"This year's first slam-dunk Best Picture nominee."

Dave Karger, Entertainment Weekly
Winter 2011
Produced by

FEATURES

Case Study: Stuart Comfeld
Is the audience laughing or screaming?
He’s happy either way.

Animal Magnetism
Producer Julie Yorn puts together
We Bought a Zoo.

Night of the Producer 2011
Woody. ‘Naif said.

Fantastic Four
A quartet of talented women take the lead
at DreamWorks Animation.

Hot Water
The inside scoop on Disney’s successful
mobile game, Where’s My Water?

The Long Run
Charles Floyd Johnson and
the making of Red Tails.

Top 5 Film & TV Finance Series
Aha! Moments
Haven’t attended a PGA Seminar lately?
Here’s what you’re missing.

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Cover photo: Eric Michelson

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TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY

For up-to-the-minute screening information and more on                       this extraordinary fi lms, go to: www.FocusAwards2011.com

UTTERLY ABSORBING, EXTREMELY SMART AND BEAUTIFULLY EXECUTED.
The sterling cast is uniformly on top of things, undoubtedly delighted to find themselves in such excellent company. Gary Oldman’s performance is most eloquent and expressive in his fluent command of body language. Tomas Alfredson is startlingly adept – intently focused and with a dispassionate eye for the small, telling detail; on a face, in a room, from a conversation. A fine screenplay by Peter Straughan and Bridget O’Connor.

—ANGIE ERRIGO, EMPIRE
Where did “Street Kings 2: Motor City” get treated like Royalty?

Shawn Hatosy and Ray Liotta

DETOUR
America’s Production Playground

“Shooting in Detroit was like having my very own Hollywood back lot with art deco skyscrapers, industrial monoliths, turn-of-the-century mansions and limestone and marble ballrooms all to myself. The only thing better than the architecture were the talented and hard-working local cast and crew who made the experience deeply personal and everlasting”, according to Chris Fisher, Director of the 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment police drama, starring Ray Liotta and Shawn Hatosy.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
by Vance Van Petten

It's All About “We”

Usually, I would use this space to promote our upcoming 23rd annual Producers Guild Awards, and talk about the incredible evening the Guild has planned for January 21. But lately, I’ve come to feel that there’s an even larger question to be grappled with, something that transcends even the importance of our Awards event.

Movies, television programs and new media projects don’t happen in isolation. And while a project’s primary producer may see her or his name appear above the line, there’s no producer worthy of that credit that isn’t the first to acknowledge the efforts of the legion of craftspeople and technicians whose combined effort truly brought the story to life.

The same is true of the Producers Guild. Yes, my name appears at the top of this column, but the fact is, it’s our members who are not only the heart of this Guild, but its body and brains as well. (If anything, I’m just the mouth, and sometimes a pretty big one.)

For instance, consider our annual Holiday Party, which took place three days before this magazine went to press. Sure, I may have had the privilege of taking the podium and handing out our terrific door prizes to lucky members and guests, but I would not have been in that position if we didn’t have an incredible team handling every aspect of that event. That team included volunteers Jin Hee An, Judy Balfaro, Carole Beans, Karyn Benkenstorfer, Dee Camp, Chris Debelec, Rebecca Eddy, Craig Erpling, Travis Gates, Rebecca Graham Forde, Michele Holt, Charles P. Howard, RJ Hume, Carmie Jasico, Michele Jeffers, Brett Maier, Megan Mascena-Gaspar, Roger Memos, Stacy Parker, Sarah Quale, Giselle Rivera, Kari Sims, Karen Spiegell, Jon Tierney, Diane Ward, Ryan Wills and Stephen J. Wolfe. And that’s not to mention dealers Kimberly Austin, Fred Baron, Stacy Gate, Gary Goetzman, Mark Gordon, Rachel Klein, Hawk Koch, Leonard Koss, Pamela Lane, Gary Lucchesi, Carla Patterson, Michael Sarna, Mark Shelton and Mike Snyder; prize procurer Maureen Dooling; photographer Michael Q. Martin; and Holiday Party Chairs Vincente Williams and Salvy Maleki, as well as our own PGA staff.

That’s 44 people for just one event out of the PGA’s year. Every seminar, every job forum, every networking mixer and new member orientation has its own collection of dedicated PGA volunteers. These people contribute so much to the life of this Guild that we could publish a full issue of this magazine — in small type — that included nothing but the names and roles of our volunteers.

Years ago, we promoted the Guild with the slogan “Bringing the Team Together.” Today, with nearly 5,000 members, we’ve delivered on that promise. It’s an incredible team we’ve brought together under the PGA roof, and it gets bigger every week. No one person built this Guild, just as no one person creates a film or TV show. But I couldn’t be more grateful to be a part of an organization that hundreds, if not thousands of individuals can point to and say, “I made that.”
As we’ve observed several times in this space, great producers emerge from all branches of the entertainment industry family tree. On its cover, this magazine has featured producers who began their careers as writers, directors, actors, agents, executives or even stand-up comics before they found their calling as producers. But so far as we know, Stuart Cornfeld is the first individual we’ve encountered to parlay a stint as a game show contestant into a successful producing career.

We’re not going to spoil the story here; it’s Cornfeld’s tale to tell, and he does it better than we ever could. But in accordance with those offbeat beginnings, it’s only fitting that he’s become one of the most respected producers of feature comedies today. Having learned the demands of the genre at the feet of Mel Brooks, Cornfeld has brought that knowledge to bear throughout his decade-long partnership with Ben Stiller. Together, the collaborators have brought the world such inspired feats of lunacy as *Zoolander*, *Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story*, and the smash hit *Tropic Thunder*, a sure inclusion on anyone’s short list of the top comedies of the past decade.

Alongside his comedy output, Cornfeld has carved out a credible niche as a producer of horror features, well balanced between unsettling psycho-drama and out-and-out scare-fests. The common thread is the caliber of the work; Cornfeld’s horror output has placed him alongside such visionary directors as David Cronenberg (*The Fly*), Guillermo Del Toro (*Mimic*), David Lynch (*The Elephant Man*) and Steven Soderbergh (*Kafka*).

This is the 53rd in *Produced by*’s ongoing series of Case Studies of successful producers and their work. *Produced by* editor Chris Green joined Stuart Cornfeld at his Red Hour Films office for a wide-ranging — and very funny — conversation that took on such topics as the excitement of opening up new comic ground, the appeal of “aggressive” genres, and Mel Brooks’ habit of firing editors after every rough cut.

Stuart Cornfeld (right) on the set of *Tropic Thunder* with writer Justin Theroux and co-producer Brian Taylor (standing), cast members Robert Downey Jr. and producer/writer/director/cast member Ben Stiller (seated). Photo: Merie Weismiller Wallace © 2011 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved.
So, off the top, how did you find your way into the industry? Did you always want to be a producer?

Well, I grew up here, and I always liked movies. But I had graduated from college and had no idea what I wanted to do. One day, I went on a game show, and was champion of that show for three days.

What show was it?

It was called *Split Second*, which doesn’t exist anymore. It was kind of a West Coast counterpart of *Jeopardy!*... very hard questions and relatively little money. At the time, I was living with my girlfriend, and I was just a drag to be with. [laughs] So she told me to figure out how much money I had, and how long I could live off that money. Then she said, “Figure out what it is you’ve always wanted to do with your life, no matter what that is, and just go do it for that period of time. Just get out of the house.” I was aware of the American Film Institute because a friend of mine’s mother ran a research library there. So I went there and volunteered to work on a student film, and everything just kind of clicked. I loved it. I went from a PA to becoming the AD, and the students on the film wrote letters to AFI recommending they bring me on as a producing student, and I ended up getting into the school.

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The film school experience sometimes gets mixed reviews in this industry. Was AFI helpful for you?

It was helpful in that there were a lot of productions to work on. I was working constantly. There was also this class “The Visual Aspects of Film” taught by this guy Slavko Vorkapic, who was sort of the father of the modern montage. And in that class, I think I learned more than in any class I’d ever taken. Just coincidentally, when I was in college, I was a cognitive psychology major. A lot of what Vorkapic was talking about was how the brain assimilates information and what the psychological impact of different shots is. So, in a very weird way, this major that I sort of bailed on became extremely helpful for this one class that is still, to this date, the most interesting class I’ve ever taken.

Are there lessons you learned there that you find yourself applying today?

Oh, absolutely. It gave me a very, very specific understanding of what the implications of different shots are. What is a close up really doing, just visually? Because there isn’t a lot of movement, except around the mouth. You know, stuff that when you hear it, it makes sense, but it was just taught in a very clear, concise, specific way. So, yeah, whenever I’m shooting, it always comes into play. Vorkapic was on the board
of the Academy when they were trying to decide the criteria for determining what was the best film. He was purely a visualist, so his suggestion was to give the award to the film that looked best when run upside down. (laughs) Anyway, I was in the class with Marty Brest and Amy Heckerling, and we all became friends. And then I worked with a Directing Workshop for Women, and one of the women in that workshop was Anne Bancroft, and through her I met Mel Brooks. He said, “Look, when you get out of AFI, give me a call, I have you in mind for something.”

That sounds like AFI working like the way it’s supposed to work. I was very lucky, but I was also coming off of a time in my life where I feared I wouldn’t find anything I wanted to do. So I was sort of turbocharged by fear as I was going through that, and because of that, I was working really hard.

So what did Mel Brooks have you in mind for?

I worked as his assistant on High Anxiety. And, then after High Anxiety, one of the projects I had worked with Anne Bancroft was this short video Fatso and I had encouraged her to write it as a feature. She wrote it as a feature, FOX wanted to do it, and I ended up producing it ... partly because I was good at what I did, and in a much more major way because Mel Brooks told the studio that I would be producing it. (laughs)

Obviously, there’s a difference between producing short films for AFI, even working with top-notch people, and producing a studio feature. What was that learning curve like? When I worked with Mel on High Anxiety, I had seen everything. The biggest problem I had on Fatso was that I was 26. I felt there was a tremendous amount of resentment toward me for being this young idiot producing the film. That was really the hardest part. The script was good. Mel Brooks and the people at FOX, Gareth Wigan and Alan Ladd, Jr., were incredibly supportive. So the biggest obstacle was feeling the need to prove myself to everybody, and wanting everybody to feel like I deserved to be in the position I was in.

It’s the dream of probably 12% of this town to work alongside Mel Brooks in that sort of creative capacity. What did you take away from working with him over those years?

More than anything, what I got from him was the drive for hatching a good idea and trying to execute it. There was always a tremendous amount of work put in to find the best idea possible. What’s the funniest thing we can do? What’s the best joke that hasn’t been told? What’s the craziest thing you can think of? And then, once the idea was there, just making sure that we delivered it in absolutely the best way we possibly could. This was a guy who had tremendous power and tremendous credibility, so there weren’t a lot of politics that he had to deal with. The whole question of "how do..."
you work the studio system? and the politics of getting a movie made. I was completely insulated from. How do you get a movie made? For us, we went in and said, “This is the movie we wanna make.” And they said okay, good, go make that movie. So we would focus 100 percent on the work.

Was there a rude awakening when you realized that not all producers have that kind of leverage?

