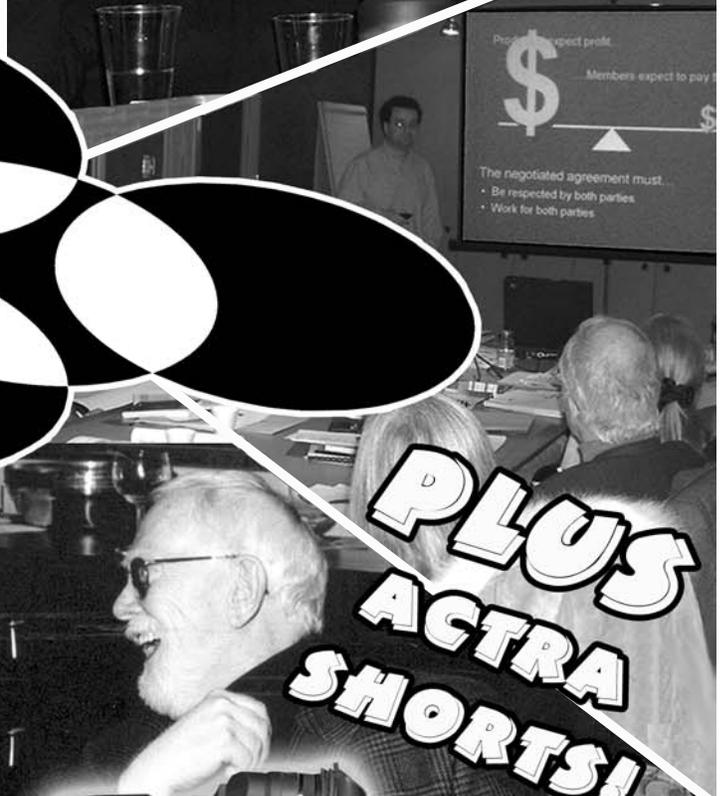


a magazine for ACTRA Montreal members

# Grapevine

winter 2002



**PLUS  
ACTRA  
SHORTS!**

**GIANT SIZED  
COMMUNITY  
BUILDING  
ISSUE!**



# a message from the ACTRA Montreal Branch Council

Dear Colleagues,

By now, all ACTRA Full Members across the country have received a proposal for a dues increase package and a referendum to vote on that proposal. The ACTRA Montreal Branch Council is unanimously recommending that the proposed dues increase package be supported by the membership. This support is critical if we are to continue doing what we're doing and face the significant challenges that lie ahead.

The reason we have a problem - and the reason that we're coming to you for support - is that too much of our funding comes from very precarious sources; producers and non-members.

When production levels go down, producers pay less in ACTRA Administration Fees. Plus, the more successful we are in putting our members to work through "The Opportunity Project", the less ACTRA receives in Non-Member Work Permit Fees.

And so we are coming to you - the member - to ask for your support.

We need to increase our dues so that we can continue doing the things that make us proud to be ACTRA members - the things that make ACTRA Montreal the best Branch in the country and a leader within ACTRA. Initiatives like providing better service to the members and "The Opportunity Project" - where we fight for jobs for members every day - have been developed here and later adopted across the country.

We also need to increase our dues so that we can keep up with the challenges that come from our increasingly complex industry. We need;

- Stronger research when we go into negotiations.
- More lobbying and public policy to fight for Canadian production.
- Tougher residuals collections at PRS.

We haven't come to you in over twelve years, and if approved by the membership, the proposed increases would only cover the cost of inflation over that period. We hope that ACTRA has gained your confidence by fighting for your rights. We hope that you will agree to pay a little more to maintain and improve on our achievements.

Thank you,

The ACTRA Montreal Branch Council.



*W. H. H. H.*  
*[Signature]*  
*Maria Bucher*  
*[Signature]*

*[Signature]*  
*Helen King*  
*Pierre Lenoir*  
*Don Jordan*  
*Suzanne Almond*

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# a letter to the Grapevine...

On the cover of your summer issue we see a corpse and the headline: "Fearing the Demise of Canadian Culture." Inside that same issue we discover a Cultural Manifesto (am I alone in finding the very word "manifesto" scary?) that declares noble sentiments about promoting film and TV production in Canada, then puts forward a number of misconceptions about the present to justify dubious plans for the future.

So let me offer an alternative point of view.

Free trade is a good thing. Good for Canada, good for the world. The **World Trade Organization** exists to liberalize commerce among countries and increase prosperity for everyone - and yes, by and large, that's what it does.

There is no "global monoculture" sweeping over Canada or anyplace else. Personally, I like the idea that humans around the globe might someday see themselves as part of a single culture, sharing a common heritage that binds us together. Then I open my newspaper and realize that day is far, far away.

The corporate giants of the media industry are no great threat to the budding creators of this country or any other. On the contrary, those giants - **Kirsch, AOL Time Warner and Vivendi Universal**, among others - are bleeding, some of them to death, of the thousand cuts inflicted by the smaller, nimbler players in a digital world that has changed radically in a generation and has plenty of changing still to do.

The last thing the Canadian film and TV industry needs is a bossy government telling distributors and broadcasters what they can and can't put on their screens, or prescribing yet another set of rules defining what it means to be Canadian. We've been playing that game since the 1970's. It's demeaning and counter-productive.

Yes, public money should continue to fund film and television. But the fewer strings attached, the better. I believe the current paucity of English-language dramatic production in Canada is a phase: we're at the low point of a cycle that turned downward around the time the **Cinar** scandal erupted. Things will look up over the next couple of seasons.

But even if I'm wrong, even if some kind of long-term decline is affecting our national production sector, a solution by government decree - which is essentially what this Manifesto talks about - seems like a hamfisted response, as doomed to fail as every other culture-by-law scheme ever devised.

Canadian culture has nothing to fear. We ACTRA members know that. We know creative fire is a delicate thing. It burns less brightly in the presence of rule-makers and slogan-spouters. Enthusiasm fuels it. Pessimism dims it. But we know better than anyone that nothing, nothing can extinguish it.

So let's stop invoking the bogey of cultural demise. Let's (please) go easy on the manifesto stuff. Let's talk instead about better incentives for first-time producers; about new and bigger development programs for screenwriters and directors; about strategies by which ACTRA itself can get the creative fire burning brighter in cost-effective, innovative ways.

