

SPRING 2019 | VOLUME 104 | ISSUE 2

Equity

ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION

NEWS

ALL ABOUT BALLOTING

EQUITY 2020:
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CABARET Kaitlyn Hoffman khoffman@actorsequity.org, x322
CASINO Kathy Mercado kmercado@actorsequity.org, x335
DINNER THEATRE Gary Dimon gdimon@actorsequity.org, x414
DINNER THEATRE ARTIST Austin Ruffer aruffer@actorsequity.org, x307
DISNEY WORLD Donna-Lynne Dalton ddalton@actorsequity.org, x604
 Buckley Stephens bstephens@actorsequity.org, x602
GUEST ARTIST Austin Ruffer aruffer@actorsequity.org, x307
LABS/WORKSHOPS Corey Jenkins cjenkins@actorsequity.org, x325
LOA-NYC Raymond Morales rmorales@actorsequity.org, x314
LOA-PP Timmary Hammett thammett@actorsequity.org, x376
LORT Gary Dimon gdimon@actorsequity.org, x414
 Jeffrey Bateman jbateman@actorsequity.org, x338
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MIDSIZE Timmary Hammett thammett@actorsequity.org, x376
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OFF-BROADWAY Kaitlyn Hoffman khoffman@actorsequity.org, x322
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 Walt Kiskaddon wkiskaddon@actorsequity.org, x336
TOURS (SETA/PRODUCTION) Tripp Chamberlain tchamberlain@actorsequity.org, x320
WEAR MADNESS (BOSTON, WASHINGTON, D.C.) Kathy Mercado kmercado@actorsequity.org, x335
SHOWCASE/NYMF Logan Cypher lcypher@actorsequity.org, x339
SPECIAL APPEARANCE Austin Ruffer aruffer@actorsequity.org, x307
SPECIAL PRODUCTIONS Corey Jenkins cjenkins@actorsequity.org, x325
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SPT/LOA MID-ATLANTIC Jeremy Bohmstein jbohmstein@actorsequity.org, x378
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 Cynthia Hanks chanks@actorsequity.org, x239
 M. Nathan Wilkinson nwilkinson@actorsequity.org, x246
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WESTERN REGION

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WITHIN LA - 99 SEAT Albert Geana-Bastare ageanabastare@actorsequity.org, x118
TYA, STOCK, LOA TO COST & LOA TO WCLO Christa Jackson cjackson@actorsequity.org, x129
SPT, HAT Gwen Meno gmeno@actorsequity.org, x110
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EquityNEWS

Actors' Equity
 Director of Communications
 Brandon Lorenz

Editor
 Doug Strassler

Contributor
 Joyce Vinzani

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Advisory Committee
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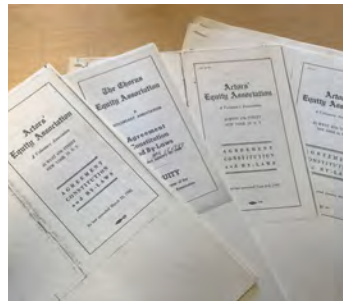
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#Equity
STRONG





FROM THE PRESIDENT BUILDING THE FUTURE: A MORE INCLUSIVE ACTORS' EQUITY

In 2016 and 2017, I used my travel for the national tour of *Fun Home* to meet with members in the majority of our Liaison Areas and to attend our liaison conference in Atlanta. I was reminded during that tour that while we live and work in some very different places, we also face a lot of common challenges.

When we launched Equity 2020, we promised to build a more aggressive and strategic organizing program, and to be more inclusive of our members in Liaison Areas. After you overwhelmingly voted up our 2017 dues referendum, our first hire was a dedicated organizer specifically for the Liaisons. Our organizing department has worked with those of you on the ground in those communities, and I'm happy to report that we're starting to see results: you've helped to bring more than 30 new theaters onto contract. Work weeks per member in our Liaison Areas were up eight percent in the most recent theatre season.

"THESE NATIONAL MEETINGS ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS TO LISTEN TO EACH OTHER, LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, TALK ABOUT SHARED CHALLENGES AND AGREE ON A COMMON VISION."

I heard so many thoughtful and interesting ideas and perspectives during those sixteen months on tour. I remembered them as we started talking about what eventually became Equity 2020. And I carried them into our discussions as we began examining our Constitution. This was a long, complex process for our Constitutional Review Committee, and then for the Council. After all, Equity's been around for more than a century...and so has some of our Constitutional language.

Over the last few weeks, you may have gotten an email or phone call from a fellow member about the changes Council has recommended to you. I'm excited about these proposals in general, but I'm especially keen on the idea of a national convention.

As your president, I've spoken at a number of other unions'

national and international conventions. I've seen firsthand how organizations similar to ours use their conventions as forums for ideas. I've seen them use their conventions to build partnerships with allies – from sister unions to policymakers. And these national meetings are opportunities for members to listen to each other, learn from each other, talk about shared challenges and then agree on a common vision to move forward.

A national convention will provide a chance for us to come together as actors and stage managers in a democratic structure. For many years, aside from electing Councillors, it has overwhelmingly been only those who live in office cities who've been able to pass resolutions at our membership meetings. And even those resolutions are simply advisory to the Council, which has the final say. In contrast, convention delegates will be able to both bring forth ideas and vote on whether they become official policy, regardless of where they might live.

After hearing that many of you feel disconnected from our union because you live outside New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, I also pushed hard to reconfigure the Council. If this referendum is approved, it will establish nine dedicated seats for members who don't live in the office cities. Those voices are incredibly important, and I believe that any debate about national policy should include perspectives from larger and smaller markets alike. That's also why we've built in a guarantee that at least one convention delegate will be elected from each liaison area. And we've recommended modifying eligibility to run for all of our elected positions, so that you can qualify throughout your stage management or chorus career.

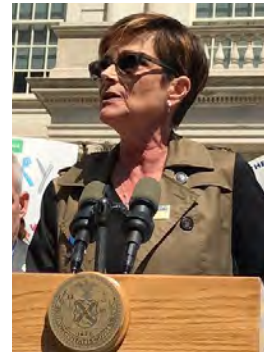
The proposals recommended by Council are much, much longer than any one *Equity News* column, which is why you will find more information on p. 13 of this issue. You can also learn more at ActorsEquity.org/2020, or email 2020@ActorsEquity.org if you have questions about the proposals.

We are building a better union together. I hope you agree that these proposals represent major progress for Equity, and I hope you'll join me as we take the next step.

Kate Shindle

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE POWER OF PERSONAL AGENCY



You may not know this, but I am a big fan of personal agency: owning, nurturing and using your power. Whether it is agency that provides the confidence to step forward to talk about an issue in the workplace, or the agency to stand up together to use your voice, actors and stage managers are recognizing their worth and demanding change. This year I have watched an increasing number of you become powerful advocates, not just for yourselves but for your colleagues as well. The rights and opportunities of individual actors and stage managers are only as strong as the rights of us all.

This September marks the 100th anniversary of the end Equity's first successful strike. One hundred years ago, Equity members went on strike on Broadway because the producers had refused – for years – to use the standard contract to which they had agreed.

I think it is important to note that we are still fighting and calling on our members to take action. This year, Equity members went on strike for the first time in decades. Now, just like then, the Lab strike came after a prolonged attempt to bring the employers to the table. Much of that activity – by design – wasn't visible unless you were part of the Show Development Committee.

Behind the scenes, Equity spent months doing what unions do best: organize. And because of the changes we have made under Equity 2020, we have new resources and staff to do so. Working with more than a hundred volunteers, we put together an incredible commitment card campaign where Equity members signed cards, pledging they would not work on a Lab contract unless Equity members were paid for their time and shared in the rewards if a show became successful. It seems like a small thing. On the contrary. What we were asking for was fair.

As your chief negotiator, I can only say that it was an incredibly powerful moment to walk into that negotiating room in December and see more than three hundred of these cards taped to the walls. As if each one of those 300 people were standing right there with me. By the time of our next meeting, we had over 2,000 cards on the walls. The meeting after that, we were up to 3,000. Hundreds became thousands.

This is personal agency at its best. It's the realization that our power – as individual workers and as a collective force – can move mountains. So often your employers have tried in various ways to divide you. But we stayed strong, knowing

that agency has nothing to do with where you are listed in the program or on the marquee.

You will read more about the strike on p. 8 (“Knowing Your Worth”). But there is an important takeaway beyond the gains we made at the table. We know that show development occurs all over the country, not just Broadway. In fact, the first Equity company to benefit from the new contract terms was working at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora, Illinois. The contract we won gives us a new model for show development we can take into future contract negotiations with other employers around the country.

**“IT'S THE REALIZATION THAT OUR
POWER — AS INDIVIDUAL WORKERS
AND AS A COLLECTIVE FORCE —
CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS.”**

Most of all, you showed us – and each other – that you all have our backs. I promise to always have yours. I cannot tell you how incredibly powerful and important that is. It is never easy to step out of your comfort zone and fight for the rights and opportunities of your fellow union members. But that's exactly what you did this year. We stood together. We won together. And that is what being in a union is all about.

Mary McColl



DIVERSITY MATTERS

WHAT'S IN A NAME? (OR LEGISLATING KINDNESS, PART 2)

If you've read any of your rulebooks lately (and I hope you have!), you'll see that Actors' Equity has continually worked towards keeping the anti-discrimination language

fluid and up-to-date not only with federal guidelines but in our public consciousness. Although we can't literally dictate who gets hired, language in our rulebooks codifies and publicly reiterates the very equal rights principles that Equity has been fighting for since 1913.

