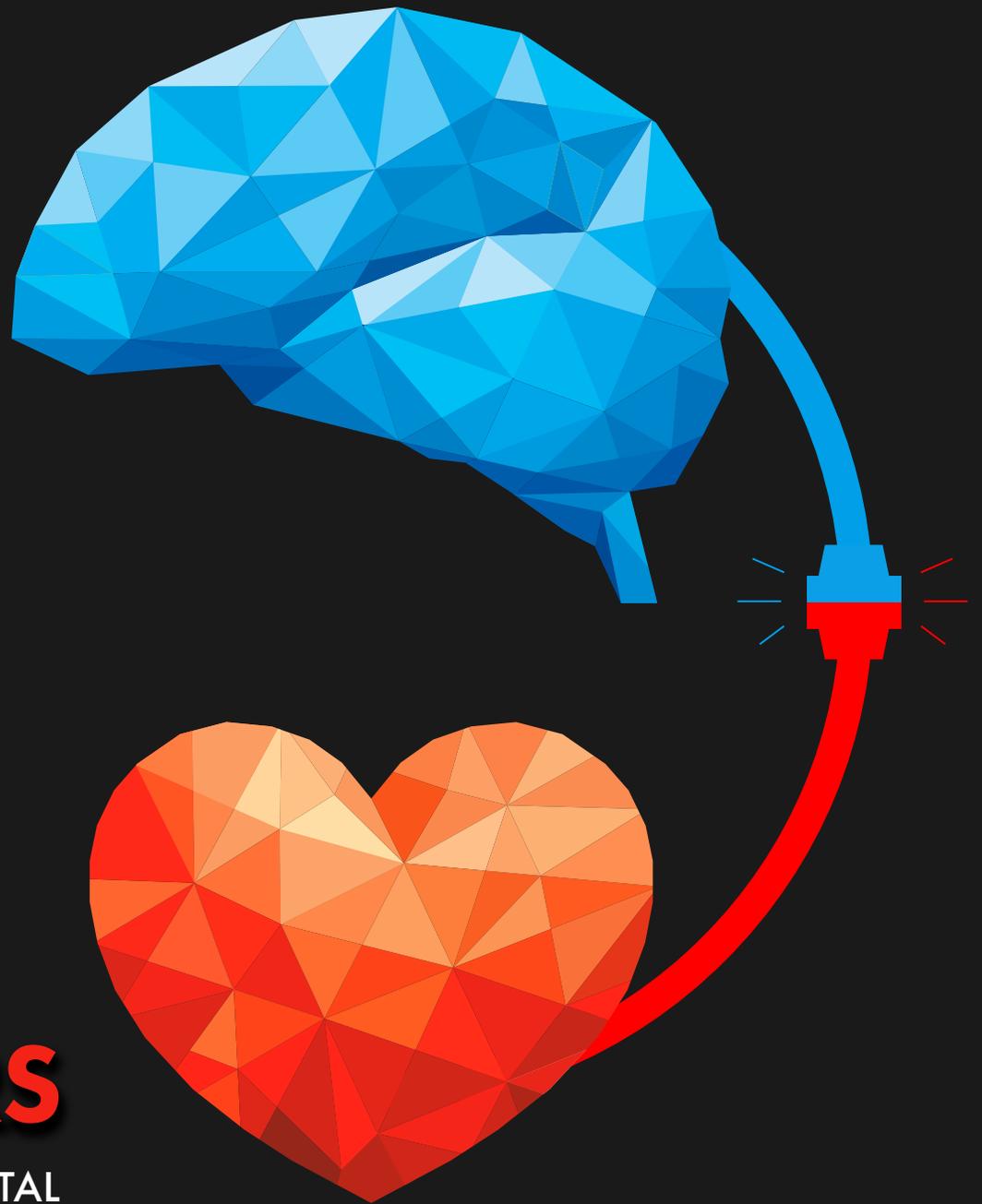


WINTER 2019 | VOLUME 104 | ISSUE 1

Equity NEWS

ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION



MIND MATTERS

MAINTAINING MENTAL WELLBEING THROUGHOUT AN ARTS CAREER

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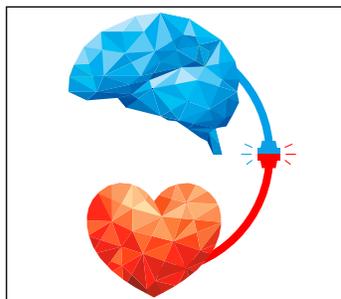
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#Equity
STRONG





FROM THE PRESIDENT THINKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

I once heard someone say that good theatre, like most art, rarely focuses on stories about happy, healthy, well-adjusted people. Of course, there are plenty of theatrical pieces which revolve around situational drama

(or comedy), but just as often, the extremes and heightened emotions that create compelling plays focus on larger-than-life characters who might be a handful to deal with in real life. But while it's true that the heroes and villains of great romances and great tragedies are often prone to a touch of madness, the same does not need to be true of those of us who crawl into their skins and live there eight times a week.

Sometimes, though, it can be difficult to shed that skin once we exit stage left. As a young actor, I remember well the challenges of playing Sally Bowles in *Cabaret*, specifically when it came to leaving her behind at the end of the night. And it seems that every awards season, we hear glowing praise of some film actor who "stayed in character," on and off the set, for the weeks or months that it took to shoot the movie. I'm not here to drag anybody's technique; there have been some amazing — and, by any metric, award-worthy — performances by those actors. But conflating artistic merit with offstage suffering can be a slippery slope. When you stir into that combustible mix our common belief that "The Show Must Go On" (which is usually mentioned when we're probably not up to doing a show), it's easy to understand how our healthier habits can slip away.

What's more, we work in an industry in which very, very few of us achieve anything resembling career stability. Actors and stage managers alike face rampant rejection, unpredictable finances, and that remarkably consistent Murphy's Law of long-term plans; when's the last time you booked a plane ticket, only to immediately book a job? For so many of us, things like homeownership, reliable income or parenthood can seem like impossible dreams. And without those types of stabilizing forces, in the context of a relentlessly competitive industry in which it feels like everything counts all the time, and in combination with our unusually creative and sensitive minds, it's not unusual to find yourself in a dark place.

That's why I'm so glad that this issue of *Equity News* is examining the significant — and often underappreciated — subject of mental health. I'm grateful for the *Equity* members who are courageously sharing their own stories and recommendations for staying healthy in our difficult business.

As you read their testimonials, I hope you realize above all that you are not alone. Not only because thousands of your fellow

actors and stage managers are having similar experiences at any given time, but because there are resources available to help you. Recognize your limits. Check in with yourself when things don't feel so great; no matter who you are or how successful you are, that will happen. Money and success alone are not super effective at exorcising demons. If you're on tour, for example, you might be making great money ... but the challenges of living on the road full-time can still pull the rug out from under you.

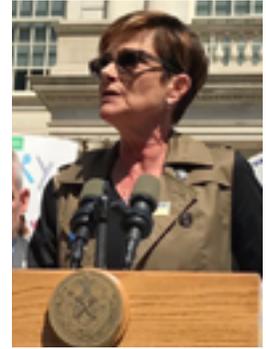
One of my favorite organizations in the business is The Actors Fund, a not-for-profit resource for everyone in the entertainment industry. The Fund serves as a very literal lifeline in all kinds of ways: training entertainment professionals in survival or transitional jobs and financial literacy, providing emergency assistance at times when the bills become overwhelming, helping us navigate the world of health insurance in the Obamacare era and providing support through counseling and social work when we find ourselves in an abusive or harassing situation, or when our mental or emotional wellness starts to slip. You should not hesitate to give them a call if you're in trouble; that's why they exist. You can find out more about the many, many services they offer at www.actorsfund.org.

And sometimes, it's a good idea to look around at the world and figure out whether you're in the right place. Obviously nobody can make that decision for you. But when I do master classes, I'm often asked if I've ever considered doing something else for a living. My answer, unfailingly, is "yes, about every two weeks." It's good for me to have periodic gut checks about whether the rewards of doing this thing that I love are worth the costs of doing this thing that I love. I'm still here, but in the past several years I've let go of the random benchmarks I used to think were necessary to have a successful career. Happiness matters more. And I was fortunate enough to have a college acting teacher who reinforced that the best actors he knew could stand in the wings having a conversation completely unrelated to the play they were doing, and drop into the character only as they entered the stage. I think that's why I finally figured out how to leave Sally Bowles at the theater when I left. It was better for my mental health to have a life away from her. And just as important: I knew she would be waiting there for me when I returned.

Be well. Take care of yourselves.

Kate Shindle

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FIGHTING FOR TAX FAIRNESS



Nobody likes tax season. That may be especially true this year since, according to the IRS, the average tax refund is down by 17 percent. For Equity members though – and anyone who works in the performing arts – the news is even more troubling.

When tax reform passed Congress last year, it included sweeping changes to the tax code. We all remember what was promised: tax cuts for middle class workers. Unfortunately, that is not what we got, especially for those who work in the performing arts.

**“ONCE TAX REFORM PASSED,
EQUITY'S NATIONAL PUBLIC
POLICY COMMITTEE PRIORITIZED
FINDING A FIX THAT WOULD
UNDO THE DAMAGE.”**

Even before tax reform (known as the “Tax Cut and Jobs Act”) passed Congress last year, Equity had raised the alarm, thanks to the tireless work of your Secretary/Treasurer, Sandra Karas. Sandra runs the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program in Equity's New York office. VITA helps thousands of low-income Equity members get their tax returns prepared every year at no cost.

