**Minutes of ATCA Ex-Com Meeting in New York**

**November 2, 2017**

Bill Hirschman called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. EST. The following Ex-Com members were present: Charles Giuliano, Lou Harry, Brad Hathaway, Bill Hirschman, Kerry Reid, Frank Rizzo, Ed Rubin, and Martha Steketee. Barbara Bannon, ATCA secretary, Jay Handelman, ATCA Foundation president, Teddie Hathaway, ATCA treasurer, Robert Sokol, ATCA operations manager, and Mark Lowry, chair of the Membership Services Committee, were also present. Jonathan Mandell sat in on the meeting. Simon Saltzman was absent.

Barbara had circulated the minutes from the July teleconference call before the meeting. Frank Rizzo made a motion, seconded by Kerry Reid, to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Teddie and Robert made a treasurer’s report. They are still organizing QuickBooks online to keep track of finances, so the report was just a quick update. At the annual conference in June, we had $49,000; Robert is still assembling final figures from the conference, but it appears to have made money. Currently we have $54,000. Current expenses include $2,300 for international travel and $15,000 for conference expenses. We are switching the bank accounts from Bank of America to Wells Fargo. It looks as if this New York mini meeting will at least break even.

Currently ATCA has 259 members, 256 of whom are active. About 25 percent of the membership still has to pay this year’s dues, but it is likely that most of them will. About 95 percent of the renewing members are paying dues online. Robert said he will send e-mails or make phone calls to remind people who have not yet paid. We have a dozen new members.

The Spring Green conference planning for next year is coming along. Lindsay Christians is doing a great job. She has gotten one grant for $5,000, and another is pending. We need to publicize the conference for people who live out of the area and are not familiar with Spring Green.

The Tennessee Williams festival in Provincetown, Mass., in late September has been suggested for a possible conference site.

Lou reported on the upcoming regional conference in Cincinnati. It will provide a viable alternative for those members who cannot afford the time or money to attend a regular conference. The conference is scheduled for Saturday, March 10, but there will also be events on Friday and Sunday. Lou went over the agenda. The mini conference will cost $30 for members and $40 for others and will be an intimate gathering of not more than 20 people. Registration will be open first to people in Ohio and the area within 200 miles and then extended to those farther away who may be interested. Lou has put the conference together with Rick Pender. They are trying to work out how to collect the money and register people and are hoping this mini regional conference will be a model for subsequent ones in other parts of the country.

Barbara made a report on the Primus Prize. Last year’s winner, Lauren Yee, will come to the luncheon at Sardi’s to receive her plaque and meet ATCA members. Thanks to Chris Rawson’s efforts, Barry Primus has expressed interest in becoming more involved with the prize process. He is sending a representative to Sardi’s to participate in the award presentation this year. There are 15 applicants for the 2017 award, and the committee is presently reading their plays and applications.

Lou made a report on the New Plays Committee. Ten plays have been recommended so far. The winners must be available to go to the Humana Festival in Louisville to receive their awards. The Humana Festival is no longer going to present its 10-minute play program, so there will be a new final event where the awards will be presented. Lou reminded everyone that the plays must be excellent in themselves, not just good productions, and said that he is going to stress that fact to members suggesting plays. We may get a few less applications, but they should all be good quality. The committee plans to start reading on December 1. ATCA will still offer the option of paying for copies of the plays if committee members wish to print them out. Last year nobody requested funds for copying.

Jay made a report on Foundation ATCA. This year the annual appeal letter will go out by e-mail, instead of regular mail. He did not get a good-enough response to last year’s letter to warrant a major mailing. Also he was disappointed that the appeal to purchase memorial bricks at the O’Neill Theater Center only attracted a few hundred dollars. The foundation should publicize the donations for bricks more widely. Perhaps an article should be posted on the homepage of the website reminding people about donating for the bricks. Maybe the foundation should emphasize monthly donations more. Possibly there can be Twitter and Facebook requests for donations.

There was discussion about emeritus membership. The main consideration for becoming an emeritus member should not be the number of years of membership but the amount of service the person has provided to ATCA. Emeritus status seems to have been very random in the past. Brad suggested that there should be written criteria for being considered for emeritus membership. The Membership Services Committee should devise a definition for emeritus membership and a description of the criteria. Jay added that the standards should be very high so that emeritus membership will be limited. Perhaps the Ex-Com can vote once a year at the annual conference to add emeritus members.

Bill said that it is important for ATCA to define itself and decide exactly what kind of an organization we want to be, especially as things continue to change in the profession.

Lou Harry made a motion, seconded by Ed Rubin, for the Membership Services Committee to create a standardized rejection letter to be sent to applicants who are not eligible for membership in ATCA. The committee can draft the letter, and the Ex-Com will vote on it and adopt it. That will help avoid situations like the recent one with the Philadelphia critic. There will not be a list of specific norms that the prospective member must meet, but the applicant will be evaluated according to the criteria listed on the website. The motion passed unanimously.

