Remembering
John Singleton
1968–2019
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1929 to 2019. What an amazing 90 years it has been for SCA. 2019 has been a year of homecomings, and of great joys and great sadness. At a School like Cinematic Arts we face the issues of any large community with new challenges every day, and we are deeply grateful to each and every one of you for your continued support and commitment to the School.

We decided to celebrate this 90th anniversary by welcoming alumni back to campus to reunite with each other, and to share their stories of career successes and challenges and even failures with our current students and fellow alumni. Our 90th Anniversary Alumni Conversation Series has been so successful that we want it to continue for the foreseeable future. You’ll find photos of the many alumni who participated in this year’s celebrations in the In Review section of this edition of In Motion.

Our cover story commemorates one of the saddest events of the year: the death of writer and director John Singleton on April 29, just three weeks before he passed away. John participated in our signature anniversary event, An Evening With Distinguished USC Alumni, at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. There he joined producers Kevin Feige, Stacey Sher, and Jennifer Todd in a passionate conversation about their best-known work and the films that inspired their creativity. John was one of the School’s biggest cheerleaders and we will deeply miss him.

We also tragically lost three talented students this year: their deaths have profoundly affected their fellow students and other members of our campus community, and we are doing our best to support each other during this difficult time. We will remember them and the other members of our family who passed away this year.

In the pages ahead we also mark the establishment of the John H. Mitchell Endowed Fund for the Business of Entertainment—a major gift in support of our business of entertainment programs; and highlight our sound design program, which has been receiving well-deserved attention thanks to Making Waves: The Art of Cinematic Sound, a documentary featuring the field’s best practitioners, many of whom are alumni. In October we held a wonderful party for the 40th anniversary of the Peter Stark Producing Program and celebrated Larry Turman’s 27 years of remarkable leadership. Since its creation in 1979, the program has been a boot camp of sorts, successfully preparing its students for any jobs that exist in film, television, or new media regardless of genre or platform.

In Review section of this edition of In Motion.

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

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It is not too late to join us in celebrating the great history of the School. For upcoming events and other information go to cinema.usc.edu. You may also email us at communications@cinema.usc.edu, or connect on social media @USCinema. Please also update your contact information in SCA Community so we can stay in touch.

I hope to see you on campus and wish each and every one of you a very happy 2020.

Elizabeth M. Daley
Steven J. Ross/Time Warner Professor and Dean
YEAR in REVIEW

MEMI
Professor David Isaacs (far right, sitting) teaching screenwriting to the students of the Middle East Media Institute.

SHANGHAI
Dean Elizabeth M. Daley (second from right, front row), Alan Baker, Associate Dean, Administration & International Projects (far right, first row) in Shanghai.

FEIGE
Professor of Practice Jason Squire (fourth from left, kneeling) hosted Marvel President/Alum Kevin Feige (Seventh from left) in his case study class for Avengers: Endgame.

ACADEMY AWARDS
Alum Ludwig Göransson receiving his Oscar for the score of Black Panther.

PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR, ALUMNA Rayka Zehtabchi pose with their Oscars for Best Documentary Short Subject.

PRODUCER, ALUMNA Shelly Chino, Alum Evan Hayes, and Shannon O’Sullivan pose with the award for Best Documentary Feature for Free Solo.

VISIBILITY EVIDENCE
Vice Dean Michael Renov with documentarian Michael Apted at the Visible Evidence Conference.

GAME EXPO
Jam City CEO Chris DeWolfe delivers the keynote at the 2019 USC Games Expo.

COMMENCEMENT
Mary Pickford Endowed Professor Doron Aizer (second from right, front row), SCA alum and 2019 Mary Pickford Alumni Award recipient, at the 2019 Commencement ceremony.

TOOD
Professor Leonard Maltin with Jennifer Todd after a screening of Jexi in Maltin’s Film Symposium class.

DOLOMITE
Scott Alexander, Professor Leonard Maltin, and Larry Karaszewski after a screening of Dolemite is My Name in Maltin’s Film Symposium class.

GAME EXPO 2019
The team from Ascend at the 2019 USC Games Expo.

A still from Advanced Games Project and the Line from the 2019 Games Expo.

COMMENCEMENT
Mary Pickford Endowed Professor Doron Aizer (second from right, front row), SCA alum and 2019 Mary Pickford Alumni Award recipient, at the 2019 Commencement ceremony.

COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER: Donna Langley.

Professor Leonard Maltin with Jennifer Todd after a screening of Jexi in Maltin’s Film Symposium class.

DOLOMITE
Scott Alexander, Professor Leonard Maltin, and Larry Karaszewski after a screening of Dolemite is My Name in Maltin’s Film Symposium class.

The Hollywood Reporter hands out the annual grade to the colleges and universities — from USC, to NYU — that are molding the entertainment industry’s next generation of geniuses.

VITAL EVIDENCE
Vice Dean Michael Renov with documentarian Michael Apted at the Visible Evidence Conference.

COMMENCEMENT
Mary Pickford Endowed Professor Doron Aizer (second from right, front row), SCA alum and 2019 Mary Pickford Alumni Award recipient, at the 2019 Commencement ceremony.

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Professor Leonard Maltin with Jennifer Todd after a screening of Jexi in Maltin’s Film Symposium class.

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Scott Alexander, Professor Leonard Maltin, and Larry Karaszewski after a screening of Dolemite is My Name in Maltin’s Film Symposium class.
90 YEARS OF CINEMATIC ARTS
In celebration of the 90th Anniversary of the School of Cinematic Arts, SCA alumni held conversations on stage with fellow alumni whose work they admire or whose careers have inspired them. Anniversary events included Q&As with the audience, and on occasion, screenings of favorite feature films, TV shows, or student shorts.

18 Alumni Jon M. Chu and Rawson Thurber with students in SCA 108, the Ray Stark Family Theatre.
19 Alumni James Vanderbilt, Josh Schwartz, and Mike Ireland in conversation in SCA 108.
18 – 21 Alumni Melissa Rosenberg and John August held a conversation in 108 about writing.
16 Alumni Jon M. Chu and Rawson Thurber with students in SCA 108, the Ray Stark Family Theatre.
17 Alumni James Vanderbilt, Josh Schwartz, and Mike Ireland in conversation in SCA 108.
16 – 21 Alumni Melissa Rosenberg and John August held a conversation in 108 about writing.
21 Alumnus Brian Grazer discussing his new book Face to Face in conversation with Dean Elizabeth M. Daley.
22 Alum Natasha Foster-Owens.
23 Alum Tina Mabry.
25 Alumnus Brian Grazer moderating a panel for the 90th Anniversary conversation series.
26 Alumni and former president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences John Bailey introducing a 90th Anniversary Panel at the AMPAS Theatre.
27 Alum Rick Fukuyama.
28 Alum Jennifer Todd, alum John Singleton, alum Stacey Sher, and alum Kevin Feige at a 90th anniversary panel at the AMPAS Theatre.
29 (Front row center) Jennifer Todd, the late John Singleton, Dean Elizabeth M. Daley, Stacey Sher, and Kevin Feige with an all SCA alumni audience at the 90th Anniversary panel at the AMPAS theatre.
30 Alumni Timothy Dowling, Joe Nussbaum, Richard Kelly, Susan Downey, Rick Famuyiwa, Sasha Alexander, Dean Johnson, and Danny Strong as a “Late 90s” Panel at the USC School of Cinematic Arts.
31 Alum Kyle Mooney.
32 Alum Peter Segal in SCA 108.
33 (Center) Kyle Mooney and Peter Segal with alumni in SCA 108.
34 Dean Elizabeth M. Daley and Brian Grazer with a crowd of alumni following a USC School of Cinematic Arts event.
35 Alumni Shonda Rhimes and John Wells in front of a crowd of students in Norris Cineplex Theatre.
36 Alumni Shonda Rhimes and John Wells in front of a crowd of students in Norris Cineplex Theatre.