Equity's warnings last year about how the changes would hurt performing artists were picked up in such outlets as *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*, *Bloomberg*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *New York Daily News*, to name just a few. The problem with the tax reform is that you can no longer deduct career-related expenses like your agents' and managers' fees. Previously, your expenses could be deducted on your federal returns as a “miscellaneous itemized deduction.” When Congress passed tax reform, all miscellaneous itemized deductions were eliminated in favor of a higher standard deduction.

Those of you who have started your taxes have probably already learned the hard truth. Losing the ability to deduct things like agents' fees and audition costs mean that many Equity members will end up paying higher taxes.

We have heard from plenty of members over the last year how difficult it would be to stay in the business if there weren't a fix. Tax fairness has long been a public policy priority of the Union. You can go all the way back to the February 1953 issue of *Equity News* and you will find tax fairness was a

topic of the day then, as it is now. (For advice on this current tax season, see “2019 Tax Advice: New Rules,” p. 18.)

The question, of course, is what are we doing now? Once tax reform passed, Equity's National Public Policy Committee prioritized finding a fix that would undo the damage. President Kate Shindle, along with Sandra Karas and 3rd Vice President Ira Mont, among others, has held multiple meetings with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to talk about the problem and potential solutions.

We've also partnered with the AFL-CIO and other unions in the performing arts to make the case. And we've added the issue to our annual Arts Advocacy Day effort, where we make the case to Congress every year to protect the National Endowment for the Arts. All this work is consistent with our promise as part of Equity 2020 to be more aggressive, inclusive and responsive when we hear from members that they have a problem. As we continue our work we will be looking for members to help us make the case. If you are interested in volunteering to help, email taxfairness@actorsequity.org.

The one thing you can safely predict about Congress is that it is highly unpredictable. But you can also predict that we aren't giving up. Not by a longshot. Stay tuned for more.

Mary McColl



DIVERSITY MATTERS WORKING TOWARDS INTENTIONAL INCLUSION

You probably received an email from me recently, encouraging you to go to our member portal and tell us about your gender, race/ethnicity and disability status. (If not, make sure your information is up-to-date in the member portal). I'm repeating parts of that email in

this column, in case you missed it. That's how much I want you to read this message! For as long as I can remember, we've been working to get a full picture of our membership, so we can find new ways to be certain that the American landscape of storytelling reflects our membership's full diversity. We are intent on inspiring our employers to #ChangeTheStage and create more intentionally inclusive hiring. Because at the end of the day, it's about jobs, and it's about access to getting those jobs: equal employment opportunities.

The data we collect about our membership is and has always been purely for internal purposes. Your individual personal information is kept confidential from any employer. The data is used in the aggregate, as in our first-ever diversity study in the spring of 2017. Those numbers help us go to our employers and show them how diverse our membership is and why we need to work together to create equal access and equal rights for all. So we need to know more about you.

This fall, we launched a revamped version of our voluntary self-identification questions, after a lot of careful thought and research by the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Committee and our staff. We made changes to our existing questions and added some new ones. We're now asking about sexual orientation and veteran status. Another new question asks whether you primarily identify as an actor or stage manager. We've also updated our gender question to better accommodate transgender identities, expanded the options for race/ethnicity and changed how we ask about disability. The committee and staff made these changes with input from experts like the Human Rights Campaign and by talking to members of color, members with disabilities and transgender members. It still isn't perfect – but it's all part of our effort to expand your ability to more fully express your identity.

If you haven't yet, I hope that you'll take the time to update your responses to the voluntary self-identification questions at actorsequity.org/selfid.

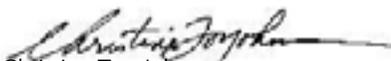
On a personal/professional note, I am six months into the First National (aka North American) Tour of *Come From Away*. I'm also commemorating my 27th year as a member of the Council and 21st year serving in a Chair capacity of our union's EEO Committee. "So how is all this EEO stuff

going?" I hear you ask (especially since this is a column about Diversity). With miles to go ahead of us, I'm also grateful to say that we're farther than we've ever been. The fact that I could start this paragraph by telling you that I, an Asian-American actor, am playing a fantastic role based on a real life non-Asian woman from Texas in the first national tour of a show still playing to sold-out audiences on Broadway is something I don't think I imagined I could report 27, 21 or even ten years ago. Our show's intentionally inclusive casting and storytelling has become my opportunity for not only a year or two of amazing employment, but also to be part of giving audiences an additional lens through which to see this show's message. But it had to start with me having access – both literally and philosophically (the team being committed to it) – to audition for the part.

I first ran for Council in 1992 because I had seen change start to happen (even back then), and I wanted to find ways to build on it. This is still at the core of my advocacy, as we work towards building greater and greater access – both literally and philosophically – to job opportunities for all of our members. With the intrepid support and guidance of Executive Director Mary McColl, President Kate Shindle, our Council, the EEO Committee, Director of Diversity Nicole Smart and the rest of our staff, I'm proud of the collective work we continue to do and the change we are seeing.

Like I said, we still have miles to go – but with your help, we can move even farther along. Thank you for being a part of our journey to gain access to more and more intentional inclusion across the industry. It's a long and arduous road, but oh so worth the travel.

In solidarity,



Christine Toy Johnson

HONORING SUSTAINED EXCELLENCE: FOUNDATION AWARDS



St. Clair Bayfield Award recipient Mia Katigbak (left), with Joe A. Callaway Award recipients Jay O. Sanders and Alison Fraser.

Three veteran actors were recognized on January 28, 2019, at Actors' Equity Association's Eastern Regional Membership Meeting in New York.

Alison Fraser and Jay O. Sanders were each recognized with a 2018 Joe A. Callaway Award, presented by the Actors' Equity Foundation. This award honors the best performance in a professional production of a classic play (defined as one written prior to 1920), established by Equity member Joe A. Callaway in 1989. It includes both a \$1,000 check and an engraved plaque for each recipient. Previous recipients include Kate Burton, Frank Langella, Laura Linney and, in 2017, Arnie Burton and Mary Testa.

Fraser was honored for her performance as Lady Ariadne Utterword in the Gingold Theatrical Group's production of *Heartbreak House*. "I was delightfully surprised and utterly thrilled that my performance as Lady Utterwood was honored with the Joe E. Callaway Award," she said. "I feel very much that I share the award with my director David Staller, my stellar cast mates, our design team, our production team and the good folks at Theatre Row who give such a welcoming home to independent theatre pieces."

Sanders was honored for his performance in the title role of *Uncle Vanya* in Richard Nelson's production of the Anton Chekhov's work at the Hunter Theater Project. "I was very moved to be recognized by my peers for this role I was so proud of and to be presented my award by Gregory Mosher, producer of the new Hunter Theater Project, who has known me throughout my career," Sanders said.

"I was accompanied by some of my greatest supporters: my sister, Marta Sanders, a brilliant cabaret performer; my wife, Maryann Plunkett who herself has won the Callaway Award twice in the past, and our son, Jamie Sanders, who had just picked up his first Equity card right before the ceremony began. When I mentioned this, he received a loud, enthusiastic welcome to our community."

The other award given out was the St. Clair Bayfield Award, established in 1973 in memory of its namesake, an Equity member. The award honors the best performance in a supporting role by an actor in a Shakespearean play in the New York City metropolitan area. The recipient receives a \$1,000 check and an engraved crystal plaque. Previous recipients include Carmen de Lavallade, Dana Ivey, Charles Kimbrough, Nathan Lane, Brian Murray, Bradley Whitford and in 2017, Peter Friedman.

Mia Katigbak, the co-founder and artistic producing director of the National Asian American Theater Company (NAATCO), whose mission is to provide as many theatrical opportunities as possible for Asian-American actors, received this year's honor for her performance as The Duke of Gloucester in NAATCO's production of *Henry VI, Parts 1-3*.

"To have received the St. Clair Bayfield Award resonates deeply and fantastically," she said. "My life's work is to support Asian-American actors and it was an honor, a privilege, a delight, an enormous satisfaction and a source of great pride to have supported 15 excellent Asian-American actors playing close to 100 roles in this epic production of *Henry VI*."

2019 REGIONAL THEATRE REPORT EQUITY'S CONTINUING QUEST TO CREATE MORE WORK

BY DOUG STRASSLER (WITH THANKS TO DOUG BEEBE, STEFANIE FREY, GAIL GABLER AND BRANDON LORENZ)

Last year, Actors' Equity debuted its inaugural Regional Theatre Report, which computed work weeks per member as its guiding metric to review the state of affairs in each of the Union's 28 Liaison Areas.

Equity continues its deep dive with the second annual Regional Theatre Report. The information in this report covers the 2017-2018 season, which ended in May 2018. It does not include information about the three biggest cities, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, each of whose theatre scenes operate very differently than the Liaison Areas. Additionally, national tours were classified based on a show's city of origin, in keeping with longstanding practice. The report includes data based on work done under paid contracts and excludes internal membership codes.

As a national union, membership counts in a Liaison Area fluctuate slightly from month to month as members relocate over the course of a theatre season for professional or personal reasons. To account for that ebb and flow, the membership numbers reported in this document represent an average taken over a three-month period.

