

EQUITY QUARTERLY

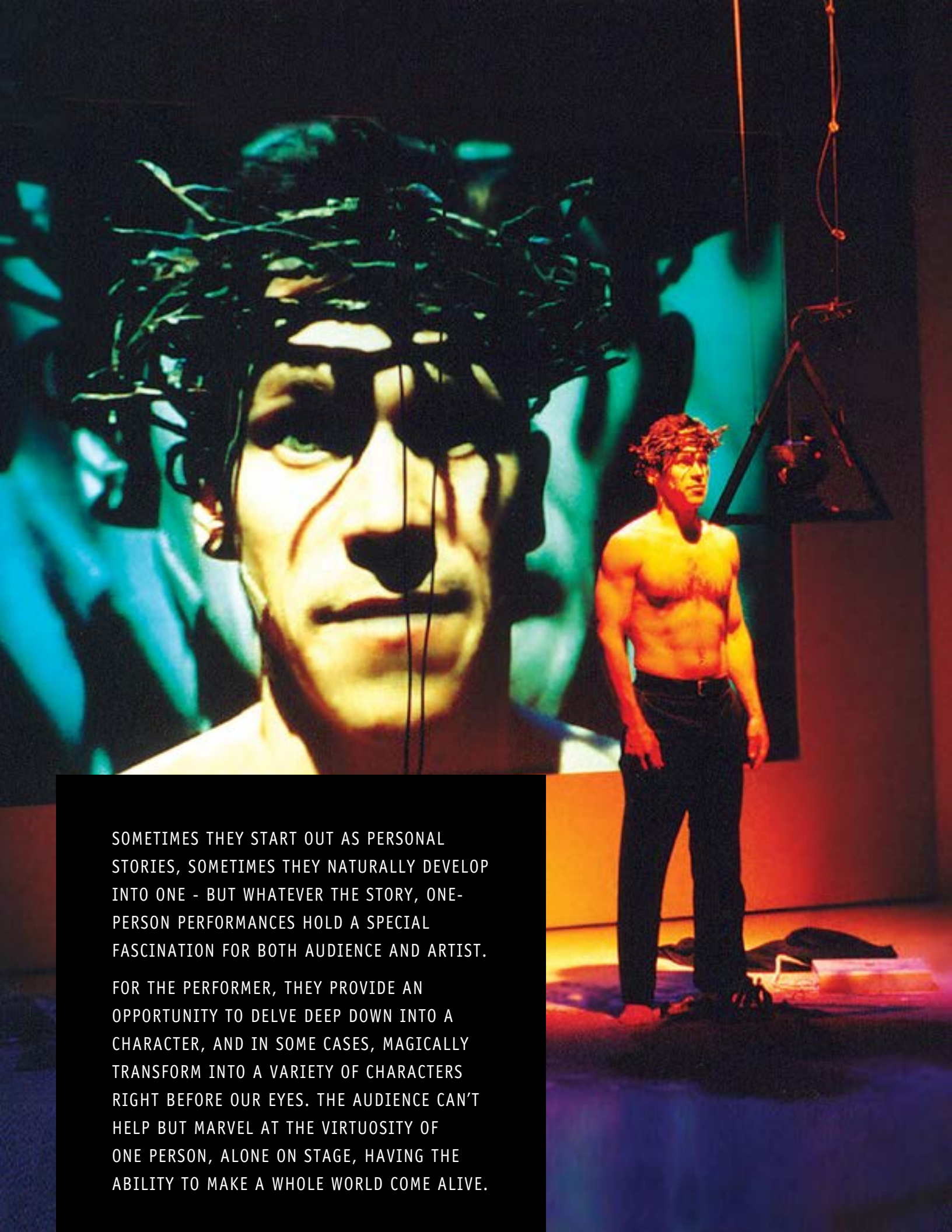
WINTER 2018

**EQ**

**JOURNEY OF A ONE-PERSON SHOW**  
**REFLECTIONS ON THE EQUITY CENSUS**  
**SOLO STORIES**

# Going Solo





SOMETIMES THEY START OUT AS PERSONAL STORIES, SOMETIMES THEY NATURALLY DEVELOP INTO ONE - BUT WHATEVER THE STORY, ONE-PERSON PERFORMANCES HOLD A SPECIAL FASCINATION FOR BOTH AUDIENCE AND ARTIST.

FOR THE PERFORMER, THEY PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DELVE DEEP DOWN INTO A CHARACTER, AND IN SOME CASES, MAGICALLY TRANSFORM INTO A VARIETY OF CHARACTERS RIGHT BEFORE OUR EYES. THE AUDIENCE CAN'T HELP BUT MARVEL AT THE VIRTUOSITY OF ONE PERSON, ALONE ON STAGE, HAVING THE ABILITY TO MAKE A WHOLE WORLD COME ALIVE.





Daniel MacIvor in *Who Killed Spalding Gray?*, directed by Daniel Brooks and produced by reWork Productions



- 6** Stories that compel actors to go solo
- 11** The process behind a one-person show
- 16** What we see in the mirror – revelations from the Equity Census

- 2** PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
- 3** NOTES FROM ARDEN R. RYSPAN
- 4** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
- 5** EQ NEWS
- 20** EQUITY'S STATEMENT ON HARASSMENT
- 21** NOT IN OUR SPACE! UPDATE



WINTER 2018 – Volume 11, Number 2

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DESIGN & LAYOUT **Chris Simeon, September Creative**

Equity members can submit letters to the editor via email at [EQ@caea.com](mailto:EQ@caea.com). The deadline for submissions is Monday, February 19, 2018. **EQ** reserves the right to edit for length, style and content.

**EQ Equity Quarterly** (ISSN 1913-2190) is a forum to discuss issues of interest to members concerning their craft, developments in the industry, Equity's role in the workplace, and the important position live performance holds in the cultural and social fabric of Canada. It is also used as an advocacy tool to educate others about the industry, promote live performance in Canada, and celebrate the achievements of Equity members.

**Canadian Actors' Equity Association (Equity)** is the voice of professional artists working in live performance in English Canada. We represent almost 6,000 performers, directors, choreographers, fight directors and stage managers working in theatre, opera and dance, and support their creative efforts by seeking to improve their working conditions and opportunities by negotiating and administering collective agreements, providing benefit plans, information and support and acting as an advocate.

Coming issue: **SPRING 2018**

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Front Cover: Neema Bickersteth in *Century Song*, her one-person song and dance performance that chronicles the story of black women in Canada throughout the century

Inside Front Cover: Virtuoso solo performer Rick Miller in *Bigger Than Jesus*

# President's message

**Well, this is it.** I'm sure you heard the news – I've resigned as Council President.



I've talked elsewhere about my reason for making this decision, but in a nutshell, it's this: Council has spent the past 15 years reshaping Equity with an eye to the future, and part of that work involves the past (me) stepping aside to make room for what's yet to come. No one should understand this choice to mean that I don't want to be part of that future, but it's time for other people to lead it. I'll be staying

on as an Ontario Councillor for the remainder of this term, to continue work in that capacity.

Having made the decision two years ago, and then having finally written the letter this spring, and delivered it to Council in September for their decision, and then learned that they had accepted the resignation, it's an awful lot like coming to the end of a long-running and favourite show. At the moment, I feel a little bit empty (I'll fill that!), but mostly like there is a large thought-bubble following me around everywhere. The caption reads, "And...?"

To Scott Bellis, I offer my congratulations, my assistance, and my thanks on behalf of Council. It's been a grand and deeply fulfilling adventure, and I wish you the same.

Onward!

**Allan Teichman**

Outgoing Council President

## **So who is this new Council President anyway?**

Well, hi everyone. I'm an actor and director, born and raised in Richmond, B.C., and have lived in Vancouver's West End for 25 years. I joined Equity in 1989 for a TYA contract and have primarily worked in theatre since then. I have a long association with Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival, a company I helped establish in 1990, and have had the good fortune to work with many companies in Vancouver and across Western Canada. I ran for Council in 2012 after being nominated by two colleagues and long-time members whose opinion of my suitability for the job I trusted. My aim was to learn more about how our association works and see what I could do to help my fellow artists.

Taking on the role of Council President feels like a great honour and an amazing opportunity to serve you, the members, by helping to provide solid governance for our Association. I hope to continue the work of improving conditions for all Equity artists and doing what I can to help maintain the level of dignity and respect I feel you deserve in your workplaces and communities.

With former Council President Allan Teichman remaining at the table with us I anticipate a smooth transition. I am quite proud to be Equity's first Council President from a western province, and look forward to pursuing the goals of our Association alongside our incredible national Council and dedicated staff.

**Scott Bellis**

Council President



## **Equity Council Officers 2017-2018**

Council President - Scott Bellis (Councillor for British Columbia and the Yukon): [president@caea.com](mailto:president@caea.com)

First Vice-President - Stephen Erickson (Councillor for Eastern Opera): [vicepresident1@caea.com](mailto:vicepresident1@caea.com)

Second Vice-President - Sedina Fiati (Councillor for Ontario): [vicepresident2@caea.com](mailto:vicepresident2@caea.com)

Secretary-Treasurer - Diane Speirs (Councillor for Western Opera): [sectres@caea.com](mailto:sectres@caea.com)

# Notes from

## Arden R. Ryshpan

**Finding oneself all alone** on a stage in front of an audience is the stuff of many people's nightmares. Not so much in our business, of course, but beyond a few moments alone on a stage, not everyone relishes the idea of flying solo the whole distance. It is a unique challenge, magnified when the piece is highly personal.

