2026 PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

MARILYN R. ATLAS is a talent and literary manager and award-winning producer. Her clients have appeared in shows such as STAR TREK, FRINGE, PRETTY LITTLE LIARS, HOW TO GET AWAY WITH MURDER, 90210, REVENGE, HART OF DIXIE, NCIS:LA, TRUE BLOOD, DEXTER, CHUCK, CASTLE, and CRIMINAL MINDS. She was film producer on REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES for HBO, which won the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival; A CERTAIN DESIRE, starring Sam Waterston; and ECHOES, which won the Gold Award at the Texas International Film Festival.

In addition to producing a variety of programming for the cable/pay TV market. In live theater, Marilyn co-produced the West Coast premiere of the musical *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater* by Ashman and Menken (the writers of ENCHANTED and TANGLED). She also co-produced the award-winning play *To Gillian on Her 37th Birthday*.

Marilyn herself has been in development on pilots for Showtime and ABC Family. In addition to Marilyn's film/TV credits, she has sold (first time) novels *Chasing the Jaguar* to HarperCollins to Hachette Book Ave Maria Bed & Breakfast to Grand Central Publishing, and the Hungry Woman in Paris, Group, and the Last Ride of Caleb O'Toole to Sourcebooks Her Lifetime movie THE CHOKING GAME based on the YA book by Diana Lopez aired in summer 2014. She is also featured in the book *Write Now!* from Penguin/Tarcher. She is the co-author of a relationship-based, screenwriting guide called *Dating Your Character*, about an organic approach to character creation for Stairway Press.

ANDI BEHRING is a DGA television director, writer, and producer based in Atlanta. She began her career in the locations department on THE VAMPIRE DIARIES, working her way from production assistant to Location Manager and eventually leading location departments on series including THE VAMPIRE DIARIES, BLACK LIGHTNING, P-VALLEY, and the reboot of DYNASTY. Over more than a decade in locations, Andi developed a ground-level understanding of how episodic television is built. Her experience spans scouting and logistics, collaborating with producers and department heads, and working with studios and directors to turn what's written on the page into something achievable on screen.

Along the way, she never stopped creating her own work. Andi has written, directed, and produced independent short films that have been screened at more than 60 film festivals around the world, allowing her to develop her voice as a filmmaker while continuing to work full-time in television. She also helps lead The Storyteller Sessions, an online community for actors, writers, and directors, where she serves as the Head of Director Initiatives.

Andi made the transition into episodic directing on DYNASTY, where she directed four episodes before going on to direct TOM SWIFT and three episodes of NBC's CHICAGO MED for Dick Wolf. Her experience across nearly every stage of production gives her a uniquely practical approach to directing, one rooted not only in storytelling and performance, but in understanding how to adapt, solve problems, collaborate, and navigate the constantly changing realities of making television.

DAVID BONNETT, JR. is an accomplished producer with extensive experience across film, television, documentary, and commercial production. He has a keen eye for storytelling and a passion for bringing creative visions to life.

Throughout his career, David has collaborated with industry leading directors, writers, and production teams to deliver compelling content for major studios, networks and brands. He has a track record of producing content that resonates with audiences, telling stories that are both commercially successful and critically acclaimed. His documentary work has been recognized to shine light on important social issues and stories, while his commercial productions reflect his adaptability and innovative approach to branded storytelling.

David is passionate about the production process and the collaboration that goes along with it. David is committed to mentoring up-and-coming talent and remains an active participant in industry events, always looking for the next great story to tell.

KATIE CULLIGAN is a working actor based in the Mid-Atlantic, with a growing body of credits in film, television, and commercial work. In addition to her on-camera and stage career, she is the founder of the Mid-Atlantic Screen Artists Forum, a collaborative community dedicated to connecting, supporting, and empowering screen actors in the region. With a passion for both performance and professional development, Katie brings firsthand knowledge of navigating today's industry outside of New York and Los Angeles and is committed to fostering opportunities for actors to thrive here in the Mid-Atlantic.

TOM FIELDS was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY and began his acting and modeling career as an infant in an Ivory Snow commercial. He appeared in many national and local ads in print, catalogs, radio, and television. Tom was a "cover-boy" on magazines, working with renowned commercial photographers like Howard Zieff, Dick Richards, Ted Bates, and Mark Shaw.

Tom's "Roadside Stand" television commercial garnered a CLIO award for J Walter Thompson and Mark Shaw, which featured Tom singing the "I wish I were an Oscar Meyer Wiener" song for the first time by a non-animated performer. Other national television commercials included: Pepsodent, Desenex, Campbell's Soup, Alpo, and Tide. After college and life in corporate America, Tom re-entered the world of full-time acting and VO work around 2016.

LISA HODSOLL is an actor, filmmaker, writer and producer whose most recent work was on LAW & ORDER SVU (NBC), TIRES (Netflix), CHICAGO P.D. (NBC), and the Apple TV + Series LADY IN THE LAKE. She is the founder and artistic director of Open Road, a not-for-profit arts group that promotes and supports independent artists, playwrights and filmmakers: https://theopenroadarts-officialwebsite.com/ and the founder of the Open Road Film festival for Shorts. For more information: https://www.imdb.me/lisamhodsoll

MEGAN HOLLEY was named one of Variety's "Ten Screenwriters to Watch" after writing the original screenplay SUNSHINE CLEANING, a family drama about two sisters who start a crime scene cleaning business in the wake of their own personal loss. The film, starring Amy Adams and Emily Blunt, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008 and hit theaters in 2009.