In talking with theatremakers throughout the industry (not only actors and stage managers, but directors, artistic directors, playwrights, designers, producers, casting directors – the whole gamut), I'm reminded how important it is for the language we use to talk with and about each other to also be fluid and updated so that it matches what we understand about each other and each other's expressed identities. I've heard some people speak of their frustration with the challenges of keeping up with current changes to accepted language – and some wondering why it's important. After all, as Mr. Shakespeare wrote, "What's in a name?"

For me, it's completely about respect. Once you know that a person can be negatively affected by the way another person refers to them, talks about their disability, their gender identity, their cultural background, etc., you cannot un-know that. And out of respect for that person, you cannot ignore what you know. Similar to wanting to see our names correctly spelled in programs, online and in the press, it makes sense for us to lead the way with our employers to let them know about our need for our identities to be correctly expressed - in both our internal and external communications with one another. In truth, people continue to be discriminated against because of labels that are foisted upon them. One way to combat this is to rectify inaccurate and inauthentic labels that exist and/or have previously existed.

In thinking about this column, I went back to a piece I wrote for *Equity News* in April 2001. The title of the column was "Legislating Kindness." In the piece, I wrote about how strange it seemed that the U.S. government needed to legislate against hate crimes – as if we needed to be reminded that they were illegal.

How far we've come since then. And yet how far we still have to go.

Though it is still unfathomable to think that a hate crime *wouldn't* be illegal, it's clear that we still need laws to protect citizens from pervasive discrimination. Similarly, every rule that our union creates is meant to keep protecting our members from any number of issues that have posed and/or continue to pose a problem – while also working towards nurturing a culture of respect for one another. Back in 2001, I wrote: "We, as a union, also find ourselves in the position to take the stance that we do not condone discrimination in the workplace and that we support Equal Employment Opportunity.

"The real question becomes: how can we, law abiding citizens, form an even greater barrier against evil than the law can, one that mandates a human being's birthright to not be discriminated against? In a time where kindness and respect for one another seems to be a commodity, and negotiations between employers and employees suggest that it's all about the dollar, here's a suggestion that won't cost anyone any money but will be of immeasurable value: mandate kindness. Mandate respect for ourselves and for each other. Perhaps in some small way, we can thereby participate in making the message clear that, 'We may be mad as hell, but we're not going to take it out on each other.'"

As a nation – and a union – we have been through so many twists and turns since 2001. And in many ways, I'm terribly sad that the words I wrote before the world changed later that year still resonate as they do. But today, I'm looking at them as a renewed call to action. If we start by respecting each other in the workplace, including how we speak about our own fellow members with our employers and each other, there's no place to go but forward.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Toy Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Christine Toy Johnson
Chair of the National Equal
Employment Opportunity Committee

PERSONAL TOUCHES GO A LONG WAY ON ARTS ADVOCACY DAY

BY DOUG STRASSLER

A group of neophytes and veterans came together in Washington, D.C. this spring for the 32nd Annual Arts Advocacy Day. This event is the centerpiece of a multi-day national arts action summit hosted by Americans for the Arts in partnership with over 85 national arts organizations that brings together a broad cross section of America's cultural and civic organizations.

Equity members attending included Roy A. Gross, Washington, D.C./ Baltimore Liaison; Karen D. Howell, Atlanta Liaison; Sandra Karas, Secretary/Treasurer; Sarah LaBarr, Kansas City Liaison; Andrew Maloney, Central Region member (Ohio); Ira Mont, Third Vice President; Molly Norris, Western Region member (Oregon); Melissa Robinette, 1st Vice President; Communications Director Brandon Lorenz and Organizer Stefanie Frey. Collectively, the group met with 34 House and Senate offices on the second day of the meeting to discuss such crucial subjects as the National Endowment for the Arts and tax fairness.

The experience allowed participants from all over the country to feel a stronger connection to their fellow union members. "Being an Equity actor in Cincinnati/Louisville, it felt like the right time to go and introduce myself to union members as a whole," Maloney said. "The arts are so important. We bring in more to the economy than agriculture and technology, but we don't have a federal office."

The first day of Arts Advocacy consists of multiple sessions that prepare attendees to meet with their representatives on the second day. Among the strategies and techniques taught were to remind individual representatives about the specific financial value the arts bring to every state. "The lawmaking process is intense and complicated, but one thing that is needed is for individual humans with personal interest and investment to talk to their representatives about the impact

of arts on their lives," Norris, another first-time attendee, said. "Our day-long intensive training provided me with all the information I need and also prepared me to continue arts advocacy with my representatives for years to come."

LaBarr, an Arts Advocacy Day veteran, had seven appointments this year – five with representatives and two with Missouri's senators. "I found every single theater I could in each of the congressional districts. And when I spoke to them, I told them, 'I'm from a small town, this is what these theaters have done for me and my career. It's why I chose to live in a city with a thriving arts scene.'

"It's about finding commonalities," she said. "Arts funding is a bipartisan issue, and everyone has an arts story. Did they ever do a play? Were they in a band? They all have some sort of arts connection."

She also found that some extra research and personal connections allowed her to have bipartisan exchanges

with Roy Blunt, the Republican senator from Missouri. "My brother is a choral conductor at Missouri State University," she said, "and Senator Blunt was the head of the inauguration committee. My brother's choir performed at [President] Trump's inauguration. The senator was very proud to have a Missouri university perform at Inauguration Day." Ultimately, LaBarr got a private tour of Senator Blunt's office the following day, where she learned that regardless of any other political stances he may hold, he is a huge arts advocate.

The ask for NEA funding for the 2020 fiscal year was \$167.5 million. "This may seem like a lot, but this number is the amount that was in the NEA in the early 1990s," Maloney said. "If this number had continued to grow, with inflation, the NEA would have upwards of \$350 million."

"This was astounding to me, because the arts are so extremely vital

Continued on page 25



Photo by Jerry Frishman, Courtesy of Americans for the Arts

Brian Stokes Mitchell, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Rita Moreno and Robert Lynch, President and CEO of Americans for the Arts, during the Nancy Hanks Lecture.

KNOWING YOUR WORTH: HOW THE LAB CAMPAIGN LED TO EQUITY'S FIRST STRIKE IN 50 YEARS — A LANDMARK WIN

BY DOUG STRASSLER



A group of volunteers phone-banking to rally member support during the Lab campaign.

Sometimes a small group can create big change.

Consider the Lab Agreement. Used by members of the Broadway League to create or enhance new work, it amounted to less than 1 percent of the total work weeks done on union contract in the most recent theatrical season – during which time 574 out of Equity's more than 51,000 members worked on a Lab Agreement.

But over the years, the Lab had become a key part of how new theatre came to Broadway.

Since 2016, one in four Broadway shows used a Lab before opening. Labs generally lasted four weeks and involved performers and the creative team working on a show – often refining dialogue, songs and dance – without a paid audience. Of the 75 shows that used a Lab Agreement since 2016, 38 had gone on to further production.

Created in 2007, the Lab had morphed into something far bigger than the image its name might suggest – a group of performers sitting around a table reading the early dialogue of a play or the lyrics of a musical. During the development period, producers were inviting potential investors and theater owners to view stagings of the property in its current form as

an enticement to them, putting undue strain on the performers and stage managers working on these productions during a show's nascent development period.

"This contract was being abused beyond what it was initially intended for," Stephen Bogardus, Eastern Principal Councillor, and Show Development Committee Chair, said. "Producers were now doing full-out shows with sets, costumes, lighting. Instead of just strategically going and finding, for example, a vocabulary for choreography – how are the apes going to fly in *Tarzan?* – the members' work was being used carte blanche for a grandiose backers' audition. We began to get complaints from members doing this kind of work that they were not being properly compensated for their collaborative work."

What's more, members felt that their increasing creative contributions were being undervalued. Twelve years into the contract, they were still receiving the same salary with no wage increase.

"The nature of development has changed so radically over the decades, and the use of actors within that development process has also changed radically," said Eastern Region Councillor Nikka Graff Lanzarone, a member of the Show

Development Committee.

Eventually, committee members felt that enough had become enough. "The issues surrounding development were such that the production contract committee felt it was appropriate to create a developmental contract subcommittee," said 3rd Vice President Ira Mont. "It was clear that over the decade that the Lab was in place, it was being utilized in more complicated ways. It wasn't just trying out an act of a show. It wasn't just singing and reading; it was mounting full rehearsals of a product. There were labs that, at the end of a four-week rehearsal, you could move right into a theater and begin tech."

The problems were clear to all the members involved. The question then became, what could be done about it?

Like so many things, it started with a committee – in particular the Show Development Subcommittee,

"IT WAS CLEAR THAT OVER THE DECADE THAT THE LAB WAS IN PLACE, IT WAS BEING USED IN MORE AND MORE COMPLICATED WAYS. IT WASN'T JUST TRYING OUT A SHOW. IT WAS MOUNTING FULL REHEARSALS OF A PRODUCT."

— IRA MONT, 3RD VICE PRESIDENT



which helped gather feedback from members about proposals that would eventually become part of the new Show Development Agreement.

These conversations hadn't happened in a vacuum. Members of the *Hamilton* cast were an important part of the conversation. As a hugely profitable show, it was a phenomenon

among phenomena, and cast members who helped develop the show eventually negotiated their own deal after it became a hit.

They didn't just land a profit-sharing deal, but also increased awareness about the small payout that had been available to artists who have been with a highly profitable show from the beginning.

AUGUST RUSH LAB: FIRST TO BENEFIT FROM AN EQUITY STRIKE



Equity members who had signed on to a developmental lab with *August Rush* held their breath during the Equity Lab strike.