This issue of *EQ* explores the particular pleasures of writing and performing a one-person show.

Not that Council is a one-person gig in any way, you will by now have noticed that the President's column is shared. I would be remiss if I did not make reference to this changing of the guard. Allan Teichman has more than ably served the membership as your President for the last 11 years and as a Councillor for 15. He has guided Council through more than one thorny discussion and written (and rewritten...) Council policies and bylaws with a careful eye to precision and clarity. Allan has a variety of interests and we sincerely hope that he is able to spend more time on them now that he isn't labouring over agendas.

Scott Bellis has stepped into the breach. Scott has been on Council for several years now and no doubt will bring a different but equal resolve to serving the members. He will, of course, be able to count on the assistance of his fellow Councillors and the entire staff, as he takes the helm of the organization.

Lastly, I feel compelled to comment on the recent revelations in the entertainment industry about men in positions of power who have abused that power in order to harass and, in some cases, sexually assault women. As women, we have come to accept a general level of harassment as we go through our daily lives – unwanted attention, inappropriate comments – the casual sexism that pervades our society. We learn to ignore it despite the anger and sometimes fear it provokes in all of us. But when that harassment threatens our livelihoods or humiliates us in our workplaces, that's impossible to ignore. While I am speaking as a woman, it should be clear that it is not only women who are subject to inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. The results of our members' survey indicated that there was more bullying than sexual harassment in our sector. Men are bullied more often than women, but women are sexually harassed more often than men.

Equity recently rolled out our **Not In OUR Space!** campaign. The materials are all on our website and I urge you to find a few minutes to review them. The campaign is designed to make it clear to harassers and bullies of all kinds that their behaviour will no longer be tolerated in the workplace. We are working with engagers across the country to ensure that they live up to their legal responsibility to provide a safe workspace. We want to find ways to empower our members to deal with harassment and bullying as it is happening, and to stop it from continuing to affect the working experience. And we are working to provide ways to make it easier for people to report this behaviour, with processes that produce consequences for those who are found to be in violation of our bylaws. **Not In OUR Space!** isn't a solution to the problem, but it is a tool to fight it. Your national Council and your staff are committed to working to reduce the incidents of harassment and bullying in our rehearsal halls and in our performance spaces.

In Solidarity,



**Arden R. Ryshpan**  
Executive Director

# Letters to the editor

## Not In OUR Space! campaign

I read your recent issue of EQ, and was very impressed with the **Not In OUR Space!** campaign, as well as your article about dealing with harassment in the workplace. Great to see Equity taking a progressive and proactive stance on these important issues. Congratulations.

— Peter Caldwell, Director & CEO,  
Ontario Arts Council

## A new look for The AFC

We just received the copies of your Spring/Summer 2017 issue. It's a wonderful issue and we are all so pleased and grateful to everyone involved in the magazine for helping spread the word about our new brand and the Financial Wellness Program.

— Sharon Tindyebwa, Development  
and Communications Coordinator,  
The AFC

## SAVE THE DATE EQUITY'S NATIONAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

### 2017-2018 National Annual General Meeting

**Date:** Monday,  
February 26, 2018

**Time:** 5:30-7:00 p.m.  
(Doors open at 5:00 p.m.)

**Venue:** Daniels Spectrum  
585 Dundas St. East,  
Toronto, Ontario

Equity members in good standing are encouraged to attend.

Please bring your up-to-date membership card to show at the door.

\* For information about introducing a resolution, please contact Council President Scott Bellis by email to [president@caea.com](mailto:president@caea.com) or by mail to Equity's National Office.

- Reports from the President and Executive Director, with updates on current initiatives. These reports will be recorded and available to all members on Equity's website at a later date.
- Receipt of the audited financial statements and appointment of the auditor for the coming year.
- Reports on Council committee activities.
- Member resolutions, if any\*.

## Honours Awards Celebration

After the National Annual General Meeting, Equity members are cordially invited to join colleagues and friends and congratulate recipients of this year's Honours Awards.

**Date:** Monday, February 26, 2018, 7:00 to 10:30 p.m.

**Location:** Daniels Spectrum, 585 Dundas St. East, Toronto, Ontario

Life Membership will be presented to Bill Millerd and Chick Reid. The Award of Distinction will be presented to The AFC (formerly the Actors' Fund of Canada) and Lisa Brown.

Light refreshments will be served.

## Your feedback about the online Deputy Reports

**Awesome** Best idea ever So fast and easy  
This form is fantastic This is amazing Loved this  
Excellent new service User friendly  
This new system is great  
**Easy to use** This system works so much better  
Smooth, easy process  
This is so great, easy, and quick **Love it**

**LETTERS on subjects of concern** to Equity members will be considered for publication. Letters must be signed, but names will be withheld on request for those letters that may affect members' employment. Letters that include artistic criticism of Equity members or letters that are antagonistic or accusatory, either implied or expressed, may be withheld or edited at the discretion of the editor. Opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are not necessarily those of the Association.

### PHOTO AND PRODUCTION CREDITS

**Cover:** Photo: John Lauener. *Century Song* (2016) created by Neema Bickersteth, Kate Alton, and Ross Manson produced by Volcano, in association with the Moveable Beast Collective. Music by Sergei Rachmaninoff, Olivier Messiaen, John Cage, Georges Aperghis, and Reza Jacobs with music direction by Reza Jacobs. Cast: Neema Bickersteth with Gregory Oh (piano) and Debashis Sinha/Benjamin Grossman (percussion, computer). Stage managed by Emilie Aubin.

**Inside Front Cover:** Photo: Beth Kates. *Bigger Than Jesus* (2003 to 2012) by Rick Miller & Daniel Brooks produced by WYRD Productions/Necessary Angel Theatre Company. Directed by Daniel Brooks and designed by Beth Kates and Ben Chaisson. Cast: Rick Miller. Production and stage managed by Beth Kates.

**Page 1:** Photo: Guntar Kravis. *Who Killed Spalding Gray?* (2015) by Daniel MacIvor produced by reVork Productions. Directed by Daniel Brooks. Cast: Daniel MacIvor. Stage managed by Marcie Januska.

**Page 3:** Photo of Arden R. Ryshpan by Michael Cooper.

**Page 6:** Photo: Susan Moss. *My Pregnant Brother/Mon frère est enceinte* (2011) by Johanna Nutter produced by creature/creature, co-presented with La Licorne Theatre. Directed by Jeremy Taylor. Cast: Johanna Nutter. Production stage managed by Rob Denton.

**Page 8:** Photo: Bronwen Sharp. *CRASH* (2017) by Pamela Mala Sinha produced by Souleppper Theatre Company. Directed by Alan Dilworth with choreography by Monica Dottor & Rubena Sinha, video design by Cameron Davis, original music and sound design by Debashis Sinha, and lighting and set design by Kimberly Purtell. Cast: Pamela Mala Sinha. Stage managed by Arwen MacDonell.

**Page 9:** Photo: David Cooper. *Gracie* (2017) by Joan MacLeod produced by Belfry Theatre. Directed by Vanessa Porteous. Cast: Lili Beaudoin. Stage managed by Sadie Fox.

**Page 11:** Photo: Colin O'Connor. *I, Claudia*, by Kristen Thomson produced by Crow's Theatre. Directed by Chris Abraham. Cast: Kristen Thomson.

**Page 12:** Left photo: Photo of Anusree Roy by Ian Brown. Right photo: Photo of Sarah Murphy-Dyson by Dejon Walker.

**Page 15:** Left photo: Andrew Alexander. *Blue Box* (2012-14) by Carmen Aguirre produced by Rupal Shah and Nighswimming Theatre. Dramaturged and directed by Brian Quirt. Cast: Carmen Aguirre. Stage managed by Robin Richardson, Jaimie Tait, Esther Howie, Nefren Feizo-Gas, and Samira Rose. Right photo: Photo of Michelle Polak by Lyon Smith.

**Page 16:** Salvador Celis, iStock.

**Page 18:** Photo: Andrew Alexander. *The Gravitation Pull of Bernice Trimble* (2016) by Beth Graham produced by the Great Canadian Theatre Company. Directed by Adrienne Wong. Cast: Deena Aziz, Rachelle Casseus, Adrien Pyke and Manon St-Jules. Stage managed by Laurie Champagne assisted by Jane Vanstone Osborn.

**Page 19:** *Oliver!* (2011), music, lyrics and book by Lionel Bart produced by the National Arts Centre English Theatre. Directed and choreographed by Dayna Tekatch with musical direction by Allen Cole. Cast: The National Arts Centre English Theatre Company.

**Back Page:** Photo: Fabio H Burtica – 161 Content Studios.



## Equity's Agreement Negotiations and Engagement Policies under review in 2018

Equity members are encouraged to contribute to the review and negotiation of these agreements or the revision of these engagement policies by the deadlines indicated. Suggested proposals for change or amendment should be emailed to [agreements@caea.com](mailto:agreements@caea.com), or call 1-800-387-1856 (416-867-9165 in Toronto).

### AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

#### Canadian Theatre Agreement (CTA)

**Expiry Date:** June 24, 2018

**Suggestion Deadline:** January 12, 2018

Pre-negotiation discussions took place November 2017 and negotiations to commence early 2018

#### Stratford Festival Addendum to the CTA

**Expiry Date:** November, 30, 2018

**Suggestion Deadline:** July 30, 2018

Negotiations to commence September 2018

#### National Arts Centre Special Events Agreement

**Expiry Date:** August 31, 2018

**Suggestion Deadline:** May 30, 2018

Negotiations to commence Summer 2018

#### National Arts Centre Music Department Agreement

**Expiry Date:** August 31, 2018

**Suggestion Deadline:** May 30, 2018

Negotiations to commence Summer 2018

### ENGAGEMENT POLICIES UNDER REVIEW IN 2018

#### Amateur Policy

Renewed to September 30, 2018, pending Council review

#### Dance • Opera • Theatre policy (DOT)

**Review date:** September 2, 2018

**Suggestion Deadline:** June 30, 2018

#### Guidelines for Benefits and Fundraisers

Renewed to September 30, 2018, pending Council review

#### Independent Theatre Agreement (ITA)

**Expiry Date:** June 24, 2018

**Suggestion Deadline:** April 1, 2018

**Note:** Review of the ITA will commence after the completion of CTA negotiations

### Fondly Remembered is online

All Fondly Remembered tributes are now published online.

To view or submit a tribute, click on "Memorial Submissions" on the [www.caea.com](http://www.caea.com) home page.

### Dues Remission Advisory

In recognition of career longevity, senior Equity members are eligible for remission of basic dues but will continue to pay working dues.

Regular members who have been members in good standing for at least 10 (ten) years may apply for dues remission as follows:

- age 65 (sixty-five) for performers, stage managers, directors and choreographers
- age 55 (fifty-five) for opera singers
- age 45 (forty-five) for ballet dancers

Contact [membership@caea.com](mailto:membership@caea.com) for more information.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

### ATLANTIC

Don Brownrigg  
Melissa Kramer  
Peter Sarty

### BRITISH COLUMBIA / YUKON

Nyla Carpentier  
Bobbi Charlton  
Itai Erdal  
Edward Foy  
Julio Fuentes  
Alexei Geronimo  
John Han  
Connor Lucas  
Kamyar Pazandeh  
Jacob Woike  
Kaitlyn Yott  
Andrea Yu

### DANCE

Jimmy Coleman  
Dayton Hill  
Jesse Petrie  
Alex Seo  
Isaac Wright

### E. ONTARIO/OUTAOUAIS

Mélanie Beauchamp  
David Benedict Brown  
Katie Bunting  
Mitchel Rose

### EASTERN OPERA

Anna Theodosakis

### MANITOBA / NUNAVUT

Johnny Issaluk

### N. ALBERTA / NWT

Kristen Padayas

Natasha Prasad  
Ben Stevens

### ONTARIO

Carlos Albornoz  
Evan Taylor Benyacar  
Ian Michael Costello  
Adriana Crivici  
Joel Cumber  
Eric Dahlinger  
John Dickhout  
Dejah Dixon-Green  
Kelsey Falconer  
Annelise Forbes  
Wesley French  
Rebecca Friesen  
Danny Ghantous  
Gabe Grey  
Jordin Hall

Terra Hazelton  
Ryan G. Hinds  
Jane Honek  
Lauren Horejda  
Jeremy Hutton  
Andrew Iles  
Melissa MacGougan  
Ken MacKenzie  
Franny McCabe-Bennett  
Edward Murphy  
Kim Nelson  
Drew Plummer  
Lucas Popowich  
Cassandra Potenza  
Jack Quail  
Athena Reich  
Allana Reoch  
Miquelon Rodriguez  
Antonette Rudder

Kirstyn Russelle  
Michele Shuster  
Berkley Silverman  
Oksana Sirju  
Alyssa Smith  
Greg Solomon  
Marco Timpano  
Amber Tomlin  
Celine Tsai  
Dimitri Vantis  
Kelsey Verzotti  
Aijia Waithe  
Adrian Zeyl

### QUEBEC

Pierre Bérubé  
Claude Lemelin  
Brandon Howard Roy  
Anne-Marie Saheb

Evan Stewart  
Jen Viens

### SASKATCHEWAN

Angela Kemp

### STAGE MANAGEMENT

Alice Barnett  
Sandra Drag  
Katherine L. Johnston  
Geoff Jones  
Gregory McLaughlin  
Georgia Priestley-Brown  
Jennifer Stewart  
Tamara Vuckovic

### WESTERN OPERA

Kelsey Andries  
Jason Cook

WHAT PROPELS PEOPLE TO GO SOLO ON STAGE

# ALONE AGAIN,



Johanna Nutter in *My Pregnant Brother*. This real-life story of her transgender sibling having a baby was also Nutter's personal journey to find her own way in life

**MANY ONE-PERSON** shows are personal stories, but that's not always how they start out.

For example, Johanna Nutter never wanted to write a play about her family.

Nutter had spent most of her early life feeling like she had to take care of her mother and younger sibling, and had learned at a young age that she would not be able to have children.

In her 30s she made a life choice. She was going to stop caretaking and dedicate herself to the theatre. "I was more of a bartender than an actor, so I quit the bar, sold all my things and

moved in with a friend," she says. "I also decided to stop feeling I had to take care of my family."

Then her brother got pregnant.

The story of her transgender sibling having a baby and wanting Nutter to help raise the child became the one-person play, *My Pregnant Brother*.

"It was a good story – but I spent three years trying not to tell it," says Nutter. "I didn't want to let people into my private life. I thought my job as an actor was to remain a blank canvas."



# NATURALLY

BY BARB FARWELL

“Your instinct is to go quickly in making a transition from one character to another. But you need to make sure the characters have the chance to listen and react to each other.”

— *Vanessa Porteous*

Nutter told herself she would apply to the Montreal Fringe Festival and write the play if she got selected. Three years later when her name finally came up in the Fringe lottery, she was away in Africa on a job.

With only three months to write the play, she joined forces with director and dramaturge Jeremy Taylor. Using chalk to draw the stage setting, Nutter told the story of her brother's pregnancy and her need to untangle family ties to find her own way in life. The play was a hit, winning the Best English Production at the 2009 Fringe.

Nutter took the show on the road, with stops at places such as Ottawa's Great Canadian Theatre Company, Centaur Theatre in Montreal, the Soho Theatre in London, and The Pleasance in Edinburgh. Although Nutter's brother had given the show his blessing, he did not see it until two years later with their mother.

Nutter had received an overwhelmingly positive reaction from people who had seen the play. Many had even sent her letters telling her how it had helped them reconcile with their families. When her brother and mother saw the play she thought it was going to be a positive experience.

That's not how it turned out. “It was shocking to them to learn how I reacted internally to certain situations,” Nutter said. “I learned that just because you are having the same experience you don't necessarily live it the same way.”

Her brother joked that he would retaliate by writing a play about Nutter, so they decided to work together to create *My Pregnant Brother/My Playwright Sister*. In this production, her brother gets up on stage after her performance to dissect the play and explain how it happened from his point of view.

The play took on an intriguing new dimension, says Nutter. “It asks whose truth is the real truth? Who owns the facts of a shared experience?”

Nutter's niece is now 11 years old, and while Nutter didn't end up raising her with her brother, she is a proud and involved aunt. Nutter and her brother joke that there could yet be a third part added to the play – *My Artsy Fartsy Children* – where they let their mother up on stage to say whatever she wants.

## Compelled to write

Pamela Mala Sinha also never planned to write about her personal life, especially about the aftermath of being assaulted by an unknown attacker.

“*Crash* is not a play I would choose to write – because I wouldn't choose to have this experience. But I felt compelled to write it,” says Sinha, who became frustrated when she couldn't find stories about people living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

“People look at us and think we are okay. If we are in loving relationships, or have careers and children, to outside eyes it looks like we have conquered the pain because we have this life that is rich and full. What you can't see is the daily struggle. You learn to live with this thing beside you. Sometimes it's quiet, sometimes loud. Living with that is what I felt the need to articulate.”

She eventually wrote a short story about her PTSD in 2004 called *Hiding* for the anthology *Dropped Threads II*, edited by Carol Shields and Marjorie Anderson. At the time, it seemed to be enough.

And then her father died.

Sinha said losing her parent made her feel the same overwhelming sense of powerlessness she had when she was assaulted – the absolute inability to stop what is happening *from* happening. At the memorial for her father a year after his passing, as she was standing at the top of the stairs in her parent's house, she thought – in that haze of illogic that envelops the grieving – if she could identify her attacker and get the justice that was owed her,

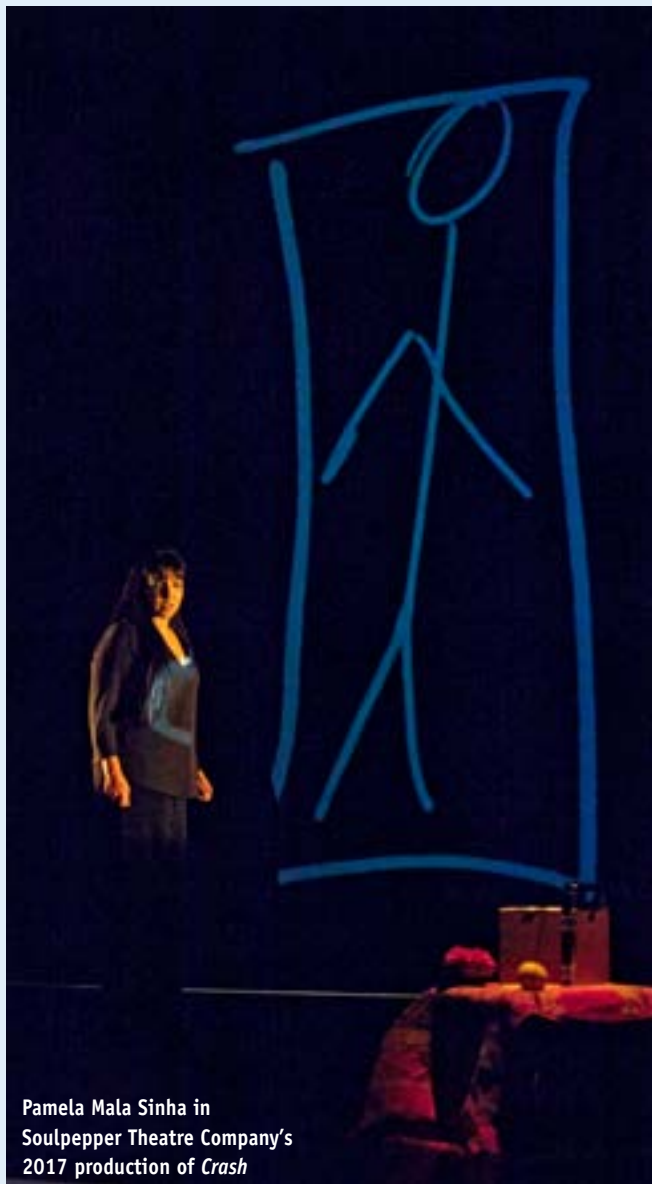
her father would “come back.” In that moment she says, the two events became “irrevocably intertwined” in her mind.