This report is an invaluable organizing tool, done in part to help guide the Equity 2020 mission to be aggressive, inclusive

and responsive on behalf of the membership. But it's also an investigative tool. It allows members and staff alike to learn more about the activity occurring in each Liaison Area. In discovering the reasons behind, say, a decline in work weeks in a specific area, staff can take the appropriate steps to reverse that trend.

Most importantly, this year's report portrayed promising upward momentum. The Liaison Areas in this report represent \$124 million in wages earned by Equity members – an increase of 3 percent over last year. Not only that, but overall, 18 of the 28 cities (nearly two-thirds) saw gains in work weeks per member when looking back at last season. Work weeks per member overall increased 8 percent over last season.

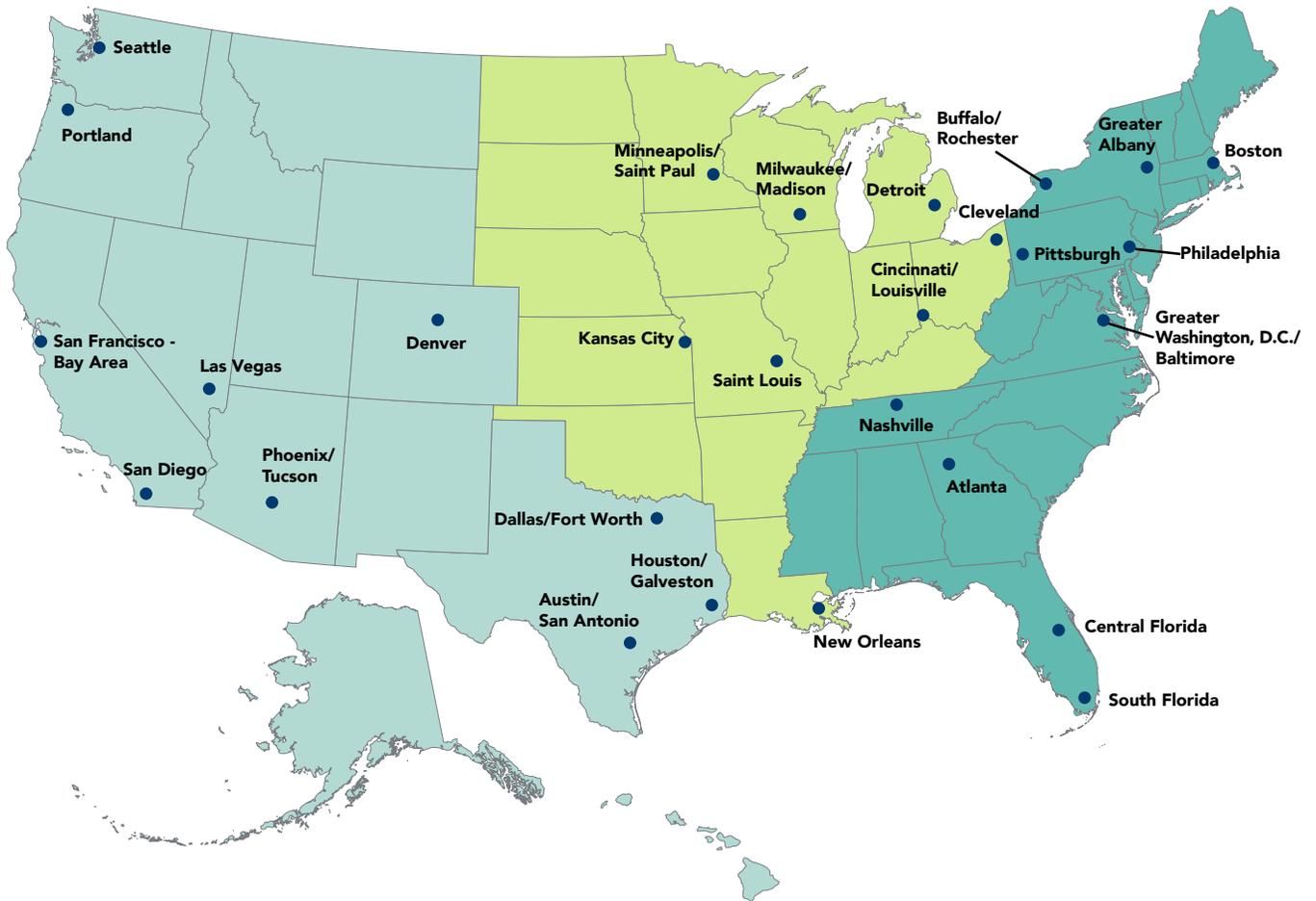
Washington, D.C./Baltimore is the first city to surpass an average of more than 20 work weeks per member. Additionally, the area also generated more than 20,000 work weeks – for the second consecutive season.

The report also details the great work that has taken place all over to ensure that the number of paid work opportunities continues to grow for all members. Under the auspices of organizer Stefanie Frey, indefatigable teams of local members and Liaison Committee Chairs have mobilized to ensure that members can not only survive, but thrive.

Tamiko Robinson Steele, Eddie George, Jackie Welch and Lauren F. Jones in the Nashville Repertory Theatre production of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Nashville is one of the nation's fastest-growing Liaison Areas.

Photo by Amos Raymond Glass



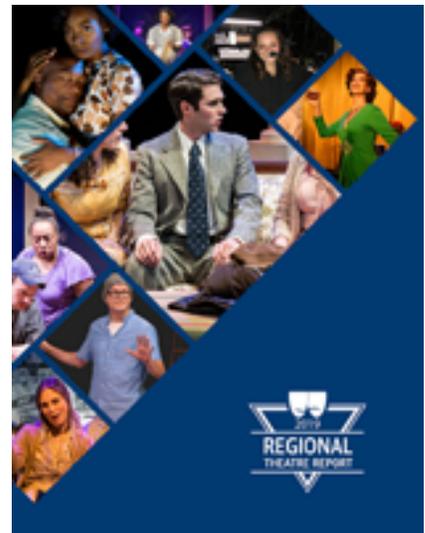


Take, for example, some of the ongoing efforts enacted to fight the good fight for arts funding, which continues to face opposition from the highest reaches of government. In San Francisco, members spent months educating people in advance of Election Day to vote “yes” on Proposition E, which would apportion money from the base hotel tax to local arts programs. And Washington, D.C., was the setting for Arts Advocacy Day, a two-day summit meeting in which Equity members from around the country lobbied for increased funding on Capitol Hill.

The report also covers achievements such as the approval of a new Bay Area

Theatres (BAT) Agreement and the New England Area Theatres (NEAT) contract, both of which included wins for Chorus, Principal and Stage Manager contracts. Other highlights include recognition of new theaters that have gone Equity in the last year, information about Liaison Areas that have expanded in the last year and venues that are under the direction of new artistic talent.

Many of Equity Liaison Areas are at different stages of their development. But they also share one important trait: when members work together, they can achieve great things and make a difference for both current and future members. 🙌



“THE LIAISON AREAS IN THIS REPORT REPRESENT **\$124 MILLION IN WAGES**. EIGHTEEN OF 28 LIAISON AREAS SAW GAINS IN WORK WEEKS PER MEMBER.”

READ THE FULL 2019 REPORT

Members can find the full 2019 Regional Theatre Report online at ActorsEquity.org/RTR2018

MIND MATTERS: MAINTAINING MENTAL WELLBEING THROUGHOUT AN ARTS CAREER

BY DOUG STRASSLER

The life of a performer or stage manager is a checklist full of must-do's: there are auditions, acting classes, dance lessons, vocal lessons, maintaining a gym routine, keeping up with the latest technology. All in the hope of it paying off and landing the next job or a bigger break.

"Mother Show Business, as I call her, is not easy," said Dr. Bradley Jones, a former actor and still an Equity member who now practices as a therapist and is referred to as Dr. Bradley. "When it's good, she gives you nourishment and mirroring – a kind of validation you didn't get earlier in your lives. But you can't always count on her."

It's a fickle, uncertain industry, in other words. Why, then, would anyone embark on a life in the arts, with no guarantee of success or security? "I truly believe that we are called to this work," Eastern Region member Josh Bardier said, "because growing up, every single person will say 'there's not enough work, not enough money, not enough security.' And we hear this, and we keep going. That perseverance is noble – but that strength and that self-confidence does not exist 24-7, and that is where things get difficult."

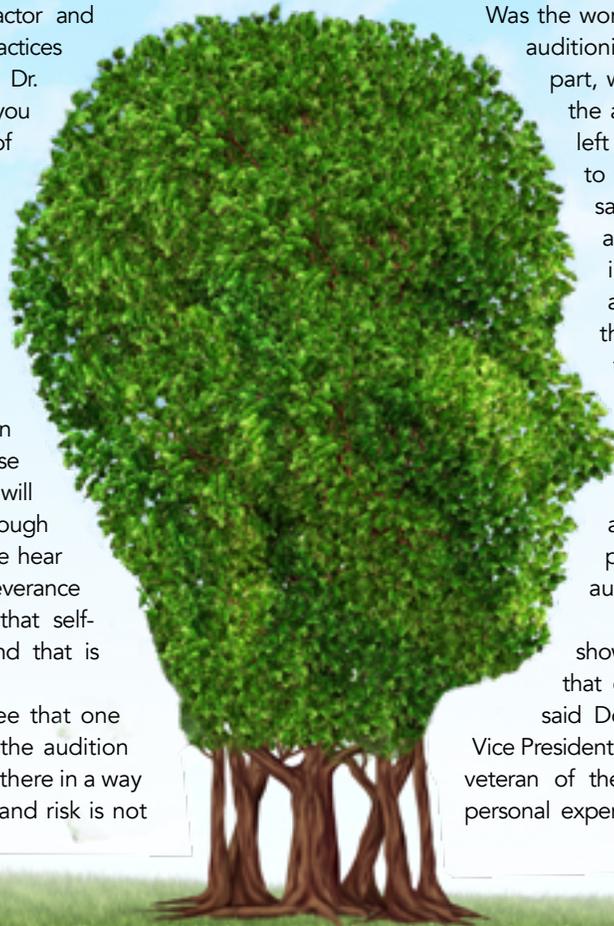
Most Equity actors would agree that one of the most consistent stressors is the audition process. "Having to put oneself out there in a way that requires constant vulnerability and risk is not

for the faint of heart," Eastern Region member André Stith said. "I feel that everyone in these spaces would like a sense of validation for the investment in our work. However, that is not always present."

