



I N T E R

WINTER 2009

ACTRA

The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists

ACTRA's TV drama campaign Fighting for a happy ending Pages 4 and 7



No giving up now

Alice laughed, "There's no use trying," she said, "one can't believe impossible things." The Queen replied, "I daresay you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

From *Through The Looking-Glass: And What Alice Found There*, by Lewis Carroll



One "impossible" thing I believe in is

a real Canadian film and television industry that can grow to be one that our government, the regulators, the bureaucrats and the broadcasting and distribution entities encourage and promote.

We got one step toward that goal with our successful negotiation of the National Commercial Agreement, with terms designed to encourage greater commercial production, especially production designed for new media. We applaud the determination and creativity of the NCA Committee and the confidence that our members coast to coast gave to our negotiating team. This union builds on that confidence.

Regulatory hearings at the CRTC for production distributed on new media are scheduled to begin in late February. ACTRA has made a solidly researched submission. Our key position is that the CRTC must regulate broadcasting in new media to set minimum content for Canadian stories and to ensure that consumers have access to Canadian choices. And we are defending the proposal that a modest levy has to flow from the Internet service providers to create a fund to stimulate Canadian production in new media, similar to the Canadian Television Fund seed money for conventional television. The profits from Internet distribution of audio-visual works will grow exponentially, and rapidly. They must not remain exempt. This is truly the future.

Licence renewal hearings for conventional broadcasters are expected in the late spring or early summer. Predictably, the broadcasters are already crying poor. As they fill Canadian airwaves with

hundreds of millions of dollars worth of U.S. programming, they are glossing over their other bad investments in buying up smaller entities and are looking for more concessions from the public.

These reviews are going to touch almost every aspect of Canada's broadcasting regulations and the CRTC now has a number of very new Commissioners. We will be briefing them on the critical role the CRTC must play in supporting Canadian drama over the airwaves and in new media.

And then we turn to the political front. In an economy struggling to climb out of recession (admitted to or not) there is much to be said for incentives that lead to thousands of jobs and working days in Canadian production for performers, writers, producers, technicians and directors.

We learned from experience during the fall federal election that the government then was gleeful to skewer programs that were outside the Conservative Party's ideological box. The lesson is there that administering while wearing blinkers of ideology solves no problems. Our protests over the ill-conceived \$45 million in arts funding cuts joined with many others to deny the Conservatives a majority government. We then openly offered ourselves as a focus group to provide feedback for any future steps that government might envisage in our industry. Maybe we've missed the phone calls.

This is an industry that must be encouraged. As it grows, the dramatic and comedic stories of Canadians find audiences within and outside our borders. It can be an industry that exists with a healthy level of co-production that locates to Canada. Without question it benefits



Artists from all disciplines protested Harper's cuts to the arts. At the Toronto rally opera singer John Mac Master and ACTRA's National President Richard Hardacre reminded Canadians that since the work of Canada's professional artists has bizarrely come under attack, it's essential to make our votes count for culture.

our economy and our cultural wealth if our government opens their collective mind to a more nuanced understanding that "the arts" represent everything we live and breathe: the television and films we watch, the books we read, the theatre, dance and opera we might attend, the music we play and listen to. A healthy recovery of our economy and a nurturing environment for Canada's cultural industries are interdependent.

A vibrant Canadian culture, with our industry as a stable and growing component is one goal of which we, this union of performers, must never lose sight... or hope.

It is the start of a new year, a time for optimism and determination. I wish you all a happy and successful one. In the meanwhile, along with the Red Queen and maybe Alice herself, we will continue to believe impossible things.

In solidarity and unity,



Richard Hardacre
ACTRA National President

WHAT'S INSIDE YOUR UNION MAGAZINE...

Dear Editor, *InterACTRA*:

Congrats on your admirable cover story on *Passchendaele*. What **Paul Gross** has accomplished is of considerable importance on a number of levels. He has made an amazing feature film about us; telling our own story, in our own language – a real, Canadian film! He has aroused in Canadians underutilized emotions of pride, gratitude and wonder at the impossible deeds our compatriots have been called upon to perform when others could not, and the stubborn determination, bred from our soil, with which they succeeded. He somehow convinced many people to invest, and he has wrapped the whole thing in a moving, emotional story of love, duty and determination that, while the film may satisfactorily appeal to others on that level alone, is particularly demonstrative of how we like to think of ourselves in Canada. The surreptitious daubing of eyes and shy, shared smiles of recognition from patrons exiting the theatre are experiences for which I thank Paul Gross and his whole gang.

Finally – and on a personal level – Paul's film has taught me a little more about my own father who was one of the 16,000 casualties at *Passchendaele*. The very few stories he told me were about other things. I know why now. I thank Paul for that too.

Dan MacDonald



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COVER PHOTOS: Eric Peterson (*large photo*) and Robb Wells (*top inset*) at the 2007 Ottawa CAB demo, photos by Chris Faulkner; Sonja Smits (*middle inset*) confronting then Liberal Finance Minister John Manley at 2003 Toronto protest of \$25 million cut to CTF, photo by Thom Tapley; Tabby Johnson (*bottom inset*) at the October 2008 Toronto election rally beside the CBC, photo by Peter Baker.

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ACTRA'S DRAMA CAMPAIGN ENTERS ITS THIRD ACT It's time to fight for that happy ending

by Joanne Deer, Director of Public Policy and Communications

For those of you who have been following the plot of ACTRA's drama campaign for the past seven years, you'll know that Canadian TV drama has been dying a dramatic death as a result of the CRTC's disastrous 1999 *Television Policy*.

For those of you just tuning in, break out the snacks and get comfy. You're joining our program at the start of the third and most exciting act.

let's quickly review what's happened in the first two acts of ACTRA's drama campaign.

In 1999, the CRTC released new rules for private broadcasters to follow. Sadly, these rules were a pale, broadcaster-friendly version of the earlier rules. The big changes included eliminating the drama expenditure requirements and expanding the definition of 'priority programming' to now include cheap reality

and entertainment magazine TV shows. The result? *Canadian Idol* and *ET Canada* have replaced dramatic series such as *Traders* and *DaVinci's Inquest*.

The Commission also changed the definition of 'prime time'. Before 1999, it meant 8-11 pm Monday to Friday, now it means 7-11 pm every night. The significance of that is broadcasters can air Canadian programming at 7 pm on

Decisions that the CRTC will make in the first half of '09 will shape the future of our broadcasting system.

What's the exciting plot point, you ask? In the next few months the CRTC (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission) has two big decisions to make. Now I know the combination of the letters 'C-R-T-C' make many of you instinctively reach for the remote – but I'm not exaggerating when I say that the decisions that the CRTC will make in the first half of '09 will shape the future of our broadcasting system and have major repercussions on our culture and your jobs. With a wide-ranging review of its policies covering broadcasting in new media and the renewal of the over-the-air private broadcasters' licences, the CRTC has the chance to give Canadians the happy ending we've been demanding.

The CRTC is a big chunk of why we have Canadian TV production – and why ACTRA members have work. Without the CRTC and its regulations we'd see even fewer Canadian programs on our TVs. Indeed, we see a direct correlation between the strength of the CRTC's regulations and the strength of our industry; when regulations are weakened – our industry is weakened.

Before we move on to what's coming,



Wilbert Headley at the Ottawa CAB demo.

a Saturday night and tick off their Canadian content requirements, whereas before they had to air it during the times when Canadians are watching TV in larger numbers.

The combined result of these changes is that Canadian TV drama has all but disappeared as broadcasters have been able to fill their schedules with cheap Hollywood drama instead of Canadian drama and still satisfy the CRTC's Canadian content requirements with cheap reality and magazine programming.

In 1999, broadcasters aired 12 one-hour fully Canadian dramas on TV, totalling 186 hours of programming. Fast-forward to fall 2007 when there was not one new one-hour fully-Canadian drama on either CTV or Global. Look for your Canadian shows on the

The bottom line: if the CRTC doesn't take measures **now** to ensure a place for Canadian programming in new media, there won't be any. Tomorrow will be too late.

schedule – they're now banished to Friday and Saturday nights and in the summer – when fewer Canadians are watching. We are presently seeing a slight up-tick in Canadian drama production as private broadcasters shore up their case for their licence renewal hearings in Spring 2009 (more later!).

Since 1999, overall program spending by private broadcasters has increased, but spending on Canadian drama has decreased. In 2007, private broadcasters spent \$718 million on foreign programming, but only \$74 million on Canadian drama. That's a lot of money and a lot of jobs being shipped out of Canada.

The reason this has happened is quite simple – it's a heck of a lot cheaper for Canadian private broadcasters to run down to L.A. and buy up buckets full of pre-made programs with built-in promotional machines at bargain basement prices than to buy Canadian. Broadcasters aren't about to air Canadian TV drama out of the goodness of their hearts.

It's quite telling that 42% of Canadians believe the CRTC has the primary responsibility to preserve Canadian content on TV and only 16% trust private broadcasters to do it. They will only do it when they are instructed to by the CRTC as a condition

Broadcasters aren't about to air Canadian TV drama out of the goodness of their hearts.

of their licences. Private broadcasters need licences to use public airwaves to ship their product. Since these airwaves belong to Canadians, it's only fair that they give something back in exchange for the privilege of exploiting them for profits.

So while private broadcasters have been racing to the bottom, ACTRA has emerged as the leading voice for restoring Canadian TV drama. Since 2001 we've rallied, we've demonstrated, we've sent hundreds of letters, made countless submissions to the CRTC, issued reports, taken dozens of meetings with politicians and CRTC Commissioners – basically we've talked to

anyone who would listen. And then we've talked to them again. All of our actions until now has been leading to this point.

First up in February is the CRTC's wide-ranging review of broadcasting in new media to determine whether broadcasting over the internet should be subject to federal regulations. In some ways, this is even more important than our fight for more Canadian drama on conventional TV since before we know it, most, if not all, broadcasting will be delivered on the internet.

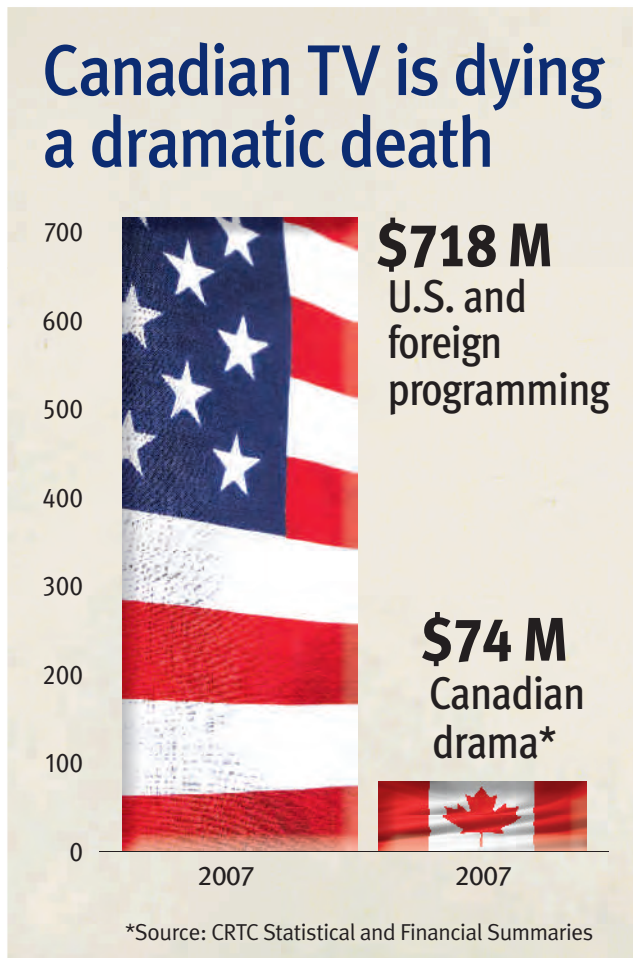
ACTRA's key position is essentially the same as it was in 1999 when the CRTC last considered the issue – that the

Commission must regulate broadcasting in new media and ensure that consumers have access to Canadian choices.