This became the dramatic thread for *Crash* – which is also an exploration of memory and forgetting; why you can’t remember the things you wish you could, and why you remember the things you want to forget. “It’s not up to you,” says Sinha.

Most of *Crash* takes place in the title character’s mind – who is only identified as “Girl.” She moves from the warmth of a memorial into the cold, harsh memory of reporting the assault – reaching back again into happy memories of her childhood faith to the moment that faith is lost. At the end of the play, when “Girl” looks down again at her family and friends as they remember her father, “I thought at the time – in real life – there can never be more love than there is in this moment. It’s time to come back to them.”

When Sinha first performed the play at Theatre Passe Muraille in 2012, it was important for her that people not know it was autobiographical. “People who knew me knew the story was mine, but most of our audiences didn’t know in its first run.” *Crash* went on to receive Dora Awards in several categories that year, including Outstanding New Play and Outstanding Performance by a Lead Actress. It had a second run in the fall of 2013, in a tour co-produced by Theatre Passe Muraille and Necessary Angel Theatre Company.

In July this year, five years after the play’s debut, Toronto’s Soulpepper Theatre took the play to New York City as part of the company’s month long residency at the Signature Theatre. Soulpepper provided the resources for Sinha, director Alan Dilworth, lighting/set designer Kimberly Purtell, sound designer Debashis Sinha, and video/projection designer Cameron Davis to explore a more elemental approach to the storytelling, and delve



Pamela Mala Sinha in  
Soulpepper Theatre Company's  
2017 production of *Crash*

even more deeply into the psychological space of “Girl”. “New York wasn’t a remount of *Crash*,” says Sinha. “It was a re-imagining of the piece – a rare gift for any artistic team.”

## Twists and turns

*Century Song*, a one-person song and dance performance by the soprano Neema Bickersteth, took lots of twists and turns before it too became a personal story.

“I was curious about singing and dancing for the classical voice,” says Bickersteth. Working with choreographer Kate Alton, they picked a selection of vocalises, songs without words, for Bickersteth to sing while dancing at the same time.

“It turns out the songs spanned the 20th century evenly, and when strung together, it felt like something was being communicated, some journey was happening.”

Over the next five years Bickersteth and Alton continued to work on development and choreography, each year adding new people to the team.

At the end of their first workshop, Bickersteth’s partner, director Ross Manson, came

on board and they discovered how the songs made them think of the time-travelling protagonist in *Orlando*, by Virginia Woolf.

“We still didn’t know what we wanted to say, but we felt something. We just didn’t know the answer,” says Bickersteth.

They continued to work on the piece, inspired by costumes and fine art from the time periods of the songs, which eventually became anchors for the story, places to look for “story-telling flags,” says Bickersteth.

The turning point came when Bickersteth thought about how story-telling affects us – how we look for ourselves in the stories we read, and want to connect personally. “I thought I had been faking that in my art – so it was important for the story to be told through me.”

So Bickersteth imagined what version of herself would be living during the time period of each song. For example, the show starts off with music written in 1911 by Sergei Rachmaninoff. "What would a black woman like me be doing? Since I'm from Alberta, I thought about who those women might have been."

She ended up transforming herself for each piece of music, and in so doing, telling a story of black women in Canada throughout the century. The show leads up to Bickersteth as herself in the present day, accompanied by a piece written especially for her by Reza Jacobs. "It has a beautiful repetitive chord progression. It's like an anthemic pop song, with a slow build that just brings everyone to a place."

Although Bickersteth is alone on the set, there are also two musicians on stage. For technical reasons, the stage manager is also visible. When Bickersteth leaves the stage to change costumes, a video montage of "Neemas" from the intervening years plays.

This is the first solo show Bickersteth has ever done, and she says it can feel isolating. "I'm in a musical right now with nine people in it – and the lead stays on the stage the whole time. I was thinking of how we get to leave and talk when we are off the stage. You don't get to do that in a solo show."

While performing *Century Song* could be "super scary," says Bickersteth, she never felt alone. Besides the two musicians on stage, her scene partner became the audience looking in.

At the finale, when the songs come up to the present day, Bickersteth actually steps off the stage to come closer to the audience. "It's a big point of connection," she says. "I directly connect with the people who have been along with me on this journey."



Lili Beaudoin transformed into multiple characters in a polygamous community in British Columbia for *Gracie* at Victoria's Belfry Theatre

## Connecting to the audience

That connection to the audience is also what appeals to Daniel MacIvor.

One of Canada's most prolific solo performers, his past one-person shows, created in collaboration with director Daniel Brooks, include *House*, *Here Lies Henry*, *Monster*, and *This Is What Happens Next*.

In his performances, MacIvor directly addresses the audience. "There is no artifice about where we are and what is happening," he says. "There is less suspension of disbelief required from the audience, and in some ways that can make for a more authentic experience for both the audience and the performer."

For MacIvor, the challenges of performing a one-person play are mostly practical. "Just being alone on stage – there's no one to throw to if you're having an off show, it's always on your shoulders. There is also a loneliness backstage – that loneliness we all feel deep within is brought out in the theatrical experience anyway, but more so in the solo show."

It also can be harrowing when the audience feels they

have permission to talk back to him, since the direct address style can make them feel like their response is welcomed.

"In the moment it's always off-putting, but those odd events, like someone jumping in to join me on stage, arguing a point of fact, or offering a story in agreement, end up being the stories I savour telling later."

Although MacIvor's shows are not usually autobiographical, in his latest show, *Who Killed Spalding Gray?*, he includes a story about how he travelled to California to visit a psychic.

"It was always the intention that I would reveal personal details, honouring Spalding and his personal story telling style," says MacIvor. "But usually my shows begin from truth anyway."



“There is also a loneliness backstage – that loneliness we all feel deep within is brought out in the theatrical experience anyway, but more so in the solo show.”

— *Daniel MacIvor*

### The performer's voice

Solo shows are not really that different in nature from other shows, says Vanessa Porteous, who has directed several one-person shows, including two productions of *The Syringa Tree* (one performed by Meg Roe and the other by Jenny Young), and *When That I Was...* with Christopher Hunt.

“You approach it like any other play, but the performer has much more of a voice,” she says. “The director is not the boss. You are an equal partner with the performer.”

One-person shows also allow you to get more specific, says Porteous. “With a regular cast there are more people, different scenes, and different relationships. In a solo show you can drill down into specific gestures.”

For example, in *Gracie*, which Porteous directed at Victoria's Belfry Theatre earlier this year, Lili Beaudoin plays the title character at different ages, as well as multiple characters from a polygamous community in British Columbia where *Gracie* lives.

“You don't want to [transition from character to character] in a boring, obvious way. You have to be creative and inventive,” says Porteous. “How little can you do to show another character? And how do you make sure each of the secondary characters is as full and rich as the main character?”

Porteous and Beaudoin ended up doing text work to find intentions for each character, just as you would do with a company of actors. “It was a lot of work, but it gave Lili something to hang on to.”

It turns out it was also fun. “She had to conjure these characters out of nothing – which is the true business of theatre. Through the tilt of your head or a slight spine shift you can make 400 people understand you are another character.”

Porteous believes a one-person show is like watching someone on a trapeze. “The audience is astonished at what the actor is doing up there – the virtuosity of memorizing all that text and playing all those characters.”

It's a tough job though, and Porteous says as a director you need to accommodate the actor. “The work schedule should be determined by their needs. You need to listen to them and create

a process that is reassuring and serves their needs. It's not about you, it's about them.”

Jennifer Swan, who was stage manager for *Gracie*, agrees that you need to be tuned to the actor's needs.

“The whole production team is there to support one person,” she says. That affects everything from the rehearsal schedule to the number of people in the rehearsal room. “In a way it is easier because you are more focused.”

Swan has worked on several one-person shows and found that eight hours of rehearsal for one person was sometimes too taxing, “but Lili wanted to work full on, she had the stamina to do eight-hour days.”

Because the actor doesn't have a scene partner to discuss things with, Swan says she finds she often develops a closer relationship with performers in one-person shows. “You sort of become their partner, debriefing after each show. It becomes more of a personal relationship.”

As a director, Porteous also has some practical responsibilities in solo shows, such as finding places in the script to give the audience a break. “The quality of concentration is so intense. The audience is staring at someone for 80 minutes. You need to give them breaks.”


You also need to find spots for the actor to have a drink of water. “Your designer needs to create a world where there is a cup,” she says.