Part of the stress comes from the unknown elements that happen in the room following an audition.

Was the work received appropriately? If an auditioning performer did not get the part, what was the reason? "Most of the actors that I work with are only left to project some explanation as to why they didn't get the part," said Dr. Andrew Cicchetti, LCSW, a psychotherapist whose clients include many actors, dancers and musicians. He explained that no matter how they explain things in their mind, without accurate feedback, it can only be a projection. "It is important that they develop a way to assess their own ability and performance, perhaps with a good coach or audition class."

"While the hardest part of show business is getting the job, that can't become your whole life," said Doug Carfrae, Western Regional Vice President of Actors' Equity, said. A lifelong veteran of theatre, Carfrae can speak from personal experience about the importance of



maintaining a life beyond the results of what happens in the audition room. "You need to actively enjoy life beyond theatre. It is never personal! A smart audition coach once said, 'Treat your audition as a chance to act on a Tuesday. Then, let it go.' Don't plan your opening night outfit before you've even been called back. Leave the audition in the room and move on."

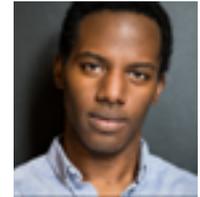
Western Region member Lily Tung Crystal agreed with Carfrae's advice. "All we can control is walking in the room and doing our best work," she said. Crystal also has a spiritual governing philosophy about roles for which she might not get cast. "The universe provides – sometimes the door closes for a reason, but a window opens that you're meant to fly through. I trust the process and the journey and believe that there are good parts of the journey that we're moving toward, and sometimes it means not getting jobs along the way. But it's hard to see that when you don't know what that next job will be."

One of the ironies of a life in this industry is that it can be equal parts grueling both for those who are working and those are not. "Depending on the amount and difficulty of the dancing, speaking or singing required, an eight-show week can be exhausting, particularly the five-show weekends, so keeping yourself healthy and rested are of utmost importance," Carfrae said. "You have to pace yourself during the week, so that you will give the same performance at the end of the week. Keeping your show fresh is your job, especially in a long-running show when the show begins to feel stale."

"Exercise is really important, not just stretching or a barre before a show. Give yourself mental time away from the show on days off. Sleep. On the road, visit the sights along the way; enjoy the cities you are playing. Explore the city. Get out in the fresh air. And, especially on the road, try to eat well."

Central Region performer Ann Michels agrees with Carfrae. "We're athletes and need to treat ourselves as such," she said. "I keep strict schedules on when, what and how much I eat during the day, focusing on small, vegetable-laden and lean-meat dinners consumed at about 4:30 pm so I'm mostly digested before the show starts. Equally as important, getting

"WHEN I'M GETTING REJECTION AFTER REJECTION, AND I CAN FEEL SELF-DOUBT CREEPING IN, I REMEMBER WHY I DECIDED TO PURSUE THIS CAREER IN THE FIRST PLACE. I REMEMBER SEEING MY FIRST PLAY AND THE EXCITEMENT I FELT."



— LAMAR JEFFERSON

enough sleep is paramount in keeping my voice clear and my mind focused. This often means keeping social activities and extra gigs to a minimum. The payoff is, when I'm rested and fueled, I'm better at my work."

There are other reasons, too, that may affect any professional's ability to feel satisfied by their career, whether it is onstage or backstage, according to Dr. Cicchetti. "As Dr. Freud said, 'Our two primary sources of satisfaction in life are love and work.' Most people don't enter the acting world with family support. Many parents aren't excited about their kids leaving a small town to go off and become an actor. When someone encounters a rough spot in their career path there might not be family support."

Other realities that can test the strength of relationships include required travel for regional productions and family planning. Some members might want to have children and fear that their income stream is too unpredictable. Dr. Cicchetti also counsels such people who seek to transition out of the industry for a career path that is more lucrative or dependable – and even that, he acknowledges, can be a tough row to hoe. "This shift, or loss of identity," he said, "is its own type of grief experience."

Equity's Equal Employment Opportunity Committee Chair Christine Toy Johnson believes there is great value in reconnecting with why you love working in the theatre as a means to maintaining your focus on doing the best work you can possibly do, rather than on the inherent challenges of the business that can completely overwhelm you.

"I also think it's vital to find your community and surround yourself with

positive energy that is supportive, and try your best to stay creative within that community," Johnson said.

Plenty of members share Johnson's mindset. "I choose to stay involved in the acting industry by going to an acting class every week," Crystal said. "It's like church. It allows me to grow and do work even if I am not on the stage. It allows me to continue to evolve and hone my craft and be with other like-minded people."

For Central Region member Lamar Jefferson, remembering what first kindled the flame between him and the theatre is helpful. "When I'm auditioning and getting rejection after rejection, and I can feel self-doubt creeping in, I remember why I decided to pursue this career in the first place," he said. "I remember seeing my first play and the excitement I felt. I remember the first time seeing my life and struggles reflected on stage and the empowerment and hope I felt wash over me. That keeps me going, that keeps me pushing. The thought I could give another person the same experiences and feelings I had keeps me motivated. Even when I'm doing an 8-show week run and my body is ready to give out, or I think I'm getting bored with the show and can't continue on, I think about those experiences and find the energy to push forward."

Members at any stage of their career are likely to face obstacles and perhaps even some demons. Many of those interviewed for this article acknowledged, though, reaching a point of realization that it wasn't necessarily the topsy-turvy nature of finding work that was affecting them – that maybe, in fact, there were other factors also affecting their mental health. According to *Inc.* Magazine, the U.S. spends an estimated \$201

billion on mental illness, including anxiety, depression and stress. Almost half of Americans will likely experience symptoms of these conditions during their lifetime.

Western Region member Karen Schleifer's career started early; she performed as one of the orphans in *Annie* in 1978. But over time and after a negative experience studying musical theatre at her first college, she found the stage too vulnerable a space for her as she dealt with anxiety and depression. Eventually, she stopped performing and chose to work in the corporate world for many years.

Recently, however, Schleifer found personal and professional fulfillment in a different role – working as a stage manager, a position that lets her fuse her professional organizational skills and her love for theatre. “Now I can be just

as much a part of the creative process without feeling anxious or under the microscope personally,” she said. “Being back at work with my first love (theatre) is a revelation for me, and I was kidding myself taking myself away from it at all. I am lucky to have found my way back – and I have never felt so right and so normal doing a job in my life.

Eastern Principal Councillor Nicole Flender recalled how frightening it was to perform in a regional production of *Oklahoma!* while dealing with a clinical depression diagnosis. “It was extremely scary because just to memorize the lines was a Herculean effort,” she said. “I would go onstage and think, ‘I’m going to blank out, I won’t be able to do this.’ I had moments of disorientation and once couldn’t even find my way to the theater on my own.”

At the same time, Flender had an ongoing dialogue with her doctor, discussing side effects (including one instance of dry mouth, making it impossible for her to sing) and adjusting medications accordingly. Despite these challenges, though, Flender said that performing regardless of her diagnosis was helpful to her. “Doing the show was a lifesaver to me,” she said. “Staying in motion was very helpful.”

“After about a year of auditioning and not being seen, I went through a slump,” Eastern Region member Victoria Rae Sook said. “It was a lot of me in bed, ordering Seamless and watching *Little Women*. I knew something was not right, and I needed help. A therapist

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TELETHERAPY: A FLEXIBLE COUNSELING OPTION

The lives of many actors and stage managers take them all over. When constantly on the move, sometimes self-care falls by the wayside.

Teletherapy might be a helpful option to create a stable, consistent therapeutic relationship for anyone who travels or whose freelance lifestyle leads to irregular hours. What exactly is teletherapy? Also known as distance counseling or therapy, as well as telepsychology and telemental health, teletherapy is a form of therapist-patient counseling that embraces the digital era. This way, no matter where you might be, you can schedule regular appointments and engage with a licensed therapist via phone, video or email. You can even chat with your therapist through an app. (The fact that treatment takes place remotely may also reduce the stigma associated with receiving mental health services.)

Eastern Region Stage Manager Councillor Amanda Spooner has found this form of therapy, which she uses through a platform called BetterHelp, enormously helpful after experiencing such life changes as having a child and adding teaching to her résumé. “I was mature enough to say, I want to stay on a path and make sure my goals are clear, and was looking to work with someone who had an outside perspective in identifying what those goals were,” Spooner said.

