Annual Membership Meeting is Friday, April 9, 2010

The Eastern, Central and Western Regions will be connected by telephonic hookup for the Meeting in order that members in all regions may be able to hear statements of candidates running for election to Council.

The statements will begin at 2:30 p.m. (Eastern Time), 1:30 p.m. (Central Time) and 11:30 a.m. (Western Time).

The meeting in the EASTERN REGION will convene at 2 p.m. in the Council Room on the 14th Floor of the Equity Building, 165 West 46th Street, New York, NY.

The agenda will also include the following:

• Special Order of Business to solicit suggestions for the following agreements:
  - Musical Stock/Unit Attraction (MSUA), which expires October 31, 2010
  - Council of Stock Theatres (COST), which expires December 31, 2010

The meeting in the CENTRAL REGION will convene at 1 p.m. in the Member Center, Room 1522, at 125 Clark, Chicago, IL.

The agenda will also include the following:

• Report of the Central Regional Vice President
• Report of the Central Regional Director
• Special Order of Business to solicit suggestions for the following agreements:
  - Musical Stock/Unit Attraction (MSUA), which expires October 31, 2010
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• Membership Discussion Period in accordance with the By-Laws

A Sign Interpreter will be present on request. Equity’s TDD telephone number—Telecommunications Device for the Deaf—is (212) 302-4306.

The meeting in the WESTERN REGION will convene at 11 a.m. in The Bellamy Room on the Fifth Floor of the Equity Building, 6755 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA.

The agenda will also include the following:

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Letters to The Editor
Letters received from past members on subjects of concern to Equity members will be considered and published as soon as possible. The Editor reserves the right to trim letters to 150 words and to select one or two representative letters when many similar letters are received. Letters must be signed, but names will be withheld on request for those letters which may affect members' employment. Signatures will not be withheld on letters at antagoistic or offensive, neither implied or expressed, against other members. Opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are not necessarily those of Actors' Equity Association.

David McGraw
REMEMBERING CARLTON DAVIS
Dear Fellow AEAMembers:
How many times in your career can you remember that you turned down an offer for a job and the producer said, “No. I am not going to take no for an answer. I will call you back in three days?” How likely is that to happen? If you say “No,” they hang up and call the next person on the list, right? Carlton Davis called me to do a summer job on the famous New England circuit on the Eastern seaboard. I was really into it at the time and, admittedly didn’t know the ropes. I was employed at another theatre at the time. I had never given notice on a contract and, quite frankly, didn’t know how to do so. Carlton called again, and once again I said, “I am employed at the time, and I feel this is not appropriate.” He called a third time and insisted, saying, “I want you to really think about this. This is June. I am offering you another opportunity through mid-September. Your loyalty is admirable, but if that theatre needed to release you for any reason, they would not turn you down. That suddenly made sense to me and I went to the producer where I was working and gave notice. When the news was out that I was leaving, fellow cast members asked what was it that I was leaving to do. I said, “Camelot for Carlton Davis on the New England seaboard.” I immediately a fellow cast member said, “Oh my God. Jeanne Lehm man is Guinevere in the production. You are going to love her.” So, AEA Councillor Jeanne Lehmman and I met in Camelot, thanks to Carlton, and married soon after. February 2010 we will happily celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary. I tried foolishly to turn this job down, and had done so, and had Carlton accepted my decision, I would have missed the love of my life. Carlton always took delight in saying that he brought Jeanne and me together, and he did.
I am certain we are not the only ones that met on Carlton’s circuit and I am sure there are other couples with similar adventures, not to mention the lifelong friendships that came out of his tours. Carlton Davis provided more work for more actors than any other producer/packager I know. He loved his work and having been a successful actor at a young age, he loves actors. He had such integrity with every show he put together. He and partner, Dick Nathlowski, lived across the street where I was staying, at 71st and Broadway, and were far more than just colleagues; we were dear friends. Jeanne and I reflected on that fact last week, and he provided 11 tours for us over the years. That circuit was probably one of the most sought after jobs. That could be had because of the locations involved. Who would not want to spend two weeks in beautiful Ogunquit, Maine, at one of America’s foremost and famous summer theatres? Jeanne and I could write a book of funny stories involving Carlton Davis. I know we are joined by many, many actors in saying that Carlton is missed greatly. He and Dick were already missed, having retired to live among the flamingos and dolphins in Florida a few years ago. I called Carlton once at Thanksgiving and he said he and Dick were stuffing a flamingo for Thanksgiving. Of course. Always laughing, always dry, always loving. Carlton is missed by everyone.
Larry French
New York
REMEMBERING ALAINA
Dear Editor:
When I arrived in New York in 1973 to take my bite of the Big Apple, as a fresh graduate, women nurtured me: Charlotte Croxley, Shezawee Powell, Ursuline Kainara and Alaina Reed. On Thursday, December 17, 2009, Alaina completed her journey on the Earth Plane, and went to receive her crown.
(caption on page 8)

Council Acts on Central Membership Meeting Resolution Concerning Rulebooks
Concerned with the length of time it has taken to publish the Production and LORT Contract Rulebooks, the following resolution was passed unanimously by members at the 2020 Central Region Membership Meeting of January 11, 2020. As required by procedures, Council’s response is published in the following issue.

