



Signed Performances In Theatre

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www.spit.org.uk

NEWS

DEAF THEATRE GETS CASH BOOST

Shape, the UK's largest arts development organisation working with disabled, deaf and elderly people has launched their new National Deaf Theatre Programme.

As part of the celebrations for European Year of Disabled People, Shape will be establishing a three-year programme for deaf and hard of hearing people to establish the National Theatre of the Deaf in 2006. The original British Theatre of the Deaf sadly closed in 1977. There has been nothing since to take its place and offer deaf people an opportunity to present their culture using a native language such as British Sign Language.

Working in partnership with organisations of deaf people, Sadler's Wells, London Metropolitan University and others, the programme will create a Youth Theatre for young Deaf people in Greater London, a Summer School for Deaf performers and a series of master classes led by visiting deaf arts practitioners from around the world.

Internationally, John Wilson, Shape's Deaf Arts Officer and SPIT Board member, will be visiting the American National Theatre of the Deaf, The Australian Theatre of the Deaf and the World Federation of the Deaf Conference in Canada 2003 to establish an international perspective for the programme.

In February, the government announced a new Disability Bill to become law within the next session. Shape, alongside other deaf and disability rights organisations, will be lobbying to ensure that there are changes to the Disability Discrimination Act affecting the public sector, transport, premises and definitions of disability. It is important to note that BSL is not an officially recognised language in the UK.

The Deaf Theatre Programme has been supported by the largest ever grant award from the arts funding system to support deaf people. The Regional Arts Lottery Programme has offered £88,321. Shape is particularly grateful to London Arts who, through various initiatives have shown a strong commitment to the inclusion of deaf and disabled people in the arts and culture across the capital.

AWARDS FOR BEST INTERPRETER OF THE YEAR

It sometimes feels that there are awards for everyone, but not in the area of sign language interpreted performances. Here's a chance to change all that...

Who do you think has given the most outstanding SLIPs, which theatre has been most welcoming and effective – from booking to visiting? This is your chance to choose. Terry Ruane, Director of Signaway, would like to set up awards to recognise the best SLIP interpreters and Deaf-friendly venues. SPIT thinks this is a great idea, but we need nominations from our members and readers.

Send your views and nominations to Sarah Sills at SPIT Address (p3) or get in touch via the web-site: www.spit.org.uk

Steve Mannix, Chief Executive of Shape, said 'We are over the moon with this award! For over 25 years there has been no platform for Deaf people to express their lives, culture, language or history. We are grateful to all of the Deaf artists and performers who have helped us develop the programme so far. This is a real moment of opportunity for the Deaf community to create innovative theatre.'

Graeae Left out of London Funding Round

Graeae, one of the UK's leading theatre company of professional theatre practitioners with sensory and physical disabilities, will no longer receive funding from the Association of London Government (ALG).

The company had received funding from ALG towards its pioneering theatre work by and for disabled people in London for a number of years, and had applied for an increased grant of £60,000 a year from 2003-04, to reflect the growth in its work in the capital. The ALG report recognises that Graeae's work matches its cultural priorities, but goes on to recommend that the funding application is turned down. Following the withdrawal of Camden Council's grant in 2001, this will mean the company will receive no local authority funding at all from 2003.

Graeae has been making critically acclaimed touring theatre since 1980. The Guardian said of 'peeling' (by Kaite O'Reilly) in 2002 "a major piece of theatre from a company that refuses to be relegated to the sidelines". The company also currently delivers a performance training programme in partnership with London Metropolitan University (*Missing Piece*, launched 5 February), and had planned a linked programme of performances in small theatres and community venues across London, as well as workshops for disabled people and performances in schools tied in with Citizenship studies: this work is now under threat.

Jenny Sealey, Graeae's Artistic Director, said:

'I'm hugely disappointed by this cut. We planned to expand our education and training programme in London, due to increased demand from arts organisations, schools and community groups, who are responding to the fact that 2003 is European Year of Disabled People, and 2004 sees the full implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act. Instead, this decision means we will increasingly have to say no to the growing numbers of people who want our work, and who think Graeae can help them to address issues around social inclusion for disabled people in London.'

