ACTORS' EQUITY
ASSOCIATION 1913

2020 - 2021

Theatrical Season Report

By Joey Stamp

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INTRODUCTION

Never in the history of our union has there been a theatrical season like 2020-2021. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected nearly every industry in this nation; the American theatre industry, more than any other.

If I had to pick a single word to define the season, it would be: Unprecedented.

Before this pandemic, the longest that the entirety of Broadway suspended performances was following 9/11, when every venue closed for two days. This pandemic darkened Broadway houses and nearly every other theatre in the country for 18 months. A sea of ghost lights kept watch over our stages as we waited, hopeful for the day we could get back to work.

Since the first production at the Theatre of Dionysus, under the shadow the Acropolis in Athens, performers knew that no matter what happened, the performance must continue. Shakespeare may have been the first to write the phrase *in Henry IV, Part 1, 2.4*: "Play out the play." Yet this past season, Equity faced an existential crisis that challenged this core philosophy of theatrical work. From that crisis, a collective decision was made that fundamentally altered this philosophy: the show must not go on if the very lives of our casts and crews are at stake.

Now that science has given us safe vaccines and boosters, while COVID-19 can still spread, the risk it poses is severely reduced to those vaccinated. In September of 2021, Broadway and many other theatres turned their lights back on and opened their doors again. While the Omicron variant shows that we still need to be on our guard, science is giving theatre a glimmer of assurance that we might not need to darken our stages once again. Live theatre can still be a shining beacon of hope at the end of the dark tunnel that has been the pandemic.

It's important to remind readers that every data point you will see in this report represents a human; when work stops for so many members, that's thousands upon thousands of stories about careers put on hold, auditions canceled, tours ended, unemployment claims filed, stages darkened and audiences left without the joy of theatre.

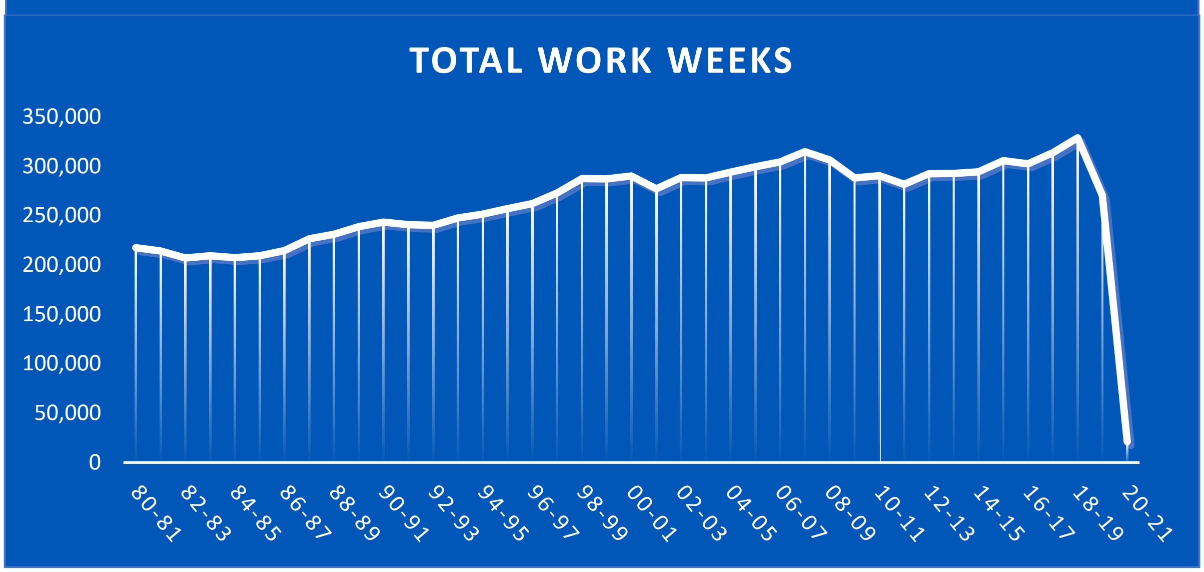
While we may never fully summarize what was lost, this report will try to analyze the work that did occur during the 2020-2021 theatrical season.

-Joey Stamp

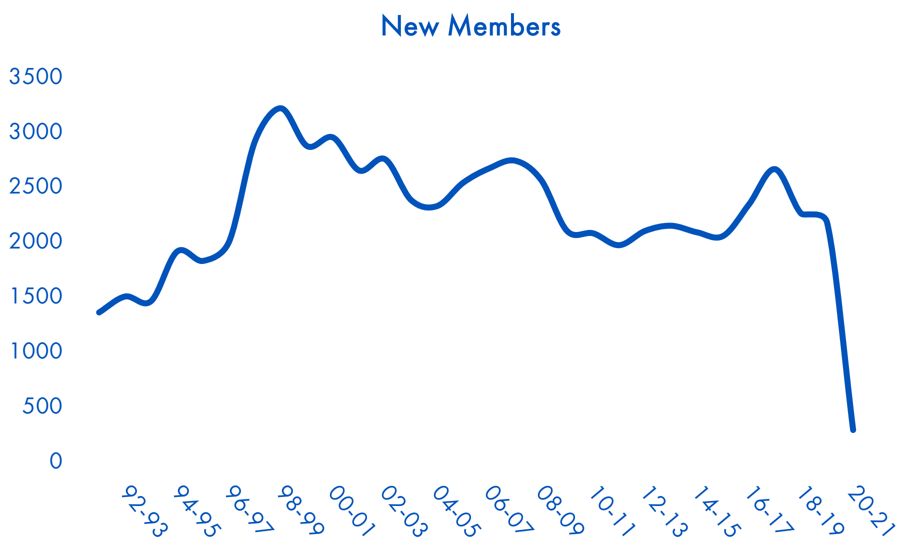
A YEAR IN REVIEW

The theatrical season, which is the time frame this report analyzes, runs from June 1 to the following May 31. Searching through past annual reports to find a season comparable to 2020-2021 led me to data going back 40 years to the 1980-1981 season, where the total member earnings were around $84 million dollars with 215,110 works weeks. Nothing from then, until now, compares to the 2020-2021 theatrical season.

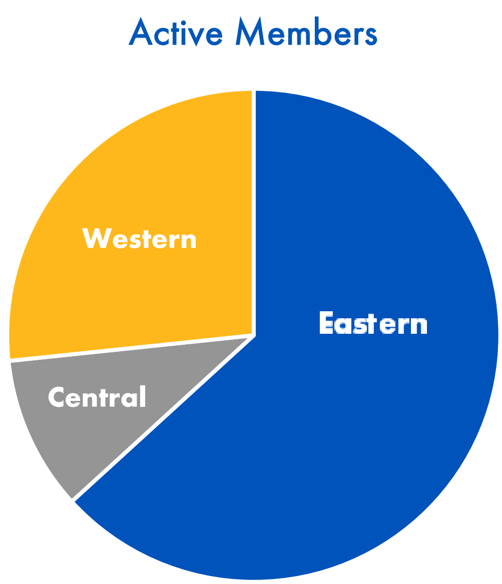
In the 2020-2021 season, members generated 21,154 work weeks, which represents in $15,282,469 in earnings, a 92% drop in work weeks and a 96% drop in earnings compared to the 2019-2020 season.