“Those in attendance strongly express the frustration of the membership with the extended delay in the signing and publication of the final Rulebooks for Production and LORT. Having completed negotiations and ratified the Production Agreement by September 2008 and the LORT Agreement by May 2009, a sufficient amount of time would seem to have elapsed to make the finalization of the Rulebooks a reality. The continued absence of a signed agreement and a published Rulebook has raised confusion for both the membership and the theatres. The body asks that the necessary action be taken to have the staff and committees prioritize the completion of these Rulebooks immediately.”

In response, the Equity Central Council, at its meeting of February 16, 2010 discussed the matter and: “RESOLVED, unanimously by recorded vote, to instruct the staff and committees to prioritize the immediate completion and publication of Production and LORT Rulebooks. Further, to ameliorate such delays in future and to improve communication with the membership, Council requests that the President’s Planning Committee discuss, and report back to Council in a timely manner, measures including, but not limited to, the following suggestions to facilitate closure of the post-negotiation process and to expedite the completion and publication of such Rulebooks:

Monthly post-negotiation reports to Council within three months following ratification, as ordered by the Chair, or so unusual. Generic negotiating timeline

Plates patrols that the year Equity has established a new critical to costs and confusion for both the membership and the theatres. The body asks that the necessary action be taken to have the staff and committees prioritize the completion of these Rulebooks immediately.”

Call 877-AEA-1913
Equity has established a new National toll-free hotline system for members who live in Equity and ofﬁce cities. The new number is 877-AEA-1913 (honoring the year of Equity’s founding). Each Area Liaison has its own extension, where members can access news and information in their region.

(1) Dial 877-AEA-1913

Centennial Plans Moving Ahead
Plans for Equity’s Centennial celebration in 2012-2013 are moving ahead with the new logo in an orderly fashion with the recent approval of a 100th Anniversary logo and outreach to theatre leadership. The focus is on the Centennial leadership Committee of 100. Recent additions to the list include Billy Crystal, Chita Rivera, Liza Minnelli, Whoopi Goldberg, Betty Buckley and James Naughton. EventQuest, Equity’s Centennial consultant, is working closely with the logo to build a style sheet which can be used in a variety of media placements that should enhance the Centennial celebration with a high national profile.

In the meantime, EventQuest and the Centennial Committee are engaged in detailed examinations of the key elements of the proposed Centennial logo and working to identify possible sponsors. Plans still call for a celebration in which Equity members and their audiences across the country can participate, and which will enhance public knowledge and respect for the Union and craft of professional theatre.
Congress Caught in Partisan Gridlock

Congress appears to be crippled by the two house differences—both ideologically and practically—moving anything forward. Decisions regarding the most critical aspects of American life are completely tied up in whether they will make or break political careers in the 2010 elections. But no one can be watching and waiting, educated Americans need their leaders to watch our premiums skyrocket. If we delay the reform, millions will continue to be dropped from their insurance providers, their health plans, millions will remain uninsured or underinsured and the rest of us will watch our premiums skyrocket. If the path of the current trajectory there could also be some harsh realities:

* Equity members and all Americans could see an individual mandate to purchase insurance without any study mechanism to ensure its affordability or the law of gravity.
* Many state revenues such as may have to grapple with a tax levied on the health plans we provide resulting in a water-down of the coverage or a reduction in the number of members covered.

In the absence of any public Option or a truly "open market" state-by-state approach could mean that insurers would be able to sell their plans across state lines, putting consumer protection in jeopardy. Insurers could gravitate to states with the most lax regulations and coverage requirements, craft insurance policies there and sell them to people across the country. While there are several senators (18 at press time) circling a letter urging Senate Leader Harry Reid, (D-NV) to pass the public Option via the budget reconciliation process, a letter already had been signed by 119 House members. The most effective way to move this initiative forward and keep the best pieces of the bill alive is for elected officials to hear from their constituents. The successes in this process have consistently come out of the public speaking loud and clear about their priorities.

Moving Forward

The bright side of this is that the fear of failure on the national level has once again spurred people across the country into action. The California State Senate passed their Single Payer bill SB810 in January and although it is not expected to be signed by the Governor, it has provided a platform for educating the public about the benefits and need for universal health coverage. There are dozens of single payer organizations and initiatives throughout the country that are growing in numbers and strength and are pushing people to get comfortable with articulating their needs to their elected representatives.

Equity will be participating in the nationwide Single Payer Conference in March sponsored by the Labor Campaign for Single Payer and the National Labor College in Washington DC. While there is no longer any agreement on how to get there we will continue to work toward the realization of a single payer system in the United States. Equity encourages all members to express their ideas and opinions on this issue and to engage in regular dialogue with their elected officials.

At press time the public option letter signatories were:

Senators: Michael Bennet (CO), Barbara Boxer (CA), Sherrod Brown (OH), Roland Burris (IL), Dianne Feinstein (CA), Al Franken (MN), Kristen Gillibrand (NY), John Kerry (MA), Frank Lautenberg (NJ), Patrick Leahy (VT), Merky Merkley (OR), Barbara Mikulski (MD), Jack Reed (RI), Bernie Sanders (VT), Charles Schumer (NY), Jeanne Shaheen (NH), Tom Udall (NM) and Sheldon Whitehouse (RI).

