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**Spelling Bee unpaid fees**

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The Stage that he was owed £960. He said there were more than 15 people in the cast and band in total, but there had been little contact from the producers about the money owed to him.

"If I was a producer and in a situation where I owed people money I would bend over backwards to sort it out. It baffles me that they are producing Copacabana because they have these debts to pay and yet are mounting a fully fledged UK tour," he said.

Caulfield added that the cast and band had been told the tour was cancelled by telephone last year, and said that he had been forced to borrow money from friends when he was left without work.

Meanwhile, a performer in the production, who asked not to be named, questioned how

Stuart-Hicks and Leno were allowed to keep producing shows.

"I know we are not owed life-changing amounts, but it's the way it was handled that was so bad. We had given up other jobs to appear in the musical and were then all laid off," she said.

Responding, Stuart-Hicks confirmed that Day had made a claim against the company, but said that Ash Productions Live rejected all allegations.

Stuart-Hicks also said he was not aware of any other cast members having raised "any claims in respect of their remuneration for Spelling Bee", and added that everyone had been paid in accordance with the company's contractual obligations.

He did not comment on the contract clause that performers claim gives them entitlement to three weeks' pay.

**Agency labelled a 'scam' after charging £180 deposit**

by Nicola Merrifield

A new agency that is charging a £180 upfront deposit to actors who want to be represented by the company has been labelled a "scam" by industry body the Agents' Association.

The recently launched agency Harris Bentley Wolf demands that actors it considers to be a risk due to "experience, age or limited credits" pay the agency the fee before being signed up.

The Agents' Association has said requesting this deposit is effectively charging an upfront fee before actors can join the agency – which is against the law – and is therefore a scam. It added that this type of practice threatens to bring the agency business into disrepute.

Harris Bentley Wolf has been approaching actors since the end of July offering a service that includes personal career management, casting opportunities, industry event invitations and help with headshots, showreels and website profiles.

It charges the £180 deposit to "some new artists" based on a risk assessment. It claims it will return

the deposit if, after a three-month review period, the actor continues to stay with the agency or if their contract is terminated by HBW. However, if the performer decides to leave the agency then the deposit will not be returned to them.

Laws on employment agency practice forbid agencies to charge an upfront fee to performers as a condition of them joining an organisation. In certain circumstances, fees can be charged for additional services – such as providing photographs for an actor or including their profile in a publication – but this includes a 30-day cooling off period.

Jenny Dunster, president of the Agents' Association (Great Britain), said: "The practice of this agency is terrible for the reputation of agents. It is horrendous. When you get unsuspecting people wanting to come into the industry who think they can be actors and work in the industry because they've got an agent – and we know patently they are not and that they wouldn't get an agent under any other terms – it brings the business into disrepute, despite most agents acting ethically."

"Nowhere in the original regulations of 2003 or subsequent updates is there any provision for a deposit to be taken from the work seeker of any sort whatsoever. In my view this is a scam trying to get around the upfront fee," she added.

A Scotland-based actor and producer who was alerted to Harris Bentley Wolf by other performers questioned whether the agency was legitimate and genuinely planned to pursue work on behalf of actors.

The actor/producer, who asked not to be named, said: "My suspicion is that once the money has been paid, there is no guarantee of work and my concern is that these actors either don't get any work and/or they have lost £180."

She added: "The problem with this is that agents are not licensed anymore so this means anyone can set up an agency with a website asking for money.

"My fear is that many young actors will pay this money because they don't know that it's not the done thing."

Harris Bentley Wolf did not respond to requests for a comment.

**Equity launches campaign to highlight licensing law benefits**

Pubs around the UK are being urged to host live entertainment – including theatre shows – as part of a new campaign launched by Equity.

The Live Entertainment Works! campaign is aimed at highlighting changes to licensing laws introduced in 2012, which make it easier for pubs and small venues to host live entertainment, such as music and theatre performances.

Under the Live Music Act, performances of plays and dance for audiences of up to 500 are permitted without a licence.

Live music events for audiences of 200 or fewer do not need a licence either, providing the event does not take place before 8am and after 11pm. If music is not amplified, there is no audience restriction.

According to Equity, the changes are a "win-win

situation" for its members and publicans.

Hilary Hadley, live performance head at Equity, said: "Pubs gain more trade through people enjoying the live entertainment, the community benefits by joining together in a shared activity and Equity members get to do what they do best."

According to research conducted by the Musicians' Union in 2012, 24% of pubs reported an increase in takings of between 25% and 50% on nights they featured live entertainment, with 71% seeing an increase of between 10% and 25%. Pubs without music were found to be three times more likely to close.

Equity has issued a guide as part of its campaign, which informs venues about the best way to introduce live events, including liaising with customers, how to advertise and how to book acts.

**Most musicians have experienced mental health problems**

by Georgia Snow

Almost 60% of professional musicians have suffered from depression or other psychological issues, while 82% have experienced money problems, a new survey has revealed.

The Health and Wellbeing Survey was conducted by musicians' charity Help Musicians UK, in order to draw attention to the main issues affecting musicians today.

More than 550 professional musicians were surveyed, 13% of whom worked in musical theatre. Most – 59% – worked in classical music.

Antisocial working hours and work insecurity came out

as being among musicians' primary worries, while three-quarters of those surveyed had experienced performance anxiety during their career.

Of those who sought help for problems, 48% received professional help, primarily from a GP or through private medical treatment.

The survey revealed private medical treatment to be the most helpful. Of those who had consulted the NHS, almost half said they were disappointed with the response.

A report on the study said: "This suggests that the NHS may not be well equipped to deal with performance-related health problems

although this and the reasons why musicians resort to private healthcare need more detailed research."

HM's help and advice manager, Nigel Hamilton, told The Stage: "Being a musician can be a uniquely rewarding career but it also brings unique pressures and challenges. The economic pressures and rapid changes affecting the industry as a whole also affect many musicians directly.

"We conducted this survey because it is important to understand these pressures so that we can support and help musicians in the most effective way."

The prevalence of money problems among musicians is in line with the results of a 2012 study undertaken by the Musicians' Union, which revealed that more than half of musicians earned less than £20,000 a year and only 35% could afford to pay into a pension scheme.

Diane Widdison, national organiser for education and training at the MU, said the results showed "a real need for musicians to have their concerns addressed".

"We all want musicians to have long and productive careers with health and wellbeing issues being a priority," he said.

**Union opposes council plans for buskers in London's Notting Hill**

Plans to introduce licences for street performers on Notting Hill's Portobello Road have been labelled counterproductive by the Musicians' Union.

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is consulting on plans to introduce a licensing regime to "control busking in designated streets".

The policy would see busking controlled on Fridays and Saturdays between 10pm and 6pm. A licence would cost £15 for six months, and performers would be allowed to book a maximum of two slots.

MU live performance organiser Dave Webster said the plans go against

London mayor Boris Johnson's campaign, launched earlier this year, to simplify the rules for busking across the capital.

"Given the proactive steps being taken by the Greater London Authority in bringing together all London's local authorities, buskers, the police, the MU and [campaign

group] Keep Streets Live, the introduction of consultations on the licensing of buskers in Kensington and Chelsea is counterproductive and goes against the spirit of cooperation which we believed to be the way forward for busking in London," he said.

Full story [thestage.co.uk/news](http://thestage.co.uk/news)



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