All therapists who work through BetterHelp – and such similar services as AmericanWell, Lantern and TalkSpace – are licensed and credentialed therapists who have been certified by their state's board to provide therapy and counseling. In Spooner's experience, working with a therapist who has had many clients in the entertainment industry has made for a very helpful match: “When I reference things, we don't have to spend a lot of time with me giving her context,” she said.

Teletherapy is mutually beneficial in terms of flexibility for both parties involved. Spooner engages in video-chat sessions once a week with a therapist. “This is the hour I take every week for myself,” she said. “With a set time and place, I can commit to it in a way I recognize as my own self-care. This is an hour each week that is truly just about me, holding me emotionally accountable for what my week was like, and what my goals are.”

However, technology enables this relationship to expand beyond the weekly sessions. Spooner and her therapist can check in with each other – perhaps in the form of a text exchange or a quick phone call. “How mental health is changing! People are very evolved now,” said Christine Harris, LCSW, BC-TMH, a licensed and board-certified telemental health therapist. “This is like a concierge therapy. Patients can write to me, and I'll respond within 24 hours of a text. Usually, we'll have a weekly video or phone call session. After I know the client, and I get what's happening, they are welcome to call me and I'll do a free 10-15 minute check-in, on my schedule.”

For now, at least, these services may or may not be covered by medical insurance. Companies like BetterHelp offer a variety of payment plans that most users consider affordable. Harris also cautions that since everyone's situations are different, some might continue to fare better with face-to-face therapy.

In the meantime, though, teletherapy offers a proven option that makes counseling accessible and convenient regardless of location and time zone.

“We have to make time for ourselves and prioritize self-care,” Spooner said. “I look forward to that moment each week when I can turn everything else off and just talk to her.”

THE ACTORS FUND: A CLOSER LOOK



One of the most valuable services available to those with mental or physical health concerns is The Actors Fund. One of Actors' Equity's greatest allies, they are a private non-profit human services organization staffed by licensed clinical social workers.

Their Entertainment Assistance Program (EAP), providing short-term counseling, group counseling, assessments and referrals, is available to all working entertainment professionals – performers, stage managers, playwrights, directors, technicians, ushers and house staff are all included. And with offices located in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, The Actors Fund prides itself on its ability to accommodate everyone all over the country both in person and over the phone.

"We all work together and are here to support you," said Lillian Gallina, LCSW. "For people who need immediate support, we are here and will stay with you to get you through a specific crisis."

For Gallina, LCSW, these services are necessary to assist a vital population that has chosen to pursue an unorthodox lifestyle. "The industry itself is anxiety-provoking and has a lot of elements beyond people's control, and people like to feel that they have control," she said. "People who enter into a creative career tend to link their occupation to a part of their identity, more so than in other professions. So their self-worth and concept of self are greatly affected by ups and downs of industry that they have very little control over."

The social services department at The Actors Fund offers two kinds of ongoing psychoeducational groups. One set is made up of ongoing long-term groups that are built around peer support for such issues as addiction and recovery, addressing dance injuries, living with HIV and maintaining relationships, caregiving and sexual harassment. The Actors Fund also has hired clinicians specifically devoted to dancers and to younger performers and their families.

They also offer eight-week skills-based groups, cognitive-based therapy sessions that are designed

to assist people trying to manage general anxiety and depressive symptoms. "This group teaches you tangible ways to change how you think so you can reduce those symptoms," Gallina said. The Actors Fund recently doubled the amount of times they offer the skills-based group due to its popularity, which Gallina finds gratifying. "It's amazing to see people in this industry come together around their personal mental health because there is such a feeling in this industry that you have to be doing well all the time."

Because of that notion, The Actors Fund pays great attention to the effect of financial stress on one's mental health. "There's the idea that success comes with financial security," Gallina said, "and in other fields that's often true. In the entertainment industry, valuing financial health and general wellness has to be looked at differently." To help foster stability and resilience in the community, The Fund regularly offers free financial wellness seminars, career counseling and resources to assist in finding affordable health insurance, health care and housing. The Actors Fund also offers primary and specialty medical care, now available at The Friedman Health Center for the Performing Arts in the heart of Times Square — a partnership between The Actors Fund and Mount Sinai.

Help is always available for people working anywhere around the country. Those whose work has taken them away from home can call their regional Actors Fund office, where a clinician will conduct a basic assessment over the phone and make them aware of local resources. "We'll try to get them support wherever they are," Gallina said. Clinicians also have resources available to members who might need assistance while on tour, perhaps by offering free short-term phone counseling or reviewing teletherapy services that might appeal to them.

"We want our entertainment folk to have full, sustainable lives," Gallina said. "We hope that artists educate themselves and have their best chances of working and making art."

THEATRE

SPOTLIGHT

UPTOWN PLAYERS



Photo by Mike Morgan

Jack Donahue, Sonny Franks and Blake McIver in *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

Considered one of the largest and most recognizable LGBT theaters in the country, Uptown Players has changed the theatrical landscape of North Texas.

Uptown Players was co-founded in 2001 by Craig Lynch and Jeff Rane in order to produce work that is both transformative and impactful, with the potential for meaningful change.

"Our mission is to present professional theatre that meets a rising demand in the LGBT community for audiences to see their life experiences represented on stage," Rane said. "We offer diverse productions focusing on contemporary and alternative lifestyle themes that explore topics including diversity, relationships, family, prejudice and values. We present plays and musicals that challenge audiences artistically, strengthen cultural bridges with the LGBT community, and create greater positive public awareness and acceptance through the performing arts."

Uptown's audience base is drawn from the entire Dallas/Fort Worth area and is comprised of 60 percent LGBT and 40 percent heterosexual patrons. With an age range of 18 to 80 years, the average audience size is 2,800 people per production. In 2010, Uptown Players moved from its previous home at The KD Studio Theatre, a 115-seat venue located in the Dallas Market Center corridor, to the historic 490-seat Kalita Humphreys Theater on Turtle Creek – Frank Lloyd Wright's only freestanding theater.

With this move, Uptown Players expanded programming to six productions and saw a 15 percent increase in attendance. In

2011, Uptown Players added a seventh event to its programming with the first Dallas Pride Performing Arts Festival taking place during Gay Pride week.

"Uptown Players has quite literally reconfigured what audiences in one of America's largest cities are now accustomed to seeing on stage," Rane said. Consider the facts: Uptown Players has presented such world premieres as *Redesigning Women* (2013), *Crazy Just Like Me* (2011) and the stage adaptation of *The Valley of the Dolls* (2007), along with the United States premieres of the West End hit musical *Soho Cinders* (2014) and the Pet Shop Boys musical *Closer to Heaven* (2010).

Uptown Players was the first regional theater in the United States to present the Tony Award winner *The Boy from Oz* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *Next To Normal*, following the closing of their respective Broadway productions. Every season, Uptown Players presents several regional premieres, including recent productions of *Priscilla Queen of the Desert: The Musical*, *The Legend of Georgia McBride*, *It Shoulda Been You*, *The Toxic Avenger*, *Mothers and Sons*, *The Nance* and *The Producers*.

Those who have been fortunate enough to work at Uptown Players are unanimous in praising the theater's intimate feel. "I am coming up on six years with them," said Western Region member Sonny Franks, who has worked on

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EQUITY ACROSS THE NATION

DALLAS/FORT WORTH

Thanks to Dallas/Fort Worth Liaison Area chair Kim Titus for his contribution!

WORKING IN THE REGION

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

Equity enjoys a greater presence than ever before in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Nearly a dozen theaters have signed seasonal contracts and currently 27 theaters provide members work under Special Appearance or Guest Artist contracts. An actor's life looks pretty much the same in D/FW as elsewhere: auditions, classes and employment. The area is home to the third largest arts economy in the country, so an actor or stage manager can find a day job in or out of the arts. Jogging trails follow an old railroad right of way or circle the in-town White Rock Lake. In Fort Worth, jogging trails follow the Trinity River through town.

WHAT IT'S LIKE WORKING IN THE REGION

A lot of driving. D/FW is spread out. This Equity area is larger than the states of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. With employment available from one end of the area to the other, an actor must budget quite a bit of time to get to auditions and work. However, the geography does not discourage a strong sense of community. And, several colleges, including Southern Methodist University, Texas Christian University, University of Texas Arlington and Dallas campuses and the Dallas, Collin and Tarrant counties community colleges feed new talent into the area.

WHERE YOU MIGHT BE WORKING

Theaters under seasonal contracts that have a commitment to hiring local actors include one of the longest-running Equity theaters in the area, Theatre Three. Uptown Players is currently producing under an LOA contract – one of the highest-paying in the region. Casa Mañana, Stage West, Amphibian and Circle Theatre provide employment in Fort Worth. A growing number of SA/GA contracts are available throughout the 11-county region, including Garland Summer Musicals in the eastern part of the area to Stolen Shakespeare Guild in Fort Worth. Also, Oklahoma CityRep employs D/FW actors a short three-hour drive north.

Brent Alford and Shannon McGrann in the Stage West production of *A Doll's House, Part 2*.