We encourage members to call these senators and thank them for their due diligence. We will provide a list of those who did not sign on as well as the House members who have and have not responded. Please visit the Equity website for talking points on the issues and to get your voice heard.

For more information please visit: www.actorsequity.org

2010 Annual Election Calendar

Friday, April 9, 2010 Annual National Membership Meeting (All regions via teleconference) Candidate Speeches

Monday, April 12, 2010 Distribution of ballots (from balloting company)

Friday, May 21, 2010 Deadline for receipt of ballots

Saturday, May 22, 2010 Tabulation Day

EquityUK Councillor Visits AEA Council Meeting

Peter Kosta, a 30 year member of EquityUK and a member of its Council since 1976, observed the Equity Council meeting on February 16, 2010. Mr. Kosta, who has appeared extensively on the West End in plays ranging from The Mousetrap to Godspell, for which he also served as the Equity Deputy, serves on numerous committees for his union. Acting Executive Director Carol Waaser and Third Vice President Ira Mont extended a cordial welcome. “It was a pleasure to have one of our British counterparts visit us and observe the workings of a sister performer union,” said Mr. Mont.

Realistic Expectations

There’s no way to predict what the net result of any health care reform process will be. If no reform is passed, the very sick will continue to be dropped from the health plans, millions will remain uninsured or underinsured and the rest of us will watch our premiums skyrocket.

Among the revisions are:

* Multi-employer plans such as those in the health industry (excluding unionized workers) will have their cuts frozen.

Continued from page 1

The Members’ Project Code (MPC) has recently been revised and includes a number of important changes. Created in 1987 and expanded upon by Equity members, the Code is administered by the Area Liaisons in 24 cities nationwide and is designed to permit the MPC with great success,” says Bill McMillin, Liaison Chair. “Most, if not all of our texts and resulted in industry response to Members’ Project Code.

The MPC is intended to encourage a number of Equity UK members and is designed to permit the MPC to showcase their talents. It is a list of program and encourages all and addresses that an acknowledgement that

Emphasis on employment and projects.”

Philadelphia Liaison Chair Tom Helmer explained: “The MPC has been around for over twenty years allowing fellow Equity members to work together on material, either established or new, that excites their artistic desires to tell good stories. It’s a great way for our members to stretch their artistic muscles when they’re not working under an Equity contract.”

Tom Moriarty, who served for five years as Kansas City Liaison Chair and recently relocated to Seattle, helped to organize a “showcase” for the past six summers using the EquityUK’s spring evening of six short plays. “The format had been so successful in Kansas City” Moriarty says, “that most of the EquityUK put together S.R.O. More importantly, this use of the MPC has directly created concrete work opportunities for our members locally, which encouraged a number of Equity Membership Candidates to join the Association as full equity members.”

The Members’ Project Code, used for productions that are member-produced, is a viable way for members to showcase their talents. For more information, contact your Area Liaison.
Your Income Tax
Continued from page 1

This obviously comes at a great cost and hardship to the examined taxpayer and obviously decreases the efforts associated with a face-to-face exam in the taxpayer’s home city. Have the process resulted in more fair and accurate assessments of our members’ returns, I would not devote time to this matter. A pattern has emerged, however, to reveal a systematic rejection of most, if not all, of the professional expenses reported followed by a hit and miss of these correspondence exams. This requires the taxpayer to file an appeal of the initial decision, and if they begin the process anew, often with a tax attorney or other professional representative, and with no guarantee of a favorable outcome. Many of our members, too discouraged and lacking sufficient funds to file an appeal, simply choose to lose the case in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles who is familiar with the entertainment industry. Your return is more likely to be reviewed by someone in Bensalem, PA or Ogden, UT who won’t be able to see you, speak with you or afford the opportunity to describe and explain your situation and work history. (2) The examination is likely to be handled by correspondence and, in spite of the records you provide, your deductions will probably be rejected as unnecessary or, on the examiner’s speculation, already reimbursed by your employer. Either way, you will likely be forced to the appeals level where, without proper representation, you will face a similar response. (3) Those on tour will have more difficulty establishing their tax homes, especially if they sublet their apartments while on the road.

We have had a few successes of late and the Taxpayer Advocate’s office was of enormous help in arriving at a favorable determination. We hope that we can continue to rely on this assistance, but we also need to hear from members when they have been examined or audited. Whether you represent yourself or have retained a professional to represent you, we need to know what has happened and/or be able to assist you before you begin the process.

If you have been examined or audited in the recent past or have received a notice that your return has been selected for examination, please contact the VITA office in New York by calling (212) 921-2548 or by stopping in the VITA office on the 14th floor of the Equity building.

Sandra Karas is Secretary-Treasurer of Equity, Site Coordinator of the AEA, SAG & AFTRA VITA Program and an attorney in private practice.

A Remembrance of Conard Fowkes, or How I Survived Two Simultaneous IRS Audits
By Francis Jue

I first went to VITA (the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program) at Equity in 1985 because a cast member from the Off-Broadway revival of Pacific Overtures happened to be one of the volunteers. I remember meeting Conard Fowkes then, and he found out that I had taken time off from Yale to do the show. “Go back to school! Get your degree! At least they taught you enough to come here to get your taxes done!”

