

SUMMER 2019 | VOLUME 104 | ISSUE 3

Equity

ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION

NEWS

A CENTURY OF SOLIDARITY

CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE VERY FIRST EQUITY STRIKE



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#Equity
STRONG





FROM THE PRESIDENT REFLECTIONS ON SOLIDARITY

Happy summer! Whether you're working, relaxing or hustling to find your next contract, I hope it's treating you well.

Let's face it: no matter where you are, it's very difficult these days to escape from the debate about our country's future. These conversations can be inspiring. They can also be divisive. So, I thought I'd use this issue's column to talk about the polar opposite of divisiveness: solidarity. A majority of Americans are clearly upset about stagnant wages and increased income inequality. According to a recent Gallup poll, unions have their highest approval rating in 15 years – with the strongest approval coming from young Americans.

We are seeing a resurgence in union organizing activity, especially by creative professionals. For example, in the past couple of years more than 30 newsrooms (including digital platforms like *Vice* and *Gawker* and mainstream newspapers like *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*) have formed unions. There's a major union drive for those who make video games. Unions are also pushing back against decks that are stacked against the best interests of workers. The battle the Writers Guild is having right now – about whether agents can represent their interests when those agents are also working as producers – is a vivid example.

A couple months ago, I attended an event where the Machinists Union was honored for their work on behalf of the Independent Drivers Guild. IDG, for those who may not know, is an effort to bring better treatment and compensation to rideshare drivers. Those employed by Uber, Lyft, Via and others work in an on-demand economy, without retirement or health benefits or other protections. Anytime I worry about the gig economy undercutting the long-fought and hard-won battles of the American labor movement, it's reassuring to remember that all people, no matter where they come from or how they enter the workforce, eventually realize that they deserve the dignity of fair wages and safe working conditions.

Unions also have taken their fights to the picket lines. A record number of workers went on strike in 2018 because of labor disputes with employers, according to new data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And those numbers may even grow higher this year. We just saw a major grocery strike in Boston, as well as hotel worker strikes across the country. Teachers in the second largest school district in the country, Los Angeles, went on strike earlier this year. Teachers were striking not only for improvements in wages, but also for smaller class sizes and more school nurses, guidance counselors and significantly more music and arts. A CBS News story summed it up, and I quote: "they were striking for what is right."

This resurgence in labor activism, coupled with public support, has also manifested itself in ways other than strikes. 2019's absurd and painful government shutdown ended after six weeks – and not because our various elected leaders did a bang-up job negotiating its end. The shutdown ended because unionized flight attendants and unionized air traffic controllers sounded the alarm about the safety of commercial

aviation and threatened to stop planes from flying.

That effort to end the shutdown and restore government services was aided by front page stories in *The New York Times* and elsewhere, where unions for NASA rocket scientists and federal immigration judges gave voice to those highly educated workers who had been locked out of their offices, labs and courtrooms. Workers who would have been voiceless without union representation.

In our own corner of the labor market, Equity has fought for, and won – at the ballot box and through lobbying efforts – millions of dollars of additional local public arts funding in Washington, D.C., San Francisco and elsewhere. We've defended the National Endowment for the Arts in Congress. We've aggressively pushed to update the parts of the tax code that involve professional artists. Many of us have also gone to D.C. to tell lawmakers that it's wrong to gut healthy pension funds (like ours) to bail out the pensions of other organizations. And of course, we recently called our first strike in fifty years and won a significant pay raise plus profit participation for shows that we help develop on Broadway.

I believe that the workers of America have now awakened to the reality that we must fight for our rights again. And it's a good fight.

Equity's recent Constitutional referendum has resulted in, among other things, the approval of a new strategy for our future. 2021 will see us hold our first-ever convention, which brings us in line with most other national unions. I'm thrilled that we will be able to try this. I believe it's a critical tool for building solidarity, increasing education and most of all, inspiring stage managers and actors to share the fundamental belief that we are more valuable and less interchangeable than we are often made to feel.

I wholeheartedly believe that this convention can achieve that, and if I am re-elected in 2020, you have my word that we will prioritize doing it in a cost-effective way. If you didn't vote for the referendum – whether it was because you were unsure about creating a convention, or for some other reason – I promise that we will work very hard to earn your support. To me, solidarity is not defined as the absence of dissent. Dissent, in my opinion, is essential. We can be, as is often stated in labor circles, an animated town hall behind the scenes and a united front to the rest of the world. And that, my friends, is where our power as workers originates.

I look forward to doing that work with you.



Kate Shindle

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSIVITY BY FIGHTING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS



If you were one of the members who attended the national membership meeting in April, you heard me talk about how important I believe it is for you to recognize your personal agency and own, nurture and use your own power. (If you missed it, you can watch a video of my remarks, and President Kate Shindle's report, by logging into the Member Portal).

Over the last year, I have witnessed some incredible moments where members have exercised their personal agency. The recent show development strike on Broadway was just one example. As you may have read in the last issue of *Equity News*, more than 3,000 members signed commitment cards supporting the strike – and we had them posted on the walls of our negotiating room. Members who signed those cards realized that when they stand together, they can move mountains.

Personal agency, though, is only one side of the equation. There are limits. For example, we know from the study Equity released in 2017 that equity and inclusion continues to be a major unsolved problem in our industry. That study found (among other things) that women and members of color continue to be underrepresented, and when they are hired, they are often paid less. Older women also face a lack of opportunities.

This is tremendously frustrating, not just because of what it means for members, but because the industry is failing to take a leadership role in our society by telling stories about, by and for the full range of people who make up our country. Representation matters.

I know that it is harder to exercise your personal agency if you feel like the deck is stacked against you. A recent survey from the Center for Talent Innovation found that workers with disabilities, for example, were frequently misjudged or excluded in the workplace. That in turn led to stalled careers and ignored ideas.

And overall, another survey from the same organization found that workers who perceive bias are more likely to feel alienated, withhold ideas and plan to leave their jobs. That's not the kind of environment that would allow any actor or stage manager do their best work.

As a labor union with a long and proud history of fighting for equality and inclusion, Equity must continue to lead by example. That is why this year Equity staff will undergo new

training to help them recognize unconscious bias. Equity has long fought to foster an environment that values and respects everyone's uniqueness so that everyone can make their best contributions. This staff training will help further that work.

Obviously, no one likes to feel like an outsider. And yet it happens all too frequently because we do not recognize our own biases. Years ago, the assumption was that only 'bad' people were biased, but we now know that everyone can carry unconscious bias around with them.

This training will help not only create a better workplace for our staff, but help our staff learn how they can be better allies for others. That includes being willing to talk about difficult topics like race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, trying to help break down our barriers and see things from other peoples' perspectives.

Three years ago, Equity partnered with The Actors Fund to develop a round of training for staff on harassment prevention. Since then, that training has become a model that others in the industry have used. Similarly, I hope this training can be useful for others, including your employers.

This training will ultimately help us better serve our members. And it will help us move forward in our ongoing push to create a more equitable and inclusive industry for all.

Mary McColl



DIVERSITY MATTERS INTENT VS IMPACT IN THE WORKPLACE

Many moons ago when I was just out of college, I was doing my first Off-Broadway show and having a casual conversation with one of the other young actors. "What's your dream role?" he asked. "Oh! I've always wanted to play Guinevere in *Camelot!*" I

said. The young man replied, "Well I guess you could do that – in theatre for the blind."

I am 150% sure that he did not intend to scar me for life, nor give me the inspiration for a life in advocacy – but in fact, he did. And though I have had the good fortune to have a robust life in the theatre, playing many incredible roles since then (and many that were not originally imagined for an actor of Asian-American descent), I learned in that very moment that I might always be defined by the shape of my eyes – and I've been motivated to fight that concept ever since.

I didn't know how to respond to that young actor. And even within the last year, when a colleague that I respect and love joked about the shape of my eyes in a truly pejorative way, I still found myself unable to express how hurt I was by the joke. Instead, I went down a lonely rabbit hole of self-flagellation, berating myself for looking the way I do; painfully reminded that I have a physical trait that has sometimes been used to ridicule me or used, on occasion, as a reason not to hire me.

How can we stop the cycle of "harmless intent, horrible impact?" When finding ourselves in similar situations, what if we didn't have to bear the onus of hurtful comments? What if we could speak truth to power, while also emboldening the health of our relationships? How can our allies learn to be conscious of when their behavior might be insensitive?

And let's go many steps further, from micro-aggressions all the way to macro-aggressions. In extreme cases of discrimination and/or bullying based on a person's race, disability, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, veteran status, pregnancy status (and more), I'm reminded of what we've been taught in anti-sexual harassment training and how it can apply to any situation that creates a hostile workplace. From The Actors Fund:

If you experience offensive, intimidating and potentially harassing behavior, remember the three R's - Respond, Report, Record.

- **Respond** – If you are comfortable, you can tell the offending party that their behavior is unwelcome and needs to stop. Responding directly will not always change their behavior, but it does communicate that it is unwanted. Responding is not necessary before reporting harassment to your union.

- **Report** the incident to your Equity business representative, if you're comfortable having the Union involved. By reaching out to your union rep, you are allowing your union to support you in addressing the issue. Your business representative can help you navigate your options and connect you with information and resources. By reaching out to your business representative, you are not committing to any particular action. Your union can explain to you the process of addressing the issue with your employer and provide support.
- **Record** – It is important to document each incident of harassment, noting information concerning the situation such as what happened, what was said, when it occurred, where the incident took place and who was present.