Photo by Evan Michael Woods

AROUND TOWN

BEST PLACES TO EAT FOR FOODIES

With nearly 14,000 restaurants, D/FW caters to just about every taste. From high-end dining like the Adolphus Hotel's French room or the relatively new Bullion in downtown Dallas to Ida Claire in Addison to a myriad of Tex-Mex restaurants like the Theatre Three-adjacent Tacos and Tequila or Fort Worth's famous Joe T. Garcia's, D/FW has it all. And it wouldn't be Texas if we didn't mention barbecue. One committee member declares that Pecan Lodge in Deep Ellum is the best barbecue in Texas, others might cite Angelo's in Fort Worth. (We will expect an argument from the Austin/San Antonio Liaison.)

WHAT YOU WON'T FIND ANYWHERE ELSE

The State Fair of Texas. For three weeks every October in Dallas, one can find fun and food, exhibits, award-winning livestock and did I mention food? Pretty much anything that can be fried is on sale. Or, shortly into each new year the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo offers a similar experience in Fort Worth. These events are so popular that people will drive 700 – 800 miles to attend. Some will even come from out-of-state. Of course, there is the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, home of the Dallas Cowboys football team.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Audition, audition, audition. Meet people in the audition room. A new actor will find people here pretty friendly and willing to help the new person in town. Additionally, one can take classes and make connections at one of several private studios in the area. A unique organization here is S.T.A.G.E., the Society for Theatrical Artists' Guidance and Enhancement, which provides low cost classes as well as networking opportunities. It's a good place to start getting involved in the community. The Liaison Committee is another great way to become involved in the area arts community and we always need the help.

BEST WAYS TO EXPERIENCE LOCAL COLOR

Dallas's Fair Park is home to an amazing collection of Art Deco architecture. The buildings house museums and events year 'round, including The Fair Park Music Hall. The Stockyards area in Fort Worth shows off the Old West flavor of the area. With lively night life that includes three theaters, Sundance Square in downtown Fort Worth proves that southwestern cities don't just close at dusk. The Magnolia District of Fort Worth, Deep Ellum and Bishop Arts in Dallas, show off the area's artsy side. The Kimball Art Museum, Fort Worth, and the Dallas Museum of Art house world-class permanent and temporary art pieces. Then there's also Southfork Ranch, the home of the *Dallas* television series, if you just have to.

THEATRE NEWS & NOTES

Arrow Rock, MO – Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre added a full seasonal contract to their summer season and an additional ASM to their fall season. These two contracts will result in 24 additional work weeks per year.

Chicago, IL – *Miracle the Musical*, a one-off CAT commercial production, was organized and will run at the Royal George Theatre. It will provide 100 workweeks and hire 100% locally.

Chicago, IL – A one-off CAT contract for a production of *Moonshiner* at The Edge Theater will bring three contracts, for a total of 13 workweeks.

La Mesa, CA – Off Broadway Live signed onto a new transitional SPT agreement.

Little Rock, AK – Arkansas Repertory Theatre will resume operating as an Equity theater. The LORT Co-Chairs and Vice Chairs have voted and are in unanimous support of the theatre to move onto a LOA in reference to LORT.

Los Angeles, CA – *For the Record: The Brat Pack* opened under a Cabaret agreement, with eight contracts.

Mesa, AZ – Southwest Shakespeare returns to Equity on a three-year LOA to LORT with salary and contract increases in the second and third years.



Photo by Stephen B. Thornton

Janie Brookshire, Joe Wegner and Gabriella Fanuele (l-r) in the Arkansas Repertory Theatre production of *The School for Lies*.

Sonoma, CA – Transcendence Theatre will use Equity contracts for the first time onstage at their outdoor theater in the Jack London State Park. With a minimum of 17 contracts in the first year, Transcendence will operate under a Letter of Agreement to the COST agreement.

EQUITY LAUNCHES WEBINAR SERIES TO EDUCATE MEMBERS ON **NEW AGREEMENTS**

Understanding Equity Contracts was a series of four webinars that offered members a closer look at four of our recently renegotiated agreements: The Bay Area Theatre (BAT) Agreement, the New England Area Theatre (NEAT) Agreement, the Walt Disney World Agreement and the Chicago Area Theatre (CAT) Agreement.

Offered once a month between November and February, each webinar featured a discussion moderated by Member Education Manager David Levy with the business representatives who work most closely on each agreement.

Discussions centered on what makes each agreement unique, what was achieved in the latest negotiations and, most importantly, ample time for questions from participants.

For the most part, these webinars were designed for members who live in the areas where the regional contracts apply. The big exception was the Disney Agreement webinar; since Disney holds auditions nationwide, invitations were extended to members around the country in communities where Disney sees prospective performers. The panelists for this webinar included three Equity members, Krista

Anderson Abbott, Philip Nolen and Mark Richard Taylor, who were able to share insight into the lifestyle and workday of Equity cast members at the Disney parks.

All four webinars will serve as the basis for new articles in the Member Portal to further help members learn about these contracts, so keep your eye on the Equity News Center. And the National Membership Education Committee will be reviewing participant feedback with an eye on how webinars and other technology can be used going forward to help educate even more of our members, wherever they may be.

TRACKING WHAT YOU'RE OWED

Central region staff recovered **\$444.03** from a theater for several actors who didn't receive tech bumps or the correct contractual salary.

Central region staff recovered **\$762.18** for a member at a theater who hadn't received their vacation pay.

Central Region staff resolved an outstanding issue with a producer in New Orleans, resulting in **a member receiving a check for mileage reimbursement for over \$2,000.00** just a few days after Christmas.

Central Region staff was able to recover payment for two members at an SPT theater in Missouri. One actor received **\$259.25 for 12 weeks of vacation pay** and **\$315.00 was recovered for 14 weeks of vacation pay** for another actor.

Central Region staff successfully collected retroactive pay from all stages of a local theater, **totaling \$15,262.15** in the month of December.

Central Region staff reported that they were able to get **two members on a one-week Special Appearance Agreement** in Detroit during the final week of the year.

Eastern Region staff reported the discovery of a theater whose mini-contract production triggered a sliding scale due to box office numbers, resulting in **\$2,200 paid to eight members.**

Eastern Region staff invaded the bond for a production that had recently closed, enabling them to pay the nine actors their final week's salary, **totaling \$71,512.55.**

Eastern Region staff was able to recover **an extra week of health** for members who had worked more than 30 hours on a developing TYA piece instead of the scheduled 28 hours.

Eastern Region staff resolved a dispute between two performers and their employer about severance pay for a show that had closed. Equity was able to get the employer to agree

to honor management's commitment and **recover a total of \$2,590.00 in additional severance pay** for the members.

Eastern Region staff learned that a long-running production that was granted permission to record new b-roll footage had exceeded permitted parameters, they convinced the producer to agree to retroactive terms resulting in **a payment of \$635.00 per actor.**

When Eastern Region staff was able to recover **\$1,548.87 in Chorus increments** for a rehearsal period on an URITA contract upon discovering the increments were payable as of the beginning of employment.

Eastern Region staff were able to reach a settlement in an arbitration about a scheduling practice that had been arbitrarily changed, thus affecting some of the performers' pay. Eighteen performers received **retroactive pay** for additional performances worked between November 2017 and November 2018, **totaling \$5,180.00.**

Western Region staff recovered **\$336.00 for a member owed additional salary increments** for four chorus parts performed over the course of two months.

Western Region staff responded to a member's request for compensation for an additional show that had not been on the schedule, leading to **a 1/8 payment – far more than the overtime** the member was requesting.

Western Region staff collected a year of outstanding vacation payments for members, **totaling \$3,406.24.**

Western Region staff reported that as of January, the 99-Seat Theatre Agreement has been used by a total of 80 companies since its introduction in 2015, covering **146 productions, 6,163 workweeks and a total of \$865,890 in member earnings.**

Betsy Mugavero and Quinn Mattfeld in *The Taming of the Shrew* at Southwest Shakespeare Company.



2019 TAX ADVICE: NEW RULES!

In discussing changes brought on by the new tax law, I start by paraphrasing Bette Davis's great line from *All About Eve*: "Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy tax season!"

The new tax law – The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which was enacted on December 22, 2017 – brings the largest set of Internal Revenue Code changes since the Reagan administration enacted The Tax Reform Act of 1986.

Some of the specific changes brought on by the new tax law vary based on location – for more information about that, check out the Tax Tips section of the Member Portal. But I wanted to use this space to share some evergreen advice that I believe is beneficial to the membership at large.

First, it is important to know that the place on the tax return where employees used to be able to deduct their business expenses, Miscellaneous Itemized Deductions, was eliminated under the new law. This means that workers who only earn employee wages will no longer be able to deduct their business expenses (agents' and managers' fees, union dues, classes, research, audition costs, travel, etc.) as itemized deductions.

However, you might be able to deduct some, or even all, of your ordinary and necessary expenses against these kinds of fee-based gigs. Do you earn money as a print model, voice-over actor, teaching private classes, singing in a church, temple or other venue, performing at private parties or gigs, doing readings, showcases and other fee-based gigs, fronting at a trade show, singing waiter, spokesperson, standardized medical patient, law school or law firm mock trial performer?

If so, or if you receive any fees for any kind of show business work or performance, whether or not you receive a 1099 at the end of the year, you can use the Schedule C form, which is for independent contractors and other fee earners.

Another question many members have asked is if they need to form their own LLC. It's a matter of personal style. The self-employment Schedule C on the tax return is available to any self-employed taxpayer, whether or not she or he has formed an LLC.

BY SANDRA KARAS

RECOGNIZING THEATRE'S BACKBONE



Mathew deGuzman, left, took over Equity's Instagram from the *Aladdin* tour on National Swing Day. (Also pictured: Gary Cooper and Jason Scott Macdonald.)