YEAR in REVIEW
OAKIE
37 (From Left) Trustee of the Jack Oakie and Victoria Horne Oakie Foundation David Sonne, alum Judd Apatow, trustee of the Oakie Foundation Charles Collier, Professor David Isaacs, Professor Barnet Kellman, and comedian Wayne Federman honoring Apatow as the Oakie Masters in comedy for 2019.

KISS KISS BANG BANG
45 Alum Timothy Dowling moderating a panel for the anniversary of Kiss Kiss Bang Bang.
46 Robert Downey Jr. and alum Susan Downey at a panel discussion for the anniversary of Kiss Kiss Bang Bang.
47 Alum Timothy Dowling, Joel Silver, Robert Downey Jr., Dean Elizabeth H. Daley, Susan Downey, and Shane Black.

PERIOD END SENTENCE
48 USC Staff Desa Philadelphia, Director Rayka Zehtabchi, Editor/Cinematographer Sam Davis, Executive Producer Helen Neer and Mark Harris at a screening of Period. End of Sentence.

MITCHELL
49 John H. Mitchell Endowed Chair in Cinematic Business (third from right) in front of a plaque honoring the dedication of the John H. Mitchell Programs.
50 Mitchell Trustee Bill Allen, with Jose Fletcher at the dedication of the John H. Mitchell Endowed Chair.
51 Bill Allen, Frank Price, Nahnataska Khan and Eric Scharf at the dedication of the Arts in Mitchell Endowed Chair.
52 USC President Carol Folt at the dedication of the John H. Mitchell Endowed Chair.

USC Interactive Media & Games alum Jenova Chen aims to introduce a new genre of “music gaming.” We might be bias, but we think he might be on to something… Look for Sky in the app store and bring a little positivity to your phone this week!

With Sky, thatgamecompany’s Jenova Chen wants to fix what’s broken with games.
the fall of 1979, the Peter Stark Motion Picture Producing Program opened its doors to its first class of students. A lot has changed since then—in the industry, at SCA, and within Stark. But as the old adage goes, the more things change the more they stay the same. Four decades later the fundamentals of a Stark education are still intact and are a large part of why it remains the premier program in creative producing for media, new and old. It all started with a generous gift from famed producer Ray Stark and his wife, Frances—who, with his wife Frances, endowed the program and named it in memory of their late son and Art Murphy, the former film critic and Professor Art Murphy, the former film critic and Professor Art Murphy, the former film critic and Professor Art Murphy. Under consummate producer Larry Turman (The Graduate, American History X), Stark began to focus on creativity and the business courses were seen as tools to achieving those creative goals. “I don’t know if I can teach creativity, but I try to have the students get in touch with themselves, get in touch with their creativity, and unleash it so that each one will receive the most personal satisfaction and hopefully create work meaningful not only to themselves but to the larger community,” says Turman.

Stark continues to be about the delicate dance between art and commerce that dictates decision-making in Hollywood. As such, students don’t just learn how to be creative or how to make good business decisions, but how to, as Turman puts it, “think like a producer.” The program actually changes the way students think about a creative project, any creative project. They learn to assess its creative merits while simultaneously vetting its business viability and thus strategizing how it should be made, when, where, and for whom. Screenwriter/playwright/tech entrepreneur John August (Big Fish, Go, Highland) class of ’94, notes, “It wasn’t strictly a creative degree, it wasn’t just about let’s make art, it was also, let’s run a business. So, if you are developing apps, then you are figuring out: Who is the market? Who are the competitors? Who are the gatekeepers that we need to impress in order to get people to take us seriously? Those are the same things you ask for movies. Same thing happens in theater. Stuff I learned in Stark translated beyond just film and television.” Oscar-nominated producer Stacey Sher (Pulp Fiction, Erin Brockovich) class of ’85, echoes the sentiment: “Grads always bring the eye of looking at the zeitgeist and marketplace, the times we live in, along with the history/critical background and the sensibility that you get from Stark.”

The program has seen a number of changes over the years, including dropping “Motion Picture” from its name. It is now known as The Peter Stark Producing Program as acknowledgement of the fact that television and new media like games and interactive experiences have been incorporated into the program in significant ways. Famously, the first Stark students had to wear suits and dresses to class. Some might still turn up in a suit, especially if they are coming from a job or internship, but jeans and sweatshirts are prevalent, especially during the weeks when final projects are due.

While Stark always selects the best candidates from its applicant pool, perhaps the biggest change has been the demographics of the students. In the early days, cohorts were often predominantly straight, white, and male. As its reputation has continued to grow the pool has broadened, and the program now attracts a more diverse student body, including many candidates from outside the United States. The class of 2000, for example, graduated just four women out of 24 students. In recent years, classes have been 50%-70% women, and often majority minority. The most recently admitted class has as many black women as it has white men, and women of color outrank men almost 2:1. The results are immediately apparent in the creative work students are producing, which represents a much broader swath of human experience than in those early days. At a time when Hollywood is still wrestling with representation, it will be exciting to see the impact these Stark grads will undoubtedly have.

Because of their industry savvy, Stark grads are formidable forces from the moment they graduate. Saxon recalls lessons from...
the first Chair of the program, the late Art Murphy, who would tell him and his classmates: “You will know more about the movie business than ninety-five percent of the people who work in it. That was his promise.” That continued to be true beyond Murphy’s tenure, says David Kramer, President of United Talent Agency (UTA), class of ’92. “When I came to UTA I knew lots of information that other people didn’t. They were super smart, but they didn’t have those couple of years that I had. They didn’t have the terms of art if you will. They hadn’t read contracts, they didn’t know about WGA, DGA, SAG, so they had a lot of work to do. They had to learn it on the job as things came up. I didn’t.”

Producer Hieu Ho, class of 2007, who recently launched new company Imminent Collision with actor Randall Park and writer Michael Golamco, had worked in the industry prior to attending Stark. He remembers that part of his motivation for enrolling was the ability to get that in-depth knowledge: “One of the advantages of the program is it provides such a holistic and practical understanding of the business across all different sectors, from financial modeling to business affairs to actually screenwriting. That was not something that I had from being an assistant.”

While the program relies heavily on the lessons of Hollywood history, it is always looking forward. The industry has seen significantly more upheaval in the past forty years than it did in its previous hundred and Stark students have had a front row seat for it all.

Stark’s curriculum evolves alongside the industry, often anticipating where the industry is headed. Five years before Apple launched the iTunes store for music and eight years before YouTube went live, Stark students in the late ’90s were learning about “digital lockers” where film and tv content would be stored electronically and sold directly to consumers on a per-title, subscription, or ad-supported basis. The key is the faculty, “all working professionals, all top of their game,” as Turman likes to point out. High-level executives are brought in, sometimes even making their own offices the classroom in order to give students insight into the most current industry practices.” This offers an edge in a business that, in the current climate, is always trying to be the first to the next development, be it creative, technological, or fiscal. “Having that real world experience, with all the teachers who are also working, it was just invaluable because you’re having real-time conversations about things that are happening now, not just theoretical,” says Monique Keller, class of 2015, currently an executive at Amazon Studios.
In MOTION

do it better. Even though he’s been doing it for so long.”

Last time I talked to him, he was trying to figure out how to

“Larry was always trying to make it better. I mean, even now.

Wednesdays

twenty-two years and producer Steven Love (optimistic, he was completely committed

about Larry, his energy was so positive, so

He had to figure it all out. What I loved

started that year. He had to get his sea legs.

remembers: “I don’t think he even started

the program when Turman became Chair,

for their mentor. Kramer, midway through

grads, alumni have strong and fond feelings

days through the program’s most recent

a fund in Larry’s name. From Turman’s early

have generously pooled resources to form

Led by class of ’94 alumni John August, Walt

Becker, and Sam Dickerman, the alumni

Courtyard at SCA, was a reunion of Starkies

of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

film and television.”