I had no idea then what kind of legacy Conard was creating at Equity. But I have since learned from personal experience how his advocacy has benefited professional actors and stage managers.

Conard and Sandra, Equity’s new Secretary/Treasurer, to assist me as well, and she gladly took up my case, personally contacting the Taxpayer Advocate’s office in Washington, DC.

Conard signed a letter, fashioned by Sandra, outlining all the business expenses that had been acknowledged as ordinary and necessary for actors and stage managers. He helped me edit my cover letter and additional supporting documents in response to the 2007 assessment. And Sandra persuaded the DC Taxpayer Advocate to monitor my audit, perhaps to use my case to educate the IRS on Performing Artists and their returns.

Over the next few months, I had more anxiety attacks, even cutting back on my holiday spending, just in case I had to make a big payout to the IRS. But Conard and Sandra remained stalwart throughout. Conard passed before my final results, but his final e-mail to me was full of optimism and characteristic camaraderie.

Over six months after the initiation of my 2007 audit, the IRS cleared me, making no adjustments to my 2007 return. The auditor even told Sandra over the phone, “Everyone kept records like Mr. Jue, we’d be out of work!”

I learned how to keep tax records from Conard Fowkes and the following year, the Equity volunteers at VITA. Without Conard and Sandra’s help, I might have folded out of frustration, and been thwarted from claiming legitimate business expenses on future returns. If you are being audited, I enthusiastically urge you to contact Sandra and the great folks at VITA.

And thank you, Conard, for being such a Bulldog.

Meet AEA’s National IT Department
Equity’s National IT Department keeps things running smoothly and efficiently behind the scenes. Picture here at their annual meeting in Equity’s New York office are: (l to r) Joe Vasos (EA Program Administrator), Kurt Lambertz (Programmer), Michael Caldwell (Chicago Administrator), Doug Beebe (NY – National Director), Karen Nothmann (NY Business Systems Analyst) and Jerry Hutt (NY Administrator).

Rulebook Available
The 2008-2011 Production Contract Rulebook is available in the Document Library on the Equity website: www.actorsofequity.org. It is labeled “Language Not Finalized.” At press time, the Media rule was not included, as that language was still being worked on. Other language has been agreed upon, with the exception of one or two places where language may still be slightly revised.

U/RTA Agreement
Continued from page 1

freeze in the first year of the contract and a 3% increase in salaries in the second year and a 2% increase in the third year, plus, there was an 11% increase in per diem and 85% increase in transportation reimbursement. Costume rental rates, which had not seen movement for some time, were increased to the current LORT rates, which for some items is a 100% or more increase.

In addition to financial gains Equity was able to improve the quality of life for Actors by achieving access to a 401(k) when theilnvestment, payroll system permits, high speed

internet access, a television in Actor housing, direct deposit accessibility, issuance of new skin parts (including tights, hair wigs, dance belts, dance bra, stockings), and a reduction in teaching hours. The Equity bio and logo will also be needed to provide, how to contact the Equity’s New York office are:

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Chicago
“Jersey Boys” Help Chicago

Since opening on October 5, 2007 at the Bank of America Theatre, the Chicago company of Jersey Boys has been stalwart fundraisers for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS and many local Chicago organizations. By the show’s final performance on January 10, 2010, the company had raised over $1,150,000 for BC/EFA over 951 performances, including $190,000 raised in the six weeks prior to the recent Gypsy of the Year Competition. This in turn allowed BC/EFA to award over $500,000 in grants to AIDS and family service organizations in Chicago over the same period of time, in addition to funding social services and emergency financial assistance offered to local entertainment industry professionals by the Chicago office of The Actors Fund. “We owe our success to the incredibly generous Chicago audiences and the support of our producers. But it was truly the Frankie Valli and Bob Gaudio autographed memorabilia that really excited everyone,” said Production Stage Manager Larry Baker. “None of this, however, would have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of the entire company—cast, crew and staff. We felt very fortunate to have been a part of this wonderful production and this was a simple way for us all to share some of our good fortune.”

New York
The Show (and Snow) Go On

Braving blizzard conditions, the Peterborough Players held their 2010 EPAs at Equity’s Audition Center on February 9 and 10. Artistic Director Gus Kaikkonen made the journey all the way from New Hampshire to hold auditions for his upcoming summer season, which includes Torch-Bearers. Actors Mark Campbell and Julia Cook, who toured together in Mamma Mia!, were among the 100+ actors who auditioned. “Every job I’ve gotten has been through an EPA,” said Mark. Julia joined AEA as an Equity Membership Candidate (EMC) and got the tour through an EPA, The Audition Department’s Keith Howard, Angel Wuehnell, and volunteer monitor Thia Stephan, made sure that things went smoothly throughout the entire wintry day.

