

Screen Australia announces \$700,000 of story development funding for 20 projects

Tuesday 21 March 2023: Screen Australia has announced 17 feature films, two television dramas and one online feature that will share in \$700,000 of Story Development funding. The projects include *Eggshell Skull* from writer/director Mia Wasikowska based on the book of the same name by Bri Lee; animated family adventure film *Laser Beak Man*; TikTok mockumentary series *CEEBS* from two of the writers of ABC ME's [Turn Up the Volume](#); and television dramedy *Debatable*, executive produced by AACTA award-winning producer Meg O'Connell.

This slate includes 11 projects supported through the Generate Fund and nine through the Premium Fund. Also announced today are the three successful teams to receive additional development funding through SBS, NITV and Screen Australia's Digital Originals initiative.

Screen Australia's Head of Development **Bobby Romia** said, "It's fantastic to support this exciting mix of projects including four stories for children and families, with *Laser Beak Man* being adapted from stage to screen, and the re-invigoration of the much-adored 'Walking with Dinosaurs - The Arena Spectacular' animatronics in *The Great Dinosaur Rescue*. These heart-warming stories will explore themes including the importance of chasing your dreams, taking care of the planet and the power of teamwork and community."

"Providing career development and talent escalation opportunities for local screen practitioners is at the core of what we do and I'm delighted to support alumni from Screen Australia's Talent USA program including Rachele Wiggins with *Method to Madness* and Vonne Patiag with *Tomgirl*."

The projects funded for development include:

- ***Anna Robi & the House of Dogs*:** Adapted from the stage play, this feature-length dramedy is about luminescent optimist Anna Robi, sole carer for her overbearing mother and their once-pedigree dogs, who dreams of romance and independence. But when Anna gets her first startling taste of life and love outside the home, she must choose between the familiar comfort of the whelping box or finally taking off the leash. Stef Smith, whose credits include [It's Fine, I'm Fine](#) and [Joy Boy](#) is writing and directing, with multiple AWGIE award-winning playwright Maxine Mellor also attached as writer.
- ***CEEBS*:** A 15-part TikTok mockumentary about recent high-school graduates, Zion and Ruby, who join forces to run for Youth President at their local youth centre. As the PR stunts and presidential pressure intensifies, so do the flaws and insecurities within their friendship - begging the question whether their bond will survive fulfilling their 'duties' as potential mouthpieces for their peers or if sociopolitical collapse is inevitable. The creative team features writers Betiel Beyin and Leigh Lule whose credits include [Turn Up the Volume](#), and producers Nikki Tran ([Fresh!](#)) and Amie Batalibasi ([Thalu](#)).
- ***Debatable*:** This eight-part dramedy series follows 15-year-old Hannah, a recently disgraced high-school debater who moves to a small coastal town with her Mum to recover from unspeakable humiliation. As rumours quickly follow, she must think, talk and act fast - even if that means joining the new school's motley debating team and learning to speak truth to power. The writers are Jessica Tuckwell ([Bump](#)), Enoch Mailangi ([Crazy Fun Park](#)), Maddie Nixon and one of the stars of Netflix's [Heartbreak High](#), Thomas Weatherall. Sanja Simić and Diya Eid are attached as development producers, with AACTA award-winning producer Meg O'Connell ([Retrograde](#)), Kurt Royan ([Retrograde](#), [Lindy Chamberlain: The True Story](#)) and Dan Lake executive producing.
- ***Eggshell Skull*:** This drama feature film from writer/director Mia Wasikowska ([Blueback](#), [Tim Winton's The Turning](#)) is a coming of rage story based on the acclaimed book of the same name by Bri Lee. The film will chart 23-year-old Bri's journey through the Australian legal system as a judge's associate and complainant - seeking justice for a crime that has haunted her since childhood. The story follows Bri as she witnesses confronting cases in the courtroom and tries to manage her own

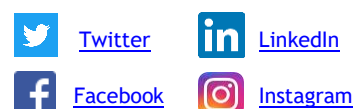


trauma that rises to the surface along the way. *Eggshell Skull* will be produced by Justin Kurzel ([True History of the Kelly Gang](#)), Shaun Grant ([Penguin Bloom](#)) and Nicole O'Donohue ([The Daughter](#)).

