THE HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF DEAF CHILDREN’S THEATRE

IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies

Lamar University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Deaf Studies/Deaf Education

by

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December 2007
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ABSTRACT

THE HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF DEAF CHILDREN’S THEATRE
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This dissertation explores the history of Deaf Children’s Theatre in America, by collecting and recording its formation and development from archival materials, from on-site interviews, and from documents published during the late twentieth century.

This study investigates the ways in which theatre became accessible to deaf people through apposite legislation and describes several forms of accessibility services for deaf and hearing audiences at theatrical performances.

The evolution of theatre leading to the formation of Deaf Theatre and, later, to the nascence of Deaf Children’s Theatre is explored within the larger social and political context of the American culture.

The case history of each of the six Deaf Children’s Theatre groups established variously at Hartford, Connecticut; Bethesda, Maryland; Seattle, Washington; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; and Houston, Texas is presented to portray the particular development of Theatre Arts for deaf children in America.

The six Deaf Children’s Theatre groups presented in this study have had different approaches to complementing and completing deaf children’s education. Suggested future research is directed to the potential future impact of drama on deaf children’s language development and also to various avenues of support for Deaf Theatre in its battle for survival.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the wonderful Deaf and hearing people working in the field of Theatre Arts whom I interviewed for this research.

My special gratitude is extended to my old, yet always young and special friends from Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf (now called Cleveland Signstage), to the National Theatre of the Deaf’s summer-school students and staff, and to all the other professional actors and actresses who shared their archival materials and personal belongings, along with their experience and perspectives concerning the impact of the theatre world on contemporary society and on deaf children’s education.

I would also like to give sincere thanks for the Federal funding received by the Doctoral Program in Deaf Studies/Education at Lamar University. By providing scholarships it has allowed for continuous productive research.

I owe special thanks to my late mother and to my recently late father for their support, encouragement, and belief in my doctoral studies.

Also, many thanks to my Deaf friends, to my friends in the Deaf community and in the ASL/Interpreter Training programs, to outsiders, to non-deaf signers, and to others who have contributed to the completion of this dissertation.

Most of all, I want to express my thousand-fold gratitude to my wife, Jacqueline, who has lovingly and faithfully believed in me and encouraged me, making possible the completion of this project.
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GLOSSARY

Accessibility. The modification of information, architecture, devices, or methods to allow easier access by people with disabilities. Examples include providing sign-language interpreters for a poetry reading, building an accessible ramp for a theatre stage, audio-describing a film, and/or providing technical aids for access to a computer.

American Sign Language (ASL). The major language used by the American Deaf population. Its medium is visual through hand movements and facial expressions rather than aural. It has its own phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics, just like any other language.

American Sign Language Consultant. American Sign Language Consultants (alternative terms: American Sign Language Coach and Sign Master) have knowledge about theatre and sign-language translation. They make sure that the interpreters’ appearance, the lighting on them, and their positioning by the stage are all appropriate. They study the play, watch several shows with the interpreters practicing the translations, and provide feedback.

American Sign Language Gloss. Individual signs are labeled or named using a common convention in the field of American Sign Language called glossing. An English word in all capital letters is the name or label for the sign. The gloss of a sign will represent the sign’s meaning. The sign could be translated to English using the word or words in the gloss.
American Sign Language Interpreted Performances. Designated performances where interpretation is provided for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. Seating for each American Sign Language interpreted performance is located in the orchestra, house left. A synopsis is available for deaf patrons at the performance.

American Sign Language (ASL) Literature. A body of stories, legends, poems, riddles, humor, and other genres told in American Sign Language that has been passed on from one generation to another by culturally Deaf people. In addition, American Sign Language literature is not English literature that has been translated into American Sign Language. It arises from the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of culturally Deaf people. American Sign Language literature exists in two forms: real-time and real-space production, and on video storage media.

Art-Sign. Artistic forms of signing. The structure of American Sign Language can be artistically transformed to convey ideas in a manner other than through straightforward signs for communication purposes. These forms are storytelling (A-Z stories, numerical stories, classifier stories), drama, poetry, and so on. Artistic forms of signing have played an important role in Deaf culture and history.

ASL Narratives. The storyteller is signing his own thoughts, emotions, and experiences. The stories can be mischievous, success-related, scary, historical, fictional, or romantic.
Assistive Listening Devices. Hearing enhancement systems using FM radio-waves transmission or infrared transmission technologies.

Audio-Described Performance. A carefully timed, live narration of the visual aspects of a performance. It is broadcast via a radio transmitter to patrons who wear a single headphone receiver, enabling them to hear both the on-stage dialogue and the describer’s narration.

Captioning. Subtitles reflecting the content of the spoken or descriptive material. Closed Captioning of a video or film program superimpose text over video for the benefit of deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers. Closed captions are hidden (encoded) as a data within the video signal and must be decoded to be visible. Captions are designed to convey on- and off-screen effects, speaker identifications, and other information helpful to deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Open Captioning places the text on screen in a black reader box at all times. Real-time Captioning are roll-up captions created and transmitted at time of broadcast origination. Theatrical Open Captioning is open captioning of live theatre performances. This technology has enabled many people to experience the joy of theatre for the first time.

Clowning. A visual and philosophical mime art intended to create a lyrical, beautifully crafted and stunning comic spectacle.

CODA. Acronym for “Child Of Deaf Adults.” In Deaf Culture, a Child Of Deaf Adult is a hearing person who was raised by a Deaf parent or guardian. Many CODAs have dual identity between Deaf and hearing
cultures. A similar term, KODA (Kids Of Deaf Adults), is sometimes used to refer to CODAs under the age of 18.

Contact Language. A pidgin, or contact language, is the name given to any language created, usually spontaneously, out of a mixture of other languages as a means of communication between speakers of different tongues. Pidgins have simple grammars and few synonyms, serving as auxiliary languages. They are learned as second languages rather than natively.

Deaf Culture. The common ground shared by Deaf people in the following four areas: linguistic, social, political, and audiological. Culture is a set of learned behaviors of a group of people who have their own language, values, norms of behavior, and traditions.

Deaf Studies. An “umbrella term” covering multiple studies: language, education, arts, literature, sociology, anthropology, and history. It consists of research and instruction about Deaf people as a cultural minority with its own language, cultural characteristics, social structure, marriage patterns, cultural oppression, institutions, and other traits.

Deaf Theatre. Theatre based on situations unique to Deaf people and generally performed in a realistic or naturalistic style, sometimes without voice narration.

Deaf World. What Deaf people call their culture with its unique language and specific institutions. This complex includes Deaf
family, Deaf role models, residential schools for the deaf, Deaf organizations, Deaf clubs, Deaf festivals, Deaf religious celebrations, Deaf hobby groups, Deaf sporting events, Deaf Theatre, Deaf conventions and conferences, and so on.

Deaf (uppercase “D”). Designates individuals who are Deaf with a strong sense of identity, rooted in Deaf Culture and American Sign Language, e.g. people working in education of the deaf, in arts, in other public institutions, and/or who are political representatives of Deaf Culture in the hearing world, and people who prefer theatrical experiences pertaining to Deaf Culture.

deaf (lowercase “d”). Designates individuals who have various degrees of hearing loss but are not identified with a significant range of the language, values, norms, and traditions of the Deaf Culture, e.g. people with hearing loss who may not belong to Deaf Culture, but who benefit from accessibility services, need to rely on vision for communication, attend accessible theatrical performances, and are learning from Deaf professionals. It also applies to deaf children and young adults, as they are still in the process of gaining and understanding Deaf cultural identity.

Disability. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a person with a disability is someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, or has record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment is a person with a disability.
Ethnography. The qualitative description of human social phenomena. It is a holistic research method, part of cultural anthropology.

Inclusion. The opportunity to participate in all activities available in a community. For example, the choice to attend an arts performance in one’s own community. Inclusion is not a new program, a trend, or something one “does” for someone else. It is not a bandwagon. People are either included or excluded. Discussion of inclusion typically addresses issues related to diversity, community building, and the consequences of exclusion.

Interpreters. People who are deaf or hard-of-hearing often request interpreters or transliterators in order to participate in docent tours, lectures, presentations, or events. Interpreters translate from spoken language to American Sign Language (ASL) and vice versa. (See “American Sign Language” and “Theatrical Sign Language Interpretation”)

Mainstream Programs. Also known as “mainstreaming.” Is the process of grouping deaf or hard-of-hearing students with general education students in regular public schools, but not necessarily for all the classes.

Minimal Language Competency. Also known as “Minimal Language Skills.” The linguistic achievement level of individuals who have essentially no skills in any Sign Language or spoken language, due to brain damage or educational or social deprivation.
National Arts and Disability Center (NADC). The national information-dissemination, technical-assistance, and referral center specializing in the field of arts and disability.

PAH!. A popular American Sign Language expression created by American Sign Language poet and storyteller Clayton Valli during the actual Deaf President Now movement (DPN, 1989). The corresponding English meaning can be one of the following: “finally,” “at last,” “success,” “we did it,” “victory.”

Parent Theatre. Hearing theatre that provides a hearing play, shares art (common knowledge in the hearing world), expresses political views, or simply makes people laugh, and adapts itself to a deaf audience. It is a new art form that is evolving. Deaf children or adults who want to attend a “hearing” play with sign language interpreters or actors will attend performances all year round. But this is not culturally Deaf theatre (i.e. theatre made by Deaf people for Deaf people, expressed in American Sign Language and portraying Deaf Cultural values). It is only a window into the “hearing” culture. These theatres contain special Deaf Drama youth groups. The Deaf Drama performances will be mainly signed on stage, while offstage actors will provide voice interpreting.

Platform Interpreting. Technique by which interpreters are placed in one stationary position during a performance, often to the side of the stage or below the apron.
Qualified Interpreter. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act Titles II and III, a qualified interpreter is an interpreter who is able to sign to an individual who is deaf what is being said by a hearing person and who can voice to the hearing person what is being signed by the individual who is deaf. This communication must be conveyed effectively, accurately, and impartially through the use of any necessary specialized vocabulary.

Shadow Interpreting. A form of theatrical interpreting in which the signing actors follow the blocking of the speaking actors to maintain as close proximity as possible during the performance.

Sign Coach. A person fluent in American Sign Language, knowledgeable about theatre, and able to assist with translations and feedback specific to signing for theatre.

Sign Interpreted Performance. A theatre performance or reading that is interpreted. (See “Theatrical Sign Language Interpretation”)

Sign Language Theatre. Presentation of plays by hearing authors, translated into sign language and performed by a signing and voicing cast.

Sign Supported Speech. English-based signing systems, which represent English in a manual/visual form, relying primarily on the lexicon and syntax of English. Spoken or mouthed English is often used while signing. Sign Supported Speech is also referred to as Manually Coded English.
Stage combat. A specialized technique in theatre designed to create the illusion of physical combat without causing harm to the performers. It is employed in live stage plays as well as operatic and ballet productions.

Theatrical Sign Language Interpretation. A method of translating from spoken language to American Sign Language (ASL) utilizing specific techniques for signing plays and musicals. The placed style is by far the most common. It is characterized by the static placement of the interpreter(s) in one location for the duration of the performance. Shadow interpreting, in which the interpreters actually follow the actors on stage as their “shadows,” is the most inclusive style of interpreting for theatre. It involves placing the interpreters directly within the action, nearly making them “sign-language actors.” In this style, the interpreters are “blocked” into each scene and literally “shadow” the actors.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Two vignettes illustrate the lack of knowledge we have about deaf children and the important role of theatre as a cultural transmitter in their lives.

Suzan Jackson, the artistic director of Illuminations, a theatrical group in Houston, was puzzled because she could not get the public school district, which enrolls more than 1,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing children, to allow Hand Held Tales to come onto the campuses for performances. Hand Held Tales was a program that featured Deaf* and hearing actors who signed, in American Sign Language, multicultural and Deaf Culture tales. The program had a track record of attracting young deaf fans to bookstores. And these bookstores were enthusiastic to see stories signed in American Sign Language as part of their offering.

Jackie Kilpatrick, a seasoned Deaf teacher was employed at a large public school enrolling more than 200 deaf and hard-of-hearing children. She taught dramatic arts to her deaf students for seven years. The children were from hearing, multicultural homes where signing was not used. She observed that the deaf children benefited from learning American Sign Language, body movement, and facial expressions. Drama was psychologically and emotionally soothing to them, as they learned to act out their feelings and ideas. She also

* In this manuscript the term “Deaf” (capital D) refers to persons who use American Sign Language, follow the values, norms, and traditions of the group of people who created their own culture in absence of acceptance from the majority American mainstream culture, and are connected with the associated institutions. The term “deaf” (small d) refers to those who have various degrees of hearing loss but are not identified with a significant range of the language, values, norms, and traditions of the Deaf Culture. (See Glossary)
observed that their reading skills improved when they had to read scripts of plays to perform for the school.

Hand Held Tales and other programs of the same kind did not survive, although they were in demand. Why were these programs terminated? Was it a matter of budgetary consideration? Was it the government mandating more emphasis on test-taking skills? Or was it that school policies followed Sign Supported Speech rather than American Sign Language (ASL), the cherished language of the Deaf Community?

Spurred by the knowledge of theatre from Gallaudet University, from which the author holds a psychology degree with minor specialization in theatre, and from the summer workshops and the training received at The National Theatre of the Deaf, the author embarked on a quest to investigate Theatre for Deaf Children. The author is also an actor who is Deaf and has acted in many theatrical performances for the deaf in Houston. In addition, the author is the co-founder of the Fairmont Theatre of the Deaf in Cleveland, Ohio, which has changed its name to Cleveland Signstage Theatre.

Theatre for deaf children can have a variety of meanings. It can mean theatre with scripts featuring children, performed by adults and interpreted in sign language for deaf children, for example, The Wizard of Oz. Or it can mean theatre performed by hearing and deaf children, signed while a children’s story, such as The Tortoise and the Hare, is performed. Or, in the true sense of Deaf Culture, it can mean a group of deaf children at school performing a play written by deaf children

* Sign Supported Speech refers to English-based signing systems, which represent English in a manual/visual form, relying primarily on the lexicon and syntax of English. Spoken or mouthed English is often used while signing. Sign Supported Speech is also referred to as Manually Coded English. (See Glossary)
themselves or A to Z hand-shape stories or ASL number hand-shape stories that are based on the linguistic features of ASL. Each of these examples represents a different meaning incorporating theatre or poetry or dramatic arts for deaf children.

Who Are Deaf Children and Youth?

Deaf children and youth who have profound and severe to profound hearing losses make up about 81,000 children in special programs in the United States. There are other deaf children who may be educated in public schools, as well as in state schools for the deaf and special programs set up for deaf and hard-of-hearing children within public schools that are not documented by the Department of Education.

About 95 percent of deaf children are born into hearing families who have no experience with deafness. Often new parents have never met a Deaf person and have great difficulty coming to grips with the reality of having a deaf child in their family. Many go through psychological stages of denial, anger, and resentment. Without counseling, these parents and families have a most difficult time raising their deaf children. On the other hand, Deaf parents who have deaf children are already knowledgeable about being Deaf. They view the Deaf Culture as a vibrant society and welcome Deaf family members.

Two Perspectives on Deafness

Medical/Audiological Model

Hearing families typically adhere to the medical and audiology professionals’ point of view. This view is limiting in that it does not
take into account the whole child. It holds that deafness is only a malfunction of the ear, that being dependent on help from interpreters for communication is a detriment, and that deafness has to be treated as a disease. The result is that the family will concentrate all their efforts on trying to fix the child’s deafness with hearing aids, amplification, or speech therapy. They will often overlook the child’s need for a fully visual, deaf-friendly social environment to enable him to develop his full potential. They will emphasize the English language to the exclusion of American Sign Language (ASL). Or, if they decide to use a signing system, they choose a Manually Coded English system that resembles English rather than ASL.5

The Deaf actor Troy Kotsur, who starred in Big River, an Off-Off Broadway touring play, says that oftentimes the deaf child must find his own way because of the views of his family.

I know that sometimes the family situation is not so great that they are the one individual in the family who is deaf. A lot of time the hearing parent believes that their philosophy is the best for the child like the cochlear implant or learning the oral method. Providing the Deaf theatre for children gives them the understanding and help. We can’t see within their minds, we’ve got to know that the moment they see us or the moment the light comes on in their minds, that they are making a connection. They have a hunger deep inside of them and they have a story to share. They can benefit from that. I think that I can help lead them to be able to get through those communication barriers.6

Cultural/Linguistic Model

On the other hand, Deaf parents and an increasing number of hearing families embrace the deaf child as a dual language learner who needs to learn both languages--ASL and English--in order to communicate productively in both a Deaf world and a hearing world. They see the Deaf Culture as a valuable support system with a rich heritage and
history and a system of beliefs and values that will enable them to assist the deaf child in realizing his or her full potential.

The cultural/linguistic view capitalizes on the importance of visual orientation and its potential for language learning. While the medical/audiological view focuses on auditory processes and strategies, including amplification, implants, and auditory training, the cultural/linguistic view focuses on visual strategies—the acquisition of ASL using space, movement, and facial expressions—as well as on incorporating elements of Deaf Culture, such as Deaf history, Deaf literature, Deaf arts, and so on.

Many hearing people, unfamiliar with the Deaf culture, view it as a haven for unsuccessful, lonely persons. However, Deaf Americans see their culture as providing positive opportunities to meet people with similar experiences and to learn, grow, and expand their interests and hobbies. Older Deaf persons become mentors for younger deaf youth. Deaf organizations for social and educational benefits have emerged on the international, national, state, and regional levels. Many of these organizations will sponsor Deaf theater as part of their programs.

The cultural/linguistic model used to be transmitted through state residential schools for deaf students. Prior to the 1970s, most states had one or even two state schools for the deaf in the case of large states such as New York and California. But today, only about 20% of deaf children are educated in state schools.7 Deaf youth today pick up their Deaf culture from peers or from meeting Deaf adults, at school or in the workplace. Some participate in organized sports with Deaf players and learn about Deaf culture in this way.8 During the early years of these state schools for the deaf, ASL storytelling, skits, and theatrical performances were very common and a major part of dormitory
life in the evenings and on holidays. Today, schools for the deaf still have theatrical performances but to a much more limited extent.

Accessibility

Providing accessibility to theatrical performances is necessary for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. Chapter 2 will expand on accessibility in detail because of its importance. Professionals in audiology, rehabilitation, and medicine refer to accessibility options, such as electronic equipment used to assist deaf people in communication, as adaptive devices or auxiliary aids (visual and auditory) to compensate for the deaf persons’ inability to hear. In line with their own cultural view, Deaf people regard accessibility options as enhancement devices rather than compensatory devices. Many people prefer to consider these devices as visual alerts and electronic devices for communication and signaling. These including hearing dogs, flashing signalers, TV and movie captioning, computer-assisted note-taking, sign-language interpreters, Tele-typewriters (TTY), the Internet, electronic mail, hand-held wireless pagers, audio and video relay services, and so on. This view reflects many deaf people’s emphasis on the importance of vision for communication.

Deaf Theatre and the Two Models

How does theatre fit into these two views concerning deaf people? Deaf playwrights have used many of the themes found in the two models and have written stories and plays about the associated cross-cultural conflicts. For example, My Third Eye, created by the National Theatre of the Deaf company, casts Deaf actors in roles of deaf children raised
in the oral—or spoken—language philosophy. Other plays exploit the
tensions between ASL and the signed systems of English, for example, *Sign Me Alice*, written by Gil Eastman. Another play, *Tales from the Clubroom*, discusses life within a Deaf club. Deaf clubs used to be major transmitters of Deaf Culture. Today, the Deaf club as an institution is vanishing with the rise of home entertainment and the increase in Deaf professional and social organizations such as Deaf Senior Citizens. Another play following a historical account is *Laurent Clerc: A Profile*. The Deaf playwright, Gil Eastman, honors the Deaf Frenchman, Laurent Clerc, who established the first school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. This historical fact is cherished by the Deaf Community because it involves the story of a successful Deaf person who made a contribution to Deaf Education.

There are many more examples of themes that emerge from the tensions within the Deaf world, as well as conflicts between the Deaf and hearing worlds and the molds that hearing people have tried to place deaf people in.

Regarding the history of Adult Deaf Theatre, there have been some limited studies such as Bernard Bragg’s autobiography or the History of the National Theater of the Deaf. However, the history of Deaf Children’s Theatre is an unexplored area. Part of this is because many of the early records of Deaf Children’s Theatre are not written in English. Many of the Deaf people involved in Deaf Children’s Theatre at schools for the deaf have died, so that oral histories cannot be recorded. Of the six theatres for deaf children found for this study two have suspended their activity until further notice and one has been discontinued. The history of each of these theatres—active and inactive—is important, and thus these are included in this study.
Deaf Studies

Deaf Children’s Theatre is first of all an important part of Deaf Studies, under the subject of performing arts. Deaf Studies is a relatively new scholarly discipline that examines Deaf history, heritage, politics, language, literature, education, arts, and theatre.\textsuperscript{15}

Since 1960, the field of Deaf Studies has focused on research on American Sign Language (ASL) and the lives of Deaf people. These studies have lead to new discoveries about Deaf Arts, specifically Deaf Theatre. This study proposes to add to the discipline of Deaf Studies by doing a historical study of Deaf Children’s Theatre.

A central concern of Deaf History, as part of Deaf Studies, is the cultural oppression, which stems from the inability of the majority hearing culture to accept the fact that the Deaf minority is different.\textsuperscript{16} Why is oppression so central to our study? Theater is one avenue that the Deaf community has to express their feelings about the hearing culture in their own language. Many of the themes within Deaf theater, for both adults and children, involve the concept of oppression. This provides a major psychological release for Deaf people as well as it becomes a beautiful artistic experience, if enough work and imagination are put into its production.

Of course, Deaf Theater is also concerned with the beauty and artistic uses of American Sign Language.\textsuperscript{17} It playfully exploits the linguistic complexity of the rich structure of ASL to make poetry and drama.\textsuperscript{18} Thus it can be valued for “art’s sake.”
Educational Benefits of Deaf Theatre

The information in this study can be used to improve the education of deaf children by contributing to deaf children’s knowledge of the arts, an important part of a liberal education, the essential function of which is to enhance one’s understanding of the human condition.

Adult Deaf Theatre represents a linguistic enrichment for deaf students, adults, and youth of all ages. It can provide deaf children with a unique learning as well as cultural experience by combining the two languages American Sign Language and English (through reading of the scripts). By using Deaf theatre in education, parents, administrators, and teachers may better understand the importance of theatre in deaf children’s development of their two languages at home and at school. Besides possibly increasing their English reading and language achievement, Deaf Children’s Theatre may also facilitate deaf children’s development of a healthy social identity and improve their knowledge of Deaf Culture.

As was mentioned above, Deaf American literature—by way of American Sign Language stories and American Sign Language art—has been passed down through the years in Deaf Clubs and in residential schools. Like Native Americans, Black Americans, and Latino Americans, Deaf Americans have their own vernacular stories and art forms. Many of these stories, skits, and dramas have not been recorded, but were passed down from generation to generation, usually within Deaf families, Deaf organizations, and residential schools for deaf children and youths.