On January 16, Actors' Equity celebrated the fourth annual National Swing Day, recognizing the heroic work of the stage's backbone, with a day-long social media celebration.

Swing Day activities included Instagram takeovers led by Mathew deGuzman on the *Aladdin* tour and Micaela Martinez on the *Wicked* tour. Both took over the reins of @ActorsEquity on Instagram throughout the day and provided an inside look at a day in the life of a swing on the road.

At the same time, swings from *Pretty Woman* and *The Prom* did Facebook live videos, offering a backstage view of the life of a Broadway swing and shared insight into their experiences getting into swing work.

Swings across the country also received gift bags of swag from Equity celebrating their unique contribution to theatre.

"The swing is one of the hardest, underappreciated jobs in our industry," said Jennifer Cody, 2nd Vice President and Chair of Equity's Advisory Committee on Chorus Affairs. "We celebrate those who save the show eight times a week!"

SAVE THE DATE! UPCOMING MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Annual Membership Meeting

Monday, April 29, 2019

2 pm ET / 1 pm CT / 11 am PT

All meetings will be held in the Regional Offices. Please visit the Member Portal for further information and any changes.

Members with disabilities who would like to request accommodations to participate in the Membership Meetings: please call 212-869-8530, ext. 318, two weeks prior to the meeting to make arrangements.

If you would like to present a resolution at an upcoming membership meeting, please note that the resolution must be

submitted in writing to Equity at least two weeks in advance of the meeting. All motions that will be discussed during the Membership Discussion Period will be posted in the Member Portal one business day prior to the Membership Meeting.

Resolutions for the Annual Membership Meeting must be submitted to National Director of Governance Allison Bodwell at abodwell@actorsequity.org by April 15, 2019.

referred me to a doctor who diagnosed me as having bipolar disorder and could prescribe medication.” Sook doesn’t view her medication so much as a magic pill as she does a lifeline: “I felt like I was stuck in the bottom of a well but had been thrown a ladder. I still had to do all of the work to climb out of the well but I was given the tools to do it and I was able to do the creative work I wanted to be doing.”

Bardier, who had been prescribed anti-anxiety and antidepressant treatments since he was eighteen, acknowledged a similar moment of reckoning during his career. “I was going through the everyday struggle of ‘What is my place in this business? How do I do all this when I still need to wait tables and work at a yoga studio to pay bills? When will I have a 401(k)?’ That’s a 30-second conversation I would have in my head every day, a thousand times. I was sleeping in and I was talking to my friends in a way that sounded not like myself.”

“Finally, I realized that maybe I needed to talk to someone,” he said. “After fellow union members recommended them, I called The Actors Fund and had a meeting the next week, where I was assigned to a social worker intern, and I started talking to someone. My life changed.” (For more about The Actors Fund, see “A Closer Look” on p.13.)

In choosing a therapist, Dr. Bradley recommends a strategy that couldn’t be more apt for Equity members: audition your therapists. “People need to find the right fit,” he said. “I’ll tell [prospective patients] to see three other therapists before you are sure. You need a natural simpatico with the therapist.”

“I FELT LIKE I WAS STUCK IN THE BOTTOM OF A WELL BUT HAD BEEN THROWN A LADDER. I STILL HAD TO DO ALL OF THE WORK TO CLIMB OUT OF THE WELL, BUT I WAS GIVEN THE TOOLS TO DO CREATIVE WORK.”

— VICTORIA RAE SOOK



If a therapist is classically trained and the patient needs emotional engagement, that’s a bad fit. If you need warmth and expressiveness, negotiate that with the therapist. It’s important that there be the right dance between therapist and patient.”

Some people resist the urge to seek medical treatment or therapy for a variety of reasons. Sook’s main concern came from being a performer. “I was afraid my medication would mess with my ability to create a character,” she said, “but I found that it was really helpful. I describe my moods as ranging from a negative ten to a positive ten. With a mood stabilizer, its job is to bring me to zero.” Sook said that every day she assesses how she feels, and then “I do the sense memory I need to get where I want to be for the stage.”

Patti Murin, an Eastern Region member who has been public about dealing with anxiety and depression, agrees with Sook about how seeking treatment for her mental illness helped improve her work as an actress. “Actors are afraid it will make you a zombie,” she said, “but it gives you a larger range of emotions. Instead of living in the highs and lows between being devastated and elated, I am now living on a level playing field. I can feel my

true emotions more purely, rather than wondering if I am accurately feeling things. I have better clarity, and more trust in my brain and confidence in myself.”

It’s not uncommon for arts professionals to identify mental illness in themselves, and Murin has a theory as to why. “Mental illness is not picky, and it knows no bounds,” she said, “Because part of our job is dealing with emotions, and requires us to be more open and vulnerable, we discover it easier, and it hits us a bit harder.” For that very reason, Dr. Cicchetti suggests that this emotional fallout is something that needs to be addressed not only by actors, but by acting schools, theaters and production companies as well.

Both Bardier and Murin acknowledge that another reason people are loath to seek treatment is the stigma surrounding it, despite a 2016 report in *Health Affairs* magazine citing that the United States spends more money on mental disorders than any other medical condition. Flender, for example, acknowledged that she never informed anyone about her depression diagnosis during *Oklahoma!* because of just this stigma. “Mental illness has always been seen

as weakness, as a minority affiliation,” Bardier said, “but it is strength, it affects a majority. It is courageous to take a step to help yourself.”

Murin has experienced this negative stigma firsthand after some people on the Internet minimized her calling out of certain performances in Broadway’s *Frozen* due to her anxiety. In her view, the more educated the public is on mental illness, the more people would understand that doing so was not at all a reflection on her abilities as a performer. “The problem with anxiety and mental health conditions,” she said, “is that you don’t understand it unless you are living it. This wasn’t performance anxiety; it didn’t matter that I was onstage. If I had an office job it would be the same.”

Murin’s calling out exemplified the need for more people to address mental illness publicly. “I remember how brave Patti was to speak out about that,” Bardier said. “We are built to believe that we have to put on a veneer that everything is okay at all times, and that veneer is fake. Breaking through the silence is the most important action to assist in breaking the stigma of mental illness and bringing more awareness to

Continued on page 23

CLAYTON HODGES A YOUTHFUL FORCE

Clayton Bradley Hodges, 41, died of brain cancer on Monday, January 14, 2019 in Los Angeles. Clayton was raised in Tulsa, OK and earned his BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and his MFA from the American Conservatory Theatre. He graced the stages of London, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles for nearly two decades. His generosity as a teacher, mentor and connector of people led him to found Tisch East, an alumni association for NYU's performing artists.

This is how he met his wife, Writers Guild of America member Susan, whom he married in 2010. Their daughter, Cecilia, was born shortly after. Their little family enjoyed a life of love, laughter and creativity that served as a strong support system for Susan's writing career and Clayton's entrepreneurial spirit.

As a result, Clayton launched Fervently Fun Concepts, a staffing agency specializing in toy demonstration.



Clayton Bradley Hodges

It was the perfect fit for Clayton, a man with boundless energy, a quick wit, a blinding smile and a playful, child-like, goofy spirit. It was also a big hit with his daughter – she had a daddy who brought home toys as his job!

Clayton was preceded in death by his younger brother, Kevin, and leaves behind

his wife and daughter; his father, James Hodges and wife the Honorable Jane Wiseman of Tulsa; his mother, Jan Owen of Tulsa; his step-brothers, John Wiseman and wife Kiran Malhotra of Brooklyn, New York and James Wiseman and wife Dana, along with their children, William and Grace, also of Brooklyn; his mother-in-law, Bobbie Johnston of Charleston, West Virginia; his sister-in-law, Pamela Clark and her husband, Brian and their daughter, Chloe as well as many aunts, uncles, cousins and an extensive network of family members and friends.

Clayton's private wake was held in his home on the day of his death. The Tulsa memorial was held on February 3rd and the Los Angeles memorial was held on February 8. They were attended by over 500 of Clayton's friends and extended family.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in Clayton's name to WeSpark Cancer Support Center.

IN MEMORIAM

Reported November 1, 2018 to January 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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ROWENA BALOS
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ALLEN BLOOMFIELD
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BILLY PATERSON
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TEDDI SIDDALL
WALT SMITH
DIANA SOWLE
RACHEL STEPHENS
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LOIS WHEELER
STAN WILSON

HOW I GOT MY EQUITY CARD

MADRID ST. ANGELO MEMBER SINCE 2012



Every young actor dreams of becoming a “legitimately” recognized working professional. I was no exception. As a student of Sanford Meisner’s, training under the auspice of William Alderson at New York’s Neighborhood Playhouse (New School of Acting) in the 1980s, I’d worked hard to hone my skills. Eventually trading in my New York City stomping grounds for digs in Chicago, I set out to build a solid resume, working with as many Equity theaters and directors as I could.

Racking up EMC points and securing an Equity contract

is no easy task. Young actors need to be mindful of several important things. They need to focus on the craft of acting in the long haul; understand that building a resume and making insider and union connections take time and set (moveable) deadlines for accomplishing the goal of union membership.

My induction into our union came as a result of landing a leading role in the landmark production of Luis Alfaro’s *Oedipus El Rey* at Victory Gardens, spearheaded and directed by Chay Yew. Today, my intent remains much like it was when I started out: to work with the best union directors at the best union houses, to make a living wage doing what I love and to relish my hard-earned union membership. I fully intend to make the most of every opportunity to promote my union, its benefits and its growing pool of accomplished performers.

