

Interview: Grace McPhillips, Steve Scholz on Chicago Acting in Film Meetup Holiday Event

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 12, 2013 - 4:25pm

- [Actors](#) [2]
- [CAFM](#) [3]
- [Chicago Acting in Film Meetup](#) [4]
- [Chicago Fire](#) [5]
- [Chicago PD](#) [6]
- [Fitting](#) [7]
- [Grace McPhillips](#) [8]
- [Hard Rock Hotel](#) [9]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [10]
- [Interview](#) [11]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [12]
- [SAG/AFTRA](#) [13]
- [Saturday Night Live](#) [14]
- [Steve Scholz](#) [15]
- [The Onion Network](#) [16]
- [The Other One](#) [17]

CHICAGO – One of the Windy City's best networking resources for local film actors is the Chicago Acting Film Meetup (CFAM) group, and they are having their annual end-of-year "Holiday Hurrah" event at the Hard Rock Hotel on Monday, December 16th, 2013. Organizing that event are two board officers of CAFM, actors Grace McPhillips (President) and Steve Scholz (Vice President).

CAFM was founded by Grace McPhillips six years ago, and has expanded every year since. The membership has a growing and diverse range of employment opportunities in the Windy City, including TV shows ("Chicago Fire" and "Chicago PD"), commercials, films ("Divergent") and web series in production. CAFM has established itself as a vital co-mentoring and educational group for working actors in Chicago, with monthly meetings and seminars, and the upcoming holiday event is open to the public.



Grace McPhillips in the New Film, 'The Other One'
Photo credit: Sterling Rock Productions

The board officers of CAFM, McPhillips and Steve Scholz, are veteran actors and performers in Chicago. Scholz has a deep theater and Chicago improv background, including The Second City Conservatory, Annoyance Theater and iO Chicago. Grace McPhillips hails from Montgomery, Alabama, and moved to Chicago specifically to pursue a career in independent film, TV, voiceover and stage. She has recently wrapped production on a film entitled 'The Other One.'

HollywoodChicago.com recently talked to both actors regarding the upcoming event and the state of the film actor in Chicago.

HollywoodChicago.com: The easiest question to begin with for both of you...what have been the biggest accomplishment of the Chicago Acting Film Meetup group this year?

Steve Scholz: We've done a tremendous amount of connecting filmmakers to actors, and in a variety of ways. The two main ones were the Chicago's Film Actors Showcase that we did in May, and the Chicago Film Actor's 'generals,' which were designed to show our members on camera, in the format that they work in best. Much like theater or school generals, film actor generals put 76 of our members on film, reading sides from recent films and TV shows. This gives casting directors, filmmakers and even student filmmakers a chance to cast us from those on-screen auditions.

Grace McPhillips: We took ourselves more seriously this year. We wanted to get the people that were raising the bar together, a pushing it even further. As a not-for-profit, we received our first grant this year, which was a big accomplishment. We're now funded, through an Illinois Arts Council grant. In addition to the generals, we paid for casting directors outside Chicago to critique and give feedback on them.

HollywoodChicago.com: You changed the attitude and location of the event last year. What was the feedback – both positive and negative – and what changes will come about to this year's event, because of that feedback?

McPhillips: People liked it because it was sexier, it felt more official and formal. We will also include a red carpet this year – colored green for the holiday. We picked the wrong band last year, we want more dancing this year.

Scholz: Our raffles are a big hit, and the prizes get bigger every year. We included meetings with casting directors and agents, which were very popular, so we'll expand that this year.

McPhillips: We plan to put those prizes into a silent auction.

HollywoodChicago.com: An unprecedented number of new series, shows and the web series phenomenon has exploded in 2013 for Chicago. How has that helped the employment for actors in the Windy City?

McPhillips: Bottom line, less fear about staying here. Actors operate in fear, because we're at the bottom of the totem, until were not, and then it's the top. Having more opportunities to work is a good thing,

Scholz: It's the inspiration of having the various TV series here, and the web episodes that people have produced themselves. That motivates actors to take initiatives for themselves. We did our third production within the Meetup this year, we had members taking about their own creations and we had much more going on with that this year. It's great to see the outside productions come into town, and to see what people can do for themselves.



Steve Scholz Plays a Role on 'The Onion Network'
Photo credit: The Onion

HollywoodChicago.com: We are nearing the first anniversary of the SAG/AFTRA merger. What benefits can you both point towards that directly came out of that pairing, and has there been any backlash?

Scholz: Grace has been on that board, and I just joined it this year. When they all met in California, I can't say all the acrimony regarding the merger has subsided, but I can say there is a greater willingness to have cooperation, and the benefit has been the outreach to local chapters, and that's what is happening here right now. There is a sense that Chicago has more pull, and that hadn't been the case before.