Each year Actors' Equity Association adds new members to its rolls. Prior to the 2020-2021 season, Equity added, on average, 2,297 new members year over year. In the 2020-2021 Season, Equity added only 239 new members, an 87% drop compared to the previous season.



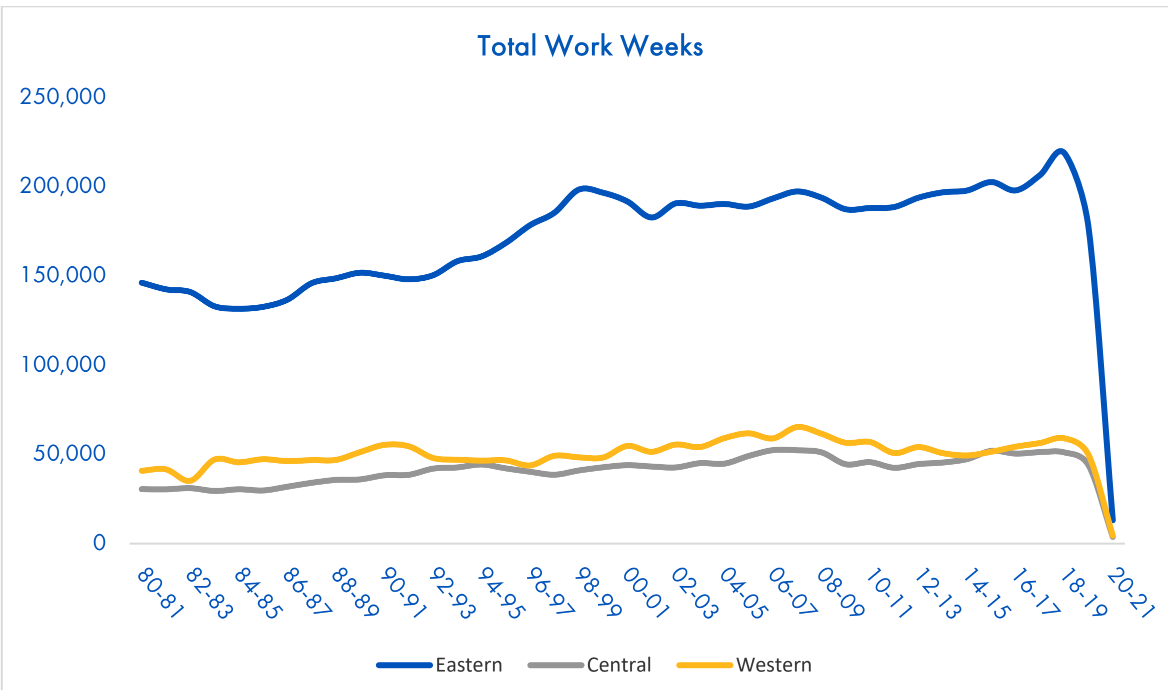
A member with outstanding dues is still considered active and represented by the union. However, the member is prohibited from participating in certain Association functions until the dues obligation is satisfied. Looking at active membership by region for this season, the Eastern Region held 63% of all active members within the union. The Western Region had the next largest share with 27% of active members, and the Central Region rounded out the remainder with 10% of active members.



WORK WEEKS

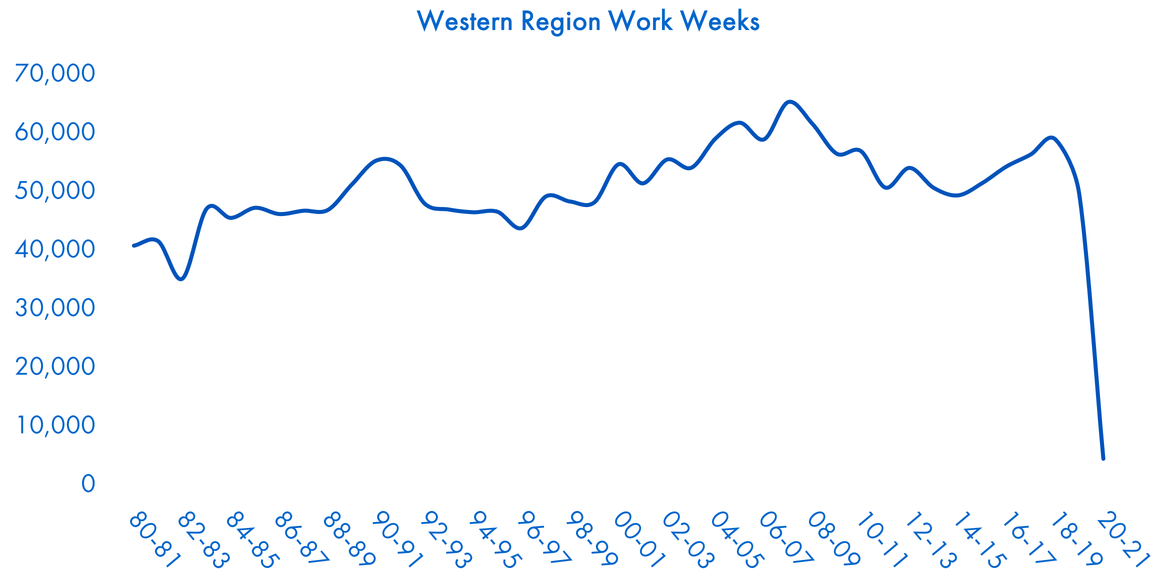
Work weeks are among the oldest and most important metrics that Actors' Equity Association uses to measure the work that happens for its membership. We have historical work week data in our records going back to the 1948-1949 season! Fun fact: *Death of a Salesman* went on to win the Tony Award for Best Play and *Kiss Me, Kate* won the first ever Best Musical Tony that season.

A work week is simply defined as work that happened in a given week. A member doesn't need to work a whole week to have the work counted as a single work week and, given the unique transient nature of theatrical work, this definition makes sense.

