



# MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, November 16, 2023

## Theatre performers to enlist audiences in call for pay rise

Theatre lovers around Australia will be urged to contact producers to help performers secure a fair deal after more than a year of negotiations have failed to reach agreement.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance is calling on the hundreds of thousands of Australians who attend the theatre each year to back performers who are seeking a real wage increase, protections against workplace fatigue and stability of employment.

As part of the campaign, performers will be handing flyers to theatre audiences at major productions in capital cities around Australia.

The action will begin this Thursday outside *Beauty and the Beast*, which is currently on stage at the Capitol Theatre in Sydney.

MEAA members began negotiations for a new Performers Collective Agreement, the framework for pay and working conditions in theatre, in 2022. Agreement has been reached on most claims, leaving just a few key issues unresolved, but the producers' organisation, Live Performance Australia, is refusing to talk any longer.

"The Australian performers audiences love seeing on stage are struggling to make ends meet," said MEAA Equity Director Michelle Rae.

"Many had to live off their meagre savings during the COVID pandemic when they were unable to work but also weren't eligible for JobKeeper. Now, like all Australians, they are feeling the burden of the cost of living crisis.

"We have been negotiating with Live Performance Australia for more than 12 months and although we've made some progress, negotiations have reached a stalemate.

"So now performers are calling on audiences to back their demands for a real wage increase of about \$34 a week for an ensemble cast member on a major musical.

"Producers need to hear from audiences that they support performers getting a fair deal."

In addition to a real wage rise, performers are also asking for limits on the number of times they perform in nine shows per week back-to-back, in addition to the many hours they spend in rehearsal and preparation time each week.

As shows are so physically demanding this leads to injury and illness putting performers, and the show, at risk.

Performers also want some continuity of employment and job security while touring by restricting the number of multiple separate contracts that can be used for the same production.

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Many productions are requiring multiple contracts for the one show with the time between contracts unpaid but the performer is still required to maintain their show ready performance levels, choreography and scripts on their own.

It can be very difficult for performers to secure work during the dates in between the contracts/cities as dictated by the tour schedule.

MEAA Equity Federal President Jason Klarwein said performers had been inspired to go public by the success of the screen actors strike in the United States.

He said the public action by performers was aimed at drawing attention from audiences to their situation.

“Seventy per cent of professional Australian performers earn less than \$29,000 per year,” he said.

“Most spend many months per year without any performance work at all. Many are leaving the industry as result of the low pay and insecure work.

“How can Australian musical theatre thrive without the best of the best?”

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