

The Implications of the SAG-AFTRA Strike

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As I'm not just a teacher, but a professional actor...I have a vested interest in this issue, especially with my knowledge of IT and understanding of the impact of AI which is one of the major points of the strike for both the WGA (representing writers for Film, TV, and more) and SAG-AFTRA (representing actors for Film, TV, and more).

A lot of folks think that actors are just the rich and famous. Like society, that's the 1% that are the most visible. The majority of SAG-AFTRA members struggle to get by. Over 80% make less than \$5K per year and it takes \$26K to qualify for benefits which even fewer qualify for. And, you can lose them following year if you don't maintain that level of income. The new streaming inequities in payment that aren't encompassed in past broadcast residual-type payments, it's hard to keep that going, even in you've made a successful and profitable show. Stars of even some of the most popular shows on those networks can't even make their bills without taking on other jobs.

While SAG-AFTRA has entered a new phase of negotiations today with AMPTP, representing the studios and the major streamers, and while the WGA agreement (not approved yet by the members, but accepted by the leadership) bodes well for that Union, a strike authorization was approved almost unanimously against major Video Game creators under the Interactive Media Agreement (where I do a lot of work) for many of the same issues. As of today, those negotiations are at an impasse and the contract hasn't been revised in over a year.

The Dangers of AI in Entertainment:

To better understand just how AI can affect creatives, take a listen to Justine Bateman said on the matter. Yes, that Justine Bateman from Family Ties, but she's also a writer in WGA, a director in DGA, and an IT Professional who understands, as I do, the dangers this represents to creatives right now. While from much earlier this year, she states very clearly what the issue is on just this single front, and from May (and things are progressing at a staggering rate with violations of copyright and use of works without permission or compensation):

<https://ktla.com/entertainment/justine-bateman-rings-the-warning-bell-on-ai-use-in-hollywood/>
Fortunately, Justine has been actively recruited in the negotiations related to this key point in negotiations.

About the WGA Strike:

As all of you are aware, writers with the WGA and actors with SAG-AFTRA have been striking for fair treatment in terms of wage adjustments, compensation for streaming views (along the lines of former residuals for broadcast), and, the use of AI to sample or produce scripts, as well as capturing the likenesses, voices, and other forms of performance in terms of actors. There has been a great deal of support and solidarity between the two Unions.

While the leadership of the WGA has accepted the agreement, the new contract must be approved by the members, but it seems quite likely that it will pass as a number of very

important gains were made. One of the last and biggest hurdles being the use of AI, which we are struggling to deal with in other ways in education right now. Fortunately, the agreement on this point went through.

This is just an indication of how AI might affect us, as teachers, very soon in terms of not only student submissions, but our jobs themselves.

More about the SAG-AFTRA Strike:

But, even though SAG-AFTRA now has a new round of negotiations set to begin on October 2nd with AMPTP representing the major studios and streamers for film and television contracts, it will be a wait and see game to see how SAG's proposals for changes are met. Hopefully, the contract with WGA is an indication of how things can benefit actors.

Interactive Media Agreement Negotiations with SAG-AFTRA & Video Game Makers

<https://www.sagaftra.org/get-involved/take-action/interactive-media-video-game-strike-authorization-2023>

98.3% of union members voted for a strike authorization for the interactive media agreement or IAM which affects production of video games (and something that I do quite a lot of).

The voice and performance capture artists (like myself) who bring video game characters to life deserve a contract that protects their voices, likenesses and careers and reflects the value they bring to the multibillion dollar gaming industry. The critical issues at play are similar to those at stake in SAG-AFTRA's TV/Theatrical/Streaming negotiations.

These issues include:

- Artificial intelligence protections around consent, control, transparency and compensation.
- Wage increases that reflect compensation erosion due to inflation.
- Safety for on-camera performers and vocal stress protections for voice artists.

SAG-AFTRA has continued to negotiate in good faith with the interactive media companies, but those companies remain determined to underpay performers while turning a blind eye to key tenets of performer safety and exploiting actors' performances and likenesses without proper informed consent. For many performers, their first job may be their last, as companies become increasingly eager to scan our members or train AI with their voices as soon as they show up for work.

I have already seen incursions into taking away my voice through auditions, hidden language in contracts, and even services that trained their models on my voice to try to take away what I can do. But, I'm not alone, see what happened to Stephen Fry:

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/movies/news/stephen-fry-shocked-to-discover-ai-stole-his-voice-from-harry-potter-audiobooks-and-replicated-it-without-consent-says-his-agents-went-ballistic/ar-A1gXtEx>

About IATSE:

Film, Television, and Streaming Media would be nowhere without the hardworking, talented, and dedicated crews that make these productions happen. They are the real troopers on the set...working long before the "talent" arrives, and still have to take it all down again and pack it

up long after the “talent” leaves. That’s why I always wait for crew to go first at Craft Services (when we get fed). We actors are often in the “hurry up and wait” and can grab bits in-between shots, but the crew works so hard, they don’t have that opportunity. I’ll admit that I do check on my crew from time-to-time to bring them stuff while they’re working! Teamwork makes the dream work!

While production has shut down, it has been very hard on the crews that make our productions happen! (Not to mention many privately owned small businesses that rely on and support the industry.)

Although this article is from August, it does a good job at breaking down the collateral hardships on film and television crews (represented by IATSE) as work ground to a halt on so many productions:

<https://variety.com/2023/biz/news/strike-impact-crews-iatse-sag-aftra-wga-1235683713/#!>

And a more recent article on the pain it is causing for these workers as well:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2023/09/hollywood-dual-strike-animation-guild-iats/e/675368/>

IATSE are up for new negotiations next year and we all need to support them. In positive news, the hardworking FX crews at Marvel just joined their ranks, and those at Disney have also maneuvered to a vote to join!

Simple ways that you can help in Solidarity with SAG-AFTRA:

<https://www.sagaftrastrike.org/stand-with-us>

<https://www.sagaftrastrike.org/social-toolkit>

Other ways that you can help support those in need during the strike:

<https://entertainmentcommunity.org/services-and-programs>

<https://sagaftra.foundation/emergencyfinancialassistance/>

A great list of relief funds and efforts from IATSE representing the crews and other folks who make entertainment possible and are dealing with collateral effects from the strikes:

<https://www.iatse728.org/blog/iatse-strike-aid>

Finally, \$5 goes to help folks in the union in need with the Merch on this site sold:

<https://shop.worxprinting.coop/collections/sag-aftra>