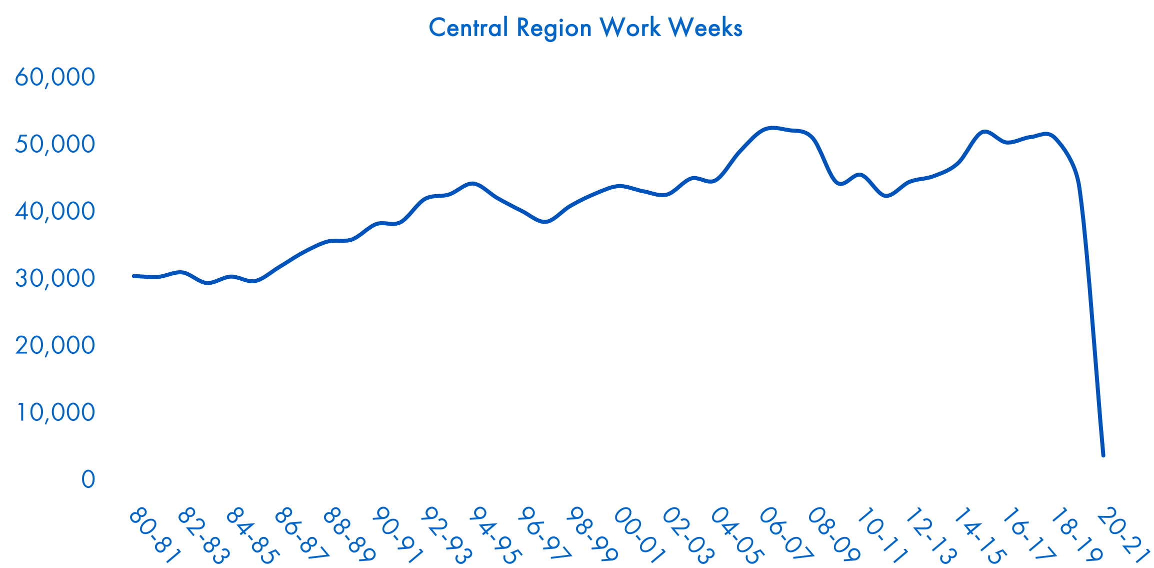


This chart illustrates how work weeks have played out across our three major regions for the past 40 years. While the Eastern Region lost the most work weeks, comparatively all regions lost work weeks at similar rates, ranging between 91% to 93%.

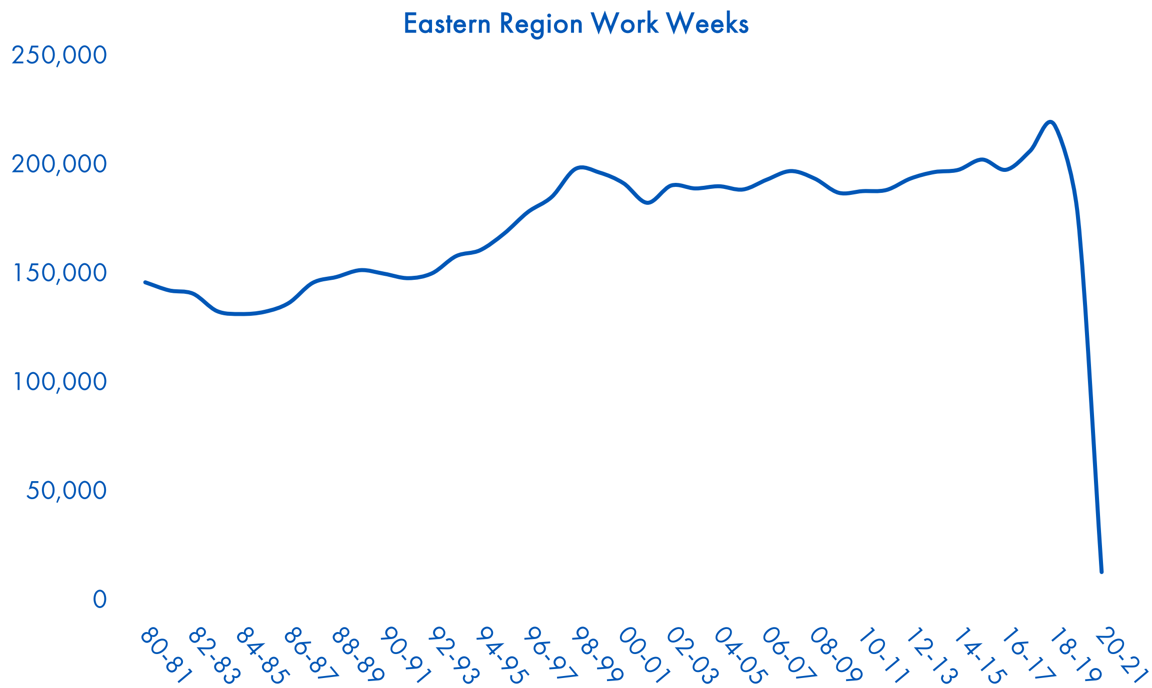
Looking at just the Western Region, in the 2019-2020 season, members worked a cumulative amount of 49,682 work weeks. In the 2020-2021 season, members worked 4,420 work weeks, a drop of 91% year over year.



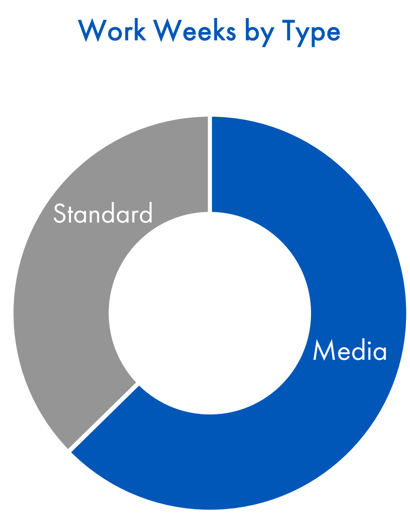
Shifting to the Central Region, in the 2019-2020 season, members worked a cumulative amount of 43,875 work weeks. In the 2020-2021 season, members worked 3,710 work weeks, which is a drop of 92% year over year.