Yes! Absolutely. After I had left working with Mel, I was working on a film with Amy Heckerling called *My Kind of Guy* that ended up not being made because there was an actors’ strike. David Begelman was at MGM at the time. Amy Heckerling and I thought that Carole Kane would be good for one of the co-leads in the film. And I was told by our executive that David Begelman didn’t like the idea of Carole Kane, and my reaction to that was [laughs]. “Okay, well, that’s his opinion. But we’re the ones making the movie.” So we continued down the road with Carole Kane until ultimately it was made very clear to me that Carole Kane was not going to be in the movie. And that was when I realized there’s a big difference between being Mel Brooks, and being a 28-year-old producer who’s blowing off the head of the studio.

So, with this new calculus in mind, how did that change your approach to building a career for yourself outside the umbrella of Mel Brooks?

Well, I was fortunate enough to get an overall deal at United Artists from Paula Weinstein, who was running it. And even though I was beginning to understand that I wasn’t Mel Brooks, I was never at a point where I was going to second-guess what a good project was. So as I began to understand the dynamics of

There’s that point where you’ll come up with jokes, where people will just know. There’s polite laughter, like, “I understand how that’s supposed to be funny.” But it’s pushing beyond that, toward that place where it really is funny.
power, it didn't change the dynamics of what's most important in making a film.

So in terms of developing your taste and refining your taste, what is it that speaks to you, or in the past, has spoken to you? Has it changed over the years?

I always liked films about outsiders. That's why I liked The Elephant Man, that's why I liked The Fly. Cocteau's Beauty and the Beast was always my favorite, favorite, favorite movie. I was always drawn to things like that. And I was always drawn to things that made me laugh. But I've never really connected with romantic comedies, and I've never been big on the action genre, I don't feel like I have anything to add. I don't think have enough of an active sensibility to really respond to it. "Oh, great, it's six cars going over the Grand Canyon." Or, "I can't believe it — two chefs at competing restaurants that fall in love ... how could that be? What will that sauce taste like in the third act?"

[laughs] I respond to movies where the characters have relatable emotions, even though the manifestation of those emotions may be eccentric, or comedically eccentric. I mean, Zoolander is a character where you know exactly what he's going through. He's lost. He doesn't know what his life is; some guy has taken over his place as top model. He never imagined there'd come a point in his life where everything wasn't handed to him. And he's lost, like a 5-year-old kid is lost. He's not mean, he's not neurotic; he's too simple to be neurotic. But, the manifestation of all of that, in his rarified world, is very, very funny.

Comedy is often so performance-driven. In terms of developing comedy, are you developing with a performance in mind? Or are you developing more based on a concept?

No, I think if you find a character that's emotionally true, and there's comedy coming out, that's what you focus on. Comedy is actually a genre that isn't so dependent on movie stars. Because there's always a new generation coming up. I mean, you can draw the line from Animal House to Superbad — those were cast with unknowns. I think the writing and the emotion is really more important. If you don't have that, it's very rare to find a performer who's gonna bring it. And if you do have it, there are a lot of performers who can.

When you're developing a comedy, how do you work with writers, in terms of refining a coherent vision that will translate to the screen?

It's always different, depending on the strengths of the writer. Most of the time, you sit there and you play the movie in your head. And you think about the parts that aren't working for you, and then you kind of go, "What if this happened, or what if that happened?" I'm a big believer in holding scenes up to real life. If it was real life, how would you react to that situation? Sometimes that leads you to good places. But there are a bunch of questions like that: What would happen if the character did the exact opposite? What would happen if those two characters suddenly didn't like each other? They're exer-
“You really try to hit something great, and every once in a while when you hit it, you know it. And you’re amazed that you were able to do that.”

Comedy is notoriously circumstance-specific, and some material can seem funny on the page but not so funny on its feet. How do you deal with those moments when you’re not getting what you expected to get, comedically speaking?

Well, you usually see it on the page if something isn’t working. When you put something up in front of an audience for the first time, if they’re not laughing then, well, that’s not good. [laughs] And then you ask, “Well, why aren’t they laughing?” And, are they not laughing because it’s just not funny? Is it a performance moment? Is there a way to change the timing? When you look at that first rough cut, you gotta be tough. That’s a tough moment. Mel Brooks would fire his editor every time. Every single time he would see his first cut, he’d fire the editor. “What is it about you that’s trying to sabotage my career?” [laughs] “Are you jealous? Do you feel that you should be the comedy genius?” And then he’d fire the guy. And then it was “Alright, let’s go back to work.” But the audience tells you a lot. It’s that Billy Wilder line about the audience, “As a group they’re genius; as individuals, they’re probably idiots.”

Do you find yourself doing a lot of re-cutting or fine-tuning based on previews?

Oh, yeah.

How thoroughly do you test a film before you’ll release it?

Until it’s really working. Until you think there are no more changes you want to make. We’ve sort of evolved this system of where we put together the film, cut it down until we have a cut that we like, and then put it in front of an audience. And then we tape the audience and put that into the AVID to play against the film, so that there are no internal arguments as far as where they laughed, and how hard. You cut the film down to all the stuff that’s working and then you build the film around it.

So in a way, you’re kind of creating the structure after the fact?

Yes. Oh, yeah. You really try to hit something great, and every once in a while when you hit it, you know it. And you’re amazed that you were able to do that. That’s a nice way to spend your day.

Well, yeah. But the thing about comedy is surprise. Once you read a script twelve thousand times, and you’ve looked at the dailies twelve million times, it’s very difficult to be surprised anymore. You know that the fat lady is going to fall down the stairs. So, the audience tells you a lot. I mean, you just have to take it for granted that you’ve lost your objectivity. You’re so far past that point of “what happens next?” When you have that first screening with an audience, it reminds you. And there are always crazy things that you didn’t expect. Like the biggest moment in The Fly was a moment that Cronenberg and I didn’t even think about. It’s a moment where Geena Davis kisses Jeff Goldblum after her ear has fallen off. When we were shooting, we were thinking, “Okay, then they kiss, and the scene is over.” But when we screened it, that was the biggest scream in the entire movie. And we just looked at each other like, “That’s nice to see!” [laughs] We had no idea that was coming.

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That’s got to be very exciting, those moments of discovery. Oh, it’s great. Are you kidding?

We’ve spoken a little about The Fly and The Elephant Man, so it’s probably worth taking a moment to recognize that you’re not exclusively a comedy producer. You’ve got something of a sideline in grotesque bug movies.

Yeah. [laughs]

So how does that inclination toward horror co-exist with your role or position as a comedy producer?

I just came back from Sitges, the Spanish film festival for horror and fantasy. That’s where I went on my vacation! There are a lot of similarities between comedy and horror. They are the two genres that you can preview and get real, instant feedback. The audience is screaming or they’re laughing and if they’re not, then you know something is wrong. I like an aggressive-type genre where you’re literally trying to take control from the audience, get that involuntary physical response. But I think that people go to the movies to have control taken away from them. They want somebody to tell them a story. They don’t necessarily want to think about the story; they just want to absorb it and relax. There’s nothing more fun than going to a film that you’ve done and the audience is like screaming because it’s scary or laughing because it’s funny. It’s great.

Do you do that often? Drop in on screenings of films that you’ve done in order to sit with an audience and feel it play?

I do it if the film is good. [laughs]

Not everyone has had the opportunity to enjoy a 20- or 30-year career as a motion picture producer. Do you have any thoughts on how you’ve been able to sustain that? I’ve been extremely lucky to have had associations with people who are extremely gifted. I mean, that’s really it. Jim Cameron once said that whatever your first job is in show business, that’s the job that you just keep on doing. He was an effects guy, so that’s what he’s doing. My first job was assisting a writer/director/actor/producer. [laughs] That’s kind of what I’m still doing.

So with all the credits you’ve accumulated, including a handful of contemporary classics like Tropic Thunder and Elephant Man, what keeps you from saying, “Call it a day, this has been great! What keeps you getting up in the morning?”

You know there’s that line that’s definitely been said about show business, that “The only thing worse than doing it is not doing it.” It’s that. I mean, what’s better than sitting in a room and trying to come up with the funniest thing you can possibly come up with? I’ve never had that kind of life perspective of “Well, what is there to do now?” You mentioned Tropic Thunder ... I just want to do a movie so that when I’m looking at it, I say, “Wow, well, that’s a kick-ass movie. God, I really like that movie.” Because I really, really, like movies — I like being in a dark room with a large group of people who don’t know that I’m overweight. [laughs] But, anyway, I don’t know what the answer to that is, other than that I haven’t found anything else I’d be able to have as much fun at and contribute as much to. On a good day, it’s great.
“My favorite experiences are what I’ve had in the last couple of movies,” she professes, “where even when you’re watching it for the hundredth time, you’re so psyched, you’re so happy. There’s tremendous possibility if you get it right.”

Yorn’s career in filmmaking began almost by accident. “Nobody in my family was a big movie-goer,” she explains. “But everybody was a writer, everybody was published, and so that was my trajectory coming out of college.” After trying to find a job in journalism, Yorn instead found a position in the literary department at William Morris in New York. “I was thinking it would be a good inroad for journalism and publishing, and once I was there I kept looking down the hall to the movie division and thinking there seemed to be some really interesting things going on in there.”

After transitioning to the motion picture department at William Morris, Yorn moved to Los Angeles and found a job as assistant to producer Charles Gordon, just as he and his brother Lawrence were forming Largo Entertainment. “They were finishing Field of Dreams and shooting Die Hard 2,” she recalls, “and that was interesting because I got to see this giant action movie which was very different from any set I had been on in New York, which were all small indie films.” After learning the Hollywood ropes at Largo, Yorn was hired by Keith Addis and Nick Wechsler’s new company, a joint management-production entity. “That was a very unusual experience because I got to see this kind of action movie I could get excited about. How do you make an action movie that has the feeling I had when I saw Jaws or Apollo 13, in terms of realism and the character-centric nature of the stories?” The development of Unstoppable took several years and involved multiple incarnations before it was finally made by director Tony Scott. Yorn explains, “If you don’t have the mentality of an upstream swimmer in this town, it’s not for you... What I learned from making smaller-budgeted and independent films is that it’s very difficult in this world to get people to see them and get them proper distribution. So I’m excited when something happens.”

