



Signed Performances In Theatre

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NEWS

This issue of SPIT News opens with two reviews – *Mamma Mia!* in London's West End and *Carnival Messiah* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse this July. We are always pleased to include reviews of recent shows, so get writing!

Carnival Messiah

Interpreted by John Parker

A review by Chris Broadbent

My literary skills will never match the breathtaking performance of *Carnival Messiah!*

I went to the show unsure and unprepared. The production parallels the catholic belief of the birth, death & resurrection of Christ with the Trinidad Carnival practice. The cast was vast. Folk singers, dancers, blues and gospel singers, African percussion interspersed with classical/modern dance, disco, hip-hop, reggae.... The legal scene where Joseph presents his court "brief" case, was very witty and overflowing with puns. The crucifixion performed on stilts brought gasps from the audience. It was without doubt the best show I have ever seen. I doubt you would see better in Venice, Rio, Sydney or Notting Hill! The interpreter was brilliant and deserves an Oscar. I would recommend *Carnival Messiah* to everyone from 5 - 105 and defy any spectator to remain seated.

MAMMA MIA – IT'S DONNA!

A review by Allen Klein

The only way to see *Mamma Mia!* is to book a year in advance. The West End usually offers half price seats for signed performances, but *Mamma Mia!* was on sale at £32.50. Would Deaf people pay that price? As one member of the audience put it, "for a top show and a top Interpreter, yes". Over 60 others obviously agreed, so as the last SPIT Newsletter said, "signed performances are alive and well in London"!

The Prince Edward Theatre is a beautiful well-laid out theatre and the Deaf audience were placed in the dress circle with interpreter Donna Ruane standing to their left further down on an extension of the circle. There was a clear view of both the Interpreter and the stage; it was an interesting departure from the usual "Interpreter at the side of the stage" arrangement and worked well in this particular Theatre.

Having seen Donna doing *Fame* with a great deal of energy at Bromley in July I wondered how she would adapt to *Mamma Mia!* a play that has Abba songs weaving in and out of the story.

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"I really enjoyed it. Amazed to see so many deaf people. The interpreter was at side of circle which is new. I could see her well but not at the end because everyone stood up to dance. Good show."

Deaf Focus Group Feedback

Mamma Mia! review cont'd

Donna's approach is to learn the show thoroughly and it was obvious that preparation plus her dance training with her interpreting became a performance that gave far more access to the show itself, the characterisation, the way certain lines are said, the feel of the music and the sheer impact of the songs.

Donna was dressed 70's Abba-style with a "gypsy" look, and she had her hair swept again in 70's style. It fitted in with the show and I could not think of another interpreter who takes so much trouble to look part of the show, rather than an appendage. The Theatre had rigged up spotlights to ensure that there were no shadows on her face – most Theatres around the country only rig up one light without a thought about shadows and what happens to the Deaf audience if the lamp blows during a performance?!

"I was able to follow the songs and signing along rather than the interpreter being an 'add-on' feature. I felt she was part of the show, though it may have been a bit better if we had been closer to the stage."

Deaf Focus Group Feedback

As an American visitor to London; Donna's style and method had a huge impact on me, equal to or better than the best SLIPs we have in New York (where a new show is interpreted every month). Other European Deaf visitors made similar comments; but do interpreters need to be performers as well? That is the question being debated in Europe and the U.S. right now. Terry Ruane, Director of SignAway (who was responsible for setting up the interpreted *Mamma Mia!*) is convinced that they do. "I don't think a local SLI who does Doctor's appointments, college courses and Conferences should be going on stage without a background of performance skills, otherwise strictly speaking, they are not giving full access"

And what about that "high" ticket price? Well, in New York, Theatre tickets cost \$100, and £32.50 is less than half of that – still good value for an excellent Interpreter and the best show in the West End!

POSITIVE OUTCOMES FROM DFG REPORTING... VENUES RESPOND:

Does your Loop System work?

"I have been investigating this incident and putting systems in place so that it cannot happen again. We have now installed an induction loop so you will no longer have to obtain a headset in order to use this system. Unfortunately on the evening in question the equipment was turned to the wrong frequency, a situation I have since discussed with our Chief Electrician, and he has altered this. I have organised a training session with the Box Office Staff to make sure that they all have a full and complete knowledge of all the equipment and systems available so that this sort of incident cannot happen again. Be assured that we are doing our utmost to rectify the problems that so obviously need to be addressed."

Hearing Dogs Welcome

"We were concerned by the negative feedback and hope the changes we are making as a result will improve things for the future. The nature of the theatre space and design for some shows can make it difficult to find a good spot from which an interpreter can cover all the action. We will now try to hold earlier meetings with directors, designers and interpreters and write into directors & designers contracts that they must consider a position for an interpreter from the start. We have 3 members of staff who are proficient signers and we try to ensure that at least one of these is on duty for sign-interpreted performances. We have booked another 3 onto SPIT's Deaf Awareness Workshop and will be sending 3 more along to the next one. We do recognise the importance of understanding the needs of our deaf community and of making our building and productions as accessible as possible. We will continue to do all we can to ensure that the deaf community feels welcome and comfortable."

DEAF AWARENESS WORKSHOPS &

BSL COURSES 2003

Full-day workshops on Deaf awareness continue:

London, Sadler's Wells Mon 20 Jan
Birmingham, Hippodrome Wed 5 March
London, Drill Hall Mon 12 May

We would like to run our **10 week BSL Introductory Course** in the Spring. If you are interested in hosting or attending please contact us.

No Clash Diary

Avoid clashing with another venue offering a SLIP on the same night as you; use SPIT's National No-Clash Diary to check and register dates for your SLIPs.

Remember - it only works if you use it!

Up to date listings can be seen at www.spit.org.uk/search.asp

FLORA LONDON MARATHON 2003

Do you want to run in the London Marathon in April 2003? Then why not make your training pay, by running on behalf of **Defeating Deafness**, the UK's only national medical research charity for deaf and hard of hearing people. Whether you're a regular runner or just looking for a new challenge, don't miss out on this chance to take part in the sporting event of the year.

We have 7 guaranteed places in this year's marathon, and hope to raise at least £1,250 for the charity from each place. We'll give you the help and support you need to meet the challenge. Do you have what it takes to go the distance?

For further information please contact Anna today by writing to: Defeating Deafness, 330-332 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8EE

or telephoning: 0207 833 1733

or emailing: defeating.deafness@ucl.ac.uk

Keep in touch!

To join SPIT's free mailing list, simply send us your name, address and contact details. Remember, if you received this issue of SPIT News by post, you are already on our database!

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RECENT HAPPENINGS...

SPIT was at the **RNID Breaking the Sound Barrier Exhibition** on 18/19 October.

The **SPIT AGM** took place on 29 October.



**CALOUSTE
GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION**

SPIT relies on Trusts and Foundations for a third of its income. All donations large and small are vital if SPIT is to continue its work. If you would like to support SPIT please consider Give As You Earn (GAYE) or contact us.

Good practice in action

SPIT believes in supporting good practice, so we were pleased to hear positive feedback about one of our founder members, English National Opera (ENO).

ENO has been consulting with disabled patrons about the renovation of its home, the London Coliseum, for the past two years, to get feedback on seating, pricing, services and facilities, as well as its range of access services that include regular SLIPs and audio-described performances. Meetings take place on a regular basis with groups of disabled patrons who have specific needs, and the information, advice and feedback has informed architectural plans, pricing policy and practical aspects like signage, etc.

Contact us if you know about similar examples of companies and theatres working hard to get it right, so we can sing their praises!