Spanish. Maia is represented by Insight Entertainment (Los Angeles), The Characters Talent Agency (Toronto) and Lauren Levitt & Associates (Vancouver) for her acting career as she continues to dive further into the director/creator/producer/writer roles as well.

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Erynne Michelle Gilpin

Educator | Film-maker

UATÉ STORIED LEARNING

Educator. Land-Based Wellness. Film-maker. Rock-Climber and Mother of Métis (The Pás/Duck Bay MB; Member of the Manitoba Métis Federation), Filipina and Celtic ancestry based between Canada and Brazil.

Founder and organizer of Indigenous Women Climb, Gilpin works to support place-based leadership through land-based learning, film-based storytelling and self-determined creative representation. Fluent speaker of English, French, Portuguese and Spanish, Erynne is dedicated to inter-cultural and Inter-National Indigenous leadership via pathways of self-determination, creative resurgence and knowledge mobilization. With a Doctorate in Indigenous Governance and Post-Doctorate Fellowship within the realm of Indigenous wellness and leadership, Gilpin's work focuses on Indigenous leadership, wellness and Land-based family health.

Currently, Gilpin is a community-based educator and co-director of film-production company UATÉ STORIED LEARNING.

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Ryan Atimoyoo

Writer

Gear Room Productions

Ryan is a Cree, Native American from Little Pine Reserve as well as an international award winning writer/director within the Vancouver filmmaking community. He has studied at New York's Circle in the Square Theater School and holds a Joint MFA in Screenwriting and Film Production from The University of British Columbia as well as graduating from Netflix's Pacific Screenwriting Program in 2021.

He has gathered numerous international awards, grants and has worked in the industry on various projects ranging from Batman vs Superman, Fast & The Furious 7, Fear The Walking Dead, The Magicians and more.

In 2021, Ryan completed his first sci-fi, VR short film titled "Chord VR" which screened at VIFF, and worked on S1 of Netflix's "Grendel" as a Script Coordinator. In 2022, he was a winner of Access Reelworld's competition to join the writer's room for City TV's "Hudson and Rex" S5 series and was a finalist for the NBC Launch Program.

In 2023, Ryan won a \$20K grant to complete a script and is a semi-finalist for the FOX incubator program and has recently finished his first staffing gig as an Executive Story Editor on the Paramount + series "Skymed" S2.

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Sam Karney

Producer | Director

Ice River Films

Sam Karney is a Métis-Ukrainian filmmaker from Winnipeg and co-founder of Ice River Films. He started his career working as a television photojournalist in newsrooms across Manitoba and Saskatchewan. He began producing documentaries for Global New's magazine program "Everything Manitoba" in 2012 and has since gone on to produce documentaries and factual series for APTN and CBC. Sam has currently produced 25 hours of factual television for the Canadian market and has sold programming to France, Australia and the United States.

In addition to producing, Sam has worked as a director of photography on programs for the likes of Smithsonian, Amazon Prime & the NHL Network.

Having worked in small teams and with smaller budgets, Sam has learned almost every job that is needed to make good documentary television. He has produced, directed, shot, edited, done sound, coloured and appeared on camera all in the last 10 years.

Sam hopes to one day expand into producing history documentaries and series.

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Ritchie Hemphill

Filmmaker

Bronfree Films

Ritchie Hemphill grew up on Tsulquate reserve and was raised by his community, the Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw people. He is currently living on Coast Salish territory on Vancouver Island, Canada. Ritchie is both a filmmaker and a recording musician, working to create art that is healing for himself and for his people. Ritchie co-founded the award-winning stop motion animation film studio Bronfree Films with his film partner Ryan Haché in 2015, and have since produced a number of short films that include Indigenous legends, language revitalization and Elder storytelling. Ritchie has an integral role in producing, directing, designing, composing for and marketing films with Bronfree Films. The studio's short film "Məca," recently won the Indigenous Language Production Award from imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival (2022), and was nominated for Best Animated Short at the American Indian Film Festival (2022). Ritchie's goal is to render his people's traditional stories in a beautiful light through his films.

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Priyanka Desai

Producer | Director
Jugaad Sisters Inc.

Jugaad Sister Priyanka Desai is an award-winning broadcast journalist-turned-TV producer specializing in stories that impact and entertain. Born and raised in Mumbai, India, Priyanka is known for her understanding of diverse cultures across two continents. In Canada, her credits include a variety of producing roles for the likes of TELUS Originals, Storyhive, APTN, Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and AMI. Through her company, Jugaad Sisters, which she co-founded with Jugaad Sister Joanna Wong, her goal is to enable immigrant women of colour to achieve professional excellence in Canada.

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Derek Luis

Producer | Director
Venture Vision

Derek Luis, an accomplished Producer/Director, has created content for leading Media Companies (Quebecor/SUN Media, CBC, CTV, Global, TVO, S-Vox, SLICE, OMNI, APTN, NFB, and A&E). He's the Producer of "Love's a Gamble", a made-for-tv movie (CHUM, Telefilm, CMF), broadcast on Citytv and Bravo. He's developing a documentary on Black/Indigenous Canadian Basketball Hall of Fame and Olympian Tony Simms – who's childhood dream led him all the way to the NBA. He's collaborating with an Indigenous team developing content on the Red River Resistance Movement. He has diverse feature, scripted and unscripted projects he's pitching.