The connection to Longoria (who also produced Devious Maids) is coincidental, but Avena says her success can be traced back to those early days on KyleXY and Medium. “The writers’ room for KyleXY had a lot of future showrunners in it,” she explains. When she got the call for a job on season three of Devious Maids, she still had a few weeks left in the writers’ room for East Los High. “The showrunner, Carlos Portugal, was like, ’You have to go for it.’ Avena says the support she has gotten from superiors has made her want to help younger writers, and makes it a point to reach out to new writers transitioning into rooms.

Avena always knew she wanted to work in a creative field. As an undergrad at Evergreen State College in Washington, her home state, she took every visual art class she could. Evergreen only offered documentary classes—no traditional, narrative cinema classes. “Because I learned so much toward narrative storytelling, my documentaries would always have a more experimental part to them.” After working in graphic design for a few years, she applied to graduate programs. She was rejected from San Francisco State University. Their feedback? She was “too Hollywood” for their program. “I considered that a compliment,” Avena says. “It should come as no surprise then that USC turned out to be the perfect fit.”

Avena has one major regret about her time at USC. “I was constantly making films, and maybe I should have socialized a bit more,” she says, laughing. Adding that she still managed to make “a few really good friends.” But her time at SCA contributed to her versatility and work ethic, she says.

Avena is now co-executive producer on the upcoming NBC musical dramedy Zoe’s Extraordinary Playlist, which debuts in early 2020.

ALUMNI Spotlight

By Keryl Brown Ahmed

Davah Avena

HAS CARVED OUT A WRITING CAREER IN COMEDY, AND DRAMA

In today’s world, it’s a remarkable thing for a person to dedicate a quarter century to a single project, a project that has never been broken but, in his eyes, can always be improved. Turman’s devotion is felt by the students from their first contact with him, and appreciated by alumni who are deep into their careers. Perhaps Turman himself says it best. His regular refrain to his dedicated faculty and staff is: “We’re here for the students, nothing else.”

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Nonny de la Peña had a thriving career as a journalist and documentary filmmaker, but something was missing. The disconnect between the stark realities described in written articles and the produced, fixed perspective of the cinematic medium bothered her. She wanted to capture the real-world content of the articles she wrote in a way that allowed readers to truly experience the subject matter.

Sometime in the 1990s, de la Peña came across a book called Virtual Reality: by Howard Rheingold. At the time, commercial virtual reality (VR) was still primarily theoretical—practical uses were restricted to NASA and other highly-funded research facilities investigating uses for medical, aeronautical, and military training. Nevertheless, reading about this innovative medium helped de la Peña imagine a world in which she could “put people on the scene and tell real stories.”

While mulling over the concept of VR for journalism, she quickly ran into substantial roadblocks. “There was no real ability to make it, it was too expensive, the equipment wasn’t there,” says de la Peña of her early attempts at VR exploration. So she decided to focus on documentary filmmaking until technology caught up to her ideas. In 2003, she produced and directed a documentary located in Cuba. “After that we got funding from the Bay Area Video Coalition to build a live version of that section of the documentary, and it kind of took off from there,” she says of producing and directing a documentary on Guantanamo Bay, including a large segment examining civil liberties at the notorious American detention center.

De la Peña founded and heads a company called Emblematic Group, which creates “impactful content surrounding technology” specifically virtual reality and augmented reality. “We call it ‘mixed reality’ now,” she says of the evolution of immersive media. Emblematic has launched a new toolkit and distribution platform called ReachLove, which allows users to create their own volumetric experiences with a user-friendly interface and easily modifiable elements. The company is also exploring the world of narrative VR: “It’s cool to be able to carve out the future of fictional storytelling in an immersive space,” de la Peña says. One project, commissioned by the Japanese American National Museum, tells the story of Stanley Hayami, a young man imprisoned in an internment camp during the Second World War.

De la Peña was well into her research on VR before she made the decision to pursue a doctorate. There was finally a program that suited all her interests: SCA’s Media Arts + Practice PhD, which priorities experimentation. With a disbelieving laugh, she confirms, “I’ve been running a company while doing my PhD, yes.” She officially completed her degree in May 2019.

As others try to figure out how to tell stories in VR de la Peña, who says she travels “way too much,” is in great demand. “I’m asked to speak a lot, but I love it,” she says. “It’s exciting to be the person to drive the language of new media.”
The documentary *Making Waves: The Art of Cinematic Sound* had a pretty starry 2019. The film, directed by Midge Costin, the Kay Rose Professor in the Art of Dialogue & Sound Editing and Head of Sound in the Division of Film & Television Production at the School of Cinematic Arts, premiered in the spring at the Tribeca Film Festival. From there it made the rounds at over a dozen film festivals—including Cannes, Munich, London, and Seoul—before ultimately being released theatrically in October.

But things weren’t always so rosy for the one-of-a-kind documentary, which dynamically illustrates the essential and emotional role sound plays in how we process stories and the filmgoing experience overall. When Costin and her producers applied for a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to help complete the film, they were turned down.

“There were, like, five readers who reviewed our grant, and all of them said ‘excellent’ except for one guy,” says Costin, showing no signs of jet lag over lunch at the University Club despite having just arrived home from the Berlin Film Festival. “He said no because he thought we were making a USC infomercial.”

The guy might have had a point. Costin’s movie is indeed filled with SCA graduates, chief among them the legendary Walter Murch, the first person to ever receive a Sound Designer credit for his Oscar-winning—and groundbreaking—work on Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. But the truth is, it is impossible to tell the story of cinema sound and its innovators without including USC.

For example, when SCA grad George Lucas wanted Murch to do the sound for *Star Wars* and couldn’t get him, he called USC’s legendary sound guru Ken Miura, who suggested recent graduate Ben Burtt. Burtt would go on to create the iconic sound effects for the franchise on the way to a career that includes two Special Achievement Academy Awards. Then when the folks at Pixar wanted Burtt to create the soundscape for *Toy Story*, he was busy and so Miura suggested Gary Rydstrom, whose sound work has gone on to garner 17 Oscar nominations and seven wins.

“It’s not a coincidence,” explains Costin of the USC connection. “At USC, Ken Miura allowed these guys to be creative while also letting them work through the night on all our equipment we have here.”

Adds Costin, “We’re all standing on the shoulders of giants, and here all those giants come back and do lectures.”

The tradition of sound innovators coming out of USC continues today, with such industry leaders as nine-time Emmy nominee Sharyn Gersh (SCA ’95) and three-time Oscar nominee Erik Aadahl (SCA ’98). Even *Black Panther* and *Creed* director Ryan Coogler (SCA ’11) was known to be a bit of a sound nerd during his time at USC. Indeed, Coogler was so well-regarded by the sound department that they let him come back and use the Foley stage when he was completing his first feature, 2013’s *Fruitvale Station*.

But ‘soundies’—sound department lingo for students who have managed to resist the almighty allure of the camera and recognize the magic and potential of sound—are not always so easy to spot. Ask the professors on the lower level of the Steven Spielberg Building and they will tell you that, by and large, soundies tend to be a bit less demonstrative than picture people. They’re good listeners—obviously an essential quality for anyone who cares about sound—and prefer to let their work speak for itself.

As SCA Associate Professor Richard Burton puts it, “Sound tends to attract people who don’t need validation.”
In MOTION

USC. “For young filmmakers, the meaning of sound has shifted,” explains Suhas Katki, a lecturer in SCA’s Sound Department whose sound effects editor credits include Remember the Titans (2000) and Capitan America: The First Avenger (2011). “We always treat them as filmmakers who are using sound to tell a story. We encourage them to the fullest, but at the same time, we don’t discourage them from taking other practicums beyond sound like picture editing and directing.”

When she was first out of SCA graduate school, Costin got a gig as a sound effects editor on Tony Scott’s NASCAR flick Days of Thunder (1990), where she was tasked with creating the sound for the “bad guy” engines. No one at USC taught her that animal sounds slowed way down made a speeding engine sound terrifying, or that a gunshot or explosion buried deep in the mix or a high-stress clack shift would catch up the intensity. The truth is, the program had taught her something far more important.

