



Signed Performances In Theatre

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NEWS

BDA TO ESTABLISH A BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE ACADEMY

The British Deaf Association is the largest national Deaf charity run by Deaf people for Deaf people, whose vision is a world where Deaf people who use sign language enjoy the same rights, responsibilities, opportunities and quality of life as everyone. Around 250,000 people in the UK use sign language on a daily basis, 70,000 of who are Deaf and depend on it as their first or preferred language.

So it makes sense that following the Government's statement on 18 March 2003 recognising BSL, the BDA have announced their plans to establish a BSL Academy, which will focus on the quality of sign language teaching provision. This will include training sign language tutors, developing materials and curricula for new sign language courses such as GCSE and setting up distance learning and access courses. It is hoped to start some joint working in the next year with Yorkshire Forward, the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Development Agency.

Jeff McWhinney, Chief Executive of the BDA said, "The Academy is created by the BDA with the purpose of putting the ownership and control of sign language firmly into the hands of Deaf people. It will enhance the quality of BSL teaching, especially at higher levels, leading to a rapid increase in the availability of qualified tutors and courses. This will increase the number of people who are able to communicate in BSL at all levels and ultimately increase the number of qualified sign language interpreters."

DEAF FOCUS GROUP UPDATE

Members of SPIT's Deaf Focus Group have been reporting back on theatres with recent visits to Hampstead Theatre *The Safari Party*, Bristol Hippodrome *Miss Saigon*, Churchill Theatre Bromley *Saturday Night Fever* & *The Vagina Monologues* at Cochrane Theatre London.

The performance of *The Vagina Monologues* was a one-off, directed by Jenny Sealey and Espeth Morrison, with an all disabled cast, giving their time free, and raising money for charities dealing with violence against disabled women.

At very short notice one of SPIT's DFG went and reported back that the show was "fantastic! a brilliant comedy". She encountered some difficulties booking and seeing the interpreters when they were sitting. The Captions by STAGETEXT helped when the interpreters were not very good or not visible. "It would be a fab show to see again in a good access theatre. Various disability women performing – great!"

If you are interested in joining the Deaf Focus Group please contact SPIT.

DEAF AWARENESS WORKSHOPS

What you thought

"Excellent! fantastic course that I will be recommending to other colleagues & theatres!"

"the venue tour was useful to see the practical side of access for any deaf person"

"some topics discussed cover things that a hearing person would never think of"

Next date – Monday 9th June 2003, Festival Theatre, Edinburgh

New dates in the autumn will be announced in the summer. If you are interested in hosting a workshop please contact SPIT.

THEATRE ROYAL PLYMOUTH LAUNCHES PLAYWRITE

"I thought I was 'hearing' the performance"

If you live near or in Plymouth, then you will be pleased to hear that in addition to regular BSL interpreted shows, the Theatre Royal is introducing a new in-house service for the deaf and hard of hearing, known as *playwrite*, using captioned performances.

"Captioning has made it possible for me to go to the theatre again. I no longer feel left out"

The system works through an operator, who inputs dialogue and sound effects, which is then transmitted to an LED screen. The LED screen is easy to read and gives up to three lines of coloured text at any one time.

"Thanksto the captions I realised that I liked the language and poetry of the play very much"

The LED screen will be a permanent feature in the Theatre Royal, which is working up a full programme of *playwrite* performances each year. If you would like to know more and be kept up-to-date call direct on 01752 230318, TypeText on 0870 240 5152 or email access@theatreroyal.com

"What struck me was being able to laugh with the rest of the audience. Just what we wanted to do- laugh at the right time, just like everyone else."



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More West End Musicals on the way

Sgnaway has announced a series of West End musicals to be interpreted by Donna Ruane at weekends. The first, *Grease* at the Victoria Palace on Saturday 12th July is followed by the Queen musical, *We Will Rock You* at the Dominion on Saturday 13 September. The Christmas offering *The Lion King* is at the Lyceum Theatre on a Sunday, 14th December; all these shows are reduced price and as we go to press, Terry has announced *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* at the London Palladium on Saturday 24th January 2004.

This combination of West End musicals and Saturday matinee is a deliberate approach. More sign language users go to musicals than other types of theatre, plus Saturday matinees mean that people can travel from outside London and still get home afterwards - something they cannot do during the week. Sgnaway has a strategy of holding a number of seats and if they are not selling well, then any unsold seats are gradually released for sale to the public as the date approaches.

Why musicals and not plays? Terry is quick to point out that Sgnaway has done *The Mousetrap* and the *Reduced Shakespeare Company* in the West End and also those playgoers are well catered for by the Royal National Theatre, RSC, Donmar Warehouse and Almeida where interpreters like Mary Connell and Wendy Ebsworth regularly do an excellent job. Sgnaway has concentrated on developing this area because many theatregoers ask for the big musicals in the West End.

