

EQUITY

incorporating the Variety Artistes' Federation

Spring/Summer

2022






STOP AI STEALING THE SHOW

WHY THE TIME TO PROTECT PERFORMERS FROM ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS NOW

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THE DIG ISSUE • DRAG ART ACTIVISM • THE UNSUNG HEROES OF THEATRE
EQUITY EMBLEMS THROUGH THE AGES



**“Those who fight, can
lose. Those who don’t
fight, have already lost”**

- Bertolt Brecht

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NEWS

Equity members win landmark holiday-pay ruling against world's biggest pantomime producer



The union and its members have won a major legal victory for performers and stage management against QDos Pantomimes (now Crossroads Pantomimes, which describes itself as the “world’s biggest pantomime producer”). On Monday 4 April 2022, an employment tribunal ruled that 16 Equity members had a legal right to receive holiday pay from QDos. This win has ramifications for rogue producers across the sector who seek to evade the law and Equity’s collective agreements – emphasising the union’s longstanding campaign for performers and stage management to receive holiday pay and other workers’ rights.

Unlike almost all other major commercial producers, QDos consistently refused to engage with Equity to use industry standard terms and conditions on its pantomimes (except for at The London Palladium, which is already on the Equity/SOLT West End Agreement). This has meant a lack of protection over working time, overtime, pension and living away allowances. Crucially, performers and stage management working for QDos did not receive holiday pay, even though it is a statutory and not just contractual right for these workers in most conventional theatre productions.

However, after the 2018 panto season, Equity’s members fought back. In action brought through the union, 16 Equity members claimed to the Employment Tribunal that they had a legal right to holiday pay – and they won. Crossroads now has to pay the members holiday pay, as well as performers and

stage management who work for the company in the future. What’s more, theatre production companies of every size and scale are left in no doubt that Equity’s performer and stage management members, whenever they are working, have a right to holiday pay. If not, they could face similar legal action.

The case was initially organised by Equity General Secretary Paul W Fleming, when he was then responsible for Equity members in the commercial theatre sector. He says: “The consequences of the bravery of the Equity members in this case will send ripples through the industry. For Equity, it draws a line in the sand – we want constructive industrial relations and quality agreements for our members working for every theatre producer. We again encourage them to start on that path by joining UK Theatre and using the standard collective agreements – with full provisions for holiday pay, pensions, working time, dignity at work, grievance procedures and the rights our members deserve.”

Andrew Whitehead, a performer and one of the 16 Equity members who brought the claim to the Tribunal, says: “I shed a tear of joy and relief when I saw the judgement as this ruling cuts across the industry. It’s about my fellow performers and stage management having our worker status and employment rights clearly set out in the legal process, and every contract and company recognising that. I’m immensely proud of all the claimants for what we have achieved.”

ICAF supports Ukrainian artists affected by war with £10k fund



Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February, Equity's International Committee for Artists' Freedom (ICAF) set up an emergency fund to support affected Ukrainian artists and creative workers. The fund, worth £10,000, is also open to Russian creatives who have been persecuted for speaking out against the actions of their government.

"I'm very proud that we have acted quickly to provide emergency financial help for Ukrainian and Russian artists," says ICAF's Chair Ros Shelley. "In the last six weeks, we've allocated nearly half of our initial fund to a range of individuals, including circus artists, dancers and actors."

Slava Babenkov was one of the first actors to contact ICAF and receive a grant following the launch of the fund. He remains in Kyiv because he is of military service age and spends his days volunteering at a humanitarian centre in the city, where he is unable to work or earn a living. Reflecting on the situation in Kyiv he says, "War is hell, literally and without exaggeration. People are dying, we live in fear and with no idea of what will happen tomorrow."

"I am very grateful for the financial support that helped me to live during March," he continues, "and I want to say that it's extremely important for creatives all over the world to be united and support one another. Every human being deserves to work in peace."

ICAF is a voluntary committee of Equity members who campaign against the persecution of artists and support the right to freedom of artistic expression. "For nearly 50 years, ICAF has fought for artists at risk around the globe," says Ros Shelley. "In the last year alone, we have lobbied for the release of comedians from prison in Burma/Myanmar, spoken out in support of female performers in Afghanistan and maintained our support for creative practitioners in Palestine and Belarus."

Through the International Federation of Actors (FIA) Equity is also providing additional support and solidarity to our sister union, The Cultural Workers of Ukraine.

NEWS

Sharing our social security successes



Thanks to the tireless work of the Tax & Welfare team, Equity has achieved a number of wins in the area of social security. In April, the union represented a member at a social security tribunal and secured her ongoing disability benefits for 10 years at the highest possible rate. This will ensure she gets payments into her retirement years.

This followed several years of fighting the system to put right incorrect decisions. The member says, "I can't express just how much Victoria and the whole Welfare team at Equity have helped me over the past few years, but especially this year, fighting the DWP to get the decision that was clearly the right one from the start."

"I was terrified of having to go to a Tribunal and I am sure that the DWP rely on people being too scared to fight them," she continues. "I literally could not have done this without Equity's help and it will make a huge difference to our family income over the next ten years to have this win. Thank you all so much!"

The Department for Work and Pensions has also accepted that the Minimum Income Floor (MIF) has been wrongly applied to some Equity members after the union raised specific cases with civil servants to try and rectify this. Equity had identified that self-employed workers are potentially missing out on Universal Credit payments every month because the government was getting the MIF rules wrong. Members who claimed Universal Credit for the first time during the pandemic should have a 12 month grace period from the MIF from after their gainful self-employment decision, but this is often not being applied. Now, the DWP has accepted that the rules were wrongly applied.

We are lobbying the government to check all claims for this mistake, but as things stand, the DWP are relying on you to raise this issue before they put it right. If you think this might apply to you, please contact the Tax and Benefits helpline via email helpline@equity.org.uk or call 020 7670 0223 and we can help you to challenge it.

Equity lobbies for the entertainment industry to Build in Birmingham



For many years Equity has advocated for the development of purpose-built film and TV studio space in Birmingham and the West Midlands. This is part of a long-term strategy to create work for Midlands based members and transform the city from a locational hub into a production hub.

Despite Birmingham being the UK's second largest city and an attractive location for filming, there has been no major studio production facilities since the closure of the BBC's Pebble Mill in 2004. This has undermined the region's creative economy by driving away local creative talent and hampering representation in film and TV.

In 2018, Peaky Blinders creator Steven Knight announced plans to develop a large state of the art studio complex in the heart of Birmingham. While this announcement was very welcome, the union was concerned about the level of progress achieved. Then, in February 2022, Knight announced that the new film and TV production studio would be built in Digbeth, in Birmingham's former industrial heartland.

Over the last year Equity has worked with local, regional and national stakeholders, ramping up the pressure for the development of studio space as

part of the union's Build in Birmingham campaign. We have met with various Councillors from different political parties, including Ian Ward, Leader of Birmingham City Council. Crucially, we met with Steven Knight to find out more about his plans.

The studios will be located between Fazeley Street and Montague Street, and the complex will contain four sound studios in addition to the MasterChef studio. Next to the Digbeth Loc, Digbeth's Creative Content Hub titled The Bond is currently under construction. This will house independent TV production companies and creative content developers.

Ian Bayes, Midlands Regional Official, says: "The proposal by Steven Knight is good news for the city and our members. Equity will continue working with stakeholders to ensure these plans become a reality and bring meaningful, sustainable employment opportunities for local talent that reflects the rich diversity of the region for cast members and production crews. It is vital that this development is a catalyst for further investment to meet the region's urgent need for more studio space and the rising demand for all forms of UK produced visual and audio recorded media."

Much-loved Ronnie Curran bequeaths over £100k to the Equity Benevolent Fund

The Equity Benevolent fund has been boosted by a significant legacy donation from the estate of Ronnie Curran, a much-loved Scotland based member who sadly died in November 2019. Ronnie generously left £104,358 to the fund, which provides welfare grants to Equity members facing financial difficulties. This service was crucial in supporting a large number of creatives during the pandemic, especially those who were excluded from Government schemes and continues to provide a lifeline as the cost of living crisis deepens.

To find out more about the Benevolent Fund, including how to apply for a grant or make a donation, visit equity.org.uk/about/benevolent-fund

VIEWS

**“A strong union
requires an active
membership”**



General Secretary **Paul W Fleming** on industrial power
and who can – and how to – wield it

Equity is one of the three most powerful entertainment unions in the world. Last year, excepting the medical colleges, we were the 12th biggest UK wide union out of over 70. Across the private sector trade union membership is about 10%, and just over 30% in the public sector. Equity has over 60% membership in all the main areas of theatre, variety, TV, and film – in some places like the West End, our membership is over 75% of performers and stage management.

These numbers are important because they tell us who Equity is. Equity is its membership. The bigger the membership, the more power we have – and as a growing union our potential power gets bigger every day.

But Equity's members don't always feel powerful. The potential of those numbers isn't always felt by a stand-up comedian in an unsafe venue, a small stage management team on bad buyouts, a performer locked into a bad agent, or a dance artist harassed in their workplace. The pandemic only exacerbated these feelings for every member, as Covid presented our industries and its workforce with unprecedented crises. When I was elected General Secretary back in 2020, the biggest change I wanted to affect was to change that feeling, to make sure members know that there was strength in numbers and power in the union; power in Equity.

I'm proud to say that since the last magazine we've seen a growing confidence in both that power, and its source in our mass membership. On the 1st May – International Workers Day no less – Equity members working on Cinderella were given notice that the West End show would close. Our union wasn't just quietly outraged, and we didn't just use the bureaucratic processes of our agreements to fight back – we took to the streets. It's unusual for the closure of a single show to lead the news, from front pages to headlines across all channels – it's unprecedented for the story to be one of the misery it has caused our members.

Sometimes members hope too hard that 'guidelines' or even powerful, enforceable collective agreements just stop bad practice from producers before it happens. Often, of course, that does happen: responsible producers respect the agreements they make, and the principles that underpin them. But even the law exists in a world where it gets broken. When P&O workers were sacked via pre-recorded Zoom call, the boss of P&O ferries admitted to a parliamentary committee that they knowingly and intentionally broke the law around consultation of the workforce and their union the RMT. It's not the RMT's fault that bosses can break the law and the agreements – and neither is it Equity's. But all unions take to the streets when it happened, and all unions can take matters to the courts.

That's what happened when Equity took on QDOs (now Crossroads) Pantomimes – the world's largest pantomime producer. Our performer and stage management members, many young and from working class backgrounds, were

being denied their legal right to holiday pay. That right is worth millions to Equity members across productions, across engagers, across the UK panto season. For almost three years, the union quietly worked with an exceptional legal team to win, without equivocation, holiday pay for our members. Crossroads now need to draw a line under the matter, and move forward with a full Equity agreement like most commercial theatre producers.

When I say 'Equity took on QDOs', of course, I don't mean some hulking, supernatural institution. When I say 'Equity' I mean people, artists, members. The law requires named individuals to take an engager to court to enforce rights like holiday pay or the minimum wage – and 15 named Equity members were brave enough to do just that when I put the claim together in my previous role on Equity's staff. Those members took an enormous risk; the employment tribunal judge described the tactics used by the producer to find out which members were speaking up for their rights as 'chilling'.

Whether it's members on the streets enforcing our agreements, or in the courts enforcing their legal rights, a strong union requires an active membership. An active membership needs to know that the institution of the union has their back. The union always has power, but the bosses always have control – a structure that we are nevertheless challenging.

“The union always has power, but the bosses always have control”

Enclosed with this magazine is your ballot paper for Equity's Council, Presidential and other elections. The Council, chaired by the President, is the governing body of your union. It is their job to lead and the candidates standing are looking for your mandate to do just that. As General Secretary, I have the back of members who want to enforce and expand their rights – but the unpaid Equity members on our Council govern the union and set our policy. Make sure you vote, and vote wisely so we can continue building up a strong, fighting, progressive union.

Equity has massive fights ahead: pay and conditions in theatre, and even tackling the rise of AI as a new frontier in art, entertainment work – and exploitation. These are problems for all working people – especially that of low pay at a time of runaway inflation. On the 18th June, all trade unions will be on the streets of London to fight back, and demand government intervention for ordinary people. If you'd like to join us, you can find out more on page 34.

Being on the demonstration doesn't just mean that Equity stands with other working people, it means they stand with us too. I started this article with a sly boast about how Equity compares to other unions, but here's the truth: as strong as we ever are, we're strongest when united with millions of others.

