

## Message from the President

During the last two CTA negotiations, I was invited to join the team for specific proposals, mostly pertaining to repertory theatre. During these days, we also covered proposals connected to auditions, which struck me as a perfect microcosm of the whole PACT/CAEA relationship. Since joining CAEA as an actor in 1986, I have heard every imaginable argument for and against our profession's audition practice. General auditions don't show actors to their best advantage. Artistic directors think of generals as a waste of time. Nobody wants to learn another Canadian monologue at age thirty-five. The director will shriek if she hears another piece by a certain Ontario-based-playwright-who-will-remain-nameless. Two minutes is too long. It's too short. How dare they ask me to do a general audition? Who does he think he is, refusing to do a monologue?

And so on...

Even within our own association, I have heard complaints that the CTA general auditions code is suited specifically to large theatres at the expense of their smaller cousins. While the existing article 8:06 does apply a sliding scale, it is in no way punitive towards small companies, unless, of course, you believe that there is nothing to be gained from seeing new actors at work. Call me a cockeyed optimist, but I believe that part of my role as an artistic director is to see as many actors as possible – especially considering the number of productions that I cannot attend due to my own schedule. Whether or not these actors are going to have a shot at a role in my current season is not the sole point of the exercise. I believe that if I am doing my job properly, I will take note of interesting actors for future reference – or alert a colleague who may be looking for precisely such a person.

In September the PACT office convened a conference call with eleven artistic directors for a freewheeling (and perhaps less optimistic) discussion on the challenges of CTA Article 8:06. We aired some frustrations and offered some solutions, but mostly, we just kept reframing this simple question: "What do Equity Artists really want from an audition?" Or, to be perfectly candid: "What do they want from us?" So, I called CAEA Executive Director Arden Ryshpan and asked the question. Arden's answer was equally candid: "Equity members want to be seen by artistic directors."

During my discussions with other AD's both before and after my talk with Arden we spent a lot of time asking questions about whether this is specific to a certain region or category. While we could address it as a regional issue, I fear that the problem will continue to surface until we make the necessary adjustment and view it as a collective concern. Furthermore, we must collectively commit to a meaningful solution that does not leave anyone feeling as though they have wasted time by conducting more auditions for no reason.

At a recent event hosted by Nightwood Theatre, artistic directors were invited to attend a speed-dating event with directors who were given twelve minutes to meet, greet and pitch their wares. Although I had already secured directors for Blyth's 2010 season, I was able to strike a deal with a young director who will be bringing her company to Blyth this winter for a new play development workshop. Totally unexpected for both of us, but a perfect fit, nonetheless.

Inspired by this event, I joined Emmy Alcorn, Max Reimer, PACT staffers Nan Carson and Sandy Crawley and representatives from CAEA, including Arden Ryshpan, Ken Burns, and President Allan Teichman, to talk about solutions to the ongoing audition dilemma. We agreed that a jointly-planned and produced audition showcase could be beneficial to actors and artistic directors, especially if we were to add a professional development component such as a panel discussion or a speed-dating event that would allow actors to pitch ideas and questions to artistic directors. There was consensus at the table and we are now taking the first steps toward launching a pilot project to test the format. Stay tuned for updates on this in the coming months.

Seeing as I have spent the majority of this message on issues relating to Equity and PACT, it is only fitting that I close it with a salute to an artist who brought extraordinary grace, beauty and intelligence to our theatres. Goldie Semple embodied what we should all strive to achieve in this business: an uncompromising commitment to the art and a great joy in meeting this challenge. She is sorely missed by one and all.

I wish all of my PACT colleagues a safe and happy holiday.

Eric Coates

PACT President

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