



NEW MEMBERS

A SPOTLIGHT ON SOME OF THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF THE PRODUCERS GUILD AND WHAT MAKES THEM TICK



Ouand C Robinson Thomas

After studying broadcast journalism in college, Thomas gravitated to the role of producer when she was working on her talent reel. She loved setting up stories, working with photographers, researching and collaborating. She describes producing as solving a new jigsaw puzzle every day. With a million different ways to put the pieces together, her job is to figure out the best way to create the most compelling picture.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received about producing?

The best advice I received was from a college professor. If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail. In this business, failing is way more expensive than succeeding.

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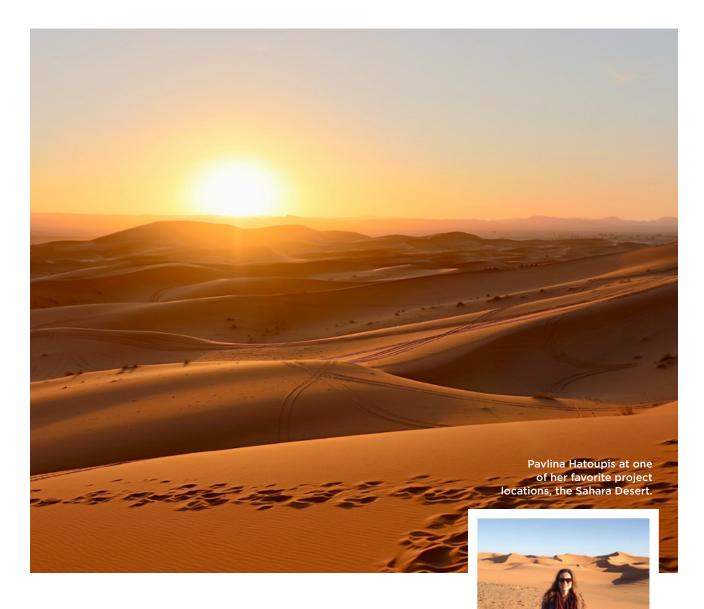
PANDEMIC DEMANDS

After the initial shock of production shutdowns in March 2020 gave way to cautious restarts, production costs increased due to COVID testing, safe distancing and mask-wearing protocols. As the key person in charge of allocating and approving budgets for each production department, line producers have come under significant pressure to juggle financial, health and creative priorities. According to an analysis released by the California Film Commission in November 2021, COVID-19 protocols created an increase of around 5% in production costs.

With the information provided by project applicants receiving California state credits, the report showed that approximately 40% of COVID-related expenditure was applied to labor costs, while the remaining 60% was applied to materials. Productions with budgets more than \$20 million typically plan to spend between 5% and 6.5% of their total budget on COVID-related costs, with lower-budget films and TV series spending a smaller proportion.

There is also impact beyond the bottom line, with the pandemic fundamentally altering the nature of rapport-building and teamwork on a project. "It's much harder to establish comfortable working relationships because of all the precautions we need to take," says Pavlina Hatoupis, executive producer of Emmy-winning TNT limited series *The Alienist* and Showtime's ongoing production The First Lady. "It has also created a lot of additional anxiety in general and has been extremely difficult for everyone involved."

Yet one can also see how adapting and finding solutions to unexpected problems are exactly the skills in a line producer's toolbox. Describing the best line producers in the business, Hatoupis shares, "They are good listeners. They are protective of the creative. They are great at balancing the needs of the artists they are working with and the needs of the studio and networkand deeply caring about their cast and crews."



UNEXPECTED JOURNEYS

Many do not aim to be line producers from the start, but gradually fall into the role. Hatoupis made several short films while an undergraduate at Yale in the late 1990s and juggled multiple side gigs to stay afloat in New York after graduation. Realizing that she could not piece together a living there, she moved to Los Angeles and worked as an assistant director on short films and commercials.

When the financial crisis hit in 2007 and 2008, the flow of jobs on commercials dried up. Out of work, a producer friend of hers, Chris Stinson, asked if she wanted to line produce

an independent film that he was not available to do.

Meeting talented independent filmmakers and picking up the ins and outs of line producing on the job, Hatoupis later transitioned into unit production manager work for a few television pilots under 20th Century Fox. There her eyes were opened to the difficulties and joys of working on an overseas-based project, as she was attached to Hieroglyph and Homeland in Morocco.

"You are completely out of your comfort zone and have to quickly understand and adapt to the ways things get done in places where you do not

speak the language and are culturally different to what we are used to in the U.S.," says Hatoupis, who also grew up in Greece and holds both U.S. and Greek passports. "The most rewarding aspect of filming abroad is learning the ropes and starting to feel at home in places you wouldn't have dreamed of living

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Rey Cuerdo

Inspired by the "golden renaissance of cinema" of the '70s-films such as The Godfather. Star Wars. Jaws, Enter the Dragon, The Sting, Dirty Harry and The Exorcist—Cuerdo became a producer with a goal of achieving longterm sustainability. Out of all the films he watched, it was Cinema Paradiso that lit a fire underneath him to become a producer.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received about producing?

Develop, develop the story and collaborate!

in. My favorite part is meeting new people and gaining new perspectives on the world."

There were also moments in production work that gave her pause, reflecting on the film world's unique ability to capture beauty and magnificence. Hatoupis says, "Watching the sun rise over the Sahara when I was scouting for a project in Morocco, I thought to myself, 'Wow, I would have never experienced this if I wasn't in this line of work'"

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These efforts eventually led to producing for the Emmynominated FX series Tyrant. "None of this would have been possible if I hadn't met some extraordinary individuals who were willing to give me a shot and help me along the way."

Responsible for budget, manpower and the daily operations of production, a line producer can have one of the biggest impacts on the safety of a set. They must uphold the importance of factoring in time for safety briefings and protocols, ensure that only qualified crew are hired, and build a strong safety culture on productions.

"I think that learning to listen is extremely important—and I mean really listen. Hand in hand with that goes empathy and flexibility," Hatoupis says regarding what she has learned over the years. "Filmmaking is a team sport from top to bottom. No one can do it alone."

Reflecting on the wider role of line producers in managing relationships and keeping people safe, Hatoupis adds, "It's important to stay as open as possible to people's perspectives and try to understand where they are coming from. It's also important to remember that no one knows everything, and things can change. Our industry has evolved in many ways and will continue to do so."