

# Summer Festival Days

## June 27: Festival Keynotes and Inspiration

1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. PST

### **PANEL: More than Sagebrush and Cowboys: An Introduction to the Western Writers of America**

Western Writers of America Inc. (WWA) was founded in 1953 to promote the literature of the American West and to recognize the best in Western writing with the prestigious Spur Award and the Western Writers Hall of Fame. Like the Western Landscape itself, WWA and the books, songs, and stories produced by its members have evolved immensely. WWA boasts historians, nonfiction authors, young adult, romance writers, songwriters, poets, and screenwriters for film and television—with their work represented in every medium, set in the ever-changing American West.

The panel includes *New York Times* bestselling author, Spur Award winner, and current Vice-President of WWA, **Chris Enss**; *Los Angeles Times* bestselling author and Spur Award winner **Deanne Stillman**; award-winning historical fiction author **Mark C. Jackson**; Western author **J.R. Sanders**. The panel's moderator will be Emmy Award-winning screenwriter and former President of WWA, **Kirk Ellis**.

Kirk will share a brief history of the WWA, introduce the panel members, and spur them into a lively conversation about how their writing has helped change the traditional stereotype of the “western” to a much truer, diverse perspective of Western Literature. A brief question and answer period will follow.

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## KIRK ELLIS

The past president of Western Writers of America, Kirk Ellis received both the WWA Spur Award and the Wrangler Award from the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum for his episode of the TNT/DreamWorks miniseries, “Into the West.”

Ellis won two Emmy Awards, a WGA Award, a Peabody, and the Humanitas Prize for his work as writer and co-executive producer on the HBO miniseries “John Adams.” The miniseries won a record breaking 13 Emmys in total, as well as four Golden Globe awards. Previously, Ellis received an Emmy nomination and won the WGA Award and Humanitas Prize for the ABC miniseries “Anne Frank,” which he wrote and co-produced. Miniseries on which he has served as writer and producer have garnered more than 50 Emmy nominations.

With Bryan Cranston and ITV Studios, Ellis is executive producer and showrunner for “A Great Improvisation,” based on the book by Stacy Schiff, which chronicles Benjamin Franklin’s efforts to negotiate a treaty with France at the height of the American Revolution. For History, he is writing a limited series about Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s years in Japan and Korea. Ellis is also developing “Aspasia,” a dramatic series set in the world of Periclean Greece, with director Julio Medem and actress Ursula Corbero, star of the record-breaking Netflix series “La Casa de Papel.”

Upcoming motion picture projects include “Age of Reason,” based on an incident in the life of Thomas Paine, and the bilingual feature “El Democrata,” the story of Mexican Revolutionary hero Francisco Madero. Ellis is also co-author of “The Order: 1886,” a history-based videogame for Sony, which debuted to record sales in February 2015. Most recently, he wrote the 30th annual National Memorial Day Concert, which garnered an audience of over 11 million in its live PBS broadcast.

A former co-governor of the writers’ branch of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, Ellis served for four years as chairman of the Santa Fe, New Mexico Arts Commission and today serves as trustee for the Museum of New Mexico Foundation.



## CHRIS ENSS

Chris Enss is a *New York Times* best-selling author who has been writing about women of the Old West for more than twenty years. She has penned more than forty published books on the subject. Her work has been honored with five Will Rogers Medallion Awards, an Elmer Kelton Book Award, an Oklahoma Center for the Book Award, and was a Western Writers of America Spur Finalist. Her book *The Pinks: The First Women Detectives, Operatives, and Spies with the Pinkerton National Detective Agency* has been optioned by NBC and is currently in development to become a television series. Enss's most recent work is *According to Kate: The Legendary Life of Big Nose Kate Elder, Love of Doc Holliday*.



## MARK C. JACKSON

Mark C. Jackson is the author of the award winning *An Eye for an Eye: The Tales of Zebadiah Creed ~ Book One*, (American Fiction Award for Best Adventure/Historical Fiction, 2018) his first book. His second of the series, *The Great Texas Dance*, is due for release in April 2020, and has already been endorsed by several nationally acclaimed western writers. Both books are published by Five Star Publishing (Gale/Cengage).

Mark came to writing after a long, successful career as a songwriter and performer in San Diego, California, recording three records and garnishing seven San Diego Music Award nominations. He began his writing career with a short story he wrote for a class at San Diego Writers, Ink in 2011, eventually publishing his first book in 2017 at the age of 59. He is currently writing the third of the series, *Blue Rivers of Heaven*.

Originally from Oklahoma, Mark resides in Chula Vista, California, with his lovely wife Judy, dog Hazel Nut, and cat Brooke.



## J.R. SANDERS

J.R. Sanders is a native of Newton, Kansas—one of the original “wild and woolly” cowtowns—whose deep interest in Old West history dates back to childhood visits with his family to the Dalton Gang hideout, Abilene, and Dodge City. J.R. regularly writes nonfiction articles for a variety of periodicals, among them *Law & Order* and *Wild West* magazines. He has authored books on topics as diverse as Southern California apple farms and Old West lawmen killed in the line of duty. His most recent book, published in March of this year by Level Best/Historia Books, is *Stardust Trail*, a detective novel set among the B-movie cowboy productions of 1930s Hollywood. J.R. is an active member of the Western Writers of America.



## DEANNE STILLMAN

Deanne Stillman has written several acclaimed books of literary nonfiction, and her plays have been produced in festivals around the country. Her latest book is *Blood Brothers* (Simon Schuster), which received a starred review in *Kirkus*, was excerpted in *Newsweek*, won the 2018 Ohioana Book Award for nonfiction, and appears on several “best of the year” lists, including *True West Magazine*. Her other books include *Desert Reckoning*, based on a *Rolling Stone* piece, winner of the *Spur* and *LA Press Club* awards, a *Southwest Book of the Year*, an Amazon editors pick, recipient of rave reviews in *Newsweek* and elsewhere, currently under option for film; *Twentynine Palms*, an *LA Times* bestseller and “best book of the year” that Hunter Thompson called “A strange and brilliant story by an important American writer,” and *Mustang*, an *LA Times* “best book of the year,” recipient of rave reviews from *The Atlantic* to *The Economist*, now available in audio with Anjelica Huston, Frances Fisher, and John Densmore.

Her essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *LA Times*, *Tin House*, *High Country News*, the *LA Review of Books* (where she is a columnist), and elsewhere, and her work is widely anthologized. Her latest play, “Reflections in a D’Back’s Eye,” opens in January 2020 at Highways in Santa Monica. It was a finalist in the 2019 Garry Marshall Theatre New Works Festival and a semi-finalist for the 2019 Blues Ink Playwriting Award from American Blues Theater. Additionally, she’s a member of the core faculty at the UCR-Palm Desert MFA Low Residency Creative Writing Program. For more, see [www.deannestillman.com](http://www.deannestillman.com).