Unfortunately, in 1999 the CRTC decided to take a hands-off approach and 'exempt' new media from regulation. At the time, it felt that new media wasn't being used enough to transmit video and other programming to warrant its attention.

Times have changed

Ten years ago, most folks used the internet for email and reading text. Today, it's a whole different story. It's estimated that more than 50% of the traffic on the internet falls under
(continued on next page)



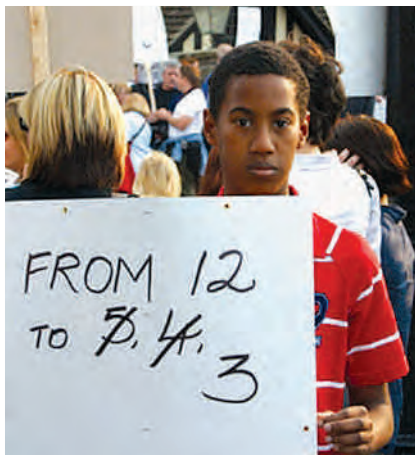
ACTRA'S DRAMA CAMPAIGN ENTERS ITS THIRD ACT

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the definition of 'broadcasting'. So what is broadcasting? *The Broadcasting Act* defines a program as any combination of "sounds and visual images, that are intended to inform, enlighten or entertain." It also says that when one of these programs is transmitted "for reception by the public by means of broadcast receiving apparatus," there is a broadcast. So whether you are watching an episode of *Corner Gas* on your TV or at CTV.ca, you are enjoying a 'broadcast'. And since it's the CRTC's job to regulate broadcasting – ACTRA says it's time the CRTC paid attention to the internet.

In the near future, the internet and mobile receiving devices will become the main way Canadians watch films and TV and listen to music. Broadcasters will no longer transmit 'over-the-air' and major movies will move to the internet shortly after they're released in theatres.

As ACTRA predicted back in 1999, the CRTC's decision to exempt new media from regulation has already created a situation in which broadcasters and cable companies are now 'competing' with their unregulated selves. We've seen what happens when conventional broadcasters are



Canadian drama is fighting for its life.

CRTC renew their licences to use public airwaves to broadcast television (aka licences to print money). ACTRA is calling for the CRTC to take this opportunity to put its 1999 *Television Policy* in the shredder and impose some strict spending and

out of 28 hours. Oh and while we're at it, let's help out our audiences by letting them know Canadian shows are there to be enjoyed. These shows need to be properly promoted and kept in decent time slots instead of being shuffled around willy nilly at the whim of U.S. schedules so folks know when to tune in.

Let there be no doubt – it's going to be quite a showdown. The risk is that the CRTC buys the sob stories from private broadcasters' CEOs and relaxes their requirements to air Canadian TV drama even further. Private broadcasters are already laying the ground work in the business pages of our daily newspapers with layoffs and tales of financial woe all blamed on the CRTC's regulations. Obviously this is a tough time for everyone. But let's be clear – private broadcasters are still making billions in profits. Perhaps certain ambitious Canadian private media companies have over-reached a little, putting a dint in their bottom lines. Blame that on bad business decisions – not Canadian content.

So after seven years of campaigning, we enter the final act with a war on two

ACTRA is calling for the CRTC to take this opportunity to put its 1999 *Television Policy* in the shredder and impose some strict spending and content requirements on private Canadian broadcasters.

let off the hook – Canadian TV drama disappears. New media will be no different.

The bottom line: if the CRTC doesn't take measures *now* to ensure a place for Canadian programming in this increasingly dominant medium, there won't be any. Tomorrow will be too late.

After the new media hearings, we move on to the conventional 'over-the-air' broadcasters. In the spring, CTV, Global and other conventional private broadcasters will march up to Gatineau and ask that the

content requirements on private Canadian broadcasters. No more writing off reality programming as 'priority' Canadian programming. No more airing *Due South* reruns on a Saturday night in July to meet CanCon obligations.

Private broadcasters should be required to air at least two hours of original Canadian drama a week during prime time – when audiences are watching. Think of that – all we're asking for is to be able to see our own stories for two

fronts. We need to be loud. We need to be clear. We need to stand in solidarity with our fellow unions and coalition partners. We need to talk to whoever will listen. We need to convince the media and the public of our case.

Canadian drama is fighting for its life. While Canadian television has given us many memorable death scenes, let's hope this isn't one of them. This time, we need to be shameless in demanding a happy ending. ■

TV Drama: Why performers need to act

We've made politicians wake up, Canadians care and our regulatory bodies listen

by Heather Allin

For the past seven years ACTRA has led the campaign to get more Canadian drama on our airwaves. Our persistence has paid off. We've made the politicians wake up, Canadians care and our regulatory bodies listen. Canadian TV drama has been in free-fall since the CRTC's disastrous 1999 decision to cave in to the broadcasters' pleas for flexibility and relaxed regulations. Private broadcasters have since filled our airwaves with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of U.S. TV programs and reduced the number of one-hour Canadian dramas on their schedules from 12 to three.

The bait and switch...

This past year we've seen a resurgence in Canadian drama – great storytelling, increased work opportunities across the country and shows that we can be proud of as performers and as Canadians. This proves that it can be done – that broadcasters can make Canadian drama that Canadians will watch in the millions.

But...

Don't let this fool you. The broadcaster licence renewal hearings are coming up and they're playing nice. They are still filling our screens with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of U.S. programs while spending only a fraction of that on Canadian drama. And in November last year, our broadcasters started another phase of their drama campaign: staff layoffs, troubled financial statements, and telling the press that CRTC regulations are restricting their business.

ACTRA has led the campaign to fix the drama disaster because we are articulate and persistent. We speak of the value of our stories defining who we are, we speak of the economic impact that this \$84 billion industry provides.

Make no mistake – this is painstaking work for all of us. It's visit after visit to Ottawa, press release after press release, lobbying the federal government, the MPs

around the country and meeting with the commissioners of the CRTC over and over and over again. While ACTRA lobbies one side, the broadcasters lobby the other, backed by their multi-million dollar corporations. We return again and again and again with new statistics, fresh research and the same battle cry, because it does work. We are being heard and changes are being made.

We also know Canadians are hearing us – and agreeing with us. It was just a short time ago that we heard Stephen Harper call artists 'elitists'. Canadians spoke with their votes and it cost him a majority government. We are speaking for millions of Canadians when we voice the need and value of continuing to create a thriving culture of our own.

Our union is our safety net.

I myself would love to just be an actor. It would be so easy to have others do all the work and allow me to reap the benefits. But I want to work, and part of getting that work is in the effort to have work happen here and now. Besides negotiating our contracts, protecting our earnings and rights as performers, our union fosters an environment where culture counts. We've created our own safety net. We make sure that film and television is supported and funded and that we have opportunities to work.

This Spring, the private broadcasters' licences are finally up for review and renewal. We've laid the groundwork – now is the time to make our move. This is the year to ensure that minimum spending and broadcasting requirements are designed to protect our industry. It's time to ramp up our campaign. This is our future as performers, our chance to rebuild our industry, our chance to hear,

It's time to ramp up our campaign.

watch and tell our Canadian stories to ourselves.

So when ACTRA calls upon you to write letters, to show up at rallies, to get on the bus to Ottawa, I hope you will join in the work and the opportunity to show that Canadians know the value of our culture and care enough to stand up for it. ■



Heather Allin was elected the President of ACTRA Toronto on January 6, 2009. An ACTRA member for 15 years, she has proudly served her union as a Councillor and Vice-President. Heather has a long history of advocacy on behalf of Canadian culture and performers' rights and has served on ACTRA's bargaining committee for both the IPA and NCA.

Two successful actors. Two cities. Two diverse careers.

Actors Tajja Isen and Andrea Menard swap stories on-line

Hosted by Joanna Bennett

Joanna: Hello Tajja and Andrea! Thank you for typing with me today! Congratulations on your careers so far – you both are award winners, multiple times over! Way to go!

Andrea: Thanks.

Tajja: Thank you very much!

J: Okay, for context, please tell our readers your age (range).

T: I'm seventeen.

A: I'm in my sexy mid-thirties!

T: Woo-hoo.

J: I'm with ya' on that!

J: Where is "home" for you?

T: I live in Thornhill.

A: I live in Saskatoon in a beautiful home right on the South Saskatchewan River.

J: Where is your agent located?

A: Vancouver.

T: Toronto.

J: How long have you been acting?

T: I've been acting professionally since I was 10.

A: For about 13 years now. I can't remember! I need to say, I can't imagine being as focused as you are Tajja at such a young age! Well done.

T: Thank you so much, Andrea!

J: You are both accomplished singers! How many years have you been doing that?

T: Singing has been a love of mine from a very young age, and I started writing and singing music of my own about three years ago.

A: I've been singing all my life, but didn't start singing professionally until about 15 years ago. When you grow up with a father who is the King of the Kitchen Party, you are not sure how to take the personal love of singing to the world stage. It took me a while to figure that out.

T: King of the Kitchen Party?

J: Yes, what does that mean?

A: My dad is my favourite singer. We would have parties at our house growing up, and he'd pull out the guitar and start singing for our company. My mom would harmonize, we'd all join in and everyone clapped and loved the King!

T: That's so wonderful!

J: Something to live up to??

A: No. I think I learned from the best. I think he may have learned from me too. I have taken the step that he never took – to the world stage.

Tajja: I always knew that I wanted to have a future in performance...



J: So he is very supportive then.

A: Oh yeah! Such a huge fan. Mom and dad live in Winnipeg, and when my first album came out, he had taken the CD to a radio station without even telling me. I got a call from the guy, not having a clue what he was talking about! Ha ha.

T: Ha ha! That is amazing!

J: How about you Tajja? Artists in your family?

T: There are a few – my great grandfather was in the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and my grandfather is a music teacher. Neither of my parents are musicians, but they gave me my love for music.

J: You play piano – was that their instrument?

A: That must be how you are such a great piano player too.

T: My great grandfather was actually a trumpet player! My grandfather does play the piano though.

J: What was your first professional performing gig? Is there a particular performance that you are proud of?

A: It was both singing and acting. I was hired to perform in a summer repertoire theatre. One production was a musical, and the other was a cabaret-style show.

T: My first professional acting gig was the voice of 'Sister Bear' on the animated series

The Berenstain Bears. It was my intro to animation, a world which I now love! It was a wonderful first experience. As for music, I distinctly remember the first time I performed my own material. It was a couple of years ago at what was formerly the NOW Lounge in Toronto... And it was an incredibly liberating experience, to share my own music. I had never felt anything like it, and I was hooked.

J: Yes, to see our own creative ideas come to fruition is exciting!

J: Andrea, your favourite? Most proud?