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Fennella Bruce

Producer

FKB Media Productions Inc.

A veteran television producer and writer, Fennella Bruce is now at the helm of FKB Media Solutions and FKB Media Productions Inc – a media consulting business and media production house.

Having worked in the field of journalism for over 20 years, Fennella has produced both of Canada's national morning shows – Your Morning and Canada AM. She has been the senior writer or producer at numerous major market television stations including: CTV News Channel, CTV National, CP24, CityTv, Toronto 1 and BET.

For six years, Fennella taught Media Theory at Centennial College and has also served on journalism boards and on many critique juries, including the Canadian Screen Awards and The New York Festivals International TV Broadcasting Awards and recently joined the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences as juror for the Juno Awards. She has her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Toronto and her Bachelor of Applied Arts in Journalism from Toronto Metropolitan University, formerly Ryerson University.

Fennella volunteers her time and expertise with Dr. Roz's Healing Place – a centre that aids women and children escaping from violent situations. She served as Vice-President of the Board of Directors and was a Board member for the past four years. She is currently the Vice-President of the Foundation Board of Women in Film and Television.

Fennella was recently named the 2022 Businesswoman of the Year by the Women Empowerment Awards and is one of 2020's 100 Accomplished Black Canadian Women.

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Mostafa Shaker

Creator | Writer | Actor

Yalla Productions

Mostafa Shaker is a comedian, writer, actor and producer based out of Vancouver, BC who started his artistic pursuit in Cairo, Egypt as a theatre actor and on-stage performer. In 2018, Mostafa transitioned from an 8 year career in marketing communications into Films and TV; to pursue his dream of telling stories for global audiences. Growing up in the theatre, he's acted in more than 20 productions both in Canada as well as Egypt. Notable plays include: A Comedy of Tenors, Cats the Musical and Beauty and the Beast. Mostafa has also acted in over 30 independent short and feature length Canadian films, including Is This A Date, winner of best comedy at the 2020 Florence Film Awards.

As a writer, He has worked as a junior writer on the Oprah Network's The Real Houses of... and the Canadian TV show Family Law. He has also written and produced over 60 commercials, 10 independent shorts, and a limited web series called Thank you for Ghosting. Mostafa has been expressing his comedic artistic voice through projects that reflect his experience as a queer Arab immigrant. He's been part of the 2022 Netflix BANFF Diversity of Voices Program, Whistler Film Festival Writers Lab, Creative BC's Equity and Emerging Development Program, Reelworld E20 Program and the NSI Series Incubator. Mostafa is currently in development at Bell Media (Crave) for a half hour comedy series based on his own life trying to find the balance between Muslim & Arabic VS. Queer & Canadian.

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Ian Mark Kimanje

Director | Producer

Film Garage North

Canadian/Ugandan, Writer, Director/Producer who prides himself in being a product of mentorship from mostly powerful women, from his own mom.

He has a multitude of experience in Product Marketing, Commercial branding and Content Production. Over his years in the industry, he has worked in Africa, Australia, Europe and North America, and has directed and produced content for the likes of Mnet Africa, Facebook, Heineken beer, Microsoft and many broadcasters such as National Geographic, PBS, TVO, and his 2020 film, "lockdown baby" for CBC and currently Directing / producing a Feature length Documentary for TVO

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Jon Chiang

Producer
Chifa Studios

Jon is a commercial director and founding principal at Chifa Studios. His work reveals the universal stories of underrepresented people with honesty and reverence. Raised by Chinese parents born in Lima, Peru, he developed a sensitivity that he uses to capture the truths about our shared experiences. His films have screened at the Vancouver Asian Film Festival, AAIF Festival, Reel Asian and VIMFF.

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Stephen Gladue
Art Director

Born and raised on the Fishing Lake Métis Settlement, Stephen Gladue is a Talented Artist residing in beautiful Vancouver, British Columbia who specializes in Animation and Visual effects for Film, Television and Games. Classically and technically trained at some of the best Art Schools in Canada,

Stephen has made it his careers mission to contribute to the Advancement of Aboriginal production, Not only to be part of it but to be a driving force behind it. As such he has become one of Western Canada's most sought after Indigenous content creators.

Stephen sharpened his base skillsets at the Vancouver film school where he developed a comprehensive understanding of classical Animation, Later devoting time to his technical skills in the 3D Animation, Art and Design program at the Art Institute of Vancouver. Between vocations he took part in the Aboriginal film production program at Capilano College. Only to be asked to return, this time as a guest lecturer. Since then he's guest lectured and provided instruction to hundreds of children when not holding key creative positions in between television projects.

His work has been profiled by the CBC, Graffiti Arts magazines and a variety of other print and digital publications.

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Sage Daniels

Writer | Producer

Code Breaker Films

Sage is an enterprising young man from Winnipeg. For a number of years Sage has been a familiar face on the Winnipeg comedy scene. He has worked as a writer and producer for film and television within Winnipeg. He has worked both as a writer and a producer in several short films, such as: Crash Site, Nosisim, and My Boy. His works have been seen around the world and on broadcast television. He was named the recipient of the Harold Greenburg Fund's Emerging Talent grant, where he will direct his first short film Broken Glass. Recently Sage has written jokes for the new CTV comedy Shelved.

