

Daily Digest: Meet The Strippers Union Backing the Writers Strike

+ hundreds of unionized janitors join the WGA picket lines in solidarity



ELAINE LOW
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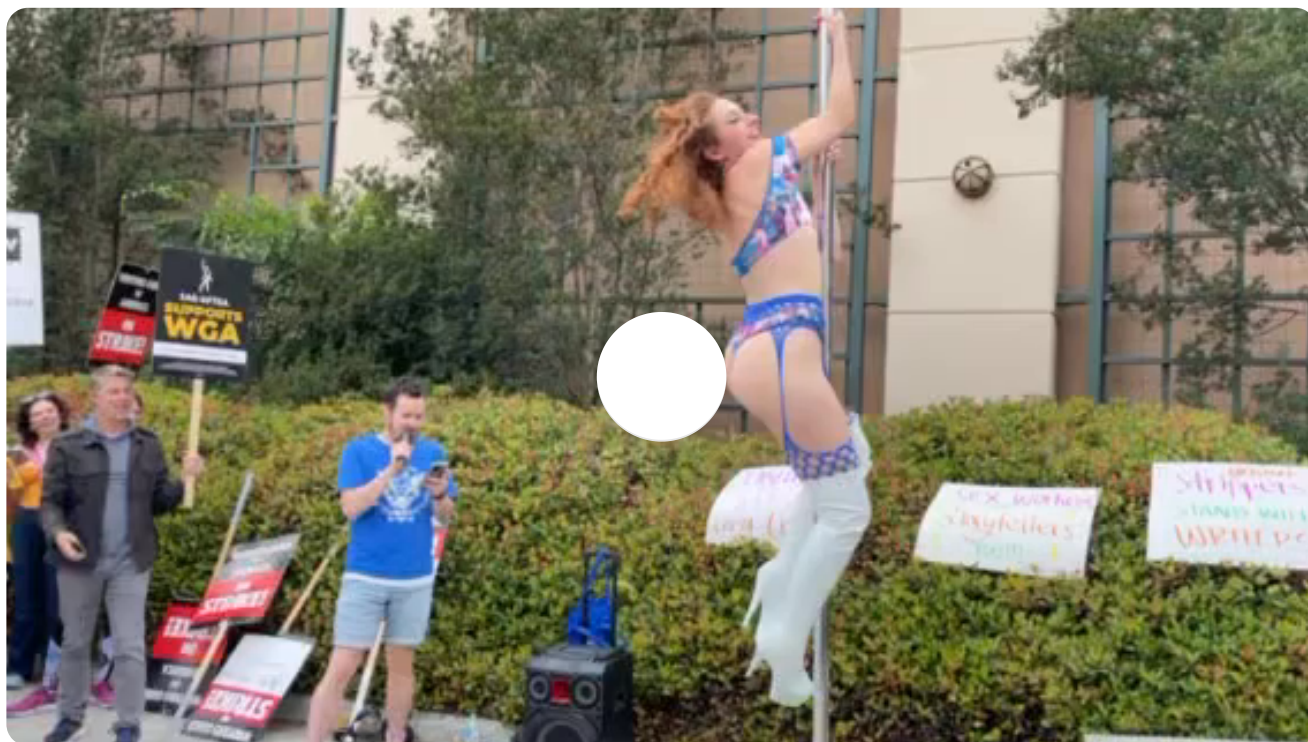


POLE POSITION The country's only currently unionized group of strippers pole-danced in solidarity with the writers on June 15. (credit: Elaine Low)

It's 2 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon and a stripper is pole dancing on Olive Ave outside the Warner Bros. studio lot. There's a whole group of exotic dancers

and sex worker allies here in Burbank, clad in fishnet stockings and thigh-high boots and in one case, a leather vest with a name tag that reads “**Mistress Juggs**.” They’re not on the job — rather, they’re picketing, in their own way, in solidarity with the thousands of film and TV writers currently on strike against Hollywood’s studios. By the pole is a large karaoke machine amplifying an uneven-voiced writer belting out **Shania Twain**, while a dancer by the stage name of **Reagan** does a gravity-defying split on the steel rod in mid-air. Nearby, Mistress Juggs carries a WGA West-branded picket sign touting “Sex Workers Rights.”

The dancers stopped by from Star Garden Topless Dive Bar in neighboring North Hollywood, where they are the only unionized strippers in the country, having successfully fought to have their union recognized in May after a 15-month campaign that began in March 2022. (They are the second group of strippers to accomplish this, and the only currently unionized group.) Fed up with wage theft, lack of health insurance, inadequate protection from abusive customers and other workplace safety concerns, the dancers are now part of the Actors’ Equity Association, the 110-year-old union that reps more than 51,000 live-theater actors and stage managers.