Actors' Equity also has started partnering with Lighthouse Services, Inc to provide a confidential online tool to report harassment. Online reporting supplements (rather than replaces) speaking with a business rep or seeking assistance from The Actors Fund. More information can be found here: ActorsEquity.org/safety

The theatre is a complicated, wonderful place in which to work. We form intimacies quickly. A level of trust must be established in order to do our best work. What if we could also establish enough trust to talk with one another in ways that can illuminate intent vs. impact, expressing *and* receiving this kind of communication with compassion and respect, and working towards a greater understanding of the many layers that are involved in bias and discrimination? What if we could all ask ourselves, "How can I be a better ally?" What if answering these questions can move us toward preventing situations from escalating to the point of becoming an untenable workplace where "The Three R's" need to be implemented? I'd like to think that it's a start.

If each one of us can be the ambassador of our own truths, maybe we can start healing these unspoken but very real rifts, together. I think it's worth trying.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Toy Johnson".

Christine Toy Johnson
Chair of the National Equal
Employment Opportunity Committee

ACTORS FUND BREAKS NEW GROUND ON SEVERAL FRONTS

BY DOUG STRASSLER

The Actors Fund continues to develop programs that foster stability and resilience and provide a safety net over the lifespan of all Equity members. They recently held two events marking progress on initiatives that pay special attention to the needs of older members, while also continuing to develop its Looking Ahead program for professional young performers.

The Fund unveiled the new Samuel J. and Florence T. Friedman Pavilion as part of its \$34 million expansion of The Actors Fund Home in Englewood, New Jersey. The senior care facility is now fully equipped as a short-stay rehabilitation, assisted living, skilled nursing and memory care facility with a 20-bed memory care unit and seven assisted living beds as well as a new wellness center, an arts studio, a dining room, a bistro and a memory care garden for the entire entertainment industry.

"The quality of care provided at The Actors Fund Home is the kind of care we all want for our loved ones, our colleagues and ourselves," stated Eastern Region member and The Actors Fund Chairman Brian Stokes Mitchell. "All of this was made possible by 81 donors who are recognized at The Home's entrance." This past spring, Mitchell was joined by Actors Fund Board member Annette Bening to cut the ribbon for the updated and expanded facility.

The memory care wing includes sixteen individual studios and two larger studios for couples and was designed specifically for seniors with mild to moderate dementia who are physically mobile but need enhanced programming and 24-hour supervised care and security.

In addition, The Fund held a launch event at the Actors' Equity office in New York City in partnership with The Research Center for Arts and Culture for the Performing Arts Legacy Project (PAL) website. The website, performingartslegacy.org, showcases and celebrates the careers of older entertainment professionals.

Joan Jeffri, Founder and Director of The Research Center for Arts and Culture (RCAC), an affiliate organization of The Actors Fund, provided a walkthrough of the website. Performers were also on hand to provide personal accounts of their experience documenting their careers on the PAL site, including Eastern Region members Len Cariou and André De Shields.

"Today's launch is an invitation to our community to visit the site and to tell your friends and colleagues in the industry that they can now begin to document their important contributions to performance and history," said Kate Shindle, President of Actors' Equity and Actors Fund Trustee.

"There is now an online space where performers can present their lifetime careers holistically and under their control," said Traci DiGesù, Manager of Activities and Volunteer Programs at The Actors Fund. "We're thrilled to add this website to the suite of social services we

provide to seniors who have devoted their lives to entertainment and the performing arts."

For Equity members earlier in their careers, The Actors Fund continues to expand offerings to young performers and their families through their Looking Ahead program in New York and Los Angeles. Originally created in 2003 in Los Angeles, the program has recently launched in New York to help young performers and their families to thrive amid the unique challenges associated with working in the entertainment industry. The program offers counseling services, educational workshops on a variety of issues such as navigating the entertainment industry and balancing demands of work and school, community service opportunities and group activities to cultivate social connections in a safe and secure environment.

Current offerings in New York include two workshops: Managing

Continued on page 27



(l-r): Joan Jeffri, Founder and Director of The Research Center for Arts and Culture; Equity member Len Cariou; Actors' Equity Executive Director and The Actors Fund Trustee Mary McColl and Equity member André De Shields.

FOUNDATION AWARDS HONOR MEMBERS AT BOTH SIDES OF CAREER SPECTRUM

The Actors' Equity Foundation bestowed its annual Clarence Derwent and Richard Seff Awards at the Eastern Regional Board meeting in June.

The Derwent Award honors performers for a breakout performance during the past theatre season. This year's award was given to Sarah Stiles (*Tootsie*) and Ephraim Sykes (*Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations*).

Stiles' work as Sandy in *Tootsie* also earned her a Tony nomination, a Drama Desk nomination and an Outer Critics Circle Award nomination. She was introduced by Santino Fontana (this year's Tony Award winner for his leading role in *Tootsie*), a former Derwent honoree.

Sykes was awarded for his performance as David Ruffin in *Ain't*

Too Proud. He was also nominated for an Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical. The show's choreographer, Sergio Trujillo (winner of this year's Tony for Best Choreography), introduced Sykes.

Previous winners have included Morgan Freeman, Ann Reinking, George C. Scott and Dianne Wiest.

The Seff Award honors veteran Equity stage actors and is considered a lifetime achievement award. Honorees Marylouise Burke and André De Shields are veteran stage, screen and TV actors.

De Shields was honored for his work as Hermes in *Hadestown* (Tony Award for Best Musical). He was also honored with a Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical this year as well. He was introduced by Rachel

Chavkin (this year's Tony winner for Best Director of a Musical).

Burke, introduced by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright David Lindsay Abair, was honored for her role as Mom in the Roundabout production of *True West*.

Previous recipients of the Seff Award include Margo Martindale, Kristine Nielsen, Michael Potts and *Hadestown* co-star Patrick Page.

The Actors' Equity Foundation is the non-profit philanthropic arm of Actors' Equity Association. While separate entities, they share a commonality in their efforts to better the working lives of Equity members by enhancing their opportunities in the profession along with nurturing the theatre communities in which they work.

(clockwise from top left): Richard Seff, Marylouise Burke and André De Shields; Sarah Stiles and Santino Fontana and Ephraim Sykes with Sergio Trujillo, left and Equity Foundation President Judy Rice, right.



RECENT SETA NEGOTIATION ADDRESSES MEMBER PRIORITIES

Equity's National Council unanimously approved a new Short Engagement Touring Agreement (SETA) this spring, achieving improvements in the top three areas of concern from members in the most recent contract survey.

SETA will include two 3-percent increases to minimum salaries: one that is effective retroactively to those who worked a SETA contract after April 28 and another increase that will cover the last six months of the contract.

There will also be such improvements as a \$2 per day increase to all per diems; up to two payments per week for all stage managers who work load-ins regardless of where they fall in the week; a "joint housing best practice committee" to address housing issues and safety on the road as well as to create practical standards; and a guarantee that those who travel independently from the company will be reimbursed for travel and checked baggage fees up to the producer's cost.

For tours starting after September 2019, trunks will be evaluated based on size measured in inches in addition to weight. For tours already on the road, members will receive an increase in both seasonal shipping cost reimbursement and frequency if trunks don't meet the new standards.

Additionally, audition language will require producers to list which roles have been cast or are on offer as well as names and titles of casting personnel who are expected to attend auditions. Skin parts will match the skin tone of the actor, and the document will use inclusive and gender-neutral language throughout.

The terms of this agreement will last for the next eighteen months. During this time, Equity will – by mutual agreement – negotiate with the Broadway League on improving the touring model for the modern road market.

"Not only did we need to improve specific issues within the agreement, it was time to take a hard look at whether this agreement was actually still working in the way it was intended," said Kevin McMahon, SETA Committee Chair.

McMahon based this stance on the fact that the touring world has changed. "One-week engagements were not the norm," he said. "Today, most tours are based on a standard one-week schedule and all but the mega-hits now easily qualify for this agreement. That was never the intent of this contract."

Mary McColl, Executive Director and Chief Negotiator, is also optimistic about the potential for a new model. "This is a positive move for us," she said. "Creating rules that are specific to when actors and stage managers work on the road is a win-win."

This means that work will now begin to move the Full Production, Tiered and SETA tours to a new touring book. "This will allow us to build on the existing terms and conditions in each area," McMahon said.

These forward-looking changes come as the touring market has grown overall. On average, half of the existing tours are on the full Production Contract and half are on SETA. Since last September, there have been 33 Equity tours on the road. What's more, touring workweeks topped 35,000 last season, and earnings exceeded \$81 million. Both mark new high points since the last recession.

"The SET Agreement served its purpose," McMahon said. "Equity recaptured the majority of the viable non-union market, but it is now time to look at a new holistic model that encompasses all touring and reflects today's market and the needs of our members on the road."

