SPARK – "A Guide To Your First Equity Contract"
Prince Music Theater
Monday, January 12, 2009
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All handouts from Actor's Equity are available at Theatre Alliance office. You can also download them from Actor's Equity's website at www.actorsequity.org by clicking on "Document Library."

I. Welcome remarks – Karen
   A. Thank you to Actor's Equity representatives for traveling down from New York City for this event and for providing food and wine for tonight's event.
      - Thank you to Prince Music Theater for providing space for our 2009 Spark events.
      - For a listing of 2009 Spark events, visit www.theatrealliance.org/spark.
   B. This evenings panelists are:
      - Bryan S. Clark (Managing Director, Theatre Exile)
      - Dragica Dabo (Business Rep. Developing Theatres, AEA)
      - Joe Erdey (Traveling Business Rep, AEA)
      - Chris Sapienza (Philly AEA Liaison Chair)

II. Mission of AEA
   A. From AEA's website, www.actorsequity.org:
      - Actors' Equity Association ("AEA" or "Equity"), founded in 1913, is the labor union that represents more than 48,000 Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.
      - Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society.
      - Equity negotiates wages and working conditions and provides a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans, for its members.
      - Actors' Equity is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions.

III. Status of Philadelphia with AEA contracts
   A. Chris Sapienza, Philadelphia's area liaison, is the information link between AEA members and theatres in the Philadelphia region and the regional office.
      - Chris expresses thanks the Theatre Alliance for starting this conversation.
      - Chris and the Equity Membership Committee are committed to being proactive with an open door policy.

B. At present, there are 21 AEA theatres under a full contract. Over the past 18 months, over 20 other theatres have worked under the Guest Artist or Special Appearance agreements. There are approximately 120 Theatre Alliance member theatres. How do we bridge that gap?
   - There is a great concentration of AEA actors in Philadelphia area. Philadelphia also has the greatest concentration of LORT theatres.
   - Philadelphia area includes Southern NJ, Northern DE, and the suburb counties surrounding Philly (Delaware, Bucks, Chester, and Montgomery).
   - There are 890 members (actors and stage managers) in Philadelphia area.

C. We hope through events like this to get the word out to more companies about what AEA has to offer.

D. Using AEA is supporting a system that is beneficial for all artists, and can elevate the status of your company.

IV. Basics to your first AEA contract - NOTE: all AEA contracts may be found on www.actorsequity.org

A. For a *Guest Artist Contract*, like most AEA contracts, your company must be a 501c3 nonprofit organization. There are AEA contracts available for commercial organizations. Call the AEA office directly for assistance.

B. Like the *Guest Artist*, the *Special Appearance Agreement* was established to encourage increased employment opportunities and to allow non-equity theatres to hire the occasional Equity artist.
   - Discuss tier system for *Special Appearance Agreement*. This contract does not require health insurance payment.

C. Applications are available online. These contracts are administered by Ellen Carter, ecarter@actorsequity.org.

D. Using one of these contracts does not make you an Equity theatre. There is no further commitment to Equity outside of that contract or production.

V. Leading up to a SPT

A. *Small Professional Theatre Contract (SPT)* OR *Letter of Agreement (LOA)* are used in development situations.
   - The *SPT* may be used in both commercial and not-for-profit situations.
   - *LOA*'s provide theatres the time and flexibility needed to develop into a standard Equity agreement.
   - There is an agreement with company to hire a certain percentage of Equity actors per show or season. These numbers are negotiable, especially for smaller or newer companies to Equity.

B. To start the application process for an SPT contract, speak to a business representatives, like our guests Dragica Dabo, ddabo@actorsequity.org, or Joe Erdey, jerdey@actorsequity.org.
   - This conversation will include discussing your needs, financials, and which contract would work best for your company and production.
   - Proposal form will request the size of your venue, dates, cast, gross potential box office, non-traditional casting statement.

- Non-Traditional Casting Policies are designed to expand employment opportunities for women, senior performers, actors of color, and performers with disabilities are provided in all agreements.

C. When considering a *SPT*, you must be prepared for this growth. Sit down and discuss these plans with your board. Think of 1812 Productions and Arden Theatre Company, where they started and where they are at now.

D. For all of these contract agreements (Guest Artist, Special Appearance, and SPT):
   - If you are not set up for payroll, you can go through a paymaster. Local paymasters will charge 15-20%. Contact Joe Erdey for a list of interstate paymasters.
   - Submit your contract application at least three weeks before you want to start rehears. No Equity actor or stage manager should go into rehearsal without a signed contract.

VI. Q & A

A. The difference between Guest Artist and Special Appearance is mainly money.
   - Both contracts need a workers compensation policy. Special Appearance contract that does not require a health payment. The Guest Artist does require a weekly health payment.
   - For more details on any contract or agreements, visit www.actorsequity.org and click on "Document Library."

B. In advance of applying to AEA, you should have paymaster lined up if you do not have payroll.
   - When searching for a paymaster, make sure they are familiar with AEA policies.
   - GPCA members have access to discounted paymaster. Chris Sapienza recommends Penny Baker. Contact the Theatre Alliance for her contact information.
   - Contact smaller Philadelphia theatre companies with AEA contracts or LOA's to see how they do this. Contact Karen DiLossi for names and contact information of these companies.

C. SPT application is for a season. Special Appearance or Guest Artist Applications are for individual shows.
   - If you are applying for one of these, AEA may try to talk your company into considering SPT contract. SPT Tier 1 at $187 a week with health insurance can be more attractive to artists.
   - After 3 season of SPT or Equity house, qualify to give credits for EMC program which will attract non-equity actors.

D. In order to get 6 months of health coverage, an Equity artist needs to have 12 weeks of work. In order to get 1 year of health coverage, they need to have 20 weeks of work. It would be beneficial for these artists if more companies were able to hire Equity actors

E. AEA wants your contracts and your organization to grow, so they will work with your organization.

- Concession requests are considered by an appropriate contract committee in NYC, be it Guest Artist Committee or in the Developing Theatre Committee. This is to your company's benefit to have real people review your requests. AEA is producer-friendly because they want the actor to get the job.

F. If you are holding auditions, announce if you are a new Equity company and what contract you have available.
    - At the Theatre Alliance Annual Auditions, out of total amount auditioning, about 10-15% of the actors are Equity. These auditions are a great way to get on an actor or theatre's radar.