A lot of ACTRA members have shown admirable passion as they confronted the question of how to reinvigorate our production industry. I applaud them. I urge them now to turn their focus away from groundless fears, toward hopes - real, concrete hopes - of a future in which Canada's artists get all the recognition they deserve, here and across the world.

Fraternally,

**Arthur Holden**  
ACTRA Montreal member



ACTRA Montreal member,  
Arthur Holden

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Thor Bishopric

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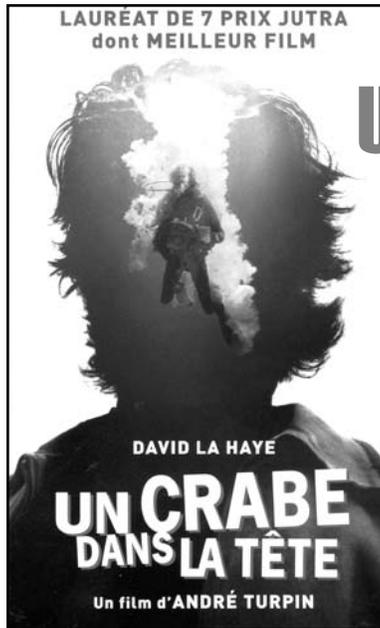
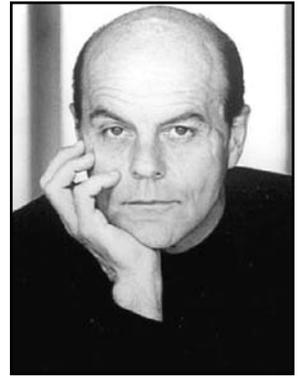
Arden Ryshpan, Yasmin Salih,

Gary Saxe

# Congratulations...

to ACTRA Montreal members **Michael Ironside** (the Last Chapter), **Céline Bonnier** (The Last Chapter), **Michel Forget** (The Last Chapter), **Jean Marchand** (Trudeau) and **Michael Gurman** (Tales From the Neverending Story) on their nominations at the 2002 **Gemini Awards**.

More than 100 members across the country were nominated this year and 27 members won awards at the 17th annual Gemini Awards, celebrating excellence in television production in Canada.



## Un Crabe dans les Oscars?

A Canadian selection committee of 24 industry players, led by **Telefilm Canada**, and including our very own **Terrence La Brosse Ross** (see last ish!) have chosen **Andre Turpin's** French-language "**Un Crabe dans la Tête**" (Soft Shell Man) as Canada's official entry for **Best Foreign Language Film** at the 2003 **Academy Awards**. "Soft Shell Man," a drama about an underwater photographer, stars **Isabelle Blais**, **Emmanuel Bilodeau**, **Chantal Giroux** and ACTRA Montreal member **David La Haye** and premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival.

## Thank you...

to Assistant Branch Representative **Micheline Russo** for thirty years of hard work and dedication to the ACTRA Montreal branch. In recognition of her 30th anniversary at ACTRA, the Montreal Branch Council presented Micheline with a gift at the 2002 Annual General Meeting.



## Actor's studio...

Audition facilities, rehearsal space and sound booth. The ACTRA Actor's Studio is ready for the members (and check out that sweet camera!). If you need to reserve some time in the space, just call the ACTRA office at 514.844.3318.



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a message from  
the president...

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Dear Members,

We need to be more than what we are. We need to be more than that which the government and the film and television industry in Canada perceive us to be.

Don't get me wrong; there's no shame in being an artist. It's a noble calling and a vital profession. There's also nothing wrong with being a performers' union, 20 000 members strong. We need those kinds of numbers in the face of shifting priorities and changing attitudes from indifferent government bodies and single-minded industry players.

The counter-productive policies, lacklustre incentives and fiscal apathy that have drastically reduced indigenous Canadian television and film production have reinforced what many of us had been feeling for a long time: we need to take matters into our own hands.

**The Writer's Panel** that took place in the fall was an important event for our membership: attendance was high and the interest in creating our own work seems greater than ever. I'm sure that similar panels for directors and producers would draw the same or greater numbers.

**The Member Initiated Program** and the **ACTRA Shorts** competition, announced at our most-recent AGM, have given us even more opportunities for creative expression and divergence. The recently-opened Member's studio and accompanying audio-visual equipment are just some of the tools now at our disposal.

I have had several one-on-one conversations with members who have taken (or are about to take) the initiative to try to make something happen for themselves (and, in many cases, for several of their colleagues as well). A reliance on the will and whimsy of others can often be a lonely and discouraging wait.

Who better than Canadian actors to take up the mantle of creative expression? For sixty years, ACTRA members (under one acronym or another) have been the vanguard, the conduit and the reflection of contemporary Canadian culture. We are intimately acquainted with several important aspects of this industry: its strengths and weaknesses; its flashes of brilliance and moments of great frustration; its rigours and its surprising adaptability.

By virtue of the simple definition of what we do, performers understand the collaborative process of artistic creation better than anyone. True, we often reap the benefits when it works, but we can also suffer the loss when it goes wrong. But we, unlike too many producers and distributors in this country, take the risk. We thrive on it. It's part of being an artist: putting your best out there, win or lose.

Perhaps the CRTC didn't mean to issue it, but there's an implied challenge in the air: if broadcasters, producers and distributors are less interested in telling our stories, who's going to do it?

ACTRA Members are already at work on the answer.

Happy holidays,

In solidarity,

Matt Holland



ACTRA Montreal Branch President



Season's Greetings

from The Grapevine

# short & SWEET

## The Member Initiated Production Agreement

Members want to work on their own productions. Some want to gain valuable experience as actors. Some want to develop their skills in other key creative areas like writing and directing. Others simply want to produce - and with the general unavailability of Canadian producers in Montreal these days, why not make your own film?

You've asked ACTRA to make it possible to work on independent productions. We heard you.

The new **ACTRA Member Initiated Production Agreement** is designed to stimulate the desire of members to come together and create original works of art without having the financial resources to pay established daily fees to performers.

MIP allows both members and non-members to work on projects - sharing in the ownership of the final product through a percentage that each production team decides amongst themselves.