SETA NEGOTIATION ACHIEVEMENTS

- A 3% salary increase twice over 18 months (totaling 6%).
- \$2 a day increase in per diem
- Up to two payments per week for all stage managers who work a load-in regardless of where it falls in the week.
- A joint housing best practice committee will be formed, to deal with road housing issues and safety on the road as well as to create some practical standards.
- A guarantee that if you travel independently from the company, your travel and bags will be reimbursed up to the producer's cost.
- For tours starting after September 2019, minimum trunk sizing shall be based on size measured in inches in addition to weight. For tours already on the road, an increase in both seasonal shipping frequency and reimbursement was achieved.
- Audition language requiring producers to list which roles have been cast or are on offer as well as names and titles of casting personnel who are expected to attend audition.
- Skin parts (exclusive of specific costume pieces) shall match the skin tone of the Actor.
- An achievement of inclusive and gender-neutral language improvements throughout the document.



100 YEARS SINCE EQUITY'S FIRST STRIKE: FIRST BOLD STEP INSPIRES A CENTURY

BY DOUG STRASSLER

Almost exactly one hundred years ago, the struggle for workplace equity felt by stage performers reached a fever pitch. It would prove to be the first crisis experienced by the still relatively young Actors' Equity. And it would also emerge as the first major triumph for the Union – one whose ripple effect has lessons for Equity members to this very day.

THE EARLY DAYS

In the late nineteenth century, a new kind of theatrical company emerged. Touring “combination” companies had begun traveling around the country, replacing resident stock companies. This enabled a small association of theatre owners and booking managers to form what became known as the Theatrical Syndicate, creating a booking monopoly that had control over 75 percent of all theaters around the country. The Shubert brothers quickly created a separate monopoly. While

both competed against each other, they each exerted control over which plays would run where and what percentage of the box office was theirs; they even dictated changes in scripts.

Working conditions, however, had not improved while economic models had evolved. Most actors faced careers defined by frequent bouts of unemployment and a general lack of job security. Producers could renege on contractual responsibilities – they had abolished a two-weeks'-notice clause that would have allowed actors two weeks' salary even if a show was to

fail, and they removed a limit on unpaid rehearsal time. If evening performances were canceled, producers could add a matinee performance at the next day's location. Actors in touring productions were responsible for footing their own transportation costs and would have to find their own way home if a show closed early. Actors who did challenge them had to worry about being blacklisted.

In response to these conditions, several actors gathered in early 1913 to organize. Actors' Equity was formally founded in May of that year (Canadian-born actor William Courtleigh coined the name), and elected Francis Wilson as the first president (for more about Wilson, see "The Role They Played" on p.13). Over the next few years, membership would grow steadily.

Meanwhile, the Shuberts, the Theatrical Syndicate and other managers had formed the United Managers Protective Association (UMPA) as a direct reaction to Equity. Equity had attempted to create a standard contract whose provisions included at least a two-week notification of dismissal, extra pay for performances numbering more than eight per week, a limit to the number of free rehearsals managers could require of actors and a requirement that managers cover costume and travel expenses.

In 1917, UMPA agreed to a contract, but managers continued to violate it. In 1919, the UMPA dissolved and formed the Producing Managers' Association (PMA), and in May of that year, they met again with Equity. Wilson refused to relent, and the PMA opted to cut ties with Equity and seek legal counsel.

This move prompted Equity to apply for a charter with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The AFL refused – they allowed one charter per profession, and the White Rats, a group of Vaudeville performers, already had AFL representation. Equity and the White Rats joined forces in late July of 1919 as Associated Actors and Artistes of America ("the 4As").

THE STRIKE BEGINS

Producers may have suffered from an inordinate amount of hubris as summer approached, assuming that

actors who hoped to procure new work for the coming theatre season would shy away from the growing fight. But the actors did not back down. On August 7, Equity members led by Frank Gillmore (see "The Role They Played" on p.13) met at the Hotel Astor ballroom and unanimously voted in favor of a strike. The resolution read: "Until a satisfactory arrangement is made with it governing the working conditions of the actor, we will not perform any service for any manager who is a member of the Producing Managers' Association, or who refused to recognize our Association, or to issue its contracts."

This strike definitely seemed to have caught producers off-guard. The show *Lightnin'* was the first to join in the strike. The companies of many other shows quickly followed suit, leading shocked audiences to demand refunds all over Broadway. Performers walked out and then picketed outside the closed theaters. Equity members delivered nightly speeches about the managers' wrongdoing, and strikers held parades to ignite support from the public.

Adding fuel to the fire was that the press sided with the striking actors. In *The New York Tribune*, drama critic and the eventual first president of The Newspaper Guild Heywood Broun wrote, "The actor is in a disadvantageous business position as long as he must bargain individually. This is so generally recognized that the



In 1960, members protested producers' lack of support for pensions in the largest work stoppage since 1919.

right of collective bargaining has been won in almost every other industry in the United States."

VALUE OF STAR POWER

Also vital to Equity's cause was the participation of its famous members – including Ethel, John and Lionel Barrymore and Alfred Lunt – who were successful enough that they didn't face the same poor conditions as lesser-known Equity members, but who stayed with the union to fight the good fight. Marie Dressler (see "The Role They Played" on p.13), for example, led the recently formed Chorus Equity Association in picket lines.

"The strike is a case study in how all are better off when each is better off," said Mike Merrill, PhD, the Professor of Professional Practice and Director of Labor Education Action Research Network at Rutgers University. "It proved that even celebrities could be organized and able to recognize the benefits of collective action and occupational solidarity."

Steven H. Jaffe, a curator at the Museum of the City of New York (see "Museum of the City of New York Gives Labor Its Due" on p.15) agreed that the star quality of Equity's better-known actors gave it leverage that other unions simply did not have.

"If you look at it, one of the advantages that the union had was that it could get all these headliners, these stars, who were supporting the union in its demands come out in public and use

1919 STRIKE AT A GLANCE

Here are some key facts about Equity's first strike:

- It lasted 30 days.
- It closed 37 shows.
- It prevented the opening of 16 other shows in eight other cities.
- It cost managers nearly \$3 million.
- Equity grew from 2,700 members to over 14,000 members.



Members (and spouses) Geraldine Page and Rip Torn picket the Actors' Playhouse where an Actors' Equity strike against off-Broadway theaters delayed the opening of the show *One Night Stands of a Noisy Passenger*.

the performance aspect of their work for the PR purposes of the Equity strike," he said. "They were parading in the streets and holding benefits to raise strike funds. It's an interesting moment in the city's history and certainly for organized labor, and it's a vitally important moment for the history of Equity."

"NO MORE PAY, JUST FAIR PLAY"

As the summer wore on, more shows stayed dark. And it wasn't only Broadway shows that shuttered. Theatres had also gone dark in solidarity in Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Providence, St. Louis and Washington, D.C. Equity's fortitude was threatening to upend the whole industry.

Meanwhile, producers began to file suit against Equity officers and many of its members; the Shuberts sought half a million dollars in damages. (Supposedly, elevator operators and janitors started tipping off Equity bigwigs when they saw a process server coming.)

Equity put on benefit shows to raise funds at the Lexington Avenue Opera House beginning on August 18. Houses were full nearly every night. On August 26, the strike received a major boon thanks to the presence of Samuel Gompers, head of the AFL, who Equity members were able to meet as he disembarked the USS George Washington and bring him to the Opera House.

"Whatever influence or power there may be in the great American Federation of Labor to help you, rest assured that power and influence is behind you until the end," Gompers said, adding, "the future depends not upon the managers but upon

you...You have aroused the managers to an understanding of your power. They are alert. But they have not only their own brains but can buy brains by the pound. As sure as life and death, if you weaken, the treatment you received in the past will be as nothing compared to that which you will receive in the future."

This appearance is viewed as the turning point in the strike. In early September, Equity and the PMA signed a five-year contract meeting almost all of Equity's demands: Equity would be recognized, all suits against the union would be dropped, there would be an eight-performance week, arbitration would be accepted and striking actors would not be discriminated against. Of note: actual salary boosts were never a part of the strike, though a provision in the new contract would ensure that actors would receive additional pay for added performances; minimum wage would not go into effect until 1933. The strike was never about money; it was about better treatment.

The strike had officially lasted an entire month, during which time Equity membership had grown from a couple of thousand members to 14,000. Its treasury had grown nearly ten-fold, from \$13,500 to \$120,000. Meanwhile, losses to the theatre industry were estimated between \$2 and \$3 million.

"This is really a crucial moment because it got artists and performers to see themselves as workers who were entitled to join or form a labor organization," Jaffe said. "That was a real leap for a lot of people. Historically, there is a legacy of having to overcome resistance on the part of your potential rank-and-file. There is something to gain if you see yourself in a wage relationship."

THE ROLES THEY PLAYED

FRANCIS WILSON



Wilson began his career as a child actor and primary breadwinner for his family. He quickly achieved great success as an adult with the McCaull Comic

Opera Company.

In 1889 Wilson established his own production company, Francis Wilson and Company, which is where he clashed with the Theatrical Syndicate, ultimately leading to the foundation of Actors' Equity in 1913, when he became the first president of the union. Co-founder and later president Frank Gillmore once said of him, "No man was more responsible for the success of the Actors' Equity Association than Francis Wilson... he was a notable actor, a fiery and logical speaker, and he was a man of independent means whose livelihood could not be destroyed by his assumption of the leadership of this movement."