A: I have to say my career highlight has to be the creation and performance of my one-woman show, *The Velvet Devil*. Mind you, it was such a long journey, that each step of the way was even more satisfying than the last. For instance, the play led to the CD, led to the national tour, led to the film version.

T: That is so amazing. Congratulations on that – putting together a one-woman show is an amazing accomplishment!

A: Ahhh, shucks.

J: And to you Tajja, to get into animation right away... that is not common.

A: Yes, what a wild introduction to the biz!

T: I was very fortunate to have that entry. It was just as it was becoming more common to use kid's voices, and I was 10 at the time.

J: Did you always know that you wanted to act and sing and those first jobs just confirmed your plans for a performing future, or did you think "enjoy it now because I'm sure it won't keep coming."

T: I definitely felt a bit of both. I always knew that I wanted to have a future in performance, but I was also aware that there are no guarantees.

J: How did you know that, at that age, that there are no guarantees in the biz?

T: Most definitely from my parents' honesty and support.

A: I definitely took the long way in finding my way to my present career. Like I said earlier, I didn't know that I could do this for a living. I had no role models who actually were in the business, so when I finally discovered this world, I was voracious about everything. I was a quick but slow study, if that makes sense.

J: So we can all "grow" into success if we keep at it?

A: When I finally made the decision to follow this path, there was nothing that could change my mind. The "no guarantee" concept was not a deterrent at all. The courage to make

Andrea: When I finally made the decision to follow this path, there was nothing that could change my mind.



the decision in the first place was the hardest part.

T: I agree, Andrea – I believe that persistence is a must.

J: I understand. In my heart, it really isn't a possibility to quit. To express creatively is paramount. That is why we continue.

T: Exactly. Once you've got the love for it, if the love is honest... you're in for life.

A: Exactly.

J: Let's type about post-secondary education: Andrea, did you go to theatre school? (Or study something different?) Tajja, do you plan on attending college or university? Are either of you interested in another career(s)?

T: I'm glad you asked that question – that's a very prominent thing in my life right now. I'm in grade 12, so the past few months have been all about university/college fairs and information nights and the like. I've come to the decision that I'd like to attend the University of Toronto to study English.

J: English?

T: Yes, I have such a love for literature – I spend most of my spare time reading. And perhaps law school afterwards, as a 'backup'.

J: Well why not medical school while you are at it? ;-)

T: Ha ha.

A: I went to school to become an acting teacher. At the time, I still had no idea there was music or acting programs in university. What a bush girl! Once fully entrenched in the drama
(continued on next page)

Tajja Isen and Andrea Menard

– continued from page 9

department, I quit the education program and my real education begun.

J: Acting teacher??

A: Ahhhh, screw the back-up plans!

T: Ha ha.

J: Well, you certainly could teach now, with your experiences...

A: Ha ha! Yes, I have actually taught acting at university!

J: When you are about to perform, do you get nervous? If so, how do you deal with it? You both work in pre-recorded and live situations. In terms of stress, is there a difference?

T: There is definitely a difference – recording is a much more relaxed atmosphere, but the performance rush is irreplaceable! The anticipation before the performance is what makes me nervous, but once I get behind the piano, the focus takes over and the nerves recede.

A: Opening nights are always hell. So no matter what it is – opening night of a play or my first concert of a tour, I get jitters. First day of shooting always gives me the jitters too. But since it has always been there, the jitters I mean, you sort of just work them into your routine. Take a moment off by yourself to breathe, ground, pray, and laugh at yourself!

J: Tajja, what about animation... when the mic is 'on'?

T: The cartoon characters come out to play! There's a great energy in animation as well, which is one of the things I love about it. If you're recording with other people, when the mic is 'on', the craziness begins. Yet, there's always another take, which allows for the relaxed atmosphere.

J: Something I have experienced... when performing live (perhaps only after a few shows have gone by) the nerves have subsided and I can take the time to survey the audience out of the corner of my eye... do you ever do that? Take in the moment, to 'see' the connection between us and the audience...

A: Well, as a singer, it is all about seeing the audience for me. Connection is paramount. In theatre, it depends on the fourth wall. I am always aware of the audience.

T: I absolutely do that! It's something I did a lot when I was in the Toronto production of *The Lion King*. It's always very interesting to observe your audience, and see how engaged they are.

J: Both of you have extensive experience as series leads (Andrea in *Rabbit Fall* and *Moccasin Flats*; Tajja in *Weird Years*, *Atomic Betty* and *Jane & the Dragon*.) How have you balanced your other creative interests and personal lives at the same time?

A: I feel blessed that there is a wonderful balance in my life. Maybe I am creating my life that way or maybe the various areas of my career are dictating to me how my life will go. When the acting gets quiet, the singing seems to flow, and when the singing and acting get quiet, I know I am supposed to be writing. When you hold all of the aspects in your heart with love, they love you back. One thing that helps me keep balanced is walking in nature. Maybe that is why I'm still in Saskatchewan. Travelling a lot sometimes takes a lot out of you and it sure is nice to just come home.

J: But on heavy shooting days, did you miss your music, walking in the woods, finding your family... was it ever tough?

A: On heavy shooting days – which was every day in *Rabbit Fall* – I missed my quiet two-hour long walks. I never miss the other aspects of my career when I'm immersed in one. It completely fills me and focuses my attention until it doesn't anymore.

T: I've also been very fortunate in terms of achieving that balance. With school, things can get a bit crazy, but as long as I get the work beforehand, the academics work out. It takes extra time management and some teacher support, but again, I've been very fortunate.

J: So you get into a groove?

T: Absolutely. I find that family is a built-in balancing factor, too.

A: Yeah, I've never had to balance school and work, that takes a tank of a human, Tajja!

T: Ha ha. Thank you.

J: Andrea, you have a website and you both have MySpace sites. As a performer, do you think having a presence on the web is important?

T: I think it's a very important medium to have your material on, for a couple of reasons – it's great to have a place that people can access your music for reference, and as well, with CD sales nowadays, it's necessary to take advantage of this freaky thing called cyberspace and claim as much of it as we can.

A: Absolutely. So far, I haven't been on a high-profile network that spends millions on advertising, so when someone sees me on television or hears me on the radio, their immediate interest propels them to look me up on the web. Thank goodness they can find me, or I may have lost them.

J: Okay next question is a longish one... Ready?

T: Yep.

J: Tajja, you are part Trinidadian; Andrea, you are Métis... what are your thoughts on the variety of characters we see on the screen? Do they reflect Canadian society? From your auditioning experience, how inclusive do you think the casting process is? Tajja, when you are cast for roles in animation, one would think that ethnicity of the actor wouldn't matter – in your opinion, is that true?

A: Although we could still go further, I think it is changing to be more inclusive. We must give thanks to broadcasters like APTN, that have given time and space to indigenous voices, educating the viewers as well as our own community in the process. As a Métis, mixed-blood woman, I can pass for any character I choose to be, but if a casting director gets the 'Native' in his/her head, I'm in trouble.

T: I am half Trinidadian – my mother was born there. From what I've seen, I think that ethnicities are well-represented among characters, in Canada especially. However, many ethnicities seem to account for a lesser variety of roles – i.e. someone of a particular background may be cast only in certain roles. I can identify with Andrea when a casting director gets a label in their head – I think that's when the casting process becomes affected.

A: I am determined to be cast because I am a watchable, magnetic person on screen, NOT because I'm Métis.

J: Tajja, in animation, what 'colour' are your characters?

T: I've got a whole range – even a purple one. It certainly doesn't affect animation as much, unless they are looking for an accent associated with a specific ethnicity. It's only been on-camera and stage where being bi-racial has had an effect.

J: A question to you, Tajja... Being underage, you must always have guardians working with you on your behalf. Who manages all this for you and how?

T: My dad manages my musical affairs, which is incredible. Both of my parents are very much in support of my pursuing of music, and their guidance is invaluable.

J: Wow, you are very lucky, I think! Do they share the day-to-day business with you or do they keep you focused on your work?

T: They definitely share the day-to-day business with me – it's part of the excitement.

J: Wow, you will be plenty ready to take over one day!

A: I'm always amazed at the different paths, we are destined to lead. I think my biggest lesson was to learn how to do it myself, and of course, I couldn't have begged someone to help me back then. You seem to be destined to find your career early, your challenges will be much different than mine.

T: I am very, very fortunate.

J: Andrea, you appear very self-reliant.

A: Yes, I am very self-reliant. But my time is so booked up now, that I can't possibly do it all. I have completely re-jigged my life in the past year. I've invited in new management and a new agent. New goals means new teammates!

J: You both have been nominated for and won several awards. Is there one in particular that you were most pleased to receive?

A: I was thrilled to be nominated for my first Gemini for both the *Velvet Devil* and *Moccasin Flats* in one year. *Velvet* was my baby and I so wanted the world to notice her!

J: Same year! I didn't realize!

T: I've been honoured to win a Young Artist award (in Los Angeles) for four consecutive years for various animation roles. I was also very honoured to be nominated for an ACTRA Toronto Award two years ago!

J: So any stray thoughts you want to add before we go?

A: I love to be part of our national community of actors. We can be lonely, solitary things, but together we form strong families. Thanks for joining my family today, ladies!

J: Ah, thank you to you both! That is why I do my work here at ACTRA... I get to connect with so many wonderful people!

T: It's been my pleasure. Thank you both very, very much!

J: I wish there was more time! You both are cool and savvy ladies! I encourage readers to check out your websites to hear your great sounds and view some of your work. Thanks so much for chatting with me!

A: My deepest pleasure and thanks.

J: THE END. ■



Tajja Isen is a sought-after animation voice-over actor, having starred in more than 25 cartoons, with title roles including *Atomic Betty* and Jane in *Jane & The*

Dragon. With additional on-camera, stage and extensive TV soundtrack experience, this 17-year-old singer/songwriter/pianist is currently working on her solo debut album. Her talents have been recognized by Yamaha Canada who generously support her performances and recording sessions. The upcoming CD release of her original piano-based rock/jazz music is a co-production with multi-Grammy winning producer/engineer Jimmy Douglass in the U.S. and the well-known Jon Kelly in London, England (Kate Bush, Tori Amos). For more information, visit www.myspace.com/tajja.



Actor, writer and singer **Andrea Menard** is back as Tara Wheaton in the second season of *Rabbit Fall*, which airs on Space and APTN.

The film adaptation of Andrea's one-woman stage play, *The Velvet Devil*, debuted nationally on CBC. It swept 13 awards at the 2008 Showcase Awards and received a Gemini nomination for Best Performance by an Actress. Andrea also received Gemini nominations for her leading role on *Moccasin Flats* and won for Best Ensemble in an Animated Series for *Wapos Bay*. Andrea is also a multi-award winning recording artist who just released her third album, *Sparkle*. She is currently touring a re-mount of *The Velvet Devil* across the country. www.andreamenard.com.



Joanna Bennett is an actor and a sign language interpreter. Sometimes she has the opportunity to combine the two by signing on stage and screen. Jo is enjoying her

second term on ACTRA Toronto Council and her first term on ACTRA National Council. For more information, visit www.jobennett.com.

Change begins with participation

by Raoul Bhaneja

So... I'm sitting at home and I get a call from ACTRA that there is going to be a press conference during the upcoming election and they are wondering if I would attend and show my support. Over the years I'd been asked to participate in a Membership Conference panel on Comedy, to observe during negotiations with producers (during our last round of the IPA) and later to address The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage on Parliament Hill along with our president **Richard Hardacre** and fellow performer **Arlene Duncan**.