There is another important element that Porteous says she has to relearn each time she directs a one-person play. “Your instinct is to go quickly in making a transition from one character to another. But you need to make sure the characters have the chance to listen and react to each other.”

How characters react to each other propels the story forward – so even though the same actor is playing the characters, the audience needs to see how the characters are reacting to each other, she says.

Fortunately solo plays give you more time to explore and refine those reactions, says Porteous. “As a director, it's 85% art. You give up the glory and gain art. You also get to fall in love with an actor.” **EQ**

# Going solo



Kristen Thomson used masks to tell the story of a young girl struggling with her parents' divorce in the one-person show *I, Claudia*

BY MATTHEW HAYS

**ONE-PERSON SHOWS** have a long and storied history, from the reading tours of Charles Dickens that spanned Britain and North America in 1858 to 1870, to Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* to Linda Griffiths' *Maggie and Pierre*.

For performers, one-person shows present an entirely unique opportunity to create a first-person show, one that often involves a collapse of the fourth wall and a distinct intimacy with their audience. But with that opportunity comes an intense set of challenges.

Many see the resurgence in popularity of one-person shows as strictly due to economic factors: as theatre companies' budgets shrink, the allure of the possible savings a one-person show could facilitate seem an obvious motivation for commissioning them. But the writers, performers, actors and directors who have concocted some of the best known one-person shows insist their appeal can hardly be reduced to their cost. Creators describe an intensity, a clarity of thought and feeling, a focus, a succinctness, and a rapport with the spectator that can't really come about in any other form. One-person shows also lend themselves well to

tours, which means performers get to connect with audiences in different regions and countries, something they describe as an added bonus to the form.

To further examine and analyze the singular and idiosyncratic aspects of creating and performing one-person shows, *EQ* reached out to a number of Equity members who have landmark one-person shows under their belts, and asked them to illuminate the phenomenon. Six responded with their thoughts and reflections on the process, as well as their advice for wannabe one-person-show creators.

## Conception

Kristen Thomson says it all began with a 10-minute piece. It was at Columbus Theatre (now Common Boots Theatre), where performers were invited to present anything they had on the go. "I had started to work with these character masks," says the writer-performer. "I had this idea for a character, Claudia, a 12-year-old whose parents were divorced."



For *Letters to my Grandma*, Anusree Roy did extensive rewriting to portray feelings of pain and loss when her grandmother died



Sarah Murphy-Dyson's one-person show, *The Naked Ballerina*, helped her come to terms with the pressures and demands for perfection she experienced as a dancer

That night, which was called Mayhem, turned out to be a turning point in terms of conceiving and creating the show that would become *I, Claudia*. "At that time we hadn't seen a lot about children of divorce. Tarragon Theatre offered to develop it, which took another year."

Thomson says her use of masks served as one of the greatest creative forces she could imagine. "I think I was approaching the project as an actor more than a writer," she recalls of the show, which became a massive hit when it premiered in 2001, eventually becoming a 2004 film adaptation. Thomson earned praise for developing several distinctive characters, and bringing them all to life in one powerful piece, winning the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play of 2001.

"I was improvising with the masks, generating huge amounts of material. I would record it, transcribe it and then edit it down. I've actually written four plays this way – you get really strong characters and strong character voices by using this method."

The improvisation means a free style, a free flowing of ideas and dialogue. "I use improvisation and then later I can make the choices about what I want to keep in the editing process. I then feel free to go down blind alleys, places that theoretically the characters might land on. I can then connect those things in a script. The improv really allows me to feel like I've unleashed my unconscious." Thomson says that "when you sit down to write, ideas are often tired, or feel

recycled. When you tap into that space, you get into an idiosyncratic thought and speech which is far more realistic."

She also relied on the use of objects. "I would choose five objects that might suit a specific character. I give myself the object when I'm in character, and then turn on a timer for ten minutes. Then I ask myself, 'How is this object connected to my character?'"

Thomson also gave herself writing exercises. "I would write down 'My biggest secret is...' and then I would give myself five minutes to write down what I thought my character's untold story would be. This research would carry me through to the next phase." That phase involved building the story of the play, by finding commonalities in all of the stories of her characters.

"It's imperative to write about something you care about deeply," she advises, "because it's a tremendous amount of work. Have an idea of what you want your play to be, but be prepared for change: because what you wrote probably won't resemble your initial idea. The idea and the reality are often quite different."

### Early stages

Writer and actor Anusree Roy has a warning for those aspiring to create their own one-person shows. "It takes a tremendous amount of writing and rewriting."

Roy immigrated to Canada with her family in the 1990s, but her grandmother remained in India. When her grandmother died,



Roy was left with considerable emotional pain and a terrible sense of loss. "I was trying to figure out how I would cope with her loss," she recalls.

"A teacher told me to write letters to my grandmother," Roy says. "I remember asking, 'Why did you die now?'"

In a subsequent playwriting class with Judith Rudakoff at York University, the letters to her grandmother came up. "I said that they weren't really pretty. Judith said, 'They don't have to be

Thus began the process of creating *The Naked Ballerina*, a one-woman show based on her own harrowing tales of being a star ballerina and the intense pressures and demands for perfection that went along with that. She is grateful for the guidance and teachings of Tracey Erin Smith and her SoulOTheatre workshops, which Murphy-Dyson says provided her with the tools needed to envision translating her experiences into a one-person show. But her biggest shout-out goes to Wes Berger, her director and drama-

## One-person shows present an entirely unique opportunity to create a first-person show, one that often involves a collapse of the fourth wall and a distinct intimacy with the audience.

pretty! We're complex.' I had it assigned as a playwriting assignment. So now I had to ask, how would this look as a play?"

The early process for creating what would become the twice-Dora-nominated *Letters to my Grandma* meant extensive writing and rewriting. "The audience has to believe the actor, who is playing several different characters. Luckily I was working with a brilliant director [Thomas Morgan Jones], who made me develop the specific characters. When the audience is watching the show, they need to experience all of the characters' experiences, and that makes the job 10 times more challenging. It's that much more intense."

And therein lies Roy's key bit of advice in developing a one-person show. "Get to know your characters. Sit down with a pen and paper: what do they like? What's their greatest fear? Greatest joy? Get to the complexity, the layering. You have to know *who* they are to give them voice."

And lastly, "Never underestimate the power of a rewrite."

### First public performance (or How I learned to love the Fringe Festival)

"This was the first thing I ever wrote and performed," Sarah Murphy-Dyson says of her hit show *The Naked Ballerina*, which debuted at the Toronto Fringe in 2010.

When she first conceived of the show, she had retired from the ballet work that she'd begun as a child and had finished a production of *Dirty Dancing*. Doing *The Naked Ballerina* wasn't just an idea, Murphy-Dyson recalls, it was something "I felt I had to do. It was very personal. And there's something cathartic about sharing pain. And while it was specific, I knew it had universal themes."

turge who "pushed me to go all the way in the writing and performance, to be fully honest and vulnerable, and to shape the play."

And then, there was the Fringe. One could argue it changed Canadian theatre forever, when Brian Paisley launched the Edmonton Fringe in 1982 (modelling it after the Edinburgh event) to immediate success. The festival expanded rapidly and spread to other cities, giving artists a chance to create their own works and try them out on audiences willing to take a chance. "I was terrified of doing it, but once I learned I had a spot at the Fringe, I knew I had no choice: I had a deadline, I had to do it."

The amazing thing about the Fringe for a performer and creator is "you don't have to worry about the production side of things. You have 15 minutes prior to the show to get in there and get ready, to do your emotional warm-up and then go. Because I could do whatever I wanted, it felt like a safe place to birth it."

"This show was a way to talk about things I couldn't talk about in real life. It was almost like a way to come out, to connect with people about experiences I had that were very painful. Really, this is a show about the masks that we wear. It opens a dialogue. How many times, when someone asks how we are, do we respond that 'everything's great,' even when they're not? Being on stage allows you to wear another mask, one that allows you to delve into those things."

The Fringe afforded Murphy-Dyson that absolute feeling of freedom, of unrestrained exploration and creativity. "I would sit down and write 'I remember...' and then just keep writing. Some things would come up that I could barely remember. It was soothing and therapeutic."

### Working with a dramaturge and director

Carmen Aguirre says it all began with a simple suggestion over lunch. “Brian Quirt and I were having lunch, and he said, ‘You must do a one-woman show.’ We were telling each other stories, and he said he could see me simply telling stories on stage.”

Quirt, an experienced theatre director who had worked with Aguirre before, saw potential in the broad range of life experiences Aguirre has. And those began to form the north-south structure of the show, *Blue Box*.

show itself evolved when she was touring with it over a two-year period. “Things would happen with the guy I had the affair with, and sometimes it was hilarious, so I’d have to incorporate that into *Blue Box*.”

The split focus of the play allowed Aguirre to explore two very different narratives: the south story was one of suspense, a thriller, as she fled the police of an oppressive regime. The north part is all about intimacy. “A question for us was, how can we maintain and enhance that intimacy? That was when I could see that the

“My strong advice would be to find a loving, trusting collaborator with whom you can be fearless, and with whom you can fail, repeatedly, and without consequence.”

— Rick Miller

That included Aguirre’s experiences as a resistance fighter in the brutal regime of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet (the southern part) and her stint as a phone-sex worker and her obsession with a man she had a sensuous if short-lived affair with, a guy she refers to simply as ‘Vision Man’ (the northern part). “They’re an unusual mix, but we didn’t want this to be like a typical life story or autobiography. It was about finding the right stories. There was a tension between being followed by the police and then hunting for a revolutionary love, chasing a man who is not available.”

