

A new competition for new and unrepresented, working class writers.

Stephen Graham and Hannah Walters of Matriarch Productions and Phil Temple of Birdie Pictures have teamed up to establish a new initiative to help writers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds kickstart their careers and gain proper access to the TV industry. They state *"We are driven by a passion to reform the system which holds back many talented, working class writers. This will be a scheme that hopes not just to raise awareness of the issues, but to help in a practical way to change it, and to also challenge others in the industry to take steps themselves to address them."*

The winner of the Grass Routes writing competition will receive a prize of **£5,000**. Matriarch and Birdie will also pay a further amount to option the script. The writer will then develop their project with Matriarch and Birdie before pitching it to different buyers, getting their work seen by key decision makers and gaining invaluable insight into how the creative and business processes work within the scripted television industry.

As part of the initiative, Matriarch and Birdie will help the winning writer obtain an agent, and arrange meetings with other leading industry writers, directors, producers, script executives and commissioners, helping them grow their network of contacts so vital for a career as a writer in TV.

The panel of judges will be Stephen Graham (**THIS IS ENGLAND, HELP, THE VIRTUES**), Hannah Walters (**BOILING POINT, THIS IS ENGLAND**), Phil Temple (**CODE 404, THE LAST KINGDOM**), Ashley Walters (**TOP BOY, BULLETPROOF**), Kayleigh Llewellyn (**IN MY SKIN, KILLING EVE**), Lewis Arnold (**THE LONG SHADOW, TIME, SHERWOOD**) and Theresa Ikoko (**ROCKS, GRIME KIDS**) – each one determined to help break down the economic, cultural and social barriers to becoming a writer working in television.

"I have bemoaned the lack of working class voices in TV for a long time, so now is a good time to do something about it with brilliant, like-minded people. I can't wait to work with this team to find untapped talent", commented Temple. *"Many industries are unrepresentative of wider society in regard to socio-economic background. Nowhere is this truer than in creative professions, including television, where writers work on a freelance basis with no job security and no guarantee of income."*

Walters and Graham said *"What an incredible opportunity to be able to give an undiscovered writer a platform to showcase their work, we feel this project is imperative to help move our industry forward and give voices a chance to truly be heard. So excited to see the wealth of talent that's out there."*

Walters, Graham and Temple added *"Matriarch and Birdie want to help provide fairer access to the TV industry, and whilst there have been great strides in reaching different underrepresented groups recently, we think that socioeconomic background still remains a key barrier to entry, and that becoming a successful writer shouldn't be less achievable for those from lower income families."*



Earlier this year Birdie Pictures became part of STUDIOCANAL's network of award-winning production companies in Europe and the USA following STUDIOCANAL's investment in the company.

Set up by Phil Temple in September 2022, Birdie Pictures specializes in scripted drama and comedy, and its aim is to produce high-end, mainstream, and memorable TV for audiences in the UK and beyond, where talent always come first. Through its partnership with STUDIOCANAL, Birdie Pictures will become a vital and inclusive producer of quality television in the UK, and a home where key creative talent, from any background, can create their best work.

Matriarch Productions is an entertainment production company founded by actors Stephen Graham and Hannah Walters. The company was established in 2020 with the aim of providing a much needed platform for underrepresented voices and stories in the UK. Championing diversity and inclusivity within the entertainment industry, the organization produces both film and television projects offering opportunities for underrepresented talent both in front of and behind the camera.

Further details for applicants below, and on the websites:

www.birdiepictures.co.uk

www.matriarch-productions.co.uk

FAQs:

How long should the script be:

We want to read script designed for TV and can be anything between 25 and 60 pages in length. Please send to us as a pdf document.

Do you need anything else:

We are also asking for a short outline (no more than a few pages) to explain more about the idea – where the story goes, why you want to tell it, is it intended as a limited series or one that can return, etc.

More importantly, please also tell us a little about yourself – your background, your passions, what drives you to tell stories and what your writing dreams are.

What kind of genres are you looking for:

Whatever you want. Comedy, drama, horror – whatever shows your writing off the best. Don't think that just because this is for writers from disadvantaged backgrounds that it means your script has to reflect that. It can if you want, but there should be no barriers to the subject matter or themes of your work.

Are there any other criteria that I need to meet in terms of my background, age, etc?

No, we don't care how old you are, where you are from in the UK, or anything else.

How do you define working class?

Good question, and one that we don't want to write an essay about. We trust you to self-identify. However, as a point of reference we like the definition provided by the Manchester based charity Reclaim:

<https://www.reclaim.org.uk/about-us>

How do I submit?

Send by email to grassroutes@birdiepictures.co.uk

The deadline for submissions is Monday 8th January 2024