St. Louis
“Unbeatable” Company Helps Holiday’s Needy

The cast, crew and production team of Unbeatable: The Musical at The Playhouse at West Port Plaza in St. Louis raised $175.00 for the United Way’s 100 Neediest Cases during the holidays. “This amount isn’t the thousands that other companies raised but we were a small group who tried to make someone’s holiday a little brighter,” said Equity member Michele Burdette Eimore. The company includes: Charity Dawson, Elise LeBarge, Emily Clinger*, Henry Palkes, John Plack*, Josh Limpert, Kevin Neyar, Kristy Cates*, Landon Shaw*, Mark Kelley, Michele Burdette Elmore*, Pamela Reckamp*, Paul J. Emery Ill, Rissa Crozier, Sue Silversten (Equity Entertainment). (* AEA members) Not pictured: Paul J. Emery III, Doug J. Hagglund, (Equity Entertainment).

Berkeley, CA
“Fat Pig” Donates Fat Check to BC/EFA

In November, 2009, Liliane Klein found herself elected to conduct the curtain speech at the Aurora Theatre after the company of Neil LaBute’s Fat Pig threw itself into fundraising for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS Week. “We figured I was the only character the audience didn’t want to kill,” she recalls with a laugh. But, in truth, the audiences could not have been more appreciative of the effort. “I couldn’t get over how supportive the theatre community of Berkeley/San Francisco was,” says the Great Neck, NY native. “They were so grateful for the performance and so supportive.” Liliane and her castmates alternated collections: girls’ night featured Liliane and costar Alexandra Creighton, while boys’ night brought out the buckets with Peter Ruocco and Jud Williford. Over the course of only one week, the cast of four raised $3,689.

Philadelphia
New Fringe Code Approved

By Tom Helmer
Chair, Philadelphia Area Liaison Committee

At its meeting on January 12, 2010, the Eastern Regional Board approved the use of a newly crafted Philly Fringe Code for the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe. For many years, AEA members in Philadelphia have used the AEA Members Project Code in the Philly Fringe portion of the annual Festival. The new Philly Fringe Code was crafted by using many of the recently adopted changes to the AEA Members Project Code that Council approved in December 2009 (see story page 3). This new Code also takes into account some of the required elements of participation in the Fringe, including liability insurance and participation fees.

How does it work?
The use of the Members support the theatre community in Philadelphia and the Fringe Festival. This Code is created to provide equity in the use by AEA members for productions in both the Live Arts and Philly Fringe portions of the Festival. These members must use an appropriate AEA contract.

If you are considering participating in the Philadelphia Fringe and want to find out more about the Philly Fringe Code, you may contact the Liaison Committee at phlliaisoncommittee@yahoo.com or call the AEA toll free hotline: 877-232-1913 ext 832 for additional contact information.
Dallas/Fort Worth
Discussion of Umbrella Theatres Tops Annual Meeting Agenda

By Dennis Ylas and Pam Dougherty

About 30 members from the Dallas/Fort Worth area joined Western Regional Director Mary Lou Westerfield and Business Rep Timothy Smith at our annual meeting on February 1, 2010, at the KD Studio theatre space of Uptown Players. We opened with a brief moment to honor the memory of several beloved theatre community members lost in 2009. Then Area Liaison Pam Dougherty announced the agenda and Ms. Westerfield shared news from across the country. She updated the group on LORT negotiations, talked about how the economy has affected theatres, and related specific examples (e.g., Las Vegas’ Phantom, LORT wage freeze) of how Equity has worked with struggling producers to help them continue to hire AEA members.

When the floor opened up for discussion, a lively debate centered on the issue of our Umbrella theatres, the length of time they’ve used the agreement, and whether or not it’s time for some of them to “grow up” to regular Small Professional Theatre (SPT) contracts with AEA. Many in the group concurred that some sort of “clock” needs to be inserted into the agreement in order to make sure our members share in the benefits when a theatre grows. Some members expressed the belief that some of our older and more established Umbrella theatres could in fact support a regular, albeit small, SPT agreement. Timothy Smith explained some of the problems the theatres face as they expand—learning to budget wisely, managing uneven income from year to year, moving from unpaid to paid staff. He also explained how staff has to negotiate the unique needs of individual theatres, while keeping abreast of the playing field level with other area producers.

By group acclamation, two committee members whose terms were expiring (Deborah Brown and Dennis Ylas), and two new members (Sharon Abbott and Mary Fergison) were selected to three-year terms on the North Texas Area Liaison Committee.

The meeting closed after a short discussion about pre-casting and members’ concerns that some area theatres have held open auditions when roles have actually been pre-cast. The membership was encouraged to make specific reports when and/or if this happens in the future.

Dallas members (l to r) Kevin Keating (back), Connie Coll, Ada Lynn, Pam Dougherty and Ely Lindsay.

New York
VITA Opens for 34th Season

On Monday, February 1, 2010, a long line began forming early at the Equity Office in New York. “I arrived very early and was number three in line,” said AEA member Charles Hendricks. This is his third year of having his tax return done by VITA. “I know it’s a great program, and I feel more comfortable and confident working with VITA. The volunteers know more about the business and the kinds of deductions that actors are allowed to take. We’re never rushed and, as actors, they genuinely care.”

VITA is just an extension of the community spirit in the room.”

The Miracle at Ivoryton

By Joan Valentina

In October of this year I had the great pleasure of doing a production of The Miracle Worker at Ivoryton Playhouse in Connecticut. What made the production special is that the actress playing Helen Keller was deaf. The following are comments from our director Jacqueline Hubbard, other cast members, and my own thoughts about the production and the rehearsal过程.