Since then, Megan has adapted short stories, novels and comic book I.P. into feature film scripts for studios and production companies that include Warner Bros., Paramount, Amblin Partners, Bad Robot, Lionsgate, Hello Sunshine, and Netflix, and has sold television pilots to ABC Studios and Showtime. She has also written, directed, and produced several short films, including THE PROJECTIONIST. Megan's work cuts across genres: grounded science fiction, post-apocalyptic worlds, horror, thrillers, and fantasy. Although the genre sandbox changes, she is drawn to stories about ordinary people reaching for something bigger than the lives they've been handed. Currently, she is developing an original television series at Chernin Studios.

ELYSE KELLY is an award-winning director and producer with a passion for human-centered stories. With a background in both animation and traditional documentary filmmaking, she approaches her work through a unique lens combining bold, unapologetic animated visuals with mindful nonfiction storytelling. Her work has won awards and been exhibited in festivals worldwide, including Sundance, Tribeca, Annecy, Zagreb, and OIAF. Elyse has directed award-winning campaigns and content for clients such as Netflix, the ACLU, The Atlantic, Sesame Workshop, Sony Music, the United Nations Foundation, and Meow Wolf.

Working in animation production, **JESSICA MENDEL** supervises 30+ pre-production artists and an entire design production team. Her work includes 2D Animated shows featured on Netflix, Fox, Apple TV, and Disney+. She enjoys advocating for artists, setting clear schedule expectations, providing support, and solving day to day problems.

CLAUDIA MYERS was named one of “10 Filmmakers to Watch” by Independent Magazine and has won numerous awards for her work. Writing and directing across genres in both fiction and documentary, Claudia strives to tell stories that make a difference. She is particularly drawn to the idea of tackling social issues through the lens of genre.

In 2026, Claudia’s thriller THE BAD GUARDIAN became a Netflix “Top 10 Film in the US.” Claudia directed the film, which explores guardianship abuse among the elderly and stars Melissa Joan Hart and La La Anthony. Before this, she wrote and directed the theatrical feature ABOVE THE SHADOWS, a supernatural drama about the isolating effects of grief, starring Olivia Thirlby and Alan Ritchson. Prior to this, Claudia wrote and directed the military drama FORT BLISS starring Michelle Monaghan and Ron Livingston. The film explores the challenges of a battle-hardened Army medic and single mom readjusting to the demands of civilian life. Monaghan was shortlisted by Variety, Deadline, and the Hollywood Reporter as an Academy Award contender for Best Actress for her performance in the film.

Prior to this, Claudia wrote and directed KETTLE OF FISH, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival and the short film BUDDY & GRACE, which premiered at Sundance. Claudia received her MFA in film at Columbia University and teaches film at American University.

MARNI PENNING, creator of the Amazon bestseller “The Penning Method for the Panicked Actor™” and fondly dubbed "The Maven of a Million Voices," is an award-winning actress known for a theatrical depth and range that has propelled her to a successful, decades-long stage and film career.

Marni was nominated for Best Fiction Audiobook Narrator alongside Ethan Hawke and Meryl Streep at the prestigious Audie Awards (like the Oscars of audiobooks) in 2024 and won an Audie in 2025. With more than 400 titles she has narrated available online, Marni wants to help change the world using the power of the human voice.

A classically-trained co-founder of Cincinnati Shakespeare Company (now in its 32nd year), Marni recently combined her love of the Bard and Voice Acting to create the podcast "One Woman Shakespeare" – full audio productions playing all the parts herself. She is also a playwright, teacher, children's book illustrator, and acting coach.

LESLIE RALSTON RAKOW has been the production manager at Rocket Media Group for more than 10 years, working on a wide variety of projects, ranging from crewing for studio and location productions to managing logistics on complex public television documentaries and dramatic narrative films. Leslie also has an extensive background as an editor for clients including Discovery Networks, National Geographic, Department of Veterans Affairs, Pentagon Channel and many other broadcast and federal agencies.

MARK RICCHE is co-founder and CEO of the award-winning indie film production company CrypticPictures.com, a privately held production/management company with offices in the U.S. founded in 2009. The company focuses on digital theatrical releases, independent film production and script management services for the independent film market. Learn more at https://www.markricche.com/biography

SHEILA SMITH is an award-winning director of photography who films documentaries, television programs, commercials, sports, independent features, PSAs, political spots, dance, and music. Her clients include BBC, PBS, NBC, ABC and many others. She specializes in lighting, visual storytelling, and dance video. She has Sony FX9 and F5 camera packages, lighting, etc. Sheila has filmed all over the US and the world for documentaries, television shows and dance videos. Sheila is on the WIFV Board of Directors, a contributor to GalsNGear, and loves mentoring upcoming DP’s and Steadicam operators.

MICHAEL STRASSNER was born in Baltimore, Maryland. He is an actor, writer, director and producer best known for his leading role in THE BALTIMORONS, which he co-wrote with Jay Duplass. He has also appeared in YOUNG ROCK, MODERN FAMILY, and ENGLISH TEACHER. His first role was Snoopy in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* during his seventh-grade year, and he hasn't looked back since.

A proud member of the Casting Society of America (CSA), **THEA WASHINGTON**'s work demonstrates her commitment to generating local employment and resonates deeply within her community, particularly highlighted by her impactful contribution to HBOMAX's "We Own This City.” Her collaborations with industry luminaries, including Grant Wilfley and Allison Hall, have been instrumental in creating more than 3,000 job opportunities, showcasing her dedication to fostering talent and economic growth in her hometown.

Thea’s civic engagement shines through her active participation in Baltimore's Arts & Culture Council and her role in founding the "Shining Stars" program, created to inspire young minds in Baltimore City Public Schools.

Thea's passion is palpable in her advocacy for women, emerging filmmakers, and underrepresented voices in the industry, driving her to create opportunities that promote inclusion and diversity. Her ethos of leading with kindness and casting with integrity is more than a motto—it's a reflection of her approach to her craft and her vision for the industry's future.