VIEWS

“There are important lessons to be learned from our fellow artists who suffer persecution”



In her final column as Equity President, **Maureen Beattie** highlights the importance of solidarity with artists and people across the world

As I enter the final days of my presidency I have very mixed feelings: I do long for a bit of freedom from the burden of the office and all the work it entails, but at the same time I am aware of an impending and deep sense of loss. Formalising my activism first on Council, then as a lay officer and finally as President has presented me with a whole world of opportunities to serve the members of this great union.

Marching alongside my fellow Councillors, our magnificent staff and all the other activists who strive in their various ways to support and improve the working lives of the members of this union – whatever their discipline – and by so doing improve the working lives of everyone who works in our industry, has been a mighty privilege indeed.

The presidency has also made me acutely aware of the importance of our extended global family of arts workers. Our membership of the Federation of Entertainment Unions joins us arm-in-arm with our fellow arts workers in the UK, and further afield our membership of the International Federation of Actors and its smaller but no less important sister, Euro FIA, connect us with 90 other member organisations in more than 60 countries around the world. These connections become ever more vital year-on-year and never was it truer that united we stand, divided we fall.

Being on Equity's International Committee for Artists' Freedom (ICAF) has brought the predicament of certain artists and companies around the world into sharp focus for me. An important case in point being the plight of the Belarus Free Theatre which ICAF is supporting. The company were forced to flee their home because their work – which is deeply critical of the ruling regime in their country – made them increasingly vulnerable to attack, including incarceration and torture. They are refugees now and all because they are speaking truth to power.

All over the world artists are fleeing just such persecution and seeking the freedom of artistic expression that countries like the UK still appear to offer. I use the words "appear to offer" because I believe there is a serious question about the freedom of artistic expression hanging over the head of everyone who works in the arts in any capacity in the UK. The notion of the UK as a sanctuary free from government censorship feels increasingly like a fairy tale.

Our Government, as I have said many times, knows the power and importance of the arts, and is increasingly bold and shameless about keeping the arts for themselves and their cronies. They are circling the BBC and Channel 4 like killer sharks smelling blood, they have decimated funding for the arts, they are unconcerned about the lack of grants and other financial support for those who wish to study for a job in the entertainment industry, and they have overseen the all but total annihilation of arts subjects in schools. Unless, as in the latter case, you went to Eton like our Prime Minister where arts

subjects are given the prominence they deserve.

This censorship-by-any-other-name is a particularly terrifying one and it is gaining momentum with every day that passes: it is the gagging of the people by class, by the accident of birth. When this article is published I will be performing in *My Fair Lady*. As I imagine most of you know, the musical is based on the play *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw and is about a young working-class cockney girl, Eliza Doolittle, whose life is transformed when a professor of phonetics takes her in hand and changes her speech so that she sounds like "a duchess" and becomes "a consort fit for a king".

Eliza was always a consort fit for a king, if that's the measure by which you judge people – it's just that the door of opportunity was closed to her because every time she opened her mouth to speak she betrayed herself as working class, and that surely wouldn't do! It's a story as relevant today as it was when *Pygmalion* was first performed in England in 1914. Over a decade of austerity and the cost of living crisis has excluded – and will continue to exclude – people from working class backgrounds from financial security and employment opportunities, as well as from being properly represented in the public sphere, whether that be on the political, industrial or artistic stage. This is why the work of Equity's Class Network is so vital to the future health of our industry.

“The notion of the UK as a sanctuary free from government censorship feels increasingly like a fairy tale”

Censorship is here and now in the UK and the walls are closing in. Beyond our industry, the Government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill – which gives the police in England and Wales greater powers to restrict protests and persecute Traveller communities among other crackdowns – is truly frightening. Taken together with the seemingly inexorable silencing of all but the most privileged voices, it shows that those in power are on a mission to cut off dissent at its source. There

are important lessons to be learned from our fellow artists and humans who suffer persecution around the world, because for us that persecution could be just around the corner.

President or not I look forward to continuing in solidarity with everyone who fights for a better future for us all.

Northern Ireland

Irish Equity and Equity UK join forces to campaign for equal treatment of Ireland-based performers

If it seems unfair to be paid less than your colleagues just because you're from different countries, then that's because it is. Which is why members of Irish Equity and Equity UK are working together to end a situation where Ireland-based performers receive less pay and worse conditions than their UK colleagues when working on the same international co-production in the Republic of Ireland.

This collaboration follows the passing of a motion put forward by the Northern Ireland Committee at Equity's Special Representative Conference last year, calling on the union to work closely with Irish Equity to protect the shared interests of our members across the island of Ireland.

An increasing number of international production companies are seeking to operate in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, where many receive generous subsidies under Ireland's Section 481 Film Tax Credit. Screen Ireland has confirmed that a record-breaking €500 million was spent on the screen industry in Ireland in 2021, surpassing the previous record in 2019 by 40%. Meanwhile, an objective of Northern Ireland Screen is for Northern Ireland to have the strongest screen industry outside of London in the UK and Ireland.

However, many international companies are currently denying equal rights to local performers on sets in Ireland. When working on the same film or TV production, UK performers do so on standard Equity UK union contracts that entitle them to receive payment for royalties, residuals and repeats, while their Irish colleagues are on non-union contracts that do not. Many production companies in the Republic offer buy-outs to actors who then lose appropriate royalties and protection for their performances while their employers enjoy



Gerry O'Brien

government tax breaks and licence fee revenues. But now members of Irish Equity have approved the use of Equity UK's collectively bargained agreements on international film co-productions shooting in Ireland. A decision made at Irish Equity's Annual General Meeting in April, the use of these agreements allow for Irish Equity members to be engaged on terms and conditions equal to – and not less than – their colleagues in the UK.

Gerry O'Brien, President of Irish Equity, said: "It is no longer acceptable that Irish performers in the Republic are treated to less favourable terms and conditions by local Irish producers engaged in co-production deals in an industry supported by public funds. The UK agreement which covers performers in Northern Ireland provides for better minimum terms and conditions at the point of production and protects the ongoing right of the performer to receive equitable remuneration, or residual fees, for the ongoing use of the artist's work. This is required by the legislation of the Copyright Act 2000 and the European Copyright directive, which was incorporated into Irish law in November 2021. The directive provides for the performer to participate in the financial success of the production."

This activity follows an historic first meeting of members from Irish Equity and Equity UK in March, and the passing of motion put forward by Equity UK at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) conference last year supporting closer co-operation between the Equity UK and Irish Equity. Together, both unions are working together so that the value of Irish, UK and international talent and the contribution they make to the global film and TV industry are recognised, and that all performers are engaged on decent union contracts.

Scotland

A Play, A Pie and A Pint is one of six Scottish theatres to sign up to an Equity agreement this year

Housed in the grand setting of Òran Mór – a former parish church turned entertainment venue in Glasgow – A Play, A Pie and A Pint has risen to become “a bedrock of the Scottish theatre industry” (The Guardian). Born 18 years ago, its concept is simple: a new play at lunchtime every week that lasts no more than an hour, accompanied by a pie and a pint. Today, it produces 33 new plays per year – putting on the most new writing of any theatre in the UK.

And now, A Play, A Pie and A Pint is one of six Scottish theatres to sign up to an Equity agreement this year alone – with more expected to do so later. Alongside A Play, A Pie and A Pint, Equity has successfully negotiated agreements with Witsherface (Glasgow), Theatre Gu Leòr (Glasgow), Cutting Edge Theatre (Edinburgh), Mull Theatre (Isle of Mull) and Pearlfisher (touring). This means that Equity members working for these theatres are entitled to Equity minimum rates of pay, and terms and conditions. These allow for numerous benefits, including holiday and sick pay, being paid for overtime, and an Equity pension.

“The more people who are following Equity rules, the better,” says Dave Anderson, Scottish National Committee member. “It’s better for the whole industry that the actors are treated and paid properly, and these agreements are going to raise the bar across the board.” Dave is an actor who has put on a play every season at A Play, A Pie and A Pint since 2004, and also sits on the theatre’s board. “I just like the vibe of the place – it’s nicely loose, informal and welcoming – and the variety of a new show on every week,” he says, when asked about what makes the Glaswegian institution so special. “And during performance weeks, your working day is done by 2.30pm in the afternoon!”



Dave Anderson

Heralding A Play, A Pie and A Pint’s new agreement with Equity, artistic director Jemima Levick says: “In spite of our continued standstill funding we really wanted to do something, albeit smaller than I’d like, to improve performers wages and the subs we were paying, and this is the start of that process.” She continues: “We still have ambitions to continue to work with Equity on this arrangement for continuous development and improvement. Performers are central to our success as an organisation – we employ between 60-100 every year – so getting this right is important for us all.”

“Securing an agreement with A Play, A Pie and A Pint has been a goal for Equity and is really positive news, especially as so many of our members work in their productions,” says Adam Adnyana, Equity’s Scotland Official. Going on to speak about why other theatres across Scotland might be interested in signing up to an Equity agreement, Adam says that a lot of them – especially those that are independent – already use the union’s rates of pay in good faith, but that this is different to actually being on an Equity agreement. “This is because the terms and conditions might not be the same,” he explains. “So I’m approaching theatres that would consider themselves to have been an Equity house for years, but who are not because they don’t have a substantive agreement in place.”

“Part of our work is educating them about this and talking about coming to an agreement that benefits our members – and their reputation. We look forward to continuing to securing more negotiations with organisations in the performing arts and serving the interests of our members in Scotland.”

Cymru

Mae 'Hwyluswyr Lles' yma i helpu i frwydro yn erbyn bwlio ac amodau gwaith gwael ar y set

“Mae pobl yn fodlon dioeddef amodau gwael – oriau hir, bwlio ac aflonyddu – yn hytrach na chael ei gweld fel un sy'n creu trafferth”. Felly mae angen i chi gael rhywun ar y set rydych chi'n gwybod sy'n anfeiriadol, yn gwrandao'n hyderus ac yn cyflawni rhywbeth,” meddai Gwenno Dafydd. “Mi alla' i fod 'y person anodd' yna i bobl fel eu bod nhw'n teimlo bod ganddyn nhw'r gynrychiolaeth honno a'r llais hwnnw ar set.”

Mae Gwenno wedi cwblhau ei hyfforddiant fel Hwylusydd Lles yn ddiweddar. Yn aelod o Equity yng Nghaerdydd, mae hi wedi bod yn gweithio fel perfformiwr a darlledwr ers 1980 a chynigiodd yngor ar ddeddfwriaeth cyflogaeth a hyfforddiant arweinyddiaeth ers 1998. Bydd ei rôl newydd nawr yn gweld ei rôl yn hyrwyddo lles y perfformiwr a'r criw ar setiau ffilm a theledu, ac mae'n rhan o o gynllun peilot yn cyflwyno 10 Hwylusydd Lles allanol i setiau ledled Cymru, sy'n cael eu talu fesul diwrnod gan gwmnïau cynhyrchu. Wedi'i gyflwyno gan 'ôft from the Spotlight', sefydliad sy'n cynnig hyfforddiant a chymorth iechyd meddwl yn y diwydiant adloniant, a'i gyflwyno mewn partneriaeth â CULT (Creative Unions Learning Together) Cymru, rhaglen ddysgu a arweinir gan Bectu ac sy'n cynnwys Equity ac undebau creadigol eraill, datblygwyd y syniad mewn ymateb i'r argyfwng iechyd meddwl cynddeiriog yn y diwydiant.

Mae amodau gwaith gwael – gan gynnwys aflonyddu, bwlio, oriau hir, ac ynysu pan yn gweithio oddi cartref – yn aml yn effeithio ar berfformwyr a chriw. Yn 2020, adroddodd yr Elusen Ffilm a Theledu fod 87% o bobl sy'n gweithio ym myd ffilm a theledu wedi profi problem iechyd meddwl ar ryw adeg yn eu bywyd, o gymharu â 65% ar draws y DU gyfan. Roedd 24% o weithwyr ffilm a theledu hefyd wedi hunan-niweidio o gymharu â 7% ledled y DU, tra bod 55% wedi ystyried lladd eu hunain o gymharu ag 20% yn genedlaethol.

Mae'n ddiwylliant y mae Gwenno – wedi'i brofi'n rhy aml o lawer. “Rwyf wedi bod yn ddiodesdefwr aflonyddu rhywiol ar set. Gwelais bethau, yn enwedig pan oeddwn yn fy 20au, na wnaethoch chi eu herio oherwydd ei bod mor hawdd cael eich rhoi ar restr ddu. Ni ddylech deimlo dan bwysau i wneud gwaith nad ydych am ei wneud oherwydd nad yw'n teimlo'n ddiogel, neu eich bod yn teimlo dan bwysau rhywiol, neu nad ydych yn teimlo'n gyfforddus yn ei

wneud,” meddai. “Mae'r ffigyrau [ynghylch iechyd meddwl yn y diwydiant] yn eithaf ysgytwol. Mae'n rhaid i rywbeth newid. Rwy'n meddwl bod hwn yn gam enfawr ymlaen; bydd yn dod ag atebolrwydd i setiau.”