LAURA ZINGLE MEMBER SINCE 2012



I grew up attending live theatre – first the shows at the high school where my dad taught, then to the regional theatre in Philadelphia and Broadway shows in New York to which my parents took me. I even saved up my money to buy a ticket to see Nathan Lane in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* when I was 15. I always wanted to be an actor, but my high school tech theatre teacher thought I’d make a good stage manager, and soon I was stage managing high school and camp plays. I continued acting and stage managing throughout college, and after a few post-college tech internships, I ended up working in

education and retail. After a few years I decided I needed to pursue theatre professionally, so I got a few local stage management credits in Philadelphia and then applied to the MFA program at UC San Diego. Part of the draw of this fantastic stage management program was the opportunity to work on a show at La Jolla Playhouse and get my Equity card by graduation.

Grad school was one of the best decisions I ever made – besides the excellent education, I got my Equity card on *Hands on A Hardbody*, which was a fulfilling experience and a lot of fun. I was so excited to receive my Equity card in the mail that I actually called the L.A. office to ask how long it would take! I have photos of myself signing my first contract and getting my first card (it was white), and have been a proud Actors’ Equity member since 2012.

STRONGER THAN HATE: CONCERT BENEFITS VICTIMS OF TREE OF LIFE SHOOTING



From left, Mara Jill Herman, Marc Winski and Collin O'Connor.

This past December, a host of talented people – including many members of Actors' Equity – honored those who died and were injured in the October shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

Entitled "Stronger Than Hate: A Benefit for Tree of Life Synagogue," the concert took place on December 6 at The Green Room 42 in New York City, where it was hosted by Equity performer Ilana Levine and directed and produced by Equity member Mara Jill Herman. It raised \$5,000 for the Pittsburgh congregation.

A variety of performers honored the lives of the Tree of Life congregants, and focused on what it means to be Jewish in America. Cast members of the Off-Broadway production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, produced by National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, performed "Matchmaker" and "Sabbath Prayer." The evening also featured a discussion with Equity member Gary John La Rosa and Jason Sirois, the Director of Education Programs at the Anti-Defamation League. "The marginalized community should not hold the burden of protecting

themselves," Sirois said. "It needs to have allies."

The "Stronger Than Hate" benefit also included performances from Equity members Jillian Gottlieb, Danny Harris Kornfeld, Rebecca Kuznick, Stephanie Lynne Mason, Jesse Manocherian, Rosie Jo Neddy, Bill Nolte, Collin O'Connor, Samantha Joy Pearlman, Hannah Richter, Alyson Leigh Rosenfeld, Gavriel Savit, Eileen Tepper, Rachel Zatzoff, EMCs Jodi Bluestein and Marc Winski, performer Nathan Klau and Tree of Life congregant Samantha G. Harris. The band Scruffy Pearls performed, and Julie Gold, the Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter, closed the evening with "From a Distance."

"When I woke up to the horrific news about another mass shooting in America, this time in Pittsburgh, I was compelled to take meaningful and immediate action," Herman said. "Within days of going public with the benefit, I heard from so many friends who wanted to help. The evening turned out to be a beautiful celebration of Jewish talent and inspired many to speak out when confronted with anti-Semitism."

SAVE THE DATE! NEXT NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION

Spring New Member Orientation
Monday, April 15, 2019
2 pm ET / 1 pm CT / 12 pm MT / 11 am PT

The next New Member Orientation will take place in Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis and New York — and can be attended online via Zoom as well. Learn more about what the union does and how you can make the most of your membership.

The Boy From Oz and *Priscilla at Uptown*. “They have built such a community of actors, designers, creatives and patrons. There is a wonderful sense of home there.”

Western Region stage manager Matt Grevan applied to work at Uptown Players before starting graduate school, although the company’s reputation intimidated him. “I was terrified,” he said, remembering when he began employment the summer after his first year of graduate school. “I dove in and realized they were more of a close-knit family than anything. From then, I would come back every summer. Jeff and Craig and Uptown are some of the main reasons I came back to live in Dallas. It’s not often you find a theater like that.”

Western Region member Kyle Igneczi earned his Equity card playing the title character in a 2015 production of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and has also performed in

Uptown productions of *Angels in America* and *Catch Me If You Can*. “They have been pivotal not only in my career but the career of so many people in town,” he said. “They started 17 years ago in a small black box, and now they are one of the places in town where you want to work. They serve the LGBT community in Dallas so, so well, telling their stories and making sure they are represented on one of the most renowned stages, in a historic building.”

The upcoming shows at Uptown Players prove they have no plans of ending that practice any time soon. They will mount a production of *The View Upstairs* in June 2019, during the anniversary of the fire at the Upstairs Lounge in New Orleans on which the show is based. They will end their current season with Bekah Brunstetter’s new comedy, *The Cake*, about a southern baker who is forced to re-examine her deeply-held beliefs when



Photo by Mike Morgan

Kyle Igneczi, right, with Grace Neeley in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

she is asked to bake a cake for a wedding and realizes there is not one bride, but two.

Of course, Grevan recalls that Uptown Players have always had a knack for producing shows with evergreen social issues. “We were doing *The Nance* when gay marriage was legalized,” he said. “During the curtain call, our lead, B.J. Cleveland,

talked about what that meant to him and the gay community, and what that meant to the next generation. And I thought about how this play that was set in the 1930s was not only relevant for its time but also relevant now. It was one of those big theatre moments.

“I couldn’t think of a better place to work.” 🍷

it. The silence and the shame that exists there is what causes the toxicity.”

The negative connotation isn’t new, according to Katrina Gay, National Director, Strategic Partnerships at the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), has seen enormous progress in a short amount of time. “People are judged differently and watched and scored through the lens of their mental health condition,” she said, “and it feels unfair. Some people are hesitant to share their experiences because they don’t want to be over-identified in the role of someone with a mental health condition. They want to be known as artists, and don’t want to wear that badge – and they shouldn’t have to, none of us should be defined by whatever our condition is. That often becomes the conversation instead of their work.”

Stith, too, admitted that he feels pressure not to speak publicly about his

bouts of depression lest it hurt his image within the industry. “I often feel that to disclose this would somehow go against the ‘life of the party’ image that so many musical theatre actors are told to maintain,” he said. “I was once told by a cast mate to simply say, ‘I’m doing fine’ when I was suffering from depression after a dear friend passed away. The #BookedAndBlessed personality can sometimes be presented as the only way to be when we know life is not always like this.”

Perhaps the best way to change the conversation about mental health is to actually alter the specific language used to discuss it – although there is no consensus on preferred terminology to use. “We do have an opportunity to shape our language,” Gay said. “To some, the term ‘mental illness’ sounds negative. It connotes the medical side of the things,

rather than a more human side of things. Life is about a journey that doesn’t just include doctors and diagnoses – it includes friends and family and work and opportunities. Some people say ‘mental wellness,’ or even just ‘wellness,’ or ‘emotional wellness.’ For others, though, ‘mental illness’ is a necessary term because it connotes a hierarchy of struggle, which might be candy-coated with another term.” Gay said she personally prefers the term “mental health condition.”

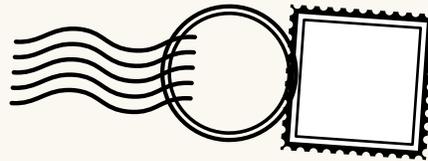
And Gay is very optimistic that public perception of mental health conditions will continue thanks to people like those in Equity. “The creative community has a huge role to play in social movements – stage, fashion, music and scripted work reflect social circumstances and also have power to influence them,” she said. “They should lead and have an impact. It’s an exciting time.” 🍷

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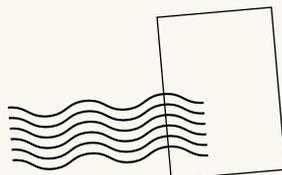
DETROIT

For more than 20 years, the Detroit area Equity Liaison Committee has been a part of Adopt-a-Child. This event benefits underprivileged children in the Detroit area, allowing them to enjoy the holiday season with gifts of clothing and toys in situations where kids might go without. Thanks to fundraising efforts and donations at the local membership meeting in November, the committee raised \$400 and "adopted" two brothers, ages two and six. Gifts were presented at a celebration on December 5 in downtown Detroit's Cobo Center. Gifts included winter coats, hats, mittens, pants, shirts, sweaters, pajamas and toys. The committee also began to raise funds for Equity and Friends Fights AIDS; all the donated funds will stay in Southeast Michigan.



PHOENIX/TUCSON

Michael Barnard, Artistic Director of Phoenix Theatre, proudly shared that his theater will be celebrating an important upcoming anniversary with its 100th Gala Celebration. A number of Equity performers from past years will be invited to join in the Gala.



HOUSTON

Houston held their annual Actors' Equity member meeting on February 4th at Queensbury Theatre – Houston's newest Equity theater. Liaison Chair Joel C. Sandel proudly proclaimed "Houston" as the official name of the Liaison Area: a newly minted designation after years of flying under the banner of "Houston/Galveston." Four members present at the meeting had been Equity members for more than 40 years, while there were also many new members to both Actors' Equity and the Houston area in attendance. Following the meeting, the out-of-town guests received a tour of Queensbury's wonderful facility.