I never really saw myself as one of "those guys". You know the ones you see quite often on the inside pages of this magazine, those people who have "profile" but more importantly have

sacrificed hours of their personal time to either speak publicly about issues important to our profession or have worked on council. I'm a guy who has pretty much stood at the side, but when

they had lost a few people due to work (What? Why didn't I have an audition for whatever they got? I can play a 90 year-old woman! Come on!) and that they really needed me there. It was a

When asked, I've agreed to participate and help out in my own modest way... basically by showing up.

asked I've agreed to participate and help out in my own modest way... basically by showing up. The night before the election press conference I got a reminder phone call also stressing that

borderline-desperate plea and despite fighting a cold I decided it was best to head down to the Glenn Gould Studio as they must be really, really hard up this time. Maybe **Karl Pruner** and Richard

FEDERAL ELECTION ACTION 2008 ACTRA gets culture on the agenda



Robert Single

Over 600 enthusiastic artists took to the streets in Halifax. ACTRA Maritimes Vice-President **Sherry Smith** spearheaded the Rally for the Arts: "Art is as essential to our lives as breathing. It surrounds each and every one of us and we all participate. Please VOTE ARTS!"



Janesse Leung

Eric Peterson, as his *Corner Gas* alter ego Oscar Leroy, reads his letter to Stephen Harper about the need for arts funding in Canada at the ACTRA/WGC Toronto rally beside the CBC Broadcast Centre in Toronto.



Michelle Gibson

Raoul Bhaneja captures the media's attention at the ACTRA election press conference.

turned the corner my jaw dropped. If you took the time to announce the total number of Gemini and Genie nominations in that room combined it would well exceed the time permitted at our annual awards orgy we've come to know as the Four Night Gemini.

I was in shock to be in a room with so many artists that were not only "famous" but also who I greatly admired. For a minute I thought it was a mistake, I wasn't supposed to be standing beside the likes of **Gordon Pinsent, Wendy Crewson, Colm Feore, Maury Chaykin, Art Hindle, Martha Burns, Maurice Dean Wint, Leah Pinsent, Tabby Johnson, Jayne Eastwood** (okay maybe it was a *Train 48* reunion) and on and on and on? As I caught my breath and wished *(continued on next page)*

Hardacre couldn't make it so they would just have a video message playing and I would stand on either side of the screen along with another not particularly recognizable ACTRA member like myself.

As I wandered back towards the green room I first saw **Chris Bolton** pacing intently in the hallway rehearsing what appeared to be a statement... on small

index cards. Okay... wait a minute, Chris is here and he's looking prepared... oh ohhh... I was not very prepared at all. What if it was the just two of us! I would look dumb as well as not as handsome! As I got closer I heard a wonderful sound... the dull but warm rumble of more voices... wow, I thought... maybe it's a *Train 48* reunion. Instead as I

ACTRA teamed up with artists across Canada to play an active role in the October federal election campaign. In solidarity, we protested the cuts to arts programs, we got C-10 (the censorship bill) reversed and we put culture on the election agenda.



Bernard Ramos

Mark McKinney spoke on behalf of Canadian artists at the ACTRA/WGC rally in Toronto. On the Conservative government's removal of Bill C-10, legislation that would have denied tax credits for film the government didn't like, Mark said, "This is fantastic news but I don't think it's anything that we should be grateful for. This is like a man who steals your wallet, kicks you in the face and then says 'sorry about kicking you in the face'."



Lois Siegel



Chris Faulkner

Toronto member **Jani Lauzon**: "You'd think the Conservatives would learn from history. The Canadian government tried to censor Aboriginal arts and culture a century ago. Perhaps they haven't noticed that we are still here, as creative as ever?"

Change begins with participation

– continued from previous page

Good Mornings all round I was told that every member at the conference would have a chance to speak from the heart about the issues that were on the table during the election: recent arts funding cuts, lack of drama on television and Bill C-10. The night before the event we were given an unusual gift from Prime Minister Harper who had made his rather infamous comment about “Ordinary Canadians” and their lack of interest in “niche issues” like the arts. Those comments not only energized a room of ACTRA members about to speak to the media but clearly culture

was a player in the election costing the government precious seats in Quebec.

A few minutes later we were all crammed on a small stage in the lobby and as I heard my fellow members speak I was struck by their poignant, articulate and passionate words. It reminded me of being back in Ottawa at the Standing Committee on Canadian Culture (which, by the way, did end up recommending sustained funding for the CBC). There I was, Ottawa boy, the son of two immigrants, my dad a retired Canadian Diplomat and a Peace Activist, standing in the heart of our Parliament

Buildings making the case for Culture. What a trip... the last time I was there was probably on a tour in grade 3. It was clear that some of the MPs, were frustrated that they got stuck with a committee that was talking “culture” and not “defence” or “economy” but I was glad that there were also MPs who were listening and trying to come up with solutions. Later that evening we where joined at dinner by one of our country’s fiercest cultural defenders **R.H. Thomson** and, for my money, a “True Patriot”. When I spoke with “Robert” I was reminded of the years

FEDERAL ELECTION ACTION 2008 – continued from page 13



Lois Siegel



Lois Siegel

ACTRA Ottawa member **Pierre Brault** tells the *Ottawa Citizen*: “All of the parties have paid too little attention to what we are and the stories that we tell. Whose stories are we telling? If we are robbed by that right to do it then we lose something critical, we lose ourselves.”

I realized it was more than lucky to have been asked to participate, it was an honour.

of hard work and lobbying he has done to get cultural issues on the political map in this country. In the days that followed I couldn't help but think that if an actor of his great talent, stature and experience had committed so much energy, on behalf of all of us, I was very

lucky to have even been asked to participate by my association. In fact, I realized it was more than lucky, it was an honour.

So next time ACTRA calls and needs your help, you should consider it... I assure you, you're in fine company. ■



Rene Grosso

Raoul Bhaneja is a Toronto-based award-winning actor, musician, producer, writer and a graduate of The National

Theatre School of Canada. Most recently he starred in *Bashir Lazhar* at The Tarragon Theatre and produced the Gemini nominated BRAVO! project *Hamlet* (solo) a documentary by Jeff Stephenson. He has been an ACTRA member since 1996.

Actors, artists and producers – stand up and take a bow. Your recent protests over \$45 million in arts funding cuts during the national election campaign helped deny Stephen Harper a long-desired majority government.

– *The Hollywood Reporter*



Michelle Gibson

ACTRA National President **Richard Hardacre** with several Canadian stars, addressed national media at a press conference in Toronto: “The economic value of culture and the worth of creative artists is under attack. We’re asking Canadians to find out which of their candidates are the strongest supporters of culture, who will reverse the cuts to cultural programs, and who will stand up for Canada’s creative and economic well-being.”



Mike Burns

ACTRA Saskatchewan members **Michelle Sereda** and **Jack Semple** take to the stage at the ‘This is not a Conservative Party’ event.



Robert Single

Maritimes Councillor **Kelly Peck** and Maritimes Councillor **Bill Carr** chanting “Vote culture. Vote culture. Vote culture. Vote culture.”

Injured on set – are you protected?

Actra Fraternal's new Accident on Set program provides performers with the best protection

by Bob Underwood, AFBS President and CEO

ACTRA has negotiated new

provisions to protect performers working in recorded production in Canada. Both the Independent Production Agreement (IPA) and the National Commercial Agreement (NCA) now require producers of film, television, new media, and commercials to provide accident insurance to performers. Similar understandings have also been reached with the National Film Board (NFB), and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

While every province in Canada has "workers' compensation" legislation which is intended to protect many of its residents when an occupational injury occurs, performers may not be eligible for provincial workers' compensation coverage in a number of provinces.

All performers insured under the AFBS Accident on Set program now have comprehensive protection while working on, travelling to, or travelling from studio or location.

Access to workers' compensation benefits varies from province to province. In some provinces, performer coverage is mandatory. In other provinces, coverage may be voluntary or not available at all, particularly to those performers who undertake 'risk' performances, such as stunt performers. Further, there are usually provincial residency requirements, which exclude non-resident performers from coverage if the engagement is less than two weeks in duration.

Actra Fraternal Benefit Society (AFBS)

– working in partnership with ACTRA and producers – is the proud insurer of a new program called Accident on Set (AoS). All performers insured under the AFBS Accident on Set program now have comprehensive protection while working on, travelling to or travelling from studio or location. The AoS program is endorsed by ACTRA as being equivalent to provincial workers' compensation and has been designed to meet the specific and unique needs of performers. In addition, the full premium cost for the Accident on Set program is paid by producers as required by the ACTRA collective agreements.

How do I know I'm insured?

ACTRA Stewards are responsible for ensuring that producers adhere to the terms of the ACTRA collective agreements. Performers injured while working on productions signatory to ACTRA's agreements are entitled to either provincial workers' compensation (where applicable), or AFBS' Accident on Set program.

Unlike some workers' compensation programs, Accident on Set benefits protect performers during 'risk' performances, or when working on a Canadian production outside your province of residence, or when travelling to or from the set.

What protection is available when an on-set injury occurs?

Provincial workers' compensation programs all differ; and some may not cover performers at all. But when provincial workers' comp programs do cover performers, the benefits provided are intended to compensate for lost income and reimburse paramedical expenses incurred as a direct result of the injury. Additional benefits may be provided when severe injury occurs.

The AFBS Accident on Set program is comparable to, and in some cases provides better benefits to injured performers than provincial workers' compensation. The Accident on Set

website www.accidentonset.com provides detailed information about the program and the performer benefits available.

What do I need to do if I am injured on set?

The immediate and primary focus must be to ensure that appropriate medical or first aid care is provided to you. Accident reports must be filed promptly by the production, the responsible ACTRA steward notified, and the Accident on

AFBS deadlines

by Ferne Downey, AFBS Governor

- Late **April 2009** is the deadline to maintain last year's insurance coverage (bronze, silver or gold). Usually by St. Patrick's Day, you receive your annual Statement of Insurance Benefits by snail mail. The statement tells you what your level of insurance will be for the upcoming year, based upon your earnings. If you fell out of coverage or have lower coverage, you are offered the opportunity to 'maintain your previous benefit level.' This is must-read insurance literature – your options are clearly laid out for you. As I say every year, deadlines in the insurance world are real deadlines. If you are far, far away, phone toll-free in North America **1-800-387-8897** or email benefits@actrafrat.com and make arrangements before the deadline expires.
- **May 31, 2009** is the final deadline for submission of claims for benefit year covering the period March 1, 2008 to February 28, 2009.

Check in at www.actrafrat.com for more details and updates on RSP activity.

The AFBS Accident on Set program is comparable to, and in some cases provides better benefits to injured performers than provincial workers' compensation.

Set program, or workers' compensation board contacted.

Under the Accident on Set program, a first response triage nurse is available by phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide professional guidance and early case management planning. Once the Accident on Set program receives an incident report, the first response nurse contacts the performer and monitors the performer's recovery. Both the first response nurse and an Accident on Set administrator remain available to assist the injured performer, including ensuring that the performer has access to program benefit information.

Performers may be interested to learn that on the first production insured under the AFBS' Accident on Set program, a Toronto stunt performer was seriously injured and was covered by AoS. This claim would have been excluded under Ontario workers' comp (WSIB) – since Ontario WSIB coverage is not available to stunt performers, nor to other performers who are deemed by WSIB after the fact to have undertaken a 'risk performance'.