Wilson retired as President of Equity in 1920, after which time he was made president emeritus for life. He also lectured and wrote books on Eugene Field, Joseph Jefferson, John Wilkes Booth and Edwin Booth as well as plays including *The Bachelor's Baby* and *His Own Reminiscences*. His final appearance was in the Players Club revival of *The Little Father of the Wilderness* in 1930. He owned a home in Florida, where was active in the Little Theatre movement; the Francis Wilson Playhouse in Clearwater was named for him.



Above: Marie Dressler with a group of volunteers during the 1919 strike.
Below right: Frank Gillmore, right, with Alla Nazimova in *The Marionettes*.

MARIE DRESSLER

Marie Dressler was an early driving engine both on Broadway and in Hollywood. After working with the traveling Nevada Stock Company in the Midwest and Starr Opera Company in Philadelphia, she made her Broadway debut at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in *Waldemar, the Robber of the Rhine*, which, while short-lived, led to a career in comedic roles.

As a result of the 1919 Equity strike, she was voted the first president of the newly formed Chorus Equity Association. Actors' Equity and Chorus Equity eventually merged in 1955.

Late in Dressler's career, she began working with filmmaker Mack Sennett (eventually to be half of the title couple in the Jerry Herman musical *Mack & Mabel*) and tried to ignite a film career. While both her stage and screen careers experienced numerous ups and downs, Dressler's stage experience enabled her to benefit from the transition from silent film to "the talkies" and become one of MGM's first stars, going on to win one of the first Oscars given for Best Actress for her performance in the 1930 film *Min and Bill*.

FRANK GILLMORE

Frank Gillmore was the son of two actors. Born in New York, he made his stage debut in 1879 in London. He primarily worked there until the 1890s. After returning to America in the late 1890s, he worked both onstage and in such silent films as *The Fairy and the Waif* and *The Lifted Veil*. He also served as president of the Siasconset Casino, a social club in Nantucket, Massachusetts.

Gillmore was the Executive Secretary of Actors' Equity from 1918 to 1929, and then President from 1929 to 1937. He was also the president of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America ("the 4As") from 1938 to 1943.

As Equity President, Gillmore received The American Arbitration Association's annual gold Commercial Peace Medal in May 1931 "for distinguished service in the establishment of commercial peace through arbitration." He died in 1943, at the age of 75.



A BRIDGE FROM PAST TO PRESENT

"When we say that New York City is a union town, those aren't just words," said Vincent Alvarez, President of the New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO. "Actors' Equity was successful one hundred years ago because they stayed together as one union and because they had the support of their fellow workers across the city."

Of course, that success is far from limited to the last century or New York City alone. The same tenets that proved successful in 1919 – tenacity, teamwork, a refusal to back down – are what have proven successful throughout all of Equity's campaigns over the last hundred years, including the 2019 Lab Campaign that resulted in major wins for actors and stage managers working in new show development.

"The 1919 strike set standards for the 20th century," said Caroline Propersi-Grossman, a PhD candidate in history at State University of New York-Stony Brook who studies work and unions in New York City entertainment. She believes that the key to Equity's 1919 victory was the solidarity among not just Equity members, but their allies all over the country as well.

"It was only when the actors, the musicians, the stagehands and the billposters stood together in city after city that management came back to the table," Propersi-Grossman said. "The 2019 strike for a fair wage in laboratory productions showed us that the standards set in 1919 like a fair wage and fair credit for artistic work are still relevant."

Alvarez agrees: "The same is true today – when working people have solidarity, there's nothing we can't achieve." 🤝

Right: Andrea Burns raises awareness about the #NotALabRat campaign with an audience member during this year's Lab strike.

Below (l-r): Eastern Chorus Councillor Rashaan James II, Eastern Regional Vice President Sid Solomon, 1st Vice President Melissa Robinette, Doug Shapiro, Eastern Chorus Councillor Kirsten Wyatt and Mike Giordano at the IBEW Local 3 strike.



NOTABLE EQUITY STRIKES SINCE 1919

Not every negotiation after 1919 required a strike. Here are a few key moments where Equity members went on strike and what was achieved.

1960

Equity, led by president Ralph Bellamy, insisted on a pension plan. On May 24, 3,000 Equity members showed up for a 12:30 AM meeting at the Edison Hotel, which could only fit 1,000. The actors created an impromptu early morning parade, singing and dancing down Broadway to the larger Hotel Astor. Members supported the strike plan: if no agreement was reached by May 31, one Broadway show per night would shut down. The League called this a "hit-and-run tactic," and promised that if one show is shut down by the actors, they will all be shut down.

When the union closed down *The Tenth Man* on June 1, the League shut down the rest of Broadway, known as the "Broadway Blackout." (The League called it a strike, while Equity called it a lockout.) After thirteen days, Mayor Robert B. Wagner brokered a solution.

1968

Equity demanded better wages and working conditions. After rejecting a contract offered by the Broadway League, Equity called a strike on June 7. After shutting Broadway down for three days, Mayor John Lindsay intervened, brokering an agreement that included the highest minimum-salary increase up to that point in history.

2019

Citing a lack of pay increases over eleven years for work on developmental labs used to develop new work for Broadway, Equity called for a strike January 7 as part of its #NotALabRat campaign. The union appealed for profit sharing-based compensation for its members, barring its members from taking part in the developmental lab sessions that are used to develop new productions, especially musicals. The strike also covered workshops and staged readings.

After 33 days, the Broadway League and Equity reached an agreement and called off the strike. The new Development Agreement includes five-year terms for salaries with three wage increases, profit sharing following a show's recouping of its initial investment, stipulations for additional assistant stage manager contracts, and a minimum of five weeks of rehearsal time for Broadway musicals (four for plays).

NYC MUSEUM **GIVES LABOR ITS DUE**

Covering more than two centuries' worth of working people's movements, the current exhibit "City of Workers, City of Struggle: How Labor Movements Changed New York" at the Museum of the City of New York follows the travails and triumphs of diverse workers in New York City – and how banding together in unions enabled them to improve working conditions for themselves and those who followed.

Steven H. Jaffe, a curator at the museum, says that this exhibit shows "just how intertwined the rise of modern New York City is with working people and their movements." And it does so using a compendium of artifacts, videos and even interactive games that trace workers' struggles over the course of four sections: "In Union There Is Strength" (1830–1900), "Labor Will Rule" (1900–1965), "Sea Change" (1965–2001) and "New Challenges," focusing on activists after 2001.

"City of Workers," nestled in the museum's second-floor gallery, also highlights the intersection of historical events and sociological patterns, from the rise of capitalism to the segmenting of race and gender. "There were lots of labor unions to address, and we worked with the New York City Central Labor Council and the AFL-CIO to balance the story we tell, involving many different organizations in many different fields of endeavor," Jaffe said.

Of course, Actors' Equity is among the unions represented in the exhibit, by a menu from a fundraising gala. This is significant, according to Jaffe: "It's very unusual for a labor organization to have such an elegant, glamorous cover," he said.

Equity's ability to rally familiar faces empowered them during the 1919 strike. "1919 was a tremendous strike year around the country. Many of the strikes that year failed – it probably made the career of Calvin Coolidge when he quashed the Boston Police Strike. But one of the advantages that the union had in New York City was that it could get these headliners, these stars, to come out and support their demands."

Of course, not all unions are so lucky. Jaffe also makes a point of clarifying one of the words in this exhibit's title. "We use the word 'movements' to establish one of the key arguments of the exhibition," he said, "which is that while solidarity has always been the goal, organized labor, variously defined over the last couple hundred years, has not always been a unitary or monolithic thing."

The exhibit also makes clear that some of the first labor organizations in the country were formed by the city's artisans going back as far as the early nineteenth century. "Looking at who is included in the tent of labor is a fascinating, complex story – that is, of course, extremely timely for working people everywhere," Jaffe said.

"City of Workers, City of Struggle" continues until January 5, 2020. During the week of 9/1-9/7 (Labor Week), the Museum is offering 50% off admission to any Equity member with their card.

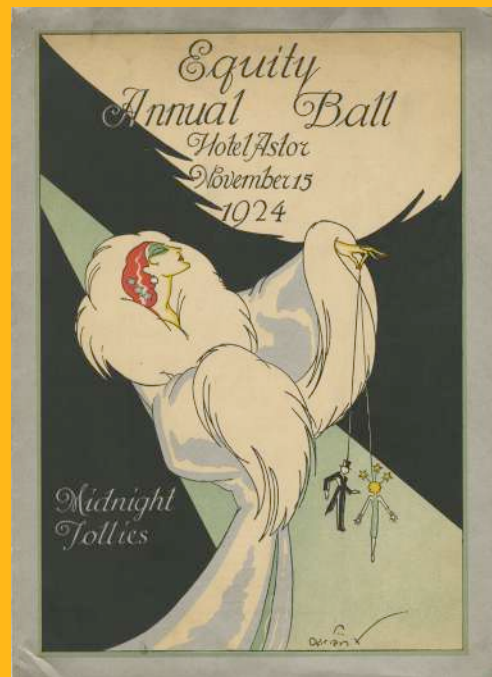


Photo Credit: Museum of the City of New York. Collection on Actors' Equity Association, F2018.50.3.

THEATRE

SPOTLIGHT

WILMA THEATER

The secret to the success of The Wilma Theater, one of Philadelphia's longstanding stalwart theaters, appears to be the company artistic director Blanka Zizka keeps.

More specifically, the company she maintains.