Aguirre said they decided early on that there would be “no fourth wall whatsoever. We made sure the house lights would be left on so I could make eye contact with the audience. If I saw someone I knew, I’d actually say hi to them and mention them by name. The point was that we were trying to create the feeling that the audience and I were having an intimate dinner together.”

She concedes “we were taking a risk. I’m standing three feet from the audience. And while it’s told in present tense, some of the show is set in the past and some in the present, and the audience has to do the work to figure out between those two things.”

Aguirre says she gained from having the safety net beneath her that was such a solid and supportive director. “When we workshopped it, we explored the transitions. It went back and forth from south to north, and we had to figure out the rhythm of those shifts. It’s about keeping the audience surprised and on their feet. That’s what we spent a lot of time refining.” And the

women in the audience were *really* with me. I mean, I’m describing the scene of us being in bed together, and I can see how engaged many of the women are.”

Aguirre had another encounter with her real-life Vision Man, a man who works in the film industry and is Los Angeles-based, which provided her with a new ending for *Blue Box*. “We had dinner one night and it was very intense. And as we said goodbye, he turned to me and said, ‘Did we ever have sex?’ It was incredibly bittersweet. He hadn’t even remembered it. That brought out a huge gasp from the audience.”

### The one-person show as Cottage Industry

While Rick Miller has worked extensively in multi-actor, ensemble works of the stage, he has become renowned for a number of his one-person shows, including *MacHomer*, *Bigger Than Jesus* and *Boom*.

His shows have met with huge critical acclaim and have been performed in over 200 cities around the world. His retelling of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* through the characters from *The Simpsons* tickled *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening enough that he granted Miller the right to use his characters. (Quite something given how possessive Fox TV is of this property.)

Which prompts the question: what does he get out of creating and performing a one-person show? “I get that question a lot. I think it is the incredible freedom and control you have when doing

a one-person show. When I started, part of it was, 'Shit, I have no money and I've got to put on a show. I have to create a unique experience for the audience.'"

That said, Miller points to the considerable stress of putting on a 70-minute show as one performer, often telling stories through



In *Blue Box*, Carmen Aguirre weaves two stories together – her experience as a resistance fighter in Augusto Pinochet's Chile, and her passionate affair with a Los Angeles based actor

numerous characters. "In some cases, it's a hundred different characters, from Martin Luther King Jr. to Janis Joplin to the entire cast of *The Simpsons*."

Miller stresses that solo shows are far less solo than one may think. "They're actually very collaborative. My shows often involve multi-media, so I'm relying on many people behind the scenes. My strong advice would be to find a loving, trusting collaborator with whom you can be fearless, and with whom you can fail, repeatedly, and without consequence. Someone who can help you draw out interesting parts of yourself, that you then process and reflect back to an audience, hopefully with a sense of humour."

When discussing creativity, Miller says he often refers to this quote by famous choreographer and dancer Martha Graham. "No artist is pleased," she once stated. "There is no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only a queer, divine dissatisfaction; a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others." **EQ**

Matthew Hays is a Montreal-based writer whose work has appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Walrus*.

## RE-IMAGINING THE SOLO ACT



Michelle Polak

"I knew I was stepping into huge boots," Michelle Polak recalls.

No kidding. Polak was taking up the epic task of bringing multiple characters to life in *I, Claudia*, a one-person show that had received raves and heaps of audience love. Sounds like an

actor's dream, except Polak would be taking over from Kristen Thomson, who had created and developed the show, and – until this point – had been the only person to ever breathe life into it.

"I had fantastic advice from the director of this production, Leah Cherniak," says Polak. "She said simply, you can't be her. You'll never be Kristen. So don't even try. Bring your own soul into it. That allowed me to be free, to allow my creativity and my craft to find a home. Obviously, the show was a real gift because the writing is so amazing."

When she auditioned for the role, Polak neglected to tell Cherniak that she had never really done mask work, something *I, Claudia* demands a great deal of. "It was a bit ballsy of me, but I went for it. And I got the gig! I had to do a lot of learning about mask work in order to do the show."

The rewards were remarkable. "There were standing ovations every night. People were in tears. I got so many cards and letters from people saying how moved they were by the show."

Polak also notes that one-person shows are very collaborative – in her case with a writer as well as director, stage manager and designers – but that when you're performing, "you are out there on your own."

One of her favorite moments came during a production at Montreal's Segal Centre, when a fire alarm went off in mid-performance. "I stayed in character and led everyone out to the steps of the Segal. I did an entire improv on the steps, remaining in character. When the alarm was done, we went back, the audience sat down, and I managed to get back into the show. It was quite an experience." – M.H.





BY DEENA AZIZ

**WHEN I WAS A KID,** I adored movie musicals. There's no explanation – there was certainly no family encouragement (thank God I wasn't caught stealth-watching the late show at low volume). So when my high school announced auditions for *Oliver!*, my untried heart picked up the beat... until some juggler informed me there were "no brown kids in Fagin's gang."

Needless to say, I was crushed.

But I moved on, towards my destiny – doctor, lawyer, engineer – until my final year of undergrad when I lost/found my senses and auditioned for theatre school. (With a choice of schools, I instinctively opted for the one with some melanin on the teaching staff.) The rest, as they say... is still being workshopped.

After graduation, and with no models to guide me, I submitted for generals at the various regional and repertory theatres. At one such audition, after suffering through my party pieces, the artistic director asked if I had any questions! I'm sure he was just being polite, but I was young and earnest so... I queried his position on (what at the time we were calling) "non-traditional casting." His patient reply:

*"It's difficult enough to maintain a reality on stage these days without pressing the indulgence of the audience by introducing such factors as extraneous ethnicity."*

Micro-aggression notwithstanding, I was baffled by his rea-

soning. I mean, isn't that what we *do*? Invite the audience to suspend their disbelief? To embrace worlds of invention, endow them with substance, and find therein meaning and resonance? No one believes that peas in a plate are really rain, or that the stage left exit leads on to a battlefield. Why should a performer be sentenced to self-portraits?<sup>1</sup>

So I kept asking questions.

Like, why were there disproportionately fewer Artists of Colour on the festival stages? Another patient answer: the demands of classical work require a level of formal training, and there just aren't as many culturally diverse actors graduating from theatre schools.

Granted, this was a while ago. A quick glance at the ensembles at our festival theatres today shows a level of diversity from which most (mainstream) stages could learn. (Then again, the classics have always been the sci-fi of live performance: "Starship POC"<sup>2</sup>... as if only by crossing time or space can we conceive of a world that is inclusive.) But at the time, those rosters looked different. And at the time, there was no foundation for rebuttal.

Cue the 2015 **Equity Census**.

With the recent release of the Census Final Report, we now have robust data about demographic composition, identity per-

<sup>1</sup> And let's be real: if anything is "pressing the indulgence of the audience" it's the perpetual insistence that nostalgic Russian socialites express ennui in *RP*.

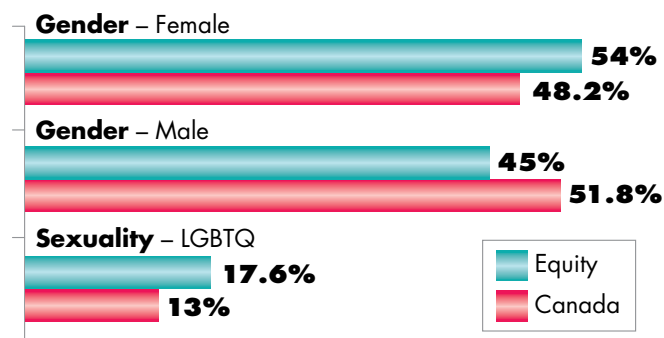
<sup>2</sup> *Person of Colour*.

ception, and comparative earnings. And most critically (to my mind at least) we can finally talk concretely about representation – the old “mirror up to nature” bit.

Some figures give heart. When it comes to gender parity, Equity’s Male/Female ratio outdoes national statistics: 54% of the membership identify as Female, 45% Male, and 0.75% Trans and Other<sup>3</sup>... compared with 48% Female and 52% Male<sup>4</sup> across the country (and perhaps by 2020, Statistics Canada will have a strategy to reflect the gender spectrum). And yet 37% of members – of all genders – noted that women are underrepresented in live performance.

We could feel smug that LGBTQ identification in our industry is 35% higher than national figures (intuitively, this is less surprising). But we also learned that 30% of LGBTQ members who reported that they are not “out” in relation to work environments, express concerns about discrimination and career impact.

### Gender & Sexuality: Equity-Canada comparison<sup>5</sup>



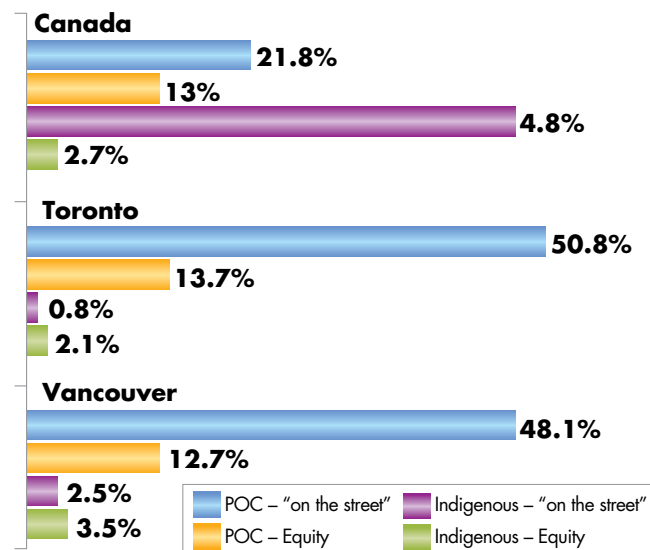
Turning to ethnicity, the picture is far from black and white.