His funny wit and pithy sarcasm has earned him a spot in the heart of the Winnipeg comedy scene. He is always trying to better himself as a comedian and a filmmaker. He seeks out stage time to perfect his voice and writing style, showing a true love for the art of Comedy.

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Christopher Bautista

Producer

Matista Media Ltd

Christopher Bautista is a creative producer, CEO/Founder of Matista Media, and member of I.M.P.A.C.T, the Independent Media Producers Association of Creative Talent. He is also a co-founder of the Union of Black Artists Society, an organization dedicated to supporting and promoting Black artists in Canada. His recent productions include the music video "For the People," and a series of documentary-style shorts in support of the Canadian Black Class Action Project, both aimed at supporting equal treatment for Black workers in Canada. With a distinguished background in theater and film, including appearances in August Wilson's *Fences* and Shakespeare's *Othello*, Christopher's inspiring work continues to uplift audiences worldwide.

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Maissa Houri
Filmmaker

Maissa Houri (she/her) is an Arab-Canadian award-winning independent filmmaker and actor based out of Ottawa, Canada, who attended Montreal's Vanier College Theatre and Film Program. She is passionate about telling stories from the perspective of being an Arab-Canadian. Maissa is the Director of Equity Initiatives for the Digi60 Filmmakers' Festival and prides herself on helping the growth of her local filmmaking community. In a few short years, Maissa has released award-winning web series, short films and has been actively producing, directing and is a full member with ACTRA. Currently, Maissa is working on the development of a new comedy series with GAPC Entertainment based on Arab-Canadians. When she's not on set, you can find her at home with her husband and two young daughters.

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Daniel Berish

Director

Black Rhino Creative

Danny Berish is an award winning documentary film director dedicated to pushing the boundaries of traditional documentary storytelling and co-founder of Black Rhino Creative, a film production company creating captivating content that showcases diverse voices. He was featured at Hot Docs in 2019 for a six-part Indigenous food and travel series entitled Red Chef Revival and again officially selected in 2021 for Nude to Me, which is currently airing on CBC Gem.

In the fall of 2022, Danny Berish premiered his first feature length film Outside In, which explores the science of healthy home design and a five part food and travel series, House Special, which explores Chinese Canadian history through small town Chinese food.

He is currently in production on a feature length documentary chronicling the life of world famous architect Arthur Erickson airing on Knowledge Network and a five part travel series airing on AMI, exploring Canada through the lens of the disabled community.

Past awards include a Leo Award for best direction, Yorktown Film Festival Golden Sheaf Award and Best Doc Series of the year by Doc Weekly.

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Jamie Escallon

Partner
Lulo Films Inc

Based in Toronto, Jaime Escallon-Buraglia is an award-winning Writer, Director, and Showrunner, who has worked across five continents and ten languages. Jaime has directed six feature films, a dozen scripted series, and over a hundred and fifty documentaries, including the Emmy Award-winning *The Cancer Dancer*.

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Léa Geronimo Rondot

Writer | Director

Léa Geronimo Rondot (she/they) is a writer-director raised in a Franco-Québécois, mixed Filipino-Caucasian household, in a small town near Montreal. Now, in Toronto, Léa works on short film projects, writing for television, and developing her own slate of original ideas.

Léa's been selected to many competitive programs, including the BIPOC TV/FILM Showrunner Bootcamp, the Women In The Director's Chair program, Netflix-Banff DOV initiative, the WIFT-T Digital Series Incubator, and the Women On Screen Webserie Incubator.

Most recently they've worked as a writer on S2 of the multi-CSA and Peabody Award-winning series, *Sort Of*, streaming on CBCgem and HBOmax.

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Mariam Barry

Writer | Actor | Producer

Mariam Barry is a biracial filmmaker of Norwegian and African descent. Her creative work as an actor, writer, director and producer is grounded in her experience as a Third Culture Kid. Mariam grew up internationally between the United States, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, and The Netherlands, before moving to Canada as a young adult. This multi-lens ignites Mariam's work as her voice explores what it means to be Black and biracial around the world. Mariam has a BFA in Acting from the University of British Columbia and is an alumni of the VIFF Catalyst Program for up and coming filmmakers. Her filmmaking credits include: "Cypher" (Short doc, Telus Storyhive), "RISE" (Short film, Bakau Consulting Inc), "Legacy" (short film, ETC & Iris Studios), "Yaye" (short film, Studio 104 Entertainment, Harold Greenberg: BC Shorts Program & Creative BC), as well her first feature and a series concept in early development.

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Sashoya Simpson
Writer

Sashoya Simpson is a writer, audiobook storyteller, theatre practitioner and visionary. Her work is highly influenced by her afro-Caribbean heritage in which she shares authentic stories, for all ages, through a variety of mediums. Born in Dalvey, St. Thomas, Jamaica, she was often surrounded by the storytelling, music and chatting sessions of her people which fuels the art she creates today. Her work has been published in Black Solo: Watah Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Monodrama Volumes 1, 2 & 3 as a playwright and in From The Root Zine as a storyteller/poet. She's also the award recipient of the ArtReach Pitch Contest in 2016. Her joy exists in growing, sharing and offering fruits and stories from the land representing our yesterdays, today and the days to come.

