



2026 PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Dating Your Character: An Interactive Development Experience

- **Saturday, November 21, 1:30-4:30 pm**
- **Sunday, November 22, 11:00 am-4:30 pm**

Great characters are not discovered by accident. They are built through curiosity, preparation, and a deeper understanding of the human condition. This workshop is centered around an in-depth conversation moderated by **Mark Ricche** with Talent/Literary Manager and Producer **Marilyn Atlas**, exploring her co-authored book, *Dating Your Character: A Guide to Screenwriting for Film and TV* (Stairway Press).

Designed as an applied lab, the workshop is divided into three segments, each featuring:

- 1.) An Interview & Industry Conversation with Marilyn Atlas, sharing insights from her extensive professional experience and exploring key concepts from her book. Participants will acquire practical tools to further refine their stories and approach their work with a stronger understanding of the craft, the marketplace, and the professional expectations of screen and television writers.
- 2.) Hands-On Character Development Exercises will allow participants to apply concepts directly from the book to characters from their own projects currently in development. These exercises are designed to help writers deepen their understanding of character development, strengthen their storytelling foundations, and recognize the importance of preparation in an increasingly competitive field. Marilyn Atlas will also provide real-time industry feedback throughout the exercise process.

This workshop is designed for writers at all stages of development, including emerging screen/television writers, playwrights, professional assignment writers, and filmmakers developing narratives.

Feature Writing Masterclass

- **Saturday, November 21, 9:30 am-4:30 pm**

This course is designed for writers who have written an outline, treatment or draft of a feature film. This interactive session will unfold in two parts. First, the instructors **Megan Holley** and **Claudia Myers** will share their journey as writers, the process they have developed to get from the seed of an idea to final draft, and tips and hacks they have devised along the way. During the second half of the day, each student will receive the instructors' feedback on a synopsis or the first five pages of their script. Topics will include how to develop compelling characters, functions of dialogue, why tone matters, how to vet your own idea, dealing with writer's block, revision, knowing when the script is ready, taking notes, breaking into the business, the importance of networking, the art of pitching, and hooking the reader in your first ten pages.

Production Assistant Training

- **Saturday, November 21, 9:30 am-4:30 pm**

So, you want to work on film/TV productions, but don't know how or where to start? You're invited to a unique two-part workshop designed for those eager to master the role of a Production Assistant (PA). These sessions are a starting line for anyone interested in diving behind the scenes and becoming a part of the magic that brings stories to the big screen.

The Production Assistant Workshop is an opportunity to gather insights and practical know-how to set you up for success in this dynamic field. Whether you're set on starting your career or simply curious about what a PA does, join us for this immersive experience and become an indispensable crew member of any production team! Limited to 10 participants.

PART 1: "Before I Get to Set, What Do I Need to Know?" with **Leslie Ralston-Rakow**

We'll demystify what it means to be a Production Assistant in the DMV area, show you how to find local gigs, secure your first job, and navigate the nuts and bolts of getting paid. You'll also learn how to step onto a film set for the first time with confidence, fully prepared.

PART 2: "I'm On Set, Now What?" with **Sheila Smith** and others

Discover what it's like to collaborate with crew members as a Production Assistant. This is your chance to learn about the essential daily tasks that keep a set moving, the tools a PA needs, production etiquette, on-set safety, and much more. You'll spend the afternoon guided by industry experts through a simulated film set experience designed to prepare you for your first real gig.

Town Hall: Best Practices for Successful Collaboration with Actors

- **Saturday, November 21, 9:30 am-12:30 pm**

Join a Town Hall presenting both the actor's and casting director's perspectives about the benefits of industry standard expectations for all members of the creative process. We'll walk through the stages of a project from concept to launch, discussing best practices to be followed in the interest of better marketing the DMV's highly qualified talent community. This session is moderated by actor **Tom Fields**, and guests, including casting agents and managers. Your voice is invited.

Enhance your Documentary Through Animation

- **Saturday, November 21, 9:30 am-12:30 pm**

What's unique about the use of animation in documentary is its ability to tap into the emotional core of a story. It moves beyond reality, blending the literal and abstract—using color, movement, and design to connect with audiences in a way that feels both personal and profound. In this 3-hour discussion and workshop, **Elyse Kelly** and **Jessica Mendel** will lead a conversation about the boundless storytelling possibilities that animation unlocks, alongside the practical demands of the medium; including different styles, cost, and pipeline.