In addition to its entertainment value, drama has instructional potential for teaching children cognitive, linguistic, and social
concepts. One of the best ways to expose children to the dramatic arts is through theatre performances. However, Deaf Children’s Theatre is an area that has never been adequately explored with regard to aesthetics or practical importance. This fact constitutes the rationale for my study.

Research and Organization

Historical Research Methods

This study uses historical research methods, semi-structured and structured interviews, open-ended questions, and oral histories. Those interviewed included theater directors, actors and actresses, artistic directors, and teachers of the deaf, as well as audience members.

Information was also collected and recorded from archival materials and published documents. The archival records are mainly materials produced by the parent Theatre and its associated deaf youth programs in the forms of letters, memos, proposals, reports, meetings, and some e-mail printouts. Other material used included brochures and some youth program descriptions. Documents contained in program books, newspapers, play pictures, periodicals, doctoral dissertations, and computer on-line services, were used as primary and secondary sources.

Those interviewed for this study included adults and children, as well as Deaf, deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing audience members. Written and videotaped questionnaires were obtained from theatre personnel and audience members of live productions. In the literature research, the collected information mentions accessibility issues pertaining to deaf people in the theatrical milieu.
Of the six Deaf Children’s Theatre programs visited, four were under what is called the “Parent Theatre sites.” In other words, the Children’s theatre was under a larger theatre group. Two of the Deaf Children’s theatres, however, were independent. The sites are as follows, in the order of the year of their establishment:

1. National Theatre of the Deaf, Little Theatre of the Deaf (LTD), Hartford, Connecticut, established in 1967
2. International Center on Deafness and the Arts (ICODA), Northbrook, Illinois, established in 1973
3. Imagination Stage, Deaf Access Program, Baltimore, Maryland, established in 1979
4. Illuminations Arts, Houston, Texas, established in 1984
5. Seattle Children’s Theatre, Deaf Youth Drama Program, Seattle, Washington, established in 1993
6. Wheelock Family Theatre, PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, established in 1994

Figure 1 shows a map of the locations of the six Deaf Children’s Theatre groups.

At all of these, the theatre directors shared their experiences and their views on the Deaf Children’s Theatre in their communities and on the impact of theatre on deaf children. Table 1 contains the number of D/deaf and hearing staff interviewed at each of the six Deaf Children’s Theatre groups.

In addition ethnographies (see Glossary), which included interviews and questionnaires (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 5), were used. Information from questionnaires enabled the creation of a timeline for the establishment of these distinct theatres for deaf children (see Appendix 1). Table 2 contains the number of D/deaf and
hearing people interviewed at various theatrical events, part of the ethnographic research.

Table 1. Number of D/deaf and Hearing Staff Interviewed at Each of the Deaf Children’s Theatre Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatrical Company</th>
<th>D/deaf N</th>
<th>Hearing N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Theatre of the Deaf, Hartford, Connecticut</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Center on Deafness and the Arts, Chicago, Illinois</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination Stage, Bethesda, Maryland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illuminations Arts, Houston, Texas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Children’s Theatre, Seattle, Washington</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Number of D/deaf and Hearing Staff Interviewed at Various Theatrical Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place/Theatrical Company</th>
<th>D/deaf N</th>
<th>Hearing N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Mouse Trap</strong> (interpreted), Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big River</strong> (shadowed) Broadway Tour Company, Miller Outdoor Theatre, Houston, Texas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I Do, I Do</strong> (interpreted), A.D. Players, Houston, Texas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Nice Place to Live</strong> (sign language), PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deaf Academy Summer School</strong>, Little Theatre of the Deaf, Hartford, Connecticut</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American School for the Deaf</strong>, Hartford, Connecticut</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Magical Literacy Camp at Learning Center</strong>, Framingham, Massachusetts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York interpreter/actor visit in Houston</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illuminations Deaf Kids Little Hand Theatre</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer Camp</strong>, Houston, Texas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals:</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Locations of Deaf Children’s Theatre Groups in the United States.21
Procedures

At each of the six theatres, the Deaf or hearing director(s) and assistants were interviewed. Current or former Deaf actors and shadow performers were also interviewed. Since the researcher is Deaf, all the interviews were conducted in American Sign Language. A digital Sony camera was used to videotape all the interviews. The documents were transcribed from the videotaped interviews into English print.

Several groups of questions were asked:

1. What is the history of Deaf Children’s Theatre?
   a. What are its beginnings and organizations?
   b. What plays and workshops would constitute a complete list?
   c. Who are the Deaf Children’s Theatre participants and audience?
   d. What kinds of skills are taught?
   e. What conversational themes emerged in interviews with the actors and participants?

2. Based on the medical/audiological model and the cultural/linguistic model, how do the six theater groups support each model?

3. Based on this history, what can be predicted as the future of theater for deaf children?

Appendix 4 contains the questionnaire.

An English transcript of selected interviews with the Deaf Children’s Theatre representatives can be found in Appendix 5.
Chapter 2 describes key issues in making theatre accessible to people who use ASL and are part of the Deaf Community, as well as to those with different degrees of hearing loss who do not use ASL and are not part of the Deaf Community, but who benefit from auditory and/or visual technological aids. It also contains a section on making theater accessible to deaf-blind persons. In addition it surveys important laws adopted to sanction the accessibility provisions in general, with a more specific application for theatre performances, also addressed in this study. Without accessibility, theatre is essentially meaningless to the deaf consumer.

Chapter 3 provides a historical account of the nascence of Theatre, the birth of Deaf Theatres from parent hearing theatres and their evolution within the Deaf Community, and the birth of Deaf Children’s Theatre.

The major portion of this study is contained in Chapters 4 through 9. These describe the birth, development, and evolution of six Deaf Children’s Theatre groups around the United States, including, in one case, the death or end of the theatre company.

Chapter 10 provides a rationale for the preservation of Deaf Children’s Theatre not only from a Deaf Studies perspective with a view to preserving dramatic arts, but also from an educational point of view, and makes recommendations to artistic directors, administrators, and teachers and parents of deaf children and advocate the continuation and development of Deaf Children’s Theatre.
Endnotes for Chapter 1


10. Ibid., 97.


18. Ibid., 187.


20. Ibid., 124-158.

CHAPTER 2
ACCESSIBILITY FOR DEAF INDIVIDUALS IN THEATRE ARTS

Introduction

Theatre can take us to magical and fanciful lands. It can inspire us with new ideas. Theatre can evoke feelings that lift us up and bring us down. However, for many American citizens the theatre is not always accessible. But accessibility to theatre is a right protected by U.S. laws. Many deaf and hard-of-hearing people are not cognizant of these facts. They may choose not to attend live theatre performances because they do not find them accessible. Or they may have never acquired an appreciation for theater in general or Deaf theater in particular. Due to lack of accessibility, the meaning of the dramatic performance is not conveyed in its entirety. Hence it also impedes the deaf public’s education about theatre.

Historically, making live theatrical performances accessible to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community has had its challenges. Legislation has helped. In fact, laws have mandated that theatre companies make their performances accessible to the Deaf community. This chapter discusses the legislation relating to theatre accessibility. It also reviews five different accessibility options commonly used by deaf and hard-of-hearing people. It explores the often misunderstood complexities of two options of theatre Sign Language interpretation. Sign Language interpretation of theatre scripts is a complex linguistic task requiring a high level of artistic, linguistic, and poetic awareness and understanding of both languages: American Sign Language (ASL) and English.
A Brief Description of the Origins and Evolution of Theatre

From the beginning of time, theatre has been a visual performing art. It originated in the cultures of primitive societies who used dance and masks to gain supernatural powers that were believed to control events crucial to survival. As the years passed and the knowledge of natural phenomena increased, drama ceased to be exclusively ritualistic and then became an educational tool for transmitting culture. Theatre acquainted the young with their tribal culture. As time progressed, various aspects of theatre evolved.

In its beginnings, drama was entirely based on visual art, containing no spoken words. Later, during the Greek and Roman times, a vocal chorus became an integral part of the theatre performance. Ironically, the artistic kernel of Deaf theatrical performances resides in gesture and body movement, accompanied by ASL, constituting a return to the highly visual art of the early roots of drama performance.

By the fourth century B.C., Greek theatre had become a professional institution with specialists responsible for the various aspects of theatrical art. The Romans re-introduced mime and pantomime into theatre. The art of mime and pantomime is a visual art not focusing on the spoken word, but relying on the movements and performing style of the actors to visually portray characters. Is it any wonder, then, that the Deaf World has embraced theatre arts so openly?

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, allegorical and mythological, pageant-type ballet-pantomimes were performed at the courts and in the theatres of Europe. These shows were called “dumb shows.” They were still based on mime and pantomime and the actors did not speak. Relating to deaf people, the phrase “deaf and dumb” is an
archaic expression that was commonly used prior to the 1950s. It refers to “dumbness” or “muteness”—the inability to talk. In reality, most deaf people can talk, although not always intelligibly. The word “dumb” is often confused with “stupid” or “lacking intelligence.” The expression “dumb and mute” is considered pejorative and is seldom used today in writings about Deaf people. The traditional dumb show in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French and English melodramas, as well as the Elizabethan dumb shows, were also called pantomimes. In France, after Italian comedy was prohibited, pantomime with Commedia-type characters appeared. In nineteenth-century England and America, pantomime was incorporated into circus acts.

By the mid-twentieth century, several great masters in Paris gave new life to the mime art, as well as merging it with other forms. Etienne Decroux, Marcel Marceau, and Jacques Lecoq developed schools of mime that no longer represented traditional, nineteenth-century pantomime. Their schools and styles differed from one another as much as they differed from Eastern European pantomime. Marcel Marceau developed body-only mime into an art that could be readily communicated. Through his famous character, Bip, and style pantomimes he made this art known to the world. And while Decroux trained body-only mimes in Paris and New York, Jacques Lecoq taught mime not as a separate art but as a research tool to further dramatic creativity as well as an art that could be combined with other arts. Lecoq’s global training method fused the art of the clown and the buffoon with juggling, acrobatics, dance, plastic arts, and all of life through body movement. His movement expression, based on the observation of natural movement, opened up new directions for physical theatre.

* Conveyance of a story by bodily or facial movements especially in drama or dance.
A famous Deaf actor, Bernard Bragg, performed in numerous plays for the National Theatre of the Deaf. In the summer of 1956, Bragg went to study with Marcel Marceau and brought back to the United States a larger spectrum of improvisation techniques for mime performances. Bragg incorporated what he learned from Marceau in his theatrical productions for deaf audiences.  

In 1967 Bragg and David Hays found the National Theatre of the Deaf. Since its inception, this theatre has produced several sign-language productions and shared with the hearing community the conjoined abilities of talented Deaf and hearing actors. By using several methods of interpreting, theatres all over the world are working with Deaf and hearing actors to produce successfully some of the most classic plays in history, such as *Gianni Schicchi, Sganarelle, Songs from Milk Wood, The Dybbuk*, and others.  

**Motion Pictures**

The history of motion pictures is related to Deaf Theatre because early movies were silent and incorporated body language and mime. Charlie Chaplin’s early movies entertained both deaf and hearing audiences. When English captioning was added, the deaf film watchers were not left out.  

Motion pictures started in 1895, owing to the portable motion-picture camera, the film-processing unit, and the projector (called the Cinematographe), three functions covered in one invention of Louis Lumière, enabling the recording of performances that otherwise could not be reproduced exactly from one representation to the next. Initially these motion pictures had no sound recorded, just images
scrolling one after the other faster than the eye could perceive to give the impression of movement. This was the Silent Era of the movies.⁹

During the silent film era, because the possibility of recording sound with the pictures had not yet been discovered, all of the dialogue was accessible through written English. The filmmakers would show a scene and follow it with written texts, i.e. captioning.

The silent film era provided accessible entertainment for deaf and hearing audience members alike. Many Deaf people could work in the motion-pictures industry, as voice was not important in the creation and production of a movie. The most widely recognized Deaf actor in the 1920s was Granville Redmond, who played a dance-hall manager in Charlie Chaplin’s film *A Dog’s Life*, and many other roles as well. Interestingly, the roles played by Deaf actors were not deaf characters in the scripts.¹⁰

Once sound could be incorporated into each scene, captioning was dropped. Dropping the captioning was devastating to deaf audiences because it excluded them. It took much lobbying from the Deaf Community to bring captioning back into use, and this did not happen until 1950. With the addition of sound, the world of motion pictures was also closed to Deaf actors. One result was that Deaf actors returned to their own community to establish Deaf Theatre using American Sign Language (ASL). Many of these skits, plays, and performances were never recorded, because they occurred at schools for the deaf, at school reunions of the Deaf, or in Deaf clubs before the video-camera recorder was invented.¹¹ Many Deaf people alive during this time have died, so that no “oral” histories were recorded. There were some historical videotapes produced that feature two Deaf filmmakers: Ernest Marshall and Charles Krauel.¹² More on the work of these two Deaf filmmakers can be found in Chapter 3.
Legal Provisions for Accessibility

Accessibility to theater is not just a luxury for deaf people. It is a right. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or P.L. 101-336 Stat. 327, 42 U.S.C. 12101-12213 and 47 U.S.C. 225 and 611, states in Title III, 28 C.F.R. Part 36 that all theaters are required to provide “effective communication,” to patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Therefore, theatres must provide qualified interpreters, assistive listening devices, and other appropriate services to facilitate access. But access to theatre did not happen overnight.

Legal provisions for accessibility to the theatre for the deaf and hard-of-hearing did not occur until 1973. One major organization that spearheaded the making of theatre accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing people, as well as to other disabled individuals, was the National Arts and Disability Center (NADC). It was established in 1994 at the University of California at Los Angeles. NADC is the national information dissemination, technical assistance, and referral center specializing in the field of arts and disability. It promotes the full inclusion of audiences and artists with disabilities in all activities of the arts community. The NADC is a program of the Tarjan Center at the Semel Institute of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Its programs are supported by the University and federal, state, and private grants and contracts.

NADC is the only national organization dedicated to providing arts-related assistance, counseling, and information dissemination for the disabled. At the state level, there are several agencies and organizations enforcing ADA compliance and providing technical assistance.
In general, accessibility is the modification of information, architecture, devices, or methods to allow easier access by people with disabilities. For deaf and hard-of-hearing people in particular, accessibility includes providing sign-language interpreters for a poetry reading, audio amplification describing a film, captioning in English print, and/or providing technical aids for access to a computer. The major accessibility laws related to deaf and hard-of-hearing people are briefly described in the next section.

Public Law 85-905

The first accessibility option is placing English text captions below a movie or film. This used to be a long, tedious process, but today, in the digital age, it is far easier, and some desktop computer editing programs, such as Final Cut Pro, have the capacity to insert subtitles.

In 1950 the Captioned Films for the Deaf Program began in Hartford, Connecticut. The films involved were provided by Captioning Films for the Deaf, Inc., a private, non-profit company. This organization initially acquired captioned theatrical films, which were rented to schools for the deaf. Although the program was a success from the start, more financial support was needed than could be supplied through private funds. The possibility of government support was explored, and the United States Congress was prevailed upon to legislate federal funding of the program.

English captioning was an issue very close to the hearts of Deaf Americans for obvious reasons, and Deaf people advocated vigorously for captioning. For example, among the organizations that lobbied in behalf of the program were the National Association of the Deaf, the National
In 1958 the United States Congress passed Public Law 85-905, an act providing for a loan service of captioned films for the deaf. The goals of the program, as stated in the law, were threefold:

1. to bring to deaf persons an understanding and appreciation of those films which play an important part in the general and cultural advancement of hearing persons;

2. to provide, through these films, enriched educational and cultural experiences through which deaf persons could be brought into better touch with the realities of their environment;

3. to provide a wholesome and rewarding experience which deaf persons might share together.

The law allowed for the captioning of feature films by federal subvention. In July of 1959, funding was available, and in October of that same year, the federal agency Captioned Films for the Deaf opened its doors to the public.19

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Another law that helped to make theatre accessible to deaf persons was Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act passed in 1973. This law prohibits discrimination against and mandates accessibility for disabled people in employment, education, and in other health, welfare, or social-service programs. The 1978 amendments to this Act clarify that for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, accessibility means the removing of communication barriers. One way of accomplishing this is to
provide interpreters to bridge the communication gap. According to Brian Cerney, the Interpreter Training Program director at Community College of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the following applies:

Section 504 protects the civil and constitutional rights of people with disabilities. It prohibits organizations that receive federal funds from discriminating against otherwise qualified individuals on the sole basis of a mental or physical disability. Section 504 applies to public education through any college or university that accepts federal funding. Other institutions that are affected are all federal government agencies, most state-level agencies and hospitals. For Deaf and Deaf-Blind* people the law provides a mechanism to obtain access to information through interpreters, but this right to access must be asserted by the consumer and is not outlined in great detail in the legislation.20

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990

The law called the Civil Rights Act for people with disabilities is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. As was mentioned above, the ADA states that all theatres are required to provide “effective communication” to patrons who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind.

The ADA applied the same basic concepts of Section 504 to the private (non-governmental) sector and also provided much more specific definitions and requirements. It mandates equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications.

* Concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination that creates such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education in programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness (Dept. of Education, 34 CFR Parts 300 & 303. Vol. 64, No. 48. 3/12/99)
The ADA has five parts, called Titles:

- Title I: Employment (provides protection from discrimination at work)

- Title II: Public Services (prohibits the exclusion of people with disabilities from services provided by state and local governments)

- Title III: Public Accommodations and Services Provided by Private Entities (makes discrimination illegal in any public facility or service)

- Title IV: Telecommunications (makes public relay services available to people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, and speech impaired. Relay services are also available for hearing people who need to contact people with such disabilities. This title also requires public-service announcements to be captioned).

- Title V: Miscellaneous (covers only administrative and miscellaneous details).\(^\text{21}\)

In particular, Title III of the ADA applies to public accommodations, which are private entities that are open to the public. These included theatres and cinemas.\(^\text{22}\)

**Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990**

Still another law assisting the deaf and hard-of-hearing was the Television Decoder Circuitry Act (TDC), also adopted in 1990. The TDC provided government funding for the captioning of public-service announcements. Increasing the audience that was served led to market expansion, thus increasing the incentive to provide captioning, hence captioning became available. On the other hand, the TDC required that
television sets with screen sizes of 13 inches and larger, manufactured after July 1993, have built-in closed-captioning decoders—electronic devices that convert signals from one form to another. Today, it is impossible to purchase a television that does not have captioning built into it.

Telecommunications Act of 1996

In 1996 the Telecommunications Act was passed. According to this law, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was directed to implement rules mandating captioning. While captioning can be used by all people, the deaf and hard-of-hearing community is its primary beneficiary. Children who are learning to read or who need to improve their reading skills can also benefit from captioning. People who have immigrated to the United States and who want to learn English benefit from captioning as well. And people in general may benefit from captioning as for example to be able to follow the televised news in noisy bars and restaurants.

The combination of these laws opened the world of film and television to deaf people. Live theatre is under the umbrella of the five ADA titles. It is mandatory for theatres to provide captioning or interpreting services for the audience. Many theatre managers complain that the interpreting process and/or the captioning system are distracting to the regular audience. Even after the Americans with Disabilities Act became law, its effect in theatres is still “not 100-percent equal access.” It is important to note that neither of these ways of providing access to deaf people is fully linguistically and culturally suitable. They are typically implemented only as a necessity to comply with the law, so as to avoid law-suits. Deaf people differ
in their preference for one or the other of the accessibility options. Some deaf people benefit more from captioning, while others benefit more from interpreting services.

**Implementing Accessibility Provisions in Theatre**

Since these laws were instituted, deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind individuals have options for obtaining accessibility. In theatre, there are several performance enhancements used to provide accessibility to both deaf and hearing audience members. These are listed and expanded on below:

- Theatrical open captioning--English text
- Amplification systems--English audio
- Performances in sign language with voice interpreters (for hearing and deaf audiences)
- Theatre interpreters who use sign language
- Theatre interpreters for deaf-blind persons
- Shadow interpreting ("twin" actors--one Deaf actor who signs and one hearing actor who talks--representing the same character)

![Access Symbols and Terminology](image)

Figure 2. Access Symbols and Terminology.\(^{27}\)

Each of these six accessibility provisions is described below.
English Captioning

A captioned video or film program has English subtitles reflecting the content of the spoken or descriptive material. The captions are designed to convey on- and off-screen effects, speaker identifications, and other information helpful to the deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers of the film.

One device designed for captioning provided by real-time transcription in live theatres is called CART. It stands for Communication Access Real Time Translation. A trained stenographer types into a computer what he/she hears. This typing gives an instant translation of the spoken word into English text using a stenotype machine, a notebook computer, and real-time software. The text is then displayed on a computer monitor or other screen for the audience to read.

Here is an example of captioning provided with CART, displaying a dialogue between two characters:

![Figure 3. Speaker Identification in CART Open Captioning.](image)
Open Captioning

The Open Captioning option places the text on screen in a black reader box at all times. All the audience views it whether they are using it or not.

Theatrical open captioning is the open captioning of live theatre performances. This technology has enabled many deaf and hard-of-hearing people to experience the joy of theatre for the first time. They can fully understand what is happening in the story by reading the captions in English print.

Theatrical open captioning is one way to communicate using English text display. However, captioning is not an option for all deaf people. The success of this form depends upon the reading level of the audience. Nationwide, the average reading level of the majority of deaf high-school graduates is fourth grade. Thus, captioning is not appropriate for illiterate or low-functioning deaf persons with low English reading abilities. English captioning also has other obstacles. For example, it is often difficult to understand which character has just given the line or dialogue. In addition, certain characters’ emotional display can be very difficult or impossible to grasp during the performance using an English print display. In short, English captioning has its limitations.

Some hearing persons find open captioning annoying and distracting, but many deaf and hard-of-hearing people depend on it.

Closed Captioning

Closed Captioning superimposes English text captions over video. Closed captions are hidden (encoded) as numerical data within the video
signal emitted by the broadcasting stations and sent to the receivers. These numerical data must be decoded to be visible as captioning on the screen.

Closed captioning is often preferred by the part of the audience who are not using captioning, because it is less distracting while they are viewing the performance.

**Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART)**

As was mentioned above, CART, or Communication Access Real Time Translation involves a stenographer to key in a machine while listening to a performance. It is similar to court reporting systems. The machine is connected to a Light Emitting Diode (LED) screen (see Figure 3), or projected from a computer using a Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) projector.

The CART transcription can be unscripted, in which case the English print appears on the screen with a delay after the actors have started speaking. Alternatively, it can be scripted, in which case the English print is formatted and metered in synchronization with the actors' dialogue.