Jacqui Hubbard:
For most small professional theatres outside of major cities, this tough economic climate has made producing a well-rounded season a challenge. Comedies and musicals are in; dramas are usually waiting in the wings. I knew that choosing a drama was a risk, but The Miracle Worker had the appeal of being a story that everyone knew. I knew that local schools included it in their curricula. Also, I felt strongly that the play should be signed for the deaf population in our community. So I approached Aaron Kubey of The National Theatre of the Deaf and asked him if I had considered using a deaf actress to play the role of Helen, I confess I was taken aback. I hadn’t considered the possibility and the fact that it had not even entered my mind made me feel uncomfortable. How could I direct someone that could not hear me?

After meeting Jenilee Simons Marques, I knew that she had to be Helen. She had the intensity, the fierce will and the passion needed. She also had the distinct advantage of understanding a large part of Helen’s world. I knew casting Jenilee would make my job more complicated, but I had no idea of the incredible joy and miracles that it would bring.

Joan Valentina:

Day 1: We are almost halfway through the two-week rehearsal period. The process has been slower because everything has to be signed, but spirits are high. I have not yet had a conversation with Jenilee. This day she has a very large bag of gummy worms (one of my favorite candies) and I watch as she consumes massive amounts. All I can think is—she has removed her braces to play Helen and oh, the cavities. She must have caught me staring because she crosses the room and offers to share. I sign thank you. We continue to eat candy on the break, and at the end of the night I do some moves. Just like that, the ice is broken.

Day 7: Our director tells us we are not accepting the challenge of Jenilee’s world. With the exception of our stage manager and the actor playing Annie Sullivan, both very good signers, most cast members still have not had a lot of interaction with Jenilee. She spends most of her breaks signing with her sister, working on a computer, or reading. So, we all take the plunge big time. I ask her about her school (I bring the candy this time) and we have conversations. One actor and Jenilee discuss music. He will bring in his guitar to give her a lesson. The younger cast members giggle as they look at photos of The Jonas Brothers.

Day 9: I feel that our two wonderful rehearsal partners, Rick Farndell and Betty Beekman, have become our life support. We see them out to get us back on track. Jenilee, they teach us the short-cuts of signing and they re-sign when Jenilee does not understand something we have tried to communicate to her. It takes my hand and corrects my fingers when I misspell. She also writes notes when she is excited about something. She underlines words that I might not know upon first meeting them. Jenilee signs that she is 12, an award-winning poet, and that she is deaf. The cast has all been told that the actress playing Helen is deaf. I suppose we had all prepared in different ways. I learned the American Sign Language (ASL) alphabet, volunteered for a day at a school event for deaf children, and had many conversations with my neighbor Mary Lee who had taught sign language. Mary Lee’s best tips were never to hold your hands too high when signing, and use your whole body—especially facial expressions—to convey your thoughts.

Day 5: We are almost halfway through the two-week rehearsal period. The process has been slower because everything has to be signed, but spirits are high. I have not yet had a conversation with Jenilee. This day she has a very large bag of gummy worms (one of my favorite candies) and I watch as she consumes massive amounts. All I can think is—she has removed her braces to play Helen and oh, the cavities. She must have caught me staring because she crosses the room and offers to share. I sign thank you. We continue to eat candy on the break, and at the end of the night I do some moves. Just like that, the ice is broken.

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Washington/Baltimore

Perfect Ten for Local Auditions

By Gregory Gorton

For the third successful year, the Round House Theatre in Silver Spring, Maryland hosted the recent Washington/Baltimore Equity Regional Auditions. Sponsored by the Washington/Baltimore Equity Liaison Committee, these auditions are in their ninth very productive and popular year.

One hundred and forty-nine Equity members from this region and beyond performed for over 30 casting and artistic directors from area theatres and points north and south. Thirty-two EMCs also were seen. An excellent start for 2010.

These auditions have set a benchmark for regional auditions with many of the auditors expressing as much enthusiasm for them as do the participating actors.

At the Annual Membership Meeting of the Liaison Committee in November, 2009, a panel of five distinguished and well-known Producing and Artistic Directors was asked how important these auditions were to them in their casting decisions.

All five enthusiastically responded that they found the auditions useful and productive.

While the Equity auditions here in Washington/Baltimore have become an important casting tool for the production community, the auditions continue to be a highlight of the season for actors bringing their three minutes of monologue and/or song to this very receptive audience. Here are some comments:

“I have already received a call from American Theatre Ensemble and Olney Theatre thanks to these auditions.” – Carolyn Agan

“I received an audition from Olney Theatre for its upcoming production of MissAlliance.” – Kevin Hassler, EMC

“It was my first time auditioning and I was very impressed.” – Vaughn Irving

“Since I cross between acting, directing, producing and being a mom, the AEA auditions were a great way for me to let everyone know I was back on the market.” – Lee Mikesa Gardner

“I am 13 now. This was my second time auditioning. I felt like I was as an equal and a professional in every respect. At an audition like this, I feel that I am building a reputation with a very influential group of people.”

– Future AEA member and Broadway star, Centeine Stein

We like to get them started young in the Washington/ Baltimore region.