Toronto Stewards and Branch Representatives across the country have been very helpful in providing support for this program, and UBCP now requires the AoS program for all union performers working on zero budget productions in B.C.

Unlike provincial workers' compensation programs, the first and only objective for AFBS is to settle claims fairly, quickly, and to assist the performer to return to health and to work. ■

ACTRA's new Work Histories on-line

Q: Will the ACTRA "work history" eventually be as good as the AFBS site? I've been having trouble downloading my work history. Perhaps it's a Mac/PC thing?
– Jeff Pangman

A: ACTRA has updated the work history screen to ensure that all users have the same experience, regardless of the computer operating system (Windows, Mac, etc.) and browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, etc.) they use.

Q: What a splendid idea this is – so much fuller than the AFrat sheets, and not on their November to November schedule.

However there are some bugs it seems. I can't get this year's report by defining dates, and when I go the way of choosing the year, I get an unsorted random selection of my gigs.

Not urgent, and doubtless the squirrels are squirreling away with folders full of this sort of comment. Best of luck with the database.
– Peter Messaline

A: To sort dates and columns click on the column titles. The format compatibility issue raised above has been fixed and will resolve the issues you were experiencing.

Thanks to ACTRA members for your generous feedback!

The last *InterACTRA* magazine announced the launch of your new online work history records on ACTRA's Membership System (AMS). Your comments have been helpful.

Every member is encouraged to view your work history, and not just at tax time. If you find an error call ACTRA and ACTRA staff will track it down for you. It's also a wonderful way to keep current with your ACTRA PRS income.

No matter where you are – AMS is available to you. ■



How to view your work history:

To access the ACTRA Membership System (AMS), you need a password. (If you're a Face To Face Online user, you already have one). If you need a password, email: f2f@actra.ca.

- 1 Go to www.actra.ca.
- 2 Choose a role: click on **Member**.
- 3 Enter your username and password.
- 4 Click on log in, select **ACTRA Membership System**.
- 5 Select "view your work history" (you can view your work history info by date range or assessment year).
- 6 To print your work history click on "print".

Ottawa CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

ACTRA Ottawa rounded out its 50th Anniversary celebrations by honouring acclaimed members **Holly Larocque** and **Wayne Rostad** with ACTRA Life Memberships at their gala event on December 4 at the National Arts Centre.

The event was a huge success with more than 130 members, industry guests, and media in attendance along with representatives from ACTRA National, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Actors' Fund of Canada.

MCs **Bill Luxton** and **Katherine Dines** took the crowd for a walk down memory lane reminiscing about ACTRA Ottawa's storied past while keeping them entertained with their witty banter. Life Memberships were presented by National President Richard Hardacre following a short film highlighting ACTRA Ottawa's 50-year history of outstanding performances and a live puppet performance by local puppeteers **Matt Ficner** and **Stephen Brathwaite**.

Holly Larocque's television credits include starring roles in three internationally acclaimed series: *Under the Umbrella Tree*, *Homes by Design*, and the animated series *Teddy Ruxpin*, as well as CBC music specials *Holly Larocque: It's About Time* and *Christmas Holly*.

Wayne Rostad is one of the most-recognized voices and faces on the Canadian landscape. His award-winning CBC television show, *On the Road Again*, has made him a Canadian icon. On stage, he has shared billings and rubbed shoulders with many of the best entertainers in the business.

The official portion of the evening culminated with a presentation of a \$500 donation to the Actors' Fund on behalf of the branch and a matching donation from ACTRA National. The celebration carried on into the evening with live music, fine food, drink, and good cheer.

Chris Cornish
Branch Representative



For Hammond

Life Members **Wayne Rostad** and **Holly Larocque** with ACTRA Ottawa President **Guy Buller**.

Alberta

The ACTRA Alberta Branch Council is pleased to welcome **Tina Alford** to the team as the new ACTRA Alberta Branch Representative. She's familiar with the film, television and digital industry in Alberta, as she spent the last six years with the Alberta Film Commission. Tina is dedicated to the promotion, sustainability and growth of the industry in Alberta. In her role at the film commission, she chaired and sat on a number of committees including: the annual Film and Television Wrap Party, ScreenWriters Initiative, Reel Adventures Movie Maps and more. Tina is excited to start not only promoting Alberta, but Albertans in her role with ACTRA.

Tina recently attended the Doug Blackie Memorial Charity Hockey Challenge at the Olympic Oval in Calgary. Cast and crew from CBC's *Heartland* and *Wild Roses* hit the ice to collect donations for the Calgary Interfaith Food Bank. ACTRA Member **Shaun Johnston** was the enthusiastic captain for the Heartland Mustangs along with cast mate **Jake Church**. ACTRA Members **Steve Byers** and **Adam MacDonald** played for the victorious *Wild Roses* team, The Wild. Fellow ACTRA members **Amber Marshall**, **Graham Wardle**, **Michelle**

Cast and crew from
CBC's *Heartland* and
Wild Roses hit the ice
to collect donations
for the Calgary
Interfaith Food Bank.

Morgan, Sarah Power, Kim Huffman, Clare Stone, Gary Hudson and **Landon Liboiron** were in attendance to cheer for their colleagues. Hundreds of donations were collected for the food bank to help families through the holiday season.



Duval Lang
ACTRA Alberta President

British Columbia

We performers face technological and market changes complicated by ubiquitous attempts to devalue the contribution of our skills and talents at a time of global financial meltdown. What to do? Make common cause with performers everywhere. Only performers will safe guard the well being of performers.

Canadian performers are doing that and our agreements and understandings are better for it. We fully participated in the National Commercial Agreement negotiations and the result was the best that could be hoped for and for the best. We recently ratified our Animation agreement making it as close to parity as we could make it. A level playing field will remain a first principle for the B.C. Branch. The recent UBCP/ACTRA election saw a blend of present E-Board members and new members-elect who will govern our branch for the next three years. We thank the outgoing and welcome the incoming as we move from strength to strength.

At the same time as we prepare to face bargaining of our Master Agreement and bring a new E-Board up to speed, we are moving our address to a more cost effective and efficient office solution and look to the future with optimism and determination.

We were pleased to host the ACTRA National Executive face to face meeting in November where we grew in our ability to understand each other and work together. Here's to a dynamic and performer-friendly 2009.



Howard Storey
President UBCP/
ACTRA & National
Councillor

UBCP's resolution to the B.C. Federation of Labour

by Alvin Sanders



Alvin Sanders, Treasurer-elect of the Union of British Columbia Performers, made a passionate speech on behalf of performers at the B.C. Federation of Labour's 52nd Annual Convention. Here is an excerpt from his address:

Good afternoon Sisters and Brothers,

I am an actor and I represent actors who perform primarily in feature films, TV series, and do voices for animation, radio, and video games. We need your help and this resolution speaks to what we'd like you to do and why we'd like you to do it. We live in a time of celebrity where most people hear the word actor and think of stars who are rich and famous. Less than 10% of the unionized actors in the world fall into that category. These are the people I represent... the doctor that tells the star, "I'm sorry, but you're going to die." We're all the used-car salesmen and the judges. We're the crowd of people standing at the bus stop, and the 200 stunt people that get beat up by Will Smith. We're the babies in the toy and diaper commercials and the wife and husband in the Future Shop and Viagra ads. But we're also the people standing behind you in the Safeway store, the kinda loud parent you met on parent/

We're unionized contract workers who, for the most part, don't make a lot of money.

teacher night. We're mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers... regular people.

We're not necessarily looking to be stars. Everyone who becomes a lawyer doesn't expect to end up on the Supreme Court of Canada. Every delegate to the B.C. Fed Convention doesn't think they're going to be Jim Sinclair some day. We're workers just like you. We're unionized contract workers who, for the most part, don't make a lot of money. Even when I've got a job, I know when it ends. I'm self-employed. No employment security for me.

We actors, the over 90% of us that aren't celebrities or the leads on the TV shows, are getting bullied by our provincial government about how we're allowed to negotiate our contracts. We are getting bullied by the federal government about when (or if) immigration officers choose to enforce the rules we've negotiated into our contracts about when people are allowed to be brought into my country to take a job from me. Being a Canadian actor doesn't mean I'm a second-class citizen in North America. Being a Canadian actor doesn't mean I can be treated disrespectfully. Even if the provincial and federal governments don't understand my job choice, I am a human being... a Canadian citizen... AND I DESERVE RESPECT!!! ■

To read the full submission go to: www.ubcp.com/index.asp?layid=33&csid1=481

ACTRA PRS Minors' Trust

SAVING FOR OUR WORKING KIDS' FUTURES

by Theresa Tova

ACTRA protects the unique interests of minors – a responsibility that your union has always taken seriously. Inspired by *Coogan Law**, ACTRA PRS Minors' Trust ensures that the monies earned by the youth actor are held in trust up to age 18. ACTRA's Independent Production Agreement (IPA) and National Commercial Agreement (NCA) are both designed to ensure that 25% of all of a minor's earnings will be available to the child when they reach the age of majority.

Charlotte Arnold's impression of the trust fund, "...has always been really positive. When I was a lot younger I remember working with a kid who was looking forward to cashing his paycheck and going out on a shopping spree with his parents. I remember thinking it's a good thing they're putting away some of your money because you never want to end up bankrupt before you're even 18."

Charlotte began working in the biz at four years old. After starring in a myriad of commercials she moved on to TV movies and two hit TV series: *Naturally Sadie*, and now *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. A second-year journalism student, she enrolled in university to "do something different." Charlotte was protected by her parents from the business side of things



and she always knew ACTRA protected her money in a minor's trust and "that made me feel safe."

Prior to the establishment of the fund, ACTRA's stewards and talent agents were hearing too many stories about parents using their children's earnings to pay for mortgages or fun family holidays. In B.C. and California, the government administers minors' trust programs. In all provinces other than B.C., ACTRA administers the PRS Minors' Trust through the IPA and NCA. The *raison d'être* of ACTRA is the representation of performers and the promotion of performers'

rights, contractual, statutory or otherwise. As a further example, when it became obvious that actors were being ill-served by the insurance industry, who did not understand the particular needs of artists who are independent contractors, ACTRA created the Actra Fraternal Benefit Society (AFBS) – a resounding social and financial success. ACTRA is accountable to its members and understands their needs.

Open your mail!

Like so many of her young friends, Charlotte wasn't up on who, why or how the ACTRA PRS worked to protect her money. But she remembers the day, not so long ago, when she opened up a regular window envelope from ACTRA PRS and found a cheque representing 25% of her earnings from over the last 15 years, a staggering amount.

Says Charlotte, "I'm pretty sure we got a letter telling us it was coming but nevertheless the day it arrived was sort of out of the blue and now we have to sit down and figure out how to best invest it."

ACTRA PRS provides detailed reports and mails them out semi-annually. Once a minor's earnings reach \$5,000, 25% are remitted to ACTRA PRS. As of today, PRS administers 779 minors' trusts, with a book value of almost \$4,000,000.

So ACTRA youth performers, and parents of youth performers, should you have any questions about the Trust please contact Judy Land at **416-644-1516** or **jland@actra.ca**. *ACTRA PRS Minors' Trust is there for you.* ■



Michelle Gibson

Degrassi cast member and title character in *Naturally, Sadie*, **Charlotte Arnold** speaks out on arts and culture issues.