Though CART seems to be a good solution for captioning in live theatres, it also has drawbacks. While instrumental music can add to the excitement of theatre, it poses a problem for captioning. The music overrides the voices of the singers, resulting in inaccuracies in the captioning process. Because of the resonating open space in a theatre, the quality, precision, and exactitude of the language may suffer. Another barrier is that the audience itself can block the visibility of the CART display. In addition, voices overlap; it is hard for the CART operator to provide literal text. Another problem with captioning is
that in order to read the screen, the individual has to constantly shift his/her eye gaze from the stage to the monitor. This creates a “ping pong” effect in that the viewer is forced to switch constantly from one focus to another.31

Besides problems with the relaying of the content, CART fails to relay emotion the way an actor can. For example, simply typing the words “with anger” does not convey the feeling of the message. The reason why we go to the theatre is to watch how an actor can portray a character and take on the emotion of that character. We are not there to read about it on an English caption display. Thus, in some ways, captioning turns the theatre experience into a reading experience.

Figure 4. Open Captioning Scenes.
Amplification Systems

Some people with hearing loss may have the ability to hear more effectively when provided with sound-amplification devices, such as hearing aids, or other assistive listening devices, such as FM systems and infrared systems. These individuals often refer to themselves as “hard-of-hearing” or “hearing impaired”; many do not use American Sign Language. Theatres usually accommodate these users by providing FM or infrared amplification devices that help channel the sound from the theatre’s sound system directly into the patron’s hearing aid.32

FM systems are portable and have a large coverage and transmission range. They function in the same way as radios, capturing radio waves characterized by certain wavelengths.

![Figure 5. FM Assistive Device.][33]

Infrared amplification systems are also portable. They are based on infrared light transmission technology, and they offer certain advantages compared to FM systems. The infrared signal does not penetrate through walls, thus offering security for sensitive transmissions. This advantage is particularly valuable in courthouses and other multiplex facilities such as movie houses. All receivers can
be identical and can be used in any one auditorium without interference or signal pickup from adjacent rooms. Headset receivers, under-the-chin receivers, and body-worn receivers are all functionally interchangeable with one another as long as the transmitting frequency is the same.

Figure 6. Infrared Hearing Enhancement System by Phonic Ear.\textsuperscript{34}

Figure 7. Lightweight Infrared Earphone.\textsuperscript{35}

There is little information about how individuals using assistive devices perceive the theatrical experience. There are some complaints to the effect that the systems do not work at all times. However, as with any engineering problem, this issue can be solved if the theatre makes sure to check the functionality of its equipment before performance.
Theatrical Arts Interpreting

Sign-language performances are those in which all the characters, whether played by Deaf or hearing actors, use sign exclusively, without voice. Any voicing is performed offstage by a performance-art interpreter who voices for the signing occurring on stage.

A main issue in sign-language performances is the sign-language comprehension level of the audience. A minimal-language (see Glossary) member of the audience may not comprehend some of the more advanced concepts presented in a performance. ASL is a complex natural language that has all the linguistic properties of phonology, syntax, semantics, morphology, and pragmatics. Some deaf people acquire it late in life and many have difficulty following a theatre performance in ASL.

Theatrical-arts interpreting is a relatively new art form. It does not merely involve translating words; it is creating a work of art. It is striving to re-interpret the director’s vision. In the process it creates a different, more pictorial, staging of that vision. It implies a realization that, while there are many ways interpreters could physically relate to the stage, they all require acting. It involves acting, but it uses a different language and style to communicate the story.

Increased sensitivity to American Sign Language and to the Deaf Community, sustained by the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act, has led theatre producers to explore new venues throughout the country by providing them with the opportunity to reach out to a new audience via interpreted performances. Sign-language interpreters are gaining popularity in theatres throughout the United States. Nowadays, there seems to be an increase in the number of theatre productions offering ASL interpretation.
Many theatre producers are not necessarily aware that providing quality theatrical interpreting requires more linguistic preparation and rehearsal time with the actors. For many interpreters who accept a theatrical interpreting assignment, usually as a last-minute request, the job is frantic because they lack preparation. Moreover, community interpreters of a more general professional orientation are called once in a while to interpret performances, as there is no specific theatrical interpreting specialization. Consequently, a theatrical performance can run the risk of being interpreted inaccurately and being aesthetically unpleasing, detracting from its artistic quality.

From the perspective of Deaf actors, theater teachers, and members of the Deaf community, another critical issue is theatre appreciation by the Deaf Community. Neither theatre producers and interpreters nor the Deaf Community itself have a clear perspective on theatrical education. The theatre profession simply lacks knowledge of how to provide theatrical experiences where deaf people can participate, exchange ideas, and enrich themselves without feeling isolated, even looked down upon, as just disabled people.

Some deaf people will support theatre arts by attending interpreted “hearing” plays, even if they do not agree entirely with this idea. These are simply plays that are written by hearing people, do not utilize Deaf Culture or ASL as themes, and are simply interpreted into sign language. Many Deaf people may not enjoy such a play as much as they would a Deaf Theatre performance or just reading the script before or during the performance and then seeing the actors play. This may detract from enjoyment. They may continue to attend interpreted plays and may miss out on the experience of Deaf Theatre created for and by Deaf people.
In general, a theatrical interpreter’s job is to provide access. Contrary to a widespread misconception about interpreting in theatre, real theatrical interpreting is nothing like interpreting at a professional conference, in a courtroom, or in an educational setting. Training an interpreter to become a qualified theatrical interpreter includes a combination of translation and performance instruction.41

Damon Timm, a hearing signer and performer with the experiential education project on Shakespeare’s Henry V at Northern University, has compiled statements by Deaf actors, hearing interpreters, and theatre representatives such as Dennis Cokely, Candance Broecker-Penn, Rico Pederson, and Janice Cole. Here are some of their comments about interpreting at the theatre.42

Dennis Cokely, author of American Sign Language, the director of the American Sign Language Program and the interim chair of the Modern Languages Department at Northeastern University, once said, “What you don’t understand you can’t interpret, and what you misunderstand you misinterpret.”43

Candace Broecker-Penn, Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)-certified interpreter, former actress with the National Theatre of the Deaf, and staff member of the Julliard Interpreter Training program, declared:

The bedrock, or framework, of all theatrical interpreter and instructor, has to be the creation of a good translation that captures the essence of the play in a way that is directly understandable and enjoyed by Deaf audiences.

Rico Peterson, professor in the Department of American Sign Language and Interpreting Education at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, stated:

Theatrical interpreting ... is not interpreting at all ... it is performing.
Janice Cole, a Deaf actress with many different theatres and a former actress with the National Theatre of the Deaf, commented about theatrical interpreters:

Therefore, it can be concluded that the qualified theatrical interpreter must also be a performer; a strong performing arts background is essential for an interpreter to produce a successful performing arts interpretation.44

About ASL consultants (see Glossary), she says the following:

A good ASL consultant is one who can apply both her understanding and artistic creativity to the translation and performance via linguistic, cultural, character, and performing arts choices; in addition, a qualified ASL consultant must have a 'Deaf eye'—the ability to analyze and provide feedback on a production from a visual standpoint that will ensure an appropriate translation from the auditory to the visual.45

Whether it is a children’s show, a musical, or a play by Shakespeare, a script needs to be translated into a signed form of communication, like American Sign Language or a code such as Signed English. Most often, the theatrical translations lean towards Pidgin Signed English (PSE), the contact language that combines American Sign Language with English syntactical structure.

American Sign Language lends itself beautifully to any production, especially to scripts that include a lot of imagery and poetry. It takes more time to translate a script into American Sign Language than into Signed English and the translation often benefits from the assistance of a sign-language consultant or coach.46

Interpreting for Deaf-Blind Persons

Susan Kosoff, the Producer of Wheelock Family Theatre, says this about making theatre accessible for deaf-blind persons:

It is no mystery why the majority of theatres do not serve Deaf-Blind audiences. Providing a meaningful experience means
planning and implementing pre-show activities that introduces characters, capture the plot, and establish sensory awareness of set, costumes, and props, as well as finding and providing interpreters for every Deaf-Blind patron. The process is time consuming and difficult. Added expense to an already tight budget, demand on front-of-house and technical staff and inconvenience to other audience members are serious considerations. Though the value to the Deaf-Blind community is clear, the benefit to theatres may not be as obvious.\textsuperscript{47}

Deaf-blind persons may vary in their language backgrounds. Some are hard-of-hearing and partially sighted. Others live in total deafness and blindness. Some experience tunnel vision. Some have poor night vision only. Some are born deaf or hard-of-hearing only and experience progressive loss of sight throughout their lives. A smaller minority are born deaf and blind. Some with limited vision may be able to see ASL at close range. Others understand language only tactilely or through the hands. Some deaf-blind persons are mobile and can use a cane or a guide dog when using public transportation. Some work in jobs in the public sector, while others are confined to their homes.\textsuperscript{48}

Susan Kosoff says this about the way deaf-blind persons have responded to theatre interpreted for them:

We have found that there is a palpable, contagious excitement generated among cast, crew and audience members alike that is inherent in making the magic of theatre come alive with and for others who would otherwise be denied the opportunity. Quite simply, the significance of the theatre experience is enlarged and enhanced. I doubt anyone present during a performance of Wheelock Family Theatre’s \textit{The Miracle Worker} will soon forget the Deaf-Blind woman who spontaneously yelled out in jubilant recognition and identification when Helen Keller fingerspelled the word “water” into Anne Sullivan’s hand. She captured for all of us the essence of the experience.\textsuperscript{49}

Janet K. Marcous, a deaf-blind patron, went to the play and said:

I look through a snowstorm all the time. But with a good interpreter sitting at close range, proper lighting, and seating close to the stage, the excitement and fun of music and dance become accessible to me.\textsuperscript{50}

Deaf-blind can have a satisfying theatrical experience if provided with specially trained interpreters, close-up seating, and an
opportunity to experience sets, costumes, and props through touch prior to opening night.51

Interpreters for deaf-blind audience members are often Deaf themselves and rely on ASL. They craft their tactile or close-vision translation of the performance. The interpreters also assist the production department in determining the need for and arrangement of auxiliary lighting. These interpreters are paid for their preparation, for the pre-show tour where the deaf-blind persons can walk around the stage and “feel” the props and costumes, and for the performance. It is important that the interpreters get copies of the script about one month prior to the performance so that they can practice for the performance. Interpreters should be allowed to view as many rehearsals as they can, as well.52

The deaf-blind Theatre Access Project was a collaborative project among Northeastern University’s Interpreter Program, the Wheelock Family Theatre, and the deaf-blind Contact Center and Deaf Equal Access Foundation, Incorporated (D.E.A.F., Inc.).53

This project created guidelines for theatre staff, production departments, box-office staff, stage managers, front-of-the-house managers, and marketing teams to follow in providing access to deaf-blind patrons. This project advises theatres to hire ASL consultants who can assist with coordination of the interpreters. The ASL consultant can also be the “go-between” connecting the deaf-blind community and the theatre company. The ASL consultant can also provide information to the actors about the deaf and deaf-blind communities. In addition, the ASL consultant can provide linguistic feedback to the other interpreters during the rehearsals. The ASL consultant can prepare a short summary of the play before the performance for the
deaf-blind patrons, which can include ASL name signs of the characters.\textsuperscript{54}

The pre-show tour enriches the experience for deaf-blind patrons as they walk around the stage touching props and costumes, sets and furniture. Seating and lighting can be adjusted for them. A model of the set can be provided so that they can visualize the set.\textsuperscript{55}

There are financial considerations involved in providing deaf-blind access. Two interpreters are needed for each deaf-blind patron. Reserved seating is necessary in the front row of a side section. Some theaters provide half-price tickets for deaf-blind patrons and sometimes local organizations help support these costs for the theatre company.\textsuperscript{56}

Interpreters for a deaf-blind patron can sit in the aisles on folding chairs placed across from or next to the patron. Or the two can sit on either side of the deaf-blind patron. The deaf-blind patron should be consulted on where he would like the interpreters to sit.

See Figure 8 for Seating Options diagram. See Figure 9 for Close-Vision Interpreting location. See Figure 10 for Tactile Interpreting location.\textsuperscript{57}
Jody Steiner, a hearing interpreter, says this about the experience of interpreting for deaf-blind patrons:

In live theatre, so much is happening in any given moment—dialogue, subtext, lighting, blocking, sound effects, the use of props—it would seem impossible to provide an interpretation adequate for a Deaf-Blind person to have an enjoyable experience.
of the show. But it’s not! ... Flexibility is a must, along with a good editorial sense.

One interpreter cannot capture all of the dialogue and describe everything that is seen on the stage, but with proper rehearsal and familiarity with the play and the performance, an interpreter can guide the Deaf-Blind patron’s experience of the play. ... Art changes people’s lives. Theatre empowers people to reach into themselves and find their own inspiration. This has happened in the Deaf-Blind community. After attending an interpreted performance of *The Miracle Worker* at Wheelock Family Theatre, a group of Deaf-Blind patrons said ‘We can put on a play!’ and went on to create their own piece called *Journey into the Deaf-Blind World*, which was performed by a Deaf-Blind cast in Boston and Hartford. ... The interpreter can be the hand that opens the door to new possibilities in art and creativity.61

Troy Kotsur says this about performing for a deaf-blind child whom he took aside to explain the play, using tactile communication, during a performance of the Little Theatre of the Deaf (LTD):

One time there was a deaf blind child, for whom I felt deeply. He missed a lot of things, so I was able to take him aside and tactilely communicate with him. Oh, he just latched on to me. He was engrossed in the stories I told him and shared with him. I thought, whew!, what an inspiration! The young boy could be inspired by me as a Deaf actor. He touched my face. He wanted to know everything there was to know about me. He was just a young Deaf-Blind little boy. I could see myself when I was twelve years old.62

Deanne Kotsur agreed with Troy and added her comment:

I went to camp one year and I met a Deaf-Blind person. I continued to attend the camp on a yearly basis until I was about 18. At camp I saw the movie *Mask*. There was a Deaf-Blind person at camp who wanted to understand the movie. So our group acted out the show. And we were able to give the whole story through acting. She was an inspiration to me! I became an actor because of my involvement in the Deaf camp. In other conditions I don’t think I would have.63

**Theatre Interpreting for Children versus Adults**

Interpreting theatre performances for children is fundamentally different that interpreting for adults. For one, the language level of the interpretation has to correspond with the language levels of the children in the audience. In addition, theatrical performances should
have a more dramatic action to keep the children focused and interested. Thirdly, the story plots have to be explicit for children to be able to comprehend. Young children may not be able to pick up on ironies or subtleties.

Julie Gebron has interpreted a wide range of works from children’s theatre to Broadway touring productions and is internationally recognized for her innovative work as a shadow interpreter for Shakespearean productions. She commented:

I love interpreting for children’s theatre. I have found, for the most part, that children’s theatre companies are more open to using interpreters and more flexible about integrating interpreters into performances. Their mission is to captivate young theatergoers in the hope that these children will develop a love for the theatre that will last a lifetime.64

**Performance Issues**

Before one begins translating a play written in English into ASL, there are some things that need to be considered, for example the age range of the audience. If the audience is composed of children under the age of seven, their writing and reading skills are minimal. Therefore they may not have an opportunity to read the story that they will be viewing in a theatrical setting. They also might be viewing an original work created specifically for their age group, so that materials for teachers or parents to use ahead of time might not exist.

For children ages eight through twelve, it is more likely that they will be viewing a classic story that has been adapted for the stage. In this case, there are usually plenty of materials available for the teachers and parents to share with children before they attend the show.65
Children have a difficult time attending to the interpreter. They would prefer to watch the actors engaged in action on the stage. Many young deaf children do not have either the attention span or the proficiency in ASL to utilize the interpreter sufficiently to get all the information from the interpreted play.

Todd Czubek, a hearing Child of Deaf Adults (CODA), who is a teacher of deaf children at Scranton School for the Deaf, Pennsylvania, and also the director and founder of The Magical Literacy Camp, which took place at the Learning Center in Framingham, Massachusetts, said this about interpreting plays for children:

I only saw one interpreted play, one time only. The play was *Annie Get Your Guns*, on Broadway. This was 2 or 3 years ago. At first, I had no idea that there was an interpreter there. There was a group of Deaf people and a group of deaf children that the school brought to see the play. The children looked mostly at the stage, fascinated by the action, and only sometimes at the interpreter. Without an interpreter, though, it would be hard for Deaf people. If I were Deaf, I would want to have an interpreter there. However, the stage is more animated than the interpreter. I think Deaf people appreciate more Deaf Theatre. ... Yes, Sign Language Theatre, with actors signing on stage. Definitely! If I were Deaf, I would rather see sign language on stage with all the action instead of having to constantly shift between watching the stage and watching the interpreter. Interpreted performances do not feel natural. But we have to have interpreted plays. I mean, if Deaf people go to see a play on Broadway, they have to have interpreters. Not having interpreters could infringe the right to equal access. Equal service is a must. But to really enjoy themselves, Deaf people prefer Sign Language Theatre. ... I have seen videotapes of shadow-interpreted plays. And I absolutely do not like shadow interpreting. It is really confusing. It ruins the dynamics."

Interpreter Organizations and Theatre

The Theatre Development Fund (TDF) "Interpreting for the Theatre" was founded in 1968 in New York City. TDF is the longest non-profit service organization for performing arts in the country. This group offers the Julliard Interpreter Training, which is a weeklong program
of study for interpreters. It provides interpreters and artists with training in advanced techniques for signing musicals and plays. Housed at the Julliard School, the program’s summer classes are taught by New York’s most qualified theatre interpreters, Candace Broecker-Penn and Alan Champion. These individuals are the co-founders of the Julliard program. In addition, Stephanie Feyne, Lynette Taylor, and various members of the Deaf Community are involved in the summer program throughout the week.67

Hands On is a New York based service organization created in 1982 by Candace Broecker-Penn, Janice Cole, Janet Harris, interpreter coordinator for the New York Society for the Deaf, and Beth Prevor, interpreter and former Stage Manager on Broadway. Its mission is to provide greater accessibility through interpreting exclusively for arts and cultural events for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, to initiate deaf adults and children into the fine arts, and to cultivate them to become patrons of the arts.

The TOLA program (Theatre Offers a Lifetime of Adventure), named after James Tola, a Deaf parent, actor, teacher of the deaf, and supporter of Interpreted Theatre, was developed to offer theatre programming for deaf school-age children and their families, both Deaf and hearing. It provides the opportunity for families to attend theatre performances together. TOLA also offers accessible theatre experiences for deaf school-groups that include post-show discussions with members of the cast.68

The Sign Language Interpreting Theatre (TerpTheatre) website was created in Detroit, Michigan, in 1998 by Dan McDougall, who has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sign Language Studies from Madonna University. The site was designed as an educational tool for theatre clients. This website provides the basic information about developing a
specialty in theatre interpreting: strategies of interpreter placement, legal issues, compensation, costumes, performances, and advice for interpreters and theatres.69

American Sign Language Interpreting

American Sign Language interpreted performances are designated performances during which American Sign Language interpreting is offered for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. Seating for these patrons at each American Sign Language interpreted performance is located in the orchestra, house left. The script, distributed by courtesy of the theatre company at the performance, provides deaf patrons with the English text of the play.

Even when knowing or having read the script of the play, deaf people find it difficult during the performance to follow at once the actors’ performance on stage and the interpreter’s rendition. For example, Adrian Blue, Deaf director, playwright, and former actor with the National Theatre of the Deaf and the Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf, commented:

The interpreters are wonderful and do a good job, but when I read the script I would much prefer to watch the actors and read the script than to watch the interpreters, because I get lost trying to watch both the actors and the interpreters.70

Typically, interpreted plays are far from being the perfect way to accommodate the Deaf audience, keeping in mind that most plays do not constitute Deaf Theatre, meaning that they do not incorporate Deaf cultural themes or ASL in the performances. They are a window into the “hearing” culture, because they concentrate on the mainstream focus points, ranging from political views to simple humor, and these do not include the focus points of Deaf Culture. Deaf Theatre is based on
situations unique to Deaf people, expressing Deaf values and norms or illustrating oppression of the Deaf minority by the hearing majority. Deaf Theatre is generally performed in a realistic or naturalistic style, using ASL in a visually creative manner, sometimes without voice narration.⁷¹

Commonly, theatrical interpreting uses either the “zoned style” on stage or the “platform stage” to place the interpreter outside the acting space (see Figure 11).

In the platform placement, theatre interpreters hold one stationary position during the performance, often to the side of the stage or below the apron. One of the drawbacks of this form is the “ping-pong” effect. This leads the deaf audience to shift focus between the interpreters’ signing and the action on stage, rather than concentrating on the content of the play itself. The deaf audience must look at the interpreters, then up to the stage, then back to the interpreters, and then back to the stage.

![Diagram of platform interpreter placement](image_url)

Figure 11. Platform Interpreter Placement.⁷²
In an interview, Brenda Schertz, a Deaf professor of ASL and Deaf Studies at the University of Southern Maine, stated that a better interpreter placement is for the interpreter to stand partway up in the main aisle, or on a raised platform above the stage. In both situations the interpreters are placed out of the actor’s space. However, this placement allows the deaf audience to be able to watch both the play and the interpretation at the same time.73

Figure 12. Platform Interpreting Scenes.74

Sightline interpreting is basically platform interpreting, the only difference being that interpreters are placed on the stage, or near the stage, to bring close together the visual foci of the stage action and of the interpreters’ rendition. Their position remains stationary throughout the performance. The best position for the deaf audience is four or five rows away from the stage, on the side of the auditorium closest to the position of the interpreters. Another sightline placement, used for amphitheatres where the seating is raised from the level of the stage, is for the interpreters to stand on the
stage, or on a platform at the back of the stage. In this case the best position for the deaf audience is in the back rows, well above the stage.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{sightline.png}
\caption{Sightline Interpreter Placement.\textsuperscript{76}}
\end{figure}

The zoned style of interpreting brings the interpreters’ placement even closer to the stage focal point. The interpreters are assigned zones in which they can move, and they interpret for whichever character happens to approach their part of the stage. The interpreters are often placed in stage-left and stage-right areas.\textsuperscript{77}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{zoned.png}
\caption{Zoned Interpreter Placement.\textsuperscript{78}}
\end{figure}
Although this arrangement assures the best placement of the interpreters in the deaf audience’s sightline toward the action on stage, it loses accuracy in interpretation. The deaf audience has to mentally infer which character is given the line in the rendition of each interpreter, according to the position of the character on stage. Also, when there are more than two characters on stage, the two interpreters can have alternative line exchange for more than one character, therefore the audience is subject to the “ping-pong” effect. In addition, the difference in time span between the English spoken line and the ASL interpreted line usually implies a non-concordance of the interpretation with the movement of the actors on stage.

Figure 15. Zoned Interpreting Scene.
Challenges of Translating Plays Into ASL

Translating an artistic performance cross-culturally and cross-linguistically requires the time, dedication, and talent of a team of interpreters, both Deaf and hearing. They must have both an understanding of the different languages and cultures, and also a personal awareness of artistic expression. It is this combination of talent and skill that makes an interpreted theatrical production successful and meaningful to the targeted audience.81

Adapting a play for American Sign Language is a challenge in more than translation. This is especially the case for plays written in or about a historical time period. For example, concepts need to be adapted visually to the way objects looked during the period concerned.

Linda Bove, a nationally known actress on stage and on TV, says:

There’s a lot of work behind the translation process because the meaning or conceptual equivalent could be lost unless the person is highly skilled in translation ... I can’t use the sign for ‘time’ because it’s a reference to a watch, but they didn’t have watches back then. So I have to define time in the form of a sundial.62

Here are two more examples of translated play scripts for Sign Language Productions.