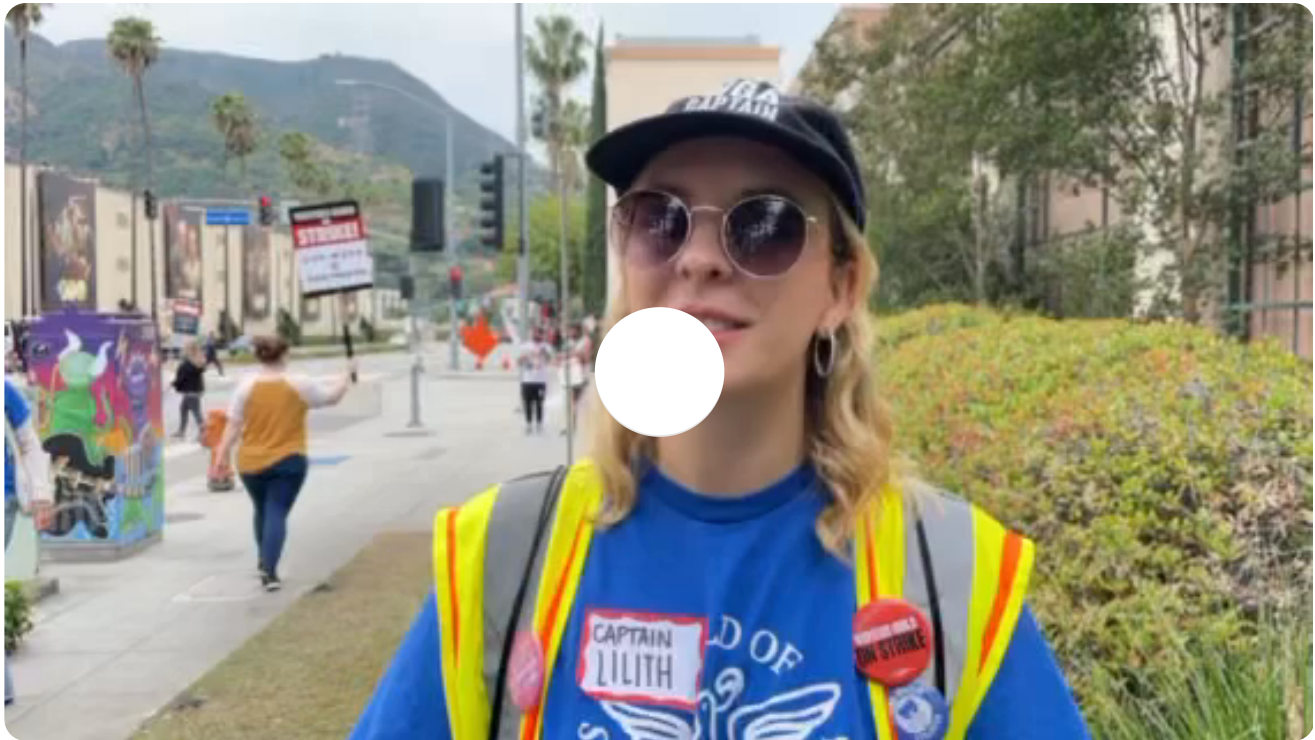


One Star Garden dancer in particular also happens to be a member of the WGA: a local strike captain who goes by **Lilith**, a dancer for only about a year and half but a longtime writer who earned her Guild card as a writers assistant with a freelance script credit.

“As an assistant in Hollywood, my pay has been too low to sustain me on its own, so I’ve had to have some other kind of side hustle,” Lilith told me as the stripper pole was still being erected behind her. “After the pandemic I just didn’t want to go back to waitressing. The thought of customer service seemed really draining to me, so dancing was a new side hustle to try out, and I ended up loving it and loving the people I worked with.”

And now the Star Garden group — about 17 to 20 strong — is out on the picket lines once again, in sympathy with the WGA’s more than 11,500 scribes who are in Week Seven of a work stoppage that has brought the industry to a creaking slowdown.

“Strippers are live entertainers. While some elements of their job are unique, they are essentially performance artists, and have a lot in common with other Equity members who dance for a living,” Actors’ Equity Association president **Kate Shindle** had said in a statement in May.



The writers strike has drawn support from a wide array of unions in other industries, including local teachers and hospitality workers, as this “**hot labor summer**” stretches on. While the dancers took to the pole, across town, more than 400 Service Employee International Union (SEIU) janitors took to the picket lines outside Amazon Studios, reportedly shutting down the street. The gathering was not only a celebration of “Justice for Janitors Day,” but also a protest against more than 50 janitorial worker layoffs at major studios caused by the writers work stoppage, according to the SEIU. And Wednesday saw writers from the world over **back their American counterparts** with the International Day of Solidarity that spanned pickets in over two dozen countries.

Lilith believes that if a small crew of strippers can become unionized, there’s hope yet for the writers to have their demands met by Hollywood’s massive conglomerates.

“The odds we were facing in unionizing our club were insurmountable, it seemed,” said Lilith. “We fought it with all we had... we knew the union could’ve just been a dream, so to win that after standing together for so long

feels unreal, and makes me feel like workers can do anything when they stand together. If we can do it, then by God, so many other workers can win better conditions and better pay. It's left me very optimistic for the writers strike."

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Today in Strike News

- Today in New York City was WGA Broadway Day Rally, where theater heavyweights such as **Lin-Manuel Miranda** and **Sara Bareilles** marched along Times Square in support of the strike. ([The Hollywood Reporter](#))
- With just three months to go until the Emmy Awards, a potential actors strike could throw a wrench in the TV Academy's plans. ([Variety](#))
- UTA president **David Kramer** signaled his support for the strike in a recent interview, saying "We really hope that they get everything they want and they deserve. But we also hope they can resolve their differences as quickly as possible, which is good for everybody, and hopefully SAG can figure it out as well." ([The Hollywood Reporter](#))
- Another project on hold due to the strike: a new **Phoebe Waller-Bridge**-written series, as the *Fleabag* star said on the *Indiana Jones* red carpet last night, "It's all very much the writers strike at the moment, so, we're all taking a break. But if that all gets sorted, I'm working on *Tomb Raider*." ([Deadline](#))
- Though the strike has halted work for many, *Gotham Knights* writers PA **Andrea Alba Von-Buren** has launched a mobile coffee pop-up that's proved to be an overwhelmingly successful side hustle. "It's just been incredible and it just keeps getting bigger and bigger — maybe a little bit bigger than me — but we're doing our best to sustain the growth so we can continue to grow," he said. ([The Hollywood Reporter](#))

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Picket Sign of the Day

The bare facts, indeed.



(credit: Elaine Low)

Additional reporting by Matthew Frank



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Janice Esser Jun 16, 2023



This is epic.

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