*COOGAN LAW

The California 'Coogan Law' was enacted in 1939 to protect child performers from financial abuse. Coogan Law ensures that the earnings of a minor are the legal property of the minor and not his or her parents. The law resulted from the experience of silent picture star Jackie Coogan who earned millions as a child, but was left broke at the age of 18 because his parents had squandered his earnings. Coogan is best remembered for his role as Charlie Chaplin's sidekick in *The Kid* and for the title role in *Oliver Twist*. He was the first star to get heavily merchandized.



Award winning actor, writer and singer, **Theresa Tova's** career has gone from Film, TV projects, and the Broadway musical stage to Concert and Jazz venues around the world. This

year Tova toured to Amsterdam, Weimar Germany, Warsaw Poland, Houston Texas, and New York while still serving the ACTRA membership as a National councillor, Toronto's VP internal and ACTRA's Children's Advocate. **www.theresatova.com**



Bob Gunduli

Peter Keleghan to receive ACTRA Toronto's Award of Excellence

Peter Keleghan will walk away with ACTRA Toronto's Award of Excellence at the annual ACTRA Awards in Toronto on Friday, February 20, 2009 at the Carlu.

With four Gemini awards under his belt, Peter is a familiar face for his work on *The Newsroom*, *Made in Canada*, *The Murdoch Mysteries* and *Slings and Arrows*. Peter's cultural activism includes lobbying Ottawa for more Canadian drama and speaking out in support of culture during three elections. Peter Keleghan conceived of and tirelessly advocated for ACTRA Toronto's Creative Arts Savings & Credit Union.

Three juried awards for outstanding performances by male, female and voice talents will also be presented at ACTRA Toronto's gala event. This year's awards will be hosted by **Teresa Pavlinek**. Winners will be posted at www.actratoronto.com. ■

LA AWARD: Sandra Oh receives ACTRA's Award of Excellence

Grey's Anatomy star **Sandra Oh** received ACTRA's Award of Excellence for her contribution to Canada's film and television industry on January 21 at a reception at the Canadian Consul General's residence in Los Angeles. The Ottawa native has won two Genie awards, a Golden Globe and three Screen Actors Guild awards to go with four Emmy nominations. An advocate for Canadian culture, Sandra went off script as the host of the Genie Awards last year to criticize Bill C-10 which would have censored Canadian films. ■



Congrats to our 2008 Gemini Award winners

A celebration of excellence in Canada's English-language television, the 2008 Gemini Award winners include:

- Best Ensemble Performance in a Comedy Program or Series: **Inessa Annie Frantowski, Brooks Gray, Andy King, Rebecca McMahon, Leo Scherman, Morgan Waters**, *Cock'd Gunns: A Taste of Success*.
- Best Performance by an Actor in a Continuing Leading Dramatic Role: **Justin Louis**, *Durham County: What Lies Beneath*.

- Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role in a Dramatic Program or Mini-Series: **Nicholas Campbell**, *The Englishman's Boy*.
- Best Performance by an Actress in a Continuing Leading Dramatic Role: **Helene Joy**, *Durham County, Guys and Dolls*.
- Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Dramatic Program or Mini-Series: **Natasha Henstridge**, *Would Be Kings*.

For a complete list of winners go to www.geminiawards.ca. ■



George Stoubouloupoulos wins the Gemini for Best Host/Interviewer in a Talk Program: *The Hour*.



Photos courtesy of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television.

Natasha Henstridge wins the Gemini for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Dramatic Program or Mini-Series: *Would be Kings*.

APPLAUSE

YOUR UNION
APPLAUDS YOUR
PERFORMANCE

VIGILE 1914-1918 VIGIL: Preserving our Canadian Heritage

ACTRA member **R.H. Thomson** and **Martin Conboy** were co-creators of *Vigile 1914-1918 Vigil*. The electronic tribute to fallen soldiers displayed names of the 68,144 Canadian soldiers who died in battle in the First World War. The Queen

and Duke of Edinburgh helped the London launch with public vigils taking place nightly from sunset November 4 to sunrise on Remembrance Day, November 11, in Halifax, Fredericton, Ottawa, Toronto, Regina and Calgary. ■



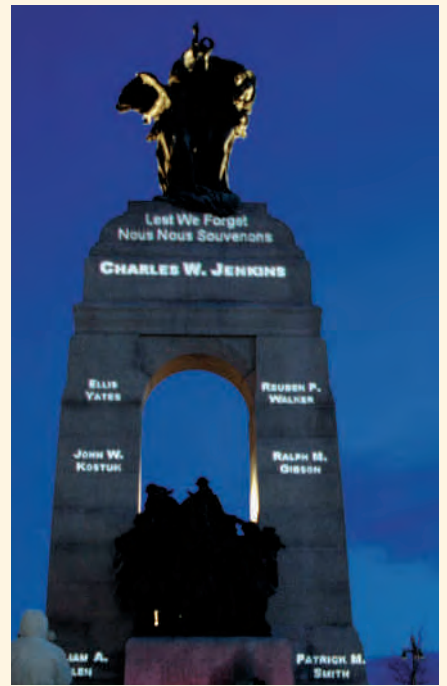
Bernard Remos

Richard Hardacre and Carol Off.

Carol Off 2008 recipient of ACTRA's John Drainie Award

"*Carol Off* is one of our country's finest and most prolific journalists. From her hard-hitting TV documentaries for CBC's *The National*, which have won numerous awards, to the sharp wit and intellect she brings to interviews on CBC radio's *As It Happens*, Ms. Off's journalistic style reveals a deep humanity in the stories she tells about Canadians and people around the world. ACTRA is thrilled to honour Ms. Off with our John Drainie Award," said Richard Hardacre, ACTRA National President.

The Award has been presented since 1968 to a person who has made a distinguished contribution to Canadian broadcasting. ■



Heartland joins TV charity challenge

The cast and crew of CBC-TV's *Heartland* have made their mark raising \$11,700 for the **Actors' Fund of Canada**. The Actors' Fund recently set a new record for the amount of financial aid delivered to industry members in a single year, topping \$500,000. The Fund has helped over 10,000 entertainment industry workers recover from illness, injury or other circumstances causing severe economic and personal hardship since it was founded in 1958. The Fund marked its 50th anniversary in 2008.

For TV Charity Challenge updates, visit www.actorsfund.ca. ■



Courtesy of FOX Searchlight Pictures.

Ellen Page and Michael Cera in *Juno*.

Beavers awarded to outstanding comics

9TH ANNUAL CANADIAN COMEDY AWARDS & FESTIVAL

The 2008 Canadian Comedy Awards were presented in Regina, Saskatchewan. More than 100 comedians performed in 14 shows. **Ellen Page** was declared Pretty Funny Female Actress of the Year for her performance in *Juno* and *Superbad* star **Michael Cera** won the Beaver for Pretty Funny Male Actor of the Year. **Gavin Crawford** received two Beavers – one for Pretty Funny Writing for Special or Episode as part of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and another for Pretty Funny Male TV Performance.

For a complete list of winners go to www.ccavoting.com. ■



Amber Marshall and Graham Wardle posing with *Heartland* fans.

APPLAUSE

Sandi Ross receives Crystal Award

WIFT'S AWARD OF DISTINCTION PRESENTED AT 20TH ANNUAL GALA IN TORONTO

Actor, director and activist **Sandi Ross** was presented Women In Film and Television – Toronto's (WIFT-T) Award of Distinction as testament to her commitment to Canada's entertainment industry. Sandi received a BFA at the University of Minnesota and has been a professional actor for 31 years. In 1994 she served as the President of ACTRA Toronto Performers – the first woman and the first person of colour to hold this elected position. She also sat on arts juries for the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council and the Racial Equity Committee of the Canada Council. Sandi has maintained a dynamic career as an actor with many film and TV credits. She has performed in three seasons at the Stratford Festival and appears on most of Toronto's stages.

Established in 1988, the Crystal Awards celebrate the outstanding achievements of women in Canadian screen-based media.

For a complete list of past winners visit www.wift.com. ■



Sandi Ross with producer, director and journalism professor Dr. Rita Shelton Deverell, presenter of the award.

ACTRA celebrates Rudder's recovery

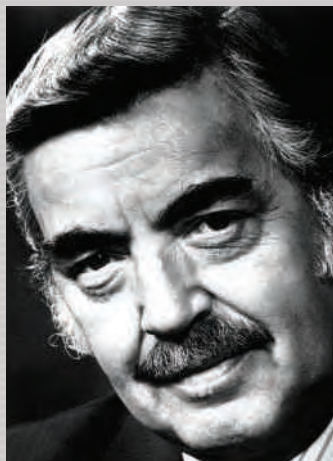


ACTRA is celebrating the home-coming of Montreal member **Michael Rudder** who was shot during November's terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India. Michael had been in the restaurant of the Oberoi Hotel when militants stormed in and shot him three times. After several weeks in hospital, Michael was

able to travel home on December 18 where he was greeted by a jubilant crowd of cheering family, friends and fellow performers at the Montreal airport.

Best wishes from everyone at ACTRA, Michael. We're behind you as you continue your remarkable recovery! ■

FAREWELL



Frederick M. Diehl

Frederick M. Diehl, of Calgary, Alberta, passed away on November 15, 2008. Frederick retired from the CBC after a colourful career in writing, acting and broadcasting. He was born in Cypress Hills, Manitoba. Frederick is survived by his brother Barrie, son Scott, daughter Patti, grandchildren Glenn, Kadin, Nick, Crista, Hayley, Courtney, Kevin and great grandchildren Jordan, Makani, Shantel, Tyler and Troy. Frederick is a recipient of ACTRA's John Drainie Award. ■



Women of Steel inspire Women of ACTRA

Two years ago the USW International

Women's Conference was held in Toronto and an invitation was extended to ACTRA Councillors to participate as observers. It was a generous gesture and many of us went with curiosity and open minds, not at all certain how this would directly relate to our world as actors in Canada. We were absolutely blown away by the passionate, articulate and stirring points of view that cut right to the heart of our lives. We came back to ACTRA all revved up with a deeper understanding of national and international trends and how we could make a contribution as activists.

This past November, the **Women of Steel: Sisters in Global Solidarity National Women's Conference** was held in Vancouver. Again, we were very fortunate to be invited, this time as participants. We spoke on panels, helped facilitate workshops and collectively invented the 'ACTRA Sisters in Solidarity' performances. ACTRA's Women's Committee Chair **Ruth Lawrence** was joined by **Wendy Anderson, Jo Bates, Merilynn Brodie, Ferne Downey** and **Christine Willes**. We are grateful to the brilliant Woman of Steel Sue Milling for including us so warmly.

Stories give us context and champion our causes

ACTRA women can get pretty jazzed up, but this conference totally surpassed our expectations. We listened to the stories of the women workers. Gabriela Barrueta, Helena Taipo, Joni Fraser... our heads hurt... our hearts hurt. This was the first time that we were hearing about them. We also told our stories and shared our knowledge. Stories are powerful and cross borders. They change the way that nations think about themselves and their



Jo Bates, Christine Willes and Merilynn Brodie open the conference with a powerful welcome greeting, the first 'ACTRA Sisters in Solidarity' moment (seated: Mary Lou Scott and Brenda Wagg).

place in the world around them – they give us context, they champion our causes.

Actors are subject to the same depredations as workers in other industries in this country, and like many others we are worried about our ability to continue to work. We face specific challenges in our film and television industry and are under-represented in above-the-line positions – specifically writers and directors. ACTRA's Women's Committee is aware of the need to support initiatives like the Women in the Director's Chair workshop at Banff. We are working hard to get up to speed with the Women of Steel and they certainly have been an inspiration to us. We can help women in other industries too by working together in pursuit of our common goals.

