

Int'l actor unions to weigh globalization

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By Etan Vlessing

TORONTO -- International English-speaking acting unions will gather in Toronto this weekend to discuss how to protect movie and TV performers in an age of growing media globalization.

Stephen Waddell, national executive director of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), host of the Saturday-Sunday gathering, said the international unions, including the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, will look at bolstering the ability of unions to protect performers on international productions by setting minimum standards for fees and workplace conditions.

With runaway production in mind, the unions are especially concerned that global media conglomerates are sidestepping performer agreements by shooting outside their home markets.

"Given that the entertainment business has become a world business, the unions have to respond and come together to discuss how they can mutually protect the rights of performers in this global production environment," Waddell said Wednesday.

Also taking part at the conference is the British Actors Equity Assn., the New Zealand Actors Equity, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance in Australia, and members of the International Federation of Actors.

Traditionally, performer contracts and terms for fees and workplace conditions emphasize domestic movie and TV markets.

But with continuing media globalization and movie and TV product increasingly being financed by the United States, Europe, Japan and other nations, performer unions want to protect their members when they work at home and abroad on productions by transnational media conglomerates, Waddell explained.

The English-speaking actor unions want to ensure that a member's image is protected from unauthorized use, and that actors receive proper fees and residual payments when their work is broadcast outside their home country.

The international performers unions first discussed global protection of their membership late last year during a meeting in New York to discuss SAG's extension of Rule One, which aims to make sure that U.S. unionized actors avoid producers not signed to a SAG contract.

"We support the idea of SAG members exercising jurisdiction over their own members when working outside the U.S.," Waddell said. "This would ensure SAG members don't work non-union in Canada."