‘American Idol’ Protested by Writers and Teamsters for Health Care and Working Conditions

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WGA members, reality TV writers, Teamsters rally during live broadcast of American Idol at CBS TV City

By Jeffrey Jolson

HOLLYWOOD, CA (RushPRnews/Hollywood Today) 2/19/09 - “American Idol” has been known for making dreams come true - but not for its employees and allied industries.
As such it is the center of controversy between the show and the writers - even reality show writers - musicians, and the teamsters, who deliver all the goods and even stages. Idol is the biggest series on television, yet uses the reality show defense to pay less than most shows as it is supposedly “unscripted.”

Audience members waiting in line for the first live broadcast of American Idol this season were greeted by picket signs and chants of protest as reality TV writers, the Writers Guild of America, the Teamsters Local 399, Professional Musicians Local 47, and Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice rallied outside CBS TV City in support of better working conditions for American Idol workers.

A crowd of 200 picketers called for American Idol's producer FremantleMedia to provide its "reality" TV writers and other workers with health care, pension benefits and other necessities that are standard for workers in the entertainment industry.

"I am a writer that has worked on a lot of reality shows. I loved working in that genre, but I had to leave it and start working on a 'scripted' TV show because I have kids and I need health care coverage," said WGAW member Wendy Calhoun.

"Fremantle is lowering standards for workers all across the entertainment industry," said David N. Weiss, vice president of the Writers Guild of America, West. "American Idol is the top-rated show on television, and the fact that Fremantle does not compensate its writers and other workers fairly is unacceptable."

FremantleMedia North America (FMNA) is a multinational production company that produces one of the highest-rated programs on television, American Idol, as well as other primetime network programs including Million Dollar Password for CBS, Farmer Wants a Wife for the CW and America's Got Talent for NBC.

"American Idol generates billions in revenue and there is no excuse for the company not to offer its hardworking employees benefits that are standard in the entertainment industry-minimum compensation, health insurance, and pensions, for example," said Rabbi Alison Abrams, Community Organizer for Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice. "It's simply not ethical."

“Fremantle wants to pretend that writers don’t exist, but we’re here. We work hard, we have families, and we need to be able to provide for them like everyone else,” said reality TV writer Ro Di Salvo. “As a former Fremantle writer, I’m here to show support for all the writers who work on reality shows that don’t get the compensation they deserve.”

The Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW) is a labor union representing writers of motion pictures, television, radio and Internet programming, including news and documentaries. Founded in 1933, the Guild negotiates and administers contracts that protect the creative and economic rights of its members. It is involved in a wide range of programs that advance the interests of writers, and is active in public policy and legislative matters on the local, national and international levels. For more information on the WGAW, please visit: www.wga.org.

Hollywood Today

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