### Some key points under the MIP agreement:

- Individuals working on each project form a Limited Partnership
- The Limited Partnership determines each individual's share of ownership (by percentage)
- ACTRA members must retain at least 55% ownership
- No individual ACTRA member may retain more than 60% ownership
- No individual non-member may retain more than 40% ownership
- PRS retains 5% ownership
- ACTRA must approve all projects
- Performers DO NOT receive a credit for roles in MIP productions

## the ACTRA Montreal Short Film Festival

With the new Member Initiated Production agreement available to encourage our members to produce their own films, what better than a film festival to showcase some of those creative juices.

ACTRA Montreal is proud to announce the first annual **ACTRA Shorts** competition - a short film festival for ACTRA Montreal members. How do you make an ACTRA Short? Easy. On your own, or in a team, members fill out an application, submit it with your script for approval and shoot. Finalists will be chosen from submissions and a jury will then choose a winner. Finally, to coincide with **ACTRA's 60th Anniversary** celebrations next year, the shorts will be shown at the 2003 Annual General Meeting and a prize will be awarded to the winning film. It's a great way to express yourself, have some fun and celebrate 60 years of ACTRA.

We'll provide team members with a professional miniDV camera (on loan, of course) and we can even hook you up with a student editor if you aren't already editing your own projects at home!

### Some of the rules:

- All films must be produced under the MIP agreement
- No films over 6 minutes will be accepted
- Films must be in English or have English subtitles
- To qualify for Official Competition: all ACTRA Short films must contain at least one shot of the **ACTRA Shorts**, a pair of ACTRA boxers that will be given to each team

**Applications must be submitted by February 1, 2003**

**Films must be submitted by July 1, 2003**



For more information about MIP, contact **Molly Ann Rothschild** at 514.844.3318  
To obtain an **ACTRA Shorts** application form, contact **Randy Duniz** or visit the website ACTRA Montreal at [www.actramontreal.ca](http://www.actramontreal.ca)

# AGM 2002

**It must have been during one of those eight minute speeches** - er...questions - posed from the floor when I finally realized that our own AGM was beginning to bear a striking resemblance to yet another time honoured annual tradition in our industry; the Academy Awards. Think about it. It always runs long. You're bound to be both tired and hungry by the time it ends (don't forget that while all of us in Montreal are waiting to go to bed after the Oscars, the folks in L.A. are still waiting to eat supper!). And on occasion, some normally good hearted and decent person abuses their 30 seconds on the mike and has everyone else in the room wishing John Williams was lurking about with a baton and a 30 piece orchestra - ready to play us out to a commercial - whether our orator was finished or not.

So why do people come to the AGM? Simple. You learn things. A lot actually. Time after time. Year after year. We are shown a glimpse of the statistics, conjecture, obstacles and plans of action that allow us to make sense of the year that has passed and prepare ourselves for the future. This year was no exception.

For the 300 plus members in attendance, the **2002 ACTRA Montreal Annual General Meeting** was a sobering look at the state of our industry in this city. For those on the Council and the other presenters on the panel, the reaction from the room was equally demonstrative: the members support this branch and their union.

**ACTRA Montreal Branch President, Matt Holland**, opened the evening with a brief look at some of our successes this past year and a few of our goals for the year to come. Our President cautioned that we must remain fiscally responsible and yet continue to be progressive - in these crucial times - if ACTRA is to respond to the many challenges which our industry, our organization and our members now face. It was a sentiment which was echoed in the **Branch Treasurer, Pierre Lenoir's** report. Production is down for the fourth consecutive year and that is clearly reflected in the branch's financial difficulties. As Pierre Lenoir, was quick to point out, "when times are tough for all of us as performers, times are similarly tough for us as a branch."



Montreal Branch President, Matt Holland



Eastern Regional Director, Raymond Guardia, Life Member, Walter Massey & National President, Thor Bishopric (from l to r)

## **What is going on and what ACTRA is doing about it**

So why are times so tough? "We at ACTRA Montreal have always been concerned with getting our members a fair piece of the pie; ensuring through the Opportunities Project that when a production shoots in Montreal, our members get a significant share of the roles available," says **Eastern Regional Director, Raymond Guardia**. "The problem is, that pie is shrinking." Doing well on production doesn't mean much if nothing is being produced.

The past four years have seen the emergence of two telling (and frightening) trends that could account for a shrinking pie: a steady decline in the number of Canadian production (always considered our bread and butter here in Montreal) and the increasing difficulty of seducing American production dollars (upon which we risk becoming overly reliant). Responding to these two problems is the focus of ACTRA Montreal's resources.

## The Industry Coalition

Our members are not the only ones who benefit from American production in Montreal. Technicians, equipment rental houses, studio owners and Canadian service producers are all standing in the same line, hoping to pay the rent (or in some cases, pay off the yacht) with the income from a Hollywood film. As Raymond made clear, part of ACTRA Montreal's initiative has to be joining these industry partners who share our interest in bringing as many American productions to Montreal as possible. "It isn't enough to go down to L.A. on our own. The studios have to see that the entire Montreal community is committed to this," says Arden Ryshpan, an integral part of the Coalition.

## Canadian Programming and the CRTC

A more challenging obstacle may, however, be the need to address the downward spiral of Canadian production in this country. Since broadcasters lobbied for a change in CRTC policy (resulting in the 1999 CRTC Television Policy), one hour dramas have dropped from 12 to 5 - more than 3,500 workdays lost each year. Locally, our own Canadian production (due in large part to the shockwave of the Cinar and Telescene fiascos) has been in freefall, having gone from 42 Canadian productions in 1998 to just 17 this year. Nationalism aside, the demise of Canadian production means one thing to our members: lost jobs.

**National President, Thor Bishopric**, spoke to the room about the efforts ACTRA has already made to stem the tide. Working with high profile Canadian actors like R.H. Thomson and Paul Gross, ACTRA has presented its case to the Parliament's Heritage Committee. Political Action Committees have been set up across the country to meet with Members of Parliament and educate other performers such as students in theatre schools. A letter writing campaign has been launched and all members are encouraged to participate by sending their letter either online (at [www.actramontreal.ca](http://www.actramontreal.ca)) or cutting it out of the last Grapevine to send by post. There is still much to do, but in the 3 short months of this campaign, the industry trade paper, Playback, has already called ACTRA, "the most vocal among several organizations calling for a reversal of [CRTC] policies." Not bad, for a start.