Directed by John Doyle and based on the Oscar-nominated 2007 Warner Bros film featuring Freddie Highmore, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Keri Russell and Robin Williams, *August Rush* is a modern-day Dickensian tale of an orphan who discovers his musical gifts while searching for his biological parents.

In advance of the show's intended world premiere at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora, Illinois in April, a lab was also going to take place in New York in early 2019 – timing that was threatened when Equity's strike put *August Rush* on the DO NOT WORK list.

To the show's cast, this signaled a likely end to the project. "We respected the tenacity and bravery of Equity," Eastern Region member

George Abud said, "but we were sad we were going to lose our show."

Still, they stood in solidarity with the union, knowing the importance of the strike. "As workers, it was the only way," said Eastern Region member Leenya Rideout. "This is the top echelon of what we do, and we were only asking a small amount for our contribution of creating something from scratch, the possibility of getting injured and not being able to audition for other things. We invest something even more valuable than money, so why aren't we getting something back for our investment?"

As the strike wore on, the Paramount Theatre continued conversations with Equity. Ultimately, they agreed to the terms Equity had been negotiating for during the strike, making the actors and stage managers of *August Rush* the first members to enjoy any benefits of the new Show

Development Agreement – just four days before the lab was to begin!

"I was very impressed and proud that they were able to settle the whole thing," Abud said. "I think the settling of ours and the commotion of us fighting for it helped the Broadway League come to the table earlier."

The *August Rush* lab stands as a sterling example of how the strike will benefit members everywhere as the Union continues to work to set new terms.

"Because of our willingness to stand together and say we deserve more, Equity was able to make an individual developmental agreement that kept the show out of jeopardy," Rideout said. "This is something historic we'll be able to look back on. It's part of our experience and we'll bring that on the stage with us."



Top row (left to right): Kyle Selig, Grey Henson, Josh Daniel and Stephanie Bissonnette. Bottom row (left to right): TyNia René Brandon, Kamille Upshaw, Andrea Burns, Erika Henningsen and Stephen Bogardus.

Other Broadway shows, including *The Book of Mormon*, *Frozen* and *Mean Girls*, had also made profit-sharing deals with their casts.

These deals were a catalyst to move the conversation about new terms for the Development Agreement to the front burner, according to Bogardus. Equity requested, among other terms, a pay raise and a provision requiring that one percent of any profit after a show recoups its capitalization costs be shared with lab participants. While these meetings with the Broadway League occurred, Equity also created a social media campaign to raise awareness among its membership, using the hashtag #NotaLabRat.

As negotiations stalled towards the end of 2018, it became increasingly clear that Equity might have to call on its members to support a drastic action. Members began phone-banking and visiting Broadway ticket buyers at Times Square's TKTS booth to educate them on the #NotaLabRat campaign and the importance of a new agreement. At the same time, Equity members signed commitment cards in support.

That support would be crucial. Actors' Equity and the Broadway League reached an impasse in early 2019, and on January 7, after authorization from the National Council, Equity declared a strike calling for a halt to all new show development work with members of the Broadway League.

It was the Union's first strike in 50 years.

What exactly did this strike mean? It meant that Equity placed its Lab Agreement, Workshop Agreement, Staged Reading Contract and Stage Reading Guidelines with the Broadway League on its DO NOT WORK list. Equity members were barred from participating in commercial Broadway development work. EMCs were also put on notice they would be denied membership in Equity for crossing the picket line.

This strike put some members in the unenviable position of having to halt working on developmental labs that had been scheduled – including Broadway-bound jukebox musicals based on the catalogs of Michael Jackson and Huey Lewis, and stage adaptations of the movies *Almost Famous* and *August Rush* (For more about that last developmental lab, see "August Rush Lab: First to Benefit from Strike" on p.9.)

Organizer Stefanie Frey led many of the meetings telling developmental cast members that their work had been struck during the campaign. "It is hard to tell people not to work. But one of the memories that will stick with me is when a member raised his hand and said 'Let's go. Equity has presented us with an opportunity to say, 'I'm fed up with this, let's do something about it.' Those cast meetings were hard but were successful in terms of building solidarity."

"The number of members who are working on show development at any one time on Broadway isn't very large," said Brandon Lorenz, who served as campaign manager for the strike. "But what the members do have is the power of solidarity. They knew what they were worth and they stuck together."

Given the small universe of members involved, it was clear that any successful strike would need to mobilize the broader Equity family.

The communication leading up to and continuing during the strike was also very carefully calibrated. The deliberate rollout began with a video on social media featuring testimonials from many members who had previously worked on labs and were in favor of a new agreement. The strategy increased incrementally, also including digital advertising that made it clear just how serious Equity's stance was.

"It can be easy I think to jump to the end – let's go on strike," said Lorenz. "But part of what really made this strike work is that not only did the members involved know their worth, they also really bought into a plan that would gradually escalate and allow us to grow our support."

During the strike, members continued to turn out in support. In addition to phone-banking and text messaging, members had also signed commitment cards. When negotiations began, Equity had amassed 300 cards. But as they continued, that number mushroomed to more than 3,000 signed commitment cards – all of which were posted in Council Room of the New York office where the negotiations took place, confronting the Broadway League with the number of members who had pledged their solidarity to the cause.

Eastern Region stage manager Johnny Milani felt that the strike was vital, not just to validate the contributions of the actors, but to improve the working conditions that stage managers faced during the development period. "The strike needed to

These were some of the wins from Equity's historic Lab Strike:

- Increased Salary
- Profit Sharing
- Guaranteed Broadway Rehearsal Weeks
- Additional Stage Managers

happen because the actors needed to feel their contributions were valued and acknowledged," he said, "and stage managers needed more help. At the end of the day, it was stage managers who felt incompetent because we didn't have the number of people we needed to run a rehearsal room, working with half a staff. You stand with your brothers and sisters about their wants and needs."

Eastern Region actor Sam Strasfeld and volunteer had firsthand experience with not receiving credit for work put into the development of a successful Broadway show. "While I was working on *An American in Paris*, I observed firsthand the content being created by the ensemble of the show and how not a single person received credit for their artistic input," he said. "The myriad contributions artists make to theatre often goes uncredited (though certainly not unnoticed). We create movement, text and life in rehearsal halls and on stages across the country but are only compensated for what we do on a weekly basis. We are the only members of the creative process who forfeit ownership over our intellectual property. It's never more evident than when you replace someone in a show and are taught their 'bits' or staging that they created."

One takeaway for Central Region actor and volunteer Chloe Campbell, a veteran of developmental labs for *Escape to Margaritaville* and *King Kong*, was how successful the outreach conducted throughout the strike was. "This felt like a new wave of Equity, where they were fighting the fight and making sure members got involved and saw that Equity follows through on what they say they will."

After 33 days, Actors' Equity and the Broadway League were able to reach a new Show Agreement that included five-year terms for salaries with three wage increases; profit-sharing following a show's recouping of its initial investment (which will last for ten years and could include money generated by touring productions); stipulations for additional assistant stage manager contracts; a guarantee of additional rehearsal time should a show move to a Production Contract and additional health and pension benefits stemming



More than 3,000 Equity members signed commitment cards, which were mounted on the walls of the Council Room where negotiations took place.

WHAT'S NEXT? WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE STRIKE

From pins to commitment cards, it's clear that this winter's Lab strike – Equity's first in fifty years – has emboldened its position as a negotiating force.

And that's a tribute to both staff and membership. "We had never negotiated with The Broadway League in this way and they knew that the members were behind us and they knew that they wanted the professional workforce that we provide," 3rd Vice President Ira Mont said. "The support came from the clear unity of the members that were both affected by the work stoppage directly and were affected by the idea of this new agreement for the future."

This strike proves that the Union knows how to wage a campaign both publicly and behind closed doors. Externally, too, it means that our ability to strategically organize a work action will force whoever comes to the table with us to raise their game. "The employers knew we were serious," Mont said. "I think the work of the staff all the way across – the organizing of the members, the communication pipeline we had to the members at large, right down to the production staff and Mary McColl were the backbone of what transpired."

Organizer Stefanie Frey also feels that the lab campaign strengthened the perception of what Equity can achieve, both externally and internally. "It is always inspiring to me to see members coming together to work towards a common good and the strike was a perfect example of that, seeing so many strong member leaders stand up together throughout this campaign," she said.

"The members should be extremely proud of themselves. We had a 33-day strike and not a single member crossed the picket line. Because of this campaign, I think the Broadway League takes us more seriously, I think our sister unions take us more seriously, and I think the industry takes us more seriously. If you get involved and work together with the Union, that's where the magic happens."

from the additional work weeks. Equity's National Council unanimously approved the new agreement, and development work resumed immediately.

While proud and relieved upon the newly negotiated agreement, Mont was especially happy about the new terms established for stage managers, who will share equally with the actors in any profit participation. "The key benefit was getting a guarantee when the appropriate triggers are in place to make sure that stage management teams are staffed properly to function well in order to execute the development process that the producers want to have.

"Also, the guarantee of ultimate production contract rehearsal weeks tied to the agreement is beneficial to stage managers because they are not trying to rush a process along," he added. "As difficult as it is for performers who are trying to catch up, it is as difficult, if not more, for stage managers who are trying to manage an accelerated process."

And now that the dust has settled, those involved on the frontline recognize what a mammoth effort this campaign was—and how sweet a victory it is.

"The negotiations might have been at the table, but the deal was really made by the many thousands of members who stood together," said Mary McColl, Executive Director, who also served as Chief Negotiator. "They won not only for themselves but for the next generation of Equity members. I couldn't be prouder of the members for standing together."