Yorn’s films have been on in New York, which were all small indie films. After several years of packaging and producing indie movies such as Eve’s Bayou outside of the studio system, Yorn teamed up with legendary agent Michael Ovitz and her former brother-in-law Rick Yorn to form Artists Management Group, which quickly became a key Hollywood player, merging with The Firm in 2002. Around this time, however, Yorn felt it was time to move in a different direction. “I realized that I missed spending all my time working with writers from the inception of an idea, and from my own ideas too,” she recalls. Yorn phased out of the management side of her company and into full-time producing. “I was most excited about having more time and resources available for book adaptations. I always loved that material, but in the indie world, nobody’s paying for development.” In this period, Yorn’s films as executive producer included such titles as The Exorcism of Emily Rose and First Sunday, starring Ice Cube. One of the first projects Yorn had begun to develop was based on the true story of a runaway train incident in 2001, which eventually became Unstoppable, starring Denzel Washington and Chris Pine. “Unstoppable was an example of the kind of action movie I could get excited about. How do you make an action movie that has the feeling I had when I saw Jaws or Apollo 13, in terms of realism and the character-centric nature of the stories?” The development of Unstoppable took several years and involved multiple incarnations before it was finally made by director Tony Scott. Yorn explains, “If you don’t have the mentality of an upstream swimmer in this town, it’s not for you. What I learned from making smaller-budgeted and independent films is that it’s very difficult in this world to get people to see them and get them proper distribution. So I’m excited when something happens.”
“We had a version we could have gotten made in two seconds, and it probably would have been enormously successful, but we decided to swing for the fences.” Instead, Yorn pushed to make the best movie possible, first hiring Aline Brosh McKenna (The Devil Wears Prada) to write the screenplay, and then searching for the right director. “I had approached Cameron Crowe with many projects in the past, and he always said he was open to things that he didn’t originate, but nobody in town thought he ever would.” Crowe, the writer/director behind Say Anything and Jerry Maguire, had been developing a biopic of Marvin Gaye for several years that had become bogged down by budget and casting issues. “He came in and we talked about the book and the sights and sounds of the zoo, and I think it lived under his skin for a few weeks. And he came back and said he would do the movie.”

Yorn has high praise for the collaborative process that developed between producer and director. “One of the central jobs a producer has is making sure everyone is on the same page. Sometimes you find that you’re sitting around a table, even with the best intentions and the best people, and you suddenly realize you have different visions of what the movie should be... If you’re doing that on-set, you’re dead. There was never a moment on this movie—ever—where I sat in a meeting and thought, ‘Oh, I didn’t think it was going to be like this.’ Cameron is very specific, he tells you the movie he’s going to make and what’s going to be on the soundtrack and from there, it’s just wonderful discoveries.”

One of the first collaborative decisions was casting the lead actor. “We started talking about Matt Damon, and we started watching videos of him online and realizing how funny he is. You don’t usually think about how funny he is; you think of him as Jason Bourne. And we realized he hadn’t done a fatherhood movie. It’s a fresh side of him, something we haven’t seen before,” Yorn explains.

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One of the oldest Hollywood watchwords is never to work with children or animals, and this movie had both, and in several key roles. "I was concerned going in," says Yorn, "how do you get the emotion that's written on the page from an animal? How do you get a 700-pound bear to hit its mark? But we had such a good team, the trainers were fantastic."

Yorn recalls a key moment of serendipity from the film's production. "In the story, there's this tiger who's old and ailing, and Matt's character wants to do everything he can to keep the tiger alive; he just doesn't want to give up on this tiger. He's just come out of this experience with his wife, so much was wrapped up in his struggle and being told by everyone that he needed to let go. And Matt and the tiger have a scene together, and you read it and wonder, 'How's that going to happen?'

Fortunately, the stars aligned. "We were shooting it," she continues. "We had the tiger, and Matt talks to the tiger and he says, 'You're going to be okay, buddy ... you're going to be okay.' And the tiger spoke back, the tones that come out of the tiger were so heartbreaking. And Matt flinches a little, but in reaction to the tiger, and it was really incredible. Grips who looked like they were sleeping for half the movie were crying. You've never seen anything like it."

In a film industry that seems to be increasingly bent on making films based on brand-name properties and sequels, Yorn is optimistic about the potential to continue to make more character-based films with wide appeal like We Bought a Zoo. "I'd love a movie like this to do really well so that we can keep making movies like this," she says emphatically. "The more we're not just dependent on sequels and franchises, the more that I can work with original filmmakers like Cameron and contribute in any way to those movies, that's what would be the greatest feeling of accomplishment to me."

For Yorn, producing is always about having endurance for the long haul: "You have to be incredibly patient and diligent and push-push-push, and then suddenly you're sitting there with somebody really talented, working on a film with a lot of talented people. It's a great feeling."
It was a rainy night, but despite the dearth of taxi cabs and crowded subways, no one was late for this evening. The audience of more than 350 PGA members and their guests, not always known for their punctuality, was ready and waiting at the DGA Theater in New York City — no one wanted to miss a thing. Without any fanfare, wearing a baggy grayish sweater, khaki pants and his ever-present black-rimmed glasses, Woody Allen walked onstage, willing (though by his own admission, perhaps not quite ready) to share this evening with us.

"When the Night of the Producer was invented a few years ago — the goal ... was to have this gentleman with us," David Picker, Chairman Emeritus of the Producers Guild East, admitted this truth at the start of Night of the Producer 2011, celebrating the career of Woody Allen. Of course, given that Mr. Picker and Mr. Allen’s collaborative history dates back to 1970, it’s no surprise that our annual event finally realized this ambition.

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Arguably one of the most prolific “hyphenates” in the entertainment business, Woody Allen isn’t just a writer-director-actor-composer — he is a cottage industry. Although he has enjoyed success in television, publishing, theater and stand-up comedy, it’s as a filmmaker that he’s created his most celebrated work. No one has shown New York in a more fabled light. For over a generation, his quintessential New York storytelling has painted a picture of a metropolitan, erudite world rich with music, comedy, tragedy and truth. The fact that Woody Allen has been able to assemble one of the richest bodies of work over the past 40 years is a development that amazes Allen himself.

"I wanted to be a writer, stay in my room — by myself," he confessed. "Not deal with the world. Never come out and just write." Allen further explained that his first screenwriting assignment, 1965’s *What’s New Pussycat?*, was an “abysmal” experience. "I hated the movie, I hated everything about it and I vowed that I would never ever go near films again unless I could be the director. And that’s really what got me into it. It was for survival. I didn’t want my scripts to be mutilated by, you know, a group of Philistines. So I did them myself."
As the evening’s host, David Picker, pointed out, there doesn’t seem to be another filmmaker who is in quite the position Allen is in. From the very beginning, Allen has never had to deal with anybody except himself. “I know,” Allen agreed, “that’s the biggest con job of all time!” As way of explanation he offered some insight: “You know, right from the start, from the very start, even on my first movie, I never had to deal with anybody. There was such a sense — I think they had this with Mel Brooks too — that these guys know comedy and it’s some special rarefied thing, leave them alone; they’re geniuses or something. And it was so silly. I didn’t know what I was doing! I made the film with no interference, did everything I wanted... Then when I went to United Artists, they gave me the same [deal].” To this day, I’ve often said — and people think I’m being facetious — the only thing that stands between me and greatness is me. I have no excuses!”

Picker related a story of how he and Allen’s relationship at United Artists nearly ended before it started. Allen had come in with an idea of doing a movie about a clarinet player who had a drug problem — very dark, serious material. Picker recalled telling him, “But we had a six-picture deal to do comedies — could you make this your sixth picture?”

Allen interjected, “I had delusions of grandeur at the time. I thought… I’ll start off with The Jazz Baby, and I’ll act in it, because there was no limit to what I thought I could do. When I gave them the script, it was more grim than the actual film [proved to be].” (“The project ultimately came to life as 1999’s Sweet and Lowdown.”) “They looked at it, and they were very, very disappointed. Am I right?”

Picker confirmed wholeheartedly, continuing, “I called Sam [Cohen, Allen’s agent]. Sam said, ‘I’ll talk to him.’ I don’t know if Woody remembers this, but two days later, Sam called me back and said, ‘He’s got a movie called Bananas. I said, ‘It’s approved!’” Despite having no script and no idea of the story, the prospect of Woody Allen directing a film entitled Bananas was enough for the nervous executive.

When asked if it bothered him that he just made the biggest hit of his career with the 2011 film Midnight in Paris, Allen admitted that his most recent film was “a happy accident.” “You make each film and you hope that each one is going to be Citizen Kane. I’m laying in my bed at home and I’m writing it and I’m thinking this is going to be Citizen Kane. I know it! This is just great! By the time I get into the editing room in the last stages of editing, I just want to stave off humiliation. And that’s what happens on most of my movies. Now some of them, inexplicably, become fairly successful and some of them — also to me, inexplicably — don’t. So this one [Midnight in Paris] was just a happy accident. I made it, I had fun. I wanted to go to Paris — I wanted to live there for a few months and make a film there. Maybe because I put so much affection into the making of the film, it communicated something to people. But I don’t know why this and not something else... I’ll never figure that out.”

As all producers are painfully aware, no project, whether it is TV, theater or film, is going to get off the ground without financing. So how does Allen get the backing for his films? For Allen, financing has never been a major problem, because he simply has a system that works. “People do come to me and say we want to give you money and make a film. Though nobody comes to me and says, ‘We want to give you $25 million to make a film.’ We wouldn’t accept that — in fact, I don’t think I would accept $20 million, because I don’t feel comfortable that I could earn it back for them.”

Allen continued that at between $16 million and $18 million for a film, he feels he’s “a good bet” to make back his investors’ money. So he has managed to have a fruitful career with no interference from anyone by doing his own thing and staying, according to him, “under the radar,” which has been “a very good thing for me... They figure, what can we lose? The film is not going to...
make no money at all. So we're spending 17 million bucks. Let's say it's terrible and it makes $8 million in the movie houses and then it's gonna make something on DVD and something on TV. So no one is going to lose $40 million or $60 million. In the end, between Europe and all the auxiliary markets, they break even or they make a few bucks — at least enough to keep me going for 40 years making them." After all, Allen has made 42 films in 45 years — so he may be on to something. His 43rd, Nero Fiddled, is scheduled for release in 2012.

Although technically, Allen has been credited as "Producer" only once (on What's Up, Tiger Lady?, from 1966), there is no mistaking who is in charge. For the last 30 years, he has been in control of his films from soup to nuts — everything from scripts, casting, music, ads, trailers and more. His tight-knit team keeps him insulated from the outside world. And many of them, from his producers including sister Letty Aronson, to his editors, cinematographers and his casting director, Juliet Taylor, have been with him through the decades. Many of the actors who appear in his films also come back for more.

It seems to be every East Coast actor's dream to appear in a Woody Allen film. There is an unofficial troupe of New York character actors who have shown up in several of his films, adding to the intimacy of his work. Allen's talent and mystique is often cache enough to lure some of the film industry's biggest stars, as Hollywood's top talent have always taken deep pay cuts for the privilege to appear in one of his films. Allen's roster of A-list players has included Diane Keaton, Michael Caine, Alan Alda, Scarlett Johansson, Leonardo DiCaprio, Penelope Cruz, Owen Wilson, Sean Penn, Meryl Streep, John Cusack, Dianne Wiest, Rachel McAdams, Judy Davis, Martin Landau and Mia Farrow.

The process of casting is not something the famously shy director relishes. "I don't like casting," he admits. "Because I was never a social person and never like to meet people. I'm going to see six actors or six actresses for the same role. Any one of them could really do it, it's just how they happen to strike myself and Juliet Taylor at the time as being right for it... So I spend as little time with them as possible. I don't put them through a lot of rigmarole. I don't have a lot of conversations with them. And after I hire them, I don't have conversations with them either... If I think they're the conversational type, then I don't hire them."