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Shazia Javed

Producer

LifeSketch Media

Shazia Javed is the Founder, Producer & Content Creator at LifeSketch Media, a production company that is committed to nuanced storytelling & perspectives from historically marginalised communities. Her documentary, 3 Seconds Divorce streamed worldwide on Netflix, won the Reelworld Audience Choice Award and was invited for impact screenings across the globe. Her docu-short, Namrata was produced by the National Film Board and was a finalist for 3 AMPIA awards. Shazia's work has screened at prestigious film festivals such as Hot Docs, Doxa, MIFF and Durban International among others. She is an alumna of Banff Spark Accelerator for Women in the Business of Media; Reelworld E20; Women in Director's Chair; BIPOC Film & TV Showrunner's bootcamp; and the DOC Breakthrough program where she won the pitch prize sponsored by Rogers Media and CBC. She has garnered support from Canadian and international broadcasters, various arts councils, IPF, CMF and ISO for her projects. Shazia is an inductee of Playback's 10 to watch. She is currently working on a robust slate of projects at Lifesketech Media.

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Kathy-Ann Thomas

Producer

Cotton Bush Productions

Kathy-Ann Thomas is a seasoned film professional with over twenty years of industry experience working on feature films, television, and documentaries. She has strong media and communication skills and is among the few women of colour working in the Quebec film industry. Her film credits include Oscar-winning ARRIVAL, directed by Denis Villeneuve, THE UNITED STATES VS. BILLIE HOLIDAY, directed by Lee Daniels, and TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE BEASTS, directed by Steven Caple Jr. In 2016 Kathy-Ann founded Cotton Bush Productions with a mandate to seek out and develop emerging underrepresented talent of all ages. She creates content with unique, character-driven plots and distinct voices. In 2017 Kathy-Ann produced and wrote the short film SNOW, which aired on CBC.

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Mona Hersi

Writer | Producer

Mona Hersi

Former teacher and ex-banker, Mona Hersi is a layered multi-hyphenate writer-producer-actor-sketch comedian. She draws on her intersectional experiences of being a first generation Somali-Canadian born and bred in Toronto to fuel her writing. Her unique POV and often optimistic tongue-in-cheek observations have contributed to TV writer's rooms and staged productions across Toronto. Her recent credits include writing for comedy series *Abroad* (OMNI TV) and a series in development at A Tokens Entertainment Company. She is currently a resident of the CFC's Bell Media Prime Time TV program first ever comedy cohort and is ¼ of the darling sketch troupe the Don Valley Girls. Mona's next steps are to further develop her 2 original half hour comedies, be staffed in more writer's rooms in production, and to ultimately make a decent living as a multi-hyphenate creative with the financial security acceptable by her immigrant mother.

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Mathias Richard Horhager

Creator | Director | Writer

M.R. Horhager is a Filipino-Canadian creator, director, writer and filmmaker from Toronto, Ontario with over a decade of experience in the animation industry. His work includes directing the award-winning series “Dot.” produced by the Jim Henson Company, working with Sesame Workshop as a director on “Prankster Planet”, and most recently director on two animated specials for live-action sitcoms: a reboot of Norman Lear’s “One Day at a Time” on POPtv/ CBS and an election special for “Black-ish” on ABC/Disney. His current role is Director on Nickelodeon’s “Blues Clues & You” reboot where he was nominated in the “Best Directing Team” category for the 2021 Daytime Emmy Awards.

His past director credits also include the pre-school series “Chirp”, and the Christmas special “The Curse of Clara: A Holiday Tale”, which won a 2017 Canadian Screen Award for “Best Animated Program or Series”.

In addition to his work in broadcast TV, M.R. Horhager is also a prolific creator of original animated content, with multiple projects in various stages of development. He has also written, directed and produced several short films, with many that have appeared in international festivals, including “Extreme Nuts” (2010), “Ball’oons” (2011), “I Hate You Red Light” (2012), “Ringo” (2012), and “Kafka’s Little Fable” (2016). In 2017, he was invited to pitch one of his original projects, “The Distinguished Dinosaurs”, at the acclaimed Annecy International Animated Film Festival.

M.R. Horhager’s varied experience has given him the opportunity to work on shows and develop content that span from the pre-school demographic up to adult. In addition to his many projects, his newest venture is leveraging his strong storytelling ability as a TV writer.

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Randy Quansah

President | Host

Kujo's Kid Zone

Randy Quansah is an HR expert and business instructor, but his most important job is being a father to 5-year-old Olyvia. Seeing a need for children's education to be more inviting and inclusive with greater representation of people of colour and diverse culture, Randy co-created "Kujo's Kid Zone (KKZ)" to produce quality learning videos and educational materials for preschoolers and their parents. The goal is to also promote BIPOC representation including Kujo, a fun, smart and friendly Black, bilingual Canadian host.