ACTRA is bringing our campaigns on film and TV issues into the labour movement

ACTRA's strategic alliance with USW is in our fourth year. On the surface, what could we and the USW possibly have in common? Lots. ACTRA is bringing our campaigns on film and TV issues into the labour movement and broadening our coalition to protect Canada's cultural sovereignty. The more partners we have in this fight – the better. Steel is a proven leader in partnering with like-minded organizations and has a long, successful history of lobbying governments and campaigning on vital public policy issues. The first year Steel and ACTRA lobbied together on Parliament Hill, we caused quite a stir – it is helpful that we can bring Canadian stars to the table to speak about the important issues.

Our alliance with Steel also enhances our ability to negotiate the best terms and working conditions for our members. Our industry has changed immensely since ACTRA was founded more than 65 years ago. Until recent decades our main employer had been the CBC. Now more than half of our members' work comes from multinational media-conglomerates,



Ferne Downey on the panel “Your voice and your vote make a difference” (with Helena Taipo, Minister of Labour, Mozambique, MP Libby Davies and MLA Rachel Notley).



Ken Neumann, USW National Director for Canada, honours Carol Landry’s appointment as the first woman International VP of USW.



Aissatou Djahate, Director of Programmes, Stephen Lewis Foundation, speaking out on behalf of the Grandmothers Campaign.



Ruth Lawrence leads cheers and chants created from the “Finding our Voice” workshop.



Wendy Anderson, Martha Villeda, Connie Sorio speaking on the panel “Defending Workers’ Rights” (not in the photo, Cath Speight, UNITE).



M’Girl, a remarkable all aboriginal women’s ensemble from Vancouver, closed the conference with their beautiful music.

All photos by Joe da Costa

many headquartered in the U.S. Steel has a solid record of standing up to multinational corporations and is way out in front in terms of understanding the globalization of the economy.

Most importantly, ACTRA and the USW share the same values: dignity and respect for all workers and the right to fair pay and safe working conditions. We have built a strong bond of co-operation.

For our part, ACTRA is viewed as one of the leading experts in negotiating agreements on behalf of self-employed, independent contractors. We also bring our understanding of the value of culture and identity, and how it plays an ever-increasing role in our economy.

We explained the importance of Canadian culture and how it plays into all of our lives as Canadians. That it generates more than 1.1 million jobs and contributes more than \$85 billion to the economy – 7.4% of Canada’s real gross domestic product. How the federal governments have attacked Canada’s cultural foundations, slashed budgets and gutted regulations that ensure space for Canadian

stories. The infamous \$45 million cut in cultural spending that cost Harper Quebec. Silly cuts to the programs that promoted Canadian cultural work abroad! It was seed money. No seeds, no crop.

From the front row we are witnessing the decimation of Canadian production and Canadian stories. Culture is how we communicate – it carries that most precious commodity – our voice

For all of us Canadian workers, the deregulation of our markets has resulted in the flurry of mergers leading to a concentration of businesses in fewer and ever more powerful hands. Powerful hands are shaking other powerful hands. It is harder for us to bargain for better working

conditions and better wages. In our business, we clearly see the weakening of our national fabric. From the front row, we are witnessing the decimation of Canadian film and television production and Canadian stories.

Political service is part of the rhythm of life. We can all stand up, speak up, vote and get politically involved. When we join together to take important stands on the most important issues facing our countries and our unions, individuals, who normally have little political power, gain. That is why we join unions. Why we join committees in those unions. Why unions join with other unions, why we join others across borders to create international movements. We gain the opportunity to combine our contributions with others to gain a greater voice in the political process and bring about social change. We reap what we sow. ■

To learn more about ACTRA’s Women’s Committee, please contact committee chair Ruth Lawrence at rlawrence@actra.ca and visit www.actra.ca. For more conference info, please visit www.usw.ca.

Bargaining update

by Marit Stiles, Director of Research

Today we have veritable agreement ratification frenzy at ACTRA. In November and December, many ACTRA members – those eligible to vote – received ratification ballots for the National Commercial Agreement (NCA), the CBC Agreement and the Local and Regional Addendum to the NCA.

Times change. When I last reported on the status of bargaining, ACTRA's commercial bargaining team was buried deep in negotiations, steeped in costing exercises, and without a deal. Meanwhile, on the CBC front, management continued with their endless delays and postponements, after three long years of bargaining.

Commercial terms

Today, with the overwhelming support of the membership (96.6% of members eligible to vote supported ratification) we have a ratified Commercial Agreement that provides a significant rate increase of 7.5% (delivered as a 2.5% increase during each year of the agreement), an 8-hour work day

for more overtime earnings, new accident-on-set insurance for all performers, and strong curbs on non-union production.

With the overwhelming support of the membership we have a ratified a Commercial Agreement that provides a significant rate increase, an 8-hour work day for more overtime earnings, new accident on-set insurance for all performers, and strong curbs on non-union production.

The new terms also include provisions that are designed to encourage more large-cast productions, repatriate commercial shoots, close loopholes that currently keep jobs out of union hands, and result in more union new media work.

Terms of settlement were also reached for Addendum No. 1, the Local and Regional Addendum. This addendum to the NCA applies to commercials produced to advertise products and services that are

available on a local or regional basis, and broadcast on a local and regional basis only.

In addition to the general increases, new media opportunities and new accident-on-set insurance received in the NCA, the addendum settlement includes a reduction from 1½ minutes to 1 minute of finished commercials that may be produced in a basic work session, and improved wording for a performer engaged to record tags.

Here in the Research Department at ACTRA, we'll be very closely monitoring

ACTRA's CBC Negotiating Committee



Stephen Waddell
ACTRA National
Executive Director
& Chief Negotiator



Thor Bishopric
Co-Chair, Montreal



David Calderisi
Toronto



Catherine Disher
Toronto



Kyra Harper
Toronto



Ray Landry
Toronto



Richard Hardacre
ACTRA National
President and
CBC Negotiating
Committee Chair



Nigel Bennett
Halifax



Jackson Davies
Vancouver



Soo Garay
Toronto



Brooke Johnson
Toronto



Karl Pruner
Toronto

the effect of the Commercial Agreement changes, particularly the impact of the temporary and experimental rates for commercials made for new media that expire six months prior to the end of the contract.

We will be watching to see if work opportunities in new media increase with the introduction of these experimental rates, and how they work for performers on set, in the real world.

Retroactive payment for performers in CBC productions!

On the CBC front, while it has been a long road to arrive at this point, the deal that has finally emerged also represents significant gains for performers. These include: rate increases of over 15% delivered as general increases of 3% per year over a five-year term fully retroactive to July 1, 2005; an additional 1% increase in CBC's insurance contributions; much-improved provisions covering new media, retroactive to 2000 and stronger work rules including equal opportunity language.

New media retroactivity to 2000, along with new media terms that are among the strongest of any ACTRA agreement, amount to groundbreaking achievements. In the last issue of *InterACTRA* we thanked the Commercial Negotiating Committee for all their hard work. This time, let's raise a glass to the exceedingly patient and strong CBC Negotiating Committee for a major achievement.

Up next

Now is the time to start turning our attention to the next round of Independent Production Agreement (IPA) bargaining. While the IPA expires on December 31, 2009, bargaining could commence as early as June 2009. All branches will carry out consultations with performers, asking what works and what needs improvement. Lend your voice and experience to this process. We need to know what is important to you, what your priorities are for this round, and what you are experiencing on set.

Another busy bargaining year lies ahead. Check out www.actra.ca for updates and information. ■

Contract Q&A

Need clarification on a contract query? Agonizing over an agreement? Puzzled over payment? Send your questions about how ACTRA's collective agreements work for you to interactra@actra.ca and ACTRA's crack team of collective agreement experts will provide the answers you need.

Q: I have been booked as a Principal Performer to shoot three 'new media' commercials in one day. They tell me it will be a 10-hour shoot not including the meal break. What will I be paid and what will my residual fees be? The commercials will each be on the Internet for six weeks.

– P.L. from Montreal

A: The newly-ratified National Commercial Agreement includes revised terms for commercials made for new media. Under these terms you will be compensated for the shoot day as follows: \$640 for the first spot, and \$320 for each of the second and third spots. The 2 hours of Additional Work Time (AWT) will be paid out only once, at \$108 per hour. Your total fee for the shoot day will amount to \$1,496. If the commercials are used, the residual fees will be paid based on 50% of the basic session fee. For the first commercial, the use fee will be \$320 and for each of the second and third spots, the use fees will be \$160. Your total residual fee for 6 weeks use will be \$640.

Q: I worked on a commercial that was made to go on a website. They paid me a session fee of \$640 for an eight hour day and a residual fee of \$224, to cover a cycle for 4 weeks of use (35% of \$640). I get that... but now that 4-week cycle period is over and the commercial is still on the Internet! What should I be paid?

– J.G. from Toronto

A: If the commercial is used beyond the original period of use, your fee must be upgraded to cover the extended use period. This is done by paying the percentage difference between the initial residual fee and the fee for the extended use period, up to a maximum of 100% of the session fee for one year's use. So, if the extended use period is one year, you would be paid an additional residual fee of \$416 (65% of \$640).





CREATIVE ARTS
SAVINGS & CREDIT UNION



by Stephen Waddell, National Executive Director

IN BUSINESS FOR PERFORMERS

I joined my first credit union back in 1984. In that year, I left ACTRA where I had been working as Assistant General Secretary since 1972. I had been recruited by the Screen Actors Guild to work as Assistant Hollywood Executive Director. And in December 1984, I moved my family to L.A. When I got my first paycheque from SAG, I went to the Bank of America close to the SAG office, and learned that I couldn't open a bank account without a California driver's licence. And I couldn't get a California driver's licence without a valid social security card (Catch 22). I was a nobody. I had no U.S. credit rating. Hearing my plight, one of my colleagues at the SAG office suggested that I join the AFTRA/SAG Credit Union, and called the credit union office to set up an appointment for me. I walked into the Credit Union office, was welcomed by the staff who quickly signed me up, took my \$50 minimum deposit, and assigned me an account into which I could deposit my paycheque. From there I was able to get the rest of my documentation in order, get a driver's licence, and continue with my life. When I needed a car loan, I went to the AFTRA/SAG Credit Union, and they gave me a car loan – without any fuss.

A couple of months ago, I made a substantial personal investment in shares in another credit union – the first Canadian English-language entertainment industry credit union – the Creative Arts Savings and Credit Union. An initiative of ACTRA Toronto, Creative Arts has now achieved its required capitalization, and opens its virtual doors on January 26, 2009. Creative Arts will join the ACTRA family of member service providers that includes:

- ACTRA – our union;



Jag Gundu

Maurice Dean Wint, Wendy Crewson, Gordon Pinsent and Peter Keleghan, along with fellow ACTRA Toronto performers, advocated for ACTRA Toronto's Creative Arts Savings & Credit Union.

- ACTRA Performers' Rights Society – our royalties and rights administration arm; and,
- AFBS – our insurance and retirement provider.