Bill reported that J. W. Arnold’s committee is in the process of designing a recruiting campaign for ATCA members and will report on it later in the meeting.

What do we want the Membership Services Committee to do? During this transition time, we need to ask committee members if they want to continue and try to recruit new members who will reflect more diversity in the membership. It is important not only to increase ATCA’s membership but to attract more diverse critics to become members. It is important to balance the need to attract new members against the importance of maintaining the organization’s critical standards. We should be focusing on offering different things of value to different populations of people.

Part of promoting ATCA should be sponsoring regional meetings like the one in Cincinnati. Even informally getting people together will promote growth and diversity in the organization. Perhaps the website can provide links to interesting articles about theater that are appearing around the country.

The Membership Services Committee should have a three-pronged focus:

1. Vetting new applicants for membership in ATCA;
2. Recruiting new members to ATCA;
3. Defining and developing benefits of membership to potential members from different areas of the country.

We need to embrace change to promote future growth and provide different access paths to the organization. ATCA should actively encourage students and those learning to become critics or write about theater as well as support professionals in the profession and associate members. We need to search on the fringes of the theater world where writers are writing about theater in a different way. One part of recruitment can be having present members talk about why they are members and what they get from the organization. It is important to fold membership recruitment into the work of the Membership Services Committee and try to expand the committee to reflect different points of view.

Do we need different categories of membership? Should we consider a beginning member category? How do we fold these people into the organization when it is time? Should ATCA be a resource for theater writers? The Membership Services Committee can determine if applicants have potential and are promising theater writers. How can the National Critics Institute at the O’Neill become part of our recruitment process? We should ask Chris Jones about ways the institute can relate to ATCA and the growth of the organization. Are there ways for us to piggyback on his students or ideas? Should we have scholarships to ATCA? Perhaps the O’Neill is already suggesting that. We need to check with Chris and find out.

The process of rebuilding the Membership Services Committee involves inviting the current members to remain as well as inviting new members we would like to see become involved to join. We want to encourage a range of ideas and viewpoints. Perhaps the entire committee should act as the vetting basis for new members. There should be both subjective and objective criteria for vetting applicants for membership. Presently there are seven criteria listed on the website. They are the following:

1. Is the applicant paid for his/her theater coverage?
2. Is the applicant’s work subject to oversight by an assigning editor or copywriter?
3. What is the educational background of the applicant in regard to theater?
4. How long has the applicant been covering theater?
5. What is the reputation of the applicant? (Ask for the names of two or three theaters he/she covers and call the theater personnel to see if the applicant has influence in the theater community. Also ask the sponsoring ATCA member why he/she wants to sponsor the applicant.)
6. How often does the applicant cover theater?
7. Does the applicant have any apparent conflicts of interest with the theater community he/she covers?

It is important for the committee to ask why people want to join ATCA. What do they expect to get from the organization? These questions should be added to the membership application. People suggested names for new committee members to Mark Lowry, the new Membership Services Committee chair. Bill said that the recruitment strategy for new members will be in place by the end of February.

At 3:30 p.m., J. W. Arnold joined the meeting along with Jack Lyons. J. W. reported that the recent online survey gave the recruitment committee a lot of valuable information. The committee members are Robert Sokol, Susan Cohn, Brad Hathaway, and Mark Lowry. He reviewed the survey findings, which had already been distributed, with the Ex-Com. The recruitment campaign will target three categories of people:

1. Lapsed members
2. Overall entertainment writers who now cover theater. We want to know their motivation and validation as writers. He mentioned that there is a list of more than 700 style and arts and entertainment writers.
3. Independent bloggers and freelancers. We also want to know their motivation and validation as writers. We can send e-mails and use social media to contact them.

Here is the timeline for recruiting new members:

1. Within 30 days: review and revise the information on the website about membership in ATCA;
2. Within 60 days, develop an e-mail campaign to recruit new members;
3. Within 90 days, offer outreach to lapsed ATCA members.

Bill announced that there will be a follow-up teleconference call in January that will deal with how to execute the recruitment strategy and get people involved. He also reported that we need to find someone to do the organization’s press releases in-house; it is too expensive to do them any other way. We also need an updated policy manual, which will be especially valuable for newer members. Brad sent out a copy of the old policy manual some time ago to all the Ex-Com members. The committee chairs should update the descriptions of their committees.

Bill is trying to solicit information on the history of ATCA from old-time members. The website is much improved, but we can do even more to keep it updated and interesting. Robert Sokol, Chris Rawson, Brad Hathaway, and Jonathan Mandell have been working very hard on the site.

The business being concluded, the meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Barbara Bannon, ATCA secretary.

**Addendum**

The following motion was made and passed by e-mail.

On December 10, Martha Steketee made a motion, seconded by Frank Rizzo, that Robert Sokol be reappointed as ATCA operations manager for the calendar year 2018 at the same salary. The motion passed unanimously on December 11.

On January 9, Brad Hathaway made a motion about ATCA’s emeritus policy that was amended by Martha Steketee, but the motion was never seconded or voted on.