Council Member, Helen King



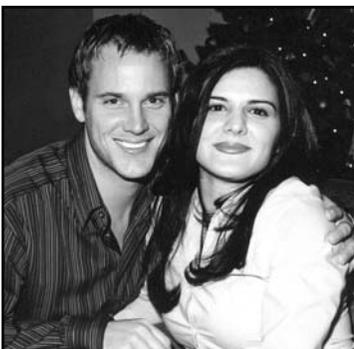
Two pillars of the ACTRA Community: Walter Massey and Terrence La Brosse Ross

"...in the 3 short months of this campaign, the industry trade paper, Playback, has already called ACTRA, 'the most vocal among several organizations calling for a reversal of [CRTC] policies.' Not bad, for a start."

**National Executive Director, Stephen Waddell**, closed the evening off with a look back at the past year on the national level and returned to a familiar sentiment for the evening when describing our organization's future: "The industry has become far more complex than it ever was. In our 60 year history, ACTRA has always responded to the challenges it has faced. But we must be even more prepared if we are going to continue to do so and succeed in the future."



Stephanie Biddle & NED, Stephen Waddell



Sebastien Roberts & Carmy Renda

In the end, the analysis was well received - as well received as any discussion of the "dark clouds that lay on the horizon" could be, that is. It seems that a show of solidarity and support for this organization goes a long way to making any obstacle seem surmountable. We adjourned for some fine food, a little dancing and a good time seemed to be had by all.

The ACTRA Montreal Branch Council and staff would like to thank all of the members who joined us at the 2002 Annual General Meeting. We hope to see you all (and those who couldn't attend) next year!

# A little knowledge goes a long way

## ACTRA Montreal unveils the Apprentice Member Initiation Course

**For many of you out there, your initiation into ACTRA was a heady affair,** involving a handshake and a smile, some reading material and an encouraging ‘good luck’ - usually in between phone calls at the reception desk. That being said, becoming an Apprentice Member of ACTRA has always been considered a serious decision which comes with not only benefits, but obligations and responsibilities appropriate to joining a union of more than 20 000 professional performers. To ensure that all Apprentice Members clearly understand that point, ACTRA Montreal has unveiled the **Apprentice Member Initiation Course (AMIC)**.

After some months of development and a couple of test runs, the AMIC is finally up and running, providing AMs with some valuable guidance, a thorough understanding of ACTRA's role in this industry and an appreciation for the part they will play as members in determining how this organization works for them. Performers signing up as new AMs are expected to take the course within three months of obtaining their eligible credit. Following a By-law change at the recent AGM, all Montreal Apprentice Members (who have not already taken a comparable course at another branch) will be obligated to take the AMIC in order to become a Full Member of ACTRA.

The course lasts six hours (including a one hour lunch) and will speak to such important issues as union solidarity, professional behaviour, administrative requirements, advantages of membership and others. It is very much an initiation into being a member of a union of professional performers. It will not, however, speak to matters of artistic development - better left to the widely successful workshops of the Professional Development Committee.

**"It was important for us to develop a course that helped members understand the fundamentals of their union and its workings - to get a better sense of the mechanics of the industry in which they strive to make a living,"** says Shannon Joutel, one of the staff members involved in creating the course.

### What's in the Course?

- An overview of ACTRA's role in the industry
- Working under our Collective Agreements
- Professional behaviour
- Union Solidarity
- Administrative requirements
- Advantages of membership

### The Kit ...some helpful stuff you'll get at the course...

- A Members' Manual covering all course material
- The By-laws & Constitution
- The Independent Production Agreement
- The National Commercial Agreement
- The Nudity Survival Guide
- The Stage Mom Survival Guide (for parents of AM minors)
- How to Find an Agent pamphlet
- Sample Performers' Log
- Ethical Code of Conduct for Talent Agents pamphlet
- How to fill in a Voucher pamphlet

The course comes at a cost of \$130 - identical to the fee for a Principal Performer work permit. The good news is: you will obviously have to buy one less work permit as an Apprentice Member since the course will be **worth one credit** towards your Full Membership. The really good news is: existing AMs and new members will finally have a resource of information provided to them that will hopefully make the head spinning world of unions, collective agreements, work permits, by-laws and a constitution a little easier to deal with and understand.

"Finally, this training program offers our current and prospective members an excellent primer on their union, and an essential road map for navigating today's increasingly-complex media landscape," said ACTRA Montreal Branch President, Matt Holland.

Monthly courses are scheduled for both new Apprentice Members and existing Apprentice Members. To register for the course, you must visit the ACTRA Montreal office. Reservations will not be made by phone.

# I DID NOT KNOW THAT!

**With the new Apprentice Member Initiation Course up and running**, there's going to be a lot of awfully well prepared AMs lurking about on set pretty soon. And while that's great news, it may also have a few of you **Full Members** feeling like you've been left out in the cold. What's more - having never taken the course yourselves - you wouldn't even know that it was your responsibility to ask if it was an exterior shoot when you were booked so you could dress warm or that the producer should be providing you with a means of shelter so you don't freeze your butt off.

It's these kinds of helpful hints that sometimes make the difference between an enjoyable workday and hypothermia. Not to mention, filling forms out correctly and keeping track of everything is a good way to ensure that you're paid what's owed to you, paid on time and paid properly. And what the hell do all those numbers on your cheque mean anyway?

The nitty-gritty details of this business can be daunting to even the most experienced folks. Heck...I bet you could fill a book with all the rules and regulations. Oh wait...you can: it's called a Collective Agreement! Now we're not going to reprint the ol' IPA here, but we've tried to put together a few tips and answer a few questions for all the members out there...

## Did you know?

When recording or shooting a **radio or TV commercial**, your payment is called a **SESSION FEE**. The engager is required to forward your cheque to the ACTRA office no later than **fifteen (15) working days** from the date of production.

**RESIDUAL FEES** are paid (excluding Demonstrator & Background categories) for the use of a commercial. In radio, the **SESSION FEE** includes the first thirteen (13) week cycle of use. In television (and subsequent radio cycles) the engager has **twenty (20) working days** from the beginning of a cycle of use to forward your **RESIDUAL** cheque to the ACTRA office.