Kujo, in Ghanaian culture, refers to a boy who is born on a Monday, the fresh start of the week. And like Mondays, Kujo always looks at things with a fresh outlook. Kujo believes that questions are the way children explore the diverse world around them and become who they are meant to be - so he loves nothing more than to help them find answers. With his trademark red glasses, cool hair, and African dashiki, he brings a curious and fun approach to learning while embracing and celebrating differences.

The show promotes diversity, unity, respect and self-love, encouraging acceptance of differences and the opportunity to expand a child's ideas about the world. In 2021, KKZ received funding from Shaw Rocket Fund to update its show concept. Hey, Kujo! was developed as an updated version, which takes place in a diverse and bustling community centre with some familiar faces and new friends.

Kujo's Kid Zone (KKZ) has been nominated for The Calgary Black Chambers Achievement Award - Received The Telus Story Hive, Shaw Rocket Fund and Federal Government funding - Recognized as one of Calgary's Top 20 Calgarians (Calgary Herald January 2021) - Received the KidSafe Seal (Shaw Rocket Fund) - Safe for child viewing - Kujo's Kid Zone is featured on KiDoodle.tv & Sensical TV featuring kid-safe, child focused platform with over 100M views monthly in over 140 countries).

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Eva Grant

Filmmaker

Tooth & Nail Pictures

Eva Grant (she/they) is a bilingual filmmaker and dreamer of protopian futures, operating at the intersection of queer and BIPOC storytelling. She is the creator of the Indigiheist series Degrees of Separation, the short film Minus-1, and a guest director on Couleurs du Nord season 2. With dynamic bouts in academics, curation, literature, art, and performance, Eva's work is influenced by fantasy, technology, mythology, death, love, and her mixed St'at'imc Indigenous, South and West Asian, and European heritage. She is a Vancouver Queer Film Festival Disruptor fellow, an Art Gallery of Ontario Artist-in-Residence (working with Artificial Intelligence to create an art film), and the host of the CBC docuseries pilot Dark Arts, profiling experimental artists in Victoria, BC. She is an alumna of the Blood in the Snow Film Festival's Horror Development Lab, ReelWorld Emerging20 program, BIPOC TV & Film's Episodic Writers Lab, and Whistler Film Festival's Indigenous Fellowship. Her work has been supported by TELUS STORYHIVE, the Independent Production Fund, the Canada Media Fund, the Indigenous Screen Office, CBC, and Creative BC. She studied literature and philosophy at Stanford University.

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Kanja Chen

Owner

Chensational Productions, Inc

Kanja Chen is a creative producer, writer, educator and puppeteer, who has worked on numerous high profile television productions. He's been formally trained by The Jim Henson Company, Sesame Street Workshop and has taught at the Second City Training Centre in Toronto. Kanja is multi-racial (black/asian father and white mother), and is heavily influenced by his Jamaican heritage, being co-raised by his Jamaican grandmother and family.

Kanja's most recent achievement as a puppeteer was performing on the highly anticipated reboot of the Fraggle Rock franchise, airing on AppleTV+. Other recent works include Kanja as a writer and educational consultant on The Fabulous show with Fay & Fluffy, a pre-school show for Family Channel Jr. and recently being hired as a freelance writer for Dodo Kids. He's worked as a puppeteer/builder on Odd Squad (PBS), and was the head of the Puppet and Creature Department for "Oh Yuck!", a Canadian-Australian co-production currently airing on Amazon Prime.

Kanja was honoured to recently been chosen as a semi-finalist, in the Ottawa International Animation Festival's Pitch This! Contest. He also placed top two, at the Toronto Animation Artist Festival International, pitching his original content. In addition he was selected to be a participant in the BIPOC TV and Film "Writing for Kids TV" Intensive and was selected as one of the twenty-five Fellows at the 2022 Banff Media World Conference Pitch Program. Kanja currently resides in Burlington Ontario, with his wife, his three awesome kids and a room filled with puppets and 80's toy collectables.

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Kassia Ward

Animator | Director | Content Creator | Writer

Kassia is an Indigenous animator, content creator, director, and writer from the Enoch Cree First Nation. Her artistic inspiration comes from traveling, nature, vivid dreams, life experiences, and culture. After graduating from VanArts in 2018 with a diploma in 3D character animation, she was selected for the 2019 Hothouse 12 animation apprenticeship with the National Film Board of Canada. She wrote, directed, and animated a 1-minute short entitled "Collector." "Collector" has been shown at film festivals like Imagine Native, Spark Animation, and GIRAF.

In 2020, Kassia became an Indigenous Screen Office/Netflix Indigenous Production Apprenticeship recipient. Through this program, Kassia got to work as an animation intern with E.D. Films, where she worked on her animation skills, started creating digital art, and developed a few projects. In 2021, Kassia received a development grant from the ISO for a project based on her family history. Kassia was also a finalist at the Ottawa Pitch This Competition for creating a live-action/animated limited series entitled "The Stories of our Ancestors." In 2022, she also pitched the animated short "Calling the Buffalo" at Les Sommets Du Cinema d'animation in Montreal. In addition, she participated in the Banff World Media Festival in 2021 and 2022 by being selected for the Banff Diversity of Voices Initiative.