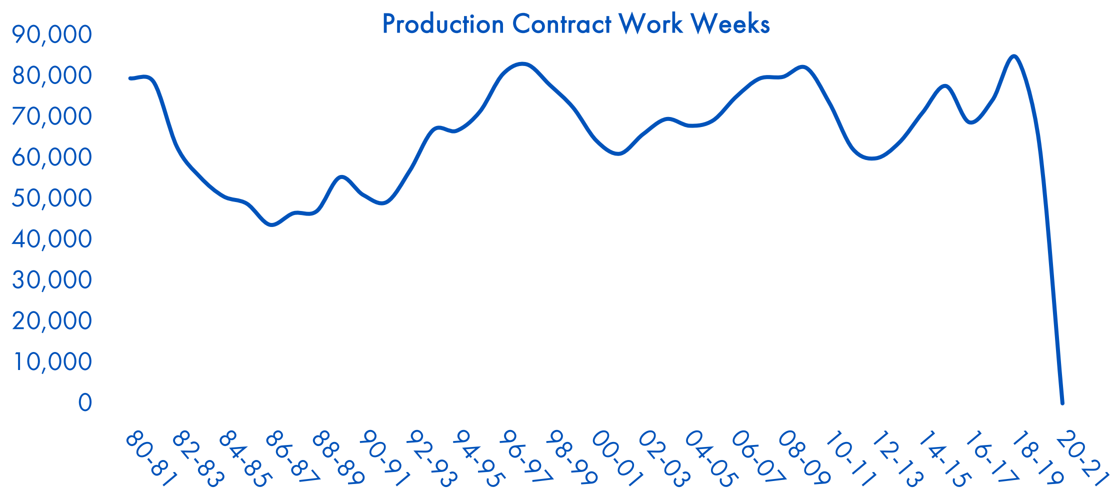
Lastly, we turn to the Eastern Region. In the 2019-2020 season, members worked a cumulative amount of 177,003 work weeks, which was the lowest amount of work weeks this region had reported in over 20 years, primarily due to the pandemic shutting down all of Broadway on March 12th of that season. In the 2020-2021 season, members worked 13,024 work weeks, which is a drop of 93% year over year.



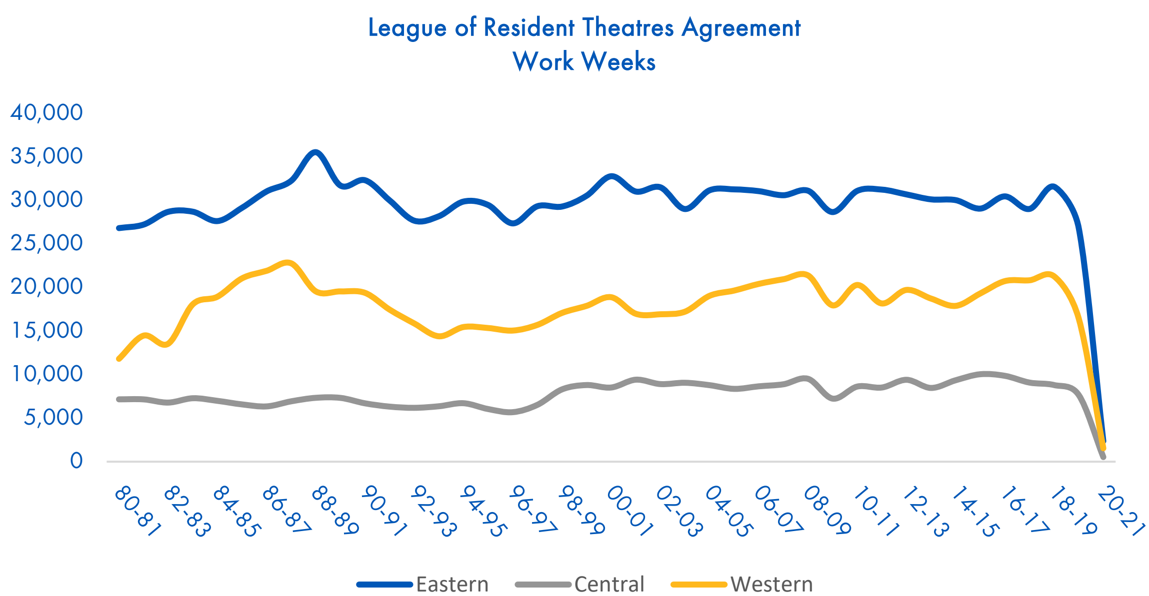
The pandemic shifted many things into the digital world, and the live theatre was not spared from this transformation. Equity dramatically revamped Media Agreements this past season to accommodate streaming theatrical work on scales previously unavailable to our producing partners. As a result, 63% of work weeks were from Media Agreements, whereas 37% of work weeks were in-person work. It's important to remember that, for a time during this season, Media Agreements were almost the only way for members to work in the industry.



First negotiated in 1919, the Production Contract is one of the oldest agreements that Equity administers, covering work produced by the Broadway League: sit-down productions on Broadway and elsewhere in the United States, along with national and international tours. Over the last ten years, the Production Contract averaged around 70,000 work weeks a year, and in the 2018-2019 season, this contract peaked at an all-time high of 84,741 work weeks. In the 2020-2021 season, the Production Contract netted a total of 65 work weeks, arguably the lowest number of work weeks in the100 year history of the Agreement. In large part, the 65 work weeks were generated due to media recording work done for *Diana: A New Musical*.



The League of Resident Theatres (LORT) Agreement is normally the next largest generator of work weeks, averaging around 58,000 work weeks a year over the last ten years. This theatrical season, each region saw a drop of over 91% in work weeks on this contract. After an all-time high of 61,627 work weeks in 2018-2019, the LORT Agreement only generated 4,433 work weeks in the 2020-2021 season; 79% of these work weeks were from Media Agreements.



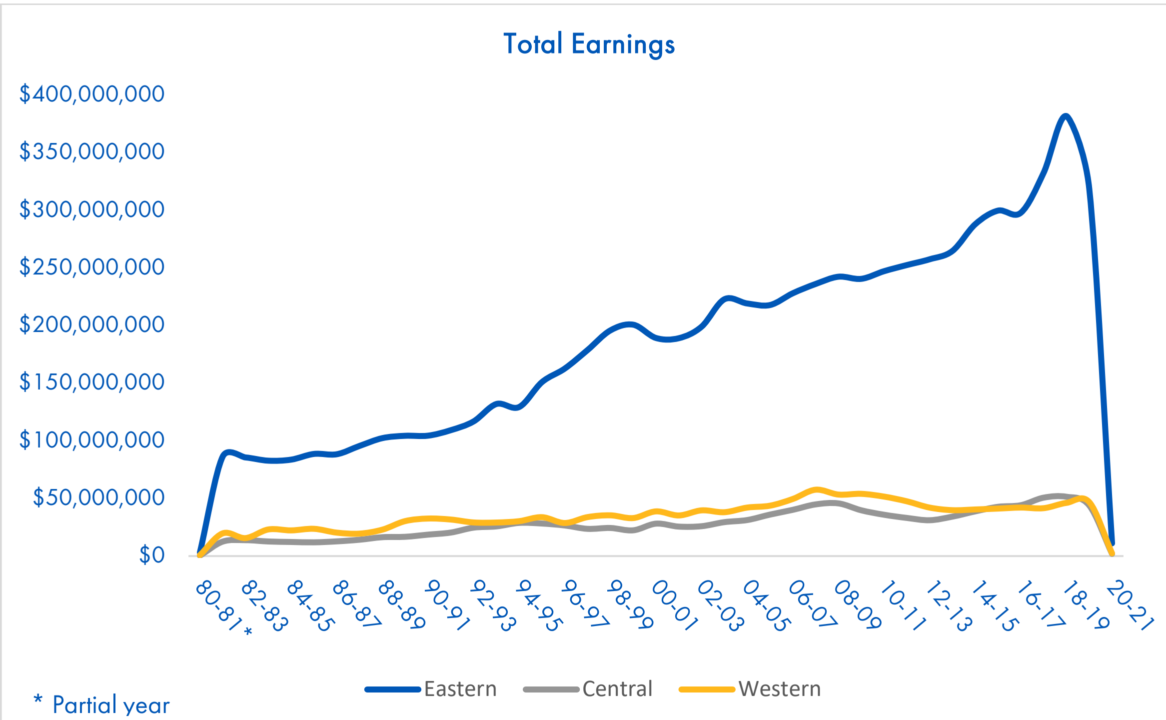
The table below illustrates a complete picture of all work weeks from the 2020-2021 season, by contract and region. There are 13 agreements not on this table because they produced zero work weeks this season. They range from national agreements like the Production Touring Agreement and Short Engagement Touring Agreement (SETA) to regional agreements such as New Orleans Area (NOLA), Western Civic Light Opera (WCLO). The breadth of contracts affected demonstrates how far reaching the impact of the pandemic is on our industry. No agreement, big or small, was left unscathed.