Mae rôl Hwyluswyr Lles yn ddeublyg. Mae un rhan yn ymwneud â sefydlu'r amodau gwaith cywir o'r cychwyn cyntaf. I wneud hyn, mae Hwyluswyr yn cynnal asesiad risg straen ac iechyd meddwl ar ddechrau pob cynhyrchiad. Maent hefyd yn rhannu gwybodaeth gyda chynhyrchwyr, gan eu galluogi i gyflawni eu dyletswydd gofal cyfreithiol i'r gweithlu.

Mae'r rhan arall yn ymwneud â bod yn berson diduedd y gall perfformwyr a chriw droi ato pan fyddant yn profi problem, gan ganiatáu i Hwyluswyr Lles godi pryderon gyda chynhyrchwyr ar ran criw a pherfformwyr gan amddiffyn anhysbysrwydd pobl os dymunant. “Mae pobl yn teimlo na allant godi eu llais mewn gwirionedd, ond gallant,” meddai Gwenno. “Oherwydd gallaf i fod yn llais iddynt.”

Y nod yw sicrhau bod Hwyluswyr Lles ar gael i bob cynhyrchiad yng Nghymru sydd, ochr yn ochr â'r BFI yn darparu cyllid ychwanegol ar gyfer y rôl ar brosiectau ledled y DU a gefnogir gan eu Cronfa Ffilm, yn golygu efallai y byddwch yn taro i mewn i Hwylusydd Llesiant yn eich man gwaith eich hun yn fuan.

Wales

'Wellbeing Facilitators' are here to help combat bullying and poor working conditions on set

"There is a lot that people put up with – long hours, harassment, bullying – because they don't want to be seen as a troublemaker. You need to have someone on set that you know is nonjudgmental, will listen in confidence and will get something done," says Gwenno Dafydd. "I will be that difficult person for people so they feel they have that representation and that voice."

Gwenno has recently completed her training as a Wellbeing Facilitator. An Equity member based in Cardiff, she has been working as a performer and broadcaster since 1980 and offered employment legislation advice and leadership coaching since 1998. Her new role will now see her championing performer and crew wellbeing on film and TV sets, and is part of a pilot introducing 10 external Wellbeing Facilitators to sets across Wales, who are paid a day rate by production companies. Delivered by 6ft from the Spotlight, an organisation that offers mental health training and support in the entertainment industry, and rolled out in partnership with CULT (Creative Unions Learning Together) Cymru, a learning programme led by Bectu and including Equity and other creative unions, the idea was developed in response to the mental health crisis raging in the industry.

Poor working conditions – including harassment, bullying, long hours, and the isolation of working away from home – often takes its toll on performers and crew. In 2020, the Film and TV Charity reported that 87% of people working in film and TV had experienced a mental health problem at some point in their life, compared to 65% across the UK as a whole. 24% of film and TV workers had also self-harmed compared to 7% UK-wide, while 55% had contemplated taking their own lives compared to 20% nationally.

It's a culture that Gwenno -- has experienced all too often. "I've been the victim of sexual harassment on set. I saw things, especially when I was in my 20s, that you didn't challenge because it was so easy to get blacklisted. You should not feel pressurised into doing work that you don't want to because it doesn't feel safe, or you feel sexually pressured, or you just do not feel comfortable doing," she says. "The figures [around mental health in the industry] are quite shocking. Something has to change. I think this is a huge step forward; it will bring accountability to sets."



Gwenno Dafydd | Credit: Tony

The role of Wellbeing Facilitators is twofold. One part is about establishing the right working conditions from the start. To do this, Facilitators carry out a stress and mental health risk assessment at the beginning of each production. They also share information with producers, enabling them to meet their legal duty of care to the workforce.

The other part is about being an impartial person who performers and crew can turn to when they experience an issue, allowing Wellbeing Facilitators to raise concerns with producers on behalf of crew and performers while protecting people's anonymity if they wish. "People feel they can't really raise their voice, but they can," says Gwenno. "Because I can be their voice."

The aim is to make Wellbeing Facilitators available to all productions in Wales which, alongside the BFI providing additional funding for the role on projects across the UK backed by their Film Fund, means you may soon be bumping into a Wellbeing Facilitator at your own place of work.

The real stars of the show



From left to right: Ben McDaid, Sam Lupton, Natasha Leaver, Harveen Mann and Claire Darcy at The Stage Awards 2022 (Credit: Alex Brenner)

Zoe Ellsmore and **Stephanie Soh** on why understudies, swings and covers are the lifeblood of theatre

When theatre casts were hit by Covid-19 last winter, it was the understudies, swings and covers who kept shows on stage, venues open and audiences entertained. Many stepped into roles at the shortest of notice – and often in the most challenging of circumstance – pulling off brilliant performances to boot. There were the understudies who treaded the boards without a dress rehearsal, the swings who played a different part every night and the covers who learnt choreography via Zoom, as well as those who took up the crucial stage management roles that shows simply can't do without.

"I've understudied for the last 10 years, but this year there was an extra pressure," says Claire Darcy, who performed a myriad of roles in *Cinderella* at Eden Court, Inverness – and made local headlines doing so. "I was choreographer, I was the Fairy Godmother, I danced in the ensemble, and I was also understudying three parts. We wanted the shows to still be as professional, as slick and as sharp as ever – you wanted people who were coming to the theatre for maybe the first time in the last two years to still have a magical experience. And even if there's an understudy on, to not know. That's the best thing – when they leave and they go 'Oh, I didn't even realise that you jumped into the role.'"

Cover: A broad term for a performer who takes the place of another if they are unable to appear in a show due to illness, injury or other reasons.

Swing: A cover for multiple ensemble or chorus parts.

Understudy: Refers more specifically to a cover for one or more roles in a show.

Claire is one of five Equity members who, in January this year, accepted The Stage's Unsung Hero Award on behalf of every understudy, swing and cover in the country. She was joined on stage at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane by fellow understudies and swings Natasha Leaver, Sam Lupton, Harveen Mann and Ben McDaid. The award was a rare moment in the spotlight for covers, and a much-deserved acknowledgment of the important role they play in keeping the live performance industry running.

"The Stage's Unsung Hero Award is usually given to an individual working in the theatre industry who has gone above and beyond away from the glare of the spotlight," said Shan Ako, the West End performer who presented the award. "This year, the judges have decided to recognise a whole group of people without whom it is fair to say, theatres across the UK would completely have ground

to a halt. They are the unsung heroes of the companies across the UK who, during the pandemic, have really stepped up to ensure the show can go on."

But away from the glitz and glamour of awards ceremonies, the past two years have presented covers – alongside live performance workers across the country – with a huge challenge. "It's been quite

manic, quite stressful," says Ben McDaid. Stepping up as an understudy in *Sleeping Beauty* at the Millennium Forum, Derry – during a panto season beset by the Omicron wave no less – was Ben's first professional role on stage. "Beyond the theatre you weren't sure whether the Government was keeping places open or what the regulations were. The Covid passport came in in the middle of our run, which meant a bit of uncertainty over whether audience members would be deterred from visiting." Ben says that although he was nervous, he knew that there was a lot of support from the cast and crew, and that people were "going completely out of their way to get you through it, which was very exciting and rewarding."

The difficult working circumstances created by the pandemic has meant that the role of Equity deputies (or 'deps') – who liaise with the union to raise issues on behalf of their colleagues – has never been more important. "It's the most rewarding thing I could have done," says Natasha Leaver, an understudy and Equity dep on *Hamilton*. "I actually became a dep right at the beginning of the pandemic because we could feel that there was something brewing, and I wanted to be that person that found out about my rights. Prior to that I didn't know too much, but I could

"I've understudied for the last 10 years, but this year there was an extra pressure"

see that we needed some people to stand at the front, speak to producers and just fight for what we need to make sure people feel safe and comfortable coming into work. I feel like the team of deps on *Hamilton* have made such a profound difference and I hope that we can just inspire more people to take on this role – there's strength in numbers!" Someone who needs no convincing of this is Harveen Mann, who has been an Equity dep for 16 years – and who, as swing on the *School of Rock UK* tour, learnt the drums overnight to cover for a fellow cast member.

"Every job that I've done, I've always been the Equity dep – and it's because I love it," Harveen says. "I love what we stand for and I love the fact that I know if there is a problem – on behalf of myself or anybody in the company – I'm comfortable enough to pick up the phone and speak to somebody about it. It's been trickier than ever because of Covid, so having the support of Equity and [Live Performance Official] Charlotte Bence has been amazing. We've needed Equity now more than ever."

"It's an overused phrase 'the show must go on', but I think without standbys, understudies and swings, especially over the last six months with Omicron, it just wouldn't have happened," said Sam Lupton during his acceptance speech. An understudy on the *Bedknobs and Broomsticks UK* tour,

Sam is another Equity dep – and he used his platform to courageously champion the working rights of covers across the industry: “There are negotiations coming up this year and I hope that the public recognition that has been so loving from producers and from the industry can continue – with the management associations and Equity – into those talks over the table, to make sure that there can be job and financial security for swings and understudies.”

We couldn't agree more. Well done to covers across the country – you are a lifeblood of our industry.

From left to right: Ben McDaid, Claire Darcy, Harveen Mann, Natasha Leaver, Sam Lupton at The Stage Awards 2022 (Credit: Alex Brenner)



“Women in our industry have felt unable to speak out about the menopause”



Vice-President **Jackie Clune** recounts her experience of going through the menopause as a performing artist

Working in the creative industries as a woman is hard. As an older woman, harder. As a menopausal older woman – probably best to just give up and go lie down in a darkened room with a cold flannel on your head, dreaming of what could have been.

I entered the menopause at the early age of 41, having just had triplets in what I can only assume was my ovaries’ last hurrah. At the time I was appearing as Mrs Wilkinson in *Billy Elliott*, and it was my wiggie, ‘Tony Wigs’, who became aware of my monstrous hot flushes – and my husband who became aware of my off-the-scale rages and sudden swooping lows.

I became anxious. I got stage fright for the first time in my 20-year career. I had to seek counselling. I had hypnotherapy to be able to carry on performing. It helped, but I was still suffering horribly.

I finished in *Billy Elliott* and went back on the international tour of *Mamma Mia!*, where my menopause really took hold. I would feel so anxious and unsettled that I would be desperate for the show to end so that I could drink alcohol to calm myself down. Pretty soon I decided I needed more help.

The doctor prescribed anti-depressants. I wasn’t depressed. She then prescribed

hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in the form of one-size-fits-all patches and then pills. Neither worked. It was only when I went to a private consultant that I got the precise combination I needed to start functioning as a normal person again. Within a month of the new regime, I felt back to my cheerful, capable self.

Throughout that time I made no mention of my condition to any of my employers – I was the female lead in two hugely successful shows and I felt I had to suck it up. The show must go on, never mind if you are sweating profusely, feeling exhausted and irritable, and suffering yet another urinary tract infection. Leading ladies just get on with it.

I think I was ashamed – it’s unsavoury to talk about ‘women’s problems’, even in the supposedly open-minded and caring creative industries. The specific hormonal rollercoaster – from painful periods, through pregnancy and childbirth and on to menopause – experienced by a huge number of our members is seldom addressed because it’s not very showbiz, is it? Add to that the fact that to identify as menopausal tips you into the ‘past it’ casting bracket if you’re a performer, or the ‘too dithery’ if you are backstage, and it’s easy to see why women have felt unable to speak out. And there is much pain and suffering in

“It’s unsavoury to talk about ‘women’s problems’, even in the supposedly open-minded and caring creative industries”

that silence, because it’s a silence built on inequality, prejudice – and, yes, misogyny.

I often try to imagine what workplaces would be like if men went through ‘the change’ – cool showers, rest rooms with blackout blinds and soft music, statutory leave for ‘Change Days’, perhaps menopause sabbaticals and Hormone Welfare officers in HR. It’s incredible to consider how normalised the lack of care for women is.