The first example is the script that Donald Bangs, a Deaf playwright with Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf, translated into American Sign Language for the play The Four Poster in a comparison-friendly two-column page setup:

ACT ONE: SCENE I: 1980. NIGHT.
BEDROOM. FOURPOSTER. DOOR IN BACK WALL, WINDOW TO THE RIGHT, WASHSTAND AND LOW CHAIR TO THE LEFT. THE ROOM IS DARK. LOW-BURNING GAS LAMPS SHIMMER BLUISHLY TO THE RIGHT OF ARCH AND AT BED, LEFT.
THE DOOR IS OPENED CLUMSILY, AND HE ENTERS, CARRYING HER IN HIS ARMS INTO THE ROOM OUT OF THE LIGHTED PASSAGE. HE WEARS A TOP HAT
ON THE BACK OF HIS HEAD; SHE IS IN HER BRIDAL GOWN. HE STOPS IN THE MOONLIGHT, KISSES HER, WHIRLS AND CARRIES HER TO BED.

English
Oh, Micky, whoo! Hold me!
Hold me tight! Whoo! Whoo!
I'm falling.

American Sign Language
SHE: Wow, Micky, wow! Hold me,
hold me. Wow! Will fall. Can’t...

HE THROWS HER ONTO THE BED AND TRIES TO KISS HER AGAIN.

Michael, the door! The door!

American Sign Language
SHE: *point to door* door! *point to door* door!

HE RUNS TO THE DOOR AND CLOSES IT. SHE GETS OFF THE BED,

STRAIGHTENS HER HAT AND DRESS.

Oh, goodness, my hair... and look at my dress!

American Sign Language
SHE: Aawful, my hair... *both hands sign 'see' as if someone was looking her up and down* my dress!

SHE TURNS ON THE GAS BRACKET ON WALL BESIDE THE BED. HE GOES TO HER, TAKES OFF GLOVES, PUTS ONE IN EACH POCKET AND KNEELS BEFORE HER.

What are you doing?

American Sign Language
SHE: What you *both hands use 'c' sign for work*?

I’m worshiping you.

American Sign Language
HE: Me worship you.

Get up immediately! (TRIES TO LIFT HIM UP) Michael, get up I say!

American Sign Language
SHE: Get up now! (TRIES TO LIFT HIM UP) Me-tell-you get-up!

Can’t I worship you?

American Sign Language
SHE: You *both hands use '5' position to sign 'crazy'!* Maybe Lord *left hand points upward then, while in raised position, 'looks' down* *hands open as if asking 'what will you do about it?'*...

If our Lord should see you...

He could only rejoice in such happiness.

American Sign Language
HE: Me happy *left points up then, while in up position, 'looks' down* *right points upwardand nod head to show satisfied look from above*. Thrill.

Michael, you mustn’t blaspheme, you know you mustn’t. Just because you had a little too much to drink.

American Sign Language
SHE: True must not sarcastic sarcastic *left points upward* Know true must not. You drink too much no-matter...

I haven’t drunk a thing. If I’m drunk, I’m drunk only with happiness.83

American Sign Language
HE: I late drink drink. Me *both hands sign 5-claw sign for 'dizzy' because me happy...

Another example of script translation is the one realized by Clarence Russell, a Deaf stage director, and Brian Kilpatrick, a Sign Language coach, for the play The Diviners:

LANGUAGE OF THE DEAF
Understanding a literal English translation of American Sign Language is like appreciating a van Gogh by touching—if there were such a thing—a Braille transcription. It doesn’t work. American Sign Language is a visual communication system. Individual signs convey basic meanings, but the fine nuances are
described through facial expressions and the style of signing--
the forcefulness, fluidity, size of motions, and so on. The
example below, taken from a speech in The Diviners, is printed
here to suggest the conceptual nature of ASL and to show some of
the differences in syntax between the two languages.

**English**

DARLENE. So anyway, this business
a being naked really sets God off
at the garden snake, see? Cause
with Eve bein so dumb she didn’t
get in any trouble, but it’s like
a whole nother ball game. And God
wasn’t just mad at this one snake
either--he was mad at all a the
snakes and all a the worms in the
world. So he tells em, ‘From now
on you guys’re gone crawl in the
dirt!’ God says, ‘From now on
nobody likes you.’

**American Sign Language**

DARLENE. Talk about nude true
make God mad at snake,
understand? Why? Because Eve
dumb, hand-off, not involve in
trouble--now set-aside.
Understanding God not mad only
one snake, all snakes--worms,
everything. Well, God ordered
‘Stand no-more, now fall and
crawl degraded dirt and they-
people like you no more.’

---

**Shadow Interpreting**

Often the director of a play will utilize the shadowing style of
interpreting that places the interpreter directly on stage. In this
style, the interpreters are placed within the set, near the actors.
This is referred to as “shadow interpreting.” To maximize the deaf
viewers’ visual sensation, the shadowed style of interpreting allows
them to avoid the placed and zoned style of interpretation.

Shadowing was first developed by Debra Brenner, a certified sign-
language interpreter and teacher of the deaf. In 1975 she founded and
directed Stage Hands, a theatre organization in Atlanta, Georgia.
Shadowing interpreting is a technique in which the signing actors
follow the blocking (see Glossary) of the speaking actors, to maintain
as close proximity as possible during the signed performance. They act
as “twin” actors, in which both actors represent the same character.

The “shadowed” style of interpreting is inclusive, in that it
allows the interpreter a direct link to the action. The interpreters
actually echo or “shadow” the actors’ every line and move and even
their emotions. Shadowing requires the most effort from the entire cast. However, it allows the most visually enjoyable experience for the deaf viewer.  

To accomplish the shadowing technique, there will usually be two interpreters to take on all the roles of a play. (Pure shadowed interpreting would consist of one interpreter for each character.) The interpreter is placed so close to the actor that the deaf audience does not need to make a decision about whom to watch. This eliminates the “ping-pong” effect. Often the interpreters have to become involved to the point where they must take on the same physical characteristics and enthusiasm as the actors.

Dan McDougall, the founder of TerpTheatre Company, commented:

The interpreters will sometimes have to dance, carry objects, and participate in set changes and many other tasks taken on by the actor. In some instances, where there are more characters or actors than interpreters, the interpreters must dress neutrally, which allows them to shadow many characters without the need for costume changes.

Interpreters who choose the shadowing style of theatre must be highly skilled. They must have a broad knowledge of theatre acting. They must attend every rehearsal in order to be properly placed or “blocked” into action. In sum, they must be skilled at characterization, movement, and all other skills belonging to actors. This makes them, in essence, “sign language actors or performers.”

Shadowing is not just one person translating for an actor. It is creating a double image in which two different mediums convey the same message. Good shadows don’t crowd the stage; they bring it alive.
Figure 16. Shadow Interpreting Scenes.
Deaf Audience Preference

Considering interpreted, shadowed, and full ASL presented plays, which would deaf children and Deaf adults enjoy the most? Here are some comments from interviews with Deaf and hearing actors, parents, and audience members.

Troy Kotsur, Deaf, answered:

Of course we would want it to be a full ASL play. You know, hearing people hear everything that is going on. My own preference is, along the same lines, a visual presentation. As for shadowing, I think that it has its place. But as a theatre patron, I am looking for the details; I want to see it all. I don’t think that the people who do not necessarily enjoy theatre would have a concern. But from my point of view, I want to get all that information to integrate it. When I consider this, having in sight the benefits for deaf children, a signed production would surely be more accessible and beneficial.90

Adrian Blue, Deaf playwright, replied:

Interpreted productions and signed productions each have their own different values. If we look at it honestly, interpreted plays and also Deaf theatre are not big ‘money makers.’ Maybe Deaf West Theatre, NTD, a few of those, can maybe still have a full house. In general, the hearing theatres usually do have a full house every night. The interpreters are wonderful and do a great job, but when I read the script I would prefer to watch the actors and read the script rather than to watch the interpreters, because I get lost trying to watch both the actors and interpreters.91

Jody Steiner, hearing director, commented:

What do I think about interpreting a show for deaf audiences? Good question. It is confusing, and that is the truth. The Deaf can’t fully enjoy the show. If the play is shadowed, then that is better, it is a little bit closer. The ideal would be to hire Deaf actors who would watch the performers, then switch and have the Deaf actors on stage and the hearing actors voice the show. That would be perfect. But interpreted plays? It can be suitable and fun if the show is full of action and colorful. If the Deaf person knows the script beforehand, it would be better, as they can glance between the interpreter and the show.92
Jerry Agte, the hearing mother of a ten-year-old deaf girl, comments:

Yes, but I really enjoy Deaf Theatre. Interpreted plays force me to have to shift my eyes repeatedly between actors and interpreter. Also, those plays use adult language. She is still young; the language used by the interpreter is too complex for her to comprehend. She enjoys more children’s theatre and she learns from it.93

Rosa Gallimore, a Deaf actress commented:

Shadowed plays are better than interpreted plays. It is easier to follow the interpreters and the actors when they move on stage keeping in close proximity. However, there is still a feeling that the line does not come from the actor. At first, it seems that there are too many characters on stage. It takes a while to realize that the interpreters are not characters in the play. That is bothersome. But I prefer shadowing to interpreting. A shadowed performance makes me feel more involved in the play. The interpreters’ signing style is more theatrical, with enhanced facial expressions and display of emotions. In contrast, in interpreted performances, the interpreter abstains from acting, and delivers a dry story.94

As it can be summarized from these samples, Deaf audiences typically prefer to have Deaf actors. Why is this so? Deaf actors while in a theatrical production, either in an ASL play as independent performers, or in a shadowed performance as shadows of hearing actors, bring to the audience a more artistic and live theatrical experience. They are also representatives of Deaf Culture and are able to naturally and artistically portray the theme of the production in an appropriate linguistic manner, while adapting the underlying cultural concepts to the Deaf perspective. In an ASL play this adaptation is only necessary if the script of the production belongs to the hearing culture. In the case of shadowed performances, this adaptation is critical to achieving the dynamic equivalence of the theatrical experience for the deaf audience. In addition, Deaf actors are proof of professional excellence, thus being considered role models by the Deaf Community.

The deaf audience feels more immersed in the theatrical experience of a shadowed play than that of an interpreted play. The
facial expressions and body language of the shadowing Deaf actors are the bond to the world of ideas conveyed in the play. But this artistic expression and visual imaginary world is brought from behind the hearing actors. Hence, the deaf audience has the feeling that the stage is “crowded” and that the hearing actors are a sort of “visual noise” that interferes in the process of connecting with the acting on stage.

Full ASL productions are the natural way for the deaf audience to dive into the theatrical experience. In these performances, the Deaf actors choose the linguistic level of the play that is best suited for their audience. If the play is addressed to adult audience, then the linguistic level will be adapted function of the characters and ideas contained in the play. In contrast, if the play is a children’s play, then the linguistic level of the play would be brought to match the linguistic level of the young deaf audience. This is the main reason why deaf children prefer full ASL plays for children. Shadowed plays based on children’s stories usually employ a higher linguistic level than the one of the young deaf audience because, often times, for the translation of the script, being precise is more important than achieving dynamic equivalence. Therefore, the young deaf audience may miss the actual world of concepts conveyed by the play, and only enjoy the movement and facial expressions on stage.

Performing Arts Interpreter Certification

The Registry Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) was formed and established by a group of educators, interpreters, and rehabilitation counselors at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, in the summer of 1964. The purpose of the organization had originally been to recruit, educate, and maintain an updated listed of certified sign-
language interpreters. RID has since extended its work to include interpreting for theatre performances.

In 1979, there were the fifteen interpreters attending the five-day training held at Eugene O’Neill Theatre Center in Waterford, Connecticut. The program was a joint effort between the National Theatre of the Deaf and RID supported by a grant from the National Endowments for the Arts. The work of these RID pioneers has opened theatre doors all over America. They all had extensive training in translation—thoroughly understanding the script and matching the translation to the actors’ interpretation. In addition, they participated in many rehearsals. They learned to include the interpretation in the whole theatrical experience by shifting the focus of the audience as needed from the stage to the interpreter and vice-versa. At the end of the program, out of these fifteen interpreters, ten were granted Performing Arts Specialist certification: Darlene Allen (California), Janet Bailey (Maryland), Debbie Brenner (Georgia), Becky Carlson (Minnesota), Andrew L. Diskant (Ohio), Steve Fritsch-Rudser (California), Laurel Goodrich (Colorado), Rob Granberry (Texas), Margaret James (Wisconsin), and Anna Witter-Merithew (New York).95

The Americans with Disabilities Act has forced the performing arts to open up more for deaf people, and this category includes concert halls. More and more interpreters are in this area, audiences are increasing, and training opportunities abound. There are only ten interpreters who have held the specialist certificate since 1980, as that certification process was offered only one time.96 Although the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf was queried, the author could find little information on this certification process except that the RID theatre interpretation certification lasted only one year and was discontinued probably, because of funding.97
A Comparison of Accessibility Options

The ADA stipulates that “effective communication” must be provided. However, it is often up to the deaf consumer to choose which option best suits his or her communication needs. The section below describes the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

The advantage of closed-captioning systems is that the captions are visible only to the intended audience. Accordingly, the captions do not interfere with the stage view of the general audience. One disadvantage is that the deaf audience must sit in a designated area of the auditorium that has been equipped with screens on the backs of the seats. Consequently, they may not be able to sit close to their hearing friends and family. In terms of viewing the performance, seat-back screens present the challenge of constantly having to adjust focus of the eye from the screen to the stage.98

Open captioning does raise the public’s awareness regarding hearing loss and makes the production more accessible to everyone, as the printed text is in view for all the audience members. It is a relatively simple and cost-effective way to provide access to live performances for a maximum number of people. Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing people have the freedom to choose where they sit in the auditorium and can enjoy the performance together.99

Jody Steiner, interpreter for Wheelock Family Theatre, said:

Deaf prefer signing done on the stage. It really depends. Many people who became deaf in later life want to see the English with an interpreter. They don’t want to see the ASL. We do get complaints from deaf people that they want their interpreters to transliterate and not sign in ASL. Others want to see the ASL. So, what we do is sign in ASL one night and then the next show is transliterated. Best of all would be to have open caption above
the stage and an interpreter on the stage. Not behind, but on the stage. Have the interpreters on both sides of the stage interpreting. That way people can see. You can sit anywhere. We do reserve a special area where it’s easier to view the interpreters. However, Wheelock Family Theatre is different from other Boston Theatres. Boston theatres tend to be rigid and require that their interpreters stand on the floor in front of the stage. The director of the Wheelock Family Theatre is open and creative. If the show has a lot of action, it is best if the interpreter stands to the side of the stage. If the show is a drama, it is best to have the show shadowed. We work with the deaf advisors to determine what is best for the show.100

Shadowing interpretation that is well done provides deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences who know ASL a linguistically rich and artistically enjoyable theatrical experience. But this is not always easy to do. In fact, shadowing can be a very complex process. It can also be expensive for under-budgeted and understaffed theatre companies. Many theatres rely on grants to cover the costs of shadowing a play, and, in today’s political climate, grant agencies’ budgets for the arts have been drastically cut. Here are some budget details. For example, the Shadow Interpreters are paid about $250 for a one or two-night performance. This entails about thirty to forty-five hours of work, including rehearsal and script translation from English to American Sign Language. In addition, a Deaf sign-language coach must be hired. While the theatre directors hope that deaf people will fill the house, in reality this is not usually the case, and the theatre investment in providing the shadowed performance often ends up exceeding the performance proceeds.101

The Deaf actor Troy Kotsur commented on interpreted plays:

In interpreted plays, I miss a lot but... I remember one time in Arizona I saw a shadowed play. At that time I had never seen a play where the actors actually had their own shadows. It was a humorous play and characters played off of one another. The main character played along with the shadowed character. This was quite interesting. At that time it was very new to me as an audience member. At an interpreted play there are things that you miss and things that are dropped.102
Deanne Kotsur, a Deaf actress renowned for her appearance in the Public Broadcasting service (PBS) production *Sue Thomas: F.B.Eye* (2002 through 2005), and for her role in the Broadway tour play *Big River* (2005), comments about shadow interpreting:

Over these last recent years, we have seen where shadowing become more used and more successful in meeting the needs of the Deaf audience. We understand that there is a higher percentage of hearing people in the audience. But at Deaf West Theatre, the primary form of communication for both Deaf and hearing cast is ASL. I would rather see the signing on stage than seeing an interpreter sign on the side of the stage, and miss the characters' emotions and facial expressions. ... If you have to look at an interpreter who is off to one side, you miss a lot. Another thing that I think is helpful is to get the script beforehand, to read it before going to see the interpreted show. Also, having captioning available does help. I like to have that script in front of me.  

The exposure of a hearing audience to an interpreted play leads hearing people into a glimpse of the Deaf World with American Sign Language and Deaf Culture. Many times hearing people are more attracted to the liveliness of the interpreter(s) than to the action and rhetoric on stage. On the other hand, for Deaf people, the more commonly provided platform interpreting seems as linear as the script itself. Interpreted performances often lack the artistic quality of an entirely Deaf theatrical experience. Deaf people see shadowing as a mere "hearing" learning experience about their Deaf Culture.

Problems with blocking in the zoned interpreting setup can cause conflicts within the performance, as the deaf members of the audience do not know where the next line will be given. For example, if there are two actors on opposite sides of the stage involved in an active dialogue while other actors are interacting, deaf spectators do not know where to look for the next line.

After more than one hundred years of theatre activity involving Deaf people and sign language, there is still very little information about the audience’s perspective on the theatre experiences.
By using different methods of interpreting a production, theatres everywhere will gain an opportunity to learn from the identity of the particular cultures attracted to each performance. The primary aim is to ensure that all people have access to a broad range of theatre arts though the provision of quality interpreted performances. As we move through the twenty-first century, it is apparent that theatre and the other performing arts are bridging the gaps among communities across the world (see Appendix 3).

All methods of communication are applicable in some situations and for certain groups of people. But they are not always successful. A Deaf person who seeks to experience fully a theatrical production might be deprived by the manner in which the theatre has provided accessibility. As is perceived by most hearing theatres, providing accessibility for the Deaf Community means providing an interpreter; yet it is not that simple. Interpreting a play is a very complex process. The challenge consists of finding the dynamic equivalence not only of the script itself, but of the whole performance.

In the current state of the art, most theatres underestimate the time and effort necessary to provide a truly equivalent experience to the Deaf audience. This may be one reason why the Deaf Community does not feel compelled to attend theatrical representations. Also, theatres do not feel a responsibility towards the Deaf Community, only an obligation to follow the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Deaf Community would represent an important expansion of the performing arts audience, but theatres are not yet ready to provide the best possible experience to attract them.

Last but not least, a financial consideration is that signed performances do not represent a significant profit base for theatres. In fact, theatres usually spend more than they earn from providing
accessibility to deaf people. From this perspective, it is not surprising that theatres do not see the Deaf Community as a market niche.\textsuperscript{105}

**Conclusion**

The Deaf Community has made some startling comments that are rich in irony. They highlight the paternalistic views that hearing people often unknowingly have toward deaf people. For example, hearing people often think that deaf people need sign-language interpretation to have access to theatre. However, in a Deaf World, it is the hearing people who need interpreting. Linda Bove, a Deaf actress, said:

> There has been so little place for the Deaf in the theatre, in all the arts. Until very recently, most of the performing arts were not part of our lives, because reliance on sound and the spoken word. Even places like museums were relatively closed to us without interpretation. When interpreted performances in theatres began that was helpful, but now it’s no longer enough. We are tired of having access only under special circumstances. At DeafWest Theatre at Los Angeles, California, we put hearing people in the role of needing interpretation, providing them with infrared hearing devices.\textsuperscript{106}

Steps towards acknowledging the complex, difficult, and unique nature of sign-language interpreted play production have already been undertaken by other services, interpreting agencies, and some Deaf theatres. Their purpose is to provide better services and the necessary access in view of the issues faced in the performing-arts interpreting field.

What are some reasonable solutions? One would be to recognize and identify those interpreters who are currently qualified to work in the performing-arts field. Such a list would help theatres to better the artistic interpretation of their productions. However, this measure falls short as it fails to address the issues of adequately providing
script and performance preparation to the interpreters and ASL consultants within the performing-arts interpreting fields. Such unique theatre interpretation training would be essential to raising the performing-arts interpreting experience to higher and more artistic levels to better serve deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons.


5. Ibid.


10. Ibid.


16. Ibid.


19. Ibid.

20. Cerney, Deaf History Notes, 112.


31. Ibid.


43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.


48. Ibid., 1.

49. Ibid., 5.

50. Ibid., i.

51. Ibid., 5.

52. Ibid., 4.


55. Ibid., 5.

56. Ibid., 6.

57. Ibid., 4.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., 7.


64. Gebron, *Sign the Speech*, 89.
65. Ibid., 94.

66. Todd Czubek, director and founder of The Magical Literacy Camp, Pittsburgh School for the Deaf, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


70. Adrian Blue, director and scriptwriter from Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 27, 2004, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


72. Gebron, Sign the Speech, 17.


75. Gebron, Sign the Speech, 20.

76. Ibid., 17.

77. Ibid., 21.

78. Ibid., 17.

79. Ibid., 24.


87. McDougall, “Shadowed Style.”

88. Ibid.


90. Troy Kotsur, former actor with the National Theatre of the Deaf, Little Theatre of the Deaf and with Deaf West Theatre, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 17, 2004, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

91. Adrian Blue, director and scriptwriter from Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 27, 2004, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

92. Jody Steiner, co-director and founder of the Wheelock Family Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

93. Jerry Agte, deaf girl’s (Katy Agte) mother from Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

94. Rosa Gallimore, acting and improvisation staff member with PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

96. Ibid.


99. Ibid.

100. Jody Steiner, co-director and founder of the Wheelock Family Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


102. Troy Kotsur, former actor with the National Theatre of the Deaf, Little Theatre of the Deaf and with Deaf West Theatre, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 17, 2004, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


CHAPTER 3

THE PRIDE AND TREASURE OF THE DEAF COMMUNITY: DEAF THEATRE

The history of Deaf Children’s Theatre has deep roots. It has emerged from many previous influences. These influences are ASL storytelling, early performances in churches, and schools, clubs, communities, and universities. Deaf actors, playwrights and poets have also played an important role in the history of Deaf Children’s theatre.

ASL Storytelling

Like Native Americans and Black Americans, Deaf Americans have their own vernacular stories and art forms. Many of these stories, skits, and dramas concerned have not been recorded. They were simply passed down from generation to generation, usually within Deaf families or Deaf organizations.

American Sign Language (ASL), the language of Deaf people in the United States, has been cherished and used since the earliest times. The use of ASL in performance and storytelling has always been an important part of Deaf Culture. American Sign Language stories and Art-Sign, part of Deaf American literature, have been transmitted through the years by way of socializing in Deaf Clubs and in schools for the deaf. The first school for the deaf was established in Hartford, Connecticut, on April 15, 1817. We might assume that ASL storytelling began there and was transmitted through faculty and students. As more states established schools for the deaf, ASL storytelling spread throughout the United States. Thus, from 1817 until the 1950s, ASL storytelling was a form of instruction and entertainment at schools for
the deaf. We do not have written records of these ASL stories, because they were not captured on film or videotape.

