

FINNISH PLAYWRIGHTS AND SCREENWRITERS GUILD

Originally founded by a group of writers, the Finnish Playwrights and Screenwriters Guild has been in active operation since 1921. Today the guild comprises over 500 members who work as professional script writers for stage, film, television, radio and new media. Both Finnish and Swedish speaking authors are represented by the guild.

FINNISH PLAYWRIGHTS AND SCREENWRITERS GUILD (formerly The Finnish Dramatists' Union) protects the professional, copyright and financial interests of its individual members, and handles the rights of properties owned by other controlling bodies such as estates. In addition to negotiating and issuing contracts, we develop codes of practice in co-operation with theatres, television channels and producers. We also work closely with various artistic, copyright and public affairs organisations in order to further the aims of professional writers.

Over the years, and alongside the evolution of new forms of media, the main purpose of THE GUILD has remained largely unchanged: our goal is still to serve the needs of Finnish authors and to promote Finnish drama – be it written for the stage, film, television or one of the emerging media platforms.

AGREEMENTS

THE GUILD has negotiated collective agreements with YLE, the Public Broadcasting Company of Finland, and KOPIOSTO, the common copyright organization of authors, publishers and performing artists. In the coming months, parts of these agreements will be under re-evaluation and negotiation. Even if these particular agreements have been well honed and thoroughly tested through recent years, THE GUILD feels confident that there are still many improvements to be gained.

A loosely formed model contract has been negotiated with SATU, the association of independent producers. This contract is often, but regrettably not without exceptions, applied for independent television productions.

Attempts to negotiate a collective agreement with SEK, the organisation of Finnish film producers, have failed - again. THE GUILD offers consultation and has issued guidelines concerning feature film contracts for its membership. We feel that vigilance is very much in need in this area.

CULTURAL POLITICS

THE GUILD is an active partner in discussions with the Finnish Film Foundation (FFF) and other funding bodies. The maximum script support grant by FFF for an individual writer has been incrementally increased over the years and – more importantly – the rules for the grants were clarified in 2010. Nevertheless, THE GUILD hopes to make new breakthroughs in discussions concerning the level of script support. We feel that writers need to be funded in the early stages of script development. Too often this funding is not available from production companies.

THE GUILD maintains active contacts with the Ministry of Culture and is a recipient of funding from it. THE GUILD regularly participates in discussions concerning its field of interests and issues statements when necessary. As the Finnish system of state funding for all arts faces a drastic overhaul, THE GUILD feels that our alertness is of paramount importance.

A new law that improves the social security and retirement benefits of freelance artists and people making a non-trivial part of their living in the form of grants was introduced in 2008. THE GUILD was one of the organizations participating in the preparation process of this law. We feel that even more work needs to be done in this area, as an increasingly larger portion of our members age and reach a less active stage of their career.

This year, FINNISH PLAYWRIGHTS AND SCREENWRITERS GUILD commissioned a study into the education, work opportunities and standard of living of its screenwriting members. The survey gained good visibility in the national media in September when THE GUILD published its results. While a major purpose of the survey was to provide our organization with quality on hand information of its members and their working conditions, THE GUILD also feels that the importance of educating the general public about the realities of the screenwriter's profession cannot be overemphasized.

EMERGING ISSUES

As 2012 draws to a close, the financial and cultural horizons of our screenwriting members appear somewhat brighter than only a year ago. YLE is finally starting to commission new drama after a three year slump and domestic films have done very well in box office in 2012. There are somewhat more work opportunities for screenwriters and the public image of the profession is slightly clearer. People are beginning to understand what screenwriters do for a living – and how modestly they get paid for it.

Several important issues will demand our attention in the near future. Among them is the rapid expansion of video-on-demand services in our country. This fall, both Netflix and HBO Nordic launched their services in Finland. While these vehicles of distribution may very well herald a new era in all drama consumption, THE GUILD feels that we need to pay closer attention to the VOD clauses in screenwriting contracts.