In 2022, Kassia received development grants from the Canada Arts Council, the ISO, and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for research and script development for "The Stories of our Ancestors" and "Calling the Buffalo." She also received a need-based scholarship from the Sundance Collab to take T.V writing: Core Elements, which she used to start working on the pilot episode for the limited series. The outline she created in this class got her into the 2022 national edition of Tricksters & Writers, a Women in Film in Television script writing program. Through this program, Kassia completed a 15-minute script for the short "Calling the Buffalo." She will be moving into phase 2 of the program, where she will work with an editor to ready her script for production.

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Nauzanin Knight

Writer | Director | Producer

1844 Studios

Nauzanin Knight is a Canadian writer, director, producer of Caribbean and Middle Eastern heritage. With a passion for social issues, she creates stories that reflect her unique background and international experiences.

Nauzanin holds an MSc from University College London and is a published writer. She shifted her focus to filmmaking and has since written, directed, and produced a range of films, including “My Lyric I Never Knew,” (American Indian Film Festival; CBC Gem); “Precarity” (TELUS Optik On-Demand); “Notes on Being Un-Popular” (CINEfam/TIFF, the Big Pitch Audience Choice Award Winner 2022). She is in the process of directing “White Sands” (NFB, Development Phase). Outside of her own projects, she held the position of Story Editor on CityTV’s Hudson & Rex Season IV.

Nauzanin has also been recognized by Women in the Director’s Chair, the Whistler Film Festival Doc Lab, and the BANFF Spark Accelerator for Women in the Business of Media, among others. She is a board member and EDI chair of the Alberta Media Production Industries Association and has facilitated workshops to empower Black youth in filmmaking.

As an Executive Producer of 1844 Studios, Nauzanin is dedicated to fostering international artistic collaborations and promoting the universality of human emotions through striking stories. She believes in contributing to the discourse of diversity and inclusion in the film and television industry, having designed and published a guide titled “Building Inclusive Networks in the Film and Television Industry” in 2022.

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Alexander Nunez

Writer | Creator

Border2Border

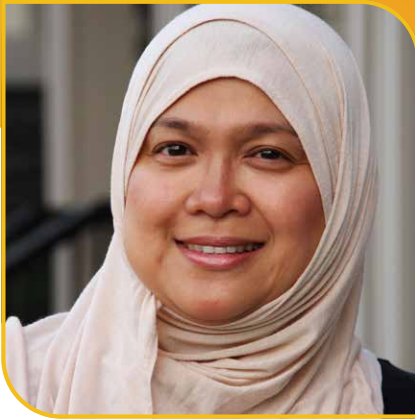
Alexander Nunez is an actor and writer of Jamaican & Chilean descent. He is most well known for his performances in programs like Kim's Convenience (CBC), A Teacher (FX), and Moonshine (CBC). On Moonshine, Alexander both stars as Sammy Finley-Cullen, and works as a writer on the show's third season, currently in development. Alexander's other writing credits include two consecutive seasons of This Hour has 22 Minutes (CBC), and the second season of the multi-award winning series, Avocado Toast The Series (OutTV). For his work on "This Hour", Alexander was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for writing on a sketch comedy/variety series. Alexander's short, titled Diversity Hire (2019), released on October 20th at the 2019 Reelworld Film Festival and has since garnered success at several festivals, including 2020's Just For Laughs Festival. Alexander currently has his own original series, titled Well Versed, under development in partnership with Border2Border Entertainment.

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Flordeliza Dayrit

COO

MuslimKids.TV

I am a founder of MuslimKids.TV a streaming service launched in 2016. I supervise original production and licensing and write, produce and direct multiple TV series and interactive projects every year. MuslimKids.TV is available in over 60 countries spreading messages of love and global citizenship. Find us on web, mobile and Smart TVs.

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Jamila Pomeroy

**Writer | Director | Executive Producer | Founder
RUCKUS Machine Pictures INC.**

Jamila Pomeroy is a Kenyan-Canadian internationally-published writer, a filmmaker and multidisciplinary artist. She is the founder and Executive Producer of Vancouver product and media house, RUCKUS Machine Pictures. Jamila was born in Toronto, Ontario and grew up in New Westminister B.C, before moving to Vancouver B.C. where she still currently resides.

Her experience spans scripted and documentary in both feature and episodic formats; as well as fiction and non-fiction content for print and new media. She has created content for globally-recognized outlets like CBC, BBC, BBC Storyworks, Telus Optik TV, Network Entertainment, Quibi, Showtime, Red Bull Media, Hypebae & Hypebeast, Montecristo Magazine, Nuvo, Chatelaine and many more.

Her writing across all mediums is known to be impact-driven, with immersive worlds that unpack contemporary social issues. Specifically, her work often champions historically underrepresented people and narratives, while generating both accessible and intellectually-charged storylines.

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Giselle Miller

Producer

Orange Rose Productions

Giselle Miller is a Jamaican-Canadian writer, actor and filmmaker living in Vancouver. Giselle fell in love with storytelling early, winning her first writing competition at 13. Five of her feature-length screenplays have placed as quarterfinalists in competitions in the United States and her most recent screenplay *The Great Black North* was a semi-finalist in the Vancouver International Women in Film Festival Screenplay competition.

