**Essex and Hertfordshire Branch AGM – 30 November 2024**

**Held at County Hotel Chelmsford (also via Zoom)**

**Attending**

Dee Mardi (chair) Stephen Moriaty, Andrew Alton-Read, Liz Mullen, Danny Worthington, Erin Battle, Evie Meadows, Duncan Hess, John Boswell, Iain Croker (SE Organiser), Hywel Morgan (SE Councillor) Lynda Rooke (President)

**Apologies**

Nikki Simon, Charlie Wilson, Alison Whismore

**Guest Speaker Lynda Rooke**

She gave us a very interesting talk. She is a hard working Pesident on behalf of us and has been to New Zealand for the International Federation of actors and will be going to Canada for similar negotiations regarding PACT and SagAftra. We were told not to underestimate Equity as a union. Across the world entertainment unions look to us. The deaf and disabled committee is leading the world.

Equity committee elections will take place in 2025 and anyone interested should contact Iain or Hywel.

Equity’s action against Spotlight has been listed in the High Court for the 16th and 17th of July 2025. Equity is also speaking to the government about Spotlight. Spotlight are now owned by Talent Systems Network which is part of a hedge fund 40% of which he's owned by Redbird Enterprises which itself is owned by Sheikh Mansour. Redbird also own many programmes which are made. Spotlight or now in Germany where the fee is only €80. They are also in Ireland and are moving into Spain.

Continuing the talk on proper pay it was noted that rather than money Sainsbury's had offered 50,000 nectar points has compensation to people taking part in an advert. If you are aware of similar cases then please report to Equity.

The union is working to protect against AI. Local government funding has been cut back over the past 14 years. It's important to get the message through to funding bodies particularly as no checks seem to be made on the use of the funds after the funds have been granted.

Next year's conference will be in Derry and Equity are looking at the carbon footprint whereby taking the ferry will be more sustainable than flying. They are considering putting together a package from Liverpool to Belfast and this will be under the banner the Ferry to Derry.

The next FIA conference will be in Birmingham where there will be actors from all over the world.

EB Asked about different levels of membership and the costs involved. LR Commented about all members have the same level of benefits whether they are actors supporting artists or students. The level of insurance for everyone has increased. There is the Benevolent Fund which will pay fees if people are struggling.

**News From Guild House**

Hywel Morgan referred to an article in the Guardian on pensions. He said that the unions policy on Palestine was on the Equity website. There has been a donation of £3000 two theatre in Palestine and it was noted that a director has been taken hostage.

Nominations for General Secretary will open in February. Council will be nominating Paul Fleming and do not expect him to be challenged.

Equity is no longer offering funeral benefits to significant others but for members this has increased to £400.

There was discussion with EB about supporting artists. HW said that The SA network is the fastest growing network and is free to join. It is open to any supporting artists whether or not they are a member of Equity and hopes that the word could be spread on this, eg on the Facebook page Heavy pencil.

Equity negotiates at the same time as Bectu and John Boswell commented that Equity is a better negotiator than Bectu.

Iain Croker confirmed that Equity is collecting and lots of money on behalf of its members and that was a reminder that you cannot sign away your rights.

The South East Area AGM will be on the 24th of March.

**Minutes of the last meeting** were approved (proposer DM seconded EB)

**Reports**

SM referenced the Variety officers report from Variety officer Nikki Simon which will be on the website.

LM has 2 speakers lined up for next year the first in January will be from the organiser of Colchester Fringe and later Jenny Sealy who works with actors with disabilities. LR said that staff members were always happy to attend branch meetings.

Treasurer – AAR had to leave early. SM referred to the accounts which show a healthy balance of £3461.85. As the meeting was not quorate no vote was taken.

Chair – DM commented that the Equity newsletters were very detailed and thanked all the committee members.

**Showcase**

DM said that all those who were to take part would receive a questionnaire to complete.

Evie Meadows asked if she could be involved and SM said that he would contact her.

**Any Other Business**

Duncan Hess was concerned that Equity did not have a policy about smoking real cigarettes on stage. He attended a play put on by Delfont McKintosh where this occurred. Usually herbal or fake cigars are used. He was concerned about the effects of passive smoking for the other cast members who wouldn’t speak out because they were in a major production. It was suggested that he contact Hannah Plant who is the West End Official at Equity (hplant@equity.org.uk)

The meeting closed at 1pm