BizParentz FOUNDATION

Actors Equity MEMBERSHIP

For more info, check the AEA website here: http://www.actorsequity.org/

Equity's "National Guide of Young Performers Working in Theatre":

http://www.actorsequity.org/docs/outreach/Young_Performer_Overview.pdf

Actor's Equity Association (Equity for short) is the prestigious union for live theatre actors. AEA is the original performer's union, founded in 1913. It represents approximately 50,000 professional actors and stage managers. AEA typically organizes shows on Broadway, some national tours, and other large venues.

When to Join

Our members advise waiting as long as possible, but as always, it is a decision dictated by individual circumstances. For adults, the Equity card is a necessity for a professional theatre career. For kids, not so much.

Equity, unlike the other performing unions, does not REQUIRE union membership until age 14. Often Equity shows will hire the child performers as non-union (and pay them far less), while allowing the few Equity contracts to go to adults. In smaller regions, theatres avoid hiring Equity children completely, since they have limited budgets.

A main benefit to Equity membership for adults is the preference given at auditions (AEA members get to audition first, and sometimes that means non-union performers often don't get seen). But if a child has an agent, the agent is usually able to get an audition appointment, thus avoid open calls altogether.

Equity's main disadvantage for growing artists is the inability to do non-union theatre once you join. If a child under 14 keeps their non-union status, they can continue to work both non-union community theatre, and Equity shows as a non-union performer. Once a child joins, they must either temporarily withdraw from Equity to do a school play or community theatre (members under age 14) , or they must ask special permission of Equity to do the project (members over 14).

For this reason, kids do not usually join Equity unless they truly plan on having an adult career. Even then, the joining time frame should be strategized. For instance, it may be to the child performer's advantage to join via the EMC program, in order to buy 25-50 weeks before having to fully join and leave the non-union world behind. You want to make sure that your child has enough quality theatre credits to really compete in the professional world once they join.

How to Join

Equity allows you to join in one of three ways:

1. Get an Equity contract. The opportunity to join is valid only for the run of the show though (you can't do a show, and then decide you want to join later). When you are cast in an Equity theatre, you will get a form.
2. The 4 A's. Equity honors the ability of an actor in another union who has been a member of that union for one year AND worked a principal job in that union, to join Equity once their year is fulfilled.
3. Equity Membership Candidate (EMC) Program. Stage managers often use this option, but it is available to all. It allows you to work professionally while working toward union membership. Here is how it works:
    a. Obtain a position in an EMC theatre.
    b. Pay a $200 registration fee, and when you apply for membership, the registration fee will be credited toward the $400 you must submit when you decide to submit a union membership application.

c. Work 25 weeks at an eligible EMC theatre. At 25 weeks, you *may* choose to join, or you may continue on to "Phase II" as an EMC for another 25 weeks before joining for a total of 50 weeks. *If you are already SAG, then you MUST join after 25 weeks.* We advise child actors to wait until the last possible moment to join.

d. Submit an application to join AEA and pay your initiation fees. $400 is required at the time of the application.

Cost of Membership

Initiation fee (one time): $1,600 ($1,700 in 2019) plus the semi-annual Base Dues of $85 = $1,685

Ongoing: The Base Dues of $85 are paid twice a year, in May and November.

Working Dues are additional and are 2.5% of your earnings, which is taken out via weekly payroll deduction.

Benefits of Membership

Audition preference: Equity members are seen first at open calls (and sometimes they are the only people seen). Unlike all other performing unions, Equity monitors the audition process and gives it's members a very big advantage. As an adult, this advantage would be invaluable, but children are often seen anyway. If you are planning an adult career, consider this.

Casting Call website listings: Although this is available to non-members as well, this section of the AEA website is considered a key for finding auditions. You can find it at http://www.actorsequity.org/CastingCall/castingcallhome.asp

Health Insurance and pension, but only after you are vested (kids don't usually get this).

Equity limits child contracts to 6 months at a time, so that you can't be held to very long contracts.

College Scholarships: Equity members are eligible for various scholarship opportunities including the Alan Eisenberg Award and Union Plus Scholarships.