“I knew storywise what the sound was supposed to do,” says Costin. “I knew how to break down the individual story points and translate what was happening into sound. Every choice I made was based on the story.”

During Costin’s time as a student, sound often played second fiddle to picture in the minds of students, who far too often did not consider its significance until just before putting their films in the can. Studios that under-budgeted for sound in comparison to the visuals frequently shared this attitude. As Making Waves points out—Costin interviewed well over 90 filmmakers for her documentary—it wasn’t until big money-making filmmakers like Barbra Streisand, Robert Altman, Stanley Kubrick, and Lucas started stressing to their studio bosses just how significant sound is to the overall filmmaking experience that things began to change.

These days, things are a bit different regarding sound. At least at USC. “For young filmmakers, the meaning of sound has shifted,” explains Costin. “From the time that kids are little, they’re taking videos on their phones. By the time they get here, they are well aware that the area that keeps their work amateurish is sound. So that has made them much more interested in it. They want to know, ‘How do I do that?’

Fortunately, at SCA students have the most up-to-date equipment to realize their sound ideals. Each of SCA’s two sound classrooms is equipped with industry-standard Avid 56 consoles. (Avid is a longtime SCA partner.) The consoles are essentially sophisticated remote controls that make using the Pro Tools sound mixing software faster and more intuitive. Not only are the Avid consoles, the size of a small conference table; they are the tools students will encounter once they graduate and enter the workforce at professional post-production facilities.

“We have a duty and a responsibility as a university to teach film students what is being used in the real world, not just what is convenient, easy, or cheap,” says Buddy Halligan, SCA’s Chief Audio Engineer and former Senior Audio Engineer at Bell Sound Studios who recorded and worked with Ray Charles, Steven Stills, Johnny Cash, Jack Lemmon, and Elizabeth Taylor, to name a few. “Audio isn’t inexpensive, not by a long shot,” adds Halligan.

One of the most crucial elements of the sound department, the Foley room, is neither high-priced or cutting-edge. In fact, it looks like a garage sale. It is here, using things like shreds of plastic, old tools, and even equipment, that students add dynamism and continuity to their storytelling. It is also where students begin to grasp the full creative potential of sound in film.

“At first students tend to be very hesitant about the Foley stage,” says Katki. “They don’t completely understand what they can do with it. Then when we’re in there, we don’t just teach students how to record footsteps; we teach them how you can change the character of the film just in the way that they record footsteps. All of a sudden, their imagination takes off and their eyes open up. They realize they can use a pair of pliers to make a gun rattle in a way that changes how a movie plays; or how rolling a basketball on gravel can even make tires sound emotional.”

Emotional tires? It may sound a little strange to a non-soundy but makes perfect sense to anyone who has worked in sound— or for that matter, anyone who saw Costin’s film. As she says herself, “Sound is where so much of the emotion lies in film.”

This is another way of saying that sound is what allows a story to exist beyond the screen. It is what transports an audience into the world portrayed on screen, whether it’s a NASCAR track, a galaxy far, far away, or somewhere much closer to home.

“That’s what hooked me on sound years ago and what hooks my students today. The enjoyment of seeing a film come alive,” says Burton, who has been teaching at SCA for twenty years and has 103 sound department credits. “When you string a bunch of still photos together and play them rapidly so that it’s a moving picture, it’s still at the heart of it, just static moments.”

“It’s not until it gets married to sound,” says Burton, “that it truly enters the room and the whole thing comes alive.”

“Sound in film is what created sound as an art form. Otherwise, there had been no structure for it.”

―Midge Costin

Sound professionals at work. (From left) Ai-Ling Lee (left); Suhas Katki; Ann Behlmer (Bournehawke); Top: Ben Burtt (Star-Wars); Pat Jackson (The English Patient); Walter Murch (Apocalypse Now).

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In his heyday as president of Columbia Pictures’ television division from 1968 to 1977, the late John H. Mitchell produced TV classics *The Flintstones*, *Bewitched* and Emmy-winning TV movie *Brian’s Song* along with more than 150 other shows. Intent on extending his legacy to future generations of hit-makers, the Patricia W. Mitchell Trusts—named after the executive’s late wife—has endowed USC School of Cinematic Arts with $20 million earmarked for entertainment business studies.

An Appetite for Ethics

The Mitchell monies enable Chi and her BCA team to address a topic that Allen describes as a key priority: business ethics. "That issue really resonated for Pat as well as for John, and certainly for me," he says. "Grounding people in a framework of mores and values is a big component of the Mitchell gift. So often these days, we're driven by the need for financial aid. We want to make sure qualified people who don't normally find pathways into the industry. Especially now that we're in this economic downturn, we want to provide opportunities for people from different cultures to create and distribute content worldwide. These diverse voices are only going to enhance the industry's economic fortunes and improve the creative output itself."

A Div erse Talent Pool of Mitchell Scholars

The $10 million “Mitchell Scholars” endowment, funded by $5 million from the Mitchell Trust and $5 million in matching funds from USC sources, will expand upcoming efforts to support talented students from diverse backgrounds. As Dean Daley observes, “These are not the people you normally find pathways into the industry. Especially now that we're in this economic downturn, we want to provide opportunities for people from different cultures to create and distribute content worldwide. These diverse voices are only going to enhance the industry’s economic fortunes and improve the creative output itself.”

With the initial Mitchell gift scheduled to take full effect next year, Allen notes that more money will become available in the form of matching funds aligned with like-minded donors. He says, “I still have $20 million left and I believe many leaders in this industry are going to be either the ethical leader or the non-ethical leader. I am a big believer in having a diverse candidate pool. For the next round, I openly invite those leaders to avail themselves of matching dollars from the Mitchell Trust. If potential donors ask me, under certain scenarios, ‘Do you want to advance our mutual interests?’ – the answer is ‘Yes.’"
In Spring 2017, the School of Cinematic Arts’ newly re-launched Council on Diversity and Inclusion initiated a speaker series that was in search of an inaugural guest. It had to be someone able and willing to come to campus, and whom people would show up for. A plus would be if he or she had some association with the School—an alumnus or parent maybe. And, of course, they had to have something profound (or at least interesting) to say about the need for an increased focus on diversity and inclusion at the School, and in the media industry.

As the council discussed who it should invite, a few hot-right-now names emerged. But each would come up short on at least one of the important criteria. Finally, someone said the obvious choice: John Singleton. But would he have the time to come to campus to speak to students? Especially for a no-frills speaker series for which there wouldn’t be much publicity. His answer: He would make the time.

A TRANSFORMATIVE TROJAN

JOHN SINGLETON’S INFLUENCE ON A NEW GENERATION OF FILMMAKERS

By Desa Philadelphia
Singleton, who died on April 29, 2019, at age 51, after suffering a major stroke, always made time for the School of Cinematic Arts and its students. A Los Angeles native, Singleton belonged to every subset of the SCA family. He had been a student, graduating from the Filmic Writing program (now the John Wells Division of Writing for Screen & Television) in 1990. He loved the School, which he insisted on directing because it was based on his own life, because the phenomenally successful film Boyz n the Hood, that had a breakout debut at the Cannes Film Festival and made Singleton the youngest person and first African-American nominated for a directing Oscar.

Singleton was also a dedicated USC alumnus, making appearances at many University events even returning to teach a class. He was the 2006 recipient of SCA’s Mary Pickford Award, given to a distinguished alumna at graduation each year; and in 2016 he received a Legacy Award from the University’s Black Alumni Association. He was an active member of the SCA Alumni Development Council and was also an SCA parent, having inspired two of his children—daughter Justice and son Masai—to enroll at the School.