Not so long ago, women past childbearing age would just die. Now we are living longer many of us are living half our lives the other side of the ovulation window, and yet there has been precious little provision for our care. HRT has been under-researched, leading to an often vastly exaggerated risk and a low uptake by women, who are not given the right information to make an informed choice. The majority of menopausal women just struggle on – a task that often becomes doubly arduous when work is involved. A recent national survey revealed that more than a million women in the UK are at risk of being forced out of their jobs because their employers are failing to support them as they go through the menopause.

Self-employed women don’t even have the back-up of HR to turn to, which is why Equity’s Women’s Committee put forward a motion at last year’s Special Representative Conference, calling on the union to protect members going through menopause from discrimination. The motion passed and Equity has begun work campaigning via the Women’s Committee on improved menopause awareness in the workplace.

For instance, Equity conducted its own snapshot survey of members to get an insight into the nature and extent of the problem. The results showed that 20% had experienced intimidatory and exclusionary behaviour in the workplace directly connected to their menopause. Participants also identified the top five symptoms of the menopause as being fatigue, sleep disturbances, hot flushes and palpitations, night sweats and poor concentration.

The results of this survey will help inform the creation of guidance for employers. This work aims to educate and empower employers to come up with robust structures that can offer more support to women going through perimenopause and menopause. A menopause code of practice should be normalised in every theatre, every TV and film set, every cabaret venue and audio booth.

Finally, Equity is lobbying the Menopause Taskforce, a group made up of government ministers and senior clinicians and formed to steer Government policy on issues related to the menopause. We are calling on those in power to not only equalise the rights of self-employed workers’ access to statutory sick pay, but also to request flexible work to to level the gender health gap for women workers. These measures combined are designed to provide a strong industrial provision for women workers– after all, as reported in the national survey mentioned earlier, the menopause has the second most devastating impact on women’s careers, only just behind having children. There are even moves to add the menopause as a protected characteristic in employment law – which Equity is backing.

The trade union movement is at the forefront of campaigning to address the issues affecting women in the workplace. For instance, the recent TUC Women’s Conference featured women from a wide variety of employment sectors talking about how their unions are tackling menopausal care at work. It’s crucial that our health and wellbeing is taken into consideration as part of a huge drive for greater dignity at work, so that our working lives are supported as we go through the change. We are artists, we are women, we are human beings – and we must be treated as such, on all counts.

THE DIG ISSUE

Journalist **Sarah Woolley** unearths what's going wrong with touring accommodation and what can be done about it



After a long five-hour drive, Richard* was holding his breath outside an Airbnb. "Is this one going to be OK?" the actor thought. At £600 a week for two people, it certainly should have been. But the sight that greeted Richard and his colleague, a fellow actor, was a far cry from the gleaming photos online.

"We turned up to a toilet blocked with human faeces, a window covered in plastic that wouldn't shut, hair all over the shower and stains on the sofa," says Richard. "Luckily, my colleague was able to find us somewhere else, but in order to do so she had to spend £600 of her own money." The prospect of spending your own wages on work-related accommodation is unthinkable for most of the UK's workforce, but people working in live performance can be left out of pocket as they scramble for accommodation that is clean, safe and dignified.

This is the digs crisis. And as an Equity member on a current commercial tour, Richard sees why producers and engagers must listen to members calling for action. "Some of the issues have massively been exacerbated by the pandemic," he explains. "Our touring allowance is currently £265 a week. We should be on £300."

Touring allowances don't only cover accommodation, but are also meant to contribute something towards the additional costs of working away from home. In 2018, Equity negotiated a minimum living-away touring allowance for single adults of £300 per worker per week with UK Theatre, the organisation that represents engagers

such as producers, theatre owners and managers across the performing arts in the UK. This new allowance was going to be implemented in 2020 but the pandemic, as with so much else across the world, put a stop to that.

When live performance was shutdown, Equity negotiated special variation agreements. These made variations to the standard agreements which were designed to help engagers stay financially viable throughout the pandemic, keeping Equity members in jobs through the turbulence of lockdowns, restrictions on audience numbers, sickness among cast and

crew, the NHS app 'pingdemic' and waves of different Covid strains. Variation agreements froze minimum touring allowances at the rate of £265 a week, a rate which remains in place today.

It's no surprise then that an Equity survey on digs has revealed 91% of members face fewer options and higher accommodation costs in the wake of the pandemic.

"Some of the issues have massively been exacerbated by the pandemic"

And yet – as with many stark issues we're faced with today – Covid is not by any means the only factor at play here. The digs crisis is inextricably tied to the housing crisis. The chronic shortage of affordable homes means that house prices have shot sky high, as has the amount landlords and homeowners can charge for rent. Add to this the emergence of Airbnb and other online platforms that make it easier for people to temporarily let out their property, and every spare room has been turned into a lucrative commodity and driven up prices across the market.



“An Equity survey on digs has revealed that 91% of members face fewer options and higher accommodation costs in the wake of the pandemic”



All this makes it harder than ever for live performance workers to use the once-reliable 'digs lists' system. For decades, the touring theatre workforce had accessed lists compiled by engagers that advertised spare rooms at a rate generally in line with touring allowance, often under the roof of theatre fans. But today, those lists are drying up. Production companies now have fewer staff available to compile digs lists, while safety concerns due to Covid is another factor, as are the profits to be gained from listing accommodation at full price on the open market.

So, many live performance workers, like Richard, say they have to fend for themselves. "A couple of times on this tour I've reached out to my executive producer and said, 'We can't find anywhere within budget so I might have to commute hundreds of miles every day.'" But the response to that was, 'This is not something we usually get involved with.'"

"The digs crisis is inextricably tied to the housing crisis"

Understandably, some live performance workers fear repercussions if they speak out, but many are taking to social media to protest and debate what should change. "We're no longer in an environment where people can be treated poorly without risk of that coming to the surface," says Richard. Posts about nightmare digs and 'catfish' Airbnb bookings (rentals that are not how they appear online) expose the sorry state of digs performing artists are subjected to, while Kenny Wax, the producer behind productions such as *Six* and *The Play That Goes Wrong*, has called on UK Theatre to employ a full-time digs officer to vet accommodation.

This is the momentum that Equity members like Richard are harnessing as they work closely with Charlotte Bence, Industrial Official for Theatre at Equity. Priority one is a call for immediate action on frozen allowances. "The minimum allowances in agreements are floors through which no worker must fall, not ceilings through which no worker must rise," says Charlotte. "And producers have always been able to pay more than those minimum touring allowances, although many don't. The union's position is that touring allowances need to rise to £300 immediately. But £300 a week cannot and will not be the end of the conversation because £300 a week was the amount that the union claimed four years and an entire pandemic ago."

The lack of money available for digs has also had a knock-on effect on members' safety and a significant third (32%) of respondents to Equity's digs survey say issues around quality and safety mean they're regularly unable to do the job to the best of

their ability. When asked if they've ever felt unsafe, or been in an unsafe situation when travelling to or from accommodation, 52% of members said this was an occasional occurrence whilst 19% said it happened regularly. This comes as no surprise because the cheapest digs are rarely close to venues. There's safety in numbers, but when a company is scattered across a city its members face walking alone, late at night.

"I am really concerned about the threat to people's physical and mental health," says Richard. "We've got young members of our company regularly having to walk 40 minutes through a town they don't know late at night after the show ends because



they just can't afford to stay anywhere closer. We know someone who is awaiting an operation because he was attacked, unprovoked, walking back to his digs. These are real issues that have been reported and my big worry is that it will take something quite desperate to happen before it's properly addressed – and I just want to do whatever I can to avoid that. I'm reaching a point where, unless the system changes, it's becoming hard to justify touring in the UK again. Which is something, as an actor deeply passionate about this industry, I honestly never thought I'd say".

Charlotte urges producers to remember that their duty of care extends beyond the walls of a theatre. "There have been instances on current commercial tours where Black and global majority company members in towns and cities outside of London have been racially attacked," she says. "The production companies responded reasonably well after the fact, but then the question is, 'How are people put in that position in the first place? Pay and conditions are central to questions of safety because the lower your allowance is, the fewer options you have when trying to find somewhere to stay."

For Michelle*, safety is one reason that business as usual needs "a complete overhaul." As a performer, Michelle has loved touring since her career began in the 1980s, but today she sees engagers failing to live up to their duty of care and inclusivity. "I've never felt so stressed and so

vulnerable than I have touring in the current climate," she says. "When you're younger, fit and healthy, it's a lot easier to deal with than when you're my age and compromised through disability."

A decade ago, Michelle was diagnosed with cancer. After treatment and several major surgeries, she is now cancer-free but lives with medical issues that compromise her digestive system. "I can't eat at a restaurant, I can't buy sandwiches from a shop. I have to have self-catering accommodation."

"The lack of money available for digs has also had a knock-on effect on members' safety"

Stairs can also be a barrier and Michelle needs reliable access to a bathroom in self-contained accommodation. "Airbnb and Theatre Digs Booker are the only real outlets you have," she says. "You get small lists from the theatre companies but a lot of those are a room in someone's house and I'm sorry, but at my age and with a disability: I can't do that."

As it stands, the digs crisis leaves disabled members

often paying a higher penalty. "The touring allowance is woefully inadequate," says Michelle. "My accommodation has cost a weekly average of £300 to £620 with the extra amounts coming out of my own pay, and this included an Airbnb in Edinburgh that turned out to lack a fully working toilet." Last year, the average price for self-contained accommodation for two people on the Theatre Digs Booker website came to £536 a week, more than triple the cost for the same arrangement with a host at £152. Lodging with strangers in the past has left



Michelle in a hostile situation. "I'm a person of colour and had a couple of instances where on the phone everything was fine. And then when I've arrived there's been a problem and it's often the only thing it can be attributed to," she says.

Nearly one in five respondents to Equity's survey said that digs-related issues impacted their mental health, whilst 63% claimed that engagers either didn't think or care about wider safety issues. "My health has definitely suffered," says Michelle. "I'm old school, so I'm going to get on and do my show, but once the curtain comes down you have to deal with whatever issues your digs have presented you with."

It's a different world when Michelle accompanies her husband, an international performer, on his tours abroad. "They're always given apartments that are close by. They're not fancy-schmancy places, but they're clean and there's security. It just makes sense." To reach an international standard, Michelle champions greater flexibility. "Either they substantially increase the touring allowance to fall in line with the prices that are out there or you provide your

staff with proper apartments or hotels, close to the theatre. That's the way it should be. Every other country does it. Why can't we do it?"

As Equity prepares to renegotiate both the Commercial and Subsidised Theatre Agreements with UK Theatre, this summer is set to be a watershed moment for the digs crisis. Work has started on determining the priorities for the next round of negotiations taking place later this year, and the union will further consult with members who