That would be the HotHouse company, a unique ensemble borne out of Zizka's desire to create a richer creative home and to foment a deeper dialogue between the Wilma and its audience.

"The Wilma seeks to create a nurturing environment that allows the artist to feel comfortable exploring and discovering stories that may be difficult to tell," Eastern Region member and Wilma stage manager Pat Adams said. "Blanka is an artistic director who looks to those in the room with her to share in the ownership of a project. The HotHouse is an example of the affirmation of local artists, and the work chosen for the Wilma's upcoming season

is a prime example of the collaboration between Blanka and the HotHouse. We invite the audience to engage in conversation with us."

HotHouse is a deeply rooted resident company that requires a unique kind of discipline among its actors in order to achieve a deeper level of storytelling in its productions.

"Blanka had grown tired of the conveyor belt process of the regional model," Eastern Region member and HotHouse member Matteo Scammell said. "Living, adventurous art is her foremost goal and vision. Wilma is really a place for people to engage in the culture, especially with the political conversation. Blanka wants to make political, diverse theatre that challenges theatergoers."

Naturally, none of these changes happened overnight. Wilma Theater first began under the name the Wilma Project in 1973, as a feminist collective trafficking

in avant-garde works from such artists as Bread & Puppet Theater, The Wooster Group and Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company. In 1979, Blanka and her then-husband, Jiri, came aboard the Wilma team shortly after defecting from what was then still known as Czechoslovakia. In 1981, they assumed the role of co-artistic directors and moved the venue to a 100-seat theater on Sansom Street.

Many of Zizka's artistic impulses stem from what she witnessed in Eastern Europe. "I feel that theatre is political, and the political is personal," she said. "There was no gray zone. I feel very strongly that what we do here at the Wilma is in conversation with the world around us. I am always interested in the idea of who we are, where we are, what our actions are, how my individual self connects to the world around me

Continued on page 24

Ross Beschler, Jered McLenigan, Campbell O'Hare and Mary Tuomanen in *Mr. Burns, A Post-Electric Play*.



Photo by Johanna Austin

EQUITY ACROSS THE NATION

PHILADELPHIA, HERE WE COME!

Thanks to Philadelphia Liaison Committee Chair Christopher Sapienza for his contribution!

Philly has the “melting pot” culture of a larger metropolitan area but in a closer-knit community. As for the theatre scene, we have a total of 8 LORT theaters, 7 LOA theaters, 13 SPT theaters, 1 TYA and a multitude of companies using either a Special Appearance or Guest Artist agreement. As you can see from the number of theaters (including the McCarter Theatre in New Jersey and Delaware Theatre Company), theatre is alive and well here in the Philadelphia region.

WORKING IN THE REGION

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE AN EQUITY MEMBER IN THE REGION

We are like a family. Most members know each other, hang out together, socialize and support each other's productions and projects. It can be stressful sometimes, especially being in the shadow of the New York City skyline, but overall, we always pull together as a community when it comes to our creativity.

WHAT IT'S LIKE WORKING IN THE REGION

Every theater is different! We have small theaters putting on intimate productions and larger houses that match the bigger theaters elsewhere in the country. Working in Philly gives you a real taste of working in different kinds of spaces in front of different audiences. And we are wonderfully accessible, because we are in such close proximity to auditions in New York and the DC-Maryland-Virginia (DMV) area.

WHERE YOU MIGHT BE WORKING

The Drake, which is affectionately teased as the home of nearly every intimately sized company in Philadelphia. Many performers create their own work for the Fringe Festival, while others may be on contract with some of our larger companies like the Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia Theatre Company or The Wilma (see “Theatre Spotlight” on p. 16), while others are working with some of the most innovative companies to hit the region – like Inis Nua, 1812 Productions or Theatre Exile.

But with over 1,200 members in our region, local actors and stage managers sometimes have to look beyond the region for work. This is why our location is perfect; it enables us to get to New York or the DMV for auditions easily. We are a national union and can work anywhere across this great country of ours.

AROUND TOWN

BEST PLACES TO EAT FOR FOODIES

Cuba Libre is a fantastic Cuban restaurant just up the street from the Arden – perfect for dinner and a show! There is also Green Eggs and Tootsies. And then there's the battle of cheesesteaks



Photo by T. Charles Erickson

Greg Wood and Mahira Kakkar in *Skylight* at McCarter Theatre. Table of Contents image: Jake Blouch, Rob Riddle and Christopher Sapienza (front); Clare O'Malley and Melissa Joy Hart (back) in Delaware Theatre's *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (photo by Mark Miller).

– Jim's on South Street is the best! (But you have to experience Gino's/Pat's if you're visiting.) Another must is the Italian Market on 9th Street and Reading Street Terminal on Market Street.

WHAT YOU WON'T FIND ANYWHERE ELSE

The history. Right in the middle of Philly you'll find Independence Hall (the setting for the musical *1776*), the Liberty Bell and the Constitution Center – all great side trips to learn more about our country's founding and history over the past 250+ years. Plus, there are walking tours of the historic buildings and areas in Philadelphia, great museums like the Art Museum (run up the steps just like Rocky did!) and the Franklin Institute and parks like Rittenhouse Square, where you can relax in the sun with a good book.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Just show up. Step off the train or out of the PATCO speedline and walk a block in any direction and you'll find a way to get involved. Volunteer at Broad Street Ministries. You're never far from a great theater, an interesting restaurant or a fun museum that'll get you started on your Philadelphia journey!

BEST WAYS TO EXPERIENCE LOCAL COLOR

Visit one of the city's thirteen “Once Upon a Nation Storytelling Benches” and listen to the city's history as told by awesome storytellers who share tales and secret stories. Kids can collect stars at every stop and trade in their completed “star flag” in Franklin Square for a ride on the carousel, a fun way for the whole family to see and experience the historic part of the city. There's also the Philly Flower show, great shopping in suburban King of Prussia (only a quick train ride away) or you can catch all the entertainment and festivals that take place on our waterfront at Penn's Landing.

THEATRE NEWS & NOTES

Bloomington, MN – Equity has finalized a Transitional SPT-5 Agreement with **Artistry Theater and Visual Arts**.

Cambridge, MA – **Plays in Place, LLC**, has joined Equity on both a Staged Reading Contract and as an SPT.

Concord, MA – The Performing Arts program at The Umbrella Community Arts Center will kick off its 2019-2020 season in September with a new name, **Umbrella Stage Company**, as it joins Equity on a Transitional SPT-2 contract.

Golden, CO – **Miners Alley Playhouse** moved onto a Transitional SPT Agreement.

Hartford, CT – **HartBeat Ensemble** has been brought onto a Staged Reading Contract.

Kansas City, MO – **Kansas City Actors Theatre** has negotiated a new SPT rider, increasing their ratio in the coming season.

Lincoln, NE – Equity negotiated a new one-year SPT rider with **Nebraska Repertory Theatre** and achieved salary increases.

Long Beach, CA – **P3 Theatre Company** has begun work on Phase 1 of a Transitional SPT-1 agreement, during which they will do five productions with one Equity actor or stage manager per production. Health insurance will also be included.

Ogden and Salt Lake City, UT – The musical **Gold Mountain** was put under contract for a week. It is 100% Equity with thirteen actors, one Stage Manager and an ASM with health.

Ridgefield, CT – **Thrown Stone Theatre Company** will be operating on a Transitional SPT-1 contract this season.

Toledo, OH – **Lakeside Theatre Company**, dedicated to fostering a resurgence of comedic and dramatic classics, has been put on a new Transitional SPT.

Equity Member Jason Peck in *Where All Good Rabbits Go*.



TRACKING WHAT YOU'RE OWED

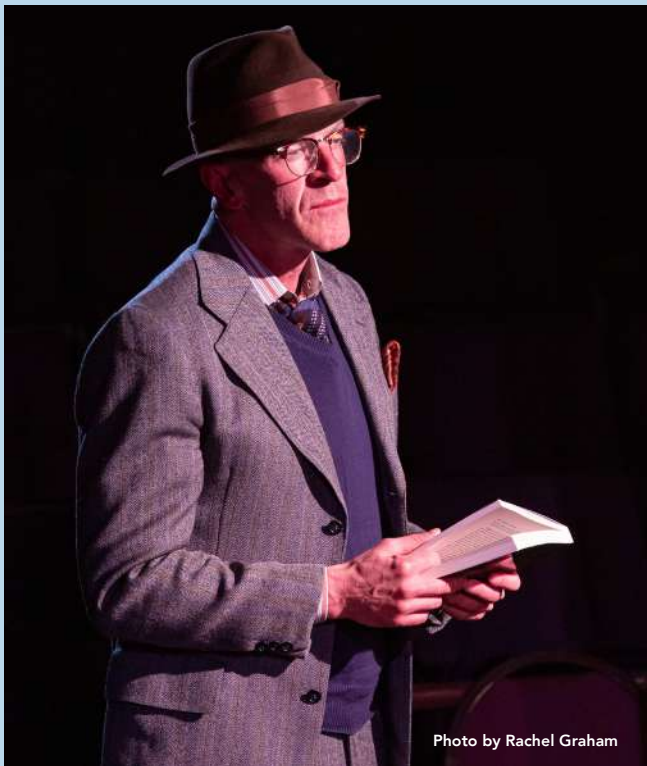


Photo by Rachel Graham

William Hahn in *Queen of Conspiracy* at Miners Alley.