After completing an MFA in Creative Writing at UBC, she went on to write, produce and direct twelve short films and two seasons of the Leo Award-nominated web series “Young, Single and Black” that follows black millennials as they navigate romance in Vancouver. Giselle also received a Leo Award-nomination for her performance in the series. Earlier this year, Giselle released her second web series “Big People Tingz.”

In 2022, Giselle was a participant in the BIPOC TV&Film Showrunner Bootcamp, the VIFF Catalyst Mentorship Program, and the Women in the Director’s Chair Career Advancement Module. She also completed a Certificate in Film Production at Vancouver Film School. Most recently, Giselle was a participant in the Fiction Toolbox at the European Film Market. Her play *THE SPIRIT HAS TEETH* was selected for the Or Festival and will be presented at the Jericho Arts Centre.

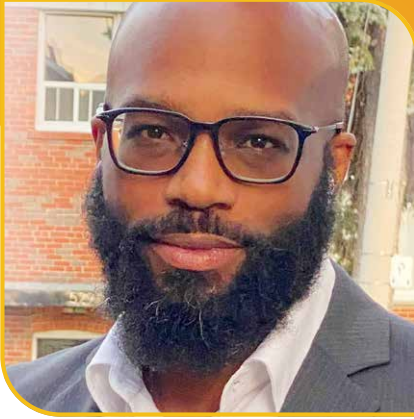
One of the reasons Giselle became a filmmaker was to elevate black female voices in the industry and tell the types of stories that she isn’t seeing on screen so that they reflect complex, nuanced images of black people. Her productions have been featured in the Women of African Descent Film Festival, the Roma Shorts Film Festival and the Reel Q: Pittsburgh LGBTQ+ Film Festival. Giselle is the founder of Orange Rose Productions, a company that focuses on telling stories from black communities.

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Gregory Parkin

Creative Director | President

Billow Blox Inc

Gregory Parkin has helped to create and develop entertainment experiences for some of the world's most loved and celebrated brands. As an artist, writer and studio manager, Gregory's work has influenced such companies as Lucasfilm, NIKE, Toys R Us, DC Comics, Fox Sports, Hasbro, Image Comics, Portfolio Entertainment, Royalty Genius, The Steve Nash Foundation and The Toronto Blue Jays.

With a passion for Comic Art and developing visual marks for businesses and brands, Greg is also a dedicated father of three children that keeps him well connected.

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Tristan Barrocks

Writer | Director

Barrocks INC

Tristan Barrocks is an internationally recognized, award-winning Afro-Canadian commercial and film director located in Toronto. The writer, producer, and director focus on telling human-centred stories. He's been featured on platforms like Henrys Canada, Glossy Inc, and Medium. His film Dear Black Dad, released digitally, has garnered critical acclaim for its authenticity and truth. Wallflower (Webseries 2023), Connecting the Dots (Docuseries 2019), and Mother To Mother (Special 2022) are note-worthy instalments to Tristan's directorial catalogue.

Tristan fuses his acting background and storytelling knowledge to provide a unique perspective to his directing style. He is a seasoned storyteller whose ability to relate to on-screen talent and communicate his creative vision technically to the production team is his secret sauce.

Tristan desires to tell human stories from a Black perspective authentically and meaningfully. Whether as a writer or director, he aims to create inclusive communities where BIPOC creatives thrive.

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Judy (Judith) Iseke

Producer | Director | Writer

Turquoise Sky Entertainment Inc.

Judy Iseke (Métis) is a producer, director, writer, and researcher who began filmmaking as a Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Education (endowed chair/university professor) creating 6 educational documentaries with Métis themes. Drawing on B.Ed, M.Ed, and PhD, her independent film projects focused on sharing community-based storytelling research, engagement, and film and website productions. Her animated and live-action short docs have been shared in educational and community settings, broadcast on Shaw cable, and premiered at film festivals including ImagineNative, Back to Batoche, and Vision Maker.

Judy founded Turquoise Sky Entertainment Incorporated in 2020 to produce Wasi's Adventures - a fun and engaging animated children's comedy series with Cree-Michif language dialogue for language revitalization, inspired by Cree and Métis storytelling. There is an English-language version too. Judy draws upon experiences creating ourelderstories.com - a website sharing 170+ Michif-language Elder stories in creating Wasi's Adventures and her 15+ years of research into Indigenous storytelling practices.

Judy works collaboratively with committed and creative teams and community Elders, storytellers, language specialists, and musicians, as well as sound designer and animators. We focus attention on creative storytelling and engaging children in thoughtful stories that help them explore the world.

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Jean-Yves Roux

**President
Natyf Inc.**

Jean-Yves Roux made his debut in the music industry as a hip-hop artist manager in the middle of the 90's while he was still studying television production at Montreal University. Then in the beginning of the 2000's he started producing music videos. In 2004, he started producing his first TV show named Vibeplus, a music program devoted to Hip-Hop culture produced for the community TV channel MAtv (owned by Quebecor). The years that followed, he devoted himself to the production of music videos, music concerts and distributing albums for local artists (Roi Heenok, Steeve K, Rebecca, Money Riderz, etc.) and international artists (Slai, Joey Starr, La Fouine, etc.). In 2008 Jean-Yves tried to launch an urban music TV channel named Clovys TV after getting its first CRTC license. But Clovys TV never had the chance to get on-air. Ten years later Jean-Yves finally comes back with Natyf TV, a channel dedicated to multicultural programming, on-air since June 2018. Several original TV shows have been produced by its team: Le Spot, Gospelmania, La Pause Hip-Hop, Keke Show, etc.