HollywoodChicago.com: You did say ‘acrimony.’ What does that mean?

Scholz: I get the feeling that there is a sensitivity between the East and West Coasts – because those who were anti-merger, kept saying it’s an actor’s union, they didn’t need broadcasters in it. Those in favor, see us all as performers in an on-screen media, and that’s what we need to preserve together. We’re better unified than divided.

McPhillips: One the big fallouts was that a lot of local folks, between the coasts, got cut. Approximately 18 offices were closed, which is understandable in some ways – fat does get trimmed – but at the same time it felt like more was being trimmed than anticipated.

HollywoodChicago.com: More and more actors are opting to produce their own work – such as you Grace – rather than audition for other folk’s productions. Obviously there are distinct advantages, what is the blowback sometimes to that strategy?

McPhillips: It isn’t economically fruitful. [laughs]

Scholz: It can also be time consuming, taking away from paying jobs. The focus becomes the project, which takes away from other outlets, or auditioning for other work. But if you have the passion for self productions, it definitely should be pursued.

HollywoodChicago.com: The talent pool in Chicago still drains toward New York and Los Angeles. What signs tell you both that actors are actually staying here?

McPhillips: What is happening in the local pool, is that this quarter we had 160 new join-ups to SAG/AFTRA, because of the TV shows. One producer I know was grateful, just because she doesn’t like working with non-union contracts. I think that will keep more people here. I’ve experienced a lot of people who move out there, and they end up having less auditions that I have here. It’s harder to get agents out there, even with people who had them here. On the other hand, if it does take ten years to find success, you might as well go out there when you’re 21 years old.



Steve Scholz and Grace McPhillips, November 24, 2013
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: Money is still king in show business, and the raising of funds is always situational as an actor or a producer. Has sites like Kickstarter made a big difference or do you see a leveling out or a contribution fatigue for those outlets?

Scholz: I have helped finance projects, such as Grace’s film ‘The Other One.’ What I like about her approach is that she used the site Fractured Atlas, which makes the donations tax deductible, makes it a greater incentive.

McPhillips: They actually sponsored me as an artist, so the film becomes a not-for-profit project. So all the money the was raised was 100 percent tax deductible. Also you get the money as it comes through, you don’t have to wait for the deadline.

HollywoodChicago.com: Steve, with your improv background, Chicago still is the go-to ‘developmental league’ for ‘Saturday Night Live.’ What does this town do best for the improvisational actor that prepares him or her for the rigors of that peculiar institution?

Scholz: Years ago I would have just said, ‘doing the improv,’ but now it’s the opportunity for these type of performers to actually do work on camera, before they get to ‘Saturday Night Live.’ This means being able to expand beyond the stage, that’s what the improv groups see as the next stepping stone, which means a higher profile and an easier way for shows like ‘SNL’ to see them on line. It’s much more equalizing.

HollywoodChicago.com: Grace, you have a feature film starting a festival circuit and one in pre-production. What have you learned from your experience with ‘The Other One’ that helped you in the midst of getting your next project, ‘Beautiful Little Fools,’ off the ground?

McPhillips: I definitely learned I don’t want to compromise on ‘Beautiful Little Fools,’ and I also know I need to make yet another film before that one. I recently signed the youngest woman ever to be accepted into the Directors Guild to take on a new project, ‘Wilder Land Road.’ Again, I don’t want to compromise on ‘Beautiful Little Fools,’ it’s a dual story line, which half taking place in the 1920s through the ‘40s. That will take money and experience.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, back to the both of you. Each of you give a one or two sentence prediction for the Chicago film actor in 2014...

McPhillips: I will predict we will have five more Chicago actors in principal roles on TV shows.

Scholz: I will predict we will get two more TV shows filming in Chicago by August of next year.

The 5th Annual Chicago Acting in Film Meetup “Holiday Hurrah” Event will be at the Hard Rock Hotel in Chicago on December 16th, 2013, starting at 7pm. [Click here](#) [18] for more information and to purchase tickets to the event.



[19]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [20]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [19]

© 2013 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 28 2024 - 6:08pm*):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/23058/interview-grace-mcphillips-steve-scholz-on-dec-16th-chicago-acting-in-film-meetup-holiday>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/actors>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/cafm>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chicago-acting-in-film-meetup>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chicago-fire>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chicago-pd>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/fitting>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/grace-mcphillips>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hard-rock-hotel>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/sagafta>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/saturday-night-live>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/steve-scholz>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-onion-network>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-other-one>
- [18] <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/5th-annual-cafm-holiday-hurrah-at-hard-rock-hotel-chicago-tickets-8986020429>
- [19] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>