Allen still values the performers in his projects; he just prefers working fast and efficiently. [These actors] were great before they met me, they'll be great after me and they're great for me... I don't want to mess them up. So I don't speak to them — and I don't direct them much." As he went on to explain, "I respect them... I [just] don't like to meet them at casting, I don't like to meet them socially and I don't like to meet them on the set." Chuckling along with the audience at his own neurotic honesty, he laughs, "Of course, I'm perfectly happy to take credit for their performances." Despite the many accolades for his directing skills, he maintains, "The truth of the matter is, it's great tiring. You hire the right people and get out of their way."

Allen admitted to the audience he had no shortage of ideas; they come to him all the time. He has a drawer full of them written on cocktail napkins and scraps of paper. Where do these ideas come from? "It's just an accident of ideas; they come to him all the time. He has a drawer full of them written on cocktail napkins and scraps of paper. Woody has a great memory and he has a way of remembering things. I don't know where he gets that." Allen still values the performers in his projects; he just prefers working fast and efficiently. [These actors] were great before they met me, they'll be great after me and they're great for me... I don't want to mess them up. So I don't speak to them — and I don't direct them much." As he went on to explain, "I respect them... I [just] don't like to meet them at casting, I don't like to meet them socially and I don't like to meet them on the set." Chuckling along with the audience at his own neurotic honesty, he laughs, "Of course, I'm perfectly happy to take credit for their performances." Despite the many accolades for his directing skills, he maintains, "The truth of the matter is, it's great tiring. You hire the right people and get out of their way."

As the exhilarating evening came to an end, Allen reflected on the comfort and solace he took in the fantasy world on the silver screen. "It was great! The guys were brave, they were witty. You know everything turned out right. It was wonderful! So I escaped into movies and I grew to love them. When I was a kid, I would go to the movies sometimes five days a week. And when I got older, I found that I could spend a year doing the same thing. I could wake up in the morning and there's Scarlett Johansson and Penelope Cruz and they look like a trillion bucks and everybody has pretty costumes and the guys are charming and the sets are beautiful and they bring me my lunch." Continuing over the laughter, Allen mused, "You love them because, you know, they are the opposite of reality. And reality is not our friend. Movies are not real; the real world is so terrifying and so cruel, and movies are so pretty and the people are so extraordinary and charming and romantic. So what's not to like?"

Before the audience headed over to the classic New York spot, the Russian Tea Room, for the post-event reception, Allen left them with one last remark — "If this conversation was meaningful and enjoyable to you, I'm thrilled... This is not the kind of evening I would have cut out for myself, but anything that David [Packer] asks me to do I would do. Thank you for coming!" To rousing laughter and applause Allen walked off the stage and out of the theater — well before anyone could try and start a conversation with him.
DreamWorks Animation SKG has enjoyed, thanks in part to the work of producers (and PGA members) Latifa Ouou, Mireille Soria, Melissa Cobb and Christina Steinberg. Alongside their teams of animators, each producer has worked tirelessly to bring their films to life, including numerous popular favorites and favorites-to-be. Their track record extends popular franchises (Soria’s Kung Fu Panda), as well as hotly anticipated works that both extend popular franchises (Soria’s Madagascar 3) and introduce audiences to some brand-new stories (Steinberg’s Rise of the Guardians).

Previously, Soria had served as Vice President of Production for Walt Disney Pictures. She had just finished the Cinderella romance Ever After when Katzenberg called, asking her to produce the 2D-animated movie Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron. At the time, she was also in development at the company for Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas, and unofficially involved with Madagascar. “I was unofficial at the beginning because it was going to move up north to PDI [Pacific Data Images], and I was clearly not going to move up north to PDI,” says Soria. “But I fell in love with the story, fell in love with the people I was working with.” So she took a chance on producing the film from a distance, and signed on for its sequel Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa.

Historically, the animation world was once dominated by men, going back to the Disney and Fleischer studios in the early 1930s. DreamWorks Animation (DWA), where most of the producers and many of the directors are women, has been a leader in changing that outlook. “Jeffery [Katzenberg], to his credit, is a very bottom-line person,” says Mireille Soria, producer of the Madagascar franchise. “He hires people who he feels will do the best job, and that’s kind of what it’s all about.”

So it’s really an inspiring environment.” Like Soria, Cobb had also been a Disney transplant, and followed a similar path to DreamWorks Animation. Cobb was a Creative Executive at Disney at the time Soria was a VP, and the two had worked closely for a number of years. So when Soria went to Fox to start Blue Peach Productions, Cobb followed. “Mireille … has been a really important mentor to me throughout my career,” Cobb offers. “She’s just always been such an amazing supporter, and I’ve learned an incredible amount from her.” Now, with both Kung Fu Panda and Kung Fu Panda 2 under her belt, DreamWorks Animation has given both women the opportunity to work as peers in the same environment. Speaking to her recent work, Cobb responds, “Kung Fu Panda 2 is something that creatively I’m very proud of. I’m proud of how well the audience has responded to the movie. I feel that it reached for some new things emotionally, and I still am moved every time I see it… That’s exciting for me.”

Christina Steinberg served as a Senior Vice President of production at Touchstone Pictures, under the Disney umbrella, before she formed Junction Entertainment in 1998. During her tenure, Steinberg produced a wide range of feature films, which included films like The Kid, with Bruce Willis, as well as the Nicolas Cage hit, National Treasure. Steinberg had never considered leaving live-action to make an animated film, but she was intrigued by a new project called Bee Movie.

In the lobby, a life-sized statue of Po the Kung Fu Panda hurls a flying kick into the air. Down the hall, a grinning Puss in Boots poses deviously on a poster, while Madagascar penguins peek from the corners of framed artwork that lines the walls. This is the imagery that welcomes visitors to DreamWorks Animation’s expansive animation campus in Glendale, California, which is home to a collection of the industry’s most talented animators, storyboard artists, editors, directors and producers. Walking through the decorated hallways, it’s hard not to acknowledge the success that DreamWorks Animation SKG has enjoyed, thanks to producers like Latifa Ouou, Mireille Soria, Melissa Cobb and Christina Steinberg.
Steinberg recalls, “I had loved my time at Disney — it was a great training ground. After I finished producing National Treasure, it just felt like the right timing to reconnect and to try something new.” Bee Movie, starring Jerry Seinfeld, was her first foray into the animation business, but certainly not her last. “I fell in love with it; I fell in love with the process and the studio,” she shares. An additional plus? She, Soria and Cobb had all worked together at Disney, and both Cobb and Soria had already made the move to DWA at the time Steinberg was considering her opportunity. As Steinberg was just getting her feet wet, Cobb and Soria were a great source of reassurance for her. “I relied on them quite a bit. I kept calling them saying ‘What do you think?’ ‘Is this a good idea?’ and they were so supportive, and now it’s so great to be here with them.”

Unlike her colleagues, producer and story supervisor Latifa Ouaou started her career at DreamWorks Animation. Ouaou began as an assistant at DWA’s partner company, Pacific Data Images (PDI), in Redwood City, just south of San Francisco. She and PDI/DreamWorks were a good match, Ouaou acknowledges, because she had the opportunity to develop a strong relationship with producer Aron Warner, who would later become her mentor. However, she was interested in the prospect of making movies in LA, and she aspired to relocate to DreamWorks’ southernmost campus. Ouaou was granted her wish with the first Shrek movie, when she was transferred to Los Angeles to work in the story department. There, she had the fortune of working her way up from assistant, to coordinator, to supervisor, to manager, and finally to development under Warner’s leadership. “I had my hands in a lot of different areas of production on the Shrek films,” Ouaou laughs. “The great thing about my job here is that you develop the stories as you produce them. And to me, that’s a dream job.”

The quartet’s enthusiasm for their work is not lost on DreamWorks Animation Chief Creative Officer Bill Damaschke, who supervises their collective output. “DreamWorks Animation’s innovative and unique culture is due to such visionary producers as Christina, Latifa, Melissa and Mireille,” states Damaschke directly. “These women continue to deliver with their creative talents, making DWA what it is today. But what differentiates these women is their exceptional ability to nurture and cultivate their large crews, which is something that is unique to producing in the world of animation. These women have helped steer some of our most successful projects and it is certainly no surprise given their consistent intelligence, energy and out-of-the-box thinking.”

If you ask any of the four women, they will tell you that, at the very core of it, producing an animated feature is no different from producing a live-action film. As Soria sums it up, “[Different] media have different strengths to each of them that you want to play to, but it’s all about story. The basic idea is that storytelling is at the center of what we do. It’s the hardest thing about the movies, and it’s the most important thing about the movies.” The chief difference, then, is in its execution.

The process of creating an animated film is, of course, a much slower one. A typical animated movie can take three or four years from greenlight to release. However, though the thought of painstakingly crafting a story down to the movement of a hair on a character’s head is enough to make many filmmakers cringe, the slower pace also offers more opportunities for creative input. Melissa Cobb explains, “We make these movies one frame at a time, so you’re much more intimately involved in, literally, every single frame of the film. Not only the content of it, but also how it comes across visually. What color the shoes are, what color the socks are… Literally every detail.” The slower progression allows producers to become
more involved with the smaller components of the film, which for Cobb, is a rewarding experience. Day-to-day, she spends eighty to ninety percent of her time on the creative aspects of her films, working with the director, the writers, the editor, the animators, and the artists, to help develop the vision for the movie.

Having come from a live-action background, Christina Steinberg also notes that the size of the crew was a big difference for her when she first switched to animation: “In live-action, you’re working with a much smaller creative core group. It’s you and the director, the director of photography, the editor and the production designer — but you’re really all making the movie, and the group is deciding the day-to-day creative process. Whereas here, with a full production, your crew is almost 300 people.” One of the challenges of negotiating such a sizeable crew is being able to communicate the vision of the project so that every person understands exactly what the priorities and goals of the production are. At first there are always hiccups, but by the end, it’s incredible what a well-oiled machine the production team becomes. “Clearly these women feel a profound sense of appreciation for the people with whom they work, and for the opportunities they’ve been given at DreamWorks Animation. Looking back on her career, Latifa Ouou notes that her endeavors have always been encouraged and supported. She says, “I’ve been here for a while, and I’m grateful to Jeffery and Bill Damaschke for constantly giving me more opportunities. I always wanted more and they were always willing to give it… I feel really lucky in that way.” Ouou is still coming down from production for Pass in Bottle, which just released this fall, leading the box office for two consecutive weeks. But she admits that she would love to develop and produce another film with the studio. “I have to find a really good story, but I hope to push the boundaries of the kind of the films that we make here, as far as taking risks,” she states. “I think that the films keep getting better here, and it’s because we are taking more risks.” Melissa Cobb’s time at DreamWorks Animation has also been marked by an admiration for the creative talent that surrounds her, and a desire, like Ouou, to push the boundaries of her medium. “I’ve worked in live-action, television, and theater,” Cobb explains, “and I really love animation, particularly at DreamWorks because there are one thousand people at the studio here, and they are truly some of the best artists in the entire world. Every day you walk into the room and you’re blown away by what you see.” Ambitious projects on Cobb’s horizon include her upcoming feature, Me and My Shadow, a groundbreaking original film that combines CG characters with hand-drawn animation. “I feel like what we’re trying to do is very technically challenging and creatively exciting. As I said, I love things that are new … so I’m really excited to be right in the beginning of that project and getting that one off the ground. I think it’s really going to surprise people with what it’s going to be able to bring.”