Central staff resolved a missing vacation payment payout with a theater, recovering more than **\$400 for a Stage Manager**.

Central staff resolved an outstanding issue with a theater regarding unpaid overtime, extra performances and a television appearance that had been underpaid (or not paid). Each Actor in the company received a check for **approximately \$250**.

Eastern staff recovered **\$6,540 for six Actors** for buyouts due under a Mini production that transferred to a NEAT contract earlier this year.

Eastern staff was able to get pre-rehearsal employment on contract for 6 Actors, **totaling \$712 and a week of health each**, and one stage manager, **totaling \$952 and a week of health**.

Eastern staff negotiated 23 media agreements, with total Equity payments of **\$24,341 impacting 59 members**.

Eastern staff achieved a claim for overtime payments for rehearsal and additional duties for 13 members, **totaling \$2,028**.

Western staff were able to recover **\$920 for two Stage Manager members doing board ops** without being compensated.

Western staff recovered approximately **\$11,000 in media payments** at a LORT theater.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM PASSES WITH STRONG SUPPORT

Following two months of voting and discussion, balloting has concluded on the Constitutional referendum. Members overwhelmingly supported both issues on the ballot.

"With delegates from across the country, a national convention will allow more members to have a voice in their union," said Executive Director Mary McColl. "I am thrilled that Equity members have voted to create a more inclusive and forward-looking union."

The first convention will be held in early 2021 and will include 211 elected delegates from across the country who can come together to share common challenges, agree on a way to move forward and take up resolutions that help

set policy for the union. More information about the convention – and how members can participate – will be available in the coming months.

The updated Constitution and By-Laws can now be found in the member portal. A summary of the changes can also be found in the Spring issue of *Equity News*.

Participation in the referendum vote was very high. More members voted in this referendum than the most recent Council election (where 8,293 members voted) and in the 2013 Constitutional Referendum, where 9,756 members voted.

Whether you voted in favor of or against the changes, the important thing is that you voted. Your participation matters.

Thank you for making #EquityStrong!
The full results are as follows:

Issue 1: The Constitutional referendum establishing a national convention and other reforms. Passes with 79 percent support.

9,086 votes to approve
2,369 votes to reject
11,455 ballots cast

Issue 2: Eliminating the cap on working dues. Passes with 78 percent support.

8,985 votes to approve
2,494 votes to reject
11,479 ballots cast

Number of Eligible Voters: 46,551

THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Perhaps with a little irony, the Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) Agreement has reached a rather adult milestone: its 50th anniversary.

The TYA Agreement covers productions of shows that are expressly written, created or adapted to be performed for children. This area of stage work was not always protected, however. According to former Councillor (as well as past 1st Vice President and Recording Secretary) Barbara Colton, "the same deplorable working conditions and management exploitation that had existed in 1913 and became the motivating force for the founding of our union" pervaded children's theatre as late as the 1960s.

"Actors were being shockingly exploited and abused," she said. "We were sustaining career-ending physical injuries without any protection, compensation or process to resolve grievances."

While numerous attempts had been made in the past to create a children's theatre contract, none had ever come to fruition – so Colton stepped up to the plate. "I volunteered to Chair, and reactivate, a totally moribund Children's Theatre committee," she said.

Colton said that her cause was nurtured by the expertise of five "Equity giants," as she refers to them: Theodore Bikel, 1st Vice President; Bill Ross, former Vice president and founder of the Stage Managers Committee; Jeanna Belkin, 2nd Vice President

and ACCA Chair; Nancy R. Pollock, Founding Chair of Equity's Department to Extend Professional Theatre and Edith Meiser, to whom Colton refers as the Council "matriarch."

All of the companies who were present at the table for the first negotiation became signatories to the contract: National Theatre Company,



Maximillian Productions, Theatreworks USA, Prince Street Players, Traveling Playhouse, Pixie Judy Productions, Gingerbread Players and Jack.

After two years of negotiations, on June 15, 1969, a Children's Theatre contract was ratified – one that included all of the provisions of the standard Equity Contract.

"Two demands that were absolutely essential to the success of our negotiations – and, in fact, were deal breakers, were Equity Shop and the requirement for a Stage Manager in every production," Colton said.

Several years later, Colton suggested to Charlie Hull (Chief Negotiator for management and the producer of Theatreworks USA) that they change the name of the contract to Theatre for Young Audiences. "In taking this action, I hoped to eliminate the stigma still attached to children's theatre and any corresponding disparaging references to kiddie theatre," Colton said. "Charlie agreed and the 1975 rule book was published with the new TYA name."

In the 50 years since establishing TYA, members have been able to make a living entertaining families around the country in such professional productions as *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *The Lightning Thief* and *A Year with Frog and Toad*.

Colton noted that she takes "immeasurable joy" in the fact that members on TYA salaries currently bring in more than four million dollars annually. "Of all the contributions during my 24-year tenure on Council my proudest achievement is the TYA contract," she said.

Special thanks to Barbara Colton, who contributed material for this article.

EQUITY'S BONDING POLICY & HOW IT WORKS

One of the most important provisions of an Equity contract, the bonding policy was established decades ago in order to protect union members when working under contract.

This policy helps ensure that you receive the minimum guarantee of contractual salary and benefits (including pension and health credits) in a timely manner should an employer default on its obligations to you or Equity. However, it's important to note that filing your contract once it is signed – no later than the first rehearsal – helps Equity guarantee the agreement is properly bonded.

Here's how it works: The bond is simply determined by how many contracts are needed for the agreement. For productions that are individually produced by one or more producers ("single unit" productions), it's especially important that the union receives your contract in a timely manner.

It's also important that we have your contract in a timely manner for seasonal theaters. For seasonal theaters, such as Stock, LORT and Letters of Agreement, to name a few, the bond is based on the highest number of active contracts in a two-week period. If Equity receives more contracts than the bond protects, the union will immediately demand additional bond be posted.

If a seasonal theater does default, you may only receive the guaranteed portion of your contract from the available bond. But know that Equity will do everything it can to legally pursue a defaulting employer in an effort to secure the full obligations due to members.

The Equity bond is just another example of how the union is standing up for its members. #EquityWorks

HOW I GOT MY EQUITY CARD

RITA RUDNER MEMBER SINCE 1969



I moved to New York when I was fifteen, which was in 1947. It was really 1968, but I'm a comedian now and I exaggerate for comedic effect. All I'd ever wanted to be was a dancer on Broadway. I had attended my first dance class when I was four and had immediately become addicted. When I got to New York, I took ballet, jazz, tap, acrobatics and jiu-jitsu. Sorry about that last item; I became a comedian again for a moment.

Each week I would buy the two show business papers: *Show Business Weekly* and *Backstage*. I saw a strange word in the ads for dancers: "Equity." I didn't know what that was until I

was kicked out of my first audition for not having an Equity card. I then began attending non-Equity "open auditions." I can't remember how many open auditions I went to before I managed to be chosen for a show, but I do remember the actual show that vaulted me into union membership.

It was the national company of *Zorba*, starring John Raitt and Chita Rivera. I auditioned for over four hours and eventually I was chosen to be the "swing girl." Again, completely naive, I thought at some point in the show I would be swung in on a rope. I said, "Yes, I would love to swing in," and was invited to join Equity. I happily traveled around the country with that show for over a year.

I have been a proud member of Actors' Equity now for almost fifty years, although I'm still waiting for a job where I swing in on a rope.

CHRISTOPHER B. SADLER MEMBER SINCE 1999



In the early months of 1999, I was finishing up my MFA at UC San Diego. One day, Eva Barnes (our speech professor) let the acting students know that Charlie Fee, Artistic Director of the Idaho Shakespeare Festival and an old friend of hers, would be coming to audition for the summer season. I offhandedly asked her if he needed a stage manager; she said she'd check, and when Charlie arrived on campus, I had an interview. Soon after, he offered me an Equity stage manager position for the season, and a few months later, I was landing in Boise.

The question I often get from students nowadays is, "When should you get your card?" and I always reply, "You'll know when the time is right." The time was right in 1999. I had worked as an intern and/or EMC for years before going to graduate school, and those places and people – PCPA, Portland Stage Company, Berkshire Theatre Festival and Hangar Theatre

(with the incredible James FitzSimmons as the first SM I worked alongside; how lucky was I!) – gave me a solid foundation in what Equity was and how it worked and why it is so valuable.

Little did I know that first Boise summer would forge a 7-year relationship with ISF. I grew as an artist and perfected my craft working with amazing directors (that first summer I stage managed *Scapin* directed by Chris Bayes and *Titus Andronicus* directed by Bart Sher – again, how lucky), talented designers and an acting company gathered by Charlie that was the core of the Festival. To work with the same brilliant, dedicated humans summer after summer after summer: yet again, how lucky!

For the past fourteen years I've headed up the Stage Management BFA program at the University of Oklahoma, where I teach the basics of Actors' Equity and unions in my Stage and Theatre Management courses and hold a special studies seminar about the union in which we dive into contracts & codes, educating future union members. My luck continues.

EISENBERG AWARD HONORS NEW GRADS



Alan Eisenberg, center, with 2019 scholarship award recipients Leanne Antonio and Blake Roman.