Late payment penalties may apply if your cheque is not received by ACTRA within these time periods.

If you (and/or your agent) have not received a commercial cheque within these time periods, please contact ACTRA for assistance. Please have your commercial engagement contract on hand, so that we may refer to the name of the advertising agency, production house, sponsor, type and date of production.

# WHAT DO I LOOK FOR IN A TALENT AGENT AND WHAT IS A TALENT AGENT LOOKING FOR IN ME?

**These are two of the most commonly asked questions by performers at all stages of their careers.** There are no hard and fast rules, but we suggest the following guidelines when looking for an agent.

## First, some general advice.

- Make it a personal decision. Don't choose an agent because someone else likes them. It is important that you and your agent see eye to eye on your career aspirations and your range and abilities. You don't have to be best friends (in fact that is something that's not recommended!) but you do need to have respect for each other.
- Make it a partnership. Many people enter into a relationship with their agent feeling as though the agent "works for them", as if the agent were a personal employee. Most agent/actor relationships work better when there is a partnership in place. Both parties have a role to play in a performer's success.

## What should I look for in an agent?

- You want an agent whose clients get seen by casting directors. Ask what their relationship is like with the casting directors in town. Some agents' taste in talent is more respected than others. Having said that, signing up with a newer agent may be beneficial. They may quickly develop the reputation of having new and interesting talent. However, feel free to ask how long they have been in the business.

## Did you know?

Apprentice Members can save themselves a lot of grief by just checking the expiration date on their card and renewing their membership on time. You move and forget to tell the Membership Department. You accept a job on a cruise ship for six months. Your mailman is afraid of your dog and refuses to deliver your mail anymore. There are any number of reasons why you may not have received that invoice ACTRA sent you, but just the same, you are still responsible for keeping your card active. So check your card and renew on time. Remember...only you can prevent forest fires...and keep yourself from being deleted!

- Your agent should not be asking you for money up front for anything. Normally, you will be responsible for providing your agent with an appropriate number of photos, and a resumé, which they will update regularly and print up on their letterhead. If you need to pay them certain fees up front, or take certain courses before they will take you on, you might want to keep looking. Your agent should make money off you only when you work, not for photos, classes, Internet portfolios or any number of other things.
- You want an agent who doesn't represent 10,000 other people. Most serious agents represent a limited number of people whose talents they believe in. This may make it hard for you to get one of them to take you on at first, but you will appreciate it in the end.

- Ask what they charge for commissions. The going rate is 15% but some agents may only charge 10% for theatre or voice work. Be sure to ask in advance and check to see if you will have to pay GST and TVQ on top of that. (This makes a difference to you - instead of paying \$15 on every \$100 of earnings, you will more likely be paying \$17.25 - not much of a difference on \$100, but it starts to add up on \$10,000!)
- Ask what happens with your existing regular engagers. For example, if you

have already established a relationship with a commercial production house who calls you regularly and directly to work, you may wish to discuss this with your agent and decide how you intend to manage that client in the future.

- Ask if you are expected to sign something. It is not unusual for agents to sign a contract with their clients. These contracts normally set out certain kinds of things - how long you agree to work together, how you can renew or cancel your relationship, the services the agent will provide, how payments are to be handled and what happens to those payments if you sever your relationship.

**“In all cases, do not feel pressured to sign any document right there on the spot if you are not sure about something. Take it away with you and ask questions if you need to.”**

They may also ask you to sign a type of "power of attorney". This would mean that your agent would receive your cheques from the producers, cash them and give you your money, minus their commission. If this is the case, then the agent should also agree to provide you with a proper accounting at the end of each year.

In all cases, do not feel pressured to sign any document right there on the spot if you are not sure about something. Take it away with you and ask questions if you need to.

Please be aware that anyone can open up shop and call himself or herself an "agent". There are no diplomas or courses that you pass in order to be certified as a real live talent agent. So, ask around, do your homework and be careful before you sign anything.

## What is an Agent Looking For in Me?

This is the million dollar question - just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so to some degree, is talent. The agent must believe that your look is sufficiently commercial and your talent is sufficiently developed for there to be a good possibility that you will get work.

It's a hard fact to accept, but how you look has an enormous impact on the work you will get in the film industry (the theatre world is much more forgiving in that respect). If you are young and clearly a character performer, it may be harder for an agent to see how they will be able to market you to casting directors. If they already have a couple of people in your age range and of your type, they may not wish to take you on at this time.

Agents also look for some experience - not that you need to have a resume a mile long, but they want to know that you've already done some acting somewhere. This tells them at least two things - one, someone thought you were good enough to ask you to play the role and two, you have some practical experience and aren't going to look around in panic when the director yells "Action!"

Training is important, and if you don't have much professional experience, an agent will often look to see what your background and training are.

An agent is also looking for certain intangible things - how dedicated are you to the craft of acting? Is this really how you intend to make your living or are you

doing two other things full time in order to "have something to fall back on if the acting thing doesn't work out"? We're not talking about having a job to pay the rent when things are slow; we're talking about not being fully committed to acting as an art and a profession.

If you have clips of work that you have done, an agent may ask to see them before deciding to take you on. (It is always a good idea to begin to collect up those clips to use on a demo tape one day) And don't be surprised if they ask you to do a monologue or to record an audition on videotape for them. Most actors who work in the theatre have at least one contemporary and one classical monologue memorized since they never know when it might be needed.

Many workshops have performers working on monologues or you can purchase specific texts of monologues (available in some bookstores or industry bookstores like **TheatreBooks** in Montreal).

An agent needs some way of assessing your ability to act. A serious agent won't accept you just because you tell them you are a great actor. So whether it is a resume of past acting experience or the performance of a monologue, you will need to show them your skills, so be ready!

Let's talk about kids specifically for a moment, and what an agent looks for in a child performer. Firstly, it must be the

**“Training is important, and if you don't have much professional experience, an agent will often look to see what your background and training are.”**

child who wants it, not the parent. It's pretty easy to tell who is really interested in acting at the first meeting. Secondly, a child who does well in school will probably do better in this field. Acting means being able to bring a variety of skills together all at once, including good reading skills, a large vocabulary, patience, good study habits (to learn lines) and a good basic education (to understand the material, the plot, directions, etc.) Kids who are struggling in school may find this industry difficult.