Because credit unions in Canada are provincially regulated, Creative Arts will initially be restricted to providing services to Ontario-resident (unincorporated) performers and others in the entertainment industry (incorporated performers can join regardless of residency). To comfort (unincorporated) performers who are resident outside of Ontario, it is the declared intent of the Creative Arts' Board to open membership to outside-Ontario performers as soon as possible. Creative Arts will be providing a full-range of financial services for performers and others in the entertainment industry, such services including

savings and chequing accounts, credit cards, loans, mortgages, financial planning advice, and wealth management services. At Creative Arts, saying "I am a performer" will be the start of a conversation, not the end of one. And as access to credit withers as a result of the global financial meltdown, Canadian performers will now have an opportunity to access a loan or mortgage through a financial institution dedicated to performers rather than profits.

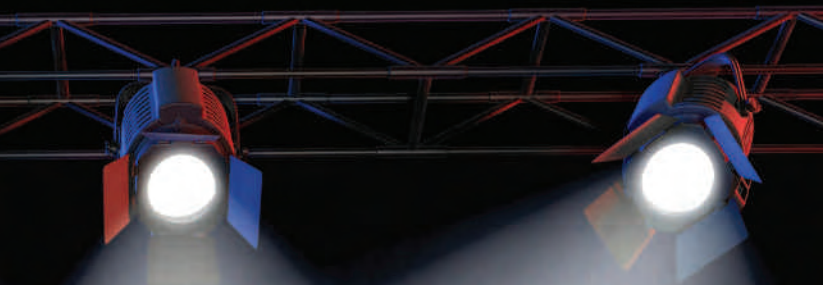
Join me and the host of ACTRA members and staff who have already made an investment in the start-up of our very own financial institution – join Creative Arts as soon as it opens its virtual doors, and make deposits into your new credit union account.

Welcome Creative Arts into the ACTRA family of services. Share in our success. ■

Lights! Camera! Discounts!

Spotlight on ACTRA Members discounts

For more information or if you have questions please contact: Christine Webber MAP Administrator at 416-489-1311 ext 4005 or via email cwebber@actra.ca.



CLOTHING

- 15% off** Deuce Custom Ink
- 20% off** Envers: Yves Jean Lacasse
- 15% off** Europe Bound/Hikers Haven
- 15% off** Fluevog Shoes
- 15% off** Higher Ground
- 15% off** Jeanne Lottie

RESTAURANTS & FOOD

- 15% off** Biagio Ristorante
- 15% off** Daniel Chocolates Belge
- 10% off** L'Aromate
- 15% off** The Nutty Chocolatier
- 10% off** The Specialty Gourment

PERSONAL HEALTH AND FITNESS

- 25% off** Absolute Spa
- 10% off** Alvaro Salon
- 20% off** Annosa
- 10-15% off** Men's Power Spa
- 15% off** Bikram Yoga
- 10% off** Moksha Yoga
- 25% off** Pro Gym

TRANSPORTATION

- Join for \$99** Autoshare
- \$30 a year** Zipcar
- Emerald Club** National Car Rental
- Best Rate + 5% off** VIA

For more discounts please go to www.actra.ca.

Contact ACTRA...

ACTRA National Office

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EMAIL: prssrd@actra.ca (SRD-SOUND RECORDING DIVISION)
www.actra.ca

Union of B.C. Performers

400 – 1155 West Pender St | Vancouver BC | V6E 2P4
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EMAIL: info@ubcp.com | www.ubcp.com

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EMAIL: newfoundland@actra.ca | www.actra.ca/stjohns

by Bruce Dinsmore

faces you'd love to slap

➤ **As with so many things in this** business it began with a phone call from my agent. "They want you to audition for *Têtes À Claques*, they're doing it in English." I replied, "Holy crap."

Têtes À Claques, for those of you who live outside of Quebec or those of you in Quebec who dwell in caves, is nothing short of a phenomenon. An internet comedy sensation the likes of which has never been seen here in La Belle Province, or anywhere else in Canada for that matter – but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Têtes À Claques translates roughly as 'smackable heads,' or 'faces you'd love to slap.' It's a unique blend of live action and stop-motion-inspired computer animation where human eyes and lips are superimposed on Barbie dolls and animal figures with eye-catching absurd results. The original French version averages over a million hits a month, and is one of the first original Canadian productions created for the net.

It's the brainchild of Michel Beaudet, who in addition to dreaming up the wacky world of *Têtes À Claques*, voices all of the characters, male, female, and otherwise.

Beaudet had been working for an ad agency here in Montreal but grew frustrated with deadlines, nagging clients and the limits the ad biz placed on his creativity. So, armed with his wit, imagination, and his buddies Hugo Caron and Simon Parizeau for technical support, he headed down to his basement, set up a camera, had a bit of fun incarnating two farting frogs, and e-mailed the result to 50 friends. The rest, as they say, is history.

I arrived at a non-descript house in the suburb of Boucherville, 20 minutes south of Montreal, early one morning in April. My agent had said that everything was very hush hush surrounding this new phase of the project, and indeed all was quiet. "Odd place for an audition," I thought. I was met by someone at the side door, and I thought "It's him! This is the guy!" Having been an unabashed *Têtes À Claques* addict since my very first viewing of *Les Grenouilles* (*The Frogs*), years prior, I was sure that I would



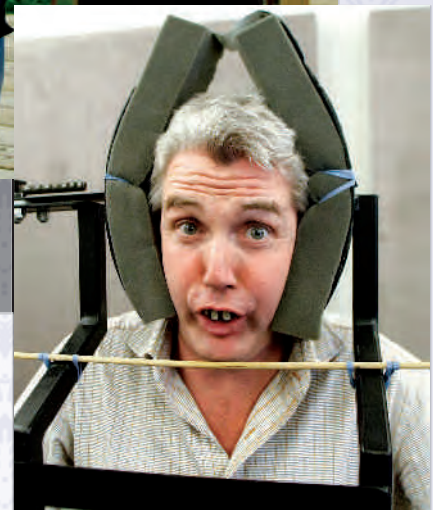
Photos by Phil Carpenter, The Gazette (Montreal).

Bruce with TAC.tv English adapter Howard Schrier and creator Michel Beaudet.

recognize the eyes, mouth, and voice of their creator anywhere.

Not so much apparently. Bernie (one of the crack computer animation whizzes) let me in and must have wondered why I was staring so intently at his mouth. When I finally DID meet Michel, we chatted as he washed dishes in the kitchen and agreed to lend me his razor so I could shave off my winter dog-walking beard for the (duh) on-camera audition. After bashing through several scripts and several characters to the seeming amusement of all present, Michel outlined the scope of the project and asked if I planned on leaving the country. He's a funny guy. I left in a bit of a daze trying not to count my chickens, but with the undeniable feeling of: "Wow. It really DID go that well."

Any actor will tell you that the audition is the easy part. It's the waiting that's unbearable. "It's in the audition angel's hands now," someone said to me. I stifled the urge to smack that person. Then a week later came the news on the CBC arts



Wearing false teeth, Bruce demonstrates the use of the "guillotine."

report that English stand-ups from far and wide were auditioning, and that the search was on. Ouch. So much for hush hush.

I've always thought that there are two types of actors, and that both are equally deluded. Those that think they'll never get anything, and those that think they'll get everything. The truth of course, as it always does, lies somewhere in the middle, but being as I am of the get-everything school, I just couldn't let it go. It wasn't just that the project would be a blast. There were also potential bragging rights with my wife's francophone family, not to mention the "cool factor" with my five-year

my TAC.TV adventure

old son. And with the times being what they are in our business, landing a potentially steady gig (as steady as any ever are) made for anxious days and sleepless nights.

I was on a conference call with the Commercial Negotiations Committee when an odd number popped up on my cell. The call display said "Michel Beaudet." Score one for the deluded guy.

The weeks that ensued, however, were even more fraught and tense as it became apparent that we (ACTRA, Michel, my intrepid agent Jean-Jacques, and myself) had all found ourselves on new and largely unexplored ground. Was it live action?

clips verbatim. After word got out that I was doing TAC.TV, I think our DOP started trying a little harder to keep me in focus. The characters and clips are not just wildly popular here in Quebec, certain expressions transcend regular language and have actually entered the Quebecois lexicon. Know what a Papoutte is? If you lived here, chances are you'd know it's a made-up *Têtes À Claques* word for little kid. Unbelievable!

So now the challenge was to do justice to Michel and his team's million-hit-a-month sensation. I found myself with the rare privilege of input into the final versions of Howard Schrier's English adap-

How do you cram everything that's going on in the character's often insane situation into just your eyes and mouth without your head exploding!? Michel, master of the art that he is, has always told me to avoid the trap of falling into caricature and 'cartoon,' (as counter-intuitive as that may seem.) And he's right. As with most everything in our craft, the key seems to be... drum roll please... keeping it real. You can check us out at www.tac.tv as we keep flatulent frogs, burping Martians, mischievous moose, and a host of other wacky folk, as real as we can. And hopefully real freakin' funny. ■

So with my eyes open wide and my head in the guillotine, I soon discovered that being a disembodied talking head ain't all that easy...

Original voice? Is it paid per click? Our new IPA agreement was intended to accommodate exactly this kind of project, but exactly how would it work? If you ever find yourself in this position **CALL YOUR BRANCH**. I sat down with Raymond Guardia, my Regional Exec., and Claire Martell, our film and TV Steward, and had a great meeting. They held my hand, answered questions, listened to concerns and were completely straight up. Nice.

So it was official. I was the English face and voice of the English version of *Têtes À Claques*. I'll say it again. Holy crap. During some recent film work I became more and more aware of how my mostly French speaking crew was constantly quoting

tations of the original scripts. "Man-boobs he should say man-boobs," I said. "And this other guy would be hilarious as a Brit." "We love it," they said. Ahhhh bliss. Input, AND silly accents... actor heaven.

So with my eyes open wide and my head in the guillotine, I soon discovered that being a disembodied talking head ain't all that easy. Because each character is filmed separately but for the entire length of the clip, you are ALWAYS in close-up, the tiniest blink or facial tick writ large. Technical considerations abound, eyes open wide at all times, no over-blinking, watch that the gums on the teeth don't show, three or more eye lines at a time... etc. In a word, it's intense.



Bruce Dinsmore was born in Vancouver, but is proud to have based his career in Montreal after attending The National Theatre School here in 1988. He works on

stage, in film and TV, and in studios big and small. He recently had the pleasure of serving on ACTRA's NCA Bargaining Committee, and thoroughly enjoyed being in the company of such dedicated and intelligent folk. Bruce now resides in beautiful Hudson, Quebec, with his wife, son, and "bump" who is expected sometime in April.



ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FARCE WRAPS IT UP

Dear Friends,

When we started doing improv comedy together (**Roger, Don, Luba** and **John**), a long time ago, we wondered how long we'd be able to have fun before we had to get real jobs. Then we started *Air Farce* on CBC Radio and wondered how long it

would last. Maybe two years? Maybe five? Then, 20 years later, we started *Air Farce* on CBC Television and hoped it might last for maybe three years. So, for 35 years we've known that one of these days, we'd do our final show.

We've had a terrific career with the great privilege of being able to entertain

our fellow Canadians, make fun of Canadian passions and pastimes, and take a poke at Canadian politicians.

We thank you for your support and your laughter, and we thank our tremendous production team for contributing their remarkable talents to every episode.

It's been fun, and it's not over yet. ■



2007-08 cast,
left to right: Alan
Park, Roger Abbott,
Jessica Holmes, Don
Ferguson, Penelope
Corrin, Luba Goy
and Craig Lauzon.

Russ Martin

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