Meanwhile, Soria and Steinberg have taken the lead in perfecting two of the key titles in DWA’s 2012 slate. Soria is, at press time, navigating the obstacles of shaping the third of the Madagascar series. “It’s always a challenge to do a third film of a franchise,” Soria points out. “But we’ve been very lucky to get back all of the key people, cast and department heads. Everybody has worked on the movies before… They love the characters, the franchise, and they love working together. We have a good time.” With Soria leading the team, the studio has every expectation that Madagascar’s third installment will only build on the immense goodwill and popular acclaim generated by the franchise’s first two films.

Finally, Christina Steinberg is in full production for DreamWorks Animation’s original feature Rise of the Guardians, based on the children’s novel by William Joyce. After 3½ years of development, Christina is now cutting together new footage with director Peter Ramsey. The 3D feature follows a group of heroic childhood legends, including Santa Claus, The Tooth Fairy, Jack Frost and The Easter Bunny, as they join forces against a villainous evil spirit. With an all-star cast of voice talent, including Hugh Jackman, Jude Law, Alec Baldwin, Chris Pine and Joda Fisher, Rise of the Guardians is slated as the studio’s major entry in the holiday season schedule for 2012.

There’s a reason DreamWorks Animation has been voted one of the top companies for which to work. It’s a supportive company. They’re good to their employees, and they invest a lot in the people who work for them. Katzenberg and Damaschke have assembled an amazing group of women from a diversity of professional backgrounds, and they have brought a passion and talent for producing that has been reflected in many of DWA’s successes. With so many original and innovative stories just around the corner, it’s exciting to look back on the work that these rising producers have already accomplished, and imagine the possibilities of their films that have yet to come.
In the world of storytelling through games, Disney has thrown the baby out with the bath water — kind of. They continue to expand their world of new characters beyond movies, television, and theme parks into the digital realm of mobile apps with Swampy the alligator, Disney’s newest original character and the star of the new app game, Where’s My Water? Developed by the team behind the top-selling JellyCar franchise, Where’s My Water? follows the story of Swampy the alligator and his quest to be clean. While this physics-based puzzle game for iPad, iPhone and iPod touch may seem like a familiar puzzle solver, the story behind how Disney made this game is all about the re-conception of storytelling itself ... with a little pixie dust thrown in, of course.

Water, Water Everywhere: Cutting Through the Clutter With a Killer App

The Apple App Store features more than 500,000 apps, 100,000 of which are game and entertainment titles. To cut through this clutter and rise to the top of the game charts (an absolute must if one’s game is to have any chance of success), a game must be designed to fit what Bart Decrem, executive in charge of Disney Interactive Media Studios’ Where’s My Water? calls the “Twitter era.”

“We are all competing for attention. Games, I believe, have an advantage over longer forms of media, because we live in an attention-deficit era, where people are on the go and only have 30 seconds to engage. They are waiting for a meeting to start, waiting for a table, on the bus. We are living in a Twitter era where everything takes 30 seconds and 140 characters. So when you look at Angry Birds or Where’s My Water?, they have a great advantage over movies or TV. They can be played in 30-second increments.”

Every impatient person seems to have an iPhone or iPad. Mobile devices are now baked into the fabric of everyday life and gaming is a major part of that. According to Decrem, the mobile gaming platform is in its infancy but shows tremendous promise for entertainment.

“As opposed to the laptop,” continues Decrem, “which started out for productivity, the core of these mobile devices is that they are made for fun. The adoption is being driven by consumers who love it and they want to do fun things on it like talking to friends, Facebook, watching movies or TV, and playing games. Entertainment is the ‘killer app’ on this platform. So this is a really important platform for the Walt Disney Company.”

You Can Lead a Horse to Water: Captivating an Audience With Killer Mechanics

Where’s My Water? features 120 levels of challenging puzzles, rich graphics, humorous effects, and a story that unfolds over time. Yes, a story — but perhaps not the kind most people are used to. In games, story typically takes a back seat to a more important element in game design: mechanics. Game mechanics are systems of rules intended to produce enjoyable game play. All games utilize mechanics, from Candy Land and Monopoly to trendsetting video game franchises like Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto. Theories and approaches differ as to the integration of mechanics...
new media

"Best animated film of the year."
— Roger Moore,
ORLANDO SENTINEL

"Adventures unwind almost nonstop with great visual style and flair."
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with story or theme. But in general, the process and study of game design are efforts to come up with game mechanics that allow for people playing a game to have a fun and engaging experience.

Bart Decrem believes that starting with a great character and then making a game from it is a backward way of making a game. Instead, he suggests the inverse is true, that "we start with a game mechanic that is going to be really great. We had [designed] this really cool mechanic around digging. We played around with it and prototyped it until it felt really good. Then we spent several months asking ourselves, 'What are we digging for? What's going on down there?' And we realized that there are alligators there, living in the sewers. As we kept brainstorming, we found Swampy, who's a little different and likes to take showers. And the game fell into place from there."

"Once we had the mechanic," he summarizes, "we looked at different stories, including different Disney characters. We didn't set out to make new IP. We set out to make a great game."

This runs counter to what most marketing groups in big studios do with TV and movie IP. Typically they license the game rights out to a developer/publisher like THQ. From there, the game is typically reverse-engineered to fit the plot or story of the original linear media. Decrem suggests that the most effective and successful games start with great game play, and back into their stories. It’s the inverse of linear content development.

Making Waves: Microstories

When stories do make their way into games, Decrem notes that they often show up as “microstories.” These short bursts of narrative or emotional engagement help create a deeper connection to the characters and their mission. These moments of story can be an animated character’s disappointment, as is the case with Swampy when the game player fails to solve a level’s puzzle challenge. They help motivate the player by moving them with pathos, however simple and light. Similar to Where’s My Water?, the now-classic Angry Birds uses “cut scenes” to show the conflict between the green pigs and the angry birds. These are merely camera moves on still illustrations — simple stuff. Which goes to show that story in games really does take a back seat to gameplay, since you don’t need much story to engage the player/audience. Players are really there for one thing — playing.

Troubled Waters: Swampy’s Story

But when story does appear in a game, Disney is not a minimalist. As a company known for great characters and IP curation, Disney takes storytelling seriously. Swampy’s story was no simple matter. Other existing Disney characters were initially considered. When they did not fit the game play, new characters were proposed that fit the activity of the mechanics. Sketches were made, designs and character back story were carefully crafted, and a plot thru-line was developed for the game, appearing as animated panel “breaks” where the story unfolds between levels. In this way, we learn that Swampy the Alligator lives under the city and yearns for a more human-like existence. He is especially fond of cleanliness. The other alligators do not take kindly to Swampy’s eccentricities and have conspired to sabotage his water supply.

Swampy is cute, he’s funny, and he just wants to take a bath with his beloved rubber ducky. Richly detailed graphics and animation bring Swampy and his subterranean world to life. Even the music is part of a compelling story. Its quirky beats and chimes are as whimsical as Swampy himself, and make playing the game more fun as they provide the heartbeat of Swampy’s world.

Wet Behind the Ears: Managing Game IP

So now that Disney has started to master story in games, how do these pieces fit into their otherwise linear franchise machine? Disney is well known for managing its franchises like no other. (They even have a central group for franchise management.) So how will they greet and manage Swampy? With open arms, of course. But that doesn’t mean they have a process for it — yet. Decrem notes that now, when they are placing characters into games, they are asking new questions.
"We start with a great game. But where’s the heart? And where’s the family? Disney’s stories have these at their core. Can we think of a character that has heart and is aspirational? If we do that, we will have a more franchisable character... Disney has taught us as game makers to think deeper and harder about character and the story arc and a world that is aspirational and rich so that the whole Walt Disney Company can go and contribute to and build on it as a franchise."

So even for a master franchise management company, there is something new to learn about interactive IP; from how it’s made, to extensions into other media and consumer products. *Angry Birds* may be the textbook example to follow — take an ingeniously designed game with unknown IP and get everyone to play it, then carefully extend it beyond the game into partnerships (like *Angry Birds Rio*) and ultimately into consumer products (I just bought my *Angry Birds* key ring) and then into TV and movies. (Marvel Studios Chairman David Maisel was hired in July to advise Rovio’s fledgling movie division.)

Will Swampy be on a key ring or in a TV show? Well, in November, YouTube and Disney announced a deal that will distribute an original animated Web series based on Swampy and his world. So, I guess the answer would seem to be: “very likely.”

**Every Drop Counts**

Decrem calls developing games for existing IP a treacherous assignment. It runs counter to the notion of developing a great game mechanic first. Fun comes first. Character and pathos will find their way and follow, and if carefully done, the results can be magical.

“Always start with the game,” Decrem dictates. “Ask yourself, is it fun to play, and do people care about the characters? As we talk to people about the game, we hear them say, over and over, ‘We need to help Swampy. He gets sad when he can’t take his shower.’ That’s why I’m so proud of the game. It’s a character that’s worthy of Disney.”

Chris Thomes is the Chair of the PGA New Media Council.
Out of the blue, you get a call from one of the most successful director/producers of all time, who even has his own studio. He invites you to come work with him as a producer on his next epic film. You are thrilled. And then, you get to work on it... for the next 23 years.

This incredible scenario actually happened. And it happened to longtime PGA member Charles Floyd Johnson, who will finally see the fruit of his efforts when Red Tails, the action drama about trailblazing African-American pilots, the Tuskegee Airmen, from Lucasfilm and executive producer George Lucas, gets its big screen release this January.

In discussing this remarkable story with Johnson, two words come to mind: perseverance and serendipity. Both words are apt in describing Johnson's remarkable journey from small-town Delaware to Hollywood, a journey that has given him a unique perspective on working in the business of film and TV.

Within seconds of meeting him, it becomes apparent that one of Johnson's innate qualities is a genuine enthusiasm both for people, especially the people he works with on a day-to-day basis, and his craft as a producer. There is no negativity. He views all problems as potential opportunities and most obstacles as surmountable. Both are concepts that he embraced early on.

Before coming to Los Angeles, Johnson graduated from Howard University and got his law degree. Working days for the government in the copyright office, his real passion was spending his weekends and nights working in a nearby theater in D.C., both as an actor and director.

Unable to resist the call of Hollywood, he finally bit the bullet and made his way to L.A. Says Johnson, "I felt I was destined for the film and TV business. I came to Hollywood when I was 28 and 29, which is late for getting started. I literally had it in my head that I don't want to wake up at 40 and not have tried."

It was in television that he found his first breaks. "When I first came out here, I had read an article about Spielberg, who was just out of Long Beach State, which inspired me. I went to the Universal lot, and a guard named Scottie let me in. I stayed on the lot all day, and came to the realization, 'This is where I want to be.'"

At Universal, he started in the mailroom. Soon he transitioned to a job as a business affairs coordinator on various TV shows. He also moonlighted as an actor, getting small gigs on several shows.