(Gregory Gorton is a long time Equity member, veteran of many area stages and a regular contributor to Equity News.)

Miracle At Iyorton

Continued from page 7

great, but Jenilee has not used her voice. We all assume she can talk, but we have never heard her voice words. The director encourages her to be verbal during the play, especially in the fight scene. We all do a great job. We often pretend to express anger and frustration with our entire body and voice.

Everyone is rolling on the floor, singing and shouting, Jenilee is surrounded and mostly just being silly. Jenilee makes the most amazing sounds. She thought we would think she sounded strange, I marveled at the fact that she has learned her language (ASL) and mine.

Opening night: Our director says in her speech that she knew doing this production would be challenging. However, she had no idea how rewarding working on the show would be for all of us. She is right. A Miracle has happened. We have come together as a cast in a new way. We have all had to re-think our methods of communicating. Everyone is backstage signing cues and spelling lines. We use touch and movement. There is nothing that can keep us from communicating with Jenilee. Even the dog in the show, Argyle, gets into the act. Jenilee signs into his paw on and off stage.

I ask some of the other actors how they felt about working on this production.

Michael Raver (James Kowin): Working with Jenilee was rewarding because it forced us to look past ego and self-reward and to work towards making The Miracle Worker into an ensemble piece. It’s fascinating how a thing that at first seems like a disadvantage can propel a production into a place of complete vulnerability and strength.

Andrea Mauilella (Annie Sullivan): Working with Jenilee was a privilege; bringing this story to life with her, an honor. Jenilee is as hard a working actress as I have known. Her commitment, consistency, and compassion on and off the stage inspire me. What a wonderful example for young people.

My hope is that she will come to find and to create work that unites our communities.

To my director, fellow cast members, stage manager and interpreters—thank you for allowing me to travel with you on such a joyous and transformative trip. To producers—please take note that you, too, can take lighter on and more authentic choic es when casting. We really are more alike than we know.

As Helen Keller herself said, “Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”

New York

Black History Month Celebrates Harlem

Julia Breanetta Simpson, Councillor and co-chair with Christine Toy Johnson of the Eastern Region Equal Employment Opportunity Committee, presented a musical tribute to the Harlem Renaissance in celebration of Black History Month in New York on February 8, 2010. Played to a full house at New World Stages, Ms. Simpson’s program, Harlem On My Mind, a musical journey from the 1910s to the ’30s, included salutes to the music of Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters and others. Shaunelle Perry directed, and accompaniment was provided by Musical Director Ken Levinsky (piano), Barbara Merjan (drums) and Jeff Ganz (bass). The evening, which was dedicated to the memory of Herb Foster Quebec, Equity Actor, staff member and EEO Committee member who died in December 2009, also included a pre-curtain dinner of soul food catered by Bert’s Catering from Bedford-Stuyvesant. Special thanks to Eastern Business Rep Brady for coordinating this event.

Syracuse, NY

Syracuse Sets a Record

Hats off to the casts and crew of Syracuse Stage for breaking all previous fundraising records with a total of $25,236 raised for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, DePalmer House, a supportive housing program for homeless people with AIDS, and SUNY’s Pediatric AIDS Center, topping the previous year’s record of $19,840. Over the course of 16 seasons, $223,304 has been raised at Syracuse Stage. Leading the appeal for the company of Little Women were David Studwell, Joseph Whelan and Equity’s Secretary! Treasurer Sandra Karas, who invited audiences to participate. “I said, ‘These are our neighbors, these are our children, these are our friends,’” recalls Sandra. “And these are very beautiful and empty baskets, so you must help us fill them.” Meanwhile at the Storch Theatre, James Leaming was engaged in audience appeals of his own at his one-man show, This Wonderful Life. “We were thrilled with the response at both shows,” says Ms. Karas, “made all the more remarkable and necessary in the midst of the floundering economy. We salute the very generous audiences in upstate New York who made this all possible.”

Orlando

Change of Venue for Central Florida Meeting

The Central Florida Liaison Committee held its annual membership meeting on Monday, January 25, 2010. In attendance were the Committee, chaired by Mark Taylor; newly appointed Eastern Regional Director Rick Berg and Acting Executive Director Carol Waaser. Over 40 members attended the meeting, which was held at a new location, the Orlando Shakespeare Festival (Rita Lowndes Center). Usually held at the Orlando AEA Office, this new location was unique and decorated with festive stars and colors. The event was catered and included a champagne reception. “A great time was had by all,” said Committee member and Councillor Valerie Toth-Grant.
A puppy? On the road? Are you out of your mind? A chorus of warnings came not only from my fellow ensemble members but also from the principals, too. Joining the first tour of Wicked in November of 2008, I was still stinging from the recent loss of my beloved lab mix Lily, but it was too much, and it was time. For me, at least, life is just better with a dog. I looked around my company and seeing others not only managed but thrived on tour. In the end, it seemed I couldn’t have done it. So, the only thing left was to plan and be part of the transition. Being the researcher and Internet pages trying to find the perfect white brindle sweetheart. It was a long battle, but with the help of the friendly desk staff at the Residence Inn in Salt Lake City I was able to secure a first floor unit right near an exit for the quick puppy potty break. Thankfully, he was a quick learner.

