

I am delighted to speak to you this evening on the sixtieth anniversary of the Gypsy Robe. For years, the Roma – or Gypsies as they are commonly known – have been persecuted and stigmatized. Living hand to mouth, they were unable to afford anything to wear over their pajamas and nightgowns. Sixty years ago, Equity established a program –what?...What?...Really? That’s what we’re celebrating?

Seriously, I love the Gypsy Robe. I love the idea of the Gypsy Robe. I love the ceremony of the Gypsy Robe. It is, like much of what we do, a little silly. It is, like many of us, a little flamboyant. It is, however, founded on solid principles of acknowledgement and brotherhood, of honor and heart.

Each year, thousands and thousands of starry-eyed youngsters leave high school and college with the goal of performing on Broadway. Very few of them ever make it. It is a very impressive achievement to be cast in a Broadway show. It is even more impressive to be cast in a second, subsequent Broadway show. The recipients of the Gypsy Robe, however, have been in three, seven, twelve or more Broadway shows.

To us , they are Broadway royalty, as surely as the Mermans, the Martins, the Lunts and the Fontannes.

The Gypsy Robe ceremony is a welcome – both to the new show and to those performers making their Broadway debut. It is an expression of hope and good wishes just before a show crosses over from the land of limitless potential and possibility to the yes/no, up/down land of critical decision, the land of flop or hit. It is a collegial hand extended from the previous Broadway musical and extending back sixty years. It is not some public awards spectacle co-opted by marketing needs; it is a private, heartfelt affair for those of us currently living in the village of Broadway, and it is all the sweeter for that.

I would starve to death if I had to earn my living on a pink contract. I don't have the talent or skills to be in a Broadway chorus – and there are dozens of musical directors and choreographers who would corroborate that assessment. But I can recognize talent in others, and those who have worn the Gypsy Robe over the past sixty years are some of the most talented performers this nation has

produced. As an audience member, as a fellow performer and as
President of your union, I salute the men and women who have worn
the Gypsy Robe.