Mont compliments parties on both sides of the table. "I have respect for our employers who went through as tough a period as we did and acknowledged that the workforce we represent is the key factor in what they do," he said. "Though it was difficult for them for a variety of reasons, they came to a deal so that they could get back to work.

The success of this campaign also caught the attention of AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka.

"I couldn't be prouder. President Kate Shindle and every



one of our brothers and sisters at Actors' Equity showed what working people can accomplish when we join together," he said in a statement provided to Actors' Equity. "Their victory speaks to what's happening across the country. Whether we work on a stage, in a classroom or at a factory, our movement is demanding and winning a fair return on our labor."

"When I found out we had won the strike I was absolutely elated," Strasfeld said. "The expediency with which it was resolved also made it evident that new work cannot be fostered without us. To quote Muhammad Ali, 'Me? We!' This required all sides to come together and find something that was a win-win.

"These gains will help current and future members while they are creating new work by allowing them to more fully contribute to the projects as a whole and take greater pride and ownership in their artistic input," he said.

"I hope these gains will give members some peace of mind, knowing that their work in the room is looped into the same pool as the investors," Lanzarone said. "We may not invest money, but we invest blood, sweat, and tears to make these shows happen. When those massive hits happen, our members will be taken care of." 🍷

Above: Volunteer Alan H. Green on the phone. Below: Members of the Huey Lewis musical *The Heart of Rock and Roll* celebrate the end of the strike.



TIME FOR CHANGE: WHAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM MEANS TO EQUITY

BY DOUG STRASSLER

No institution exists in a vacuum. They adjust and grow, responding to changes in the world around them. And Actors' Equity is no exception. Equity celebrated its centennial back in 2013, meaning it is more than a century old. And so is much of the language in the Union's Constitution.

The bottom line is, we're due for an upgrade.

In January, following two years of work by the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC), Equity's National Council recommended some changes to the Constitution that would make it speak more directly to Equity's mission to protect the wages, hours and working conditions of its members and organize new work opportunities for professional stage managers and actors. (The preamble, for example, predates the Wagner Act of 1935 that legally protected the rights of unions to organize.)

This referendum comes as a natural outgrowth of the Equity 2020 campaign to be aggressive, inclusive and responsive. It is the next step in building a stronger union.

"It comes from a desire to update the nature of the Constitution to bring it into the year and the century in which we work," said Ira Mont, Actors' Equity 3rd Vice President and CRC chair.

Foremost among these proposed changes will be a national convention where members from across the country will come together as one to help set union policy. Many of Equity's sister unions have national conventions, which serve as a stage to articulate new ideas and help organize new work.

"I think the idea of adding a convention to the Actors' Equity governance plan is amazing," Mont said. "It is the best system for giving the membership-at-large the biggest voice and the most direct input to a policy-making system that the association has. This is ultimately the most democratic process to accomplish those things. I am very pleased with what we have come up

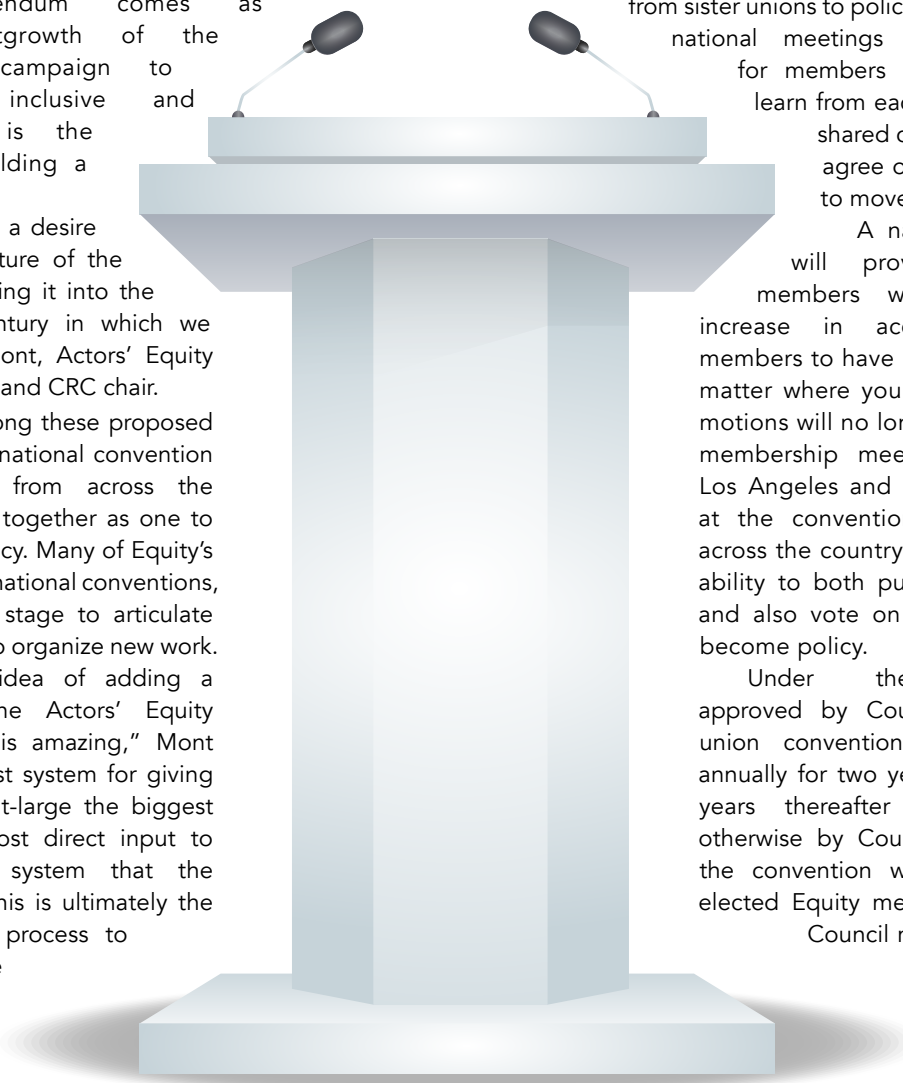
with and very proud of the leadership and staff for asking tough questions to put a plan together."

What will a national convention accomplish? It will provide a stage for the Union to tell its story and for actors and stage managers to come together as an organization regardless of where they live. It will also establish a structure that will further democratize the union's governance process by incorporating voting delegates from office cities and non-office cities alike. It will be an occasion for members to advance strategies in organizing new work opportunities while developing their own leadership capabilities.

"I've seen firsthand how organizations similar to ours use their conventions as forums for ideas," Kate Shindle, President of Actors' Equity, said. "I've seen them use their conventions to build partnerships with allies – from sister unions to policymakers. And these national meetings are opportunities for members to come together, learn from each other, talk about shared challenges and then agree on a common vision to move forward."

A national convention will provide all Equity members with a significant increase in access and allow members to have more of a voice no matter where you live. For example, motions will no longer come through membership meetings in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York. Instead, at the convention, members from across the country will have an equal ability to both put motions forward and also vote on whether they will become policy.

Under the amendments approved by Council, the national union convention will take place annually for two years and every two years thereafter (unless deemed otherwise by Council). Delegates to the convention will consist of 211 elected Equity members: 83 elected Council members, including the officers; 100 elected regional delegates and one





Members volunteered their time to phone bank in advance of the referendum.

delegate elected from each of the 28 Liaison Areas.

Regional delegates are apportioned according to the number of Equity members residing in each region. Each region's members will elect that region's delegates (and each Liaison Area's members will elect that Liaison Area's delegate) in secret ballot elections. The delegates will serve two-year terms. Regional delegates will be apportioned by employment category according to the number of members in each employment category residing in the region.

Between now and the first convention (slated for 2021), membership meetings will take place twice each year in each region, and once a year in each Liaison Area. Any resolutions discussed at membership meetings will need to go through the regular convention resolution process. At the convention, delegates will adopt resolutions that help set union policy, and delegates will have the power to amend the constitution and raise dues.

There is no doubt that these changes are a healthy move forward for Equity. "General Conventions are

the primary governing and legislative bodies of most democratic unions both here in the United States and around the world," said Susan J. Schurman,

Distinguished Professor of Labor Studies and Employment Relations at Rutgers University. Schurman is a leading expert on unions and led

ACTORS' EQUITY CONVENTION AT A GLANCE

A national convention is the highest form of representative democracy in a union. It will allow all members an equal opportunity to have a say in the Union's policy-making, regardless of location.

Equity's convention would include 211 delegates:

- 83 elected Councillors
- 28 specifically elected to represent each Liaison Area
- 100 elected from the 3 regions

During the national convention, delegates can:

- Set a vision for the organization
- Develop more member leaders
- Build partnerships with other unions and like-minded allies
- Talk about shared challenges
- Take up resolutions for new policy

For additional questions about the convention, please email 2020@ActorsEquity.org.

a session on consensus-building during one day of Council's Plenary meeting this past winter. "Delegates to the convention are elected by and accountable to the rank-and-file membership. By choosing to add a convention, Equity members are reaffirming and strengthening their commitment to a democratic union."

CHANGE FROM WITHIN

In addition to the convention, Council has also voted to recommend a historic change to how Council seats are allocated. The amendments establish the creation of nine "at-large" Council seats for Equity members who reside outside the Greater New York, Los Angeles and Chicago metro areas.

"Our union represents over 50,000 members, and nearly half of our members live outside of an office city," Eastern Principal Councillor Lee Osorio said. "I've lived and worked as an actor

"TO BE THE STRONGEST UNION POSSIBLE, WE NEED TO HAVE DIVERSE VOICES AT THE TABLE. THE CONVENTION AND DEDICATED AT-LARGE COUNCILLOR SEATS WILL GIVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO JUST THAT."