Growing up in rural Erie, Pennsylvania, Blake Roman never really considered musical theatre a viable career path. The same goes for Leanne Antonio, who spent the first years of her life in the Bahamas, where musical theatre doesn't typically get much attention.

However, both of them now find themselves graduates of the prestigious University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance, where each has received the 2019 Equity/Alan Eisenberg scholarship. Established in 2007 in honor of Eisenberg's 25 years of service to Equity as its executive director, the annual \$5,000 award recipients are chosen by the MT Department's faculty and presented to a graduating senior from the University's Musical Theatre Department to recognize outstanding talent and career potential.

Roman most recently played Anthony in the University of Michigan production of *Sweeney Todd*. His other credits include Vittorio in the school's production of *Sweet Charity*, George in a production of *Our Town* at Theatre Aspen under the direction of Hunter Foster and Willard in *Footloose* at Wagon Wheel Center for the Arts. He has also been a featured singer in Gavin Creel's *Loud Nite* and Michael McElroy's *Broadway Our Way*.

But these performances might never have happened with Roman if it hadn't been for a fourth-grade choral director who made Roman aware of his vocal gifts. Still, he didn't really get exposed to musical theatre until middle school. Roman said, "it was while doing community theatre during my junior year of high school that I started looking at it as more of an actual career path. After graduating from high school, I took a gap year to audition and put my whole heart into it. And got into Michigan."

"I come from a family of musicians and everyone plays an instrument except me," said Antonio, who is of Jamaican descent but born in the Bahamas. She immigrated to the United States during her last year of elementary school, giving

her brother and her the opportunity to grow up in America. It was here that she discovered the stage and found her own artistic calling. "I realized that I can act and sing at the same time," she said.

"My parents knew how hard that life is, but they were pretty supportive," Antonio said. "I auditioned for three schools for musical theatre and thought, 'If I don't get into any of them, this wasn't meant to be,' and I got into Michigan, and thought 'Well, I've got to do this now.'" Recent roles at Michigan have included Desi in the Michigan production of *Passing Strange* and Ashley Rose in the world premiere of *One Hit Wonder*, as well as Levora Venora in the Connecticut Repertory Theatre production of *Disaster!*

"University of Michigan is a terrific school and I'm a very proud member of the alumni association," Eisenberg said. "I think it's one of the best, if not the best, programs in the United States, as evidenced by all the talent that is on Broadway and other stages all over the country."

Eisenberg is also thrilled that the endowment has grown to the point where two graduates are now able to receive the annual scholarship. This award will surely give a very helpful boost to Antonio and Roman, both of whom have already secured housing in Manhattan as they embark on the beginning of their careers.

And both recipients hope to pay Eisenberg's generosity forward. "I want to perform and entertain and share messages any way I can," said Roman, who also writes narrative stories and music in addition to performing.

"I like art that changes, and I like making changes in communities," Antonio said. "I am an immigrant, so I know how hard it is to work for what we have and we're a huge community of minorities. There's so much art that can bring change and just to be a part of that in any way would make me happy."

I WISH I HAD KNOWN... ABOUT 401(K) PLANS

Making a career in theatre can mean getting used to a certain amount of economic uncertainty. Union pensions and retirement savings accounts are two important tools to help ensure a solvent future. Pensions are defined benefit plans, meaning that if you meet certain eligibility requirements, you will be guaranteed a certain amount of post-retirement income for the rest of your life. 401(k) accounts are defined contribution plans, which means that the employee decides how much money to invest, and that benefit only lasts until the money runs out.

Work under pension-eligible contracts automatically generates contributions to your pension plan by the employer, but the 401(k) retirement savings account requires the employee to file paperwork at the start of each qualified job. This can sometimes cause confusion for Equity members.

"I do a lot of work in the Chicago area under the CAT Agreement," one member said during a recent webinar,

"but only one theater has ever offered me the opportunity to make 401(k) contributions. I wish I had known that I could have been making 401(k) contributions on all of those jobs!"

It's not the employer's responsibility to offer you that form – you can get it

NEW SERIES!

The "I Wish I Had Known" series is a new regular feature provided by and for Equity members. All entires can be found at actorsequity.org/IWIHK.

yourself directly from the Equity-League Benefit Funds website (equityleague.org). That page also has a helpful list of Equity Agreements that are eligible for 401(k) pre-tax compensation deferrals, i.e., contracts that allow you to designate part of your salary to be put into your retirement savings account before taxes are calculated.

Note: the list of eligible contracts on the Equity-League website may not be always be definitive; always be sure to check your rulebook for the final answer as to whether the contract you're working allows 401(k) contributions. Also, you can't retroactively allocate funds from earlier paychecks, but you can start the savings mid-contract, as soon as you file the paperwork.

All 401(k) Deferred Salary Agreements (the official name of the form) require the employer's signature, and for most of our agreements, that's the extent of the employer's participation. However, members working under a handful of contracts such as Production, SETA, LORT and WCLO can receive matching funds from their employers (up to a negotiated maximum percentage). That's basically free, extra money as an incentive to put more of your salary into savings!

If you have additional questions about 401(k), you can contact Equity-League directly at (212) 869-9380 or 401k@equityleague.org.

Equity's Advisory Committee on Chorus Affairs presented its 2019 ACCA Award to the ensemble of *Hadestown*. Pictured: (standing) Kimberly Marable, Ahmad Simmons, Khaila Wilcoxon, Afra Hines, Jessie Shelton and Malcolm Armwood; (kneeling) John Krause. Not in attendance but also honored by the ACCA were Timothy Hughes and T. Oliver Reid.



and how that world influences my individual self.”

In 1996, the Ziskas moved the Wilma once more to a larger venue, a 296-seat theater designed by Hugh Hardy along Philadelphia’s Avenue of the Arts. Following Jiri’s death in 2012, Ziska began to reclaim her European artistic roots, questioning the differences between what she had seen in American productions and among European companies.

“In America, we are very much set up in a system where actors move on from one job to another, which prevents you from becoming part of a collective that goes deeper,” Ziska said. “What started to be very important to me was continuity, caring about individual artists’ work within the collective of the company. When we work on the play everyone is involved together in exploring all the parts first before we cast it. This approach gives actors ownership of the work.”

According to Eastern Region member Ross Beschler, in forming HotHouse, Ziska sought to craft an ensemble that could create dramatic worlds together. She enlisted the aid of Greek director Theodoros Terzopoulos, from the Attis Theater in Athens, to teach members of the HotHouse company an acting approach that emphasizes breathing, using the diaphragm as the gateway to feeling, and includes a rigorous physical and vocal warm-up.

“Blanka was looking to excavate the very deep stakes and circumstances of this ensemble,” he said. “The breathing technique became a more



Photo by Johanna Austin

Matteo Scammell and Taysha Marie Canales in the Wilma production *Dionysus Was Such a Nice Man*.

common feature of the work, as she got more interested in crafting an ensemble that had the tools to go deep both internally and with each other.”

“There is nothing quite like Hothouse in Philly or, dare I say, the rest of the country at the moment,” Eastern Region member and HotHouse member Taysha Marie Canales said. Canales explained that Ziska’s technique aspires to expand what she refers to as “the thinking body” beyond just psychological table work. “Blanka likes to talk about the generations of stored memory that exist within our bodies,” she said, “and we train together as a company

to access these experiences that we can then use when approaching text.”

Members agree that the techniques employed by the HotHouse company have improved the work of all involved. “It is such a gift, and it translates into really credible work,” Eastern Region member and HotHouse member Lindsay Smiling said. “Our connections are so much stronger; we do intimate work and really trust each other. HotHouse is like a gym where we all get to keep exercising different elements of our craft. It makes us really flexible both mentally and physically. It gives us agency.” 🍷

REMEMBERING JOAN LOWELL-MCMORROW

Joan Lowell-McMorrow served as an Equity Principal Councillor in 1983 and from 1984 to 1994. She also served on the CORST Contract Negotiating Committee, the Showcase Code Committee, the Off-Broadway Contract Committee, the University Resident Theatre Committee and the Production Committee.

She met her husband, journalist Thomas Evers McMorrow, Sr., at a casting call. Married in 1947, the couple founded the Orange County Playhouse in Westtown, NY. The two were together for more than seventy years prior to his death in 2017.

In 1986, she was the founding chair of the Actors’ Work Program, an Equity committee tasked with training performing artists in skills they could use for secondary or

parallel careers as well as exploring casting opportunities for mature actors. Under her leadership, first as a volunteer and later as its professional Executive Director, the program expanded nationally before becoming part of The Actors Fund. Following that merger, Joan became the first Director of Entertainment Industry Relations at The Actors Fund, a position she held through 2000.

In addition to her roles onstage and at Equity, Joan was the Co-Founder and Associate Producer of Playwrights Horizons/Queens, an achievement recognized with a 1976 Drama Desk Award.

Joan passed away at the age of 94 at the Lillian Booth Actors Home in Englewood, NJ. She is survived by a son, two daughters and four grandchildren.

MEMBER PRIDE ON FULL DISPLAY

Members came out in full force to march in Pride parades this summer. For those marching in New York, the parade carried special significance, as this year marked the 50th anniversary of Stonewall. This uprising by members of the LGBTQ community against a violent police raid took place on June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in downtown Manhattan. The resulting riots ultimately lasted for six days and served as a catalyst for the LGBTQ rights movement.