	Eastern	Central	Western	Total
Production	65			65
Point of Organization	65			65
Developmental Agreement	609			609
Resident Theatre (LORT)	2,354	529	1,550	4,433
LORT Rep	94	50	508	652
LORT Non-Rep	2,260	479	1,042	3,781
Small Professional Theatre	1,959	1,188	1,182	4,329
Letter of Agreement	781	561	569	1,911
COST	29			29
Special Agreements	76	422	144	642
Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA)	307	38	98	443
Guest Artist	311	88	34	433
Special Appearance	259	47	127	433
University Theatre (URTA)	475	61	132	668
Dinner Theatre		56	17	73
Casino			35	35
Special Production	67			67
Business Theatre and Events	283	25	19	327
Staged Reading	60			60
Off-Broadway (NYC)	316			316
NYC/LOA	940			940
Mini (NYC)	23			23
Transition	4			4
New England Area Theatre (NEAT)	201			201
Disney World	3,837			3,837
Orlando Area Theatre (OAT)	6			6
Chicago Area (CAT)		695		695
San Francisco Bay Area (BAT)			300	300
Modified Bay Area Theatre (MBAT)			56	56
99 Seat Agreement			157	157
TOTAL	12,962	3,710	4,420	21,092

EARNINGS

Earnings in this report examine the total dollar amount that members earn in a given theatrical season. This annual report reviews 40 years of data, a first. During the transition from the 80-81 season to the 81-82 season, Equity changed the time frame in which it looked at its earnings data, from calendar year to theatrical year, so most of our data for that season is partial.

Looking at earnings over the last 40 years, we can see that the most significant earnings growth has occurred within the Eastern Region. Therefore, the East fell the furthest in the 20-21 season, dropping from an all-time high of nearly $400 million in the 18-19 season to a mere $11 million in the most recent season, representing a 97% drop in earnings.

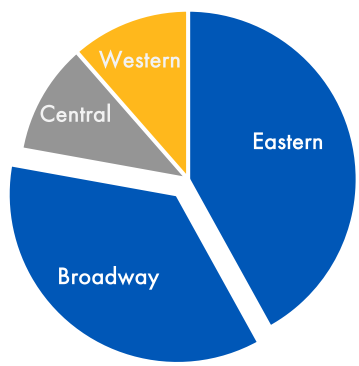


The Central and Western regions illustrate resilience and growth over the past 40 years. The Central Region grew from $12 million in earnings in the 81-82 season to an all-time high of $51 million in the 18-19 season. During the 20-21 season, it only saw $1.9 million in earnings.

The Western Region has a slightly different story than the other two regions. Rather than a peak in the 18-19 season, the West reached its all-time high earnings during the 07-08 season, netting nearly $57 million in earnings. Following the 2008 recession the West has faced a longer road to recovery, and still has not come close to its previous peak. In the 20-21 season, this region only saw $2.3 million in earnings.

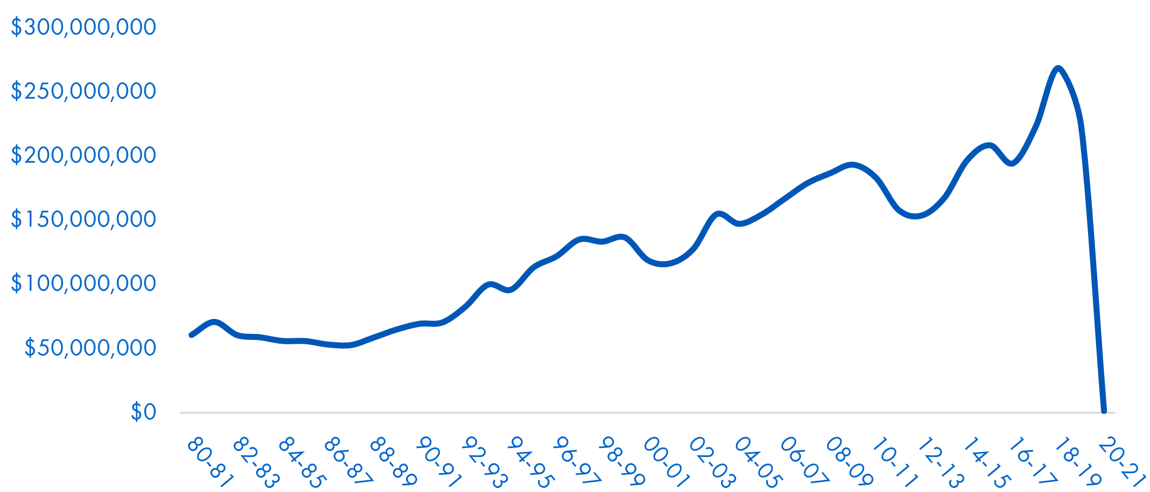
The Production Contract has historically been the contract that brings in the most earnings for our members. Over the last ten years, the Production Contract averaged around $200 million in member earnings year over year. To best understand just how much money this contract brings in, the following chart shows earnings for the 2019-2020 season by region, with just sit-down Broadway shows earnings pulled out of the Eastern Region, meaning national and international tours were not included in that section.