Deaf children became storytellers at residential schools, and later on became storytelling role models for deaf children who were deprived of communication at home.

Deaf children have not been provided with a language experience comparable to that of their hearing peers, who are routinely exposed to creativity and language-play in school and at home as they grow up. Conditions have yet to be set up in which ASL nursery rhymes and other forms of ASL language-play are cultivated.4

Art-Sign

During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there were many changes that helped spread and empower the Deaf Culture.

In 1960, the American Sign Language has been proven a stand-alone language by William Stokoe. It was not until the publication of Dr. William Stokoe’s linguistic study of American Sign Language in 1964 that scholars began giving academic acceptance and credence to creative expression that used American Sign Language.

During the 1970s, the professional summer school of the National Theatre of the Deaf worked on developing Art-Sign and poetry. In the 1980s Clayton Valli formalized more extensively the linguistics of ASL, including its artistic aspect, which is used almost exclusively for storytelling. In 1976, based on Stokoe’s work, linguist Dr. Edward Klima and psycho-linguist Dr. Ursula Bellugi began exploring the artistic use of sign language, which they termed “Art-Sign.”6

Art-Sign is comprised of all artistic forms created by transforming the structure of American Sign Language to convey ideas in a manner other than through straightforward conversational signs. The
forms concerned amount to storytelling, e.g. A to Z hand-shape stories, number hand-shape stories, and classifier stories; drama; poetry; and so on.

In A to Z hand-shape stories each sign represents one of the twenty-six hand-shapes in the manual alphabet, from A to Z. In number hand-shape stories each sign includes a hand-shape that represents a number from one to fifteen or higher. The classifier stories are told exclusively with classifier predicates, i.e. with hand-shapes that look like an object, a person, or an animal, and move in the natural manner that object/person/animal moves. Classifiers are more iconic, less abstract, and allow for greater latitude of the artist to express an idea in a creative manner.\(^7\)

Poetry also uses more classifiers than everyday communication signing and transforms the signs to create visual art. Signs in poetry are chosen for their specific visual image to accomplish rhyme, rhythm, and meter. The artists have greater latitude to modify the parameters of the signs and to create new signs.\(^8\)

Here is an example of poetic expressiveness, where signs are modified to adjust to the rhythmic and emotional content of the idea to be conveyed. Louie Fant, hearing actor, and Dorothy Miles, Deaf actor, worked together with the National Theatre of the Deaf. Dorothy Miles wrote the following Haiku*, of which the Summer, part of The Seasons, is:

\[
\text{Green depths, green heights, clouds}\\
\text{And quiet hours, slow, hot,}\\
\text{Heavy on the hands.}
\]

Dorothy Miles signs the poem in usual, conversational signs:

* An unrhymed verse form of Japanese origin having three lines containing usually five, seven, and five syllables respectively; also a poem in this form usually portrays nature imagery.
Figure 17. Conversational ASL Rendition by Dorothy Miles.\textsuperscript{9}

Lou Fant transformed this Haiku into Art-Sign:

Figure 18. Art-Sign Rendition by Louie Fant.\textsuperscript{10}
Fant decided to set the audience in the context of summer. However he led the audience, in lieu of diverse and lively scenery, to immerse visually in a three-dimensional space of only one color--green. At this point the audience will feel overwhelmed due to the lack of variety in perceptions. The focal point moved in this process to the sky, where Fant held the end of the upward movement of the last sign for “green.” Suddenly some white image described with a claw “5” hand-shape appears, describing clouds. Would this be a ray of hope? Maybe so, maybe it is a remembrance of past happiness, or the intrinsic knowledge that the summer will end. But for now it is just one flake of white in a sea of green. From now on the movement of the signs slows down and internalizes the exhaustion that the audience first felt, passing completely into the emotional realm, without rhyme, and without eye-contact. All there is left is a sensation of fatigue.

Artistic forms of signing have played an important role in Deaf Culture and history. In the same way that storytelling lent itself to students’ expressivity in residential schools, Art-Sign should lend itself to Deaf Children’s Theatre. However, there is very little documentation or applied research in the area of Deaf Children’s Theatre and its use of Art-Sign. Most records consist simply of brochures and playbills or advertisements for performances. As with the “oral tradition” (storytelling), there has been little written documentation about Deaf Children’s Theatre. This study will, for the first time, document the history of this little-known theatre.

Drama in ASL is characterized by large and rhythmic sign movements and clear visual information such as facial grammar (questions, adverbs, conjunctions, and so fourth) and emotions.11 Dramatic performances have flourished in the twentieth century in Deaf
Clubs, Deaf colleges, Deaf Theatre groups, Deaf TV and film production groups, and Deaf celebration groups.

Deaf Literary Societies

The earliest plays by Deaf actors originated in the mid-nineteenth century in the residential schools, where plays portrayed Deaf school life, Deaf history, and Deaf family situations. In such plays, the students were not limited by their English proficiency. They could give free rein to their talents in acting and in the expressive use of ASL. In this time, serious drama flourished at such schools as the California School for the Deaf in Berkeley, the New York School for the Deaf in White Plains, and the American School for the Deaf in Hartford.12

During the early nineteenth century, the residential schools for the deaf were scattered across the country. Many children had little opportunity to go home during the school year, owing to poor transportation facilities. Consequently, faculty and staff tried to promote various organizations and weekend activities. One type of organization was usually the literary society, oriented toward the older students.13 Deaf students gathered together in the dormitory to watch and perform stories signed in ASL. Teachers and staff would coach the students on how to tell stories in ASL. An art form consisting of American Sign Language storytelling was developing.

One type of traditional ASL production, the Literary Night, developed when literary societies at residential schools started to adapt English stories and poems to ASL and deaf viewers’ visual needs.14 According to Cynthia Peters, these stories clearly displayed a carnivalesque nature, i.e. in the spirit of carnival, of Deaf American
literature, showing comic violence, bad language, exaggeration, and satire. These ASL stories became a cultural staple. They were a heterogeneous mix of news, storytelling, skits, one-act plays, poetry, song, and mimicry. These diverse forms and performance styles were then assembled into variety or talent shows and performed for the whole school. After graduation, the tradition of storytelling would be carried on, as a means of entertainment and socialization, by young and older Deaf adults in Deaf Clubs.

Deaf Clubs

Deaf Clubs started as a response to Deaf people’s need to socialize and share with each other their life experiences. Deaf Clubs became the social support structure for the Deaf Community. Deaf Clubs developed both in Deaf Colleges and throughout the Deaf Community. One of their major functions was to provide a safe environment in which deaf people could freely use their natural language. As such, Deaf Clubs offered the only viable opportunity for Deaf people to continue their tradition of storytelling. Deaf clubs began to decline in the 1980s when home movies became more accessible with VCRs and more recently with DVD technology.

Literary Nights at Gallaudet

The cultural literary societies at residential schools were scattered across the United States. However these oriented toward older students. One example of such a cultural literary society is the Clerc Literary Association, established in 1865 in Philadelphia.
Theatrical activities involving Deaf colleges started more than one hundred years ago at Gallaudet College around 1870s.

Gallaudet College, located in Washington D.C., was founded as an Institution for deaf children’s education by Amos Kendall in 1856. Edward Miner Gallaudet--son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, founder of the first school for deaf students in the United States--became the new school’s first superintendent. By 1864, Congress authorized the Institution to confer college degrees, and President Abraham Lincoln signed the bill into law. Gallaudet was made president of the entire corporation, including the college, which that year had eight students enrolled. Nowadays, Gallaudet is a prestigious University of international importance.¹⁷

As early as 1874, a men’s literary society was founded at Gallaudet College with the help of Melville Ballard. The society organized performances of skits, farces, and sketches. In 1891 the male students formed an organization, The Saturday Night Dramatics Club, for the purpose of presenting “dramatic entertainment.”

By 1893 the female students at Gallaudet had formed their own dramatic organization, The Jollity Club. Interestingly, some male Saturday Night Dramatics cast members dressed up as female characters, while some female Jollity cast members dressed up as male characters. These two clubs operated for many years, until the Jollity Club disbanded in 1928. Under the influence of women’s liberation movements, the nature of the Saturday Night Dramatics Club changed its policies to include female participants in 1935.¹⁸ During Thomas Gallaudet’s period, there were drama groups and organizations such as the Kendall Green Dramatics Club (1893), the O.W.L.S., of whose acronym only members knew the meaning,¹⁹ which later became the Phi Zeta Sorority, functioning between 1930 and 1957, the Kappa Gamma Fraternity, and other groups.
Deaf Clubs in the United States

Deaf Clubs were not established simply from a desire to socialize and preserve life experiences, life lessons, and Deaf history. They were also places where deaf people could network to find jobs. Deaf Clubs were an institution of Deaf Culture, providing socialization, literature, networking, and entertainment, responding to almost all the aspects of a deaf person’s life. They represented a world that could not be seen and judged from the outside, a safe haven where deaf people could feel “at home.”

In places like Chicago and New York City, Deaf Clubs were like towns in that they had “mayors,” “city councils,” and citizens who voted on the actions of the Club. For example, in the first half of the twentieth century Ohio had at least one Deaf Club in each of its major cities: Akron, Toledo, Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland, Warren, and Dayton. There were yet more in the smaller cities. New York City had at least twelve Clubs in its boroughs. The largest Club in New York City was the Union League. Other big Clubs were the Hebrew Association of the Deaf in Manhattan and the Hebrew Association in Brooklyn. In Chicago, there was the Chicago Club of the Deaf.

The dramatic activities at the Deaf Clubs included films, vaudeville shows, short comedy skits, and even blackface performances. A film with Mary Williamson reciting Longfellow’s poem, The Death of Minnehaha, in ASL, is probably the oldest existing film of a Deaf woman performer. It was made in the 1920s.

An important prelude to Deaf Theatre was the era of silent films. In fact, Deaf people have participated in the entertainment industry, particularly the silent films, since the early years of the twentieth
century. Granville Redmond demonstrated his performance skills next to the most famous stars of the silent film era: Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, and Raymond Griffith. However, by 1935, talking motion-picture films had replaced silent films. Films became inaccessible to the deaf audience. Therefore, Deaf people started to develop their own entertainment: Deaf Theatre with signing actors. Without access to movies or to plays, deaf people were drawn to the plays and storytelling that were taking place either in someone’s home or at the Deaf Clubs.

Recent technological advancements have brought people the capability of communicating with each other without leaving the comfort of their own homes. These developments have led to a change in the way people communicate, do business, and socialize. Consequently, deaf people have lost interest in attending Deaf Clubs to meet other Deaf individuals, and the communication language has changed to become more expedite and concise. Deaf people use now a more business-oriented language, due to the fact that business and economic interest have taken priority over social life. Accordingly, the new social and economical structure of the Deaf Community has overshadowed the storytelling custom, and the latter started to fade.

Churches

In the 1890s, St. Ann’s Church for the Deaf, founded by Reverend Thomas, the oldest brother of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, presented plays for deaf audiences in New York City.

In 1970 a movie was produced titled With this Sign, He Conquered. It was the story of Reverend Louis Foxwell, Sr., the pastor of a Deaf church in Baltimore, Maryland. He set up a signing choir of deaf and
hearing members who would render hymns and songs in sign language.28
There were probably more unrecorded examples of Church signing choirs.29
From these drama-oriented social gatherings emerged Deaf Theatre
in Universities and in the larger Deaf Community.

Theatre of the Deaf

The theatre arts are an important part of the field of Deaf
Studies and of Deaf Culture, and have a rich history that has been
recorded for the theatres geared towards adult audiences.30 Deaf Theatre
has existed for hundreds of years and has played an important role in
transmitting Deaf Culture.

Meaning of Theatre

Before we go in depth into the history of Deaf Theatre, some
definitions are necessary.

The terms “drama” and “theatre” have been used interchangeably for
centuries, and it is only within the past two decades that a clear
distinction between the two has begun to take shape in the literary
sense.31 There is a clear distinction between “drama” and “theatre.” The
communication between the actors and the audience is a primary concern
of theatre, whereas drama is concerned with the performer’s inner
experience. Interactive participatory theatre is actually drama.32 The
distinction between the terms “drama” and “theatre” is found in the
initial Greek root of each word. “Theatre” comes from the Greek word
theatron (θέατρον) meaning “a place for viewing,” while “drama” comes
from the root dran (δραν) meaning “to do” or “to live through.”33
This gives rise to a clear definition of the terms:

Drama: creative drama or improvisation intended for personal development of the participant, not for an audience.

Theatre: the development and performance of a play for an audience and its attendant activities.

Children’s theatre started to develop in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. The earliest evidence of children’s theatre is found in the social and educational centers of the larger cities. Drama provided entertainment and a method of learning for the youngest immigrants and most disadvantaged children in our society.

Mark Twain was a fervent supporter of children’s theatre. In September 1908, he wrote in one of his personal correspondence letters:

The Children’s Theatre of the East side, New York ... supports and re-affirms what I have so often and strenuously said in public that a children’s theatre is easily the most valuable adjunct that any educational institution for the young can have, and that no otherwise good school is complete without it.

It is much the most effective teacher of morals and promoter of good conduct that the ingenuity of man has yet devised, for the reason that its lessons are not taught wearily by book and by dreary homily, but by visible and enthralling action; and they go straight to the heart, which is the rightest of right places for them. Book morals often get no further than the intellect, if they even get that far on their spectral and shadowy pilgrimage; but when they travel from a Children’s Theatre they do not stop permanently at that halfway house, but go on home.

The children’s theatre is the only teacher of morals and conduct and high ideals that never bores the pupil, but always leaves him sorry when the lesson is over. And as for history, no other teacher is for a moment comparable to it: no other can make the dead heroes of the world rise up and shake the dust of the ages from their bones and live and move and breathe and speak and be real to the looker and listener: no other can make the study of the lives and times of the illustrious dead a delight, a splendid interest, a passion; and no other can paint a history-lesson in colors that will stay, and stay, and never fade.

It is my conviction that the children’s theatre is one of the very, very great inventions of the twentieth century; and that its vast educational value--now but dimly perceived and but vaguely understood--will presently come to be recognized.
Deaf Theatre and Sign Language Theatre

The term Deaf Theatre refers to plays based on situations unique to Deaf people, issues of concern to Deaf people, or conflicts between Deaf and hearing people. These plays are performed solely in ASL, in a realistic or naturalistic style, without voice.37

One example of a Deaf Theatre play is Circus of Signs, an original work (no voice narration) by Adrian Blue, produced by Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf in 1982. A circus format was used to demonstrate some of the possibilities of sign language as an art form. Circus “acts” included: The Aerial Atoms, a team of the tiniest acrobats in the world who did amazing gymnastic tricks while looking like two fingered hands in white gloves lighted by black light; You Asked for It, an improvisational troupe which created everything from washing machines to Gone with the Wind at audience members’ requests; and many other fascinating demonstrations of the artistry of sign language.38

The term Sign Language Theatre refers to plays of which the scripts are written by hearing authors, not necessarily related to deafness and not necessarily containing Deaf characters. The scripts of these plays are translated into ASL. The signing actors on stage are in prominent positions, while the voicing actors are in the background, less noticeable.39 Examples of such plays are Children of a Lesser God and The Signal Season of Dummy Hoy. There are also hybrid plays based on scripts written by hearing authors and adapted to Deaf Culture. One such example is The Touch, produced by the Hughes Memorial Theatre in 1976.40

Sign Language productions usually cover skits, song mimicry, melodrama, farce, and suspense thrillers. These can easily engage the
deaf audience from an emotional point of view, and therefore they are preferred by deaf people. More thought-provoking Sign Language Theatre, e.g. plays by Shakespeare or Chekhov, is not so appealing to deaf audiences. In the absence of previous training in play script understanding, the audience would most likely be unable to connect their own experiences with the ideas in the play.

If the script is based on Deaf Culture and performed by Deaf actors, the deaf audience will more easily involve itself in exploring the imaginary world proposed by the play. However, if this imaginary world is based on hearing culture, or conflicts in any way with Deaf Culture, the task of involving the deaf audience becomes more difficult.41 A Sign Language production with strong Deaf cultural elements may be far from the hearing audience’s experience base, so that a hearing audience may not be engaged by it. And on the other side, a Sign Language production oriented more toward hearing culture may not engage a deaf audience.

Deaf Playwrights and Deaf Poets

Deaf plays usually focus on immediate social and political matters pertaining to the Deaf World. Today there are many plays with Deaf themes involving Deaf Cultural traditions, norms, and experiences, such as *Children of a Lesser God* (Mark Medoff, 1980), *Sign Me Alice* (Gil Eastman, 1997) and *Tales from a Clubroom* (Bernard Bragg and Eugene Bergman, 1981), *I Didn’t Hear that Color* (Bob Daniel, 1990), and *The Hearing Test* (Willy Conley, 1990).42 Undoubtedly many un-staged scripts are composed by would-be playwrights working on their own, or in creative-writing classes or workshops.43
There have also been Deaf playwrights such as Donald Bangs, Willy Conley, Steve Baldwin, Shanny Mow, and others. Their plays have incorporated many themes related to Deaf Culture, including Deaf and hearing conflicts, growing up deaf in the hearing world, and various other real-life situations. Some examples include *Institution Blues* by Donald Bangs, *The Hearing Test* by Willy Conley, and *Counterfeits* by Shanny Mow.

Prior to the 1970s, due to the denigration and oppression of American Sign Language, artists faced more difficulties than has been the case more recently in finding the necessary support for producing and performing artistic works in American Sign Language.

Like many Deaf artists of his generation, Clayton Valli found a powerful early influence in the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD): “It was the first time I had seen signs used in so many creative ways.”\(^{44}\) Valli, a Deaf linguist and ASL poet, started to explore the art by turning to the linguistic forms concerned.\(^{45}\) ASL poetry emerged in the 1970s and is a fast-developing art form. It is believed that from the 1840s (when residential schools flourished in the United States) to the 1960s (when William Stokoe recognized ASL as a language), there were some ASL poets, but they went unrecognized because of the oppression of ASL and the inability of documenting signs and sign performances. In the 1970s, videotape equipment became widely used, and as a result, it became possible to record and preserve ASL and ASL poetry. Several ASL poets--among them Patrick Graybill, Ella Mae Lentz, and Clayton Valli--published their works on tape in the 1990s.\(^{46}\)

Jonathan Kovacs is the Deaf founder of the Rathskellar Deaf touring company. Rathskellar draws its name from the student café with the same name at Gallaudet University. That café often stages presentations of ASL poetry, mime, and the unique A to Z hand-shape
stories. He said: “Creating works in ASL is one way of expressing ourselves as artists. We need to see more of it.” The popularity of American Sign Language literature can be seen in the growing number of American Sign Language Deaf Festivals, Deaf Expo and Deaf conferences, where established Deaf performers can showcase their works and emerging artists can participate in workshops or compete in storytelling and poetry contests.

Douglas Alker, director for quality and development at the Royal National Institute for Deaf People in London, comments on the reality of theatre as seen from the Deaf perspective:

As for deaf theater, many of the plays and performances are based on hearing people’s experiences and try to fit deaf people into them--like the chimpanzee’s tea party, where apes imitate the actions and habits of the human race. Where are the plays and performances based on the deaf experience? Where are the productions based on the use of sign language? We see hardly any. If this pseudo-deaf theater is all there is to see, it is not surprising that the media conceive of deaf people as defective medical models struggling to be like “normal” hearing people. We have the responsibility of encouraging more deaf playwrights and promoting productions of their plays.

The 1987 Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness contains this unfortunate fact: “No play with a deaf theme, written by a deaf playwright has been produced by commercial theatre.” This is still true today.

University Deaf Theatre

Gallaudet University

Frederick Hughes graduated from Gallaudet in 1913. He later became an English teacher at Gallaudet College. He noticed a large number of postlingually deaf undergraduates. These students, who became deaf after they had acquired language (i.e. English), were skilled in both
English and sign language. Based on this observation, Hughes initiated a dramatics class at Gallaudet College in 1940. Many students joined the Dramatics Club, allowing Hughes to carry out his vision of a sign-language adaptation of the spoken theatre. A few of the students from Hughes’s drama class later became teachers of the deaf and went on to promote serious drama at residential schools for the deaf elsewhere in the United States. These people included Emil Ladner and Leo Jacobs working at the California School for the Deaf in Berkeley, Joseph Hines and Robert Panara working at the Fanwood School in New York, Loy Golladay working at the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford, Connecticut, Race Drake working at Georgia School for the Deaf, Ralph White working at Georgia and Texas Schools for the Deaf, and James and David Mudgett working at Illinois School for the Deaf.50

The Dramatics Club’s first production, Arsenic and Old Lace, directed by Hughes himself, was enacted on Broadway on May 10, 1942. Eric Malzkuhn, a Deaf actor who played the lead role of Boris Karloff in this performance, and who graduated in 1943, commented:

I read Arsenic in the summer of '41 and decided it was an ideal vehicle for signs. ... I wrote to the Dramatists Play Service to plead our case, and they wrote back, 'The play is not available to amateurs until after the Broadway run is over.' I replied, 'We are not amateurs, we are the best sign language actors in the world.'51

In 1963 the Gallaudet College Drama Department was officially established. In 1969 Gilbert Eastman became the first Deaf chairman of this Department. In 1973 he wrote and then directed the play Sign Me Alice, which was written especially for Deaf Theatre. As a result, plays with themes related to deafness have appeared almost annually in the Gallaudet Theatre schedule. In 1973 Eastman adapted Sophocles’ Antigone for performance by Deaf students during the American College
Theatre Festival V at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{National Technical Institute for the Deaf}

In 1965 the United Stated Congress passed a bill to establish the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). Dr. Robert Panara, an English professor at Gallaudet University, was responsible for writing the guidelines for the future NTID and reviewing the proposals received from over thirty universities. Dr. Panara became the first Deaf professor at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in 1967, when the decision was made to establish NTID under the umbrella of RIT in Rochester, New York. Finally, NTID became functional in 1968, enrolling its first students.\textsuperscript{53}

Dr. Panara established the Drama Club at NTID, and the Experimental Educational Theatre opened on October 3, 1974, with a production of Shakespeare’s \textit{The Taming of the Shrew}.

In 1980 the Experimental Educational Theatre changed its name to the Department of Performing Arts.\textsuperscript{54} In the same year Timothy Toothman supervised the creation of the theatre’s outreach program Sunshine Too. This group consisted of three Deaf and three hearing performers who toured throughout the United States and Canada. The shows of Sunshine Too focused on issues such as cooperation, overcoming fears, personal attitudes, and prejudice, with the underlying goal of promoting Deaf awareness. Jerome Cushman, the former artistic director of Sunshine Too, commented:

\begin{quote}
With a little understanding, and flexibility, all people can live and work together and enjoy one another’s strengths and weaknesses. The only handicap is the lack of understanding.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}
James Orr, the outreach coordinator, stated:

We don’t shy away from controversial subjects, but we do focus on the positive. Sunshine Too is always a positive experience. I call Sunshine Too ‘attitudinal theatre’.  

