A purple sign with white text

Description automatically generated

**Minutes – Equity London South meeting 20/9/25**

**Apologies** – Paul Valentine, Simon Furness, Lawrence O’Conner, Amanda Grace,

Angela Ekaette.

**Attendance** – Neil Kelly, Claude Starling, Nicky Goldie, Maria Tyminski Sally McKenna, Angie Lieu, Su Gilroy, Issam Al Ghussain, Fiona Whitelaw. STAFF Salome Wagaine, Charlotte Bence.

Chair asked branch for nominations to Lambeth Trades Council, please email branch if you live in Lambeth and are interested in this TUC committee.

**Results of branch election –** Salome gave the results of the branch election – members elected to the branch committee - Amanda Grace, Maria Tyminski, Paul Valentine, Issam Al Ghussain, Jay Lafayette Valentine, Fiona Whitelaw. We have three spaces for co-option on our committee, 1 Variety member, 2 members from other Equity professions. Chair commented that we already have several members interested in co-option, which the new committee will make a decision on when it takes office.

Members are encouraged to email if they are interested in Committee.

**Treasurers Report** – James Somerset submitted the report in writing.

London South received £1,606.59 in expenses from Guild House, including money for our affiliation to Lewisham TUC. Current Balance £2,554.67. Over the next few weeks James will be collating accounts to pass to the next treasurer during cttee hand over.

The Chair expressed thanks on behalf of the branch for all the work James has done.

**Variety Report –** Belle Finn updated members ,her report is included with the branch follow up email.

**Campaign Report** – Maria Tyminski reported on the Stand Up to Racism march attended by branch members with the banner on 13th September. The anti-racism group was peaceful and represented many communities across London and the UK. We marched with Manchester branch who had come down on the STUR coach. The kettling of SUTR march in Whitehall for three hours was frightening with missiles being thrown from the opposing facist march. Members also attended the Cultural Workers For Palestine march on Sunday 14th which was peaceful, we marched alongside members of the Writers Guild GB. Monday – National Afro Day was marked by an Equity screening of the film Untold Stories – Hair on Set <https://tv.apple.com/gb/show/untold-stories-hair-on-set/umc.cmc.48dbchfavf6efp5jdxo1mbca6> plus a panel discussion with makers of the film and Hair and Make Up Equality now <https://www.hmuequalitynow.co.uk/> (Ann and Cherrelle have been invited to speak at an upcoming branch meeting.

**Council Report** – Fiona Whitelaw gave a brief Council report the text version of this is included with the branch follow up email. Members asked questions about the Spotlight appeal which were answered by Fiona and Charlotte Bence, focusing on next steps, costs and the Union’s two pronged approach lobbying parliament for a change in the law regarding exemption for being charged to seek work. There will be further updates on how members and activists can get involved in this campaign after the October Council meeting.

**Guest Speakers – Charlotte Bence**

Charlotte highlighted the connection between her role as Industrial Official Theatre, to the Spotlight Campaign. In early 2026 she will be part of the team negotiating the new commercial and subsidised theatre agreements. The aim of these negotiations is to put more money in members pockets. Evidence shows that there is a problem with pay in theatre including. The West End is better, but not where it should be. Consultations have been sent our to members who have worked on the different theatre agreements.

The leading priorities for member are rates of pay and allowances to be higher than where they are now. Charlotte noted the campaign on wigs and make-up for global majority workers on screen but said that in theatre, provision was much worse and this will be an integral part of these negotiations. During negotiations on the agreements in 2022 improvements for accommodation while touring was discussed but refused outright. We are going back into this, determined to get a better deal, our members deserve the same level of dignity in accomodation as any other worker, working away from home. Theatre is not in a good place, there is proliferation of co-productions with 2/3 theatres producing a show instead of 3 shows from different theatre. This is a substantial loss of work for our members. Access riders will be an important part of these negotiations and also the role of Fight Captain, which is not well understood and members are often asked to take on tasks that are not their job.

Charlotte then spoke about ways in which our branch and other branches can be involved in visits to local venues on our patch, increasing visibility for branches. She is working on a poster template that Equity Deps will be able to put up on Green Room notice boards with a section giving details of local branches.

The Chair noted that we are in talks with `Nick Day about doing similar visits to variety venues with an emphasis on comedy venues and the low pay end of the circuit.

There were questions on dynamic pricing and how this is not reflected in money given to members.

**Helena Breck – Streatham Hill Theatre Campaign.**

Helena began by giving us a history of the venue, which you will find below. She then spoke about ways we can support the campaign to restore this historic building to a living/working theatre. The branch was asked to send a letter to the planning department as it would hold some weight. Members present supported this idea.

