



## Outstanding Creative Experts Team Up to Celebrate the 20th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards®

Executive Producer **Kathy Connell** vividly remembers the 14 months leading up to the inaugural Screen Actors Guild Awards® ceremony. As the first SAG Awards Committee chair, Connell and four fellow board members worked tirelessly to establish the entire Awards program, from the categories, rules and design of the award to the sit-down dinner club ambience. In hindsight, that might have been the easy part.

“It was fairly terrifying when we sent out the invitations the first year,” recalls Connell, who stepped down from the board to become the full-time producer of the show in 1996 and who also holds the title of SAG-AFTRA Assistant National Executive Director of Awards and National Programming. “We were throwing a very grand party and we didn’t know if anybody would come. We didn’t know then that when you send out invitations nobody replies until two weeks before the show.”

But a bevy of enthusiastic guests *did* attend and were first-hand witnesses to the highly successful debut of the Screen Actors Guild Awards, broadcast on NBC. Today, even as the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual SAG Awards approaches at the Shrine Exposition Hall on Jan. 18, Connell has much more than RSVPs or what 1,200 guests will eat and drink or where they will sit to keep her awake at night. With counsel from the Awards Committee, she negotiates the contracts with the network and with Jeff Margolis Productions. She oversees every aspect of the show’s budget, marketing, promotion corporate sponsorships and partnerships, as well as both the awards and publicity departments.

The SAG Awards Committee continues to play a vital role in the success of the show, which now airs on TNT and TBS. Says current Chair **JoBeth Williams**: To this day, the Committee (which includes Vice Chair **Daryl Anderson** as well as members **Scott Bakula**, **Shelley Fabares** and **Woody Schultz**) is involved in every step of the Awards, from the hiring of the producer-director to adjudicating rules questions, to proofreading ballots and submission forms. They have creative approval over the show’s content and have the always-painful task of selecting which members are included in the on-air “In Memoriam” tribute.

“The Committee’s involvement is crucial,” Connell adds, “because each one of them is a working actor. As such, they offer unique perspectives in the development of the show and sensitivity to the union’s point of view.”

Breathing life into the annual ceremony alongside Connell and the committee is a team of dedicated, experienced and award-winning individuals who return year after year, headed by executive producer and award-winning director **Jeff Margolis**, who has shaped hundreds of the entertainment industry’s biggest events, including directing eight Academy Awards®. The SAG Awards engaged his Jeff Margolis Productions in 1998 and he has executive produced the show since the fifth awards. He added directing duties to his plate in 2006. According to Margolis, while a few changes were made to the ceremony the year he first took the reins, the format since that time hasn’t been altered all that much.

“It’s two hours, start to finish,” he says. “There are only 13 awards and three special tributes consisting of Life Achievement, “In Memoriam” and a union tribute package that changes from year to year. We’ve found something that really works. The TV audience loves the show because it’s exciting and fun to watch, and they feel like they’re part of the event. The actors in attendance love it because it’s a room full of other actors. To them, it feels like they’ve gone to somebody’s home for dinner.”

## Setting the Stage

In its natural state, the Shrine Exposition Center looks a lot more like an old roller rink than it does an elegant ballroom, so it's up to the Emmy®-winning production design team of **John Shaffner** and **Joe Stewart** to create some magic. (Shaffner and Stewart have been honored with 34 Emmy nominations, an Art Directors Guild Award for the 2006 Emmy Awards, plus four Art Directors Guild nominations and five Emmys. Additionally, Shaffner was the chair of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Board of Governors, while Stewart serves as chair of the Academy's Governor's Ball and Sculpture committees.)

The process begins on a small scale.

"John and Joe come up with three different models of the room to present to the SAG Awards Committee and the producing team," says Emmy-winning Lighting Designer **Jeffrey Engel**, a 43-year industry veteran who has worked on such shows as the Academy Awards, the Emmy Awards and 10 SAG Awards, among many others. "After they decide which look they will go with, John, Joe and I start collaborating on the details of the room."