— LEE OSORIO, EQUITY COUNCILLOR

in New York, Seattle, Omaha and now I call Atlanta home. To serve our members and be the strongest union possible, we need to have diverse voices at the table. The convention and dedicated at-large Councillor seats will give us the opportunity to do just that."

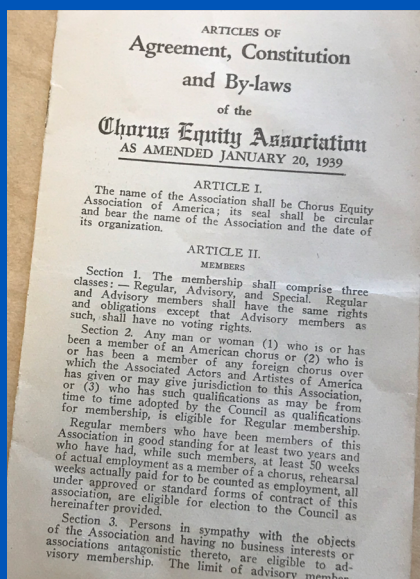
The amendments direct Council to review the number and distribution of at-large seats by the end of 2023

and make adjustments it deems appropriate, by a two-thirds vote.

The at-large seats will be phased in over two election cycles, with five at-large Councillors elected in 2020 and four at-large Councillors elected in 2022, with the overall number of Councillors remaining at 75.

"Since national representation came into effect in the 1990s, there

BUILDING ON THE PAST



Equity itself has gone through multiple changes over the decades. It's time for the Union's Constitution to do the same.

During Equity's 2013 National Plenary, Officers and Councillors met to analyze Equity's governance structure and how to position the union for the best future gains. The resulting amendments to our Constitution and By-Laws changed Equity's elections from an annual to a biennial cycle.

These changes strengthened Council's democratic nature and enhanced what it can do for its members, always the union's number-one priority. Since that seminal meeting, Equity has made an enormous amount of progress and achieved monumental wins. A historic new LORT Contract was ratified, as well as new agreements in the Bay Area, Chicago, Boston and with Disney that include higher wages and additional contracts.

Equity's electeds and staff haven't achieved any of this in

a vacuum, either. Thanks to the tireless work of hundreds of member volunteers, we have grown a new list of theaters in the Liaison Areas that could go Equity and brought more than 30 onto contract. The solidarity of our member volunteers also played a pivotal role in getting millions in more local arts funding in places like San Francisco and Washington, D.C. Most recently, Equity won the lab strike, creating increased salaries, new stage manager triggers and profit participation for members working on developmental labs.

Just like in 2013, the new proposed convention is another example of how the union continues to mobilize its resources and plan for the future. Equity's ability to listen to its members' needs and move with the times is what will keep us #EquityStrong.

has been a slow but steady build to make the regions more impactful for the benefit of the entire Union,” said Peggy Thorp, Central Region Board member and Detroit Liaison member. “Since 40 percent of the Equity membership lives outside an office city, I think it is of utmost importance to hear the voices of those of us in the regions. It can make a very powerful statement for the value of the voices of all Equity members.”

Other changes include added language guaranteeing that at least one Councillor from each employment category is elected in each region. The amendments broaden eligibility for chorus members and stage managers to run for office, making the rules the same for all employment categories.

“Serving on committees like Eastern Developing Theatre, I’ve seen how valuable it is to be able to hear from Atlanta, Boston, Washington, DC, Buffalo and Rochester,” Osorio said. “Regional voices should shape the policies that affect them. I’m so excited that the convention will allow more regional voices to be involved in our governance.”

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Equity’s National Council has also voted for some additional changes, including eliminating the cap on working dues, equalizing the rate for all members. “Eliminating the dues cap is a longtime in coming, and I think that it is an equitable thing to do,” Mont said. “It will provide additional funds to Equity, which will go right back into serving the membership.”

Equity’s National Council has paid careful attention to the Constitution’s language. The preamble has been rewritten to more directly state Equity’s purposes and values to be in accordance with Equity 2020. They have broadened the non-discrimination clause in Article 2, section 12 to include more protected categories – such as age, ancestry, ethnicity, marital status, gender identity and/or expression and military status.

“The original preamble – which is essentially a mission statement – had many wonderful poetic and prudent elements to it,” Mont said, “but it was time for an update. I can’t think of an organization who hasn’t looked at and

CONVENTION FAQ

Q: Who can be a delegate?
A: Any Equity member who is at least 18 years of age and a paid-up member in good standing who meets the regional/Liaison Area and employment qualifications. Members who are in conflict of interest are not eligible to serve.

Q: How long would a delegate serve?
A: Two years. The first delegates elected will attend two conventions. Thereafter, they will need to seek re-election if they want to continue to serve.

Q: When would elections for delegates be held?
A: During the regular Council and Officer elections, starting with 2020. Council will set the policies and procedures for delegate nominations and elections.

updated their mission statement to appropriately guide the association to accomplish the things it wants to in the time in which it exists.”

Not everyone warmed to the ideas proposed in this year’s Plenary meeting immediately. Some had to step back and think over what these changes would bring. “To be honest, I initially struggled with many of the proposed changes to our Constitution,” Western Principal Councillor Kevin McMahon said. “They are big sweeping shifts to the way Equity might work, and I’m not crazy about change. But the more I studied them, the more I saw how they truly bring Equity into a more efficient and streamlined governance structure.

“More importantly, however, is that they finally allow all members, regardless of where they reside, the equal opportunity to participate in the future of our union,” he said. Take the time to really look at these proposals.”

Continued on page 24

REMEMBER TO VOTE!

Ballots were distributed for the referendum during the final week of April. All ballots must be received by 11:59 pm EDT on May 30, 2019. If you need a replacement ballot, please email 2020@ActorsEquity.org during regular business hours. (The deadline to request a replacement paper ballot is noon EDT on May 17 and the deadline to request a replacement electronic ballot is noon EDT on May 30.)

Learn more about the referendum at ActorsEquity.org/2020.



HOW I GOT MY EQUITY CARD

VANESSA COAKLEY

MEMBER SINCE 2009



It was three days before my graduation from Emerson College when I got an offer from the Huntington Theatre Company to get my Equity card as an assistant stage manager on a production of *Fences* directed by Kenny Leon. I was shocked and thrilled.

I had worked at the Huntington as a production assistant the previous season, and had spent vibrant, intense summers training as an intern at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. The Production Stage Manager and the

general management office at the Huntington gave me an immense and unexpected gift so early in my career.

I learned an enormous amount on that show, often in front of everyone. Kenny is famous for making the entire room do push-ups for anyone's transgressions, and due to things like tardiness and not turning my cell phone ringer off, I was more than once the cause. I worried that the Huntington would regret their decision to hire me, or that everyone would think that I had no idea what I was doing. It wasn't until a few days before closing that I finally relaxed.

I've been a proud Equity member since 2009. I am grateful for the wide hammock of support that my Equity peers provide, and for those who continue to work towards setting a higher standard.

LINDA GRIFFIN

MEMBER SINCE 1985



When I graduated with my degree in theatre from California State University, Fullerton in 1982, my husband of four years and I started our own production company, Griffin Productions. We produced business industrials, a full-time cabaret show and various other ventures.

Some years later, we found ourselves as the producers of a 6,800-seat amphitheater in Burbank, producing concerts! We presented "Weird Al" Yankovic, The Gap Band, Evelyn 'Champagne' King, among many others. At the end of that season, our initial funding fell through, and we found ourselves bankrupt and a little broken.

Being back to square one, off I went to my first professional theatre audition at the age of 27. (So old!) The show was the first dinner theater production of *A Chorus Line*, directed by Danny Taylor.

ACL was the first truly professional show that I ever saw as a high school student and thought, "They know! They know what is inside my heart!" At the audition, Danny saw something in this crazy non-union woman, and I was cast in the role of Bebe. The Grand Dinner Theatre in Anaheim had

both union and non-union contracts, and there I was amidst all of these lovely actors who were saying, "Where the heck have you been?" "Off on other adventures" was the answer – but now I felt truly home.

It became Danny's personal mission to get me my Equity card. He felt that it was long overdue and that I would thrive. He knew I had a professional background as a director and producer, so when Linda Talcott left the show to perform in Italy, he asked me to be the new dance captain and thus receive my Equity card. What!? So lucky!! There was never a moment of hesitation.

I had to prove myself to the other Equity members and earn their respect, which I hope I did after my first rehearsal. It was definitely a defining moment for me, and I have always been incredibly grateful to Danny Taylor for believing in me. And just a few years later I ended up sharing the line with Donna McKechnie in the 15th Anniversary National Tour. Full circle!

Thirty-two years later, I am so proud and happy with my union status; I would never have wanted it any other way. My contracts are well-protected and I have the opportunity for medical insurance, a pension and a fairly healthy 401(k). I know, too, that if I were to have any issues while working, I have the union to back me up. For me, becoming Equity meant that I had truly made it as a pro.

THEATRE

SPOTLIGHT

BECK CENTER FOR THE ARTS

For decades, Beck Center for the Arts has provided quality entertainment for residents of Cleveland and the greater northeastern Ohio area. Named by Crain's Cleveland Business as the 11th largest cultural attraction in Cuyahoga County, it was exactly the breath of fresh air artistic director Scott Spence needed.