The Society of London Theatre is continuing to work closely with Sgnaway in developing access to the West End as a whole following the success of a project SOLT initiated three years ago where ticket prices are reduced where possible for West End shows.

For details of Sgnaway's West End Signed Performances Fax 020 8654 9282 or e-mail Sgnaway@btinternet.com

Letters

Paula Garfield of Deafinitely Theatre writes in response to John Wilson's recent article.

I read John Wilson's article very carefully and was very excited and pleased with the news that Shape was awarded such a large grant to develop a National Deaf Theatre. This project has been a long time coming and I am glad to see it finally happening. This is a very exciting time for the Deaf Arts in general as our work as artists is becoming more valued and supported in the Deaf and Hearing world.

However I feel that Shape has overlooked other varied and successful efforts to set up and establish a Deaf Theatre Company. Deafinitely Theatre offers a variety of programmes such as youth theatre workshops, children drama group, theatre in education and productions directed and performed by deaf people in BSL. Since starting one year ago we have devised and performed three plays and are currently working on our fourth, a large scale production to be performed at Jackson's Lane from 10-14th June*.

Deafway based in Preston is hoping to have a theatre project again after a successful project in Brighton this March, with deaf actor training and rehearsing and devising a short play over a 3 week period with about 200 people in the audience. Traveling Light Theatre Company based in Bristol has been running Deaf Theatre summer schools, family workshops and drama workshops over the past three years in partnership with Family Deaf Centre and is expanding its work to run a long term youth theatre with Deaf children. Elmfield School for the deaf is alive with poets, actors and dancers – this school has worked with many resident artists and performs work every year on Bristol stages.

It seems we are spoilt for choice at the moment which is great news for the deaf community. There is so much happening all over the country and we hope this will continue. It is healthy for the arts to have competition and diversity otherwise quality will suffer. So please remember that these small companies may have little money but they do have abundance of talent and determination. They need more support both from funding organisations and from large already established organisations such as SHAPE.

*MOTHERLAND presented by Deafinitely Theatre using sign and speech 10-14th June, Jackson's Lane N6 see listing for details.

Theatre News

Almeida – now reopened next SLIP The Lady from the Sea by Ibsen Captioned 11th June, BSL interpreted 18th June by Mary Connell, see listing for details

Graeae's Mother Courage and her Children – brings together 12 young actors, fresh from Graeae's Missing Piece performance training at London Metropolitan University. Exclusively for physically disabled and sensory impaired adults, it is the only training programme of its kind leading directly to a professional production. On tour in London June – July – see listing

Theatre Alibi's show Teapot for 5-12 year olds was interpreted by Connie O'Neill when they visited the Countess Weir Combined School (which has a unit for children with hearing impairment). The Royal School for the Deaf also brought a group. Connie was on stage moving alongside the performer throughout, which was a first for her and very successful. Theatre Alibi will be offering BSL interpreted shows again in the autumn.

Shakespeare at the Tower, Hoghton Lancs Don't miss the promenade performances of Twelfth Night in the open air within the dramatic setting of Hoghton Tower's courtyards, gardens and house. Michael Boe will be interpreting on 2nd, 6th & 9th July. See listing for details.

INTERPRETER TRAINING PROJECT

SPIT has secured funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to pilot its Theatre Interpreter Training Project. Full details to be announced.

SHAPE'S FIRST ANNUAL THEATRE SUMMER SCHOOL FOR DEAF ADULTS

Train intensively for two weeks with leading deaf theatre practitioners using BSL - in acting, drama, physical theatre, movement and technical skills

The course will run from Sunday 17th - Saturday 30th August 2003. The course will be based in the teaching and accommodation facilities of the London Metropolitan University on the Holloway Road, a busride from the West End!

Teaching will start on Monday 18th August. The Summer School will finish with two performances on stage on the 28th and 29th August, before departing for home on Saturday 30th August with 10 full teaching days and informal activities each evening, like theatre visits, discussion groups etc. There will be two days for relaxation.

Details

How much? Full Price - £200*
Concessions for students/people on benefits (proof needed) - £150*
*Meals and accommodation are included

For an application form - please contact:

John Wilson, Deaf Arts Officer
Fax - 020 7619 6162
email - john@shapearts.org.uk
funded by Arts Council Lottery Funding

For further information on Shape and Deaf Arts please go to the website - www.shapearts.org.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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This issue of SPIT News cost £1.00. SPIT relies on donations from individuals, trusts and foundations for half of its income. Please support us. All donations large and small are vital.

For more information on how you could support SPIT 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**