Some data, while discouraging, is not unexpected. Equity’s membership shows a combined POC and Indigenous presence hovering at about 60% of the national rate (15.7% vs. 26.6%). But Toronto and Vancouver – which boast the largest Visible Minority [sic] populations in the country – feature POC Equity members at *less than a third* the municipal prevalence (Greater Toronto Area: 13.7% vs. 50.8% or Metro Vancouver: 12.7% vs. 48.1%). – Why?

Conversely, Indigenous member prevalence in both Toronto and Vancouver is *higher* than municipal statistics.

If larger cities offer more opportunities for ethnically diverse artists, then it’s reasonable to speculate that BIPOC<sup>6</sup> professionals might flock to these centres in greater numbers. But the inconsistencies reflect a more complex narrative. Particularly when you focus on economics.

### Racially Diverse representation: Equity-Regional comparison<sup>7</sup>



With respect to Total Annual Income, we can see that:

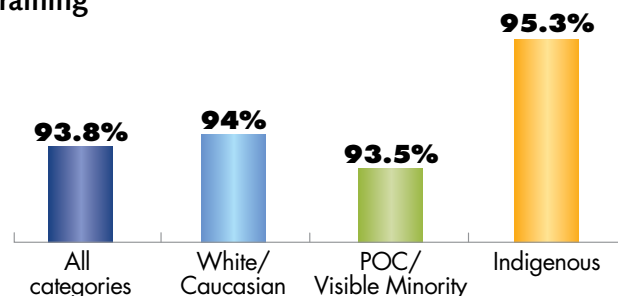
- Racially Diverse members (BIPOC) earn 13.5% *LESS* than White/Caucasian members.
- Women earn 22% *LESS* than men.
- ♀ + BIPOC...? (*You do the math.*)

And when considering income derived solely from Equity contracts:

- Racially Diverse members (BIPOC) earn 16% *LESS* than White/Caucasian members.
- 60% of Racially Diverse members (BIPOC) report that their identity has had a negative impact on their work.

As for training, it turns out that the proportion of Equity members reporting some form of formal training is *the same* for BIPOC artists as it is for their White/Caucasian colleagues (93.5% vs. 94.0%), with Indigenous artists marginally *exceeding* both (95.3%).

### Percent of Equity Members who report formal training



So clearly it’s not an issue of education, but representation. It’s about getting in the door.

<sup>3</sup> All figures, unless otherwise noted, are drawn from the 2015 Equity Census.

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 051-0001. 2017 (Non-binary gender statistics not available).

<sup>5</sup> National Gender stats: Statistics Canada estimates based on 2011 Census data. National LGBTQ stats: Fondation Jasmin Roy, 2017.

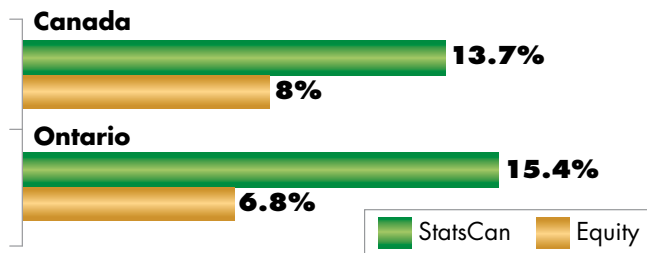
<sup>6</sup> BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Colour – terminology widely favoured for its acknowledgement of distinct lived experience.

<sup>7</sup> Regional population figures: Statistics Canada Census Profile. 2016 Census.

# OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR ARE MORE COMPLEX THAN

And what about the doors that are literally inaccessible? Inclusion doesn't stop at ethnicity, and it's clearly in the area of D/deaf and disability that Equity's membership is most egregiously impoverished.

## D/deaf and/or disability representation: Equity-Regional comparison<sup>8</sup>



It's alarming enough that D/deaf artists and artists with disabilities make up only 8% of the membership – 40% lower than the national average. Or that in Ontario, where the provincial rate rises to 15%, Equity's prevalence drops to 60% lower. Then consider that 80% of members who are D/deaf and/or have a disability indicate a negative work-related experience due to their underrepresented identity – which is hardly surprising when they are 40% more likely to live BELOW the poverty line.<sup>9</sup>

I could go on. There's a world of difference still to address (including age, and the myriad invisible dimensions of diversity), but this snapshot of Equity's membership is scant leverage without meaningful data on actual employment.

And yet ultimately, these numbers do not describe or define us. Inequity is not to be solved by quotas alone – though if Canada's arts councils elect to follow Britain's example and invoke strict diversity targets as a condition of funding ... *on dirait pas non*. Cuz if everyone's tax dollars are funding the arts, then government agencies should be accountable for ensuring full-spectrum participation. (Tax protest anyone?)

So how do we move forward? How do we influence the gatekeepers and old guard at our institutions? Well, we may be a motley assortment of precarious workers, but we are also, many of us, creators and engagers: writers and directors as well.

There's a growing movement among playwrights to champion diversity. (Though it's surprising how few invoke their prerogative for casting consultation or approval. – Why?) Playwright Erin Shields is clear that –

*“diverse casting always enriches my plays. When I am writing, I create the characteristics*

*of the characters – outgoing, intelligent, awkward, shy – but rarely assign, in my mind's eye, a particular body type or skin colour. I know I want to be in a room that reflects the makeup of the city/cities in which I work, so I strongly advocate for diverse casting choices. Also, in the rehearsal hall, actors impact the script with their questions and the way they find their way through a journey. I shift the text in rehearsal, in part in response to those questions which leads me to a richer text. Diverse casting makes my plays better.”*

Shields, among others, offers inclusive prescriptions in her scripts, as in:

- “Casting: Beautiful. Young. Culturally diverse.” – *The Millennial Malcontent* (Erin Shields); ...or
- “All productions of these two plays must be cast diversely [i.e. no all-white casts]” – *Botticelli in the Fire & Sunday in Sodom*, Jordan Tannahill; ...or
- “The names of the characters in this play are not intended to limit casting to any particular ethnic group. Casting should reflect the diversity of the country where the play is being produced.” – *Infinity*, Hannah Moscovitch.

Other writers, like John Mighton, prefer to advocate directly with directors.

*“There was a time when the approach to theatre design was very literal. But then they realized that it holds people back, it holds back the imagination of the audience. The same thing has to happen with casting. Some directors are still locked in this sense that theatre has to be literal. But then they should still cast cross-culturally, because that is a more real-*



(L to R) Manon St-Jules, Adrien Pyke, Deena Aziz, and Rachelle Casseus in *The Gravitational Pull of Bernice Trimble*, Great Canadian Theatre Company, 2016

<sup>8</sup> Regional population figures: Canadian Survey on Disability, Statistics Canada, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Low-Income Measure (LIM) 2017 Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 111-0009.



## THEY APPEAR



(L to R) Thomas Olajide, and Julie Tamiko Manning, in *Oliver!* National Arts Centre, 2011

*istic representation of our mixed society.*

*"When we were casting The Little Years, Chris [Abraham] and I were of the same mind: we cast a family where the mother was black and the daughter was white. And no one saw it as an issue. Playwrights need to work harder to insist that their plays be cross-culturally cast. The day is coming soon when a director will not be able to conceive of doing anything else."*

Last year I had the pleasure of working on Beth Graham's *The Gravitational Pull of Bernice Trimble* at Great Canadian Theatre Company, where their strategic plan includes a commitment to equity and inclusion, onstage and off. Artistic director Eric Coates and director Adrienne Wong committed to inclusive casting from the outset, and the resulting stage family featured a South Asian matriarch (moi), a white, Franco-Ontarian daughter (Manon St-Jules) a bi-racial middle daughter (Rachelle Casseus), and a Caucasian son (Adrien Pyke). The theatre received a LOT of audience feedback about the show. Not a single comment referenced the composition of the family.

The times they are a-changing. Slowly. (Some days too slowly.) But cultural touchstones are no longer immutable. Imagine my delight at the casting for the NAC's 2011 production of *Oliver!* – Huzzah! (Imagine the audiences, seeing themselves for the first time in that story.)

When Tim Dang (former Artistic Director of East West Players in Los Angeles) crafted his *See Change* vision statement, he couched it in terms of a "preparedness plan" – preparing for the day when People of Colour will constitute the majority in the US. Which is fine and prudent. But in the here and now, diversity is quite simply a best practice. Not for reasons of social justice or political expediency or because you're worried about attracting new audiences. (All valid.) But because it's an evolutionary fact that diversity eats homogeny for breakfast, every time – social scientists, economists, and biologists have been shouting this

into the wind for generations (look up Galton's steer). Diversity enhances creativity. It makes a better "thing."

The numbers are still useful; without benchmarks to reference there's no way to track progress. Thanks to The Equity Census and the Everybody Counts initiative (encouraging new members to register five basic demographic points), we now have the tools to do so. (If you haven't yet volunteered your demography to the Everybody Counts database, please do so at [www.caea.com](http://www.caea.com).)

What we do matters. In a world increasingly plagued by bad behaviour and tribal distrust, our stories have the power to tell us not only who we are, but who we *want* to be. And in the alchemical transaction that happens in the dark, that's where empathy bridges the space between differences.

I think I may eschew Shakespeare for a while and try Brecht: "Art is not a mirror to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it."