"I moved from Kansas City in 1989 after getting my MFA in directing," Spence said. "I needed to explore a new vista, and word on the theatre street was that Cleveland, of all places, was experiencing a bit of a rebirth and was in fact a very strong arts city despite the blue-collar nature. I rather stumbled into Beck Center first as an actor and soon after as a guest director, and things snowballed quickly! Sometimes it really is about being in the right place at the right time."

Spence mentioned that this summer's upcoming production of *Matilda the Musical* would mark his 100th production as director at Beck Center. But that isn't the only milestone the Lakewood, Ohio venue can celebrate. This past season marks its first as a full Equity theater.

"We've taken a fairly slow path on the journey from large-scale civic theater to the SPT status we enjoy today," Spence said. "In my 28th season, it felt right to take the next step. And we've already been richly rewarded as audition turnouts have never been greater, and we are, in fact, currently experiencing

some of our finest sales and most critically acclaimed seasons in our history."

Eastern Region member Chris Richards first worked at the Beck Center shortly after completing his undergraduate training. His credits include Carmen Ghia in *The Producers* as well as the shows *My First Time* and *Really Really*. He credits Beck Center's fearlessness as a key reason he has continued to work there.

"Nothing is off limits with them," he said. "Carmen Ghia was so much fun and *Really Really* was a dark piece, but they gave me the track of Cooper, the class clown with an edge. It wasn't a one-note thing. They gave me chances that I would normally not even consider myself for."

"They give you a lot of free reign as an actor to come in and make choices and aren't afraid to do challenging – what I find interesting – work," Richards said. But they still have a good guiding eye. They're also not married to one mission; they mix the classics and contemporary works."

Housing two venues (a 484-seat proscenium and a 96-seat black box), Beck Center allows for the variety and eclecticism that are important in the industry of today. "We recognize the need for variety and eclecticism," Spence said. "We understand that

Continued on page 25

Nicole Sumlin, right, as Billie Holiday in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* (with musical director Ed Ridley as Jimmy Powers).



Photo by Andy Dudik

CLEVELAND

Thanks to Cleveland Liaison Committee Chair Paul Floriano for his contribution!



Ananias Dixon, Natalie Green and Abraham McNeil Adams in the Dobama Theatre production of *An Octoroon*.

WORKING IN THE REGION

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

Equity is a tremendous advantage in our city. Work is sometimes difficult to come by here, as it is everywhere, but when you do work under an Equity Contract or the Members' Project Code, there is a tremendous feeling of security, knowing you will be treated fairly and that you are working with other professionals or semi-professionals.

WHAT IT'S LIKE WORKING IN THE REGION

It is an honor to work in the region, which boasts Playhouse Square (the largest producing arts organization in the nation outside of New York) and the Tony Award-winning Cleveland Play House (the oldest regional theater in the country), as well as such smaller theaters as Dobama Theatre (winner of the 2019 Kathryn V. Lamkey Diversity Award), and our newest Small Professional Theatre, The Beck Center (see "Theatre Spotlight" on p. 18).

WHERE YOU MIGHT BE WORKING

You might be working at any of the aforementioned theaters as well as other exciting venues, including the 50-year-old Equity Theatre, Porthouse Theatre, Ensemble Theatre, None

Too Fragile (the only theater ever to offer free shots of Jameson Irish Whiskey before each performance!) and Karamu House, the nation's oldest African-American theater, which continues to offer an increasing number of Equity contracts.

AROUND TOWN

BEST PLACES TO EAT FOR FOODIES

Where do I start? There are so many great places. Try the Tremont neighborhood, Little Italy or the theatre district at Playhouse Square and you will not be disappointed!

WHAT YOU WON'T FIND ANYWHERE ELSE

The Cleveland Orchestra and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame!

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

In addition to an impressive number of auditions, there is also the Northeast Ohio Performing Arts List, a totally unique newsletter with postings that include local performing arts news and announcements and goes out to over 10,000 local theater geeks, professional and amateur. Be sure to read it – it is free to join.

BEST WAYS TO EXPERIENCE LOCAL COLOR

Walk out your door! We don't call it "The Land" for nothing!

THEATRE NEWS & NOTES

Ann Arbor, MI – **Kickshaw Theatre** finalized terms and bonded as a Transitional SPT Phase Two. They have been producing for a total of four seasons.

Ashland, OR – **Rogue Theatre Company** has signed a Special Appearance agreement.

Bloomington, MN – **Sidekick Theatre** will be moving to a transitional SPT agreement effective immediately.

Boulder, CO – **Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company** is the latest Colorado theater to move to an SPT.

Chicago, IL – Producers of **Djembe the Show** finalized an agreement that will make the show a CAT 6 with three contracts and an open-ended run. If it runs for six months, that will create 78 workweeks for members.

Dallas, TX – **Scott Zeinreich** has signed a Special Appearance agreement.

Fort Worth, TX – **DNAWORKS** has signed a Guest Artist agreement.

Los Angeles, CA – **The Fountain Theatre** signed a seasonal 99-Seat agreement.

Glendora, CA – **Citrus College** has signed a Guest Artist agreement.

Nantucket, MA – **White Heron Theatre Company** has transitioned from an SPT 4 to an SPT 5, and operates as a full Equity company.

Palo Alto, CA – A production of **The Chosen** used a BAT Tier 1 agreement at the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center after having been on a 99-Seat agreement in Los Angeles.

Seattle, WA – **Harlequin Productions** has joined as a new SPT-2 transitional theater.

South Pomfret, VT – **ArtisTree Music Theatre Festival** is now in the second year of their two-year Transitional SPT agreement. This season, they are required to maintain a ratio of First 3+ stage managers and Equity stage managers as required by the SPT. Due to their overlapping schedule, they will have an Equity ASM for the entirety of their season and operate as an SPT-5.

Judith Moreland and Bo Foxworth in *Building the Wall* at Fountain Theatre.



Photo courtesy Ed Krieger

TRACKING WHAT YOU'RE OWED



Dani Cochrane and Michael Lopetrone in *Gruesome Playground Injuries* at Kickshaw Theatre.

Central Region staff recovered **\$7,713** from one theater for both a holiday pay bump and for unused sick and vacation payments.

Central Region staff issued a claim with a CAT venue to pay out **two weeks' salary to contracted actors** for an upcoming production that the theater was delaying due to an extension of another show.

Eastern Region staff made a claim on a SETA tour about an error in an actor's playbill bio, resulting in a **payment of \$119** to the actor.

On a SETA tour, Eastern staff made a claim that a travel call invaded the required overnight rest period by 30 minutes. They succeeded in getting a payment of **\$41 per affected member, totaling \$902**.

Eastern Region staff has resolved a jurisdictional dispute with Disney over the Green Army Patrol at Disney's Hollywood Studios. When the show relaunched at the new Toy Story Land,

the show was re-worked, making the work previously being performed by Character performers (organized by the Teamsters) now clearly Equity's jurisdiction. Disney agreed to recast this show with Equity Chorus contracts, meaning an immediate **increase in salary of over 13% and an estimated 8 new full-time Equity Chorus contracts** employed year-round.

A SETA production filed paperwork with Equity too late to transition an upcoming season from Category 1 to Category 2, requiring the tour to remain on Category 1 for another year. The salary difference between the two category minimums is **\$158 per week, resulting in a difference in minimum salary of \$345,072 for the year**.

Western Region staff recovered more than **\$400 of overtime payments for 11** members.

Western Region staff were able to recoup a total of 19 days of accrued but unpaid vacation for seven actors, **totaling \$2,932**.

Western Region staff reported on a grievance settlement received regarding the pay rate for members due to a term letter provision restricting seating to under 300 to qualify for a certain pay rate. Twelve members received a payment for the violation totaling approximately **\$7,000 and also received back pay, health, pension and dues payments**. Additionally, the company dropped a grievance they had against the union for the cancellation of a show, and they also dropped all claims against a member regarding contract termination issues.

Western Region staff recovered **\$90 for gas reimbursement for a member and a combined \$920 for two members** who were not compensated for doing board ops.

Western Region staff worked with a theater to recover **improperly credited vacation along with pension and working dues** to members that were missing vacation credit.

NEW HARASSMENT HOTLINE LAUNCHED

Everyone should be able to go to their job without being afraid that they will be sexually harassed or bullied. That isn't an unreasonable expectation. That's the law. Harassment can take many forms. It is always wrong and it is never justified.

That's why Actors' Equity has created a new hotline for members to report harassment or bullying. This hotline was created by the President's Committee to Prevent Harassment in tandem with Lighthouse Services. The Committee was formed last year to prevent sexual harassment and workplace hostility in the theatre.

Members can access the hotline by calling 833.550.0030 or by going to ActorsEquity.org/Safety.

The hotline is an additional way to report harassment or bullying in the workplace. If you experience or witness something that makes you uncomfortable or that you think might be harassment, you can also call your Equity business rep. If you don't know who your business rep is, you can visit the directory on the inside cover of this magazine or ask your deputy.

The Actors Fund also offers Equity members a free, safe and confidential place to receive advice and support regarding harassment and other workplace issues. If you don't reside near one of the Fund's office locations, call the Fund's toll-free number (800.221.7303) and someone will provide counsel over the phone or assist you in finding a counselor in your community.

CONFIDENTIAL, FREE & SAFE HOTLINE FOR MEMBERS

Members can report harassment by calling the hotline at 833.550.0030 or by visiting ActorsEquity.org/Safety.

KEITH SKLAR TAKES THE (RAKED) STAGE

In January 2019, Chief Outside Business Representative Keith Sklar was recognized for his contributions in the creation of an ANSI standard regarding the use of raked stages in the entertainment industry. This standard addresses members' safe and sanitary concerns when working on raked stages. The Technical Standards Program (TSP) at the Entertainment Services and Technology Association (ESTA) presented him with one of their 2018 Above and Beyond Awards.