Importantly, Singleton was always enthusiastic in his advocacy of SCA, telling audiences over the years that it was his education at the School that gave him the tools to be the first “Black film brat,” by which he meant that he was the first African-American writer/director who had creative control of his studio-financed projects. At the Diversity Council event, he talked about his storied career and took questions well after the allotted time. He was doing the council a favor by agreeing to kick off the series, but it was apparent that he was in his element, genuinely enjoying himself. His children say that, apart from his directing, the thing Singleton loved most was engaging young people. “He was very secure in who I was and where I came from. I was very secure in who I was and where I came from.” Stephen Barnes, a fellow USC alumnus who became Singleton’s friend and lawyer, says there was no doubt Singleton would succeed “John, by sheer force of will, put himself in a position to go to USC,” says Barnes, adding that Singleton “took pleasure in making sure people knew that the thing he was missing was opportunity.”

The Writing program had only been established four years before Singleton arrived on campus, and he effectively became its first superstar student. He won the Jack Nicholson Screenwriting Award, given to a promising film school student, two years in a row: first in 1988 for Twilight Time, about women mourning their mother, then the following year for Boyz n the Hood, which he wrote as his senior thesis on a campus library computer. Deni Esgon Miller, who was a counselor at the School and formed a friendship with Singleton, said it was always apparent that he was happy to be at USC. “He was always walking around talking to people, and he was very curious,” says Miller. “John was always positive, very grateful to be in the program and he would have gone on to graduate (school) except that Boyz n the Hood led to other things.”

Boyzz n the Hood (1991) led to transformative things. It stunned Cannes with advertisements that featured graffiti and a concert by Ice Cube. Made for $6 million, it grossed $57.5 million during its run and introduced Hollywood to a slate of then-unknown talents—publicist Godfrey G. Ice Cube, Morris Chestnut, Lauren Fishburne, Angela Bassett, Nia Long—all of whom would become household names. And it gave the world a new version of Los Angeles, as Singleton described it as “sunshine and bullets.”

Boyzz also helped the School land an especially important advocate. Frank Price had greenlit the movie for Columbia Pictures and famously thought Singleton could direct it despite his lack of experience. When Price was asked in 1991 to form a Board of Counselors to help the School, he already had a personal connection. As he put it: “If John Singleton was any indication of the kind of talent you found at USC, then I wanted to help.” Price, who still chairs the Board and is a USC trustee, has played an outsized role in helping to build the School’s endowment and reputation.

Singleton’s success also created a model for other aspiring Black filmmakers. Rick Famuyiwa, who also grew up in a South Los Angeles neighboorhood at the same time and makes films about the city, including The Wood (1999) and Date (2015), describes Boyzz as success as “like changing,” and Singleton as the example of what living the dream of Hollywood was like. “His success really planted the idea that it was possible that a kid from my background, which was similar to his, could actually make it. He was this young Black filmmaker that was a product of the hip-hop generation and the same L.A. neighborhoods I lived in. There were two filmmakers that inspired me to apply to USC George Lucas and John Singleton.”

Producer and director Sheldon Candis, a Baltimore native, said Singleton influenced his choosing to come to the west coast. “I admired Spike. I wanted to be John. When I discovered he went to USC Film School, I had to go there.” says Candis. “(Boyzz n the Hood) had the most lasting impression on me. It was the first time I had ever witnessed our cultural collective story on screen told so...
In the 1980s, Singleton helped to bring attention to the African-American experience in Hollywood through films such as "Boyz n the Hood" and "Poetic Justice." His success helped to break down barriers for other filmmakers of color. "I've been in this industry, and that's really good to be around," Singleton said in an interview. "It's like, ‘Wow, we really need to do more of this.’"

Singleton's influence extended beyond his films. "Everyone wanted to be in John's class in the industry," said Alumnus Steven Taylor, who taught a class in the Division of Cinema & Media Studies titled "Emergence of Multicultural Cinema." Taylor said Singleton helped to give space for filmmakers and students to see themselves reflected in the culture of USC, and to start acting like a more entrenched member of the South LA community.

Justice Singleton, his father's influence was apparent: everywhere they went in the city. "It was almost like a daily thing to learn that you knew someone who was inspired by him or in L.A. someone would recognize him or he had students who grew up in Los Angeles who was mentoring," she says. "For me it almost felt like he was certainly a Black artist who represented the tone that was rid of the class size but after a month passed with no further contact she decided to text him right away and asked him when the best time would be for me to call and he said, ‘right now is good.’” Victoria got a response from Singleton’s assistant saying he would be in touch and behold, his email was there. So I emailed him." Victoria got a response from Singleton’s assistant saying he would be in touch and behold, his email was there. So I emailed him."

In Spring 2016, Singleton brought his mentorship to campus, teaching a class in the Division of Cinema & Media Studies titled “Emergence of Multicultural Cinema.” Alumnus Steven Taylor, who came to the School from Trinidad & Tobago, said the class was best when Singleton talked about his own experiences on set and in the industry. Soon stories about his stories started making their way around campus. "He set a tone that was real," Taylor said. "Every student they could ask him anything, so they did. ‘He set a tone that was rid of egos. Honestly, his classroom was a safe space for a ton of people to think about it there weren’t a lot of Black artists who were doing that in Hollywood and he was one of the only ones who was doing it in L.A.’”

With his career it’s as if Singleton was saying, “With Steven Spielberg and Gordon Parks and all those people, and when I came along I had my highs and my lows and I’m happy.” In the same interview, Singleton said his greatest achievement was that, “I’ve been in this industry, and that’s really good to be around.”

Singleton kept calling the School on. When Miller retired a few years ago, she initially said she didn’t want a retirement party. But Singleton kept calling the School. He wanted to share it. That impulse to want to better yourself and want to learn is related to the impulse to teach. To want to share knowledge with others as well,” says Maasai Singleton, adding that SCA played an important role in his father’s lifelong education. “I felt like USC was both his playground and how he became disciplined. Because he realized as a person of color at that School he had to be very rigid (to succeed).”

SCA always remained Singleton’s home. On April 11, 2019, just three weeks before he died, he took the stage of the Samuel Goldwyn Theater at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences with fellow alumni, producers Keegan Fiege, Stacey Sherington and Jennifer Todd for “An Evening with Distinguished USC Alumni,” an event celebrating the School’s 90th anniversary. He spoke of returning to the School often, slipping into one of the back rows of Norris Cinema Theatre. When class was over, he would stick around to chat and answer questions. Where other filmmakers would quick-exit to avoid students’ questions about getting their scripts read or that first-on-set job, Singleton would make his presence known, quickly gathering up an entourage.

“Nine times out of ten, the kids don’t know who I am or whatever. But if they do we sit and talk,” Singleton recalled fondly. “They are just as we were. They have a fresh excitement, if they don’t have a vision right now, for finding out what they want to do within this industry, and that’s really good to be around.”

Singleton’s legacy lives on through the School of Cinematic Arts and the USC Black Alumni Association. If you have information or want to contribute to the Scholarship fund, visit cinema.usc.edu/singleton.
Storytelling Diplomacy

THE AMERICAN FILM SHOWCASE ENTERS ITS NINTH YEAR OF EXPORTING AMERICAN CINEMA

By Matt Meier

Storytelling has the power to change the world.

It’s an aphorism frequently spoken here at the USC School of Cinematic Arts, one we wholly believe. American Film Showcase (AFS), SCA’s State Department-funded program, puts that belief into action. AFS launched in 2011 as a “film diplomacy program” with twenty weeklong workshops and screening series in twenty countries. Since then, AFS has produced more than 245 unique programs in 111 countries, making it the largest arts exchange program of the U.S. Government.

Funded by and operated in collaboration with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State—which also oversees the Fulbright Scholarship and other cultural exchange programs—AFS’s work is grounded in the belief that authentic stories can counter political narratives and build new bridges of empathy between nations. Initially the program only focused on sending American films and their directors to various nations for screenings and Q&As. Films like Mad Hot Ballroom, Spellbound (2014), featuring portraits of five nurses across the United States working in tough situations to heal patients, and The Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, were chosen because they told stories of American life that didn’t usually make it into Hollywood films. In recent years AFS’s work has expanded significantly. While they still tour an annual slate of films, AFS also produces workshops that train filmmakers around the world in how to tell their own stories.