According to Stewart, it's more of an attitude than a particular theme.

"They call it an environment. The room doesn't necessarily have to be any one thing but it has to accomplish a lot of things at one time," he says, referring to the contemporary room that also gives a nod to the history of the Screen Actors Guild (now SAG-AFTRA) and its longevity in Hollywood. "We want the stage to have the ability to change throughout the evening, even though we're not specifically changing scenery. To achieve that effect, we use surfaces that are light reactive so that their appearance can change from segment to segment and so that Jeff can train the camera on different interesting elements."

That's where Engel comes in and runs with it.

"We try to give the room a feel that is satisfying for the actors," he says. "This is their big night. We try to accentuate the elegance of the evening. Much of the look comes from the colors and patterns, which we use quite a bit to break up walls. We use floor patterns, too."

During the course of the ceremony, there are about 12-15 lighting designs.

"We try to come up with a completely different look for each of the seven acts, for the "In Memoriam" segment, and a base look we use to go to commercial," Engel says. "To create a little excitement when there's a win, we do a bit of a ballyhoo — and we sometimes introduce some strobes." In all, more than 200 automated instruments that change color and focus bring light and atmosphere to the room.

Events Supervisor **Andrea Wyn Schall** takes the design plans of Shaffner and Stewart and makes them a reality — or as she puts it, "I make the trains run on time. I coordinate the entire showroom floor from the bottom of the stairs at the stage to the back of the room. I bring in everything: The carpeting, the catering, the tables, and the chairs. I set everything up to make sure the logistics are correct. I work with Event Designer **Keith Greco** and his crew (Greco designs the ceremony's grand entrance as well as the table and showroom décor); I also work with Graff Diamonds on the Green Room; and with the sponsors, making sure they get correct placement."

## Putting It All Together

Supervising producer **Gloria Fujita O'Brien** - who works on all of Margolis' shows - has helped assemble the SAG Awards since 1998. Working with talent, her job is to make sure that the presenters are aware of what they're supposed to do within a specific timeframe.

"I also handle the script timing of the show," Fujita O'Brien explains, meaning that during the show she's counting every second of every segment, speech and presentation, constantly making adjustments and consulting with Margolis to ensure that it doesn't run over its allotted time.

"I, from the very beginning, am the keeper of the clock," she says. "In my job, you can't be indecisive. You have to problem solve quickly and realize that there's not just one solution for every problem."

**Benn Fleishman**, who is celebrating his 16<sup>th</sup> year with the SAG Awards steps into the role of Supervising Producer this year to oversee the financial, administrative and logistical aspects of the production. Alongside associate producer and 15-year SAG Awards veteran, **Cynthia Kistler**, Fleishman also helps to manage the

large staff that works to pull it all together.

“The production manager, production coordinators and production assistants all help fill out the production team to get done all of the various elements that need to be accomplished during the course of the event, as well as before and after,” says Fleishmann, a three-time Emmy nominee for the HBO specials *Bill Maher...But I'm Not Wrong* (2010), *Ricky Gervais: Out of England* (2009) and *Bill Maher: The Decider* (2008). “Everything from hiring production staff, moving packages around town and ordering and assembling mass quantities of beverages and snacks, to ordering furniture, phone lines and Internet access.”

Consulting producer **Mick McCullough**, celebrating his 17<sup>th</sup> year with the SAG Awards, says only half jokingly that one of the most important aspects of his job is predicting the weather. The show's January date means that every year the red carpet can be subject to unpredictable weather conditions. One aspect of McCullough's multifaceted duties – by his own admission, he's involved in almost every aspect of the production – is to carefully monitor weather reports in the days preceding the ceremony and if inclement weather is predicted, to have rainy day preparations in place.

“Putting a cover on the red carpet involves a cost, of course, and it's a decision that we need to make wisely so that we don't squander our money,” says McCullough, who is also involved in handling the show's budget. “It also changes the way the carpet looks. It's much prettier if it's a sunny day and we don't have to have a canopy over it.”