And here's where serendipity comes in. About this time he brought the story to his attention and the saga of these incredible pilots resonated with him, leaving an indelible impression. "In George's case, I believe a friend of his, a photographer, called him and said, 'I have a project, and he wanted Johnson to work with him. This led to a job on the long-running series The Rockford Files where after several years he became a full-fledged series producer.

From there, he progressed through the next 20 years in television, including Magnum P.I., starring Tom Selleck, and JAG, both long-running hit series. In series television, he is widely respected as the consummate producer.

Veteran director Terrence O'Hara, who works with Johnson frequently on N.C.I.S., the current top show on television, observes, "He's always prepared. He's one of the most efficient, professional producers I know. He often spends his nights in his office poring over each and every script." In
“So, being Harry Humble, when I left that day at 5 in the afternoon, I said, ‘Mr. Lucas, if I ever get the chance to work with you, it would be an honor.’ He said, ‘What are you talking about?’ I said, ‘Well, this is an interview isn’t it?’ He said, ‘Well, yes, but I had heard a lot about you, and if you want the job, it’s yours.’ And that’s how we started. I left there on cloud nine.”

Neither Johnson nor Lucas knew that this was the beginning of a 23-year journey. Johnson notes Lucas’s approach to making Red Tails, particularly that “George felt it important to have African-American contributions to a uniquely African-American story.” Red Tails is thus the rare project that boasts an African-American producer, director and writer.

In the beginning, in assembling the movie’s assets, the script, supporting material, and support of the Tuskegee flyers, Lucas needed Johnson to go out and talk to as many of the surviving airman as he could, to get their stories. “We talked about where my major job was. Initially, my task was to go and meet these guys, and make a deal with the Tuskegee Airmen’s Association so that Lucas could do the film with them. And later, for them to talk with our writers. And so I went, all over the country.”

Johnson was doing two jobs, as he still had his day job. “The good news is that I was no longer in Hawaii, as I had wrapped Magnum, but Tom asked me to help run his company TWS, where he had a development deal with Disney for features, and a TV development deal with Universal. So I’m back in the states, and I had a five- or six-month window where I could do double duty for Lucas, meeting these people, and making contacts. I met so many of these men… I went to Northern California, I went to Ohio, I went to D.C., I went to New York, and got as many people as I could to sign a contract. I gave the names to the then-current director so he could interview them and work on the script.

But as they pressed on, there were a couple of developments that brought the Red Tails project to a standstill. In the ’90s, Bob Cooper, head of HBO, called Lucas and said they planned to do a movie on the Tuskegee Airmen. Lucas, disappointed, graciously shelved the still-in-development Red Tails in deference to HBO. Also during that time, Lucas and his producer Rick McCallum decided to do the next films in the Star Wars saga; those three pictures took 10 years.

For Johnson, “It definitely went through my mind that I’m not going to get to see Red Tails made.” He continues, “But, here’s the interesting thing about George Lucas—even though the project was not active, it was always at the forefront of his consciousness.”

During this time, the initial director and writers had left the project, but fortunately Johnson remained involved and part of the Lucasfilm family. He came to appreciate “how terrific George is in making you feel comfortable and so at ease, once you are on board and officially working for him.”

“I was the only one, I think,” continued Johnson, “who stayed in touch with him all through these years. I would be invited up to various events, the 4th of July party, etc., and they kept me part of the family. It was an amazingly wonderful thing, and George is terrific that way when it comes to people.”

CUT TO 2007. Lucas and McCallum had finished the final trilogy of Star Wars pictures, and Johnson had kept busy as well in the interim, having completed work on a series of Rockford Files movies for television, as well as Quantum Leap, First Monday, and JAG. Once again, the phone rang and it was Jane Bay, Lucas’ longtime assistant. “And she said, ‘George wants to
talk to you. And I wondered, why? She said, ‘He wants to know if you still want to do Red Tails?’ And I said, ‘Are you kidding? YES! I was thrilled.’

‘By this time,’ Johnson elaborates, Rick McCallum was working closely with George, and Rick is the consummate producer. So things on the movie’s development started heating up very fast. We discussed writers. George and Rick liked John Ridley, and I agreed. I had previously interviewed all the earlier writers and script candidates, including Aaron Sorkin, who had just come off Broadway with A Few Good Men.

Eventually John Ridley came to the Ranch and interviewed many of the Tuskegee Airmen there and in other venues. In fact, several of the airmen visited the Ranch on a number of occasions and were intimately involved in providing much of the essential background for the making of Red Tails.

It’s worth noting that even as production was starting up, Lucas and McCallum had a documentary unit working to record interviews with the surviving airmen. “This was a brilliant move on George’s part,” notes Johnson. “There is now a documentary that exists called Double Victory, which turned out wonderfully.”

The film covers the time from the airmen’s entry into the program at Tuskegee, all the way up to President Barack Obama’s inauguration, and their Congressional Medal of Commendation.

A new young director was brought on board, Anthony Hemingway, who had made a splash in television on HBO’s The Wire, and later on Treme. Johnson and Hemingway bonded quickly, and he and Rick McCallum helped bring the director up to speed about the sacrifices made by those young pilots, and how important their contributions to the overall war effort were.

“Anthony Hemingway was able to identify with the airmen,” Johnson relates. “I traveled around the country with him where we met the airmen. He bonded with them, and they...”
liked him a lot. We actually went to Tuskegee in 2007 where the old airfield was dedicated as a national monument, and Hemingway spoke to the airmen at a breakfast.” Once again, Johnson proved to be the glue that held together the development of the project.

The film finally started production in April of 2009. The young actors playing the pilots, including performers Neyo and Method Man, were put through an intensive boot camp, not unlike the one Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks created to test the cast of Band of Brothers. Says Johnson, “It was tough on them, but it paid off in the chemistry that you can see between them on screen.”

Though he spent three weeks in Europe on the set, Johnson was still doing double duty with his television day job, as producer of the nine-year-running N.C.I.S. By this time, he adds, “My part in this production was much more of a producer that was consulting during the production, while Rick handled the bulk of the on-set duties. The 20 years previous, it was my mission to keep it going, which I am quite proud to have done.”

Johnson feels it’s significant to note that the airmen’s triumph did not end in 1945. “Over my years of research, I met a lot of the Tuskegee Airmen,” he recalls, “and they went on to become leaders and captains of industry. Just the same, Red Tails is not a history lesson; it is, in the end, entertainment.”

In our final conversation, I asked Johnson if he ever doubted the film would get made. His answer was an unequivocal “No.”

“There was just something about George’s determination which made me know instinctively that he never, ever lost the sight of his desire to do the movie. That innate knowledge kept us all afloat through the years.”

For Johnson, over those 23 years, a long-ago memory came to the fore. His father was a World War II veteran in the Army Cavalry stationed in North Africa as a small boy, he remembered his dad talking of meeting these airmen during the war.

“These airmen were sent to North Africa; my dad was already there. He was up near Marrakech, and he had heard about them. He talked to me about these black pilots — he never called them the Tuskegee Airmen by name — and I listened.”

“But I was so small, and so young, and it didn’t connect, except until years later… My father wanted to learn to fly, and finally, he realized that dream.” Johnson guessed later that his father’s inspiration for wanting to fly were the brave men he met during the war in North Africa. “So, for me, this project was like something coming full circle,” as was meeting the actual airmen, and learning their names. “Life is full of these things,” he says. “You can speak of it as fate, or destiny, but a lot of it is just serendipitous.” (His word, this time.)

Lucas himself owns that Red Tails has been an extended journey. Johnson recently sat with him at a well-received screening with a live audience. When it was over, Lucas said to him, “Charles, it’s been 23 years. What do we do now?” Charles Floyd Johnson could only laugh. It had been a long run, after all.
Whenever someone says, ‘You’re in television? Well, I don’t watch television,’ I want to slug them. Do they know they’re missing some of the most informative and fabulous forms of entertainment that have ever existed?’ This statement, from television luminary Rod Perth, is one of the many provocative thoughts points we came away with during the PGA/Really Useful Information (RUI) Film & TV Finance series, held over a five-week period at CBS Radford Studios and Raleigh Studios.

We learned some good news from our instructors — for instance, that original programming (not reruns!) is the only way that cable channels can establish themselves as a brand. Feature films are recouping investments with up to 10-year pay cycles that include theatrical box office, home video, pay-per-view, pay TV, a matching international cycle, online delivery systems, merchandising and soundtrack revenue streams.

Okay, great. I’m off to the races. Now, how does this financing thing work again? No worries. I have a new mantra. NPV. Net Present Value, my friends. If you believe your budget is $25 million because that is the amount of funding you raised through equity, loans, and gap financing, think again.

Following are five aha! moments and the hard-core learning behind the RUI series:

#1 Money Costs Money

Let’s start with what should be the most obvious — but is often the most forgotten — piece of the puzzle. Money costs money. Period. If you borrow money, investors will expect an annual rate of return for the use of their funds. The minute those funds are deposited into your account, that interest rate starts ticking and keeps ticking until the money is repaid. Let’s return to your $25M budget (if only) and look at the life cycle of your production over several years with discounted cash flows. During the first year alone, guess what? Your total budget figure remained the same, but your expenses in the form of interest (a 15% weighted average cost of capital if you’re lucky) just increased by $3.75M. The total cash you have at your disposal for your production just decreased to $21.25M.

(Note to self: remind line producer to cancel the crane on Day 8 and reduce total shoot days by five.) Until the film breaks even and the funds are returned to the investor (we are likely talking years here), you will continue to pay interest on that capital. We as producers have to create a budget line item for this finance cost. It doesn’t magically go away. As Marc Robertson, CEO of RUI, says, “Don’t be afraid to look.”
#2 Brand Integration (Not Product Placement)

Here’s a new one. Your screen time has value. And to think, we’ve been giving it away for free all these years. Brian Williams, EVP of Brand-in Entertainment, taught us to think about how to integrate a brand into our project in advance, not only so we can come up with an organic way to fit it into the creative, but also because it’s going to be much harder to go back to the advertiser later on and ask them for money. Brand integration is the only type of financing that you don’t have to pay back. (Remember that $3.75M we just lost in year one? Doesn’t apply.) And it’s one of the few opportunities for advertisers to avoid DVR blowout. The networks are relying more and more on producers to deficit finance their own shows, so brand integration is a great opportunity for producers to come in to the pitch meeting with a little more moxie. If you’re an indie producer and you can successfully integrate a brand into your storyline, you can raise $150K–$500K. And brands love working with indie producers because they have a vested interest (brand money may be half the budget) in making sure the creative elements are seamlessly integrated into the picture, instead of (like certain studio pics) shoving them in at the end. Again, it’s called “brand integration,” not product placement. There’s so much we learned about this topic I can’t possibly sum it all up, but one last tip: Once you agree to portray a brand in a certain way in your project, that advertiser will hold you to those contracts — so it’s critical to get buy-in from all your creative personnel up front.

