



EQUITY

GREATER MANCHESTER

LANCASHIRE & CUMBRIA

VICTORIA BRAZIER

NORTH WEST AREA COUNCILLOR

MERSEYSIDE & CHESHIRE

It was a privilege to attend my first Equity Conference as North West Area Councillor and to be there with three members of the Greater Manchester Branch. You were well represented - between them they covered all of the Fringe Events as well as attending the conference itself and the rally the night before.

The rally was in support of small Variety venues, particularly LGBTQ+ ones, which face mass closure. That issue was reinforced by the presentation of an emergency motion from Variety Councillor, Mary Lane, about the sudden closure of Broad Plain Social Club in Bristol. The other emergency motion was also Variety-focussed. Joseph Ballard - who spoke so brilliantly at our meeting recently - asked the Conference to offer solidarity and support to those members, particularly drag artists, who are being attacked by the Far Right. Since Joseph spoke to the branch, he has had a major job in America cancelled due to problems with his visa application involving a senior political figure. On a more joyful note, Joseph was awarded Honorary Life Membership after Sunday's session. A fitting reward for such a brilliant person, performer and activist.

The General Secretary's speech included some excellent news about new trustees which should be announced soon and will ensure a team of extraordinarily representative members at the very top of their careers. Other good news includes our impressive workplace representation rate, the ten million pounds in royalty payments distributed to members this year and the creation of the one million pound strike fund. That's as well as the recent successes in theatre agreement negotiations including (announced since Conference) the huge win for the West End. The Directors' and Designers' Agreements are now in negotiation so we watch this space.

A highlight for me - albeit a sad one - was, as always, the very moving final ovation for members whose deaths have been reported to Equity in the last year. Eminent local members Maggie Fox and Chris Honer were among those named and applauded.

It pleased me that there was such a strong North West presence both in the room and in discussion. The Merseyside motion chosen at our Regional Meeting was passed, Natalie Amber (former member of the Greater Manchester committee) proposed the second motion on behalf of the Deaf and Disabled Members' Committee and branch member David Cockayne spoke about the Directors' and Designers' Committee motion (although I must admit I missed this as I was rehearsing on the Monday). Oldham Coliseum was discussed several times, including as the focus at a fringe event, and the campaign led by local members applauded.

The two Fringe events I attended - made possible by the slimmed down Conference Agenda - were excellent. The *Celebrating Activism* panel encouraged all members to get involved, emphasising that 'You don't have to understand all the politics of the union to get involved with an issue you care about'. David Morrissey and others spoke compellingly at the Class Network event, flagging up the terrifying statistic that 45% fewer students are taking arts subjects in state schools.

If you wish to get in touch to discuss the conference or any other matter, please do email me on cllrvbrazier@equitycouncillors.org.uk.