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Actors, Studio Arena settle dispute

By Colin Dabkowski NEWS ARTS WRITER

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A union dispute that threatened to cancel two shows from Studio Arena Theatre's upcoming season was resolved Wednesday after the theater reached a settlement with the New York-based Actors' Equity union.

The shows, the musical "Bat Boy" and American classic "To Kill a Mockingbird," were planned as non-union presentations to be produced by Buffalo theater companies MusicalFare Theatre and Road Less Traveled Productions, respectively.

Under the new agreement, said Studio Arena CEO and Artistic Director Kathleen Gaffney, the three theaters will be responsible for an additional cost of at least \$35,000 and the shows will be now be billed as "co-productions."

Gaffney said she is unsure of how the extra costs will be absorbed, but that she is expecting them to be offset by increased ticket sales and a possible grant.

"It's not only a win for Studio Arena Theatre, it's a win for the local actors and it's a win for Buffalo," Gaffney said of the agreement.

To avoid an arbitration hearing scheduled for October that would have forced the theater to scrap the shows, the two entities agreed to place the productions under union contracts.

"Studio Arena has a longstanding relationship with Equity and this will provide more job opportunities for Equity actors, who are vital members of the Buffalo community," said Actors' Equity Association Executive Director John P. Connolly in a statement released Wednesday.

Randall Kramer, executive director of MusicalFare Theatre, said the agreement is an ideal compromise. "I'm glad too see that everybody had to give a little bit and that's the mark of a very good negotiation," Kramer said.

Gaffney said she did not expect her original plan to meet with opposition from the union.

"I was under the assumption that it was perfectly fine to go ahead and present [work from] other companies," Gaffney said.




“It was not a happy surprise.”

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