The outreach program ended in 1999 due to lack of funding.

In 1988, the NTID theatre changed its name again, this time to honor Dr. Panara, and so became the Robert F. Panara Theatre. The theatre stages a major production each quarter, as well as a variety of smaller, student-run shows. The shows cover a variety of theatre styles: comedy, musical, dance, drama, classical, kabuki (Japanese), experimental, puppets, and new works by Deaf and hearing authors. One play by a Deaf author was Love Thy Neighbor by Shanny Mow, presented in November 1995. Beginning in 1996, the Robert F. Panara Theatre was also present at the American Deaf Play Creators’ Festival I and II with works by Deaf playwrights. This festival was discontinued in 1998 due to lack of funding.

Community Deaf Theatre

History

The institution of Community Theatre of and for Deaf people had its origin in literary societies at schools for the deaf. From here its activities became important in residential schools and in Deaf communities through Deaf clubs and Deaf organizations. Its purpose was to encourage the expressive, forceful use and the preservation of sign language.  

In 1880 hearing educators mainly from Europe, plus only five from the United States, gathered for the Milan Conference in Italy. At the conference, there was an overwhelming vote in favor of outlawing the
use of sign language as a method of educating deaf children. Most Europeans voted for the exclusive use of the oral method in the education of deaf children. The American representatives and one British representative opposed this decision. The Americans proposed a combined system of using both speech and sign. But their proposal was rejected. The results of the decisions taken at this conference began to be seen in the Deaf Community.

The recorded history of Deaf Theatre began in France. In 1892 a French Deaf activist and community leader, Henri Gaillard, tried to establish the first professional “theatre of deaf-mute pantomimists” in France. However, Gaillard’s try was unsuccessful due to the political influence of the Milan Conference and the skeptical attitude of hearing people, who could not imagine a pantomime theatre without music.58

One of the most prominent promoters of the oral method in the United States was Alexander Graham Bell. Bell is mostly known as the inventor of the telephone, but the central interest of his life was Deaf Education. Bell was one of the most prominent promoters of the oral method in the United States. In 1872 Bell opened a school in Boston to train teachers of deaf children to use the oral method and to emphasize speech in deaf children’s education. His goals were to eradicate sign language, Deaf teachers, and residential schools. His solution was the creation of special schools for deaf children, where hearing teachers would prohibit the use of sign language and enforce speech and English.59

On the other side of the barricade during the nineteenth century, Thomas Gallaudet, the eldest son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, founded St. Anne Church in New York City. This church sponsored an active Deaf dramatics group. On the east coast, in Philadelphia, the All Souls
Working Club of the Deaf presented *The Merchant of Venice* in sign language in 1894.60

George W. Veditz was a native of Baltimore, Maryland, born in 1861. He became deaf near the age of nine when he contracted scarlet fever. When he was fourteen, he went to the Maryland School for the Deaf. At age nineteen he went to Gallaudet College. After graduation he taught at the Maryland School for the Deaf, and then at the Colorado School for the Deaf. He also was twice president of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) between 1904 and 1910.61

As the oral method became the dominant method of instruction in schools for deaf students, the National Association of the Deaf actively tried to defend sign language and preserve it in Deaf Education. Veditz, during his presidency of the NAD, raised five thousand dollars to use the new film technology for recording examples of signers—hearing and deaf—looking towards the preservation of American Sign Language.62 The signers included John B. Hotchkiss, Edward Miner Gallaudet, Edward Allen Fay, and others. Veditz's own contribution to the film series, in 1913, was a protest directed toward the outcomes of the Milan Conference:

We American deaf are now facing bad times for our schools. False prophets are now appearing, announcing to the public that our American means of teaching the deaf are all wrong. These men have tried to educate the public and make them believe that the oral method is really the one best means of educating the deaf. But we American deaf know, the French deaf know, the German deaf know that in truth, the oral method is the worst. A new race of pharaohs that knew not Joseph is taking over the land and many of our American schools. They do not understand signs for they cannot sign. They proclaim that signs are worthless and of no help to the deaf. Enemies of the sign language, they are enemies of the true welfare of the deaf. We must use our films to pass on the beauty of the signs we have now. As long as we have deaf people on earth, we will have signs. And as long as we have our films, we can preserve signs in their old purity. It is my hope that we will all love and guard our beautiful sign language as the noblest gift God has given to deaf people.63
By the 1920s, Vaudeville was regular entertainment at the National Association of the Deaf conventions, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf banquets, and Deaf Club meetings. These organizations were the institutions at the heart of Deaf Culture. The National Association of the Deaf, founded in 1880, as a self-protective reaction of the Deaf Community to the Milan Conference’s banning of sign language, encouraging oral education, and thus eliminating the teaching jobs of Deaf people. The National Fraternal Society of the Deaf was established in 1901 to provide insurance for deaf people.

As the twentieth century progressed, deaf people went to watch popular silent movies, where famous silent film stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, and Buster Keaton performed. However, the new talkies (sound films) increased verbalism, which led to declining numbers of deaf attendees.

Up until the Civil Rights movement, there was no artistic expression open to the general public by any of the minority groups in the United States. One form of political theatre began in the early days of the Civil Rights movement and has continued to function up until now: the Black Theatre. By the early 1970s, many other theatres pertaining to different minority groups began to surge: the Gay Theatre, Feminist Theatre, Hispanic Theatre, Native American Theatre, and last but not least, Theatre for the Deaf.

The 1970s also introduced the “Age of Access” for disabled people, as they persuaded Congress to adopt such landmark legislation as Section 504, which mandates that all programs receiving funding from the federal government must be accessible to disabled people.

Patrick Graybill, Deaf poet, actor with the National Theatre of the Deaf, and former professor with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf’s Department of Drama, commented:
The 1970s ushered in a ‘Golden Age’ of sign language performing arts. Over the past fifteen years, American critics of the performing arts have awarded their highest honors to theater, television, and film programs in sign language.\textsuperscript{69}

The Golden Age of sign language and the Age of Access have created dilemmas for many theatre, film, and television production companies. How can Deaf culture and sign language be incorporated into the theatrical event to meet the needs of deaf spectators? And what about hearing spectators? How can the promise of performing arts in the sign-language theatre be realized for people who are unfamiliar with Deaf culture?\textsuperscript{70}

The first contemporary Deaf Theatre organization was the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD), founded in 1967. This theatre is known worldwide as one of the best Deaf theatrical groups.\textsuperscript{71} Since NTD was founded in 1967, storytelling, lectures, workshops, and demonstrations have been offered by the theatre at its home base between tour seasons, during the summer months, and on special holidays or weekends. The company also helps with the Summer Theatre Institute at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf in Washington, DC.\textsuperscript{72}

Artists whose careers are intertwined with the activity of the National Theatre of the Deaf include Robert Panara, Bernard Bragg, Julianna Fjeld, Patrick Graybill, Phyllis Frelich, Willy Conley, Paul Jonhston, Ray Parks, Chuck Baird, Linda Bove, Troy Kotsur, Adrian Blue, Bobbie Beth Scoggins, Mike Lamitola, Shanny Mow, and many more. Besides their remarkable achievements as individual and ensemble players, they have broken the barriers, despite the odds or perhaps because of them.

Initially, Deaf actors trying to obtain roles in hearing theatres were refused this opportunity because hearing theatres did not understand how a deaf person could act. As a result, Deaf actors decided to establish their own Deaf Theatres and professional training
opportunities by providing workshops for other Deaf actors and for the Deaf Community, in the same way that hearing theatres provide workshops for their theatre professionals and for the general public. A few theatres of the deaf were formed by Deaf actors--the New York Theatre Guild of the Deaf, the New York Hebrew Association of the Deaf, the Chicago Silent Dramatics Club, and the Silent Night Dramatic Club at Gallaudet College--but they didn’t last long.

From the 1970s until today, other Deaf theatres have been started in Seattle (Deaf Drama Project), Chicago (Chicago Theatre of the Deaf), Austin (Spectrum), Boston (Boston Theatre of the Deaf), Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh Theatre of the Deaf), and Bozeman, Montana (Theatre of Silence). A comprehensive list of Deaf Theatres can be found in Appendix 1.

During the 1980s, more than twenty other Deaf theatre groups followed. By the efforts, sustained work and endurance of a few well-known Deaf people, Deaf theatres flourished during the thirty-five years between 1960 and 2005. But many of these abruptly found themselves unable to continue operations due to the cessation of federal funding.

As hearing theatres began to learn about their achievement, they started to appreciate these Deaf actors’ capabilities and to accept their ability “to expand the artistic possibilities of a given project, and thereby to enrich the production as well as the audience’s experience” and accurately to portray Deafness and Deaf Culture when playing a deaf or hard-of-hearing character’s role. However, the critiques of Sign Language plays or ASL interpreted plays are heavily influenced by the cultural provenience of the critic. The hearing critic depends a good deal on the voice actors, while the Deaf critic is often unable to interpret the signing adequately because of poor
lighting, distracting stage movements, and personal insensitivity to hearing themes.77

David Hays, the founder of the National Theatre of the Deaf, pushed the Deaf Theatre a step forward by implementing the Professional School for Deaf Theatre Personnel, which was funded by the U.S. office of Education, in August 1967. Hays’ motivation was the belief that, with effective training, Deaf performers could create an exciting form of theatre:

These people have great stage presence... There’s no limitation to what the performers can project. What the speaking actor does with voice volume or softness, they can convey with big or little gestures and signs.78

But Hays did not intend to train his performers to become mere signing imitators of hearing performers. He was striving to bring Deaf Theatre to higher levels of professionalism and valuable artistic expression:

Deaf actors can do straight mime as well as people who can hear. But we are not here to show what they can do as well as ordinary actors. We are here to show what they can do better.79

The Professional School for Deaf Theatre Personnel provided an extraordinary experience for Deaf actors for whom training in the performing arts had been inaccessible. Student Debbie Sonnenstrahl, a Deaf actress with the Hughes Memorial Theatre, a community theatre in Washington, DC, found that this experience enhanced her confidence:

What I learned here was not to be afraid to make a mistake... I thought I had to do everything perfectly. Now I am freer with myself, more open. Through the exercise, I think I’m also getting better at putting my feelings into words.80

The core of the Professional School curriculums was the classes in acting. For many years, all hearing and Deaf instructors had borrowed techniques for the teaching of acting used in hearing theatre and adapted them to be used by Deaf actors. There had been no “special” approach to teaching acting at National Theatre of the Deaf.81
The next stage in Deaf theatres’ outreach initiative was to extend Deaf professional drama workshops to reach deaf children. Troy Kotzur, former actor with the National Theatre of the Deaf, said:

Providing the Deaf theatre for children gives them the understanding and help. We can’t see within their minds, we’ve got to know that the moment they see us or the moment the light comes on in their minds, that they are making a connection. They have a hunger deep inside of them and they have story to share. They can benefit from that. I think that I can help lead them to be able to get through those communication barriers?

The reaction of other children’s theatres’ hearing coordinators to this new current in Deaf Theatre was to realize the opportunities they would have to make teaching of drama accessible in the Deaf Community by inviting Deaf actors to present at their workshops. Linda Hartzell, the artistic director of the Seattle Children’s Theatre, considered this kind of experience “appreciated by the Deaf theatre-going community.”

Kenneth Albers considered that the group of presenters transformed him into “a better director, a better actor, and a better person.” He also encouraged other theatre professionals to “welcome, with open arms any opportunity to experience this special experience with another language, another culture, another theatricality.”

Nowadays, in the Deaf Community, drama groups flourish throughout the United States. Much of this growth is due to the work of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). In 1967 Douglas Burke initiated NAD’s Cultural Program and he is still the director or this program. In parallel, NAD’s Communicative Skills Program, under the direction of Terrence O’Rourke, has resulted in increased knowledge and acceptance of the sign language throughout the country.
Deaf actors

Deaf performers who master the use of American Sign Language share their artistic creativity with the general public, both deaf and hearing. Bernard Bragg, the nationally acclaimed actor who studied mime under French actor Marcel Marceau, performed in several nightclubs in the San Francisco Bay area. He also starred in his own television program *The Quiet Man*. Bragg was also the co-founder of the National Theatre of the Deaf. He used a number of techniques and approaches in teaching the Sign-Mime class. Sign-mime helped student actors to transform their visual “voices” from ordinary conversational sign language into a uniquely theatrical form. His class involved studying excerpts of haiku and short English and American poems to transpose the visual imagery of literary forms into sign-language artistic creations.

In 1979 Kenneth Albers, actor and director at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, former actor and director of the Cleveland Play House, and chairman of the Theatre Department at Case Western Reserve University, started working with the Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf, which was co-founded by Deaf actors Brian Kilpatrick and Jackie Kilpatrick and hearing actor Charles St. Clair. Albers remembers his initial exposure to a Deaf Theatre:

I directed *The Glass Menagerie* and *Waiting for Godot*. Both of these ‘maiden voyages’ into Deaf Culture filled me with a wonder for the theatricality of Sign Language and an unexpected respect for the education and training of the Deaf actors, who were not only able to grasp and understand complex concepts, but also translate them into another language and medium.

Howie Seago got involved with theatre for the first time in college, at NTID, when Ted Supalla, at that time his roommate, asked him to act in his play *The Feast*. Later he was attracted by the National Theatre of the Deaf’s Experiment in Television and decided to follow a
career in acting. He appeared in TV prime-time series like *Hunter*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and *The Equalizer*, as well as his involvement in the Emmy award-winning children’s show *Rainbow’s End*. He also had a significant role in a German movie titled *Beyond Silence* about a hearing girl growing up with Deaf parents. In the meantime Seago was also part of the National Theatre of the Deaf. His break out role was in Peter Sellars’ production of *Ajax*. He was later cast by David Byrne for the German production of *The Forest* (in 1989). Howie Seago has been honored many times, including being a recipient of the Helen Hayes award.

Michelle A. Banks is an outstanding leader for Black Deaf entertainment and culture. She studied drama at the State University of New York at Purchase (SUNY). She had to struggle to obtain the right to an interpreter in college, and she succeeded. In her senior year, she established the theatre Onyx to encourage the performing talents of deaf and hard-of-hearing black people. Banks appeared in Deaf West Theatre’s production of the critically acclaimed musical *Big River*. This was followed by the role of Lady in Red in a dual-cast production of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, at the Los Angeles Globe Playhouse. Michelle Banks was one of the first two Deaf African-American actresses to interpret for the Broadway play *Having Our Say* by Emily Mann. Her recent acting credits include her appearances on the national TV commercial for Yahoo and the Showtime series *Soul Food*, as well as a recurring role as Lynn’s new boss on the popular series *Girlfriends*. 
Deaf Children’s Theatre

While theatre arts for deaf adults have been studied extensively and are an important part of Deaf History and Culture, the theatre for deaf children has been neglected. This is surprising, as dramatic arts are vital to the development of deaf children’s cognition, language, self-identity, and social learning. An exposure to theatre will enable deaf children to learn, create, and express themselves.

Todd Czubek, the hearing director and founder of The Magical Literacy Camp, Scranton State School for the Deaf, Pennsylvania, hosted the three-weeks summer camp for deaf children at the Learning Center, Massachusetts. He commented:

I think that Deaf Children’s Theatre represents an opportunity to analyze language, to understand the power of ASL, to know that depending on how one uses ASL in politics, in comedy, in any context, this language can become a powerful tool for discourse. Theatre, either for adults, or for children, is a medium. It makes the impossible possible. It brings life to abstract ideas. It is a way children can understand, acquire ASL, and then use it to express their creativity. Theatre makes the impossible happen. Theatre can teach, can make people cry or laugh, or have all kinds of emotions. Theatre is magic. Deaf Children’s Theatre is magic.

In grassroots networks, at schools for the deaf and in Deaf Clubs, Deaf Children’s Theatre consists of plays, skits, and mime performances created specifically for deaf children and youths. This kind of theatre typically has plots based on themes of being Deaf and living in the hearing world. It also includes deaf characters enacting the conflicts that deaf children have in the hearing world and provides strategies for coping and communicating with hearing children in cross-cultural settings. Deaf Children’s Theatre can be comic, tragic, or ironic, or it can involve other emotions, such as love, deceit, loyalty, that are typically displayed in theatre.
Marjorie Timms, academic dean of Boulder Creek Academy in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, with a doctorate in role playing and creative drama from the University of Pittsburg, stated about the transmission of the knowledge pertaining to Deaf Theatre to the younger generations:

All of us celebrate the outstanding achievements of those who have earned their place in the professional arts community, but what of the tens of thousands of young people waiting in the wings? What of the children who have been denied the opportunity to express their gifts, whose creative possibilities have been ignored year after year? ...

... Sadly this world has been inhabited by only a few of our children. Educational programs that maintained a solid, ongoing commitment to the arts can be counted on one hand. The numbers of teachers trained in the arts or schooled in the methods for incorporating the arts into existing curriculum are few indeed.92

These themes characteristic of Deaf Theatre can help deaf children to build their self-concept as members of the Deaf Community. They can also provide a source of entertainment for the deaf, as well as educate hearing communities about Deaf Culture and Deaf folklore.93

After 1880, the decisions of the Milan Conference led to an oppressive attitude on the part of the hearing community toward deaf people. Deaf people grew up in “special” schools with special curriculums meant to adapt them to the hearing world. American Sign Language was refused to deaf children. Instead, English was taught as a first language, supported by oral training and speech therapy. The deaf held menial jobs as adults and were viewed as disabled people. After almost a century of experiencing this persistent and generalized attitude from the hearing majority, Deaf people started to internalize this negative attitude, and the core values of their Deaf Culture, among which of most importance were American Sign Language and storytelling, began to fade.

Since the restoration of American Sign Language as a recognized language, and under the legislative protection of the Americans with
Disabilities Act, sign language has returned to schools, but has had to enter in competition with other sign systems that are supposed to increase deaf children’s reading and writing skills. American Sign Language has not yet recovered the full status of a first language, and American Sign Language literature is present in schools only as signed interpretations of English readings. Thus, today’s deaf school-children are continuously exposed to literature (signed English readings), but their literacy level still averages fourth grade, as school curriculums do not provide them with a strong first language on which to build comprehension of written English.

Drama offers young people who are deaf an experiential mode for responding to literature. Drama can have a positive influence on students’ motivation to read, reading comprehension, and overall oral and sign-language development. It has been suggested that deaf children in preschool and kindergarten be provided with structured and free-play opportunities to recreate stories that are either read using voice or signed to them. Youngsters could be provided opportunities to create dramatic presentations of novels, parts of novels, or short stories. Their performance could be improvisational, or students could write a script based on an actual story. Theatre work and drama projects would provide exposure to the visual environment that is so important for deaf children, as well as opportunities for their participation in a discipline encompassing the rich traditions of Deaf Culture, transmitted through the Deaf Community.

During the 1980s, the development of ASL and Deaf Studies programs in post-secondary educational institutions helped to spread an understanding and appreciation of American Sign Language not only throughout the United States but also internationally. In the late 1980s such auxiliary programs, operated by only a few professional
acting companies, dwindled. Half the programs were suspended due to budget constraints and to the scarcity of achievements of Deaf playwrights, educators of the deaf, and of Deaf Theatre in general. Another reason was the lack of support from the Deaf Community itself. Moreover, Deaf theatres cannot subsist based on performance proceeds only, seeing that both Deaf theatres and hearing theatres with interpreted plays have an audience composed mainly of hearing people.

In the absence of a real drama curriculum in schools, the Deaf Community has not been educated to appreciate theatre, so that deaf people are not really attracted toward the thought process necessary to understanding a play. Increasing the deaf audience, hence providing a good chance for Deaf theatres to be able to sustain themselves from the proceeds of plays, could be achieved by instating early theatre-arts education in schools through creative drama, theatre-in-sign, playwriting, acting, improvisation, and so on. In addition, adult education and involvement of deaf children’s parents in theatre arts could increase participation in Deaf Theatre, including Deaf Children’s Theatre.

Deaf Children’s Theatre should be studied from the point of view of the same conceptual theory applicable to the Arts specific to Deaf Culture, just as Deaf Theatre in general is part of Deaf Culture. Deaf Children’s Theatre also touches another component of Deaf Culture, that of personal and artistic education, an important institution in any culture. Clayton Valli stated that no American Sign Language arts programs exist in Deaf Education to enable deaf children to improve and enjoy their language--American Sign Language. For this reason, in most of today’s public schools with Deaf Education programs, deaf children have not been exposed to any of these art forms.
There is generally not much emphasis on arts in school, especially in primary and elementary schools. Mindy Moore, a Deaf actress who owns her own acting company and has worked with the Little Hands Theatre part of Illuminations Arts, strongly believes that there is a need in Deaf Education to develop a curriculum on American Sign Language artistic expression for deaf students at all levels.\textsuperscript{100}

Outreach is important for deaf children in any theatre that performs using American Sign Language. At each show, program packets can be distributed, including the stage adaptation of the performed children’s piece of literature. This will motivate children who are deaf to read the story itself, ultimately leading them to read the book that the play was based on.

Dr. Patricia Scherer, a former Northwestern University professor, President and founder of the International Center on Deafness and the Arts (ICODA), instituted the Art festival in Chicago, Illinois, in 1985. She strongly believes that such festivals are the only avenue for deaf children to express their creativity. In organizing the annual festival, she invites Deaf writers, poets, dancers, and musicians. Each year, ICODA invites more than 150 deaf children to the arts festival. Dr. Scherer said:

Most of a deaf child’s time in school is devoted to language. There is no time for the arts. Nowadays, a child can go into a mainstream class for hearing kids, with an interpreter, and try to learn music. But there is nothing that they can profit from, because they cannot hear. In drama, they become a tree on the stage because nobody knows how to deal with deaf kids.\textsuperscript{101}

Another theatre, InterAct Children’s Theatre for the Deaf, in Knoxville, Tennessee, strives further to expose deaf and hard-of-hearing children to theatre and literature by bringing children’s stories to life on stage, expose hearing children to the existence of
Conclusion

Theatre, language, and society are interdependent and fill the human need for communication and artistic expression. One cannot exist without the others, and each influences all the others. Deaf storytelling and implicitly (only not declaratively) Deaf Theatre, preserved vividly the language of Deaf people, ASL. In turn, ASL built, through its own structure and visual nature, the Deaf Theatre. They both answered the need of deaf people to be with each other in a supportive society, where communication did not depend on sound.

When ASL was banned from the education of deaf children, deaf people suffered from the lack of a natural language. Accordingly, the exchange of stories and life lessons on an experiential basis that had before constituted the natural social support of the Deaf Community and had been educative to younger generations now were in danger of disappearing. Deaf people then built a defense system to protect their inner social structure: Deaf Clubs and Deaf Theatres, where no influence from the outside world would decide that something, as, for example, Art, was valuable only if accompanied by sound. When, by themselves, these newly developed institutions of Deaf Culture not only survived but became successful and renowned, the rest of the world started to learn that there is more meaning to Deaf Culture and American Sign Language than just deafness.