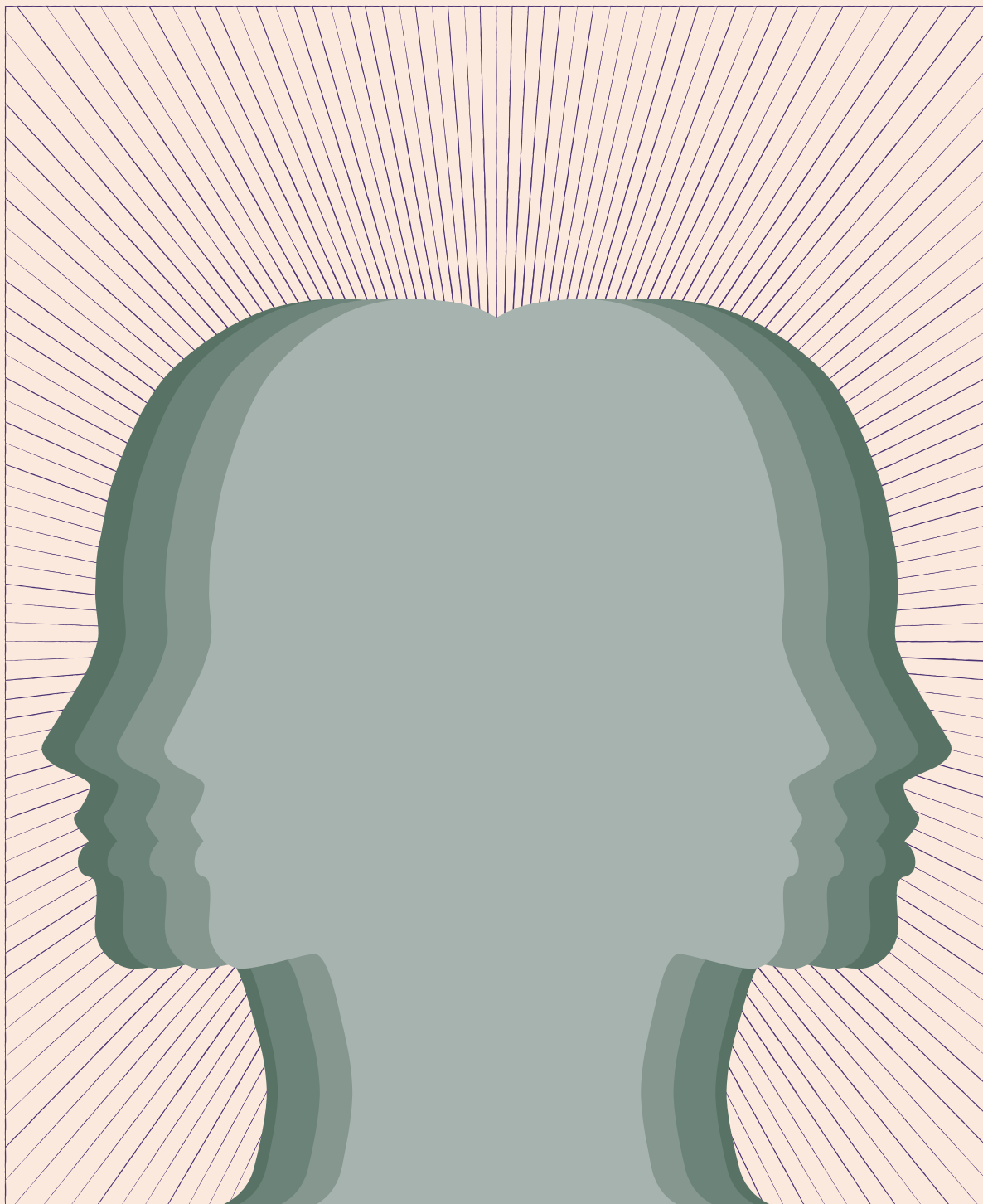
have worked on these agreements on how best to address the digs crisis and the impact of the cost of living crisis on theatre workers. Coming together, Equity deputies, members of the union's Stage Committee, and staff will prepare a claim and work to build support across the sector for the improvements members need to their terms and conditions. It is, after all, by using their collective voice that workers can

bring about transformative change.

** names have been changed*

"The digs crisis leaves disabled members paying a higher penalty"

STOP AI STEALING THE SHOW



Technology journalist **Ian Steadman** looks into the impact of artificial intelligence on performers – and why we must protect them now

"I was in a warehouse and I was being directed by somebody on a Zoom video link. And it was not only my face that was being recorded but it was also my words, so that a digital version of myself could be manipulated to speak. I did think to myself, whilst I was doing it, where is this going to end up?"

Comedian, actor and Equity member Rick Kiesewetter recently became one of thousands of performers around the world to be turned into a digital avatar. It seemed at first like a simple gig – turn up to a studio, stand in front of a complex camera setup, strike some poses, say some lines, and collect a day's wage – yet the experience left him disconcerted. There was now a digital avatar of Rick that could be made to do or say anything thanks to AI-powered software, but he had no input or control into what that might entail.

"Alarm bells rang but I weighed the risks and I sort of turned a blind eye," he says, noting that he needed the money. "I found it a little disturbing that they have these files in perpetuity, and you just don't know where this footage is going to end up. A lot of the time the agent doesn't know either – the technology is moving so quickly. The company essentially said that it was 'just data' and 'possibly for things like games and stuff.' But they own this data now – so they actually own me."

From the creation of digital avatars to the replacement of supporting artists with 3D body scans, to deepfakes, to posthumous digital reanimation, and more – Rick's

unsettling experience is not unusual. In fact, an increasing number of performers have been reporting to Equity that they've been asked to sign over their image, voice or likeness to AI companies under similarly vague circumstances, or for far less money than they feel they deserve. A recent survey of members found that 18% of respondents have already undertaken work involving AI technology; 79% of that group felt that they lacked a full understanding of their rights before signing those contracts.

"I did think to myself, whilst I was doing it, where is this going to end up?"

AI-powered imitation is even more widespread in audio, and performers in that field are ahead of the wider industry in experiencing its impact. While 36% of respondents to Equity's survey reported seeing job listings that mentioned AI, that rose to 61% for audio artists specifically. And, while 65% of respondents already feel that AI poses a threat to employment opportunities in the

performing arts sector, that again rose to 93% for audio artists.

Generating an AI version of a real person's voice is trivially easy compared to recreating their physical body digitally – either a performer can make voice recordings in a studio to provide the aural building blocks required for new sentences, or an algorithm can be trained on existing, available recordings. AI-generated voices have found an increasingly wide range of uses in the modern world, such as audiobook and advert narration, GPS and smart devices, telephone on-hold services, and much more.

93% of Equity members think the Government should introduce new legal protections for performers so that a performance cannot be reproduced by AI technology without their consent



And so it goes that many voice artists who have had their voices synthesised have struggled to receive proper remuneration, been subject to shady contracts, or had their performance misused. A well-known instance of this is that of Bev Standing, a Canadian voice actor who was hired in 2018 by the Chinese Institute of Acoustics to record for translation purposes – and ended up as the voice of a major social network.

“A couple of years later, a colleague sent me a TikTok video and said, ‘This is your voice, right?’” Bev says. “And I was like ‘Wow, yep,’ but I didn’t understand what it was because I didn’t have TikTok.

Then within 24 hours, I had numerous people – mostly my kids – saying, ‘Mom, this is you.’ So I downloaded the app and created a video that used the text-to-speech functionality – my jaw dropped and I went ‘That’s my voice.’ TikTok was not my client so I don’t know how they got it. I didn’t know what to do; I talked to a few people, and then I talked to a lawyer.”

Bev had not been told that her voice would be used for TikTok’s first ever text-to-speech functionality. Nor had this been stated in the contract she signed when she decided to take on the work in the first place. Fortunately, ByteDance – TikTok’s parent company – was receptive to her demands and within two weeks had removed her voice from the platform. A year later, they settled.

Bev says that taking on a major technology company by herself was “overwhelming,” but ultimately she felt she had a duty to the wider

industry as much as herself. “I really felt that it was important not only to get the message to the talent that you need to be clear about what you’re agreeing to, but also to the people that are hiring us. We’re not being difficult and we’re not being picky – we have our reasons why we have to protect our voice and where our voice gets used,” she says. “To me, that was the best win – that it just made people stand up and notice and understand.”

These are the early stages of a new artistic form that gives unprecedented control to directors, producers, and others in positions of creative power – potentially as significant a development in the creative arts as the invention of editing itself. The possibilities are already dizzying. It revolutionises the concept of archival preservation – imagine being able to watch Shakespeare performed by the most celebrated casts from hundreds of years of theatrical history. Dead actors can appear of any age or physical build or ability, and act opposite

their descendants. Stunts can be done entirely digitally. Reshoots can be entirely virtual. Games studios can pull in thousands of unique character models for crowd scenes at the click of a button. Publishers can pump out algorithmically generated audiobooks and tie-in content for even the least-profitable corners of their back catalogues. New spin-offs for existing TV shows can be commissioned without existing casts.

However, under existing copyright frameworks, this tips the balance of power further away from performers and

“A colleague sent me a TikTok video and said, ‘This is your voice, right?’”

towards studios, publishers and owners of intellectual property. AI-made performance synthesisation doesn't create a 'copy' or a 'recording', so it falls outside the current scope of copyright law – and so performers lack the legal backing to control their work, or even to engage with AI and monetise it. This is a boom industry, with companies sprouting up across the world that are capturing performers without giving clear information on what will happen afterwards. Many insist upon Non-disclosure agreement (NDAs).

"A lot of these guys capture this and view it purely as data that they can sell on," says Rick. "My contract was very open-ended; I think there's a lack of clarity and part of that is due to the advancement of technology. But as long as the actor, the artist or the model knows what they're getting into, then that's fine."

Bev agrees: "AI is here to stay, it's not going away. I now only work with companies where I have control over where my voice gets licensed." She also points out that the current situation opens performers up to legal action if their voice or likeness is sold on to be used in a context (like an ad campaign) which conflicts with an existing exclusivity deal.

These concerns caused Equity to recently launch its 'Stop AI Stealing the Show' campaign, which aims to strengthen performers' rights in the face of this wave of AI-powered change. "We realise that AI is happening and it's not something we can stop – just like any other new technology," explains Shannon Sailing, Equity's Audio

and New Media Official. "What we want is, from an early stage and as this technology becomes more intelligent, to ensure that our members are protected, their rights are protected and there is no detriment to their job opportunities."

"We want to work as best we can with AI companies to make sure that they're engaging members with good conditions and fair terms of usage, but we also want to inform members about what their contracts might mean. We want them to remain vigilant that they might be doing things that get used in a way that they haven't knowingly consented to."

"We want to ensure from an early stage that our members are protected"

94% of surveyed Equity members said that they wanted the Government to make it illegal for an individuals' image to be manipulated using AI without their consent, while 93% believed the same about reproducing performances without performers' consent. Members also submitted a number of horror stories

about AI manipulation: refusing to come back for an episode of a long-running TV show and a CGI version appearing instead; reading for an audiobook and unknowingly giving a company the right to use their voice for AI research "forever"; having extensive 3D body scans reproduced across multiple productions without permission. There are widespread fears that "cheap labour" AI will undercut trained performers and that some fields (like voiceover work) could be wiped out entirely.

So Equity is calling on the Government to take action by changing intellectual property law. For instance, reforming the Copyright,

Designs and Patents Act (1988) would protect performers against AI-made performance synthesisation, while implementing the Beijing Treaty would allow performers, and Equity as their representative, to combat the misappropriation of their images, likenesses, and performances.

“AI and performance rights are not really in the public or Government discourse at the moment,” says Equity Policy Officer Liam Budd. “We recognise that AI can have positive benefits when it’s used ethically and responsibly, we know it can be a vital source of income for some of our members, and from an equalities perspective it can be very helpful for increasing access for our disabled members. But we’ve already seen an impact on jobs, and we’re also seeing exploitation across the sector.”

“Government policy right now is non-existent. The National AI Strategy was published in October 2021, with the aim of making the UK an AI ‘superpower’ within the next 10 years – yet while there have been consultations through the Intellectual Property Office, there have been no questions about reviewing or enhancing rights for performers.”

Equity’s industrial department is also drawing up plans for negotiating new collective agreements with AI companies and for improving existing agreements. Meanwhile, collaboration is ongoing with unions in other countries to address these concerns within the global copyright system. Guidance is also available on the Equity website for members worried about AI-related work.

“We’ve devised a contract for voiceover work that our members can download and use as a template,” says Shannon, “with provisions for protecting themselves and their ownership of their performance. But from a member point of view, people are springing into action about this because it is going to change the landscape of how we consume media – not just for people working on it, but the public as well. It should always be clear, for example, if your audiobook is being read by a robot. And if someone puts on a bodysuit and does a motion captured performance, they often won’t get credit. We want to change that and work to redefine what ‘performance’ means within the law.”

It’s tempting to imagine a dystopian future here – one where new generations of talent are unable to break into their respective fields due to an undying generation of AI stalwarts. As with all technology that upsets an existing social order, however, a more realistic prediction would be that as much will be created as will be destroyed. When the dust settles, the initiatives performers take now to secure their rights will have played a part in the final settlement. Pushing now for the rights of performers to earn from the use of their body, face, voice, and movements will be essential to ensuring that the arts can support as many people as possible in the future – even if the full potential of what AI can do is only just becoming clear.

Visit equity.org.uk/stop-ai-stealing-the-show to find out more and to access guidance for artists



A Gay Liberation Front protest (from the Hall-Carpenter Archives, LSE Library)

THE POWER OF DRAG

Jake Hall, author of *The Art of Drag*, delves into the colourful and radical history of British drag artist activism

In September 1971, a huge crowd of devout Christians gathered at London's Westminster Methodist Central Hall to protest what they described as "moral pollution". The event was one of several organised by the Nationwide Festival of Light, a grassroots religious group which sought to enforce evangelical notions of purity.

As the religious right preached, activists representing the UK's Gay Liberation Front (GLF), an LGBTQ+ rights protest group, were preparing a counter-demonstration. As numbers continued to swell, their disruption bubbled up. Stink-bombs were thrown; soon afterwards, chaos descended. Lesbian couples snogged on the balcony. GLF members released mice into the audience. A 'bishop' stormed the stage to preach a deliciously queer sermon, urging the audience to "keep on sinning."