“Global issues such as freedom of speech, economic opportunity and women’s empowerment are the kinds of challenges creators are grappling with but might not know how to incorporate into their narratives.” says Writing Professor David Isaacs, who led the workshop. “I learned a great deal from these international creators I worked with about what change might look like in the specific cultural context of their respective countries,” says Isaacs. “It’s about learning to lead workshops on creating compelling narratives. It’s about teaching that all Americans are selfish, that they don’t do anything for anyone else.”

AFS also collaborates with U.S. Embassies around the globe to produce ten-day regional workshops on screenwriting, narrative filmmaking, animation, and game design. Workshop participants are recruited from multiple countries in a region and represent some of their countries’ most talented up-and-coming storytellers. A television writing seminar in Moldova, for example, brought in aspiring talents from neighboring Romania, Latvia, and Lithuania. “All of them were hungry to develop TV series, rich in character that could reflect their native cultures and offer their respective audiences alternative programming to the overwhelming Russian broadcast presence in the region,” says Writing Professor David Isaacs, who led the workshop. Isaacs was also recruited to help launch the Middle East Media Initiative (MEMI), an AFS sister program that is also funded by the U.S. State Department. MEMI supports writers and producers from Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates in creating nuanced, character-driven television series for their home markets.

AFS also hosts annual workshops at the School of Cinematic Arts and recently brought creative teams from six countries (Colombia, Belgium, Georgia, Italy, Mongolia, Uganda) for a workshop on developing multimedia projects for social impact. The projects explored issues like human trafficking, ethnic identity education, and civic engagement. “I learned a great deal from these international creators I worked with about what change might look like in the specific cultural context of their respective countries,” says DJ Johnson, Associate Professor of Cinema in the Division of Media Arts + Practice, who led the workshops. Johnson, who has also taught AFS workshops in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mauritania, says the experiences help him develop curricula for his SCA students that emphasize: “developing a global worldview and an orientation towards creating socially-conscious, ethical media.”

Alan Baker, SCA’s Associate Dean of Administration and International Projects, oversees all the School’s international programs, and likes to tell a story from one of AFS’s earliest programs in Russia. The screening was of Carolyn Jones’ The American Nurse (2014), featuring portraits of five nurses across the United States working in tough situations to heal patients. One audience member said that, “Before this film, I had learned that all Americans are selfish, that they don’t do anything for anyone else.” Baker says that the film allowed her to see that Americans—like Russians or people from anywhere else—could also be compassionate. “Seeing the film really opened her eyes to a different part of America,” says Baker.

As it enters its ninth year, AFS programming now covers many genres of storytelling. A recent workshop on sketch comedy was held in the Middle East, an animation workshop in Laos was so successful there will be a second edition, and a game design program will debut in Eastern Europe. AFS is even scheduling workshops on producing reality television. “American storytelling appeals to audiences and creators around the world,” says Gandin Mark. “And that makes it a powerful tool for diplomacy.”
It’s only one o’clock on a sunny fall afternoon but Hovik Terovsepyan has already died twice. To be more precise, his League of Legends (LoL) avatar was digitally destroyed by enemy forces deployed remotely by players in a practice scrimmage.

Fortunately for Terovsepyan, a member of USC’s new Esports Union, death is fleeting in the massively popular game, so he “re-spawned” and lived to fight another day. Now between matches, he is hanging out with half a dozen twentiesomething teammates on the USC League of Legends Varsity Team. They pass the time playing old-fashioned analog card games. But the serious competition will soon resume on a row of identical computer screens lined up against the wall. There, amid explosive bursts of color, the student players will destroy turrets, slay jungle monsters, demolish “minions” and try to annihilate the enemy's home base known as “Nexus.”

To become proficient in the medieval fantasy-themed League universe, players need lightning-quick reflexes, prodigious memorization skills, and acute powers of analysis to master the game’s dense constellation of special powers unleashed by 145 warrior characters known as “Champions.” Each warrior is fortified by “items” purchased with “gold” earned by killing enemy combatants. To thrive in “battle,” players invest hundreds of hours learning the game’s intricacies. “What’s the payoff? Honestly, it’s a good way to decompress,” says Terovsepyan, a USC Marshall School of Business junior who started playing the game at age 11. “Especially in college, it’s fun to play League of Legends because it’s a temporary escape from real life.”

Marshall classmate William Huang sets down his cards for a minute and points out that video game expertise these days can also be leveraged into lucrative professional careers. “I grew up with League, but when I started playing there wasn’t all this franchising and money involved. Now, pro players can make hundreds of thousands of dollars,” Huang says. “They’re doing the same thing professional football players do, which is to provide entertainment for millions of people around the world.”

All of the Esports Union team members initially locked into videogame culture as kids, though few match League of Legends competitor Ulysses Quesada in terms of early immersion. “I’ve been playing video games since before I could walk,” says Quesada, a sophomore from Milwaukee majoring in biochemistry with an eye on a pediatrics career.

Hoving quietly over the players is Head Coach, Joseph Jacko. A superstar LoL competitor at Virginia Tech, Jacko graduated last spring and joined USC’s Esports Union program in September. His biggest challenge? "Everyone’s got a different playing style," Jacko says. "We’re trying to sort through all of that and teach our players that sometimes you need to sacrifice your lead for your teammate to succeed. This is something we’re constantly working on.”

With minimal fanfare, the players drift over to the computers, put on headsets and begin adjusting their in-game avatars. "We’ve been the number one game design school for almost 15 years,” recalls Professor and Head of Marketing and Strategy, Jim Huntley. "We turned it on our head when we created an esports program in the fall of 2017. USC Games, production coordinator at Firefly Games, began pushing for the creation of an esports program in the fall of 2017. USC Games, Media & Games Division Class of ’19, who now works as a program coordinator at Firefly Games, began pushing for the creation of an esports program in the fall of 2017. USC Games, Professor and Head of Marketing and Strategy Jim Huntley, recalls, “Keanu was an esports fanatic and kept insisting that the University invest behind an official esports initiative. We turned him down repeatedly until he finally pushed back and said, ‘We’ve been the number one game design school for almost 15 years, and lived to fight another day. Now, between matches, he is hanging out with half a dozen twentiesomething teammates on the USC League of Legends Varsity Team. They pass the time playing old-fashioned analog card games. But the serious competition will soon resume on a row of identical computer screens lined up against the wall. There, amid explosive bursts of color, the student players will destroy turrets, slay jungle monsters, demolish “minions” and try to annihilate the enemy’s home base known as “Nexus.”

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In MOTION

Once we make all of our mistakes with that one, then we can stabilize, those teams are only going to have middling success. We simultaneously, but if they’re not well-financed or operationally stable, those teams are only going to have middling success. We wanted to do this thoughtfully,” says Huntley. “Other schools might launch 12 teams simultaneously, but if they’re not well-financed or operationally stable, those teams are only going to have middling success. We made the strategic decision to start with one game and do it right. Once we make all of our mistakes with that one, then we can support and provide resources for additional games, successfully.”

USC’s embrace of esports comes at a time when video game culture has made significant strides expanding its reach to mainstream audiences. Esports attract about 800 million fans worldwide with global revenue estimated to reach $1.4 billion in 2020. CBS has ordered a sitcom focused on NBA athlete-turned-esports entrepreneur Rich Fox. Washington Post recently debuted the “Launcher” section devoted exclusively to esports coverage. Individual stars captivate the public imagination, as when sixteen-year-old Fortnite World Cup winner Kyle “Bugha” Giersdorf earned $3 million over the summer by beating 100 competitors (whittled down from 40 million entrants) at Arthur Ashe Stadium in New York. Tyler “Ninja” Bevins, esports’ most popular streamer, makes about $600,000 a month on the strength of his 12 million member fan base. Bullish on esports-as-spectacle, Blizzard Entertainment recently opened LA’s first dedicated esports arena. Last year, the League of Legends World Championship finals in South Korea out-drew the Super Bowl, pulling in nearly 100 million online viewers. Reflecting the rising currency of video games, Esports Union has attracted sponsors including computer company MSI and production company Om Films, that provide financial and material support to the program. Because esports falls outside the purview of the NCAA, varsity student players are currently eligible to receive cash stipends.

