

One for All, All for One All Over

I am a "New York actor," as opposed to an "L.A. actor" (or a "Seattle actor" or a "Chicago actor" or....) While this places me squarely in the mainstream of Actors' Equity work and AEA member residences, such status has always been secondary to the primacy of the "L.A. actor" in the world of film and television. This secondary status and the concomitant sense of being patronized by those in L.A. who made their living in feature films and episodic TV always used to stick in the craw of my fellow NY commercial actors, particularly those active in our sister unions' governance. Consequently, as your national president, I strive to give focus and attention to the actor who lives outside the New York area and particularly the actor who lives outside any of our office city areas.

There are many reasons for one's choice of domicile and the amount of acting work available locally is but one factor. Quality of life, the need to care for aging parents, connections to other family members, a teaching job, the weather, natural beauty, where you grew up, where you went to school, a spouse's job transfer, survival job opportunities: any one or a combination of these can prompt a stage manager or actor to settle down in a city with limited Equity opportunities. I well understand. Thirty years ago I twice -- first while working at the Arena Stage and then while working at the Guthrie -- tried to convince my wife to leave NYC and move to DC or Minneapolis.

While DC and the Twin Cities have relatively robust theater scenes, many of our other liaison cities have far fewer AEA opportunities. As I traveled the country last year for our centennial, I encountered many liaison city members who were very hard put to find much Equity work for the "Mosaic" of their life. As I have written before ("Keeping the Faith,") I was moved by their tenacious commitment to acting and to AEA in particular.

That commitment by the members to AEA is matched by AEA's commitment to the members. Your staff and your elected leaders are determined to do all the can to increase and improve your work opportunities. The success of the staff, though, is absolutely dependent upon the commitment of the members, particularly outside the office cities.

I experienced two disparate instances of this in the last week. In one instance, an actress was offered nice money by a long-time non-Equity employer to do a role. She told the employer she couldn't work without a union contract; and, in an historic first, the employer came to Equity, and the union negotiated an agreement. In another instance, a former member posted on his Facebook page that, having "neglected to pay dues for a long time" and therefore faced with a significant cost to restore his union status, he had chosen to go non-Equity and even stay non-Equity when hired as part of the AEA ratio in a show.

One of these members is working for you, and one is working against you. Union strength depends on solidarity. When someone covertly works off the card or drops their Equity membership to work non-Equity, that just makes it that much harder for the union to bring that employer to the table. If the non-Equity employer is offering decent money, we can probably work out an agreement of some sort. And if the employer is not offering decent money, why are you turning your back on your fellow members?!

I see, I hear, and I experience firsthand how tough a business this is in which to try to get some work, let alone enough to pay the bills. It is an even tougher business in our liaison city communities. Whatever the overall reason for your being in Denver, Dallas, Detroit or wherever, know that Equity stands up for you in this tough business. The All is for the One. And if you

are tempted to work non-Equity, don't do it. Don't choose One over All -- because We are One. All Over.