Earnings by Region - 2019-2020

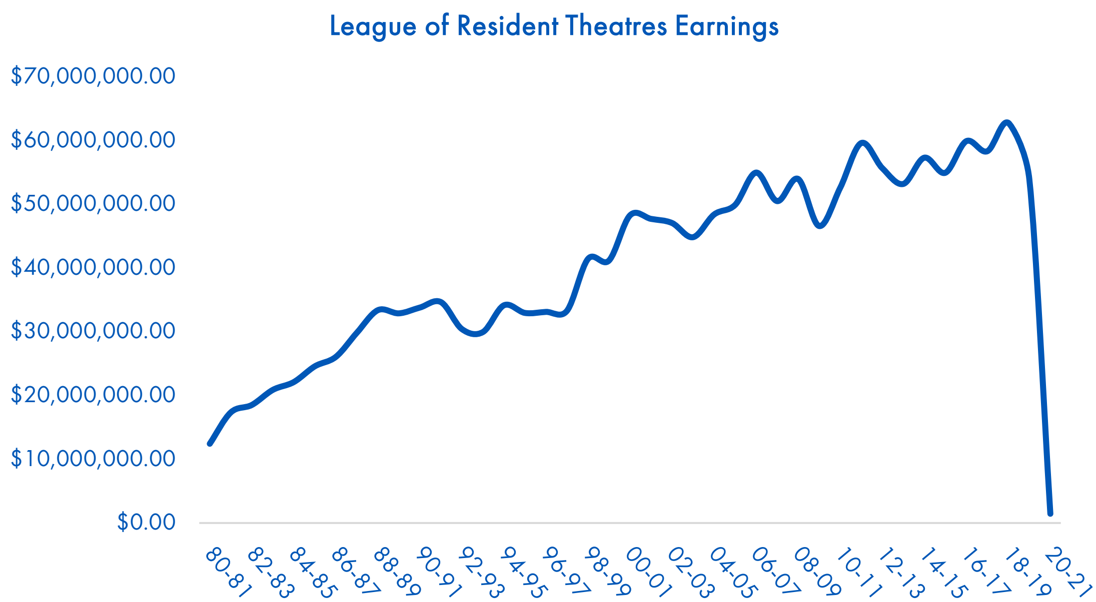


Here, earnings on Broadway were nearly $147 million, which accounted for 46% of earnings in the Eastern region, and 36% of overall earnings. The Central and Western Regions combined account for nearly $91 million, or 22% of overall earnings. The financial health of our union is inextricably tied to the financial health of Broadway and the Production Contract. The 2020-2021 earnings season yielded $1.4 million, around 9% of all member earnings.

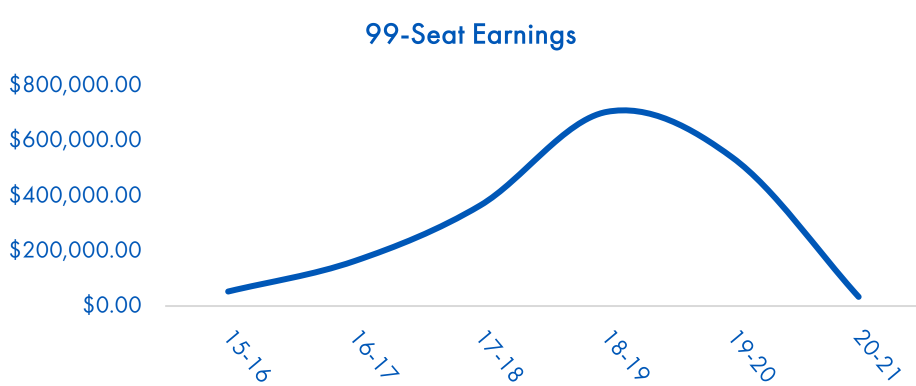
Production Contract Earnings



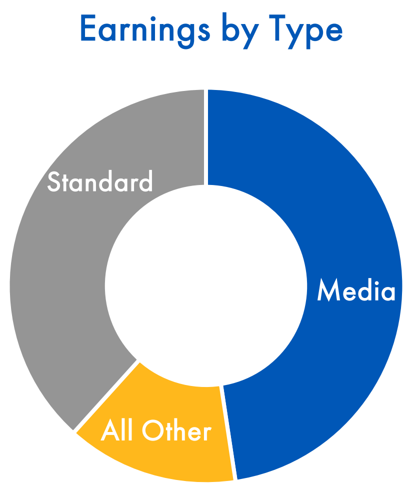
The League of Resident Theatres (LORT) Agreement is the next biggest contract when it comes to member earnings. This Agreement can typically account for anywhere between 10-20% of all member earnings in a season. Like the Production Contract, LORT reached its all-time earnings high in the 18-19 season with $62 million in earnings. This season, it earned just under $3 million, a 98% drop from its all time high.



To look at a regional contract, the 99-Seat agreement is one of Equity's newest agreements, first established during the 15-16 season. This agreement replaced a member code, which was an internal union rule that enabled members to work without the benefit of a contract under certain circumstances. In other words, it meant producers could pay next to nothing for the labor of our members. Since its inaugural season, members have earned nearly $2 million across six seasons. While this Agreement also faced challenges during the pandemic, its rapid initial growth signals that the best is yet to come for this Agreement.



This season, 48% of all earnings came from work on Media Agreements, and 38% came from traditional work. All other earnings accounted for the remaining 14%, which includes things like buyouts, royalties and vacation payments.



This next data set looks at member earnings, by group, from calendar year 2021. There is good news in this year's data. Previously in this section, we learned that members earned around $11 million in the 2020-2021 season. Because the 20-21 season ended May 31, 2021, this table gives us an early preview into the 21-22 season, and that preview is good. There is evidence of a strong upward trend in member earnings, with initial data showing that members $120 million in the 2021 calendar year. There is still a long road to recovery ahead for our members and the industry, but there is hope to be found on the horizon.

Member Earning Groups *(2021 Calendar Year)*		
$1-$2,499	3,372	33.5%
$2,500-$4,999	1,571	15.6%
$5,000-$9,999	2,023	20.1%
$10,000-$49,999	2,683	26.7%
$50,000-$99,999	332	3.3%
$100,000-$199,999	56	0.6%
$200,000+	16	0.2%

The table below illustrates a complete picture of all earnings from the 2020-2021 season, by contract and region. Many agreements are not on this table because they produced zero earnings this season. Noticeably absent are our touring agreements. Also missing are contracts like Hollywood Area Theatre (HAT), New York Musical Theatre Festival (NYMF) and Musical Stock and Unit Attractions (MUSA) to name a few. The Walt Disney World Agreement, listed at the bottom of the table, resulted in the highest member earnings, with nearly 21%.