There is just a starting point for those of you looking for an agent (or looking to change agents). Picking up additional material which will give you some more information on how to choose an agent would probably be a good idea - like a copy of the Entertainment Industry Coalition Code of Ethics for Agents, for example. Remember, outside of the Province of BC, there are no laws or regulations governing talent agents, and ACTRA has no jurisdiction over them. Our best advice to you is to do your homework, and ask around for references.

## Show them something that looks good...

Being a Professional Performer means having professional tools of the trade. When it comes to **HEADSHOTS** and **DEMOS**, the photo booth in the subway and hitting play and record on your home VCR isn't going to cut it anymore. Check out these professional...

### Photographers

**Karin Benedict**  
Tel: 514.938.1059  
karinb@total.net

**Elizabeth Knox**  
Tel: 514.276.0830  
www.knoxpix.com  
elizabeth@knoxpix.com

**Shane Kelley**  
Tel: 450.458.0098

**Sabrina Usher**  
Tel: 514.272.9244  
www.sabrinausher.com

**Raina Kirn**  
Tel: 514.614.0914  
rainakirn@yahoo.com

**Wendy Longlade**  
Tel: 514.993.5857

**Stephane Brugger**  
Tel: 514.982.9783

### Demo Editors

**Espresso Films**  
Tel: 514.769.9898

**Immersive Cinema Technologies**  
Tel: 514.453.4364  
markjob.com

**Mom & Pop Sounds**  
Tel: 514.490.0178

**Surf Studios**  
Tel: 514.273.1109

**Brian Baker**  
Tel: 514.235.5605



**ACTRA**

Montreal Branch  
1450 City Councillors, #530  
Montreal, Quebec  
H3A 2E6

CHEQUE NO. **001875**

DATE *September 1, 2010*

AMOUNT  
*\$1,000,000*

PAY **Understanding Your IPA Paycheque!**

TO THE ORDER OF *All ACTRA Members*

PER *[Signature]* ACTRA  
PER *[Signature]*

**"001875 :60031 009: 01986 19"**

**Figuring out** what calculations went into determining the dollar amount on your cheque is tricky at the best of times. With an increase in the number of payroll companies cutting your cheques - and their confusing approach to the cheque's back-up (paper work), the task can often be downright daunting. What is the actual **GROSS FEE**? Was the GST/QST paid? How do I figure all this out? Here's how.

First off, it is important to understand that the gross fees are what your deductions and contributions (as well as your commission to your agent) are based on. Now to help you break down the amount on your cheque, you are going to need a calculator. Hey, we never said it would be easy... Let's pretend you're a Full member with GST/QST numbers. Here's an example of your pay cheque:

**1.** An 8hr day as a principal performer @ \$525.25  
130% Pre-payment @ \$682.82  
**Gross Fees: \$1208.07**

**2.** Deductions based on \$1208.07:  
Working Dues @ 1.75% = \$21.14  
RRSP@ 3% = \$36.24  
**Total ACTRA Deductions: \$57.38**

**Note:** Apprentice members do not pay working dues - just a 3% deduction for Independent Productions and a 4% deduction on commercials.

**3.** Contributions by producer to performer's RRSP and **Insurance @ 10% (of gross fee): \$120.80**

**Note:** Every payroll company has a different method of reporting your fees on the back-up to your cheque. AXIUM, for example, includes a 10% engager contribution in the "**gross fees paid**" column. This is the amount contributed to your **RRSP** and **Insurance** by the producer. We at ACTRA Montreal call this amount (your gross fees + producer's contribution) the "**Super Gross Fee**".

**4.** **Super Gross Fee:** Gross Fee (\$1208.07) + Producer's Contribution (\$120.80): **\$1328.87**

**5.** GST and QST are then calculated on this Super Gross Fee.  
**GST** is based on **7%** of the **Super Gross** (\$1328.87): **\$93.02**  
**QST** is based on **7.5%** of the **Super Gross** (\$1328.87) + the **GST** (\$93.02): **\$106.64**

So...at the end of the day, your cheque should look something like this:

**Gross Fee** (\$1208.07) - **Deductions** (\$57.38): **Net Fee \$1150.69**  
**Net Fee** (\$1150.69) + **GST/QST** (\$199.66): **Cheque Amount \$1350.35**

You take home a cheque for **\$1350.35**. And there you go. The mysteries of your cheque revealed to you. Of course, you can always call your ACTRA steward if you're still confused. Now if only I could figure out how much to tip my waiter...

## Did you know?

**MEALS ARE NOT GIVEN AUTOMATICALLY ON EVERY SET.** Where a film set is in an area where restaurants are readily available, the producer is not OBLIGED to provide meals to performers. Most producers do however provide meals in an effort to save time. (Most breaks where meals are not provided are an hour and a half long). When in doubt, ask in advance or bring a lunch.

# Far From the **Madding** Crowd

When is it a Background role and when is it really an Upgrade...?

## Every once in awhile, a

Background Performer is asked to do something that falls outside the scope their category. It happens. But not as often as you would think...

## How Do I know if I Deserve an Upgrade?

Well, what is *inside* the scope of the Background Performer category? According to the IPA, a Background Performer means any Performer other than a Principal Actor or an Actor, who is:

- not required to give individual characterization;
- not required to speak or sing any word or Line of Dialogue;
- not required to perform as a Special Skill Background Performer;
- engaged to perform, either alone or as a member of a team or group, special silent businesses requiring a level of proficiency or other physical skill within the competence of the average person, even if required to perform in dress clothes or costumes.

Of course, by now, most of you are well aware of the fact that Background Performers **can** sometimes speak - as long as it's in a group (it's just a few paragraphs later in the IPA). This is a good example of the rather ambiguous nature of our Collective Agreements and an excellent way to illustrate the point: don't jump to conclusions - every instance is unique and what may be deserving of an upgrade under certain circumstances may not be at other times.