Here are some useful links

ur Campaign page re Ruach's current Panning Application for Change of Use:

<https://streathamhilltheatre.org/campaign>

‘Catherine Russell supports the campaign for Streatham Hill Theatre’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLBvbhotEIU>

Our Creative Industry Supporters:

<https://streathamhilltheatre.org/support/creatives>

     (Please email [supporters@streathamhilltheatre.org](mailto:supporters@streathamhilltheatre.org) to be listed)

To sign up for our newsletters:

<https://streathamhilltheatre.org/support/join-us>

|  |
| --- |
| HISTORY OF STREATHAM THEATRE  Almost 100 years ago, the Streatham Hill Theatre opened. It was the only A-list touring theatre south of the river forming part of an exciting entertainment complex with the Locarno Ballroom and Gaumont Cinema. Its slogan was ‘*West End Shows at Provincial Prices’*and Streatham became known as ‘*The West End of South London’*. |
| Originally named the Streatham Hill Playhouse, Evelyn Laye laid its foundation stone on the 6th September 1928. The 2,800-capacity theatre was the last project by the renowned theatre architect W G R Sprague, along with W H Barton. |
| For around 27 years - 1929 to ‘44 and ’50 to ‘62 – Streatham was home to one of the largest theatres in Britain, even larger than the London Palladium. The first production was the Cochran revue ‘*Wake Up and Dream’*, with music and lyrics by Cole Porter, starring Sonny Hale and Jessie Matthews. (These pictures are some of the treasures from our archive of programmes and memorabilia.) |
| To give you an idea of its original splendour, here are some ‘Bingo Years’ pictures of the Foyer - |
| – and of the Auditorium... |
| The stage itself was one of the largest in London, designed and equipped to hold any Major West End production.  The electronically controlled safety curtain weighed 8 tons and could either swiftly drop within 10 seconds or gradually in 1 minute. |
| The theatre’s lighting system was one of the most advanced of its kind in England at the time - even more advanced than many American theatres. In ‘32 a microphone was installed allowing the manager to make announcements to the audience.  At the time it was the only theatre with such a device. |
| The orchestra pit was the best of its kind and unique in London. Each of its three sections could be raised or lowered by hydraulic jacks.    There were two ‘Star Traps’ through which actors were catapulted in a puff of smoke and an aptly named larger Grave Trap due to its frequent use for Yorick from Hamlet.    To the rear of the stage were the changing rooms. Those for the artistes were on four levels; the main stars obviously had rooms at stage level, and a smaller compartment room was provided for a quick change. |
| Over the years between 1962 and 2017, a myriad of stars both of the day, and future stars, as well as renowned companies from all around the world, graced its stage.    It was home to the world of Plays, Reviews, Variety, Opera, Dance, Comedy and Music. |
| Stars from the early years included Anna Pavlova and her company in 1929; Paul Robeson as Othello in 1930 with Dame Peggy Ashcroft as Desdemona and Dame Sybil Thorndike and Sir Ralph Richardson also in the cast.    Many of Ivor Novello’s plays transferred to Streatham and in 1930 he was visited there by Lord Laurence Olivier with Douglas Fairbanks Jnr and his wife Joan Crawford. 30 police officers had to hold back the fans besieging the Stage Door!    The D’Oyly Carte and Covent Garden Opera Companies were frequent visitors and Sir Henry Wood conducted his own symphony orchestra there. |
| The theatre went dark as war broke out but started up again only three weeks later.    At the beginning of the war Sir John Gielgud gave his classic interpretation of ‘*The Importance of Being Ernest’*, with Dame Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell.    With some West End theatres closed, the SHT and its companion north of the river, the Golders Green Hippodrome, were regarded as the premier theatres in London. |
| It closed for three months in the Autumn of 1940 at the time of the Blitz, re-opening only for the pantomime “Mother Goose” at the end of the year.  This newspaper photo captures the Home Guard attending it in January 1941.  Throughout the next few years, performances were spasmodic, consisting mainly of concerts and variety shows, with only the occasional play. |
| Then in Summer 1944, disaster struck when three V1 rockets hit the streets around the theatre causing enormous structural damage, and the theatre was forced to close. |
| It was eventually rebuilt, sadly without the roof’s original beautiful glass dome, and reopened at the end of 1950, with ‘*Cinderella’* and a young Clive Dunn as one of the Broker’s Men.    The rich and famous continued to visit after the reopening; Winston Churchill attending a D’Oyly Carte Opera Company performance of the *’The Yeoman of The Guard* ‘in 1952. |
| In one of the last shows performed at the SHT, Sir Tom Courtenay made his first major London appearance in ‘*Billy Liar’*.  In our ‘Memories Project’ series at our YouTube channel, you can hear Sir Tom talk about performing it there, and see Kenneth Cranham saying that watching the production at the theatre was one of the main inspirations for him to become an actor!    However, with the introduction of television, audience numbers fell drastically. Variety was replaced in the public’s affections with TV shows such as Coronation Street which started in December 1960, and further competition was provided by a new craze sweeping the nation, Bingo. The theatre finally closed its doors in 1962, and reopened as Mecca Bingo, later becoming Beacon Bingo. |
| Sadly, at one point a false floor was built to extend the auditorium over the orchestra pit and stage area, to allow for more bingo tables.    During the bingo years a few entertainment events still took place at the theatre – mostly music on the stage itself in the early years…. |
| …. but the local amateur ‘Streatham Theatre Company’, also did pop-up theatre in some of the larger unused bar spaces and tours of the building.    Merkur, who by then were leasing the theatre, closed the Beacon Bingo operation in early 2017 but continued their 24/7 Slots Machine lounge in a partitioned off section behind the foyer and which remains there to this day.    The So & So Arts Club ran a 60-seat pop-up venue there in July 2017, but that same year Merkur stopped further outside use of the theatre. |
| In 2017 the Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre was formed to campaign to bring our Grade II Listed ‘Sleeping Beauty’ back to life, as a working theatre and creative hub for S. London and beyond. We managed to get the building awarded a five-year term of Asset of Community Value status with Lambeth, and when that was appealed, we organised a flashmob of over 1000 supporters outside it, making BBC London News.  The appeal was refused. (Our later application for a new 5-year term of ACV status was awarded in 2023!) |
| The Friends strove to get the theatre added to several ‘At Risk’ lists – most importantly that of the Theatres Trust in 2018, who have been fantastically supportive throughout – and later with Historic England, Save Britain’s Heritage and the Art Deco Society. |
| We’ve built a list of fantastic Patrons, who live (or have lived) in Streatham or the South London area, so have an affinity with our close local community and its creativeness.    We’ve ongoing lists of Creative Industry Supporters – around 235 to date, mostly with links to Streatham or S. London, and Supporter Organisations. |
| In 2020, the Friends crowdfunded, with the support of the Mayor of London, Lambeth, Theatres Trust and individuals, raising £46k for a Viability Study and Economic Impact Assessment. It was published in 2021, and concluded that it is indeed viable at that size, as a working theatre and community space.  The study included an important ‘Statement of Heritage Significance’ for the building. |
| We had talks with Thom Southerland, currently Artistic Director at Southampton’s Mayflower and Mast Theatres. He heads a theatre company, IC Venues, with financial backing wanting to buy the theatre for their shows. They have long term plans that match our vision for full renovation of the theatre (costing millions!), working with the Friends and the local community, and also had Theatres Trust, Lambeth and GLA support.  However, they lost their bid for the building’s freehold and instead, it was sold to a team of investors for £1.76M on 10 May 2022.  Around seven weeks later the ownership of the freehold was ‘flipped’ to Ruach City Church for the sum of £4M on 1 July 2022. |