In the midst of this havoc, a dozen drag queens dressed in blue-and-white nuns' habits took to the speakers' platform, chanting gay activist slogans. Underneath their habits, their legs were hairy, clad in ugly boots. If their faces were painted at all, they were painted hastily, the results gloriously messy and unpolished. Visually, it was a middle finger up to the notion that drag should be high-femme and ladylike. Politically, it was a vehicle for maximum disruption. The activists called it "radical drag."

Although the GLF disbanded in 1974, members of the group's "drag queen commune" kept the anarchic spirit of this drag style alive. Lavinia Co-Op, Bette Bourne and Gretel Feather later formed Bloodlips, a collective designed to disrupt through gender-f*** – the art of subverting binary attitudes about gender. With faces smeared in clown-like makeup, they blurred the lines of drag and performance art with radical leftist art. "We rather challenged the gay men in gay lib because they wore a badge saying Gay Liberation Front, while we chose to dress as men in frocks," said Feather in a 2019 interview. Expanding on the ethos of "radical drag," Feather continued: "No falsies, no pretending to be women. We wanted to be

seen from the other side of the street for what we were. So radical drag can be defined as drag which clearly reveals it is worn by a man who is not parodying a woman."

As we understand it now, there's a difference between cross-dressing and drag. The former refers to the act of donning the garb associated with a different gender to yourself, often – but not always – in an attempt to pass as someone of that gender. Drag, on the other hand, is about performance – and performing gender. It is, and always has been, inherently political. Usually, drag subverts gender norms by hand-picking their most obvious visual signifiers and amping them up to the millionth degree. Drag kings generally have huge bulges and exaggerated beards; drag queens have towering wigs, and lips painted into a high-femme snarl.

The GLF's "radical" take pushed this further, teaming makeup and moustaches with heavily symbolic women's clothing, like the nun's habit. It's an overtly political example of drag as activism, but dig deep into the annals of British history and you'll find countless others.

Criminal acts

It wasn't until 1967 that homosexuality was partially decriminalised in the UK. In the centuries leading up to that, both sodomy and cross-dressing were punishable by law – prior to 1861, sodomy was actually punishable by death. Despite these illegalities, a handful of molly houses across the UK thrived. These proto-gay bars allowed who we'd now know as LGBTQ+ folks to mingle, joke and have sex in relative peace – and as a result, they were a regular target of police raids. Rictor Norton, an historian of early modern and nineteenth-century homosexuality, writes that "many of the [molly house attendees] would wear drag, and sing and dance together, and engage in camp behaviour."

In 1725, a molly house near London's Covent Garden was raided. Rounded up by the police, 25 men were accused of both cross-dressing and sodomy, yet they "did not submit sheepishly to their arrest, but put up a show of

resistance.” According to Norton, none were prosecuted. These proto-drag queens had no choice but to be political when drag itself was criminalised. Yet fear of arrest did nothing to deter the likes of Princess Seraphina, a molly house regular credited as “Britain’s first recognisable drag queen.” Described by Norton as a “messenger for mollies and a bit of a hustler,” Seraphina dragged up regularly. By taking to the streets in full drag, Seraphina was making a covert political statement.

Things were different for women. While male sodomy was punishable by death, female homosexuality wasn’t outlawed in any way. This wasn’t an act of benevolence by the courts; in their eyes, it was simply inconceivable that lesbians even existed. Cross-dressing was still punished, yet when women cross-dressed on-stage in particular, the connotations of homosexuality weren’t there. Usually, their cross-dressing was an attempt to disguise themselves and temporarily enjoy the perks of male privilege. This happened regularly in Shakespearean plays such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Twelfth Knight*, where women were afforded at least some degree of freedom for disguising themselves as men. This, of course, was an activist statement in and of itself – it was living, theatrical proof that women were treated as second-class citizens.

Centuries later, drag kings took the world’s vaudeville music halls by storm. Usually, these “male impersonators,” as they were then known, were queer – and their tongue-in-cheek portrayals of masculinity were deeply political. Annie Hindle, an English drag king born at some point in the mid-19th century (records of the exact date differ), toured American saloons performing archetypes of military men. Her drag challenged the notion of what a woman should be, but it was also used as a tool to break the law; when she married her dresser Annie Ryan, she dragged up in a tuxedo to get away with it. Florence Hines, a queer, Black drag king, used cross-dressing as a medium to overturn racist perceptions of Blackness. Hines’ career started out in minstrel shows, where Black characters were portrayed as a kind of humorous underclass for the amusement of white audiences. Hines ascended the ranks of vaudeville, later perfecting a style of elegant, upper-class drag – a direct challenge to racist portrayals of Black characters in minstrel shows. His career flourished; when he died in 1924, he was known as one of the world’s best-known, and best-paid, drag kings.

Post-Stonewall

As the decades rolled by, drag became more overtly political. Drag artists played leading roles in some of queer history’s most important moments – although in most mainstream queer histories, their presence is either understated or erased.

Take the 1969 Stonewall Uprising as an example: cops raided the Mafia-owned Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar in New York City. Herded onto the streets in preparation for a mass arrest, the patrons resisted violently, sparking a series of riots which lasted for several days and spawned a global gay liberation movement (including the birth of the Gay Liberation Front). Accounts of the first fateful riot, on June 28th 1969, vary wildly. Some say bricks were thrown, others argue that drag queens – who, crucially, remain largely unnamed – bashed officers with their purses, inciting others to fight back.

Marsha P. Johnson is another drag queen (Johnson is also a trans woman of colour) named in accounts of the riots, yet she’s explicitly said she didn’t start the riot. Other descriptions of that night claim that Stormé DeLarverie threw the first punch, and then called on the crowd to fight back. Here, the specifics are important. DeLarverie was a queer, Black drag king, and a true trailblazer. DeLarverie was the only drag king to perform as part of the world-renowned Jewel Box Revue. Her mere presence in an all-queen troupe was political. That she played a pivotal role in the global fight for gay liberation should come as no surprise, yet her backstory is often omitted from mainstream LGBT+ histories.

Prior to 1970, British drag had largely been tongue-in-cheek female impersonation. The likes of Danny La Rue and Dame Edna found enormous success for their comedy acts, which played up to the comedic value of gruff, cisgender men in high-femme drag. La Rue, for example, sometimes opened his sets by growling “wotcha, mates!” The joke was immediate – here was a self-aware macho man in a dress poking fun at himself, but also subtly poking fun at gender more widely. Pantomime dames and ‘principal boys’ took a similar approach; they were political in the sense that cross-dressing was taboo, but they weren’t overtly subversive.

The global spread of post-Stonewall, gay liberation politics changed all of that. The GLF’s “radical drag” became a British



From the Hall-Carpenter Archives, LSE Library

blueprint, spawning radical drag artists like David Hoyle, whose Divine David character (whom he killed off in an avant-garde performance in 2000) was an ode to all things hedonistic, unsanitised and anti-fascist. Off-stage, drag artists joined the ranks of key protest groups. London's first Pride march, which took place two decades ago in 1972, was attended by some 2000 protestors, many of them dressed in drag. Solidarity group Lesbians and Gays Support The Miners, which supported striking miners and their families throughout the mid-1980s, counted a handful of drag artists amongst its ranks. It's in recent history, too; in 2018, self-defined drag "unicorn, alien and idealist" Cheddar Gorgeous led a march of thousands to protest then-President Donald Trump's four-day visit to the UK. In 2020, pantomime dames took to the streets alongside their union, Equity, to demand fair treatment and government support during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Contemporary drag activism

Some drag artists are literally on the frontlines of marches and demonstrations, but others use their art to make political statements instead. While gender-f*** icon Leigh Bowery was living with HIV, he took to painting himself, his clothes and his masks with blood-red polka dots. These were an aesthetic nod to Kaposi's Sarcoma, a cancer which manifests visually in the form of lesions on the face and body. HIV patients were disproportionately likely to contract Kaposi's Sarcoma, so by painting himself with these blood-red dots, Bowery was making HIV visible in a world whose governments – led by homophobic misinformation – routinely ignored the virus.

Back on the streets, the early 1990s saw the rise of a UK branch of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. These drag nuns were radical gay and trans activists, who channelled the anarchic spirit of drag to wreak political havoc. In 1991, the Sisters staged a "canonisation" ceremony for queer, HIV+ filmmaker Derek Jarman, making a deeply political statement in the process. That year, the Government had spent "precisely £0" on HIV research, they later explained in the 2021 documentary *Saintmaking*. Infuriated by the homophobic, religiously-motivated stigma around HIV, the Sisters canonised Jarman in a filmed ceremony to protest the government's inaction. The ceremony itself was gloriously camp and tongue-in-cheek; the drag nuns crowded around Jarman, dressed in a gold lamé robe and matching hood. It was a

sarcastic, playful protest – the kind that drag artists always do best.

Despite the rising mainstream profile of drag, its artistic underbelly remains rooted in activism. The likes of drag artists Asifa Lehore and Amrou Al-Kadhi have used it as a medium to discuss acceptance of drag in Muslim communities, as well as Islamophobia in the LGBT+ community. In 2020, the drag artist Son of A Tutu created a collaborative video which filtered discussions of micro-aggressions, economy inequality and the Black Lives Matter movement through a drag lens.

The binary of drag "king" and "queen" has also long been broken. Given the rise of mainstream transphobia, this blurring of gender lines is an automatically radical stance. Drag creatures such as Charity Kase, who spoke on RuPaul's Drag Race UK about being subjected to serophobia (the fear of HIV) as an HIV+ queer person, uses prosthetics, gore and SFX to create post-human drag monsters. Trans drag artists such as Chiyo and self-proclaimed drag alien Juno Birch use their ever-growing platforms to challenge the UK's ingrained transphobia, breaking boundaries with acts that fuse cabaret, striptease and much, much more.

Today's drag is interdisciplinary, boundary-breaking and still inherently political, no matter how many think-pieces argue otherwise. Internationally, drag artists remain at the forefront of the global fight for queer rights. To quote the late, New York-based activist Sylvia Rivera: "Hell hath no fury like a drag queen scorned."

Want to join the drag activism movement?

Equity's Drag Artist Network is a community where drag performers can come together for support and find collective solutions to the issues they face. These include problems with the pubs and clubs that make up the majority of venues featuring drag performance, unsuitable changing rooms, and issues around health, safety and harassment. The union is also building regional drag networks, initially in London, Blackpool and Manchester, to connect local drag performers in those cities. Whether you are resident there or live elsewhere, all drag artists are welcome to contact drag@equity.org.uk and follow us on social media [@equitydrag](https://www.instagram.com/equitydrag) to get started on your own contribution to drag activism history.



Shining a spotlight on mental health

Policy Officer **Liam Budd** on the startling link between mental health and a performing arts career

At Equity we have been increasingly concerned about the high prevalence of poor mental health across the performing arts industry. As Equity Councillor Sam Swann tells me: "So few actors actually make all their living from the profession yet everyone seems to feel like they're failing. Those in precarious work are also disproportionately affected by this crisis, as we so often feel paradoxically both overworked and unproductive; both useless and underused."

Yet statistics rarely portray the true severity of the mental health crisis. "There has always been a high level of depression amongst comics. It is also something that performers feel very reluctant to share as it could affect work opportunities," says Mary Lane, Secretary of the West of England Variety Branch, the branch that put forward a motion to Council calling on the union to address the issue.

In fact, a survey Equity conducted in 2015, in collaboration with The Stage and Spotlight, found that a huge 46% of performing artists self-reported poor or average mental health. A significant one in five of the 5,000 survey respondents was seeking help for their mental health. And since that survey was conducted, it has been noticeable that poor mental health has increasingly featured in casework handled by Equity staff.

A growing body of evidence has also developed in recent years. For example, 'The Making an Appearance' research project carried out by Equity Women's Committee

and Royal Holloway University helped illustrate the close relationship between body image, appearance-pressures and mental health, particularly from the dimension of sex and gender. The majority of members (58%) responding to our recent digs survey also said that accommodation problems had a detrimental impact on mental health.

So to explore mental health in the performing arts further, the union has commissioned a leading academic to review the existing academic literature across performing arts sectors and critically analyse the key themes that have emerged. This landmark study by Dr Lucie Clements, published during Mental Health Awareness Week (9 – 15 May), examined 111 pieces of research from across the globe. The review confirmed that there is a clear trend of increased mental health concerns across the performing arts – and that those working in the performing arts are more likely to experience poor mental health compared to the general population.

According to Dr Clements, a number of factors are at play here: "The culture of unstable work, antisocial working hours, time away from home and financial fears was the most discussed cause of stress and mental health concern in performing artists." Situational factors were also identified. This includes the nature of performing, such as constant exposure to evaluation, competition and comparison with others, as well as expectations to manage emotions on and off stage. Another stark finding is that there is currently no research explicitly exploring

"The crisis should not be individualised, it is a collective crisis!"



mental health in relation to ethnically diverse performers, disabled performers, as well as issues surrounding class.

For some people with poor mental health, being in work can play an important part of maintaining mental health wellbeing or as part of recovery, while providing vital links to a wider community. Tackling stigma and discrimination around mental health is also important, as we know this often makes someone's mental health problems worse, and delays or stops them getting help.

If your workplace is affecting your mental or physical health, we can help. Call Equity on 020 7379 6000 to speak to someone confidentially. We have also worked with mental health experts to provide and signpost a range of resources for members. If your health issue arises from a non-workplace related matter, contact the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (bapam.org.uk) where members can access six free counselling sessions.

However, as Sam Swann rightfully points out: "The crisis should not be individualised, it is a collective crisis! We know that this is a class problem – the poorest fifth of the population are twice as likely to be at risk of mental health problems. The focus must be on tackling the systemic causes of poor mental health – from low pay, high rents, bullying and harassment."

Producers and engagers have a big role to play here. They should be responsible for mental wellbeing in the same way as their other health and safety obligations, with the emphasis on prevention and assessing risk, and improving conditions in the workplace. We also know that a unionised workplace is a safer and healthier place. Studies have shown that workers belonging to a trade union are more familiar with their employee rights, and unionised companies are more likely to have inspections for health and safety violations.

Indeed, when it comes to mental health and wellbeing, the union movement has been at the forefront, working with employers to develop 'mentally healthy' workplaces. For instance, Equity's Safe Spaces campaign to tackle sexual discrimination and harassment at work has achieved protections for performers engaging in scenes and castings involving nudity, adhered to by

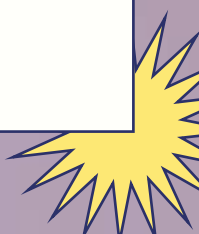
producers signed up to the union's collective agreements. The role of trade unions is especially vital when systemic issues, such as austerity, Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, have all contributed to ever-increasing levels of work stress and mental ill health.

Which is why our work for Mental Health Awareness week – including the review by Dr Clements and educational events held for members and staff – is part of a wider strategic programme taking place across the union to safeguard performers and creative practitioners' mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Crucially, we are focused on bringing about deep-rooted structural reform for the industry, and have outlined ways Equity members' mental health can be improved in our recently published Mental Health Charter. The Charter includes demands of producers and engagers to adopt relevant safeguards in the workplace, such as mental health risk assessments, safe spaces policies and consultation on organisational change; and to address the harmful impacts of precarious work by improving pay and work-life balance.

What we need is a radical shift in government policy. A decade of underfunding has left our mental health services overstretched and under-resourced. Urgent reform of the Mental Health Act is also needed if we are to see an end to structural racism that exists within mental health services.

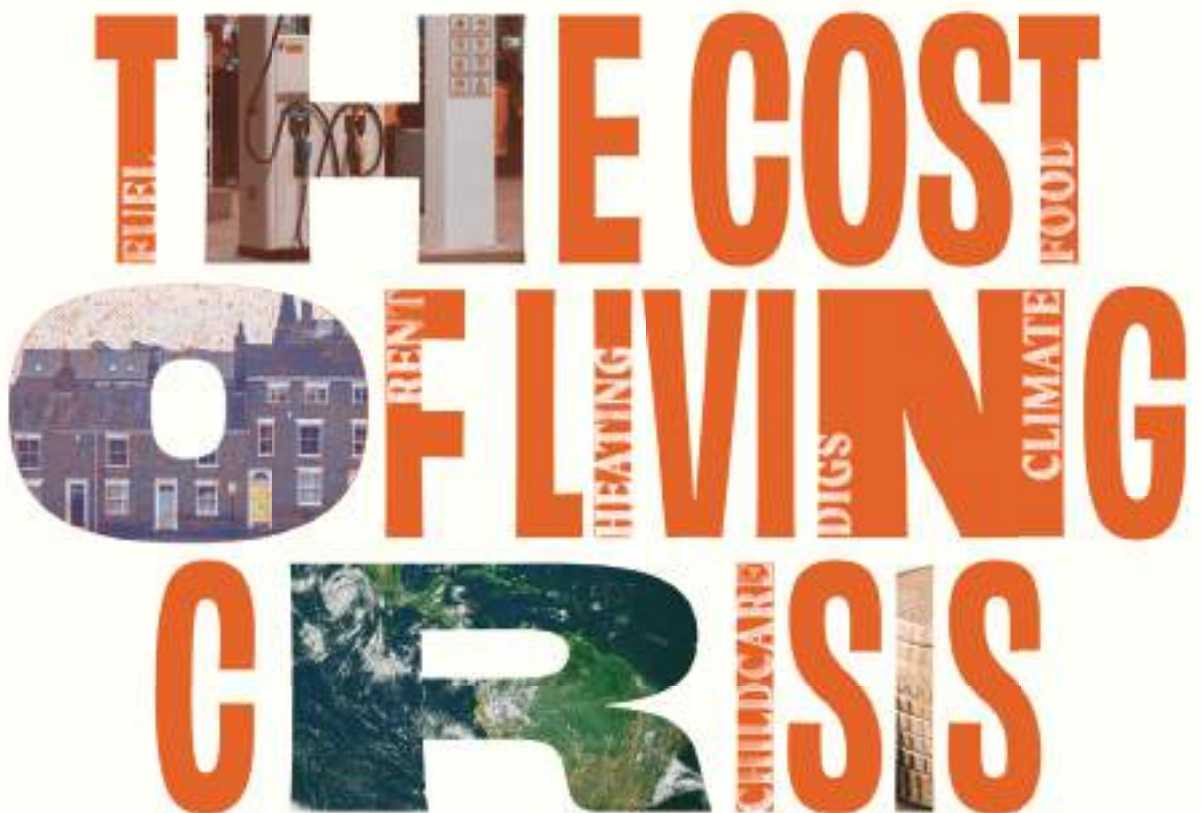
There are many ways you can stand alongside your fellow members and get involved in Equity's work, from promoting a campaign to attending a rally to putting yourself forward in one of our elections. We also want to hear directly from members about the structural change that is needed to drastically improve your mental health.

Every artist has the right to a dignified working life. As trade unionists and activists, we must use our collective power so that the Government and bosses cannot ignore this critical situation any longer.



MARCH ON SATURDAY 18 JUNE

**TELL THE GOVERNMENT
TO ACT ON**



**JOIN EQUITY
AND THE REST OF THE TRADE UNION
MOVEMENT IN LONDON**

ASSEMBLE FROM 10.30AM PORTLAND PLACE W1 | MARCH 12PM
RALLY 1PM PARLIAMENT SQUARE

Now is the time to stand with fellow trade unionists and community groups to demand that the Government do more to shield us from the debilitating impacts of the cost of living crisis.

Join us – alongside members of all UK trade unions – in London on Saturday 18 June to march for a new deal for working people, real help with energy bills, and a pay rise.

Why does this matter?

The current cost of living crisis is worsening the economic and social position of Equity members, alongside many other working and ordinary people in the UK. As inflation reaches record levels, our wages simply haven't kept up. As energy costs leave households out of pocket, oil and gas companies reap massive profits. And as increasing numbers of people and families fall into poverty, the Government response – or lack thereof – has been woeful.

Fight for our collective welfare

We know that economic and social instability are nothing new for Equity members and the evidence overwhelmingly underlines this. A recent survey on the impending changes to Universal Credit, conducted by the union in September last year, revealed that a shocking 53% of respondents were on the precipice of experiencing financial hardship due to the removal of the £20 uplift, with 43% stating that this would mean they would not be able to meet housing and other essential costs.

Protect our mental health

The economic instability faced by members – including costs of childcare, rent and more – sits at the heart of a mental health

crisis experienced by workers across the creative industries. As detailed on page 36, this has led Equity to develop a Mental Health Charter, calling on the industry and the Government addresses the issues of pay and insecurity at work which are fuelling the mental health crisis. It is impossible to decouple the relationship between the insecurity of work and pay and the resulting emotional and psychological impact, and bosses must take responsibility for the effect this has on Equity members.

The demands of our charter are non-negotiable, as are the rights of Equity members – and all workers – to live free

from economic and social instability, a situation being worsened by the cost of living crisis.

“The current cost of living crisis is worsening the economic and social position of Equity members, alongside many other working and ordinary people in the UK”

Help with travel

The march is being organised by the TUC and if you live outside of London you may be able to book a seat on a coach, with many places being subsidised or free. This is being co-ordinated by regional TUCs and you can find out more at tuc.org.uk/travel-coach.

The role of Equity branches is also critical in mobilising members to attend the demonstration, and guidance will be shared with Branch Secretaries to help identify where

transport may be available for members outside London.

Deaf and disabled Equity members who are able to attend the march can view guidance supplied by the TUC on accessibility measures at tuc.org.uk/accessibility-disabled-marchers.

New emblem, historic roots



Founded in 1930, with predecessor unions going back even further than that, Equity has a long and proud history. Our rich heritage is reflected in the creation of the union's new emblem, revealed here on this page.

Designed by illustrator Rebecca Strickson, with the creative direction of Equity's General Secretary and Design & Content Co-ordinator Tom Greenwood, the new emblem is decorated with nods to the past. This includes the 'T' that originates from the first emblem used for the British Actors' Equity Association

– it's original meaning isn't clear, but it's fitting to see it as an 'umbrella' of protection offered by the union.

There are also the connected symbols that have long been associated with live performance and Equity itself. Homage is paid to the Variety Artists' Federation (VAF) with the emblem featuring not only the VAF logo from the 1950s crowning the top of the design, but their colours of green and gold, alongside garlands that reference the variety union's pre-1950s aesthetic.

Then there is the present, and this emblem is notable for its inclusion of a film camera to represent recorded media artists for the first time. Of course, there is the encircling and distinctive purple shade that has become associated with the union.

Looking forwards, we have the words that succinctly set out Equity's vision – "To all artists: good work. To all workers: good art. To all people: Equity". It may be the past that we inherit, but it is the future that we build.

We are organising the Equity archives and are interested in finding items from Equity, the VAF or our predecessor organisations' past. If you own or know of an interested piece of Equity history, we'd love to hear from you – contact tgreenwood@equity.org.uk.

Thank you to the Trade Union Badge Collectors Society for lending us your images and expertise.



Two theatrical players are shown here, representing the two then-disciplines represented by Equity in the West End and increasingly in Repertory Theatre. On the left is the 'straight player' perhaps in a classical play, while the figure on the right represents musical theatre.



The VAF was founded in 1906 and incorporated into Equity in 1967. This badge is likely from the 1940s and has elements similar to other unions and workers associations of the time - notably the aesthetic of the Music Hall Artistes Railway Association.



Equity may now be associated with purple, but prior to the 1990s the union's colour was blue. With its inclusion of the latter-era VAF logo, this badge reflects the merging of the two unions.



Equity's name formally changed in 2006 from the British Actors Equity Association to simply 'Equity', so as to include our broad membership beyond performers, and simply state our guiding principle of almost a century.