#3 Reality & Serialized TV Shows

Have Little to No Downstream Revenues

As a television producer, you have to think about downstream revenues (otherwise known as syndication) for your shows. If you are pitching a reality show or a serialized show, recognize that you will have limitations on the back end. Reality shows are most often based on competition, and once we’ve learned the outcome, there is no rerun value. A serialized show requires the viewer to watch every episode to understand the character development, the narrative, and the arc of the story. These don’t work well downstream. For instance, HBO’s *Sopranos* was one of the most acclaimed series of the past 20 years, yet tanked when it was rerun by A&E. There’s a lot of money left on the table if syndication isn’t part of the formula. Therefore, you may want to rethink your show’s storyline and create an “A” story that is always closed-ended, and a “B” story that has a through line. This season’s *Pan Am* is a good example. You can watch and enjoy an episode without having seen every prior episode.

#4 Protect Yourself With Investors

Make investors aware of what you are doing as a producer. Document everything. Investors may not know the process you’re going through and what it means to make a movie, but they may know everything there is to know about finance, investing, and risk. Never underestimate your investors. Let them know in advance all the possible areas where things could go wrong (extra shooting days, overtime, different release patterns, etc.) so they understand what they’re buying into. It’s okay for equity investors — who may be asking for 20% or more — to take a risk, because you’re paying through the nose for that money. Nonetheless, they may expect a level of financial reporting or projections that you don’t understand or don’t have time to perform. Give them what you can, which sometimes may only constitute a SWAG formula (scientific wild-ass guess). Set parameters, such as providing them with an update every five days — they may be less inclined to be intrusive if they know information is coming their way soon. You don’t want to paint a dishonest picture of success. There is a chance that investors may get a solid return or they may
lose everything. You want to let them know up front about all the holes. It’s always worth taking the time to inform investors. What’s not worth it is having the plug pulled in the middle of production because you’ve gone over budget, or asking for more money never having communicated the potential pitfalls. The bottom line is to protect yourself as much as you can with people who are financially savvy by being up front. They can and will sue you. Did I mention to document everything?

#5 200+ Is Not an Exaggeration
There’s a 1000:1 chance if you’re selling a show in prime time that you’ll succeed. Every network purchases hundreds of scripts. Out of those, a small number are developed. Of those, a minute number are picked up as pilots, and out of those, 3–4 shows are acquired (per network). From there, you have to contend with cancelation rates. So, network success is tough, but worth going after. HOWEVER, there are more than 200+ cable channels out there. As we’ve said, cable channels need original programming (rather than reruns) to not only establish themselves as a brand, but to increase their standing with advertisers and cable operators. Cable companies also happen to be much more patient, not following a tyranny of ratings that may blow out a show after only three episodes like broadcast networks. You may have to put up with lower fees and less ownership. They may not be able to afford to pay for high-priced productions, but they do need the content. 200 is a big number. Start pitching.

#6 (Bonus) Get Your Confidence On
I said five, but let’s make it six aha! moments. During the last session, one of the attendees started to ask a question about approaching a well-known person saying, “Well, I’m not in their league, but…” Marc Robertson stopped the speaker immediately and interjected, “Who’s out of your league? Seriously, who? No one is out of your league. Everyone is walking around the same planet breathing the same air. In this business, a name can carry tremendous clout. But if you think you are beneath them, that’s bullshit. It’s critical that you understand you are just as valuable as anyone else.” He went on to say that getting rid of feelings such as “I’m not worthy” or “I’m not that good yet” or “I’ve never had a hit” is the first step to winning. What makes you think you’re less than those people who just happened to close a deal? They may just be good negotiators, and you may be a creative genius! So, go get some training in negotiations. Get your confidence on. People in power are magnetized to those who express confidence. Why? Because confident folks might be able to shoulder the burden top executives are carrying — they might be responsible enough to get it done right on their behalf. Join the league of human beings. That’s the only league there is.

There is so much more we learned during these film & TV finance sessions, so if you missed them, you can view this series as well as other educational series online at http://www.rui.us.com.

A very big thanks from the PGA to Marc Robertson, Rod Perth, Andrew Sugerman, Brian Williams, Devin Arbiter, and everyone at RUI.

Deanna McDaniel is a writer/producer, PGA member and author of the newly released book A Speck of Light: How to Free Yourself From Emotional Darkness.
This is the basic — and completely valid — argument against producing a short film. Why go through the stress, heartbreak, highs and lows of filmmaking if the completed project doesn’t have any fiscal value? Well, I’m so very glad you asked. Here’s a couple reasons why producing a short film may be just what you need:

“Nobody ever paid 12 bucks to see a short film.”

This is the basic — and completely valid — argument against producing a short film. Why go through the stress, heartbreak, highs and lows of filmmaking if the completed project doesn’t have any fiscal value? Well, I’m so very glad you asked. Here’s a couple reasons why producing a short film may be just what you need:
1. Career Boost? Possibly. In my experience, there are two types of people in Los Angeles: people who make things and people who talk about it. Producing a short film is a tangible goal and puts you in the category of ‘Doers.’ And once your short film is completed, you never know where it could lead. *Napoleon Dynamite* started as a short film and then went on to become a feature and gross $45 million at the box office (‘Jenny Craig’-type disclaimer: Results May Vary).

2. Work With Your Heroes. As all fine and gifted PGA members know, asking successful people for favors in this town — even the ones you’ve known for over a decade — can be a Herculean task. But to ask that same person for just a few evenings to work on a short film can be that easy favor that makes them feel fuzzy all over. Know a famous actor? Maybe a DP with some great credits? Coordinate a weekend and have fun on set. We all made movies with our friends when we were kids — keep it light and enjoy ‘Doing for Doing’s Sake.’ And always have good food on a gratis set. And comfortable chairs.

3. Awards Are Sexy. When you finish your short film (and keep it under 10 minutes to help with festival placement) and you actually like it, you’ll be surprised at how many people will want to show it places. Withoutabox.com has quickly turned into the clearing house for every festival in the world and in an afternoon of clicking your laptop, you can enter all the biggies. This year has seen a drastic increase in the number of fests that accept digital screeners as well, so you won’t even have to drive to FedEx in your jammies.

4. Oscars Are Really Sexy. So it breaks down like this: Every year, of the thousands and thousands of short films that get made, only a relative few get qualified for the Oscars. Last year, only 76 short films made it to qualification. To qualify you have to have either won a major festival (Sundance, Cannes, Toronto, etc.) or have your short shown theatrically in Los Angeles for three ticket-selling days. Your film also has to be transferred to a ‘DCP’ file for the theatrical run. These hurdles aren’t cheap, but last year you had a 1 in 7.6 chance of making the Academy Short (short) List of 10. Some notables with Short Film Oscar nominations: Walt Disney, Peter Sellers, Jeff Goldblum and even Taylor Hackford.

So — is producing a short film for you? The above are a few reasons why it may be. Here’s one more: It felt pretty good at Cannes telling Gus Van Zandt that my short film *African Chelsea* was playing at the Palais the next morning. So get out there and do it. Make it happen. Build your wagon. Do or do not — there is no try.
NOW WHAT?

“OK, Mr. Fancy Pants — you’ve made your point. You’ve convinced us that we should make a short film — now what?”

Well, again, I'm so very glad you asked. Getting the word out on your short film is just as important as making the doughnuts in the first place. If a tree falls down in the woods and doesn’t crack the top 10 at the box office, does anyone give a whirl? So, it’s time to pound the pavement. To achieve any of the goals stated earlier, you’ve got to get the word out.

Think Like an Editor. And when I say ‘editor,’ I don’t mean one that is still cranky about Final Cut 10. I mean an editor at your local paper (or Transmedia Publication, which is a fancy term for all
the different ways you can read *The Onion*). Thinking like an editor starts with one question: “Why should I care?” You can test out whether or not you have an interesting idea by talking to an actor about it. This actor doesn’t need to be successful at all — they only have to admit to being an actor when asked what they do at parties. Begin your pitch: “Hello, [actor acquaintance], I’ve made a short film about the migration patterns of llamas.” Watch how long it takes them to start checking the door to see if Deborah Aquila is actually going to show up. (After all, it is her hairdresser’s son’s soccer trophy presentation ceremony.) This is the quickest way to see if you have an idea that sticks — see if you can keep an actor’s attention with it. If they say, “I’d love to be involved,” then you’ve got a winner. If they say, “Is that Deborah Aquila over there?” you need to come up with a better idea. My short’s pitch is this: “An exotic dancer struggles to survive in Los Angeles, starring Oscar nominee Sally Kirkland and Corinne Becker.” Short, sweet, and full of — hey, actor, I’m right here, talking to you. If an actor (or your sister who’s not in the biz so therefore a civilian) changes the subject, then come up with a better idea for your short, because when it comes time to pitch, it has to be inherently interesting or you’ll just be wasting your time.

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-Rodrigo Perez, INDIEWIRE

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PROMOTION PLATFORMS
(aka Places to Talk About Your Movie)

The Whole Internet Thingy. Yeah, yeah, I know, every conference, panel, or media person in town just repeats the words ‘Social Media ... Social Media’ until they’re blue in the face. Well, let me first state the obvious: Any media that is successful is social. When radio first started it was social because people talked about it, spread the word and tuned in to hear Milton Berle say, “He’s so old that when he orders a three-minute egg, they ask for the money up front.” Here are some ideas:

a) Internet Plan Step #1: Facebook fan page. Tell all 500 of your Facebook friends to join. After you learn that you only have about 25 real friends (the ones who joined up, natch), ask them nicely to ask their friends to join. (Disclaimer #2: This process is much easier if you have a good movie.)

b) Internet Plan Step #2: Get your short reviewed (if it’s good). A good quote at the top of your ads and marketing materials is the best way to say QUALITY. It’s also the best way to say your film is good to people at a party without saying, “I think it’s good.” Much better to say, “Variety said it was well done.” Third-Party Validation — the whole town runs on it.

c) Internet Plan Step #3: Get on a podcast — or make your own. Here’s one of the great things about the Internet: once your article, interview, etc. is posted, it comes up in a search. Certainly the bigger the site, the higher and faster it will jump up (numbers of visitors and traffic consistency does this), but — especially if the name of your short is unique — the things you get posted will come up. Don’t call your short Johnson Family Reunion. Call it Francis and the Iguana Play the Xylophone & Tuba or something. Actually, a short title is better: Francis Xylophone. There probably won’t be too many competitors for that one. Actually, instead of Francis, call it Alfred — alphabetically speaking, it will come up first in lists at festivals and awards nominations. Michael Micklewhite chose Caine for his last name because it would come up early in alphabetical credit lists.
The Potential for Low-Fi. People still read stuff that they can hold on to. It’s true! Think of all the things this morning you’ve read that was printed onto something (this exercise gets harder every year). Low-cost items that you hold on to: newspapers (there’s one at the next table here at Kings Road Café and small ads aren’t that expensive), postcards (your friend with the play on Santa Monica Boulevard made you tape one to your fridge last week), T-shirts (make the design cool and people will forget they’re key components in your low-fi marketing strategy), and magazines (you are likely holding one right now). The great part about things you read that you can hold on to is that they stick around for a while. They find themselves in odd places and continue their work of costlessly marketing long after they’ve been handed over. A friend’s indie feature made mousepads — yes, friggin’ mousepads — and two years later, one of the biggest producers in town still uses it because, well ... he needs a mousepad. So print some stuff and start handing it out already!