	Eastern	Central	Western	Total	*% of Total*
Production	**$1,919,523.79**			**$1,919,523.79**	**12.56%**
Point of Organization	$1,919,523.79			$1,919,523.79	12.56%
Developmental Agreement	$613,657.80			$613,657.80	4.02%
Resident Theatres (LORT)	**$1,471,508.14**	**$291,674.08**	**$1,096,619.42**	**$2,859,801.64**	**18.71%**
LORT Rep	$77,381.08	$28,203.00	$435,760.72	$541,344.80	3.54%
LORT Non-Rep	$1,394,127.06	$263,471.08	$660,858.70	$2,318,456.84	15.17%
Small Professional Theatre (SPT)	$892,079.57	$557,665.28	$429,715.04	$1,879,459.89	12.30%
Letter of Agreement (LOA)	$493,158.46	$352,809.62	$276,532.43	$1,122,500.51	7.35%
Short Engagement Touring (SETA)	$38,307.92			$38,307.92	0.25%
Stock	**$27,887.00**	**$14,188.03**		**$42,075.03**	**0.28%**
COST	$19,123.00			$19,123.00	0.13%
CORST	$8,764.00	$14,188.03		$22,952.03	0.15%
Special Agreements	$66,488.16	$158,535.56	$81,374.62	$306,398.34	2.00%
Young Audiences (TYA)	$112,520.66	$9,048.62	$27,409.32	$148,978.60	0.97%
Guest Artist	$139,038.23	$32,722.17	$16,274.83	$188,035.23	1.23%
Special Appearance	$58,549.56	$15,928.00	$38,211.17	$112,688.73	0.74%
University Theatre (URTA)	$952,327.31	$40,702.40	$115,066.06	$1,108,095.77	7.25%
Dinner Theatre		$39,629.56	$10,100.00	$49,729.56	0.33%
Casino			$28,120.00	$28,120.00	0.18%
Special Production	$89,482.42			$89,482.42	0.59%
Business Theatre	$163,450.44	$6,066.90	$8,741.84	$178,259.18	1.17%
Staged Reading	$6,972.75			$6,972.75	0.05%
Royalties	$51,931.42			$51,931.42	0.34%
Filming and Taping	$13,990.00			$13,990.00	0.09%
Off-Broadway (NYC)	$382,413.23			$382,413.23	2.50%
NYC-LOA	$290,070.65			$290,070.65	1.90%
Mini (NYC)	$10,626.13			$10,626.13	0.07%
Transition	$2,205.00			$2,205.00	0.01%
New England Area (NEAT)	$61,414.10			$61,414.10	0.40%
Disney World	$3,187,154.84			$3,187,154.84	20.85%
Orlando Area (OAT)	$730.80			$730.80	0.00%
Chicago Area (CAT)		$389,775.51		$389,775.51	2.55%
San Francisco Bay Area (BAT)			$147,236.01	$147,236.01	0.96%
Modified Bay Area Theatre (MBAT)			$19,545.66	$19,545.66	0.13%
99 Seat Agreement			$33,288.22	$33,288.22	0.22%
Grand Total:	$11,045,488.38	$1,908,745.73	$2,328,234.62	$15,282,468.73	

MEMBERSHIP

A union is nothing without its members, but who is Equity? Each year this report takes a moment to examine the people that make up Equity's membership.

Race or Ethnicity	Female	Male	Non-Binary/ Third Gender	Prefer Not to Say	Prefer to Self-Describe	Unknown	Total
Asian or Asian American	591	453	5		1		1,050
Black or African American	2,098	2,182	9	1	4		4,294
Hispanic or Latin American	731	864	5		2	1	1,603
Indigenous Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	22	34					56
Indigenous North American	34	38			1		73
Middle Eastern or North African	17	24	1				42
Multi-Racial or Multi-Ethnic	1,234	1,061	16	3	5	1	2,320
Prefer Not to Say	1365	1272	4	21		2	2,664
Unknown	2,706	2,745	17	5		25	5,498
White or European American	16,479	16,321	68	9	22	4	32,903
Grand Total	25,277	24,994	125	39	35	33	50,503

This chart breaks down the membership based on how members self-identify. Unfortunately, it shows there is much work to do. In comparing this data to July 2021 U.S. Census data, Equity's numbers fall below the national numbers in a few areas. The U.S. Census reported that 13.4% of Americans identify as Black or African American, yet only 8.5% of Equity members identify as Black or African American. 5.9% of Americans identify as Asian or Asian American, and yet only 2.1% of Equity members identify as Asian or Asian American. Most notably, however, is that 18.5% of Americans identify as Hispanic or Latino, yet only 3.2% of Equity members identify as Hispanic or Latino.

In June 2020, the Equity national council loudly declared that Black Lives Matter. Council stated that Equity would use all the tools at our disposal to implement anti-racist policy across our industry. Equity revolutionized the member-joining process by creating the Open Access program. For decades, joining Actors' Equity Association had been limited to those working for an Equity employer. But Equity theatres, like all entertainment industry employers, are disproportionately run by white people, and their programming and hiring decisions often hold biases in favor of people from similar demographics. Until now, our membership rules have left access to membership in employers' hands; they have implicitly created a disproportionately high barrier to access for actors and stage managers of marginalized identities. We have inadvertently contributed to the systemic exclusion of people of color and people of other marginalized identities from the benefits of union membership.

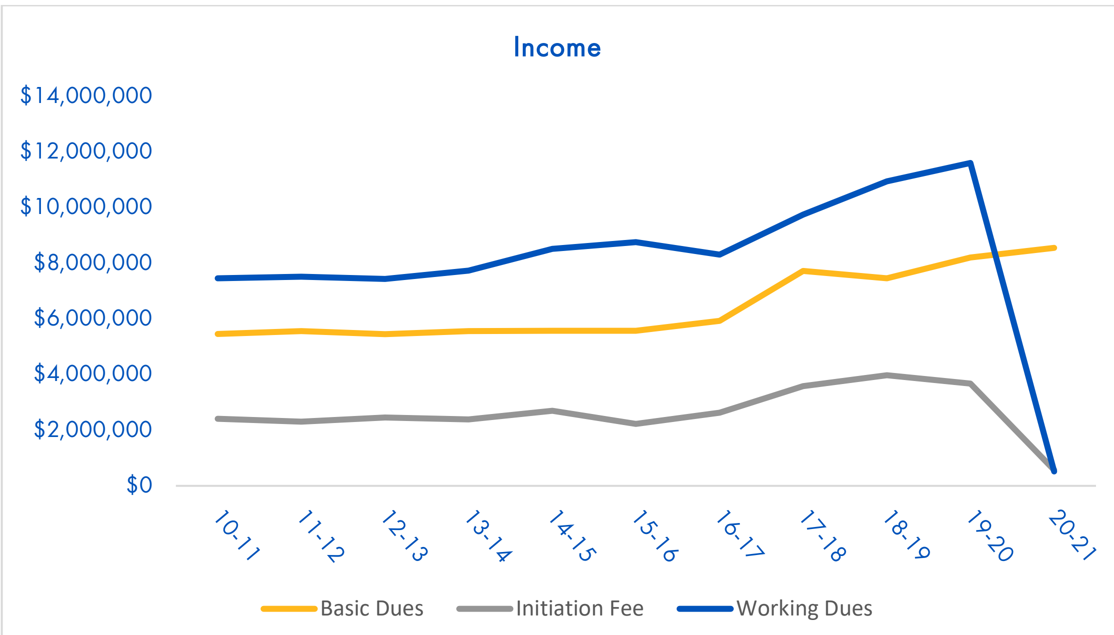
One action won't solve all of the problems, but Open Access is a step towards addressing the issues that directly impact our current, and future, members.