The Civil Rights movement in the United States brought a new era—the Age of Access, or the Golden Age. Deaf people have equal rights to communication, and equal rights to their own community and social
structure. However, the imprint of the oppression of the Deaf minority is left in the most vulnerable institution of the Deaf Culture--Deaf Education, and more precisely Deaf Arts Education.

Deaf Theatres, besides fighting a yet slow-to-react hearing theatre community, also have to fight the Age of Technology, where communication in a plethora of forms becomes less and less dependent on human approach and contact. Despite this reality, Deaf Theatre is adapting to the new society, which is more and more ruled by economics, and has also instilled itself into institutions of higher education. Most recently, Deaf Theatre has extended its reach to both schools for the deaf and public schools, through outreach programs meant to educate artistically, personally, socially, and humanly, deaf and hearing children to accept and work with each other. The hope is to build a future society in which the means of attaining an art form would no longer be judged with prejudice.

Chapters 4 through 9 trace the birth, evolution, and development (and, in one case, the death) of six Deaf Children’s Theatre groups.
Endnotes for Chapter 3


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 78.


8. Ibid., 187.


10. Ibid.


12. Ibid., 145.


21. Ibid., 80.

22. Ibid., 102.


27. Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Ben Bahan, Journey into the Deaf World (San Diego, California: DawnSignPress, 1996), 145.

28. Peggy Johnson and Robert L. Walker, Deaf Ministry: Make a Joyful Silence (Charleston, South Carolina: BookSurge LLC, 2007), 9-21; L. Earl Griswold, With this Sign He Conquered, prod. by Quota Club of Baltimore, Maryland, CD-ROM, Total Communications Laboratory, McDaniel College (Formerly Western Maryland College), 1974.


30. Peters, Deaf American Literature, 78-79.


41. Bangs, “What is a Deaf,” 752-754.

42. Peters, Deaf American Literature, 97.

43. Ibid.


46. Ibid., 187.

47. Ibid.


52. Van Cleve, Gallaudet, 285.


54. Van Cleve, Gallaudet, 287.


56. Ibid.

57. Van Cleve, Gallaudet, 288.

58. Ibid., 289.


60. Van Cleve, Gallaudet, 288.


64. Peters, Deaf American Literature, 78-79.


68. Bangs, “What is a Deaf,” 751.

69. Bangs, Deaf Theatre, 751.

70. Bangs, “What is a Deaf,” 751.

71. Baldwin, Pictures in the Air, 81.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid., 107.


75. Baldwin, Pictures in the Air, 83.


81. Bangs, Deaf Theatre, 68.

82. Troy Kotsur, former actor with the National Theatre of the Deaf, Little Theatre of the Deaf and with Deaf West Theatre, interview


84. Ibid.


86. Bangs, Deaf Theatre, 68.


91. Todd Czubek, director and founder of The Magical Literacy Camp, Pittsburgh School for the Deaf, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


93. Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan, A Journey, 138-158.


98. Baldwin, Pictures in the Air, 81.


100. Mindy Moore, director of JustMindy theatrical company, Austin, Texas, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 10, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


CHAPTER 4

LITTLE THEATRE OF THE DEAF

The Little Theatre of the Deaf is a Deaf Children’s Theatre group that emerged from work from the parent organization, The National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD). In this chapter, the history and development of this theatre group was explored.

History of NTD

The beginnings of Deaf Theatre in modern times can be traced back to David Hays. In 1959 Hays was working as a set and lighting designer on Broadway. He participated in the Broadway play The Miracle Worker with the leading actress Anne Bancroft. Hays was struck by the beauty of sign language on stage, at Gallaudet University. He presented the idea of a national theatre for Deaf actors first to his theatre colleagues and then to potential financiers. The typical response was an incredulous “A theatre of the WHAT?” Despite this reaction, David Hays founded the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) in 1967.

In the 1950s Dr. Edna Simon Levine, a psychologist in the field of deafness and mother of deaf children, developed the concept of a professional company of Deaf performers. She published several books and articles over a twenty-five year period, including Youth in a Silent World (1956), Psychology of Deafness (1960), and The Ecology of Early Deafness (1981). She also authored a fictional story about a deaf child, Lisa, and her Soundless World, which oriented hearing children to what it meant to be deaf. She played an influential role in determining federal policies that impacted deaf children and adults.
David Hays is hearing and, at the time, had no previous experience with Deaf actors. After seeing Gallaudet College’s production of *The Miracle Worker*, Hays wanted to establish a sign-language theatre for hearing audiences. He met Edna Levine and contacted the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, asking for funds.\(^5\) He obtained the requested funds and established NTD.

Another important figure in the founding of Deaf Theatre was Bernard Bragg. He had grown up in the shadow of his father, Wolf Bragg, who owned a local theatre company in New York. Bernard Bragg had performed in a Deaf Club theatre. Dr. Levine told him that she would recommend him to Hays, to help start the National Deaf Theatre.

Furthermore, David Hays and George C. White, a theatre executive, persuaded the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) to sponsor a special *Experiment in Television*, featuring a number of short theatre works performed in Sign Language with voice narration. Bernard Bragg was featured in these TV productions.

Before establishing the Theatre, Hays met with a group of Deaf consultants at Gallaudet University to seek their advice. This group included highly respected members of the Deaf community who were committed to the arts: Robert Panara, professor of literature; Gilbert Eastman, chairman of the Drama Department; Lou Fant, professor of education, a hearing CODA, and also a performer with the Hughes Memorial Theatre; and Bernard Bragg. Hays selected June Russi, Eastman’s wife; Phyllis Frelich, who had created a sensation in the title role of Medea at Gallaudet; Audree Norton, Bernard Bragg’s performing partner from San Francisco; Howard Palmer, a talented performer from Mississippi; and Ralph White, an actor and community leader from Texas. The production also featured Nanette Fabray, a hard-of-hearing actress, as the narrator.\(^6\)
Some of the early performances of the National Theatre of the Deaf were produced under the auspices of the Eugene O’Neill Memorial Theatre Foundation. This foundation was established in 1964 by George C. White. It was named in honor of America’s only Nobel Prize-winning playwright, Eugene O’Neill. The Foundation now shares its home base with the O’Neill Theatre Center in Waterford, Connecticut. The Eugene O’Neill Memorial Theatre Foundation and the National Theatre of the Deaf are the oldest continually producing and touring theatre companies in the United States.

The National Theatre of the Deaf has had tremendous good fortune to find a home at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center and to find financial support through an award grant obtained by Mary Switzer, head of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, in 1965. The newly established National Theatre of the Deaf provided a forum for other generations of Deaf actors to demonstrate their competence and art. The identity of NTD is first and foremost that of professional theatre. As such, NTD sets high standard levels for its actors and strives to maintain professionalism while encouraging creative and valuable artistic expression.

Ever since its inception, the National Theatre of the Deaf has brought the beauty of both signed and spoken languages to audiences around the globe. NTD’s performances are suitable for both deaf and hearing audiences. The deaf audience benefits by getting a more in-depth artistic understanding and the hearing audience benefits by connecting the imagistics of sign language with the spoken word. The National Theatre of the Deaf has also been successful in educating the hearing public on how they view deaf individuals. As the hearing audience begins conceptually to add new meaning to their knowledge of familiar theatrical works and themes through the insight provided by
the imagistic of sign language, their perspective on the world of
deafness changes.\textsuperscript{11} The hearing audience begins to understand the
difference between deaf perception and hearing perception and to
realize the intellectual depth of the Deaf experience.\textsuperscript{12}

The National Theatre of the Deaf operates under the following
comprehensive mission:

To produce theatrically challenging work of the highest
quality, drawing from as wide a range of the world’s literature
as possible: to perform these works in a style that links visual,
physically-expressive American Sign Language with the spoken
words train and employ Deaf artists whose culture and language
offer a perception of the world that challenges the traditional
understanding of how individuals look at themselves and how they
interact with one another: to offer our work to as culturally
diverse and inclusive an audience as possible; to provide
community outreach activities that will educate and enlighten the
general public, opening the eyes and ears to Deaf culture and
building linkages that facilitate involvement in our methods of
work.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to being the recipient of the Tony Award for
Theatrical Excellence,\textsuperscript{*} the National Theatre of the Deaf has long served
as an artistic ambassador of the United States through its
international tours. It has displayed its artistic expression for many
audiences. NTD has received rave reviews in every place where it has
performed.\textsuperscript{14} The National Theatre of the Deaf was the first to perform
in all fifty states. It has toured all seven continents and performed
in thirty-two countries.\textsuperscript{15} The acting company is composed of
professional Deaf and hearing actors. During their simultaneous
performance the audience sees the combined signing and voicing of the
script that brings together American Sign Language and spoken English.

\textsuperscript{*} The Antoinette Perry Awards for Excellence in Theatre, more commonly,
the Tony Awards, are a recognition of achievement in live American
theatre presented by the American Theatre Wing and the League of
American Theatres and Producers at an annual ceremony in New York City.
The awards are for Broadway productions and performances.
Beginnings and Organization

From this parent theatre emerged a Deaf Children’s Theatre company. In 1968 the Little Theatre of the Deaf (LTD), the Children’s Theatre Wing of the National Theatre of the Deaf, was created and began touring. It performed in schools, libraries, parks, museums, and theatres in the United States as well as in England, China, and throughout the world.¹⁶

The actors who are performing in the Little Theatre of the Deaf this year are certainly not the same actors who started the company. Those original actors, however, still remain involved with the Little Theatre of the Deaf. Some direct our plays, some teach in our Professional School Program in the summer and all of them remember that first year when they performed in 32 different schools and started a tradition that has built steadily ever since.¹⁷

Since the Little Theatre of the Deaf was created, the demand for its services has constantly increased.¹⁸ It started with only ten to twelve actors who decided to break into smaller groups to increase the company’s revenues.

David Hays thought that the National Theatre of the Deaf needed to diversify its activity in order to provide more work for the company during routine downtimes. To this end he created the outreach program directed toward schools. This program assured that the company would be busy during the fall and spring semesters. The Little Theatre of the Deaf and the National Theatre of the Deaf would perform simultaneously in two different places, thus spreading Deaf Theatre to diverse audiences young and old.

In 1970 a second Little Theatre of the Deaf group was formed on the East Coast. A third Little Theatre of the Deaf was founded in 1978 on the West Coast, based in Los Angeles, California, the Los Angeles Little Theatre of the Deaf, its main objective being to perform for the
inner-city schools. Unfortunately, due to lack of funding, the Los Angeles Little Theatre of the Deaf was discontinued later in 1978.\textsuperscript{19}

Currently there is only one Little Theatre of the Deaf, in Hartford, Connecticut. The usual LTD performance is one hour long. The performance is given by a group of three Deaf and hearing actors. However, the artistic purposes of entertaining and educating children and adults through the performances of the Little Theatre of the Deaf in schools and in public theatres are still ongoing but with reduced numbers of performances depending on funding availability.

**List of Plays and Workshops**

By combining Sign Language with the spoken word, the Little Theatre of the Deaf creates a unique visual language that one critic described as “poetry for the eye and heart.”\textsuperscript{20} The Little Theatre of the Deaf sculpts words and meanings in the air through sign language and blends them with spoken words in every performance—original works, classic stories, fables, or poems—“You see and hear every word.”\textsuperscript{21}

Among the most recent collections of stories performed by LTD, *Fingers Around the World* offers a potpourri of folktales and stories. For three seasons, since 2004, LTD has brought different flavors from distant corners of the world to deaf children. These captivating stories are an educational tool to teach deaf children about the art of storytelling. Another recent performance, *Poetry in Motion*, educates deaf children on the art of ASL poetry.

The LTD performances, unlike theatre performance for adults, are less formal. Before the show, the performers engage the audience in a signing warm-up supposed to build cohesiveness of the audience and a more comfortable atmosphere. Also, after the performance, the actors
make sure to regain in contact with the audience and conclude the show in an open and communicative atmosphere.\textsuperscript{22} A list of the performances of the Little Theatre of the Deaf can be found in Appendix 3.

**Participants and Audiences**

In 1965, based on the need for a touring company to visit schools and encourage drama programs for deaf students, a federal grant from the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare provided planning funds to LTD. While more than 90 percent of the company’s audience is hearing, the theatre fills an important need for deaf viewers as well.\textsuperscript{23} The Little Theatre of the Deaf has performed for over 50,000 children and adults all over the United States and in foreign countries such as Mexico, Germany, Russia, India, Japan, the People’s Republic of China, and New Zealand.

**Kinds of Skills Taught**

Linda Lewis, Assembly Coordinator at the Shepard Hill Elementary School in Plainfield, Connecticut, sent the Little Theatre of the Deaf the following note:

The Little Theatre of the Deaf program was a successful show for our school! We learned many new signs in a fun way. All the children were able to participate and the artistic quality was exceptional. The performers were very talented and knowledgeable. They related well with the children. Their spirit was fascinating and has planted a desire in us to use what we have learned and to learn more!\textsuperscript{24}

A standard performance of the Little Theatre of the Deaf lasts fifty minutes. However, its length is usually adjusted to fit into each school’s schedule. Because of its educational orientation, prior to the performances the actors give the schools a Study Guide book. The
exercise and activities contained in the Study/Resource Guide are targeted for school groups from Pre-Kindergarten through the eighth grade. As was mentioned previously, these activities include engaging deaf children in discussions and games. These techniques are adapted to match and complement the school curriculum. Curricular goals include enhancing organization and sequencing in communicating ideas, developing logic, using imagination, providing an opportunity for group interaction, learning cooperation and problem solving, using varied communication skills, practicing memorization, developing deduction, and learning respect for and sensitivity to other students and their ideas.25

Conversations with Actors and Participants

Becky Beekman, the tour director of the Little Theatre of the Deaf, herself the daughter of Deaf parents, felt that bringing the theatre experience into elementary schools would allow the presenters and actors to teach children the pride of belonging to Deaf Culture. She also noted the power of the theatrical performance to express cultural identity for deaf children. It also allows the schools to see the impact it has on children. All children need a way to express themselves, but for deaf children, these performances, conducted in their own language, in a relaxed atmosphere of fun and imagination, lead to a significantly stronger sense of identity.26

LTD organizes yearly, in August, a Summer School Academy to recruit and to train their actors and performers who will be touring with the theatre. All former cast and Summer School Academy’s participants of the Little Theatre of the Deaf had been involved in community Deaf Theatre acting and in the previous summer schools
(yearly during June or July) organized by the National Theatre of the Deaf. Some also joined the touring company of the National Theatre of the Deaf before joining the Little Theatre of the Deaf. To an interview question asking “Should deaf children be involved on stage to perform rather than watching Deaf adults performing for them?”, Robert DeMayo answered:

I also think that exposure to literature is important. Hearing parents are not comfortable signing the stories to their deaf children. Sign language a visual language and the books are printed in English. Deaf kids have comprehension difficulties. At LTD, we take stories from books, put them into action and make them visual. The children are enthralled by this visual presentation. We become their book. In turn, the children gain motivation to go back to the book and read. This is why I think exposure is important. ... I think deaf children should be involved in theatre during the school year. It would be nice to incorporate that in the regular curriculum. Then everything would intertwine, becoming a holistic approach to education. Deaf children understand everything easier, if it becomes visual.27

And Shanny Mow answered:

Many deaf children don’t have the opportunity to develop the social skills, poise, and confidence in order to communicate through acting. With theatre and being on stage, we can teach them to develop their communication skills in a nice and creative way.28

Benefits of Theater for Deaf Children

Of the directors, actors, and actresses interviewed, many spoke passionately about the value of children’s theatre for deaf children—particularly those who are Deaf, as they benefited from it while they were growing up.

Vickee Waltrip, an Academy staff member in her third year with LTD, commented about the necessity of imparting knowledge about theatre:

I think it is important for deaf children have that exposure. I had the opportunity to be immersed in the arts within the residential school. I received such a wealth of knowledge; the right thing to do is to share it with others. I’ve often worked with children and I see where it (theatre) promotes better
self-worth, knowledge, creativity, comfort in relating to others, and teamwork. This is why art programs are so important. ... Art itself reflects life. Most hearing children are taught that concept. Deaf children seldom have this opportunity. Deaf children don’t understand this concept. So it is important for us to provide initiation in all arts, not just theater, but in all arts. My conviction is that we need community artists to come to schools, expose deaf children to the arts and become their role models. Their influence will remain with the children for a long time.29

Shanny Mow, former cast member with the National Theatre of the Deaf and Deaf playwright and director, commented about the influence of theatre education on developing creativity:

Theatre can be performed in Sign Language, which is the natural language of deaf children. It is also a wonderful opportunity for deaf children to become creative. Children have natural skills and abilities. Schools don’t offer many opportunities for deaf children to use their creativity in a natural way. ... Many deaf children don’t have the opportunity to develop social skills, poise and confidence in order to communicate through acting. We can teach them to develop their communication skills in a nice and creative way by involving them in theater, on stage.30

Ian Sanborn, an Academy staff member in his fifth year, continued Mow’s idea, pointing out that exposure broadens the range of career choices later in life:

I have noticed that schools focus on more academic topics. But children have creative thoughts. Schools need to provide more programs that would focus on using creative arts. They need to embrace the creative side of children. Children need exposure to arts to become even more creative. Later in life, they may choose not to pursue arts professionally, but we need to provide them the exposure, so that they can make an informed choice. ... Whether children get on stage, in front of an audience, or involved in any way with theatre, it is a valuable experience. The students who are not acting on stage work behind the stage on the technical aspects of theater, and their work is equally important.31

Vic Crosta, an Academy staff member in her fourth year and a former cast member with the South Florida Theatre of the Deaf, commented:

Not all deaf schools have drama programs. Depends on the staff, whether the kids have access to theatre. At some schools, we have the opportunity to encourage deaf children to join us on stage. They need to feel comfortable on the stage.32
Summary

David Hays presented the idea of the formation of the National Theatre of the Deaf in 1967. His mission was to reach both deaf and hearing audiences by using a combination of Deaf actors and hearing actors in productions--sign language and spoken English. The reason was that deaf people in America felt that they were being shunned from many cultural events after the silent film era with the removal of captions and the addition of sound.

From the parent organization--The National Theatre of the Deaf--the Little Theatre of the Deaf was founded in 1969. LTD has toured and performed around the United States, and abroad, in Sweden, Thailand, India, and the Far East. LTD has performed in schools, museums, parks and libraries. For schools, LTD offers a fifty-minute-long performance accompanied by Study Guides provided to the school teachers. Whether original works or classical stories, fables or poems, all LTD performances use both American Sign Language and spoken English.

The U.S department of Education awarded grants for the National Theatre of the Deaf to hold the Professional School for Deaf Theatre Personnel for one month during the summer. This summer course offers acting, script analysis, dance, movement, theatre, and arts. The faculty consists of Deaf artists and teachers from around the country. After the summer course, participant actors have ample opportunities to develop their acting skills and to share their knowledge with other theatre professionals in an informal setting outside the classroom. Some actors go back to their home theatres to start working with hearing theatres to co-team in developing a deaf children’s theatre group. Other actors search for ways to establish new Deaf Theatre
groups. An example of a new Deaf Theatre established this way was Deaf West Theatre in Los Angeles, California. The National Theatre of the Deaf on the East coast and Deaf West Theatre on the West coast are now the major Deaf Theatre poles in the United States.

After more than thirty years, the National Theatre of the Deaf is still praised for creating a bridge linking the hearing and Deaf worlds through the power and beauty of theatre in American Sign Language.

Linda Bove, a prominent Deaf actress, said:

We have a long way to go in finding more theatre, more means of artistic expression that can be identified by the deaf community and yet appreciated for its artistic worth by all audiences.33


11. Ibid., 62.


14. Ibid.

15. Judy Riley, “National Theater of the Deaf to Perform at UMM,” UMM News Service, University of Maryland Medical Center (January 6,

17. Ibid.


19. Ibid.


27. Robert DeMayo, Academy staff member, second year with Deaf Academy Summer School, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 11, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

28. Shanny Mow, director of Academy Summer camp and staff member from New Mexico, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 11, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

29. Vickee Waltrip, Academy staff member, third year with Deaf Academy Summer School, from Illinois, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 11, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

30. Shanny Mow, director of Academy Summer camp and staff member from New Mexico, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 11, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


CHAPTER 5

INTERNATIONAL CENTER ON DEAFNESS AND THE ARTS (ICODA)

A second Deaf Children’s Theatre is the International Center on Deafness and the Arts in Northbrook, Illinois. Dr. Patricia A. Scherer, an educator of deaf children and executive director of the Center, is founder and president of this Deaf Children’s Theatre group. As a Deaf Education professional, she was dissatisfied with the language acquisition and communication skills of deaf children she encountered at school. For instance, many deaf children came from language-deprived homes, where ASL was not used. Furthermore, these children attended schools that did not usually employ Deaf adult linguistic and cultural role models or even skilled hearing signers as teachers. Consequently, many deaf children were language delayed, sometimes as much as four to five years behind their same-age hearing peers. In response, Dr. Scherer founded the International Center on Deafness and the Arts. In an interview, she said:

Most of a deaf child’s time in school is devoted to language. There is no time for the arts. Nowadays, a child may go into a mainstream class for hearing kids, with an interpreter, and try to learn music. But there is nothing that they can profit from, because they cannot hear. In drama, they become a tree on the stage because nobody knows how to deal with a deaf kid.¹

The ICODA website contains the following statement about the company’s activity:

Artistic expression builds self-confidence—an essential ingredient in individual development. Compared with the education of hearing children, the education of deaf children does not include significant exposure to the arts and does not emphasize creative thinking. The fact is all children benefit from exposure to the arts: it develops their minds and cultivates the talent and skills which will help them become successful adults.²

Marlee Matlin, the Deaf actress who received an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for her performance in Children of a Lesser God and has
acted in NBC's *West Wing* series, refers to ICODA as "the place where I
grew up," adding: "I love this place!" CenterLight Theatre, part of
ICODA, was her first theatrical home. The little blue dress that she
wore in 1974 when she starred in the theatre's first production, *The
Wizard of Oz*, is proudly displayed in framed glass on the lobby wall.

Patti Lahey, the director of ICODA and CenterLight Theatre,
explains the need for a Deaf Children’s Theatre:

> It is wonderful to see an older deaf person communicating
with a really young deaf person, or a hearing child becoming very
comfortable communicating with an older deaf person. It makes
children feel more comfortable with the concept of deafness. They
don’t see deafness as being different. I enjoy seeing them all
coming together and learning. They even stop noticing that there
are two worlds coming together. I know for myself that if I never
learned the language, I would feel apprehensive about getting
involved because I would feel that I didn’t fit in. Most deaf
people are happy that you try to learn and they help you learn
more. There is the misconception about lipreading, because
hearing people are not taught that not all deaf people can read
lips. Even myself, as I was growing up, I thought that deaf
people just read lips, or just write things down. It is
completely untrue. Why don’t children learn that before becoming
adults? I was twenty-five years old when I learned that. Even in
high school, my friend’s parents were both oral. And that kept me
oblivious; I thought that was the norm. Learning about Deaf
Culture is just as important as learning about French or Italian
people, and we need to add that to American education. I wish
everyone, in every college would have this option as a foreign
language. Still, there are some colleges that persist in refusing
to offer this option. Why offer foreign languages that people
never use, like French or from other countries, instead of
offering the language of these deaf people who are Americans, so
people would be able to communicate with them?