In addition to the MOBA tournaments that galvanize USC’s competitive efforts, Esports Union hopes to collaborate on new curricula pegged to esports. “There are a few different paths we’re considering,” Huntley says. “On the business side, we’d love to partner with Marshall on how to operationally build fund and manage an esports team. And since social media and marketing exposure plays such a big role in the success of esports, we’d like to partner with the USC Annenberg School of Communications on classes that teach best practices in that space.”

A significant challenge faced by esports practitioners is the lack of gender diversity represented in most male-dominated esports rosters. Huntley says, “We’re extremely cognizant of the strength and value of inclusivity in our program and throughout the University. Esports, across the board, need to have a better gender balance, especially in front of the camera. Unfortunately, the biggest barrier to more gender inclusion is that there’s a lot of community toxicity. At USC, we have a zero-tolerance policy regarding players being toxic, but speaking more generally women who play League of Legends tell me they turn off their mics because, as soon as other players hear their voice, all sorts of inappropriate stuff gets said. That understandably turns a lot of women players off.”

Whether or not Esports Union immediately produces a new generation of full-time League of Legends professionals, Huntley believes the program can play an invaluable role in grooming students for success in the real world. “Just like football, basketball or baseball, esports develop a student’s ability to collaborate in a professional environment. We all have to learn how to take feedback constructively, figure out other people’s rhythms, learn their styles and how they like to communicate. We are not necessarily looking for social butterflies, but we do need players who can engage with others in a positive way. If you pick up those skills in an esports environment, it’s only going to help when students go out into the real world.”

Frank Biondi Jr. (1945-2019)
Executive

Frank Biondi Jr. was a member of SCA’s Board of Councilors

Biondi’s storied career in entertainment saw him serve in chief executive positions at HBO, Viacom, and Universal Studios. Following a career on Wall Street, Biondi helped turn HBO into a television powerhouse, the model for premium subscription channels. He was also instrumental in Viacom’s transformation into one of the largest companies in the entertainment industry. He is survived by his wife, Caro (Oughton) Biondi, his daughters Anne Simonds and Jane Biondi-Munza, six grandchildren, and a brother, Robert.

In MEMORIAM

SCA Student

John Lynch was a Junior in the John Wells Division of Writing for Screen & Television

Lynch had a vivacious personality and was a talented comedic writer and stand-up performer. He was known across the university for moderating the Facebook page “USC Memes for Spoiled Pre-Teens.” He is survived by his mother, Sheila Murphy, brother Erik Lynch, and sister Stephanie Lynch-Habb.

SCA Student

John Moore was a Senior in the Division of Film & Television Production

Moore had a penchant for non-stop move references and an outspoken affinity for classic rock. Although he was a student of film production, his talent as a screenwriter and film scholar resulted in friendships across the SCA divisions. Moore hailed from Sonoma County, CA, and attended St. Eugene’s Catholic School and Cardinal Newman High School, where a memorial fund has been set up in remembrance. He is survived by his parents, Bruce and Ellen; and his older siblings, sister Stephanie and brothers Stephen, Patrick, and Robert.

SCA Student

Justin Accardi was a Sophomore studying Business of Cinematic Arts (BCA)

Justin Accardi loved music, theatre and film. While at USC he sang acapella with UnderSCore, performed sketch comedy with SC2, and was a recipient of a USC Dean’s scholarship. He is survived by his parents, Selena and Jim, who established the Justin Accardi Foundation for the Arts to provide financial support to cinematic arts students whose projects reflect Justin’s belief in the positive impact of the arts.

Rey Christian Hunt (1977-2019)
Alumnus

Rey Christian Hunt got his BA in the Production program

A Chicago native, Hunt moved to Los Angeles to attend SCA and graduated in 2016. He was a writer, director, and producer who owned Catalyst, a production company in Newport Beach, California. He was also a pastor. Hunt died of lung cancer. He is survived by his wife, Heather; their son, Jaiden; and his parents, Dr. Ann Love and Ronald C. Hunt.

Justin's belief in the positive impact of the arts.
Mardik Martin

By Howard Rodman, Professor and former Chair of the John Wells Division of Writing for Screen & Television, and former President of the Writers Guild of America West.

Our friend and colleague Mardik Martin passed away on September 11 at the age of 84. Long a mainstay of the School of Cinematic Arts’ John Wells Division of Writing for Screen & Television, where he began teaching in the Spring of 1986, Mardik—compact, energetic, blunt—inspired two generations of screenwriters to do their best work until his retirement in October of 2014.

His collaborations with fellow NYU student Martin Scorsese are the stuff of legend: Mean Streets (1973); New York, New York (1977); Raging Bull (1980); all of which Mardik co-wrote. Said Scorsese: “For a time, we were inseparable. We went to see movies together; we talked about them endlessly, and then we started dreaming up the pictures we were going to make—in diner booths and on benches in Washington Square Park, walking the streets of Lower Manhattan or driving around the city in hot and cold weather; in sunshine and in rain and snow; by night and by day.”

Mardik also wrote Ken Russell’s Valentino (1977), collaborated on Scorsese’s The Last Waltz (1978), and most recently wrote Fatih Akin’s The Cut (2014), a drama set against the backdrop of the Armenian genocide. He was nominated for a WGA Award for Mean Streets, and for a Golden Globe for Raging Bull. He was given the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2007 Arpa International Film Festival in Hollywood.

Mardik’s own journey was as exceptional as his films. An Armenian, born September 16, 1934, in Iran, and raised in Iraq as the son of a bookstore owner. He fell in love with the cinema. “In Baghdad, I was going to the movies about three times a week, every week, as often as you can see a film when you’re a child in Iraq.”

Mardik attended NYU by day and worked as a waiter at the legendary Toots Shor’s by night. “I had to survive. I had to make money.”

But here’s the thing: every one of those folks, including me, always felt like they were the most important person in Norm’s life when he was connecting with them. He had that rare ability to make you feel special, seen, and appreciated.

When his office moved from the outer corner of Marcia Lucas to the 4th floor of SCA, his door was still open and the chairs filled with all who wanted to talk to him. Myself included. The room buzzed with activity. Many of us were in and out with him in his office on the 4th floor of SCA all the time. Myself included. I remember hanging out with him in his office on the outside corner of the Marcia Lucas Building, the former home of post and animation. There he could hold court and greet all passersby.

We taught many courses together at USC, but our paths had crossed years before when I was the assistant director for Liz Swados and John Cainmaker on a film called What Do Children Think of When They Think of the Bomb and Norm was the editor.

Often in filmmaking the production side does not know or interact with the post side, but Norm did not believe in that division. He believed in the integration of production and post and saw all of us as storytellers. Like so many other filmmakers, I kept a copy of Norm’s Film Editing Room Handbook, first published in 1984, by my bedside.

Norm was an educator before he fully embraced that title. Indispensable if you needed to know A wind from B wind. At USC, Norm was always looking for a way to integrate the editing curriculum in all the classes. He worked with all the tracks, all the divisions, and many schools. Norm taught animation classes, Media Arts + Practice classes, directing classes, sound and producing classes. He collaborated with the School of Architecture and probably so many more I do not know about.

There is an ocean of USC students who have been educated and influenced by Norm Hollyn, as well as faculty.

When his office moved from the outer corner of Marcia Lucas to the 4th floor of SCA, his door was still open and the chairs filled with all who wanted to talk to him. Myself included. The subjects abounded: film, politics, wine (particularly red), the family he adored—his wife Janet and daughter Elizabeth. And, of course, music. Zappa or Springsteen or Jamiroquai. He loved music.

But here’s the thing: every one of those folks, including me, always felt like they were the most important person in Norm’s life when he was connecting with them. He had that rare ability to make you feel special, seen, and appreciated.