FINANCES (unaudited)

Equity has three major categories of income:

1. Basic Dues
2. Working Dues
3. Initiation Fees

Basic dues are billed biannually in the spring and fall. Working dues are paid as a percentage, based on member earnings, and deducted when members work. The initiation fee is the initial payment made when a member joins the union. This fee doesn't have to be paid in one lump sum upfront and generally isn't; it is typically paid off while a member is working.

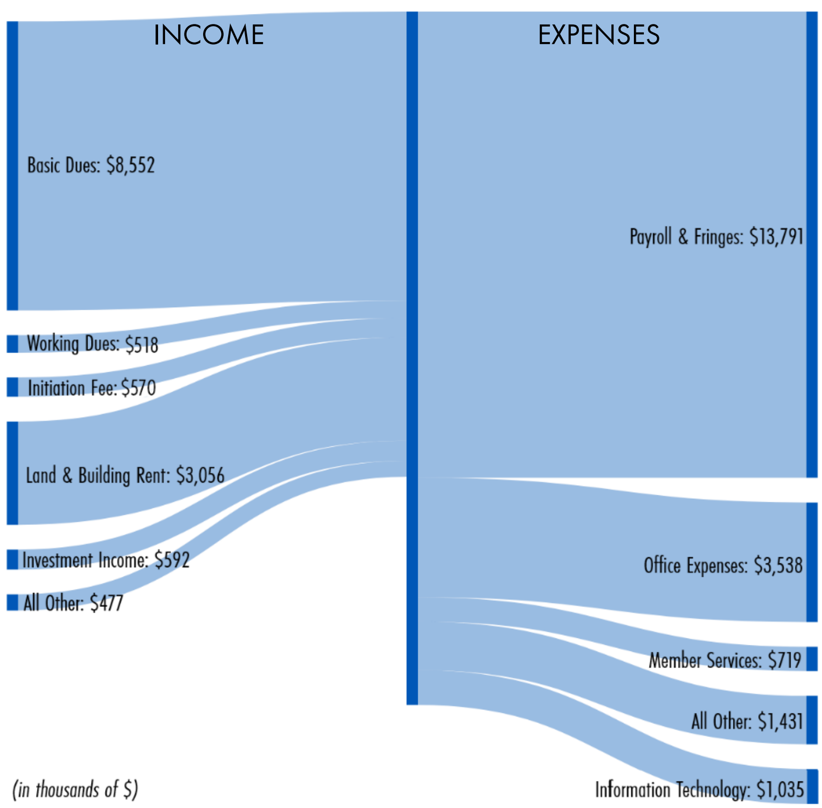


It's important to note here that our financial data is reported out in the fiscal year, April-March. Both working dues and initiation fee income dropped to fractions of their previous highs. Typically, these two categories of dues are paid when members work, but these two categories fell to historic lows because the pandemic forced nearly every theatre to close, and no work could happen. In the 19-20 fiscal year, Equity reported $11.6 million in working dues, but in the 20-21 fiscal year, working dues only amounted to $518,000, a drop of 96%. In the 19-20 fiscal year, Equity collected $3.6 million in initiation fees, but in the 20-21 fiscal year, initiation fees only reached $570,000, a drop of 84%.

The third category, basic dues, was not only resilient in the face of the pandemic but increased from the previous year by 4%. Equity collected $8.5 million in basic dues, and this income category is paid by members, regardless of if they are working or not.

Members faced many challenging financial choices during the pandemic, and the national council created multiple dues relief programs, in addition to those available pre-pandemic. Members chose to keep paying their basic dues even with all these relief offerings, and that philosophical choice has allowed Equity to remain strong and engage our employers with full strength as we begin to emerge from this pandemic. However, we all know that this pandemic has lasted much longer that anyone initially anticipated, which meant jobs continued to be scarce, unemployment benefits eventually ran out and hard financial choices had to be made. While this season was exceptional, there are many challenges ahead for the next season.

The following final chart illustrates Equity's income and expenses. The three major dues categories represent 70% of all income. Additional funds come from land and building rent: The land Equity owns in Times Square, NYC, the building Equity owns in the West Loop, Chicago and the building Equity owns in North Hollywood, Los Angeles. This rental income made up 22% of all income, with investment and other income rounding out the remaining 8%.



Most of Equity's expenses go towards the excellent staff that keeps the union running strong. This staff administered and negotiated the contracts that members worked on, established and maintained the safety protocols that kept members working safely, provided many member services and supported the union's administration. Other expenses represent legal and financial expenditures, communication costs, insurance and information technology infrastructure investment and maintenance.

CURTAIN CALL

The 2020-2021 season will go down in Equity history as one of the worst seasons this union and its members have ever faced. There has not been a season like it in our more one-hundred-year history. Unprecedented.

It is hard to believe that even as I write this report reflecting on the past season, we still find ourselves amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Omicron variant has wreaked its havoc and hampered our hope for a strong recovery, but we see signs that the surge is beginning to recede. However, our road to recovery is only just beginning, and it may take years to fully recover from the damage that this pandemic has caused our industry. We saw earlier in this report that earnings are already starting to improve in the 2021-2022 season, and so I believe that the horizon is filled with hope.

This report could not have been completed without the amazing work of our membership associates and contract management associates, our front-line staff that receives the vast amounts of data and inputs it all into our central database system. Thank you to Katey Schwartz, assistant national director of contracts, and John Fasulo, national director of contracts and membership, for their collaboration and hard work finalizing the data for this report.

Our impeccable communications department also deserves praise. Their style-guide was instrumental in directing the design of this year's report. David Levy, communications manager, and Gabriela Geselowtiz, senior writer and project manager, also provided essential guidance and feedback.

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"I believe in the American theatre. I believe in its power to inform about the human condition, I believe in its power to heal, 'to hold the mirror as 'twere up to nature,' to the truths we uncover, to the truths we wrestle from uncertain and sometimes unyielding realities. All of art is a search for ways of being, of living life more fully. We who are capable of those noble pursuits should challenge the melancholy and barbaric, to bring the light of angelic grace, peace, prosperity and the unencumbered pursuit of happiness to the ground on which we all stand."

-August Wilson