The Actor's Calling Card: Reels That Work

- **Saturday, November 21, 1:30-4:30 p.m.**

This hands-on workshop with **Lisa Hodsoll** and **Thea Washington** will examine industry expectations for actors and analyze examples of what makes a compelling – or not compelling - reel. You will then have time to work with editors from WIFV's Editors Roundtable to help you create your own reel from materials you bring with you.

Make sure to bring your smartphones, laptops and either a reel you are currently using or clips from work that you want to create a reel with. If you don't currently have a reel or clips, but want to learn, you can team up with another actor and practice these skills with their materials. This session is open to actors who are new to the business, seasoned professionals, and everyone in between.

Episodic Directing: From Page to Picture

- **Sunday, November 22, 11:00 am-5:00 pm**

What happens when the beautiful shot you planned meets schedule, budget, locations, actors, weather, studio notes, and the clock? How do you adapt and still deliver a great episode when the landscape is constantly changing?

This session, presented by **Andi Behring**, aims to answer these questions with a practical, all access look at what it takes to direct an episode of television. Drawing from real world experience, we will begin from the moment the script is received and walk through the entire prep/shoot/post process. This includes collaborating with writers and producers, breaking down the script, navigating budgets, prepping the episode through location scouting, and developing a clear creative vision going into principal photography.

We will also discuss all that you may need to know once you arrive on set. Whether that means working with actors, blocking for the camera, collaborating with department heads, or solving problems under pressure, it's important to be pliable to adapt to the set's changing circumstances. In addition, we will walk through the process of post-production, where we'll examine the director's role in editing, sound, music, color, visual effects, and ultimately delivering a polished final cut to the studio and network.

This masterclass is designed to demystify the role of the director, and all that comes with it. The goal is to give filmmakers of all experience levels a clear understanding of not only the technical aspects of directing, but also how to lead the charge with humor, confidence, and grace.

THE BALTIMORONS: A Script to Distribution Masterclass

- **Sunday, November 22, 11:00 am-5:00 pm**

“A newly sober man's Christmas Eve dental emergency leads to an unexpected romance with his older dentist as they explore Baltimore together.”

THE BALTIMORONS is an independent, low-budget film that continues to find an audience and may become a cult classic (you can help with that). It began as an idea of **Michael Strassner**, who started the script and made a short. Somehow, things got to Jay Duplass, who came on as co-writer and director (Michael will explain). Michael Strassner, **David Bonnett Jr.**, and Drew Langer produced the film through the company Duplass Brothers Productions, committed to an indie ethos. The cast and crew are mostly your neighbors.

The film will be shown Saturday evening, November 21, and a full-day masterclass on the making of the film from idea through distribution (described above) will be presented on November 22.

From “I Have a Nice Voice” to “I Can Actually Do This” - Voice Acting Masterclass

- **Sunday, November 22, 11:00 am-5:00 pm**

People have been telling you for years that you have a great voice. But what do you actually do with it?

In this hands-on voiceover masterclass, award-winning audiobook narrator and professional voice actor **Marni Penning** will take you through the process of creating a professional voiceover recording — from the script in your hand to the finished audition on your computer.

We'll demystify the equipment, the recording space, the performance, and the business of getting your work heard. This session dives into common questions like:

- How do you choose a microphone?
- Can your closet really become a recording booth?
- What does “good” sound like?
- How do you prepare a script?
- How do you record yourself?
- What makes an audition stand out?
- Do you need a demo?
- Where do you actually find voiceover work?

We'll tackle all of it — and most importantly, you'll actually record. Bring your own microphone and laptop/phone if you have them, or use equipment provided by the conference if available. You'll work with scripts, experiment with recording techniques, learn how to improve your sound, and get practical guidance you can take home and use immediately.

Whether you're completely new to voiceover or you've already started experimenting and aren't sure what you're doing, you'll leave with a better understanding of your voice, your equipment, your recording environment, your audition, and your next steps. No fancy studio required. No “perfect” sound required. Just bring your voice — and your curiosity.