Several months after Norm’s passing I walked by his office on the 4th floor of SCA and heard voices, talking and laughing. My heart skipped a beat. His office has been repurposed as a creative meeting space, and I know he would love that his office still generates collaborative discussion. Hearing the collaboration emanating from the room gives me solace as every day we feel the loss of Norm. He is missed.
Waldie Striebel ’79 — is writing the text for a live-action feature film based on Krazy & Ignatz, a comic strip by George Herriman.

Jesse James ’95 — has been cast in “The Game Stalker,” a new thriller from Lionsgate.

Alma Shatz ’99 — is directing a limited series for Hulu.

Tom Stempel ’02 — is directing the ABC mini-series “The Last Spy,” which has been put in development by CBS.

Jason Wells ’99 — is a political thriller.

Tim Story — is directing “Wilds,” a post-apocalyptic drama for Amazon Prime Video.

Carla Kettner ’79 — is producing for The Story Company.

R.J. Cutler — will executive produce an untitled Alice Keys musical drama series for Showtime.

Jeff Davis ’95 — has signed a multi-year overall producing deal with Universal Television. He will also executive produce the OITNB half-hour comedy series for Netflix.

Drew Tarver ’96 — is directing “Puller” for Amazon Studios.

Jason Shuman ‘00 — will direct the New Line Cinema film “The Last Spy.”

Tim Story — is directing the half-hour comedy series for HBO starring David Spade. He will also direct “Ghostbusters: Afterlife” for Sony Pictures.

Tony Ronzoneschi ’15 & Judd Apatow — wrote the script for a feature film chronling the true life of NINA superstars Lillitkon.”

Sandra Rhimes ’93 — has a pilot order from Amazon for her one-hour drama, “The Stylist.”

Barb & Star Go to Mars” is a feature film which has been optioned by Rooster Teeth. It will be released in 2022 on Netflix.

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Judd Apatow — is producing “The Game Stalker,” a new thriller from Lionsgate.

WandaVision” is an anthology series.

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In MOTION

Ad Astra - James Gray ’91, Writer-Director; Ethan Gross ’90, Writer; Gary Rydstrom ’81, Sound Designer; John Axelrad ’88, Editor

Aladdin - Directors: Guy Ritchie ’90, Writer- Producer; John Le Battant ’89, Writer; Will McCormack ’94, Executive Producer

Armistead Maupin’s Ties of the City - Patricia Rensiek ’93, Writer/Co-Executive Producer; BJ90210 - Elizabeth Allen Rosenbaum ’99, Director; Aaron Fullerton ’07, Writer; Katie Wech ’02, Writer

Avengers: Endgame - Joe Russo ’90, Writer; Anthony Russo ’90, Director

Bad Times at the El Royale - Daniel Espinosa ’94, Writer; Kevin Feige ’95, Executive Producer; Bryan Fogel ’00, Executive Producer/Director

Batgirl - Christina Hodson ’97, Writer; Chloe Zhao ’06, Director

Beautiful Boy -locker ’00, Writer; Michael Rumman ’97, Director; Dan Levine ’97, Editor

Black Summer - Rob Turbovsky ’11, Writer/Producer

Chambers - Aleka Cooper ’86, Writer/Executive Producer

Chilling Adventures of Sabrina - Lee Toland Krieger ’95, Executive Producer/Director

City on a Hill - Chuck Maclean ’11, Writer/Executive Producer; Jennifer Todd, Executive Producer

The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance - Javier Grillo-Mansilla ’93, Writer

Fem - Aaron Kaplan ’90, Executive Producer

Four Weddings and a Funeral - Lara Chai ’01, Writer

FILM and TV RELEASES

Escape Room - Adam Robitel ’00, Director; Neal Moritz ’85, Producer; Ori Marmur ’93, Producer

Fast Color - Michael R. Johnson ’92, Director

Gemini Man - David Ellison, Producer

Godzilla: King of the Monsters - Ross Dinerstein ’05, Producer

The Highwaymen - John Schwartzman ’94, Director

Joker - Todd Phillips ’93, Director

John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum - Chad Stahelski ’90, Director; Evan Schiff ’04, Editor

Kong: Skull Island - Jordan Vogt-Roberts ’06, Director; John Schwartzman ’94, Director

Mary Poppins Returns - David Magee ’97, Writer; John DeBello ’90, Director; John Schwartzman ’94, Director

Miss Bala - Teri Lynn Shropshire ’85, Editor

Ms. Purple - Justin Chon ’03, Writer/Director; Producer; Anne Chang ’17, Cinematographer

Raise Hell: The Life & Times of Molly Ivins - Jesse Eisinger ’98, Writer/Producer; Monique Zavistovski ’03, Writer/Editor; James Egan, Producer

Ready or Not - Adam Wingard ’03, Writer-Director; Producer

Replicas - James Vanderbilt ’99, Producer; John Schwartzman ’94, Director

Rub & Tug - J.J. Abrams ’97, Writer; John Schwartzman ’94, Director

Shaft - Tim Story ’91, Director

Spider-Man: Far From Home - Kevin Feige ’95, Producer

The Sun is Also A Star - Raúl advertising ’82, Producer

To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You - Charles Inglish ‘06, Writer/Director

The Boys - Max Barlow ’89, Writer/Executive Producer; Supercollider ’94, Director

The Haunting of Hill House - Scott Kasouris ’89, Writer/Executive Producer; Michael Figgis ’81, Director of Photography

The Hot Zone - Brian Wayne Peterson ’97, Writer/Executive Producer; Kelly Souders ’97, Writer/Executive Producer

The Innocent Man - Ross Dinerstein ’05, Executive Producer; Sarah Feeley ’01, Co-Executive Producer; Shannon Rigg, Producer; Nicole Kassab ’08, Director of Photography

The Kids Are Alright - Tim Doyle ’87, Executive Producer/Writer

The Little Drummer Girl - Stephen Cornwell, Executive Producer

Now Apocalypse - Gregg Araki ’88, Writer/Producer/Director

On Becoming a God in Central Florida - Grant Heslov ’86, Executive Producer

The Passage - Matt Reeves ’85, Executive Producer; Jason Ensler ’97, Executive Producer/Director

Project Blue Book - Robert Zemeckis ’73, Executive Producer

The Spanish Princess - Helen Childress ’91, Writer

Tell Me A Story - Aaron Kaplan ’90, Executive Producer; Ryan Malbanado ’96, Writer/Supervising Producer

The Umbrella Academy - Rhys Thomas Thurlow ’99, Writer; Beau Bauman ’01, Executive Producer

What/If - Charles Rowe, Executive Producer; Robert Zemeckis ’73, Executive Producer

When They See Us - Brian Grazer ’74, Executive Producer

Why Women Kill - Brian Grazer ’74, Executive Producer

Armistead Maupin’s Ties of the City - Patricia Rensiek ’93, Writer/Co-Executive Producer; BJ90210 - Elizabeth Allen Rosenbaum ’99, Director; Aaron Fullerton ’07, Writer; Katie Wech ’02, Writer

Bliss this Mess - Erin O’Malley ’96, Executive Producer

The Boys - Eric Kripke ’94, Writer; Neal Moritz ’85, Executive Producer; Ori Marmur ’93, Executive Producer

Catch-22 - Grant Heslov ’86, Director/Executive Producer

Generation - Daniel Barnz ’95, Writer/Director

Good Trouble - Jon M. Chu ’03, Executive Producer/Director

Grand Hotel - Daniela Arieda ’03, Writer/Supervising Producer

The Haunting of Hill House - Scott Kasouris ’89, Writer/Executive Producer; Michael Figgis ’81, Director of Photography

The Hot Zone - Brian Wayne Peterson ’97, Writer/Executive Producer; Kelly Souders ’97, Writer/Executive Producer

The Illuminati - Miranda July ’82, Writer/Director

The Innocent Man - Ross Dinerstein ’05, Executive Producer; Sarah Feeley ’01, Co-Executive Producer; Shannon Rigg, Producer; Nicole Kassab ’08, Director of Photography

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