Joy is a lucky. At this point, we have three-week minimum engagements, so the constant upheaval of the road is kept to a minimum. Within our company, we currently have quite a menagerie - eight dogs and four cats: my Seamus; Paul Slade’s American Eskimo mix, Charlie; the feline trio Clemantine, Frank and Maria; Christina Tracey’s Jack Russell, Jetson; Stephanie Torro’s Moggy, Missy Monroe; Spencer Jones and Adam Sanford’s Chihuahua, Rachel; Jouzepalpats’ Boxer, Aax; Randy Danson’s Toy Poodle, Beeper; Janet Cadmus’ kitten, Maverick, who was found abandoned on a hike in Salt Lake City, and the latest addition, Meredith Kaye Clark’s Goldendoodle pup, Huck.

Leaving your pet at home just isn’t an option for some, and it shouldn’t have to be a disqualification for joining a tour or taking a long-term job at a regional theatre. Where there is a will there is a way, but understand that you may have to make some sacrifices, both personally and financially to make this work. Seamus is now almost a year old and is thriving on the road. We have, however, learned a few things.

Do:
- Have a Plan B: Not all pets will do well with the constant changes of tour life. Have a family member or close friend whom you trust that is willing and able to take over temporarily, or maybe even full time, if your animal companion is not thriving or happy in this environment.
- Expect to adjust your social activity: Your pet becomes the priority outside of the show. Walks between performances may prevent you from trying the latest hot restaurant and opening night parties may be limited or curtailed when you have a dog in a hotel room waiting for you. (Their happy face beats the steam table food any day – even if it is free!)
- Check your contract: Some riders have something small, but not too small, one that didn’t bark (much) and one that looked cute but wasn’t crazy. The Whippet kept coming up in web searches. A Whippet? What’s a Whippet? A smaller version of a Greyhound, the books said. A sprit, then a couch potato. Does well in apartment living and will do well with the constant exercise but wasn’t crazy. The Whippet kept coming up in web searches. A Whippet? What’s a Whippet? A smaller version of a Greyhound, the books said. A sprit, then a couch potato. Does well in apartment living and will do well with the constant exercise but wasn’t crazy.

Don’t:
- Take any pet on the road if you aren’t comfortable with any of this.
- Assume you are now on your own as far as travel and housing: You can’t expect your company management to make any pet arrangements for you. That includes booking your pet on the company flight. Some airlines have restrictions on how many pets can fly on each flight. It is up to you to arrange your own flights or arrange different alternative travel. Also, don’t expect management to find hotels that accept pets. If you want a pet friendly hotel is an option, but they are in no way contractually obligated to find these terms for you. Many websites are available that narrow your search to these pet friendly hotels or short-term vacation properties.

Expect more: Most hotels and nearly all short-term rentals require extra fees or deposits for pets. If you will be traveling with your pet, expect to pay between $75 - $150 each way to have your animal onboard whether they are with you in the cabin or in a crate in cargo. You may also need to arrange your own transport to and from the airport, as you can’t expect to take your pet on any bus provided by the company.

Cultivate a group of pet owners and pet lovers who you can rely on for support. Sometimes, with vacations, understudy rehearsals and runs, you just don’t have time.

Consider the size of your pet: Some hotels don’t take dogs over 30 lbs. Animals over 20 lbs or those that can’t fit easily into an under the seat carrier will have to fly as cargo. That can be stressful for your animal and to you.

Consider driving the tour: Because of travel restrictions, many of us with pets have decided to drive the tour. Not only will you have greater flexibility with your pet once you arrive, you can expand your options to put pet friendly properties outside the theatre radius. However, you need to consider your itinerary and know that you can safely make the drive in the time allocated.

Talk to the local dressers and crew about good pets, doggie day care and reliable pet sitters. Good doggie day care is a lifesaver on two show days! They’re exhausted and you know they’ve had a good day, even without you. Don’t ever expect to bring your pet to the theatre with you.

Consider the age and temperament of your pet: While potty training is possible on the road, it presents a whole new challenge. Also, an older pet may not be as flexible as she once was. Some animals become stressed with new environments; some could care less as long as you are around. Only you can determine if your pet is a good candidate for this lifestyle.

Douglas Gordon Dies

Douglas Gordon, a member of Equity for more than 60 years and a Principal Councillor for 12 years died on November 18, 2009 at the age of 90. Mr. Gordon joined the Council in 1975 and during his tenure served on the Production Contract Committee, Equity News Editorial Board, Agency and Ethnic Minority Committees, among others. He also was active in advancing the concept of a National Theatre of the United States, served as the Chair of Equity’s National Theatre Committee for seven years and wrote Equity’s Declaration of Intent for a National Theatre.

Douglas was an original member of the National Theatre’s Declaration of Intent for a National Theatre. His inimitable act was tailored gowns that would cascade down her chocolate anointed with her vitality, I wish Bernice “Tiny” Alaina Reed and the Diva Patrol (myself and Arnold McCuller). Alaina wore custom tailored gowns that would cascade down her chocolate Amazon frame like a glacial meltdown. And the entire effect was finished with closely cropped Afro. Her vocal quality was unmatched. When Lonnie Youngblood wasn’t wailing with Junior Walker or Chuck Berry, I