



National Annual Meeting for 2009-2010 held October 5, 2009

President's Report

Traditionally, the President's AGM report is used to provide a summary of Council's activities for the last year or so, but I'd like to deviate from that format this evening. Not because information on what we have done is not interesting or useful, but because our summer EQ had a huge report on exactly that topic, with even more details available on our website, and because I think it is far more meaningful to talk about what we *are* doing and *will* do than what we *did*.

Council is coming up on the end of its term in November, and as usual, there will be a number of topics carried over from this term to the next one. Council has taken care to ensure that they don't disappear into the gap between the two.

First and foremost among the carry-over topics is insurance issues. Council began the current term with a commitment to do a comprehensive review of our insurance plan, its adequacy, its cost and its appropriateness for member needs. I regret to say we didn't get as far as we had hoped. The board of ACTRA Fraternal (which deals almost entirely in insurance) required about three years of work to complete their review, so perhaps I shouldn't be surprised that a board with so much more on its plate should take as long. However, rest assured that the discussion is well and truly underway; it is the top issue on our agenda and will stay there until completed.

Over the past 18 months, one of our principle topics of discussion has been diversity issues. Through consultation with members, Council made some important changes to policy and bylaws, and details were announced in the May edition of the Council Link. Again, what is important is not what *has* happened, but what *will*. Now that they are formally on the books, these policies are the new marching orders for our Executive Director. That's where future news on the diversity front is going to come from, and it will arrive within the next two months – Arden is preparing her annual Ends report for

the new Council, and it will include for the first time a formal report on diversity. I know Council is looking forward to hearing where this initiative is going to take Equity in the coming years, and members will be able to read that report as well. Policy change is great, as far as it goes, but action on policy is what really creates change.

In our 2007 survey, when we asked members to review and grade the various member benefit categories, the benefit ranked number one was protection from harassment, discrimination, reprisal and abuse in the workplace. I can say with pride that Equity also scored very high for success in providing that protection. Nonetheless, we occasionally (very) receive reports of problems and are called upon to act on a member's behalf. Recognising that it has been some time since we have really examined the policy on harassment and the complaints procedure for dealing with it, Council is currently undertaking a review of both and we expect to have results to share with you early in the new year.

Another area that has seen a lot of recent change is our approach to professional development funding. To be frank, Council has been routinely disappointed with the usage rate of this resource over the years. Despite repeated calls for applications, much of the money regularly went unspent. As well, in our survey, members did not assign this resource a very high priority. However, rather than getting rid of it, we thought we'd give it one more go. In order to encourage greater use, we have removed many of the previous restrictions and eased some of the qualifications for activities, giving staff much more latitude for what they can approve. Our first measure of results in this area will also arrive with the November Ends report and Council will engage in further review of the professional development subsidy in June.

One topic currently under discussion is joining issues: specifically how members become part the association. We have a whole raft of entrance avenues, including two different apprenticeship programmes, associate membership and three temporary membership plans to cover actors, SMs and children. However, most of our new members still come to us by way of engagers hiring non-members under Equity contracts, making them instant members. This accounts for a whopping 90% of new joins. What we don't seem to have is a very good grip on is what attaining membership should mean, and how all of these entrance options should ultimately feed into that. This is an enormous discussion and goes to the heart of what it means to be an Equity member. While Council doesn't

intend to push this to the front of the agenda queue, it is worth sorting out and I'm sure we will be talking about it through most of the coming year.

As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure that Equity members have excellent support from their association, Council has scheduled discussion of new customer service standards, and this will take place at one of the first meetings of the new term. Each year, staff assists many, many members and engagers over the phone, in person, and in various forms of written communication. In addition to this, there is a regular stream of information flowing from the office out to the membership. For the most part, this works just fine, but we realise that sometimes it doesn't. Formal service standards and expectations for communication will not only allow members to know what level of service they may expect, but will also help Council and staff recognise when we have stumbled so that we can work to avoid doing so in future. Council is also examining the general topic of information delivery, so that we can ensure news and resources get out to members in a timely and cost-effective way.

At the NAGM in Toronto in February, a resolution was brought forward asking Council to convene a committee to review how Equity handles small independent productions, particularly those run by members. We have a similar resolution before us tonight. The original resolution, initiated by the engager-members of Indie Caucus of the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, received almost unanimous support from the members in attendance. This is no small project, and we'll begin working on it once discussion of insurance issues is largely complete. Although indie theatre represents only a small part of total member workweeks, it is a key avenue for the development of new work and artistic exploration, and we understand the importance that the indie community attaches to our work on this.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to recognise long-time Councillor for the Atlantic Region, Bill Forbes, who passed away suddenly in mid-July. In a business where we need to spend so much time and energy pursuing our own livelihood, Bill was second to none in the caring and attention that he brought to the betterment of the Association and its ability to support its members in their careers. We will miss him greatly.

Council will hold its annual honours event in Toronto this fall, when we once again will be presenting Life Membership, Honorary Membership, the Larry McCance Award and the Stage West Emerging Artist Award. I'd like to be able to tell you who the honourees

will be, but it isn't quite time yet. We would like all members to be aware that they are able to nominate honours recipients – nomination forms for the next round of honours are available online and on the materials table here tonight. Next year's honours will be presented at our autumn 2010 meeting, somewhere in Canada other than Toronto.

It has been a long three years for Council, and we have ploughed our way through an enormous agenda. Representing over 5000 members coast to coast means that there are always several hot topics on the go. Very shortly, Equity will hold elections for all Councillor and CPAG positions for a new term, and along with the new faces around the table will come renewed energy to apply to many challenges of this business. This is your association and the people you choose will be acting on your behalf for the next 3 years – don't forget to vote. All of you should have received your ballot by now, and if you haven't, please contact the national office ASAP.

On a personal note, I would like you to know that it has been an honour serving as President this term, and that this Council has been unparalleled in the effort and care it has devoted to its work. With your indulgence, I would like to recognise the Councillors for a job well done:

Representing British Columbia and the Yukon: David Adams, Kerry Davidson and Annabel Kershaw

Representing Southern Alberta: Hal Kerbes

Representing Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories: Kim McCaw

Representing Saskatchewan: Marianne Woods

Representing Manitoba/Nunavut: Tania Sigurdson

Representing Ontario: Matt Cassidy, Kerry Ann Doherty, Dawn Obokata, Virginia Reh, David Rosser, Laurel Smith, Sandy Winsby

Representing Eastern Ontario and the Outaouais: Alix Sideris

Representing Québec: former Councillor Henry Gauthier and current Councillor Lara Goldenberg

Representing the Atlantic: the late Bill Forbes and current Councillor John O'Keefe

Representing Western Opera: Wade Nott

Representing Eastern Opera: former Councillor Isolde Pleasants-Faulkner and current Councillors Robert Pel and Barry Stillwell

Representing Dance: Sharon di Genova

Representing Stage Management: myself

And I would also like to thank the membership for the honour and the confidence you have accorded us through your votes. I trust the 2006-2009 Council will be found to have served you well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan".