**Essex and Hertfordshire Branch Meeting 1st February 2025**

**Via Zoom**

**Present**

Dee Mardi (chair), Stephen Moriaty, Danny Worthington, Liz Mullen, Nikki Simon, Merelina Kendal, Dawn Harvey, Andrew Wilkinson, Charlie Wilson, Kevin Exley, Carol Paradine, Libby Wilson, Alison Whismore, Brian Eastty Ian Britten-Hull, Annie Albici, Iain Croker (Regional Official), Hywel Morgan (SE Councillor) Dr Cameron Abbott-Betts (guest speaker)

**Apologies**

Andrew Alton-Read, Martyn Harrison, Beth Birrs, Abi Roberts, Russell Whismore

At the beginning of the meeting SM mentioned that some members who could not attend had asked if the meeting would be recorded. HM pointed out of that recording was not permitted under standing orders.

**Guest Speaker Dr Cameron Abbott-Betts**

He talks about how Colchester fringe came about. He was inspired by the buzz that he found when visiting Indianapolis and return to Colchester with a desire to do something similar. He spent four years going to different fringes UN studying how they worked.

The Colchester fringe started around the time of the pandemic and they were helped by being to use empty premises. They have been running for five years and this year's fringe will take place between 24th October and 2nd of November will stop applications to take part in the fringe will open from the 14th of February and close around about April.

It is non profit making and he says he is rebelling against the Edinburgh Fringe. A show should normally be no more than 60 minutes long and an original piece. They have three grades of performance spaces and although the performer can specify the type of space they think that piece is suitable for the organisers may think that's an alternative space is more appropriate. Performers are encouraged to use their own technician where possible. They only get one the half hours to rehearse. He gave an example of the costs involved. 3 performances in a main space would cost 1£35 on the performer would take 60% of ticket sales. Ticket prices oh 8 lbs for every show which avoids the public thinking that a cheaper show is going to be a lower standard. The success of the fringe may be judged by the fact that 82% of performers apply the following year.

**News From Guild House**

HM said that the General Secretary election will be later this year. Paul Fleming has done a great job and will be a candidate according to the rules. Nominations have opened.

Equality/inclusion - there will be 3reports coming this year. They want to put equality at the heart of the union this year. The LGBTQ and trans communities and global majority have been having difficulties.

Union finances are good. There will be an audit of US studios to find any money that is due. It is the studios that have to pay for this audit.

The union is talking with the government regarding the employments bill. That working with other creative unions over concerns about AI. HM drew attention to a deep fake documentary that has been on Channel 4. A reminder that there will be elections for Equity committees and asked that members look at what the committees do and consider standing for election.

NS asked how we can be protected against the use of AI. We have agreements with all the other unions with media companies the tech AI companies or outside these agreements and we need to deal with them.

Both HM and IC reminded that the regional meeting takes place 0n 24th March with a special guest speaker, the casting director Daniel Edwards.

**Reports**

In the absence of AAR (treasurer) SM confirmed that after paying the Actors Church for the showcase the present balance is £2711.65

LM said she is always looking for suggestions for speakers. She hopes to book Jenny Sealy from Graeae to be a speaker.

SM confirmed that's progress was being made on the showcase. A stage manager had been appointed. Forms for completion by performers had been sent out and when these were returned a running order would be prepared.

NS as Variety Officer commented that the general feeling amongst variety officers was that members took more notice of social media than emails. A petition had been made to ask Tower Hamlets to try and secure the Bethnal Green Working Men's Club. There is a new storytellers rate card which will be on the Equity website and also rates for puppeteers. She is still waiting for the variety officers training.

**Conference**

Any motions to be considered for conference needs to be submitted by the first week of March. NS was asked to see if any of our variety members wished to put forward a motion. Two members who have raised matters in the past will be contacted as to whether they wish to put forward a motion.

The meeting ended at 13.10 on the next meeting will be on 22nd of March at Wylotts Theatre, Potters Bar.