## Well, what generally isn't deserving of an Upgrade (that folks often assume to be)?

- Being in proximity to the camera;
- Being in proximity to or touching the main actors;
- Receiving direction - even from the Director - to perform tasks which require a level of proficiency of an average person (like opening a door, for example);
- Having a name or title in the project - like wearing a stethoscope and being referred to as *Joe, the Doctor*.

## What is deserving of an Upgrade?

*Individual characterization of a role.*

When you are not only Joe, the Doctor, but told that you are actually Joe - who's wife left him last night, ran over his cat in the driveway this morning, has been stealing prescription drugs from the hospital and selling them on the side and happens to be a Doctor. Suddenly, you are a very specific, unique character. Time to ask for an upgrade.

## How do I Ask for an Upgrade?

Ask on set - the 3rd AD that is, not the Director. They may say no (they probably will), but then, they may say yes. If you are upgraded on set, regardless of whether or not you should have been, the upgrade will stand. And everyone goes home happy. But just so everyone understands...they will probably say no.

Now if the AD says no, but you still think you merit an upgrade, you may file an **Upgrade Request** with the ACTRA Upgrade Committee - a collection of Stewards who review these requests as a group.

You must submit a letter **in writing within 30 days** of the occurrence of the instance. The letter should include such information as your contact information, the name of the project, the date of the incident and as detailed an explanation as possible of the events surrounding the incident; both what you were asked to do and what you actually did.

Wait for a response. Based on the letter, the Upgrade Committee will review the circumstances and conduct an investigation which may require them to request the raw footage from production (and could take up to 8 weeks). So be patient!

You will receive a letter informing you of the Upgrade Committee's decision and that decision is final. Remember, you are not asking ACTRA for an upgrade. Only production can upgrade a performer. Rest assured, if you deserve it, ACTRA will make sure you get it.

## Did you know?

According to the **Independent Production Agreement** payment to a performer must be made within 15 calendar days following performance.

This applies to any shooting day as well as any fitting, rehearsal, or reading sessions or any other item that should be expected during the course of a regular production payroll. Please be advised that this rule doesn't necessarily apply to adjustments and certainly doesn't apply to money that's in dispute!

It is essential that you provide the production with all the personal information necessary so that the cheque is not delayed. Your address, (including your postal code!) social insurance number, membership number as well as your agent info should always be clearly written on your contract. It takes a few more minutes to review all of these things carefully when signing your contract, but it means that the cheque will be sent to the right place and all your Insurance and Retirement contributions will be credited to your account at the ACTRA Fraternal Benefit Society.

If you're at a reading, rehearsal, fitting or post sync session and no time sheet is available, make sure a production representative signs your personal agenda. This way we can trace the work, and a claim can be made on your behalf.

If you know you've covered all the bases and the cheque is still late, call your agent. Your agent will call the producer and notify ACTRA. Once the cheque is received, you can expect a late payment penalty payment (2% of the gross for every 30 day period after the due date). If you require any other assistance, please don't hesitate to contact the ACTRA office.

# the *writers* stuff

## FADE IN:

In an intimate café/theatre style setting, the ACTRA Montreal Professional Development Committee presented **The Writer's Panel**, a discussion with four diverse Montreal based writers. Well attended and well received, the evening allowed writers **Jefferson Lewis**, **Geneviève Lefebvre**, **Louise Migneault** and our very own **Matt Holland** (who recently had his first feature film produced! **The Limit** stars **Lauren Bacall** and **Claire Forlani**) an opportunity to shed some light on everything from the creative process to development and funding strategies to bringing their projects to the screen for ACTRA Members and would-be writers in attendance. The discussion was lively, informative and often down-right hilarious. Well, that's enough of my writing. Let's here from some professionals with quotes from the evening, in case you missed it:



A charming location: the Monument National

**Jefferson Lewis:** "There are two types of producers...the bad ones who are nice to you and never make movies. And the good ones - lying, manipulative, ugly people who do make movies."

**Matt Holland:** "That's how [getting a movie made] usually happens." **From the audience:** "Is that how it happened for you?" **Matt:** "Well...no."

**Jefferson Lewis**, on the fundamental difference between Canadian and American producers: "In Canada, it takes a lot of work to get a producer to move from no to maybe to yes. In the U.S., everything starts with yes. The problem is, from then on, it's all downhill until you're back to no."

**Geneviève Lefebvre:** "Writers are very much like actors. But we don't get a trailer and we have to make our own coffee."

**From the Peanut Gallery:** "You mean someone else is supposed to make our coffee?"



PDC Chair, Susie Almgren



Screenwriter, Jefferson Lewis



Members Dennis St. John & Bob Brewster

For more information on getting started as a writer - names and numbers for folks such as the Writer's Guild of Canada - contact the ACTRA office.

# a r a p p r a i s e . . .



Allen McInnis THE GAZETTE

Veteran centre Bryan Chiu (left) and QB Anthony Calvillo celebrate together after defeating the Edmonton Eskimos in the Grey Cup.

## ACTRA Montreal member celebrates a Grey Cup win...

Being an actor doesn't always pay the bills - which is probably why a good number our members have careers outside of the film and television industry. Some are accountants. Some are security guards. Quite a few are still students and there's at least one who makes a living as a contortionist for *Cirque du Soleil*. ACTRA Montreal member **Bryan Chiu** is a football player. He plays on a team you might have heard of - the **Montreal Alouettes**.

On a frozen field in Edmonton on November 24th, the efforts of 4 years playing college ball, a 6 year **CFL** career and a streak of 80 consecutive regular season games finally culminated in Bryan winning his first **Grey Cup**. And as one of the Alouettes who made that disheartening trip to Calgary two years ago, only to lose in the 2000 Grey Cup, the victory was well worth the wait and all too sweet.

I'm not sure how winning the Grey Cup measures up to earning his Apprentice membership - which Bryan did last year on **Sum of All Fears**, playing - you guessed it - a football player, but it is safe to say that the win in Edmonton was the icing on the cake for a season which has already seen Vancouver native named an **All-star** selection for the third consecutive year and **2002 Outstanding Lineman of the Year**.

ACTRA Montreal would like to congratulate Bryan Chiu, teammate **Tim Fleiszer** (another member!) and the rest of the Montreal Alouettes on a championship season - bringing the Cup home to Montreal!