- **Flip:** An action-adventure feature film that follows gutsy Aussie teen skateboarder Danni who joins the world's top female skaters in the inaugural Women's World Cup tour. Having never skated in a professional competition before, along the way Danni must fight against ingrained prejudice in her quest to become the first Women's Number One. Directing and producing is [Cancelled](#) creator Luke Eve, with Adam Alcabes ([Relativity Avengers](#)) also producing. Attached as writers are Alli Parker ([Secret Bridesmaids' Business](#)) and Warwick Holt ([Bruce](#)).
- **The Great Dinosaur Rescue:** For 12 years, Creature Technology's pack of animatronic dinosaurs toured the world with 'Walking with Dinosaurs - The Arena Spectacular' - bringing joy to millions of people while celebrating their ancestors. Now retired and gathering dust, waiting to be destroyed, this family feature film will follow brave 10-year-old Spike, who is determined to save the dinosaurs from destruction and find them a new home. Reviving the actual animatronic dinosaurs from the worldwide arena phenomenon, *The Great Dinosaur Rescue* will be written and produced by Belinda Bradley and Franz Docherty, whose credits include [Savage River](#).
- **Laser Beak Man:** A feature-length family animation that follows superhero and champion of Power City, Laser Beak Man who has the responsibility of bringing colour to his world. But when the mischievous Peter Bartman steals his magical colour crystals, causing Power City to start losing its colour, Laser Beak Man has to team up with an odd cast of characters to win the crystals back and return Power City to a world of colour. *Laser Beak Man* expands the world of the popular super hero created by executive producer and artist Tim Sharp, who over the years has shared his story of living with autism and appealed to a global fanbase through his unique sense of humour and amazing art. Fin Edquist ([100% Wolf](#)) is attached as writer, with Producers Su Armstrong ([Good Will Hunting](#)) and Brian Rosen ([James & The Giant Peach](#)) for Studio B Animation and Barbara Stephen ([100% Wolf](#)) for Flying Bark Productions.
- **Method to Madness:** A feature-length psychological thriller about starlet Anna, who wins the acting role of a lifetime before realising that the director's intentions may not be entirely artistic. Undergoing a week of rehearsals locked in the director's house, Anna must face some eerie and monstrous circumstances, including confronting the ghost of her late mother, while trying not to lose her mind. Rachele Wiggins ([Beast No More](#), [Scare Package II](#)) is attached as writer/director/producer, alongside writer Jennifer Van Gessel ([Beast No More](#)) and producer Sandy Stevens ([Dirt Music](#)). Greg McLean ([Wolf Creek](#)) and Kristian Moliere ([The Babadook](#)) are executive producing.
- **The Star of the Sea:** This feature-length mystery/drama follows Jan, a Dutch fisherman with a solitary disposition and a dark temper who struggles to support his wife and two beloved daughters in the tiny fishing village of Port Stanley, Tasmania. But Jan's bleak world-view is changed by a series of events that follow an apparent visitation by the Virgin Mary - delivering the chance at redemption that he, his family and the community around them have been praying for. *The Star of the Sea* is from writer/director/producer Jeremy Sims ([Rams](#), [Last Cab to Darwin](#)), with Greg Duffy ([Last Cab to Darwin](#)) and Daniel Ostroff ([Dogtown and Z-Boys](#), [The Missing](#)) also attached as producers. It is based on the original screenplay by Everett DeRoche titled 'Locusts and Wild Honey'.
- **Tomgirl:** This feature-length drama follows the story of Justin, a shy nine-year-old who is bullied at school, much to the shock of his overbearing Filipino mother. When his queer cross-dressing uncle moves in, Justin begins dressing as a girl, receiving an enchanting crash course in his homeland culture - finding the unexpected superpower in being himself. Writer/director Vonne Patiag ([Significant Others](#), [Here Out West](#)), is adapting *Tomgirl* from his acclaimed short film of the same name, with In-Between Pictures business partner and producer Maren Smith ([One Less God](#), [Alphabet Street](#)).

For the complete list of development funding approvals refer to [television](#), [online](#) and [feature film](#) breakdowns.

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DIGITAL ORIGINALS PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT

Screen Australia, SBS and NITV have announced three projects from this year's Digital Originals initiative to receive further development funding. These projects were [selected from the seven teams who received initial development funding in 2022](#). From here, up to three projects will move into production for SBS platforms and NITV.

The successful projects are:

- ***Moonbird*** (TAS): An estranged father and son reconnect when they go muttonbirding together for the first time on a remote Bass Strait island, only to find there are no birds. Team: Nathan Maynard, Adam Thompson, Catherine Pettman, Matthew Newton.
- ***Moni*** (NSW): In a desperate attempt to appease his sister, Moni, a closeted 39-year-old Samoan man awkwardly sets out to find a female date for her wedding; however, when his dead mother has other plans, his seemingly simple mission becomes a whole lot more complicated. Team: Taofia Pelesasa, Elijah Malifa, Alana Hicks, Erin Foy, Nicole Coventry, Jessica Tuckwell, Tommy Misa.
- ***Warm Props* (working title)** (WA): 8hr call, 40-degree heat, culturally clueless crews and locals who haven't spoken to each other in decades. What could possibly go wrong with this casting call? Team: Jub Clerc, Jodie Bell.

The Digital Originals initiative aims to develop exciting and innovative short-form drama projects to premiere as a single episode program on SBS On Demand and NITV, from screen creatives who are currently under-represented in the sector. This includes people who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse, First Nations Australians, people with disability, female and gender diverse, LGBTIQ+ and those who are located in regional and remote areas.

Across an impressive slate of projects, including [The Tailings](#), [Iggly & Ace](#), [Homecoming Queens](#), and [Robbie Hood](#), Digital Originals continues to be a proven career pathway for creatives. Alumni includes Dylan River ([Mystery Road: Origin](#)), Corrie Chen ([New Gold Mountain](#)), and Stevie Cruz-Martin who comes off the back of directing [The Tailings](#) for SBS On Demand, to direct SBS and Screen Australia's new drama series, [Safe Home](#). The latest Digital Original project to air on SBS On Demand was [Latecomers](#), which has been celebrated for its ground-breaking story and for giving voices to under-represented communities.

ABOUT STORY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

Teams with projects for any platform including TV, film and online, can apply for development funding from two program strands - the Generate Fund and the Premium Fund.

The [Generate Fund](#) is for lower budget projects with an emphasis on new and emerging talent, or experienced talent wanting to take creative risks. The [Premium Fund](#) is for higher budget projects of ambition and scale from successful screen content makers.

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