

Actors Seeking Influence/Caution: Falling Art/Vote Early and Often/Holzman Takes a Gamble

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Actors Seeking Influence

Remember when developers were vying to do the Church Street Plaza in downtown Evanston? "One of the ideas on the table was a new performing arts center," says Anthony Adler, a founder of the Actors Gymnasium, housed in the city's aging Noyes Cultural Arts Center. "It was a haphazard process," complains Adler. "No one had done a study to find out what would be needed. It seemed clear to me that it was just a bargaining chip."

The performing arts center had been touted as one reason to go with Arthur Hill over another developer, Adler says, but apparently neither the city nor the developer was serious about it: "It just died." To the scattered members of Evanston's performing arts community, it was another sign that their craft is slighted in a town that prides itself on cultural vibrancy but, says producer and director Linda Solotaire, "tends to focus on the visual arts." Frustrated by the limitations of an arts council that's merely an offshoot of the Evanston recreation department, and without any other means of taking action, a few of them came together to start a grassroots organization.

After a year of getting its act together, the Evanston Performing Arts Coalition is launching its first public programs--a series of forums beginning with one on June 4 exploring the efficacy of the Evanston Arts Council. That panel will include Evanston mayor Lorraine H. Morton and the arts council's new administrator (on the job since mid-January), Harmon Greenblatt. Future forums will take up festivals, audience development, and the need for a new center. The coalition aims to "advance the performing arts and artists in Evanston." Membership is open to individuals (\$35 per year), organizations (\$75), and students (\$15). Adler, whom you may remember as a Reader theater critic, can be reached at the Actors Gymnasium, 847-328-2795.

Caution: Falling Art

A curator's nightmare unfolded a few weeks ago in the hushed fourth-floor galleries of the Museum of Contemporary Art. While taking in a show from the museum's own collection, one weary visitor leaned against The Cabinet of Frank Gilmore, a mixed-media sculpture by Matthew Barney. As we hear it, the four-legged cabinet toppled and shattered with a crash that reverberated in an adjacent gallery, startling another patron who then walked into Picasso 2000, a bigger-than-life polyvinyl resin statue of the artist by Maurizio Cattelan. Picasso wobbled on its footing and then plunged to the floor as well, suffering damage to its head. The Cattelan was at the MCA on loan from a private owner. Both pieces are reparable, says museum spokesperson Sally Blanks. "We were really fortunate both artists are living and actively participating in the repairs." Nothing like this ever happened at the museum before, says Blanks. She declined to estimate the value of the pieces or the cost of repairs.

Vote Early and Often

Actors' Equity Association has its undershorts in a knot over a new recognition program for road shows. The National Broadway Theatre Awards, aka the Star Awards, has drawn a dramatic response from the actors' union by including nonunion touring companies in its roster of eligible shows. Sponsored by the League of American Theatres and Producers, the same folks who produce the Equity-only Tony Awards, the Star contest

differs in another important way: it's a "voice of the people" contest. Anyone who claims to have seen a Broadway show outside of New York can cast an E-mail vote and help select the winners. Just log on to www.nationalbroadwayawards.com, enter a name, residence, and E-mail address, and they'll send you a ballot.

It's democratic, if not exactly valid. How does the league know that people voting for a show actually saw it? "We don't," says spokesperson Susan L. Schulman. "And we don't know if they're voting more than once. If somebody has five E-mail addresses there's nothing to stop them from voting five times." Is that a concern? Naah. "It's a people's choice award," Schulman says.

So only the union is taking it seriously. Of the 26 shows eligible (everything from Fiddler on the Roof to The Vagina Monologues) 4 are nonunion. Actors' Equity is urging its members to log on and vote for anything but that gang of four: Annie, Chicago, Show Boat, and The Sound of Music. Subscribers "pay the same price," says the union's bulletin to members, but "are not aware of the difference between Equity and non-Equity tours. Merging them into the same categories is confusing. It's a quality issue." The league could be in for some major Chicago-style voting, but "winners" will be announced May 21 at a publicity-generating New York gala and that's the show that counts.

Holzman Takes a Gamble

Chicago attorney Herbert Holzman has accepted the hot seat in the continuing Rosemont casino saga. Holzman will act as administrative law judge when Emerald Casino appeals the loss of its license, pulled earlier this year by the Illinois Gaming Board. Holzman had also been scheduled to hear Jack Binion's appeal after the board found him unfit to own or operate Joliet's Empress Casino. Binion agreed to cash in his holdings before that show got under way. Chicago Crime Commission investigator Wayne Johnson says Rosemont is a questionable place for a casino, no matter who the owners are: "Cook County is the epicenter for organized crime in the midwest. Why put a casino into an area the Gaming Board can't properly police?"

Art accompanying story in printed newspaper (not available in this archive): photo/Bruce Powell.