Two-time Emmy winning writer **Dave Boone** returns to the SAG Awards this year. No stranger to awards shows, he's a veteran of the Tony Awards, Academy of Country Music Awards, Emmy Awards, the Golden Globes® and the Academy Awards. The WGA Award winner and Margolis go way back, too: They first collaborated back in 2000 on *The First Family's Holiday Gift to America: A Tour of the White House*, when then-President and Mrs. Clinton invited cameras into their home.

“Working with Jeff is like family,” he says of Margolis. “I had such a wonderful experience last year and I'm thrilled that he called me again to come back and do the show with this all-star team.”

**Paul Fagen, Quinn Monahan** and **Douglass M. Stewart Jr.** are the producers of the show's three “packages.” Fagen produces the “In Memoriam” homage, Monahan produces the union tribute segment and Stewart produces the Life Achievement Award tribute. Showcasing an actor's legacy in just a few precise seconds can be a challenge. Take it from Fagen, who has been scouring footage for the past 8 years to find those quintessential clips that capsulizes an actor's career.

“Matching those clips to great music by brilliant composers is truly exciting,” he says. “I love movies and admire actors – it's a joy rediscovering great performances from the talented actors that we get the privilege to celebrate and remember.”

Composer and conductor **Lenny Stack**, an Emmy-winner for music arranging for the *Screen Actors Guild 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special* and composer of the current SAG Awards theme, is returning for his 15<sup>th</sup> Screen Actors Guild Awards. Stack has also been musical director for the Golden Globe ceremony since 1994.

From the announcers of the nominations to the presenters on the show, Talent Producer **Maggie Barrett-Caulfield** is responsible for booking them all. She also works with the producers to determine creative celebrity pairings on stage.

When looking for presenters, she says, “The roster needs to be diverse but it also needs to have actors that are respected by other actors and have a great body of work. We do ask the lead male and female Actor recipients in film to come back and present the following year.”

Once they're locked in, Barrett-Caulfield makes sure that the presenters have an enjoyable SAG Awards experience.

“My philosophy has always been, make sure they have a great evening, make sure it's not stressful,” she says. “If they have fun, they will want to come back. If you have happy people that are there giving of their time, you will have a better show.”

Rounding out the key members of the SAG Awards team is Awards Coordinating Producer **Jon Brockett**, who has been with the SAG Awards since 1998. He is the key contact for studios and networks regarding

submissions, "for your consideration" screenings and mailings and for ticketing and seating. He oversees both nominations and final voting and is the primary contact for the Awards' elections firm, Integrity Voting System. Brockett began his career at SAG in 1996 at the New York office in production development and later served as interim co-director of SAG Indie.

### **Spreading the Word**

The Executive in Charge of Publicity is **Rosalind Jarrett Sepulveda**, who is the Women's Image Network's WIN Awards' 2013 Special Achievement Honoree. She was the 2011 recipient of the ICG Publicists Bob Yeager Award for community service and was previously honored with the Publicists Guild's 1986 and 1991 Maxwell Weinberg Showmanship Awards. She and her PR team spread the SAG Awards message — before, during and after the event — to brilliant effect, something she has been doing since the 6th Annual SAG Awards.

"Growing an enthusiastic audience for the SAG Awards is our continuing goal," Jarrett Sepulveda says. "With the advent of social media, we're constantly challenged to develop new ways to engage our viewers and the industry. While building the SAG Awards brand over the years, we've always strived to make it as easy as possible for the media who cover us and the publicists who represent our members to do their jobs."

Because of the camaraderie and teamwork that exists among the SAG Awards team, Margolis says, "We're a big family. Everybody works hard to make it the finest awards show on television."

Connell agrees.

"We have fabulous people who know their jobs and do them really well," she notes. "We have the best team in Hollywood."

*Production Staff Biographies Available Upon Request  
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