## The ACTRA Montreal Apprentice Member Initiation Course

Understand the industry.  
Understand your union.  
Earn yourself a credit.

Register at the ACTRA office.

# Organizing with Gary Saxe



## Organizing Updates

### Parisian

ACTRA found out about a series of four non-union commercials being filmed in Montreal over two days in September. The commercials were for Parisian, a chain of U.S. department stores owned by the Saks Fifth Avenue group of stores. After contacting the head office and the ad agency to inform them of the benefits of using our Members (as well as explaining their obligations under the Quebec Status of the Artist Legislation), the producers decided to sign on with ACTRA. 10 Members were hired, earning a total of over \$25,000.

### The AIP

The ACTRA Indie Production Agreement (AIP) was launched over the summer in order to provide an opportunity for very low-budget producers to access the ACTRA pool of professional talent. At the same time, this agreement provides work opportunities by allowing ACTRA Members to work on projects that otherwise would have been non-union productions. Over the last few months I've had the opportunity of meeting with several producers who are considering using the new Agreement.

### Organizing Digital Media

Our National Organizer for Digital Media, Thom Tapley, spent a few weeks in Montreal recently in order to further ACTRA's work in organizing this growing sector of our industry. Internet, CD-ROMs, computer games and other digitally recorded performances are creating more and more work opportunities for ACTRA Members. While in town, Thom met with several producers, and together, we met with a representative of the Union des Artistes in order to coordinate an approach that would assure the best possible wages and working conditions for our Members. We also met with some Members who work in this field in order to discuss their concerns.

## Youth Employment Services

is offering a  
**\$5 000**

start-up grant for a self-employed artist

to carry out a cultural project  
of an entrepreneurial nature.

**To be eligible for this grant, artists must:**  
be between 18 and 35 years old  
be Canadian citizens or landed immigrants  
have a low income  
live on the island of Montreal  
have a mentor  
present a four-page project description\*  
meet with the YES Business Coach and/or  
attend the YES Jump-Start session  
(every Wednesday morning @ 11:00a.m.)

**Deadline for applications is April 30 @ 5 p.m.**

\* Please contact Paulo Leiriao at **Youth Employment Services**,  
514.878.9788 x 315 or [bcoach@yesmontreal.ca](mailto:bcoach@yesmontreal.ca) for additional details  
regarding eligibility and selection criteria or to obtain an application package.

## Congratulations!

### New ACTRA Montreal Members

|                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Bassanoff, Toula      | Mitelman, Stephanie   |
| Bergen, Eric Pierre   | Morgan, Vanessa       |
| Berlingieri, James A. | Mounstevan, John      |
| Bigras, Dan           | Nystrom, Vie          |
| Black, Jannette       | Orchard, Jamie        |
| Bucci, Laurie         | Phillips, Thomas Vant |
| Cardinal, Claudia     | Roberts, Sebastien    |
| Carlsen, Sarah        | Rosenbaum, Erika      |
| Casimir, Melissa      | Shein, Ivana          |
| D'Alessio, Erika      | Stone, Martin         |
| Dupuy, François       | Szwimer, Jason        |
| Gilmore, Danny        | Therrien, Carole      |
| Graham, Lori          | Tomassone, Linda      |
| Lang, Ashley          | Trottier, Marc        |
| Moutome, Jayson E.    | Vamvas, John          |
| Kelsall, Kevin        | Wood, Winston         |
| McKee, Tracey         | Yao, Vanessa          |
| Meldrum, Wendel       |                       |

would  
you  
turn  
down... **25**

**0000**  
...cash?!?

**Imagine for a moment** that you're at home one day watching your favourite Canadian produced drama on television (I said imagine!) when you suddenly get a call inviting you to audition for a 5-day role in a feature film. Now, if that isn't exciting enough, before hanging up, they just happen to mention that the role pays \$25 000. Somewhere in the not-so-deep recesses of your mind, you start planning a Caribbean cruise.

You show up at the audition. You win the part. And overjoyed, you make a mental note to pick up sunscreen on your way home. Of course, being a fine and upstanding union member, you remember to ask for your ACTRA contract before you leave.

"Oh, I'm sorry," says the producer. "this is a non-union production." After a brief pause, during which your cruise ship sinks to the bottom of the ocean, the producer adds, "Will you do it for cash?" The ship momentarily bobs above the waves.

Do you take the job, or does the luxury liner disappear forever in the murky waters all too near to paradise?

ACTRA Member Guy Nadon faced this very real dilemma and with \$25 000 at stake, it was not a decision to be taken lightly. Guy finally told the producer that he could not work without an ACTRA contract. He then called the ACTRA office to report the incident.

"Well, that's great," you might be thinking, "but why on earth would anyone pass up a guaranteed 25 grand in the hopes of one day landing a union production which would certainly offer significantly less money?"

Of course, anyone who would think such a thing is NOT a fine and upstanding member of ACTRA and should apologize immediately, but I digress...

Guy did the right thing in calling ACTRA. What's more, he also encouraged the producer to call ACTRA and within a couple of days, we reached an agreement. The production went union and paid all performers above-scale rates, plus Insurance and Retirement benefits in addition to the 130% pre-payment use fee.

Working non-union is the greatest risk to ACTRA's solidarity. And while the peril of fines or expulsion should be reason enough not to do non-union work, a greater responsibility lies in helping us to eliminate it. One of ACTRA's leading priorities is to create work opportunities for members. Turning non-union projects into union ones does just that. As a National Organizer, Gary Saxe's organizing efforts rely heavily on the support of you and members like Guy Nadon who are willing to make that call. Remember, your identity will always be kept confidential - unless of course you'd like to have your picture in the newsletter...



ACTRA Member, Guy Nadon:  
the \$25 000 Man

By the way: Guy worked for 5 days and got his \$25 000 plus Insurance Retirement. I don't know if he ever ended up taking the cruise though.

## News...

**Congratulations** to ACTRA Montreal council member Richard M. Dumont and member Claudia Besso on their marriage December 7, 2002. To the adorable couple...

**We are all saddened** by the loss of three dear members this past fall. Don Harper, Marcello Pagmotta and Beverly Walker will be missed by friends, family and all of us at ACTRA.



**Seasons  
Greetings...**  
**from ACTRA Montreal**

**ACTRA Montreal**

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