These peer-to-peer awards allow volunteers to recognize other volunteers. Sklar was honored as part of the Floors Working Group, who was cited for developing ANSI E1.60, Guidelines for the Use of Raked Stages in Live Performance Environments.

"Sklar went above and beyond to bring years of experience and knowledge to the creation of a standards document that will help protect performers and technicians working on raked stages,"

according to ESTA. "Sklar's willingness to jump into the world of drafting technical standards concurrent with his role as a Business Representative at Actors' Equity Association is exemplary."

Sklar became active with ESTA's technical standards program shortly after joining twenty years ago on behalf of Equity. "We became more active because we found that ESTA was the organization that could make the industry look at their safe and sanitary conditions."

Raked stages – those which typically feature performers on an incline upwards away from the audience – have been around practically forever but have always provided some cause for concern. "They've been utilized in shows since Shakespeare, but we never knew how to tackle them," Sklar said.

Sklar joined a small task force that met on a weekly basis for months and drafted a standard for raked stages, based on their shared experiences. While one colleague focused on how

technicians should deal with raked stages, Sklar offered his input on what steps needed to take place with actors to avoid risk. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) approved and published the team's document, which Sklar views as a proactive safety measure, since "there are many raked stages out there."

Was Sklar surprised by the Above and Beyond Award? "I totally did not see that coming," he said. "It was a busy conference week and not on my radar at all. But ESTA members felt this was well-deserved because of the amount of time we spent getting this done." All told, the entire task group was honored with awards for their work.

Sklar feels proud of the progress the task group has made for the entire industry. "In the beginning, we said, 'How do we make raked stages safer?'" he said. "And now there is a standard. We have found a way to address raked stages."

MAJOR WINS AT WESTCHESTER BROADWAY NEGOTIATION

Actors' Equity's recent negotiation at Westchester Broadway Theatre yielded several important wins.

The team, which was chaired by Central Chorus Councillor Ariane Dolan, Chair of the National Dinner Theatre Committee, and also included Eastern Stage Manager Councillor Marjorie Horne, Eastern Region member Kilty Reidy, Central Regional Board member Richard Strimer and Eastern Principal Councillor Allyson Tucker, conducted negotiations at the Elmsford, New York venue. Business Representative Gary Dimon was the chief negotiator, with assistance from Contract Associate Kylie Kirk.

Minimum salary increases

amounted to 10.3 percent over the four-year agreement. The noteworthy wins also included two full swings – one male, one female – for each show in the theatre's five-production season; percentage increases for both dance captains and fight captains and adjustments to all chorus parts and understudy payments from dollar increments to percentages.

The team was also able to achieve an increase in stage manager pre-production from three days to seven days. Assistant stage managers were previously at the same minimum salary as actors, but the team successfully negotiated their salary to five percent more than the actors' salary for the first

two years and to ten percent in the third year.

The team also introduced the concept of a replacement or rehearsal stage manager to accommodate Westchester Broadway's overlapping schedules and restricted rehearsal time. They also had the opportunity to review the safe and sanitary conditions at Westchester Broadway's backstage areas and were able to achieve all standard language changes from cross-contractual committees.

"We had a great team, and achieving swings, which was number one on the member surveys (along with salaries, as always), will be of great help to our members," Dolan said.

LYNN RHINEHART TO SERVE AS EQUITY'S SPECIAL COUNSEL

Actors' Equity welcomed Lynn Rhinehart as its new Special Counsel this spring. For nearly a decade, Rhinehart served as General Counsel for the AFL-CIO, becoming the first woman to serve in that capacity. She joined the AFL-CIO Legal Department in 1996. Rhinehart, who has represented the AFL-CIO before Congress, Courts and Federal agencies, is a leading national expert in union-side labor law. Cohen, Weiss & Simon LLP will remain Outside Legal Counsel to Equity.

"Lynn's unsurpassed experience will help our leadership team as we move forward with the Equity 2020 mission to build a union that is more aggressive, inclusive and responsive," said Mary McColl, Executive Director of Actors' Equity Association. "Lynn will provide invaluable guidance to Equity

as we represent all 51,000 Equity members across the country."

Rhinehart received her Juris Doctor from Georgetown University. She currently serves on the advisory board of Harvard Law School's Clean Slate Project, which is dedicated to making recommendations to reform labor law, and on the board of the National Employment Law Project. Rhinehart is also a Senior Fellow at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., with a focus on unions and collective bargaining.

"With Equity members organizing stronger contracts in greater numbers than ever before, this is an exciting time to join Actors' Equity and I'm thrilled to be a part of the drive to create a stronger union," said Rhinehart.



Lynn Rhinehart, Equity's new Special Counsel.

The complete set of changes, including the updated Constitutional language, was posted in the member portal in early April. They can be found at ActorsEquity.org/2020. An online webinar was held for members in early May, and members who still have questions can email 2020@ActorsEquity.org.

Mont also believes that everyone benefits from the proposed changes. "Sometimes change is good when it is being done for the right reason," he said. "Members need to remember that the Council is them – it is made up of working members just like the members-at-large who will be

voting in this referendum. Everything in the document will result in the betterment of the association for all members. Everyone's representation is going to be improved by the changes in this referendum."

Osorio agrees that the referendum's proposals will strengthen the representation of the entire union. "I'm so proud that we've taken these first steps to make our union stronger and more inclusive," he said. "It's important we hear from members that live across the country as we decide the future of our union. I can't wait to see what exciting ideas come out of our first national convention!" 🇺🇸

WHAT HAS TWO YEARS OF EQUITY 2020 ACCOMPLISHED?

Many of the changes recommended in the referendum – rightly so – are about looking forward. But April marked two years since the introduction of Equity 2020. It's a natural time to look back at what has been accomplished so far.

As part of Equity 2020, the Union has committed to building a modern and strategic organizing program and that work is starting to bear fruit. Consider the following examples:

- Equity members have mobilized to win millions of dollars of additional local public arts funding in Washington, D.C. (See "A Boon For the Arts," *Equity News*, Summer 2018) and San Francisco (See "Proposition E: Major Victory for Arts Activism," *Equity News*, Autumn 2018). Equity members joined sister unions in Missouri to defeat a Right to Work for Less Law that would have been bad for all workers.
- After members voted to approve a new dues structure in 2017, Equity hired a new organizer dedicated to the Liaison Areas. Through the new Acting Locally campaign, members have cultivated theaters that could be potential candidates to go Equity – and so far more than 30 have been brought onto contract.
- The new organizing program has helped achieve stronger regional contracts from the Bay Area to Boston. Renegotiated in 2018, the New England Area Theatres (NEAT) contract included a 28 percent increase in minimum salaries. The Bay Area Theatre (BAT) contract, also renegotiated in 2018, included raises up to 37 percent. Work weeks per member in the Liaison Areas are up 8 percent in the most recent theatre season (See "2019 Regional Theatre Report: Equity's Continuing Quest to Create More Work," *Equity News*, Winter 2019).
- The organizing program has also helped make gains for members in office cities. The successful lab strike will mean higher wages and profit participation for members who help develop new work on Broadway. (See "Knowing Your Worth," p. 8). And the new CAT contract in Chicago includes raises up to 43 percent.

There have been other gains as well. Equity members mobilized to let Congress know last fall that Equity's pension system is fully funded, and Congress should keep its hands off the Equity-League pension fund. The public Actors' Equity website has been revamped. Communications and member education have been strengthened with more video outreach, including contract webinars (See "Equity Launches Webinar Series to Educate Members on New Agreements," *Equity News*, Winter 2019).

to our economic infrastructure,” he said. “We wouldn’t have sleekly designed cars without an artist designing them, no extravagant architectural wonders would grace our cities, no music or dance to help kids with their communication skills and to help educate the kids in our schools and no theatrical masterpieces to reflect the human spirit and evoke joy and hope.”

Mont noted that the attendees’ other key lobbying pitch was the Qualified Performing Artist (QPA) provision of the tax bill. “Our meetings were very good, with Democrats and Republicans alike,” he said. “The staffers we met were very receptive. I have great faith and optimism. It’s a very busy day you do a lot of walking!”

Maloney was able to discuss the matter in a meeting with Ohio Senator Rob Portman. “I thanked him for not getting rid of the multiemployer pension, because it affects actors,” he said. “I got to hand him information on tax reform for independent artist tax deduction on behalf of the union. It was a really incredible experience to be able to give him that.”

Another incredible experience, according to Maloney? Witnessing EGOT winner (and proud Equity member) Rita



From left: Brandon Lorenz, Molly Norris, Sarah LaBarr, Karen E. Howell, Andrew Maloney, Roy A. Gross and Melissa Robinette at the National Arts Action Summit.

Moreno give the Nancy Hanks Lecture on the first night of the meeting. (Eastern Region member Brian Stokes Mitchell also gave an address.) “She was introduced by Justice Sonya Sotomayor,” Maloney said. “It was really inspiring to hear Moreno speak about how the arts matter.”

Norris agreed that attending Arts Advocacy Day was not only an honor but a worthwhile learning experience. “I went into my meetings with my reps’ staffers alone; this was nerve-wracking,

but at the same time, having one-on-one conversations about the way that arts funding impacts me personally, as well as the economy of my region, was fulfilling and impactful,” they said.