Submit. Submit. Submit. You’ll go through some cash, but people actually have to see your opus, so submit it to festivals. (As previously stated, withoutabox.com is the easiest way to do this.) Once you get it into four or five festivals, you’ll have more quotes for your press items — and being a ‘Producer in the Festival’ gets more free drinks at the bar than ‘Wannabe Producer at the Festival’.

The final rule is that you need to spend the time working on your stated goal. Eventually you’ll find a crack in the concrete and actually get some momentum going. You’ll know when this has happened when someone you don’t know emails you to either write about your film or wants to show it in their festival. The entertainment industry and the people around it are all moths to the flame — the hotter your film the more moths will come out — the more moths the bigger your network — the bigger your network the more possibility for opportunity.

Good luck out there. See you in the game. Brent Roske is an Emmy-nominated director and a former creative director at NBC Universal. His short film African Chelsea, starring Corinne Becker and Oscar nominee Sally Kirkland, is qualified for this year’s Oscars.
PGA Green Receives EMA’s Green Production Award

It’s not often that in one evening, Norman Lear, Justin Timberlake and a water-free urinal share the stage, but that’s exactly what happened at the 21st Annual Environmental Media Awards, which celebrates outstanding achievements within the entertainment and environmental communities.

Timberlake was just one of the many recipients being honored for their environmental contributions, including PGA Green, which received the Green Production Award for promoting sustainable production practices, namely through the creation of PGAGreen.org and GreenProductionGuide.com. The Producers Guild of America’s Green Initiative was introduced in 2009 as a direct response to PGA members who voiced the need for additional information on how best to produce more sustainable productions.

Co-founded in 1989 by the legendary producer Norman Lear, the Environmental Media Association (EMA) mobilizes the entertainment industry in educating people about environmental issues, which in turn, inspires them to take action. Their annual event recognizes environmentally conscious artists, films, TV programs and products including the aforementioned toilet. The Falcon water-free urinal was份额for freedom humor over the course of the evening, but it’s no joke how beneficial it can be for the planet. It saves more than 40,000 gallons of water per urinal annually. It’s these kind of innovative products and services that are listed in GreenProductionGuide.com and can help your next production be greener.

The Green Production Guide is a user-friendly website where members of the entertainment industry can access a vast global database of vendors that offer sustainable or environmentally sensitive services and products. Currently, more than 2,000 vendor listings are available, referred by producers and production representatives who have positive experiences with products and services on past productions.

It’s an amazing resource and more importantly, one that is being used. In accepting their EMA Reality TV Award, the producers of Green Home 2011 on HGTV mentioned their use of the Green Production Guide and the PGA Green Unified Best Practices Guide. “We had our crew carpool to the set, used actual dishes at craft services and catering that we’d wash and bring back the next day. We felt like we were practicing what we preached instead of just doing a show about green,” added producer Loren Ruch.

It’s this implementation of the guide throughout the industry that led the Environmental Media Association to honor PGA Green with its inaugural Green Production Award, which recognizes industry professionals that go above and beyond to keep things green behind the scenes. EMA President Debbie Levin also cited PGA Green’s carbon calculator, which can be found on the site.

While introducing PGA Green, actress Kyra Sedgwick said, “It’s a bold statement for a body like the Producers Guild of America to make green production such an important part of their messaging and interactions with producers around the globe. Sedgwick added, “I personally hope it encourages hundreds of productions to take that next green step.” PGA Executive Director Vance Van Petten and PGA Green Chairs Lydia Dean Pilcher and Fred Baron accepted the award on behalf of the entire committee. Van Petten stated, “In the more than 10 years I’ve served as the PGA’s executive director, there’s nothing I’m more proud of than how our members have risen to meet the challenge of climate change.” In accepting the award, Fred Baron mentioned the fiscal rewards of going green, “Film, TV, new media, we have the answers on how to reduce your carbon footprint and save your production money, because you know ... we are producers.”

Several productions and events received EMA Green Seal Awards for their green production practices, among them, Premium Rush, Moneyball, Crazy Stupid Love, The Good Wife, Parenthood, the Emmy Awards and the Sundance Film Festival.

The variety of projects, products and events honored proved that no matter the genre, going green is a shared goal among producers. In wrapping up the evening, honoree Justin Timberlake made note of that theme when he joked, “I’m so happy to see the PGA being honored tonight along with Yogi Bear.” (The 2010 Warner Bros. film was a fellow EMA honoree.)

He also recognized that the greenness process is still evolving and that “doing things the green way is not always the cheapest way in the short term, but it’s the most sustainable way and the right way in the long term to do things ... it’s a lesson the entertainment world is constantly learning.”

Timberlake closed saying, “I believe those that travel the world playing concerts, making movies or TV shows, we have to be aware of our carbon footprints so we’re not stepping all over the lives and environments of the same people we’re all supposed to be entertaining and inspiring.”

—RACHAEL JOY

Left: PGA Green Chairs Lydia Dean Pilcher (left) and Fred Baron (second from right) proudly display their award with Kyra Sedgwick and PGA Executive Director Vance Van Petten.

Below (L-R): Rachael Joy, Katie Carpenter, Mari Jo Winkler, Lydia Dean Pilcher, Amanda Scarano Carter, Vance Van Petten, Fred Baron. (Photo: Nancy Baron)

Winter 2011 Produced by
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PGA BUILDS MORE THAN ENTERTAINMENT

On November 5, a team of dedicated volunteers from PGA Green joined together with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles to put in a hard — but rewarding — day’s work.

After their early-morning arrival at the build site in Long Beach, the volunteers broke up into teams that sanded, painted, dug, planted, sawed, hauled and all other manner of construction tasks. The beneficiaries of the work were the Lopez family, a family of five who, once construction is complete, will move out of their one-bedroom apartment in Long Beach into a home that they own and built themselves — with an assist from the PGA and numerous other Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles volunteers.

Inspired by the work of your fellow members in PGA Green? Go with that impulse! Find your way to www.habitatla.org and learn how to volunteer.

HONORED BY DARI AWARDS

Yes, it’s awards season, but here’s one we didn’t see coming: The Producers Guild is being honored by the 2011 Dari Awards, presented by KOCCA, the Korea Creative Content Agency. Thanks to their committed support of such endeavors as the Produced By Conference, the Guild has been proud to have KOCCA as a partner for the past several years; apparently the feeling is mutual.

KOCCA is a division of South Korea’s Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. As Korea’s premiere government agency involved in creative entertainment content, the organization actively promotes Korean companies related to films, broadcasting, animation, and music.

KOCCA only honors four recipients per year with their Dari Awards. As a result of the Guild’s collaboration with KOCCA surrounding seminars created for the Produced By Conference, the PGA has been named as the Best Business Partnership by the agency.

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We generally think that being a good business partner is its own reward, but we’re more than gratified that KOCCA wants to say nice things about us in public. At press time, we’re about a week away from the Dari Awards ceremony, at which our President Hawk Koch and International Committee Chair Stu Levy will accept the award on the Guild’s behalf. But speaking for Produced By: Thank you, KOCCA. We look forward to being Best Business Partners for years to come.
New Members
The Producers Guild is proud to welcome the following new members, who have joined the Guild since November, 2011.

**PRODUCERS COUNCIL**

DAVID BARBA  
KRISTA BASIL  
SHANEK BERENSON  
JONATHAN BRANDERIS  
BLAIR BREAUD  
JESSIE COLLINS  
SHAUNA GARR  
DAVID GINSBERG  
FRED GRAVER  
AARON GROSKY  
STEPHANIE HAGEN  
ELI HOLZMAN  
TED HOPKINS  
MATTHEW HOROVITZ  
RAHEL H. HOROVITZ  
RUTH IRVINE-HAUER  
TOM KARNOVSKI  
SARAH KRIEGER  
CATHY MOSS  
RUTH RAPINO  
MATT ROBERTS  
SHEILA ROGERS  
MICHAEL SLUSIAN  
CHRISTOPHER WOODROW

**AP COUNCIL**

Associate Producer/Production Manager/Production Supervisor  
ANDREW CRAITE  
RYAN GUGLIELMO  
MARK LEE  
LYDIA ROSS  
JENNIFER WILKINS  
Segment/Field/Studio Producer  
RONN HEAD  
JASON WHITE

Production Coordinator  
ELIZABETH FLAMENBAUM  
ROCCO PUCILLO

**NEW MEDIA COUNCIL**

BEVERLY ABBOTT  
JOSH COGAN  
DREW BALDWIN  
TODD COGAN  
MARK MILLER  
KEVIN SABBE  
PETER SALVIA  
DOUG SCOTT  
FRANK SIMON

**Member Benefits**

- Access to PGA employment listings, online résumé search, employment tools and job forums
- Discounted registration for Produced By Conference
- Full access to PGA website including events, calendar, social networking tools
- Eligibility for individual, family and small business healthcare options through Producers Health Insurance Agency
- Participation in the Motion Picture Industry Health, Welfare & Pension Plan
- Listing of contact and credit information in searchable online roster
- Vote on Producers Guild Awards and receive discount tickets to the event, as well as DVD screeners for awards consideration
- Eligibility for PGA Mentoring Program
- Admission to special PGA seminars, Q&A events, pre-release screenings and events, merchandise, travel discounts and 3D foreign language film ticket to the event, as well as DVD screeners for awards consideration
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SILENN THOMAS

I first joined the PGA in 2008, shortly after working on The Spiderwick Chronicles, which was overseen by past PGA President Kathleen Kennedy. My admiration for her diverse body of work, her ethics and her strength inspired me to become an independent producer.

During that time, Kathleen Kennedy was working on Ponyo, Persepolis, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, Indiana Jones 4, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button and Tintin, a childhood favorite of mine.

Inspired by Kathleen’s boundless energy, I decided to become more involved in the Guild and entered the Mentoring Program. I wanted a mentor who would understand how to approach making an indie American film and felt that a more experienced PGA producer would be a good fit.

Fortunately, I was paired with Alix Madigan. I had heard great things about Alix from a number of colleagues, including directors who worked with her at Anonymous Content. And I loved Winter’s Bone, which Alix produced.

So I wasn’t surprised that in our very first meeting, Alix wanted to get into a clearly defined project that had a focus and a practical, commercial application. She asked me to pitch a few of my projects and selected a Sundance Producers Lab script entitled Arcadia, written by director Olivia Silver. I had been developing it for some time with Olivia and producer Julien Favre.

During the next few months, Alix guided me through all aspects of production. She remained a steadfast ally throughout. Whether it was an issue with the budget, the director, or the many unexpected obstacles that one encounters while making an independent film, Alix consistently gave me candid advice and offered an intelligent and practical way to approach each situation. She was always available with constructive feedback to help me move forward and onward. For my part, I was careful to ask Alix for help in specific crisis situations rather than present general questions that didn’t have an immediate application.

Arcadia completed principal photography on September 23 and we are in post production at this time. Alix continues to be an active mentor to this day. Her unwavering support and dedication to seeing me succeed will always inspire me and serve as a constant reminder of the importance of mentoring in our professional development — and to the value of our remarkable Guild. Thank you, Alix, for everything.