The following motion was debated and passed to send on to Council. An amendment was proposed and agreed to change the wording from Actor to Actor/Company member to reflect the work of stage managers and other creatives on a production. Support was expressed for the member who had been bullied on a recent production.

Evidence has emerged that theatre producers are actively managing the bullying and harassment process out of time.

As Equity is preparing to create a claim for a new Commercial Theatre Agreement, this branch asks Council or the committee to review its contract definitions and timescales and consider the bigger picture of how complaints play out when bullying and harassment at work are involved. Time is of the essence in these cases due to the deterioration of mental health and wellbeing of the person being bullied. There needs to be more clarity in the contract

We ask Council to consider

* In particular -
* The bullying and grievance procedure does not address the need for immediacy nor the definition of immediacy, when bullying and harassment are ongoing and form the basis of the complaint.
* There need to be clear instructions on who and how to make complaints to - verbally or in writing.
* Contract definitions need to focus on "cast and stage management working days" and not working days. General  Managers often don't work weekends and use this as an excuse to do nothing - in this case the CSM did nothing without the instructions of the General Manager.
* The bullying and grievance procedure permits companies to use time off as an excuse not to delegate or work overtime to address issues. There needs to be some flexibility in wording so that complaints don't fall entirely to one named job role ie. the General Manager to address. This doesn't help the individual who is being abused during the complaints process itself.
* The bullying and grievance procedure needs to address actor/company member welfare in the light of ongoing bullying and harassment complaints during the actual complaint process itself.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING – MONDAY 20TH OCTOBER 25 7-9 PM OLD VIC THEATRE**