Thank you all for coming out here tonight to our National AGM.

My name is Allan Teichman, and I’m honoured to serve again as Council’s President for the term. Before we begin, I’d like to also introduce our other Councillors, especially those in attendance tonight (Italics indicates not in attendance).

Diane Speirs - Western Opera

Stephen Erickson, Peter McGillivray - Eastern Opera

Nicole Caron - Dance

Kate Sandeson - Stage Management

Karen Bassett - Atlantic

Deena Aziz - Quebec

Catriona Leger - Eastern Ontario/Outaouais

Kirsten Alter, Herbie Barnes, Sedina Fiati, Minh Ly, Allan Teichman, Zeph Williams, Paula Wolfson - Ontario

Aaron Hutton - Manitoba

Jaron Francis - Saskatchewan

Ian Leung - Northern Alberta / NWT

Simon Mallett - Southern Alberta

Scott Bellis, Jane Heyman, Katey Wright - BC/Yukon

I don’t watch TV much, in fact I don’t even have a TV at home, but I’ve noticed that the channels seemed to be all but swamped with shows about doing things, building things, fixing things, creating things: from cooking shows to home reno shows.
I don’t know if this speaks to some fundamental need of people, to make things better, to improve on them, to fix problems, and to make them work better, but I like to think that it does. Home renovation also makes a great analogy for what your Council has been up to for the past while.

Ordinarily, the Council President uses this opportunity to do a rundown of our activities over the course of the year, but I’d like to do something a little bit different. This is our first NAGM of the new term, which means that only a couple of months ago, we used a sizeable chunk of an issue of EQ to do exactly that kind of summary. I’ll touch on a few things, but suggest that you have a read of the Fall 2015 EQ if you really want the whole soup to nuts list.

There is another special occasion associated with tonight, and that is recognition of Equity’s Ruby Anniversary as an independent association. Equity is 40 years young this year, and like any 40-year old house, there are a couple of things that could use a bit of work. That old harvest gold stove still heats up soup just fine, but if you were building a kitchen today, you’d probably make a different choice. And not only that, you would now have access to choices that didn’t exist before, and I don’t just mean the harvest gold.

Renovation is about more than patching the holes, fixing the leaks, and slapping a new coat of paint on things. Just like the original construction of the house, it is about building things for the next 40 years, and that’s what we’ve been up to.

Looking back to 1976, I think it’s fair to say that it marked a point when Canadian live performance really grew up and came into its own. Look backward not too far beyond that, and you see diminishing amounts of “Canadian”, not only in the stories told, and the playwrights presented, but also in the artists on the stage. Look back far enough, and most of what there was across the country was semi-professional work (because, really, who could hope to earn a living doing this) and an awful lot of theatre, opera and ballet companies touring in from the US and Europe. Look back to the turn of the last century, and Canada was largely a roadhouse.

By 1956, things had progressed sufficiently that putting together an association of live performance artists seemed like a good idea, and allying ourselves with Actors’ Equity in the States the best way to go about it. Within 20 years, we had grown up and moved out of the house. CAEA was born.
But like all the change that had led up that point, live performance in Canada has continued to change. Hugely. Major repertory festivals, the advent of home-grown commercial theatre, fringe festivals, new works festivals, a huge array of independent theatre and, as might be expected, also the loss of a few stalwarts over that time. Both birth and death are part of that cycle of change.

Something else has changed, too, and that is Canada. The Canada in “Canadian” live performance is very different, too, and continuing to evolve, and Equity needs to be prepared for that tomorrow.

We started a decade ago with major structural change, to enable the other work that had to be done. Changes to governance and the joining process, updates to our insurance plan, major changes to enable and encourage the groundswell of independent and small scale theatre are all on the “done” list. Not done forever, but out in the field, in use and ready for review again in a couple of years.

As the last term drew to close, we focussed on two major topics, which resulted in major research projects on both safe and respectful workplaces, and a census of Equity’s diverse membership. Thank you very much to all the membership for their incredible generosity in contributing input to both.

Council is largely finished with work on safe and respectful workplaces, save for some overall supervisory work, and that is now in the hands of staff and a very capable consultant, developing response and education resources that we expect to have in place by the end of the year.

On the diversity front, we still have some work to do, but we also have some very important capabilities that we didn’t before: credible and broad-based statistics on the composition of our membership and the challenges they face. You can’t know if you’ve moved the needle, unless you know both where it was, and where it is now. Thanks to all the contributions to the census, we have both pieces of that equation, and you can expect to hear more from both staff and Council on this as our strategies evolve of the course of the year.

Serving our senior members better has also been an area of increasing focus, and we expect to begin a similar outreach project on that subject sometime around the end of the year to arm us with the knowledge to make changes there as well.

And, because we’re not alone in the world, we began some extremely detailed discussions with our sister organisation, ACTRA, on how we can work more closely and strongly together, and are poised to resume those in the next month.
You may have noticed something from the foregoing: all of these began with input from members. That’s important - Equity exists to serve you, and we can’t do it unless we hear from you. And so that is also why each of the last two elections have included a specific invitation to contribute to the Council agenda. If we’re going to spruce up this home, and you’re going to be the ones living in it, that is vitally important to do.

Issues that sprang to the fore were: inclusivity and diversity, a range of stage management and opera topics, continued encouragement and support of small-scale theatre, review and improvement of our insurance plan, stronger partnership with ACTRA, and increased member engagement and involvement, among a wide range of other topics.

I think I’ll draw the line on the laundry list there, so that the other people on the agenda also get a chance to speak. These are the major items from the past twelve months and looking forward, but you should be aware that there are dozens of more mundane ones that need attention year in and year out, and we take care of all of them, as well. If you want to know more about those, ask any Councillor, or, even better, run for Council yourself when the time comes.

The work Council does is in your service, and quite frequently at your specific request. We enjoy doing it, and it is an honour, but we need your help. Engage. Get informed. Show up to meetings like this. And please respond when Council requests it, so our output continues to reflect your input. In short, as we continue this renovation, please help us help you better.

Respectfully submitted,