BLISS GRIFFIN NAMED NEW DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGIST



Bliss Griffin, Equity's new Diversity and Inclusion Strategist.

Actors' Equity has announced that Bliss Griffin has been named as the new Diversity and Inclusion Strategist.

Born and raised in Oakland, CA, Griffin caught the theatre bug at Oakland's Black Repertory Theatre production of *The Taming of the Shrew* and grew up performing with the Oakland Ballet Company. She received her BFA in acting at the University of Miami, upon which she joined a non-union national tour of *Curious George Live!*

"After eight months, my 12-month contract was canceled with two weeks' notice," Griffin said. "I had no recourse. The same company offered me a second, international contract, which the producer withdrew literally hours before I got on a flight to Madrid. I knew then why we unionize. And it sparked a continued interest in employer-employee relationships in the arts."

Earlier this year, Griffin received an MBA from Fordham University's Gabelli School of Business with a concentration

in Management and Employment Law. "I went back to school particularly to address D&I in the arts as a business driver and equitable employment relationships in arts industries, which can be culturally exploitative of artists," she said.

In her role, Griffin will continue Equity's mission to achieve greater inclusion and diversity both within the organization and in the larger theatre community. When this department was created back in 2017, Equity released a landmark study of employment on two of its major contracts between 2013 and 2015, which showed that women and members of color had fewer work opportunities and drew lower salaries when they did find work.

"I'm grateful to spend my days integrating what I know from a robust theatre education and career into initiatives that protect actors and stage managers at work and influence this industry and our employers to tell every story," Griffin said.

GEORGIA ENGEL: A SINGULAR STAR

I only need write the name Georgia, and all within our Equity community know that I'm not referencing the classic Ray Charles song. Of course, I'm eulogizing our own Equity "classic," Georgia Engel.

Audiences were privileged to laugh at and with Georgia for almost 50 years.

Georgia was my friend. A one-of-a-kind, faithful, loving, caring, funny, innocent friend. Being Georgia's friend was a heaven-sent gift. We both came to New York City in the very early 70s. It seems odd now that I only saw her perform in a couple of shows, and never on TV. Three years ago, I saw her triumph off-Broadway in *John*, which Annie Baker wrote specifically for her. Then last summer she was in a Broadway tryout of *Half Time* at the Paper Mill Playhouse, for which she received rave reviews in The New York Times.

Theatre was some of the glue for our friendship but was peripheral. We also shared a spiritual outlook and a



Georgia Engel

very flowery way of communicating. Georgia was a gifted performer, exacting and precise and disciplined. But I never heard her call herself an actor. She described herself as a comedian and dancer, professionally, and as a spinster, personally. She had a unique way of expressing herself. She was sometimes "red-faced" over something, not

embarrassed.

I want to memorialize her strength, her determination, steadfastness, her innate decency, kindness, purity, wide-eyed innocence, generosity. Georgia wasn't a "Shakespearean," but a paraphrase of Juliet's line in *Romeo and Juliet* seems fitting: "And when she shall die, take her and cut her out in little stars, and she shall make the face of heaven so fine that all the world will be in love with night and pay no worship to the garish sun."

Her timing was impeccable...except in her exit in her final scene. She left this physical world too soon. Dance on, precious friend! The Psalmist wrote, "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names."

Georgia Engel! A singular star, a singular name!

With admiration and smiles and tears, Catherine Byers

IN MEMORIAM

Reported April 1, 2019 to June 30, 2019

*Equity Councillor

*What we call the beginning is often the end.
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.*

— T.S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*

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CHARLOTTE VOLAGE
KENNETH WILLIAMS
TOM WILLIAMS
EILEEN WOODS
WYCLIFFE YOUNG

COUNCILLOR MALCOLM D. EWEN

Central Region Stage Manager Councillor Malcolm Ewen passed away earlier this spring following a long battle with cancer.

"Malcolm has been a warrior over these past few years, all the while being a participating member of Council and an advocate for all Equity members," Actors' Equity Executive Director Mary McColl said. "I know that his memory will always be a blessing to me, and the members of Equity owe him a debt of gratitude for his many years of service to them."

Ewen, who lived in Chicago, was a Steppenwolf Ensemble Member (the first-ever stage manager to be so honored) at the acclaimed theater, which he first joined as a stage manager in 1987 on the production of *Born Yesterday* starring Glenne Headly and John Mahoney. The following season, Ewen stage managed a Steppenwolf production of *The Grapes of Wrath* that eventually transferred to Broadway, winning the Tony Award for Best Play of 1990. (On Broadway, Ewen also stage managed the 1998 Paul Simon musical *The Capeman* and the Tony-winning 2013 revival of *Who's Afraid of*



Malcolm D. Ewen

Virginia Woolf?

During his 32 years with the company, Ewen stage managed more than 40 shows, some of which transferred to the Royal National Theatre in London; His Majesty's Theatre in Perth, Australia; The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and many regional theaters. He was also a Founding Director of The Weston Playhouse Theatre Company in Vermont.

"Malcolm was one of the rare individuals in life who not only achieved the highest accomplishments

in his profession," said Dev Kennedy, Central Regional Vice President, "but perhaps more importantly, his greatest achievement of all was his unselfish commitment to improving the welfare of actors and stage managers across the country."

In addition to his work as an Equity Councillor, Ewen also advocated for his community as a long-serving board member for Season of Concern, which was affiliated with the Chicago office of The Actors Fund to provide care for those with HIV and AIDS-related illnesses. In 2018, the Stage Managers' Association bestowed its Del Hughes Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in the Art of Stage Management upon Ewen.

"Malcolm was an extraordinary individual," said Ira Mont, 3rd Vice President and Stage Manager Councillor. "I turned to Malcolm for guidance because he was about the most levelheaded individual I had ever met. I feel an obligation to live up to the precedent Malcolm has set as a stage manager, as a union leader and as a human being."

ACTORS FUND – Continued from page 7

Stressful Schedules for Parents of Young Performers on August 15, and The Performance Anxiety Workshop on August 24, providing management tools for young performers who experience anxiety. The program is also offering a Summer Discovery Art Series for children of all ages on Tuesdays from 4:30 – 6 pm, through August 20. Young performers can try their hands in a variety of arts, including drawing, painting, collage, sculpting and more.

To find out more about The Actors Fund Home services, visit actorsfundhome.org, and for the Performing Arts Legacy Project, visit performingartslegacy.org. To register for The Actors Fund's Looking Ahead events in New York, visit: LookingAheadNY.org. In Los Angeles, visit: LookingAheadCA.org. 🇺🇸



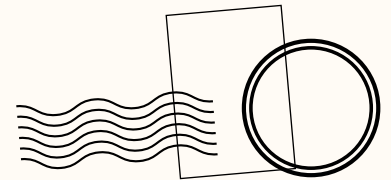
(l-r): Robert E. Wankel, President of The Shubert Organization; Annette Bening, Vice Chair of the Board of The Actors Fund; Philip J. Smith, Chairman of The Shubert Organization; Abby Schroeder, Secretary of the Board of The Actors Fund and Brian Stokes Mitchell, Chairman of the Board of The Actors Fund.

EquityNEWS

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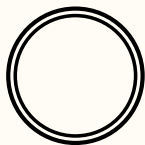
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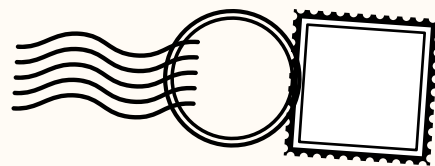
Western Region member Dain Geist spearheaded the first-ever Houston Equity Festival, a collective of local Equity members that seeks to honor artists, celebrate playwrights and enrich audiences. Five plays, planned for the summer and fall of 2019, all selected and produced by a collective of local Equity members and that abide by the Members Project Code, are scheduled. Other Equity members presenting plays in this inaugural festival are Patty Tuel Bailey, Jeff Wax, Pamela Vogel and Shannon Emerick.

"I needed other artists who were willing to jump off the deep end with me and mount their own shows under a collective umbrella," Geist said. "It is my sincerest hope that this festival takes off, becoming an annual event and a great opportunity for local artists."



SOUTH FLORIDA

On June 3rd, South Florida Equity members partnered with Health in the Hood for a community service event in Miami. Health in the Hood implements and maintains community gardens in food deserts – areas that do not have easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables – along with nutrition and fitness education, in order to break barriers between low-income communities and healthy choices. Twelve members pulled weeds and shoveled dirt to ready the planting beds for seeds and new plants, organized by Margery Lowe: Irene Adjan, Alex Alvarez, Steve Anthony, Barbara Bradshaw, Elena Maria Garcia, Patti Gardner, Jeni Hacker (who attended with her daughter, Bailey), Peter Haig, Michael Scott Ross, Barbara Sloan and Tom Wahl.



CINCINNATI/LOUISVILLE

The 2019 membership meeting for the Cincinnati/Louisville Liaison Area was held on Monday, June 17 at Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati. Emily F. Patterson, Equity Senior Business Representative, and M. Nathan Wilkinson, Equity Business Representative, from the Chicago office hosted an informative, spirited and candid conversation. Members left the evening feeling connected to their union and motivated to maintain a sense of forward momentum within the Cincinnati/Louisville theatre community.