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José Guayasamin

Filmmaker

Abrazo Ciné

Born in Ecuador, José is a filmmaker oriented towards documentaries about the peripheries of society. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Fine Arts at the Université du Québec en Outaouais and is producing the film *Becoming family* with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

His first feature documentary film, *Carlitos*, was premiered at the BAFICI festival in Argentina and in theatres in Ecuador in 2015. His documentaries have participated in over forty international festivals.

At a young age, he made his debut in the audiovisual world, working with his parents in the production of the series *Ñahui* about the indigenous and black cultures of Ecuador. In 2000, he went to Argentina where he obtained two scholarships to study filmmaking at the Escuela de Subiela and editing at the Escuela Nacional de Cinematografía. Upon his return to Ecuador, he taught film at SEK University, INCINE Institute and in indigenous communities. In 2010, he co-founded La Vérité Films, an audiovisual production company that has produced over 90 episodes for national television. The company won the social relevance award from TAL Television Latin America in 2015.

Starting in 2014, fatherhood led him to search for new horizons, not knowing that this exploration would push him towards a deep and arduous process of transformation that led him to Canada, where he has been living for the past five years.

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Anaëlle Béglet

Producer

Art et essai

After completing her Bachelor's degree in Film Studies at the University of Montreal, Anaëlle joined the team at Apartment 11 Productions, where she assisted producer Jonathan Finkelstein on various youth series. In 2019, she enters the National Institute of Image and Sound (L'Inis) and completes the Cinema programme, production profile. She then joined the Art et Essai team as a producer and developed new series projects in fiction and documentary. She also acts as line producer and content producer for series with Trio Orange and KOtv. Anaëlle received a Gemini Award and a Numix Award in 2022 for the magazine Pa t'mentir (tou.tv).

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Hanane Bendisari

Filmmaker | Screenwriter

Gosto Films

Hanane Bendisari is a Francophone filmmaker and screenwriter based in Toronto, Canada. As a self-taught emerging artist of immigrant origin and member of a visible minority, she is motivated by the desire to tell stories that reflect her personal feelings about social issues and the perspective of “the other”. In her works of fiction, she draws inspiration from her own experience and that of those she encounters. In documentaries, she seeks to touch and inspire viewers through the characters and their experiences, exploring hidden and taboo realities and stimulating thoughts and emotions. Her goal is to create accessible and impactful work that transcends indifference and inspires reflection.

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Justice Rutikara

Screenwriter | Filmmaker | Producer

Chaos harmonique

Justice Rutikara has been involved in the creation of several professional projects, both in theater and film. With a degree in International Studies from the University of Montreal, he chose to invest himself in writing and directing cinematic works with his unusual concept of harmonic chaos. His documentary and fictional works have earned him the Prix de la Relève 2018 at the Course des régions pancanadienne, a nomination as best director of the year at the Gala Dynastie 2020 and the Prix Géméaux de la relève 2021.

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Simone Béatrice Gravel
Scénariste

Simone Béatrice Gravel est journaliste culturelle, scénariste et recherchiste. Publications. Elle a travaillé pendant plus de sept ans à titre de journaliste pigiste pour divers médias, parmi lesquels Urbania, Infopresse et Grenier aux nouvelles. Simone Béatrice débute comme scénariste en 2022; elle est la coauteure de Pa t'mentir et a œuvré comme recherchiste principale de cette série. L'émission a remporté un vif succès, ainsi qu'un prix Numix et un Géméaux pour la meilleure émission ou série originale produite pour les médias numériques: magazine.

Simone Béatrice a également été sélectionnée comme participante de la 5e édition de l'initiative Diversité des voix de Netflix-BANFF (Netflix-BANFF Diversity of Voices Initiative) au Festival international des médias de Banff 2022, en plus parfaire ses connaissances en suivant le cours Websérie: écriture de scénario à l'Inis. À Dès lors, Simone Béatrice développe plusieurs projets de série, en fiction et en documentaire à titre d'auteure. Elle est scénariste et recherchiste d'une série numérique documentaire de 6 épisodes produite par Ugo Média.

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Reda Lahmouid
Independent Filmmaker

Reda Lahmouid is a director-writer who was born and raised in Casablanca, Morocco and currently lives in Montreal.

After studying communication and advertising at the Université Jean-Moulin Lyon III (France), film scriptwriting at the UQàM and having been active for more than ten years in advertising creation, Reda sees his profession(s) as a way to tell human stories to human beings, regardless of the medium.

Reda's credits include short fiction films, music videos and commercials, as well as co-directing a feature film, "Première Vague", which was released in Quebec theatres and then distributed on video-on-demand on the "Crave" platform after its premiere at the "RVQC 2021". The film "Première Vague" won the Prix Réals-ARRQ 2022 for Best Single Work of Fiction.

Reda is currently developing projects in fiction and documentary and has participated in numerous workshops and writing residencies including Talent Lab Netflix (RIDM), Produire au Sud (F3C) and Durban FilmMart.

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