In Memoriam

Robert Ashley
Ginni Barlow
Joyce Bate
Judith Baxter
Nathan Birks
David Blyth
Meriel Brook
June Brown
Denise Bryer
Harriet Buchan
Diana Calderwood
Wyn Calvin
Julie Carroll
Paddy Cassidy
Maitland Chandler
Geoffrey Chater
Cherlisa
Jeremy Child
Elliz Creez
Stephen Critchlow
Bob Croucher
Angela Crow
Enid Crowe
Pauline Cunningham
Isaac Danbury
Rowland Davies
Tony Dennes
Alex Donoghue
Joe D'Orazio
Anita Elias
Beth Ellis
Mark Elwes
Peter Faulkner
Camila Fiori
Ann Flint
Maggie Fox
Dougal Fraser
James Frederick-Harvey
Paul Gane
Sylvie Gatrill
Penelope Goddard
David Goodhart
Josephine Gordon
Kathleen Gray
Kathryn Greenaway
Cynthia Grenville
Mike (Michael) Hall
Bill Hanley

Ellen-Gayle Harewood
Andrew Harries
Jenny Harris
Antony Hayden
Felicity Susan Hayman
Jack Hedley
Margaret Heritage
Roy Holder
Bernard Holley
Gerald Home
Christopher Honer
Sally Ann Howes
Jonathan Hunter
John H Jackson
Lena Jason
Georgina Jumel
Marry Hyam
Anna Karen
Kristyna K'Ashvili
Nigel Keen
Jo Kendall
Emma Kerr
John Lambert
Melody Lang
Sheila Latimer
Claude Le Saché
Leon Lissek
George Little
John Livesey
Terry Lynch
Moti Makan
David Malkin
Tony Mansell
Antony May
Tina May
David McKail
Mary McMillen
Jean Methven
Janet Michael
Joseph Monaghan-Hughes
Renate Morley
William Morris
Katie o'Donoghue
Clare Owen
Larry Parker
Paddi Parnell
Brian Peck
Ron Pember

Morris Perry
Vera Peters
Will Power
David Pugh
John Raven
Barbara Ray
Kay Renner
Ralph Riach
Craig Richard
Gwyn Richards
Stacey Rogers
Grace Rorke
Stuart Rose
George Rossi
Iain S S McGlashan
Alaknanda Samarth
Kenneth Scott
David Sheppard
Graham Skidmore
Andy Jonathan Smart
Barrie Stacey
John Stahl
Ami-Jayne Steele-Childe
Pamela Helen Stephen
Clive Stock
Michael Taylor
Pauline Tooth
Bobby Velvet
Gary Waldhorn
Terry Wale
John Warman
Charles West
Robert Terrance Willoughby
Jennifer Wilson
Bridget Wood
Rodney Wood
David York
Jeremy Young
Abigail Zatouroff

In some cases it may be possible that another member may have used the same or a similar name subsequent to the passing of the above members.

Obituaries

Remembering Equity's Council
and founding members

Angela Crow



Remembered by Graeme Harper

My first recollection of meeting Angela, my second cousin, was in late 1958 when a small group of my family walked along a platform at Waterloo station to board a train to go to Poole in Dorset, to attend my grandfather's funeral. I was 13 at the time and in awe of Angela, who was by then a vivid red-haired, blue-eyed starlet. I offered to carry her bag, much to the anger of my older sister who was at the time six months pregnant and dragging a rather large suitcase. I, of course, was completely oblivious to my sister's dilemma as I was distracted by this up-and-coming star. My sister never let me forget this!

Angela had had a very successful time training to become an actress at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art between 1952-54. During this time she won a variety of awards which helped her to get noticed by producers, almost as soon as she left with her diploma! In 1956 she landed the part of Lily Smalls in the first ever London Production of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* and in 1958 she was offered a leading role in a BBC TV Play *The Laughing Woman* playing opposite a young Peter O'Toole, and this opened up the door to more television work.

In 1961 Angela was offered a role as a regular on the brand new and ground-breaking soap opera *Coronation Street*.

She played Doreen Lostock, a factory girl, over the next two years. Over the following years she built up a huge body of work in theatre, film and television. Her list of credits is huge and very wide-ranging, with roles in productions alongside Tony Hancock, Peter O'Toole, Michael Caine, Alan Bates, Bruce Forsyth, and Frankie Howerd.

During these formative years she met her husband and they had a son, Jonathon. Meanwhile, I was working my way up through the ranks of the BBC hoping to become a TV director. Angela had seen my name on the credits of a drama production and sent me a letter via the BBC. This was fortuitous as I had just been nominated for the BBC's directors course. I wrote a short 10-minute story about a woman pining for her boyfriend killed in the first world war and asked Angela if she would take on the role. She agreed and played the part so beautifully that it received huge acclaim and eventually helped secure my first opportunity as a professional director. During my career, in return, I was able to offer Angela several roles in some of the different productions I was to be employed on, such as *StarCops*, *Heartbeat*, and *The Royal*.

Later in her life she added writing to the list of her talents, as she became passionate about the life of Dylan Thomas and his family. She was also fascinated by the Brontë family and was closely associated with The Brontë Society.

Angela passed away peacefully at home on 3rd March 2022. She was very lucky to know from an early age that she wanted to be an actress. She succeeded beautifully thanks to her talent, passion and dedication, and became a very sought-after performer giving us all great pleasure. We will definitely miss you, Angela!

*Angela Crow served on Equity Council
1990-1994*

Tina May



Remembered by Mary Lane and Annie Bright

Tina was one of the UK's premier vocalists with an impressive discography that began in the early 1990s. She toured extensively to great acclaim and recorded with some of the top names in British and European Jazz. Tina was also bilingual, which resulted in her being asked to perform at jazz festivals in France, where she had a firm fan base.

Those who knew Tina were shocked and deeply saddened to hear that she had died of a brain tumour on 26th March 2022, at the age of 61. Tina was one of those rare people who, at your first meeting, made you think you had known them all your life.

In her professional life she was known by many for both her singing and her warm, engaging personality. But only a relative few know how active she was behind the scenes of her profession, particularly in the fight to overturn the virtual ban on live music brought in by the 2003 Licensing Act. It took nine years of struggle by Equity, the Musicians Union and others to wear down the Government. Success came finally in January 2012 with the passage of the Live Music Act, with much relief and a small celebration for leading activists (with live band of course) at the House of Commons.

Tina was also involved in the Equity Anniversary Celebration of the Variety Artistes Federation at the London Palladium 2017, as well as the Grand Order of Lady Ratlings from 2017 onwards, raising funds at the 2018 Spring Luncheon in Trinity House for the Cup of Kindness Charity.

Tina May served on Equity Council 2006-2014

Barbara Hyslop



Remembered by Yvonne Joseph

Barbara Hyslop was a very successful RADA trained actress whose career included West End theatre, touring theatre, television, films and more. In her early career she also played comedy feed in revue, a job she remembered with much affection.

Barbara had a strong personality and was astute and knowledgeable about finance and business. She served on Equity's Council for many years and was particularly proud of being a founder member of the Equity Charitable Trust, helping less fortunate members of the profession.

Barbara had a divine sense of humour. When a member of Equity Council made a comment about her RADA accent, she responded by making an entire speech in broad cockney, much to the delight and amusement of the rest of the Council. Most of all she cared about the profession and the members working in it. Her experience and expertise made her interesting and enjoyable company.

Barbara had a wonderful career and will be remembered as professional, dedicated, and considerate in everything she did. We send condolences to her son Richard and her family members. The profession has lost a great talent and I have lost a loyal friend, but we have so many memories!

Barbara Hyslop served on Equity Council 1984- 1994, 1998-2000 and 2000-2010

Getting Involved

You are the union: together, we can implement real change in the industry. There are many ways you can stand alongside your fellow members and get involved in Equity's work, from getting involved in your local branch to joining a network.

BRANCHES

Wherever you are based in the UK, there will be a branch: a community of Equity members who meet as a group to discuss the issues facing the industry, both locally and nationally. Branches hold regular meetings, organise and campaign. Equity has both General Branches, which are open to all members, and Variety Branches, which are specifically for members who work in variety.

LONDON

North & East London General Branch

north-east-london-general@equitybranches.org.uk

North West London General Branch

north-west-london-general@equitybranches.org.uk

South & South East London Branch

south-south-east-london-general@equitybranches.org.uk

Thames Variety Branch

thames-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

West & South West London Branch

west-south-west-london-general@equitybranches.org.uk

MIDLANDS

Birmingham & West Midlands General Branch

birmingham-west-midlands-general@equitybranches.org.uk

Birmingham Variety Branch

birmingham-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

Coventry & Leicester Variety Branch

coventry-leicester-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

East Midlands Variety Branch

east-midlands-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

NORTH EAST, YORKSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE

Humberside Variety Branch

humberside-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

Leeds & Region General Branch

leeds-general@equitybranches.org.uk

North & West Yorkshire Variety Branch

nwyvb@equitybranches.org.uk

North East of England General Branch

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North East Variety Branch

north-east-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

Sheffield & Region General Branch

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South Yorkshire Variety Branch

south-yorkshire-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland General Branch

northern-ireland-general@equitybranches.org.uk

NORTH WEST ENGLAND

Blackpool Variety Branch

denisaskham@yahoo.com

Greater Manchester & Region General Branch

greater-manchester-general@equitybranches.org.uk

Isle of Man General Branch

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Liverpool & District General Branch

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Manchester & District Variety Branch

manchester-district-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

Merseyside Variety Branch

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ONLINE

Online Branch

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SCOTLAND

East of Scotland General Branch

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Glasgow General Branch

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Scotland Variety Branch

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SOUTH EAST

Brighton & Sussex General Branch

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East Anglia Variety Branch

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Essex General Branch

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West of England Variety Branch

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North Wales General Branch

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South Wales Variety Branch

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NETWORKS

Networks are a space for members with a shared interest to meet and discuss issues affecting their area, from burlesque to storytellers. Through these discussions, problems are identified and solutions offered, which the union can then implement.

Burlesque Network

mday@equity.org.uk

Circus Network

circus@equity.org.uk

Class Network

classnetwork@equity.org.uk

Comedians Network

comedians@equity.org.uk

Dance Network

sblayney@equity.org.uk

Drag Artists Network

drag@equity.org.uk

Green New Deal

lstable@equity.org.uk

Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Network

imanborde@equity.org.uk

LGBT Network

imanborde@equity.org.uk

Models Network

models@equity.org.uk

Non-UK-Born Artists Network

nukba@equity.org.uk

Puppeteers' Network

puppeteers@equity.org.uk

Storytellers' Network

mday@equity.org.uk

COMMITTEES

Members are elected to Equity committees to represent their fellow professionals and to improve their working conditions.

Different committees cover the interests of different groups.

Committees drive union policy, conduct negotiations and ensure that the needs of all Equity members are heard.

Audio Committee

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Dance Committee

dance@equity.org.uk

Deaf & Disabled Members Committee

ddmcommittee@equity.org.uk

Directors and Designers Committee

directorsanddesigners@equity.org.uk

LGBT+ Committee

lgbtcommittee@equity.org.uk

Race Equality Committee

recommittee@equity.org.uk

Northern Ireland National Committee

nicommittee@equity.org.uk

Scottish National Committee

scottishcommittee@equity.org.uk

Screen & New Media Committee

screen@equity.org.uk

Singers Committee

singers@equity.org.uk

Stage Committee

stage@equity.org.uk

Stage Management Committee

stagemanagement@equity.org.uk

Variety, Circus & Entertainers Committee

vcec@equity.org.uk

Welsh National Committee

pwyllgorcymru@equity.org.uk / welshcommittee@equity.org.uk

Women's Committee

womenscommittee@equity.org.uk

Young Members Committee

ymcom@equity.org.uk

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Tax & Welfare Rights Helpline

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020 7670 0223
(Monday & Thursday 10am-1pm and 2-5pm)

Equity Distribution Services

distributions@equity.org.uk

To email a member of staff or Equity Officer, type the initial of their first name followed by their full surname with no spaces and add @equity.org.uk. E.g. the email address for 'May Whitty' would be 'mwhitty@equity.org.uk'.

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Paul W Fleming, General Secretary
Jackie Clune, Vice-President
Lynda Rooke, Vice-President
Bryn Evans, Honorary Treasurer

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Paul W Fleming, General Secretary
Louise McMullan, Deputy for the General Secretary
Hilary Hadley, Assistant General Secretary, Live Performance
John Barclay, Assistant General Secretary, Recorded Media

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DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!

This year we're running elections for President, Council, Appeals Committee and the Standing Orders Committee.

This is your opportunity to have your say on how the union is run and by who. Voting is by post only and you can find your ballot paper enclosed with this magazine.

The ballot is now open until Friday 8 July at midday.





To all artists: good work

To all workers: good art

To all people: Equity



WHY JOIN A UNION?

Join a union because of who we are, together;
not just because of what you do.

Because together, our voice is loud when we make demands of bosses,
- whether in theatre, film TV, audio,
new media, dance or variety.

Because together we will build an industry where your class, your gender,
your sexuality, your race, your disability does not limit what you can do.

Because together your lived experience becomes part of our voice too.

Because together we can fund insurances, legal support
and welfare advice - to enable artists to work.

Because together we educate each other and the industry.

Because together we put the future of our industry's workforce - freelance
and employed - at the heart of its future.

Because together politicians of every party have to hear us - and give our
industry, its workforce, and all working people the protection we deserve.

Because together we defend freedom of expression for artists
in the United Kingdom, and around the globe.

Because together we create the global society working people
& artists need to flourish - defend the environment,
fight for new housing, better transport, freedom to move.

Because together you are not alone. We are over 46,000 members, and
part of a global movement of millions, across the UK and the globe.

Together, and only together, can we say:

To all artists: good work
To all workers: good art
To all people: Equity