(And I'll save you the look-up: historians report tens of thousands of South Asians migrating to the U.K., as early as the 17th century. I'm guessing at least one or two found their way into an urchin gang.)

*Equity member since 1997, Deena has worked at theatres across Canada. Screen credits include a sampling of sci-fi, and a chorus of variously ethnic docs and shrinks. Deena also works as a dramaturge, coordinator and producer, and is an active champion for promoting equity and inclusion in the performing arts.*



### DID YOU MISS THE EQUITY CENSUS?

EVERYBODYCOUNTS is a brief five-question survey collecting demographic markers so that Equity can measure the ongoing impact of member diversity on engagement patterns and income earned.

Your permission to collect and store basic demographic information will strengthen this research and allow Equity to measure the impact of member diversity on engagement patterns and lobby more effectively, for all members.

Visit [www.caea.com](http://www.caea.com) to be part of this important research.



# Equity's statement on ha

## RESPECTFUL WORKSPACE ADVISOR (RWA)\*

Any individual, whether the subject of or witness to workplace harassment is encouraged to contact an RWA, a trained senior Equity staff member who provides informed and supportive strategies for addressing harassment questions or concerns. As well, they will offer guidance if you need to submit a formal disciplinary complaint about a member to Equity Council. In extreme situations, RWAs will direct callers to the appropriate authorities.

### RWA assistance may include:

1. Locating and reviewing the engager's harassment policy.
2. Suggesting approaches for discussing the concern.
3. Contacting key production personnel on the complainant's behalf if requested.
4. Providing information on the filing process.

**\* YOUR RWA IS ALWAYS A GOOD FIRST POINT OF CONTACT**  
(notinOURspace@caea.com / 1-800-387-1856)

## ENGAGER

Engagers are responsible for their workspaces. The engager has a formal workplace harassment policy, is familiar with it and will support you in resolving any complaints.

If an incident is not successfully addressed through informal interactions, formal reporting involves talking to an engager representative. An RWA can provide support in preparing for and making the initial contact with the engager. Engager contacts should be identified during the first day of rehearsals or upon request.

## NO PLACE FOR BULLYING, DISCRIMINATION, AND PERSONAL AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN EQUITY WORKSPACES

Allegations of sexual harassment and assault continue to rock the film and television industry, both in the United States and in Canada. Many courageous women and men have come forward to name their abusers. We applaud their courage for doing so and recognize how difficult it is to speak out publicly.

The live performance sector is not exempt from this kind of behaviour.

In early 2015, Equity's national Council undertook a survey of the membership asking about experiences of harassment and bullying in the workplace. While the results were not surprising, they were nevertheless shocking. Nearly 50% of respondents reported being on the receiving end of inappropriate behaviour and nearly 50% reported being a witness. Men and women equally reported bullying as the most prevalent form of workplace harassment but twice as many women than men reported being sexually harassed.

These survey results motivated Equity's Council to undertake an immediate review of the Association's bylaws, policies and procedures. Members that had experienced harassment in the workplace were consulted throughout the review process to see if they felt the proposed changes would have made it easier for them to report. The new Respectful Workspace Policy, a more understandable and accessible reporting process, resulted from this work.

The **Not In OUR Space!** campaign: a proactive initiative to change industry culture launched in full this fall. Equity and our PACT colleagues partnered to get this message and materials out to CTA and ITA theatres and members across the country. Materials are now being distributed to opera and dance companies as well as other theatre companies.

**Not In OUR Space!** offers a variety of reporting mechanisms and support when a member has questions about or is experiencing unwelcome behaviour in the workspace or when steps need to be taken to resolve an incident.

It is important for members to report inappropriate behaviour. The theatre/engager bears the legal responsibility for ensuring a safe and respectful workspace. But it is even more important for us all to work together to stop this pernicious behaviour before it starts – to send a message to harassers and bullies that they can no longer behave that way without consequence.

Email or call Equity if you have an issue you would like to discuss or for more information about the campaign. Equity has trained staff in both the National and Western offices, known as Respectful Workspace Advisors (RWAs), to assist you in deciding how to approach your individual situation.

Together, we can change our culture so that we can create safe and respectful workspaces.

## EQUITY

If the alleged harasser is an Equity member, filing a formal complaint with Equity Council is an option. Council's complaint protocol is a general disciplinary process for unprofessional behaviour and is not designed to address issues immediately.

### Equity Complaint Process – A Snapshot

#### 1. Initial Review

The Executive Director will oversee the initial documentation intake.

#### 2. Council Review

- Case reviewed and dismissed; or
- Mediator engaged to resolve dispute; or
- Hearing Committee established.

#### 3. Council Decision

The decision will be delivered to the complainant and respondent (if not dismissed) within two weeks of being reached.

## COMMUNITY

Collective oversight is the greatest asset in keeping spaces respectful. Stage managers and deputies on productions are individuals you may want to speak to about concerns.

Trusted cast members may also be allies. The colleague that you approach for support and guidance is a very personal choice. Remember, there are many community members that want to help you. If you are looking for tips on how to support cast members with harassment concerns, you are encouraged to visit **Not In OUR Space!** at [www.caea.com](http://www.caea.com).

# Not IN OUR SPACE!

## Campaign Update

**Not In OUR Space!** is a collaborative anti-harassment and respectful workplace campaign seeking to ensure healthy and productive working conditions for all professionals working in live performance across the country.

### Pilot Project a Success

Reaction to the first phase of the **Not In OUR Space!** campaign, consisting of a pilot project, was generally very well-received. General managers and artistic directors from a number of theatres across Canada designated a staff person to jointly deliver a First Day Statement in partnership with an Equity stage manager. The statement included a commitment to the pursuit of safe and respectful workspaces by promoting zero-tolerance for bullying and harassment in professional Canadian theatre.

### Not In OUR Space! National Launch

Starting in fall 2017, a theatre and Equity representative will now jointly present the anti-harassment statement outlining access to engager and Equity support networks on the first day of rehearsal of all CTA and ITA productions. Equity has created brochures, bookmarks and posters to support the campaign, which are mailed to the theatre for distribution and display.

### Industry Gathering

Senior staff from Equity were invited to present the development process of **Not In OUR Space!** and resulting campaign materials to a gathering of film and television leaders convened by ACTRA. Senior staff also recently traveled to Ottawa where they shared the **Not In OUR Space!** campaign with the Canada Council for the Arts and officials at the Department of Canadian Heritage. Both were impressed by our campaign and complimented Equity on our proactive work on harassment in the workplace issues.

### International Projects

At a recent meeting in Croatia hosted by the International Federation of Actors (FIA), Equity's Executive Director, Arden R. Ryshpan, was asked to sit on an informational panel to discuss efforts under way to support individuals who have experienced harassment, and how to develop effective, union-driven strategies for dealing with the issue. Reaction to Equity's **Not In OUR Space!** materials was again overwhelmingly positive.

**All Not In OUR Space! materials and statements are available on Equity's website.**





### Want to receive an electronic version of **EQ**?

Equity offers electronic access to *Equity Quarterly*. If you would rather read an online version of **EQ** – login to the Member Only zone on EQUITYONLINE ([www.caea.com](http://www.caea.com)) and update your **EQ** delivery options.



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[info@caea.com](mailto:info@caea.com)



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## 2016 RRSP FUNDS ON HOLD LIST - FINAL NOTICE

### Are you on the list or do you know a colleague on it?

The following members have not opened an RRSP account and in accordance with Bylaw 107(h), failing to have a valid RRSP account will result in the assignment of the money to The AFC ([www.afchelps.ca](http://www.afchelps.ca)). Members must act quickly to avoid losing unallocated RRSP funds collected in 2016. Contact Souha Chaar, Membership Administrator, by email to [membership@caea.com](mailto:membership@caea.com) or by phone at 1-800-387-1856 (416-867-9165 in Toronto) before February 17, 2018.

George Absi	Tyce Green	Joshua Ramsden
Matt Alden	William Greenblatt	Paulo Ribeiro
Mike Allen	Alexandria Haber	Michael Riley
Alexandra Beaton	Kimberly Harvey	Michelle Rios
Scott Beaudin	Mirian Katrib	Rachel Rudd
Mike Bell	Peter Keleghan	Valerian Ruminski
Jonah Carson	Desmond Sean Patrick	Jacob Sampson
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Ann Rose Cupidon	Djennie LaGuerre	Carolyn Sproule
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Tyler Duncan	Gordon McLaren	Marie Josée Strazzerro
Hilary Farr	Elaina Moreau	Tammy Sutherland
Dorian Foley	Michelle Morgan	Tracie Thorns
David Francis	John Murrell	Christian Van Horn
Fawn Fritzen	Lisa Nasson	Angela Vint
Emmelia Gordon	Laura Osnes	Sharon Wahl
Gabriel Gosselin	Brenda Phillips	Charles Wallace
Danielle Greaves	Mitchell Poundmaker	Amelia Welcher

### Voluntary RRSP contribution

It is not too late to make a voluntary RRSP contribution to increase deductions from your 2017 income tax.

Cheques must be payable to London Life Insurance Company and post-marked on or before March 1, 2018. A members' name and certificate number

must be clearly marked on the front of the cheque.

Mail to: Group Retirement Services,  
330 University Avenue, Toronto, ON  
M5G 1R8

Contact [membership@caea.com](mailto:membership@caea.com) for more information.

## Pay Your Dues Online

Basic Dues are processed on May 1 and November 1 each year. The Online Dues Payment feature allows members to log in to EQUITYONLINE and securely pay dues by credit card in a few simple clicks.