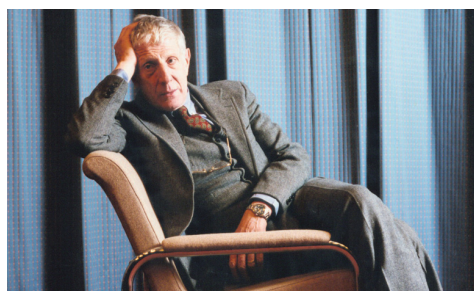


## No refunds or exchanges

Traditional theatre policy is outdated, but new ticketing initiatives could help customers and banish touts, says Richard Howle

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## The gift of giving

Philanthropy isn't something only billionaires do. Meet the small benefactors making a big difference to their favourite theatres

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## Spotlight rules branded 'ageist and hypocritical'

**MATTHEW HEMLEY**

Spotlight's joining criteria has been branded "hypocritical" and "discriminatory" by agents and performers, who claim the rules prevent swathes of actors over 25 from signing up.

They are calling on the casting site to overhaul its eligibility criteria, warning that many late starters to the industry are being "thwarted" before they have been given a chance.

Currently, performers aged 25 or over looking to join are required to have graduated with a minimum of a year's professional training from a full-time accredited drama school or university course, or have four or more professional credits in featured, named speaking roles. These must be in full-length film, television or theatre productions. Commercials, idents, short films and extras work are not included within this.

Performers under the age of 25 are able to join if they are represented by a Spotlight-registered agent.

Spotlight has argued that the criteria is needed to maintain professional standards, but agents and performers claim the joining rules deny opportunities for many people who come into the industry later in life, or who do not go down the drama-school route.

Susie Blundell, from agency Goldmans Management, said: "Performers coming back into the industry or joining it later in life are thwarted at the first hurdle, as without being on Spotlight there is no way they can access the kind of roles being asked for."

She said the criteria made it tougher for many black performers who may not have had

drama training but grew up singing in churches. "We understand Spotlight's desire to be professional, as it's supposed to be the premium casting network. But as agents, we know what we are looking for in talent, and we are saying: 'We think they are good enough but you are saying no'," she said.

Stacey Pomeroy, a 28-year-old performer, did not go to drama school and said she lacks the credits required to sign up to Spotlight.

She labelled it "discriminatory" and added: "It seems to me that, below the age of 25, the criteria is less stringent, but once you hit 25 they're expecting you to have brushed shoulders with [Martin] Scorsese or something."

Meanwhile, agent Josh Boyd-Rochford, from JBR Creative Management, said Spotlight had a "monopoly" that no one challenged.

He described the joining criteria as a "relic of the past" and added: "It really does need a complete overhaul." He said the casting site held the "industry to ransom" and was not helping to nurture new talent.

"No one gave them this power. They've just been around for such a long time. To say you can't be an actor unless you have four professional credits, you can't be an actor unless you have been to an accredited drama school, is ridiculous," he said, adding that he felt it was unfair that successful, high-earning actors paid the same £158 fee annually as performers not earning as much.

Campaigner Helen Raw, who created the British Actors Network, said her biggest "bugbear" was the hypocrisy of the criteria.

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**Theatres should ditch all royal patronage**  
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## Shakespeare's Rose faces debt claims of £378k

**GIVERNY MASSO**

Claims totalling more than £378,000 have been made against the collapsed Shakespeare's Rose Theatre, the pop-up venue that ran in York and Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire this summer.

Shakespeare's Rose Theatre Ltd began liquidation proceedings in October following "unsustainable losses" from the season. The company was set up by producer James Cundall, who runs six companies globally under the brand of Lunchbox Theatrical Productions.

The £378,000 claims relating to Shakespeare's Rose Theatre Ltd are in addition to more than £5 million debt claims reported to The Stage by producers of some of the world's biggest shows.

Actors, suppliers, agencies and creatives are among the list of 160 creditors for Shakespeare's Rose Theatre Ltd, which has been published by Companies House.

The largest claim is from Yorkshire-based company Acorn Scaffolding for £71,472. York City Council, which owns the car park where the York pop-up theatre was located, claims to be owed £33,922.

Other substantial claims include £38,000 from caterers Searcy Tansley and £27,000 from merchandise company Global Marketing Group. There are a number of claims from agencies, including Conway van Gelder Grant and Amber Personal Management, as well as from individual actors and creatives, totalling thousands of pounds.

A spokesperson for Shakespeare's Rose Theatre previously "strongly disputed" a statement from union Equity claiming that actors had been left thousands of pounds out of pocket.

The liquidation of Shakespeare's Rose Theatre Ltd is being handled by Rob Sadler of insolvency practitioners Sadlers. Cundall did not respond to a request for comment.

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