“Not only was I afforded the opportunity to lobby on behalf of my state, but I also developed lovely connections with Equity members from around the country – being a rurally-located member, that is a rare treat. It was hard but fun, fulfilling work, and I’d do it again in a heartbeat.” 🙌

in today’s market audiences are less and less inclined to want to commit to seven or eight shows, so we embrace the variety and throw a lot of different types of theatre their way. They know that they can choose to embrace it as a whole if that’s what they want... but we also pride ourselves in creating literally ‘any’ mini-subscriptions that they’d like to create.”

Talk to anyone who has ever worked with the Beck Center, and a common refrain pops up: their respect for the community. “There’s very much a sense of community and a loyal following among audience members and actors who have worked there many times,” Central Region member Ursula Cataan, who appeared in *Shining City* at the Beck Center, said, as did Richards and Central Region member Heidi Harris.

Both Spence (“I’m now directing

kids of actors I previously directed. It’s the joy of longevity, I guess!”) and Harris also refer to Beck Center as a family. “From the box office staff, to the creative team, to the folks who keep the facilities running,” Harris said, “Beck is a place where I always feel valued.

“One of my favorite experiences working at Beck was when we had a talkback session after a performance of *A Great Wilderness*,” Harris said. “We had representatives from the Cleveland LGBTQ community there, as well as an individual who had actually experienced gay conversion therapy. That talkback spurred conversation that moved some folks out of their comfort zones...which is exactly the kind of theatre that can help change the world for the better. I was truly proud to be a part of that production.”

“I think the people are what I like most about working at Beck Center,”



Andrew Gorell, left, and Geoff Knox in the production *Bent*.

Harris said. You won’t find anyone putting on airs or having an enormous ego. No pretension. They love to make great theatre, and that’s what they do!” 🙌

KATHY AWARDS CELEBRATE DIVERSITY



Cheryl Lynn Bruce accepts her Kathy Award.

On March 11, 2019, Actors' Equity awarded four recipients with its Kathryn V. Lamkey ("Kathy") Awards during the annual Spirit: A Celebration of Diversity event. This honor takes place in Chicago and is presented by Equity's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Committee in collaboration with Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

The Kathy, named for former Central Regional Director Kathryn V. Lamkey, recognizes theatre companies, individuals, producers and organizations that provide ongoing opportunities for underrepresented members in the Central Region. This year's event was hosted by Wydetta Carter, James Holbrook and Robert Schleifer.

The four recipients included three institutions, one of which was 16th Street Theater in Berwyn, Illinois, which was created in 2007 with a focus on the playwright and giving voice to the community. "And they are proud to be Illinois' most affordable and inclusive Equity venue," Mark David Kaplan, a Central Region and EEO committee member who helped plan the event, said.

Another was Cleveland's Dobama Theatre, which was originally founded in 1959 with the intent of producing plays of consequence not previously offered in the area. As of the 2014-15 season, it was the Liaison Area's only full time Small Professional Theatre.

The third theater to be recognized at this year's Spirit festivities was the Coterie Theatre of Kansas City. "For 40 years, the Coterie Theatre has continued to challenge audiences,

provide educational outreach programs, and open lines of communication between races and generations," Kaplan said. "They recently marked the milestone of serving over 100,000 students and families in a single season."

The Kathy Awards also recognized one individual: Chicago-based director/actor/playwright Cheryl Lynn Bruce. "Cheryl Lynn has spent her career developing works that highlight the underrepresented individual," Kaplan said. "Besides being an award-winning storyteller and activist, Cheryl Lynn is a founding Chair of our Central Region EEO Committee and – with E. Faye Butler – helped to create the Spirit Celebration in its earliest inception."

Butler felt that the evening not only succeeded in its mission of celebrating diversity and allowing underrepresented members to network but exceeded it. "It gets better and better every year," she said, and emphasized the storytelling role food played in the celebration. "This started out as a social event just to lift one another's spirits. We used to do our own baking, so we baked desserts that would represent cities from all over the region. We also had heavy hors d'oeuvres that were ethnically diverse – pan pizzas, empanadas, street tacos, sushi, an international mix of food from around the world."

The Spirit celebration was catered by The Hearty Boys, a company that includes actors and Equity members like co-founder Steve McDonagh and has its own show on the Food Network. "We try to incorporate or union members any way we can," Butler said.

ERIC LAJUAN SUMMERS FAMILY TO ALL

At the beginning of every Equity Council meeting, our Executive Director reads a list of those members who have passed away in the preceding month. Each name read is a deep loss to our community. Each name read is a scene partner, stage manager, dance partner of many of our surviving members. Those of us who make a life in the theatre, form a family with those whom we share the stage. And losing a family member is never easy.

On April 9, 2019, we lost Eric LaJuan Summers just a few days before his 37th birthday. Eric was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in 2017. After two bone marrow transplants and two remissions, Eric lost his battle with cancer.

Eric grew up in St. Louis in a very big family. When, at 17 years old, he got a chance to audition for the American Musical and Dramatic Academy, his family could not afford the plane ticket to New York City. News spread. A friend of the family told him and his mother to go to the airport. They found two first class tickets to NYC waiting for them. Eric never found out who this anonymous donor was, but he never let his luck and good fortune go to waste.

At the age of 21 he was cast as Mereb in the Broadway production of *Aida*. He would go on to be cast in five more Broadway musicals, including *Motown the Musical* (for which he received the



Eric LaJuan Summers

2013 Astaire Award) and *Kinky Boots*. He also performed in theaters all over the country. Numerous friends speak of him being "the best James Thunder Early (in *Dreamgirls*) you've ever seen!"

It was during his time at *Kinky Boots* that Eric was diagnosed. And his theatre family came out in full support. Producer Daryl Roth flew Eric's family in from St. Louis. Billy Porter and the *Kinky Boots* company put on a benefit concert to help with Eric's medical bills. As Dana Ianuzzi, an Equity member and great friend of Eric's, said, "Actors are often seen as cutthroat, but Eric's friends are proof that that is far from true."

A few weeks before his passing, Equity member Gina Milo went over to Eric's apartment to help him pick out a "fancy cane." He was determined to go

to the closing night party for *Kinky Boots*, so he had ordered a few canes online to help him walk. He entered the hospital for the last time a few days later.

He didn't make it to the party for *Kinky Boots*, but the party came to his hospital room. Friends from all over the country came to see Eric. Dana and Gina spoke of the famous theatre names that poured through his door. Both Eric's biological family and theatre family were at his side during his final days.

"Most people will talk about how funny Eric was, or how he was like a blazing comet onstage, all of which is true. But what I remember most is how thoughtful and sensitive he was as a friend and colleague" says David Goldsmith, lyricist and script consultant for Motown. Valerie Lau-Kee Lai, former Equity stage manager and current producing director at Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS was Eric's friend and landlord. She spoke of the void that Eric's passing has brought on, saying that Eric "didn't just exist in a song or a show, but in all the people that unite around him."

A life in the theatre is rarely as glamorous as the outside world believes. But the life of Eric LaJuan Summers is proof of the full, artful and meaningful lives we are lucky enough to live. Rest in Peace, Eric.

-Todd Buonopane, Equity Councillor

IN MEMORIAM

Reported February 1, 2019 to March 31, 2019

*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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GUY ALE
JENNIFER ANDREWS
DAVID BEAIRD
ROBERT BECTON
KATHLEEN BISHOP
BRAD BLAISDELL
CAROL BOARDMAN
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PAMELA M DANSER
MARCELINE DECKER
MARTA DU BOIS
JOANNE M DUNN

AL FANN
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GRENOLDO FRAZIER
SANDY FREEMAN
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KATHERINE MARIE HELMOND
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MICHAEL HOLMES
HOWARD HUSTON
DONALD ILKO
RODNEY KAGEYAMA

JOAN KAYE
PHIL KELLEY
TIMOTHY LEWIS
EETA LINDEN
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NEIL LYONS
MARGO MC ELROY
CAMILLE MC GRATH
RITA MC NALLY
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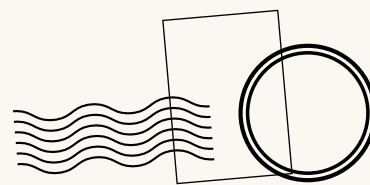
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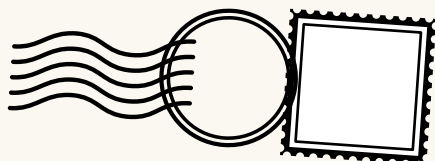
SAN FRANCISCO

The 43rd Annual San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle (SFBATCC) Excellence in Theatre Awards Gala took place at the historic Mission District's Victoria Theatre in March. Awards in most disciplines went to productions in three size categories: theaters with fewer than 100 seats, theaters with 100-300 seats and theaters with more than 300 seats. Local theatre writer Richard Connema, received the Gene Price Award as "a person who embodies superlative professionalism and passion for Bay Area theatre." Meredith Hagedorn, Executive Artistic Director of Dragon Theatre in Redwood City, received the Jerry Friedman Lifetime Achievement Award as "an individual who has furthered creativity and growth in Bay Area theatre throughout her career."



BALTIMORE/ WASHINGTON, D.C.

Members in the Capitol gathered on Monday, April 29 to discuss the referendum and how the exciting changes will directly impact Liaison Area members. Everyone who showed up walked away informed and ready to vote yes!



KANSAS CITY

Equity members participated in the 31st annual AIDS Walk Kansas City on Saturday, April 27. Members walked, were route leaders and worked a special Actors' Equity table. "Kansas City Equity members were proud to join an estimated 2,500 participants, along with Kansas Congresswoman Sharice Davids and Kansas City Mayor Sly James," Kansas City Liaison Chair Sarah LaBarr said. "To date, they have raised more than \$1,400!"