Sadler's Wells Deaf Theatre projects are also under threat, notably the Deaf Summer School with Green Candle (as featured in past issues of SPIT News). In addition, a number of key London arts organisations addressing social inclusion are also being left out in the cold by ALG (notably Cardboard Citizens – the homeless people's theatre company – and Oval House – funded by ALG for over 20 years for their work with excluded and disadvantaged young people in south London).

These decisions affect £10 million of public funding of the next four years, and Graeae believes it throws the idea of a 'cultural strategy' for London into chaos. The company has started a campaign to persuade the ALG to think again (www.graeae.org).

SPIT DEAF FOCUS GROUP... NEEDS YOU!

In the past couple of issues we have been reporting back on the progress of the SPIT Deaf Focus Group (DFG). The DFG is made up of Deaf and Hard of Hearing theatre-goers, who attend signed performances and write a review, including feedback on the interpreter, booking process, and facilities like loop systems. SPIT reimburses members for two tickets for the show plus reasonable travel expenses.

This feedback is then shared directly with the individual theatres, with SPIT offering support and advice on how to develop services for Deaf attenders. As Paula Garfield, the pilot co-ordinator, says, 'The DFG gives us the opportunity to open a dialogue with theatres about signed and captioned shows and how access could be improved. We see it as an important and positive step for Deaf and Hard of Hearing attenders to share views with theatres on the services provided for us.'

We would like more volunteers to join the group, so that more performances and theatres can be included. It's an excellent way of seeing more shows and ensuring that your needs are being met, through the feedback and discussions with theatres and companies. If you'd be interested in taking part, please contact Sarah Sills at the SPIT address opposite.

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!

“ACCESSORISE 2003” – BIRMINGHAM, EDINBURGH, LONDON

The SPIT team are offering a full-day workshop on Deaf awareness in Birmingham, London and Edinburgh. Each workshop is led by our experienced trainer John Wilson, SPIT board member and Deaf Arts Officer for SHAPE London.

*“I would highly recommend the course to anyone”
participant 2000*

Birmingham, Hippodrome Wed 5 March

London, Drill Hall WC1E Mon 12 May

Edinburgh, Festival Theatre Mon 9 June

What is the workshop about?

How to communicate with Deaf patrons

How to create a “Deaf-friendly” environment

Booking a BSL Interpreter & understanding their needs

*‘This has been a very rewarding and interesting day’
participant 2003*

Who should attend?

Ideally, all staff. The workshop is of particular interest to members of staff who either communicate directly with Deaf patrons (e.g. FOH, Ushers, Box Office), those who currently organise BSL Interpreted Performances, or those who want to know how to begin organising them. (e.g. Theatre programmers, Education, Marketing).

What will I get out of it?

You will learn about the issues that Deaf patrons face when they enter a theatre; you will learn the necessary skills to welcome Deaf patrons to your theatre; you will receive guidelines on how best to prepare for a sign language interpreted performance; you will be given the chance to ask questions specifically related to you and your theatre’s needs.

‘This course was really inspiring’ participant 2003

How much does it cost?

£50 to SPIT members; £70 to non-SPIT members (Lunch is not included)

How do I book?

Fax or e-mail SPIT (details opposite)

**Places are limited and already booking fast,
so don’t delay!**

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!

SPIT, 1 Stobart Avenue

Manchester M25 0AJ

Tel/fax: 0161 773 1715

Email: sarah@spit.org.uk

Website: www.spit.org.uk



**CALOUSTE
GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION**

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.

**VDay London and Graeae present
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES by Eva Ensler
Sunday 2nd March 7.30pm**

**Performed for the first time ever by an all
disabled cast of 30 women**

Interpreted by Hetty Bailey; Kate Bass; Jeni Draper; Wendy Ebsworth; Vikki Gee Dare; Sharon Lee; Sam Mailes; Ali Pottinger; Eivire Roberts; Jenny Towland and Siddika.
Captioned by STAGETEXT, Audio Described by Vocaleyes.

Cochrane Theatre, Southampton Row, London
see listing for booking information