**Beginnings and Organization**

Few people realize that the ICODA theatre was the first
children’s theatre in the country that featured deaf children as
actors. How did this come about?

ICODA’s founder, Dr. Patricia Scherer, made an important
observation about the comparison between the Little Theatre of the Deaf
and ICODA. While LTD uses adult actors to play children’s theatre, ICODA uses children to play children’s theatre. Dr. Scherer said:

NTD is adults doing children’s theatre ... That is not us. Ours is children doing children’s theatre. ... We have a deaf theatre and we add some hearing children to it, so that the focus is always on the deaf child. ... In most of our plays, the deaf and hard-of-hearing play the roles of the actors--the signing actors. The hearing children are the voices. But we put them on the stage with the deaf kids. ... Our goal is that most of the lead roles are played by deaf children.6

Dr. Patricia Scherer was formerly the head of the Northwestern University Clinic for the Deaf. In 1973, when the university announced its decision to phase out the clinic, Dr. Scherer gave up her position as a tenured professor to create an alternative, the Center on Deafness. She had started with a $1,000 donation and a working relationship with the parents of many deaf children from the center of Chicago to the Wisconsin border. “Scherer’s first priority was to start a theatre company, the first in the nation for deaf children.”7 This company was the Center on Deafness. Dr. Scherer commented on the expansion of the Center:

The first play that we did, we had seven children. Today, in a play, we will have twenty-eight, twenty-nine children. In the beginning it was very difficult to find hearing children to voice for the deaf children. Now they stand in a long line to audition, because the community knows about the theatre and they come, and they support, and they want their children involved, because they feel it’s such a good experience for them to learn to be with deaf children and the acting, the sign language, all of it.8

In 1992 the name was changed to International Center on Deafness and the Arts, or ICODA. Dr. Scherer explained the name change:

When we moved, in ’92, we moved to this building. We bought this building. And at that time, there were two corporations: one was the Center on Deafness, and the other was Mental Health and Deafness, and that one represented the mental-health work that we were doing. In COD, the short name for Center on Deafness, we were doing two different things--arts and mental health--with a school for kids who had emotional problems. As time wore on, the school got bigger and bigger, and the arts were like small, kind of ignored, and some of the art graduates didn’t like the idea of mental health and emotional disturbance being combined together
with the arts—they thought that the people misunderstood. So I finally went to the Board and said: ‘I would like to separate and to establish a new corporation and name it the International Center on Deafness and the Arts.’ And that was about six years ago. And since that time, the arts has grown and really developed a lot. And it has been a lot easier to get grants because of the separation.  

As was mentioned above, ICODA was the first theatre company that allowed deaf children to perform as actors for other deaf children. The theatre was located in Chicago’s northern suburbs. With a four-room storefront site, the Center on Deafness housed a theatre, a room for creative arts, a class for sign-language instruction, and a day program for a small number of deaf students. The original mission was to provide access to services and resources to help develop deaf individuals’ potential. Thus it would address the need for effective language and arts education for children who were deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Dr. Scherer is a lady with many different interests. Her primary concerns were Psychology and Deaf Education. But Dr. Scherer’s major in college was music. She had a great love for music and theatre. She wanted to find a way to blend both, and so she started the International Center on Deafness and the Arts with the idea of forming a children’s theatre for deaf children. Her interest in psychology complemented her love for theatre, therefore she found a way to mesh the two and make them work together.

Christine Strejc, one of the ICODA staff members, remarks the positive effect of theatre of children:

Because Dr. Scherer is interested by both psychology and theatre, she found a way to use theatre as a therapy for deaf children who maybe have problems at home. The children don’t know how to solve these problems. In this regard, we also become counselors. Children find this place attractive, so they feel free to impart their problems and what they experience in their own homes to us. This place is safe for them.
Other research supports Dr. Scherer’s theory that combining theatre and psychology would lead to improving deaf children’s self-esteem and building stronger personalities. For example, Dr. Dragomir Vuckovich is a neurologist and a professor at Loyola University. He commented on the physiological benefits of the theatrical experience for a deaf audience:

The center is an unusual place by going around the hearing loss, they are able to create complete individuals. The vibration of the music and the movement of the dance help deaf people, especially, to develop physical coordination.13

Dr. Vuckovich also sees psychological reasons for the success of the arts program. He believes that the process of gaining confidence is crucial to deterring the psychological problems that some deaf people experience due to isolation and frustration. In his opinion, the confidence-building derived from the theatre and arts festival programs has far-reaching effects.14

Through the support of individual and corporate contributors, fundraising, state and federal funding, and grants, the Center on Deafness expanded its variety of training to include other arts programs. With a new board of directors and a new name, the International Center on Deafness and the Arts (ICODA) was inaugurated in July 1997.

ICODA is a place where deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing children are encouraged to imagine, create, and dream through shared artistic expression. The acronym ICODA also stands for:

I inspire creative thinking through Distance Learning
C cultivate character through Museum workshops
O optimize self-continenence through Arts Festival competitions
D develop self-discipline through CenterLight Theatre and Dance training
A accentuate talent and quality as an individual through Children’s Programs15
Currently housed in a forty-thousand square-foot building in Northbrook, Illinois, the International Center on Deafness and the Arts nurtures the talents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children through drama workshops and theatrical performances. ICODA has currently five departments: CenterLight Theatre, ICODA-Fest--the International Creative Arts Festival, ICODance--the Dance company, Children’s Museum on Deafness, and Distance Learning. In 2003 the five ICODA staff employees were Dr. Scherer, Jonnalee Polerzynski, Deaf, the director of the children’s theatre program; Carolyn Strejc, hearing, the choreography dance teacher of the dance program; Christine Strejc, hearing, a teacher with the traveling team and the dance team; and Patti Lahey, hearing, the artistic and managing director of the CenterLight Theatre.

Christine Strejc said:

Deaf children’s theatre is not much different than hearing children’s theatre. The only difference is that this place is really special for the deaf, because deaf students can’t have the same experiences as hearing children in school. We try to teach them to act professionally: how to learn and memorize their lines, the movement on stage, facial expressions, etc. We try to involve also their hearing siblings and give them a chance to work together. Hearing children have many options in school, but our environment allows deaf and hearing siblings to work together, therefore this is different from school.16

The CenterLight Theatre mounts fully staged productions of plays and musicals with deaf and hard-of-hearing actors in an integrated cast with hearing actors. The goal is to build a bridge between the Deaf and hearing communities by exposing hearing members to Sign Language and Deaf performance styles. The performers tell the stories in both American Sign Language and spoken English. The Deaf or hard-of-hearing actors express the lyrics and dialogue in American Sign Language, and the hearing actors voice them in English, either while acting on stage as characters or by interpreting at the side of the stage.17
The CenterLight Theatre offers children the opportunity to participate in drama and full stage productions. Through this experience they learn responsibilities, teamwork, and creative expression. The CenterLight Theatre children’s program consists of drama and dance classes taught both on and off site, for children ages five through twelve who present regular recitals and demonstrations.

The classes have deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students, taught by Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing teachers. The drama and music programs that are organized by most schools are not particularly well suited for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, because of communication barriers. These barriers vary depending on the school and the teacher of the particular drama classes. But commonly, they stem from the hearing teachers’ inability to communicate directly with deaf children through sign language. Accordingly, the CenterLight Theatre Children’s program is able to substitute for regular school curriculum classes.18

“ICODA” + dance is ICODance, one of the few professional dance companies to feature together deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing performers. ICODance offers a dance studio and an outreach program—the Traveling Hands Troupe (THT)—that travels throughout the country performing interpreted song and dance for schools, organizations, and community groups. Through a blend of music, motion, and language, songs and dances are interpreted and translated into American Sign Language. ICODance produces yearly a two-hour program of interpreted songs and original ICODance choreography including ballet, jazz, modern, tap, and current pop music.19

The Children’s Museum on Deafness, located inside the Scherer Center in Chicago, is the first permanent exhibit on deafness and hearing loss. It includes visual arts, a theatrical performance, an
exhibit of famous Deaf actors, and a project studio. For example, one exhibit covers Marlee Matlin’s life story from her childhood to becoming the lead actress in *Children of a Lesser God*. The goal of the museum is to provide information about and appreciation for the contributions of Deaf and hard-of-hearing people. The museum also features exhibits providing information about deafness from both the medical and the cultural perspectives and about Deaf Culture in general. In addition, there is a two-hour tour presented in American Sign Language and spoken English about the exhibits.

ICODA offers also a Distance Learning program that uses technology and video conferencing to share knowledge and skills. This work in progress unites online arts education, mental-health treatment and diagnostic service, parent infant education, prevocational training, and mentoring for deaf people.

To recognize young artists, provide peer interactions, encourage cultivations of talents, and increase awareness of the arts in the Deaf Community, ICODA provides ICODA Fest, an international festival of visual, literary, and the performing arts of deaf and hard-of-hearing children and adults. In the beginning, Dr. Scherer contacted schools that had programs for deaf students. She asked them to submit drawings and paintings of the artwork of their deaf students. Using available state and federal funding, ICODA Fest has continued to grow. Yearly it has gathered artistic works from deaf students to be displayed and appreciated by other deaf students.

Matlin and several other successful Deaf artists are invited to the festival to judge the students’ entries. The more seasoned artists also hold workshops, present awards, and, most importantly, inspire their younger counterparts to believe they can have success in the hearing world.
Christine Strejc commented about the future of ICODA:

Most children are eight or nine years old when they come here, and they tend to continue training with us until they graduate from high-school. They don’t always come back here afterwards. They pursue college or other avenues. Most of those who spend five years or more with us do come back to share their experience. ... I do not believe that ICODA will ever cease to exist; it will continue to grow. Children who grow up will encourage their children to be involved with ICODA so their children will benefit from the same experience.20

List of Plays and Workshops

The CenterLight Theatre’s plays have consisted of dramas (e.g. Crimes of the Heart), comedies (e.g. The Odd Couple), musicals (e.g. Oliver! and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat”), and children’s shows (e.g. Cinderella and Peter Pan). A list of all the plays presented so far can be found in Appendix 3.

The Story-&-Sign, part of CenterLight Theatre, is the outreach theatre touring troupe. It is a group of professional actors and performers who perform, through voice and movement, and song/sign interpretation, thirty to fourty-five minutes skits, stories, mime, improvisation, and poetry at schools and in community groups throughout the Midwest. The children who attend are helped to develop a sense of awareness about and acceptance of the Deaf World through these performances.21

Participants and Audiences

The CenterLight Theatre’s performances are open to the general public. The orientation of the plays varies from children’s stories to more complex dramatic subjects. The drama and dance classes of the
Children’s program are available to children ages five through twelve. The Story-&-Sign theatre group presentations are suitable for all ages.

The ICODance outreach program involves children ages seven through nineteen. The professional company performs one concert each year in a variety of dance styles.

CenterLight’s outreach program, Story-&-Sign, brings a unique sign-and-voice style to local and community groups. It interweaves Deaf Culture and the beauty of American Sign Language in this educational and entertaining experience. The program’s group presentations are suitable for all ages. A professional troupe of performers who are Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing perform stories or poems with voice and sign. In addition, there is an educational component: the actors teach the audience how to sign common words and phrases.

The Children’s Museum of Deafness was designed for children grades one through eight, but all ages are welcome.

Still another component of ICODA is the Creative Arts Festival. It is a yearly competition among students with hearing loss. The festival sends applications to hundred of Deaf Education programs around the world. In addition to those from the United States, competitors from Canada, Japan, Finland, Sweden, and Australia strive to be part of the festival. They compete in the areas of visual, literary, and performing arts. The winners of the competition are invited to attend the festival. The Arts Festival is funded through foundations, corporations, service organizations, and private individual contributions from the local community.

Dr. Scherer remarked on the influence of deaf children’s involvement in theatre on their families and on the community:

Deaf people, they are very proud, I think they are very proud of what their people, you know, are accomplishing, so they are enjoying that very much. The parents, of course, they are
just in awe. Their children are on the stage and they are receiving applause. Like yesterday, our dance troupe went to Great America and entertained there. Well, the parents were just full of pride and joy and happiness. And a lot of times, hearing parents with deaf children don’t get that feeling, because their children are always not... like achieving, in the same way. They don’t have the spotlight on them like hearing children do. So it’s a wonderful thing when that happens.22

Christine Strejc, director of the Traveling Hands Troupe, commented:

Once the children find their passion for the arts, they start being productive. For example, we had one girl who started as an actor, on stage, but later wanted to know more about how the whole production is put together. Last summer, she started working here as intern. Then she came back to work on stage for many shows. She has experience in many different areas. Now she knows what theatre really means.23

Patti Lahey, the director of CenterLight Theatre, said about the process of learning theatre:

Children’s Theatre is not only for ages three through eighteen. A sixty-year-old first-time actor would have to start learning the same way and pass through the same process.24

About the influence of ICODA on the family communication, Christine Strejc said:

I notice a huge difference compared to ten years ago. Back then, deaf and hard-of-hearing children’s parents did not sign at all. Children would only communicate in here. Parents would drop them off, then come back to pick them up, and never enter the building. They absolutely refused to come in. Now I see parents coming to see the rehearsals. And I see parents who know at least some sign, enough to be able to communicate. This is the major change I saw over the last ten years. I think that nowadays, parents are more learned, their attitudes have changed, and they know now that if they want to have any kind of relationship with their child, they would need to communicate with their child. We do not strive to influence them. But we do influence them by example. They see their child’s relationship with us and they want to have the same kind of relationship with their child at home.25

About the influence of ICODA on developing communication and family bonding, Carolyn Strejc commented:

There is one hard-of-hearing girl who did not know any sign when she first came here. And neither did her mother. After one year her mother told us that they had taken sign-language classes
together, because the girl wanted to relate to the other deaf and hard-of-hearing children. This is marvelous. And this happened only because the mother understood her child’s needs.26

About the influence of ICODA on strengthening the bonds within the larger community, Patti Lahey stated:

Sometimes the process starts naturally when parents are waiting for the rehearsals to finish, and they start to converse with each other. The exchange begins, if not for other reason but because of being stuck in the same room for a while, every Tuesday and Thursday. Parents also formed a support group, the Boosters. It just happened. Of course, Christine asked them to form a group, and they accepted naturally. It was going to happen anyway.27

Kinds of Skills Taught

The children and adults of ICODA are “encouraged to Imagine, Create, and Dream through shared artistic expression” which results in building self-confidence and awareness.28

The annual plays of the CenterLight Theatre Children’s program show teachers, parents, and the general public the children’s skill improvement in the dramatic arts. This provides children with the opportunity to appreciate the results of their learning process, thus building their confidence and feelings of self-worth.

Education on deafness and Deaf Culture are the main topics of the Story-&-Sign theatre plays. Performances include an introduction to American Sign Language, a question-and-answer portion, and audience participation related to topics on Deaf Culture themes.

The ICODance studio is open to children and adults and is taught in both American Sign Language and spoken English. The members are chosen by audition. The dance studio has year-round classes of ballet, jazz, modern dance, tap, and hip-hop (street dance styles that are part of the hip-hop culture). ICODance produces one dance concert each year.
The two-hour tour of the Children’s Museum on Deafness is presented in American Sign Language and spoken English. The tour consists of the museum, a project studio, where children learn scientific considerations about deafness, and a theatrical performance.

Christine Strejc, the director of the Traveling Hands Troupe, commented about the Museum:

The Museum focuses on educating hearing children about deafness. For example, in third grade, children start learning about senses—vision, hearing, smell, etc. Many schools come to visit the Museum to learn about deafness, about the hearing mechanism, Deaf Culture, Deaf Americans, technology, and so on.²⁹

A narrator guides the audience through several displays and invites the audience to interact. The audience learns about the scientific perspective on deafness through explanations about sound, about the mechanics of the hearing process, and about the causes of deafness, and engages in hands-on activities like assembling parts of the auditory system into a model and role-playing. The tour continues with a history of American Sign Language, a technology timeline with a “Then and Now” display, and the experience of a Safe House—a model of a modern house equipped with visitor-activated assistive devices—which gives the audience the feeling of what it means to be deaf.

Next, the audience learns about Deaf Culture. For instance, they are told about contributions of remarkable Deaf people like I. King Jordan and Marlee Matlin. The audience learns about Deaf View Image Art (De’VIA). De’VIA uses formal art elements with the intention of expressing innate cultural or physical Deaf experiences. These experiences may include Deaf metaphors, Deaf perspectives, and Deaf insights in relation to the environment (both the natural world and the Deaf cultural environment) and to spiritual and everyday life.³⁰ There are opportunities for the visitors to write questions on the museum’s permanent structure, called The Communication Wall. The purpose of this
wall is to allow “an ongoing dialogue between the hearing and Deaf communities.” In the project studio of the museum, the audience has the chance to create a take-home memento of the museum to show parents or to share in the classroom.

CenterLight Theatre’s outreach troupe, Story and Sign, performs the original play *Anything is Possible*, written by Patti Lahey. The play is followed by thirty minutes of a question-and-answer session about the play. It is the story of a child having difficulties with the challenges of being deaf. An audiologist, Dr Earl Lobe and his faithful assistant, Spotakiss, a deaf Dalmatian, shows the boy what can be accomplished if he believes in himself.

The ICODA Fest encompasses a weekend of art display, talent competitions, social events, and workshops led by professional artists and performers who are Deaf and hard-of-hearing. The participants are chosen by preliminary contest. The winners this contest have a chance to spend a weekend participating in the unique experiences provided by these professional artists at the Festival.

The festival also includes display, a talent competition, and workshops by professional Deaf artists and performers. Many professionals attend annually and mingle with the children, thus providing them with the unique opportunity to meet Deaf positive role models. Some of these professionals are Chuck Baird, an artist and former NTD actor; Bernard Bragg, a former NTD actor; Paul Johnson, Jr., a former NTD actor and artist; renowned actress Marlee Matlin; and Liz Tannebaum-Greco, a former member of the Children’s Traveling Hands Troupe. The children can ask questions and learn from these Deaf role models. The festival is believed to be an influential way in which ICODA impacts deaf children by exposing them to Deaf Culture and ASL.
In addition, the festival has provided the incentive for many talented children to pursue professional careers in the arts.\textsuperscript{33}

In 1990 the President’s Council was created to advise ICODA so that the festival would maintain the Deaf perspective. In particular, the Council was to ensure that the festival would provide role models for the children. Members of the Council are successful artists and professionals who are Deaf and hard-of-hearing. These individuals serve in an advisory capacity for future performances.

**Conversations with Actors and Participants**

Dr. Patricia Scherer commented:

> In the deaf community, unemployment is very, very high. I have kept track of our graduates throughout the years. There was almost no unemployment. Most of them are working and have very good jobs, some of the top jobs for deaf people. So we are very proud of them. And I think it’s because of some of the skills that they have learned though theatre.\textsuperscript{34}

Sandra Harvey, director of the Creative Arts Festival and parent of a deaf child, commented:

> One of the best things about being involved in the creative arts festival is watching the students grow and mature through the years. The educators have told us that the students grow in self-confidence and become leaders in their schools. Some of the contestants started entering the festival at six or seven years of age and continued through high school! Our past Traveling Hands Troupe contacts me each year asking if they could perform at the festival to show the younger students what they can achieve! What a wonderful tribute!\textsuperscript{35}

Jonnalee Folerzynski commented:

> In my childhood, hearing theatre was inaccessible to me, because I am deaf. My professional goal has been to become a drama teacher. I wanted to teach deaf children that they are not alone and that they don’t need to hide because they are deaf. Each one of them is special. So I bring them here for them to shine like stars. Their parents are astonished and proud when
they see them perform. And this is not for deaf children only. Hearing children also join. Deaf and hearing children act together, form friendships, and shine together. Every child matters. Either deaf or hearing, each child has a unique heart and special skills. When we bring them together, they shine like stars. When children are motivated and perseverant, they can succeed.\textsuperscript{36}

Summary

ICODA’s dream has continued to expand as an arts program through the CenterLight Theatre and the International Creative Arts Festival, reaching new heights in professionalism. ICODA is based on the continuing belief that artistic expression builds self-confidence.\textsuperscript{37} Compared with the education of hearing children, the education of deaf children does not include significant exposure to the arts and does not emphasize creative thinking. In fact, all children benefit from exposure to the arts. Art develops their minds and cultivates the talents and skills necessary to help them become successful adults.\textsuperscript{38}

ICODA is believed by many to be a very special place to the children who are involved in their programs. They grow up with ICODA, and they tend to call it their “second home” because it provides them with the opportunity to socialize with other children who have different interests. It also provides them with a special family in which personal value and enrichment through the arts matters. Deaf children learn to appreciate their personalities and their differences. Through theatre they obtain an education and are able to interact with other hearing children. The hearing children learn about deaf children in the same way. This is perhaps the most valuable asset that ICODA has for the larger community--building a lasting bond between the Deaf and hearing communities.
ICODA is not just a Deaf Theatre but is also geared to family theatre. With its variety of classes, performances, workshops, and culture, it provides a way to teach and culturally enrich the deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing populations throughout the world.
Endnotes for Chapter 5


3. “ICODA Has So Much to Offer” (brochure), The International Center on Deafness and the Arts, 2003.


9. Ibid.


14. Ibid.


17. Ibid.


26. Ibid.


33. “International Creative Arts Festival” (program), in 21st Annual International Creative Arts Festival (April 26, 1997).

34. Patricia Scherer, Executive Director, founder of the International Center on Deafness and the Arts, Chicago, Illinois, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 14, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

35. Sandra Harvey, director of the Creative Arts Festival, International Center on Deafness and the Arts, Chicago, Illinois, interview by author, March 2003, e-mail message, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


CHAPTER 6
IMAGINATION STAGE

Imagination Stage, located in Bethesda, Maryland, is one of the nation’s most exciting and innovative Deaf Children’s Theatre centers. Its mission is to make the theatre arts a vital part of every child’s life, “to nurture the creative spirit in all children and to cultivate skills that serve them throughout their lives.” Imagination Stage is the largest and most respected multi-disciplinary theatre-arts organization for young people in Maryland. It has grown from a handful of children in a single classroom to a full-spectrum arts organization. Its classes, student ensembles, summer programs, and programs of outreach to schools complement a year-round season of professional children’s theatre. Bonnie Fogel, its founder and executive director, commented, “The group’s mission is to encourage self-expression in a noncompetitive, multicultural environment.”

Beginnings and Organization

Imagination Stage grew out of Bethesda Academy of Performing Arts, founded as a non-profit organization in September 1979. It was established in response to the need to provide arts education for young people ages five and up. Bonnie Fogel felt that her children were not exposed to the arts as much as she had been, growing up. “In England,” she said, “the arts are a very important part of the school days. ... There was clearly an interest, especially in programs like Deaf Access and workshops for youngsters with developmental and cognitive differences.” Fogel believes that the program has a wide appeal because children need arts in their lives.
The company was renamed Imagination Stage in 2001 in anticipation of its move to the Imagination Stage outside Washington, DC, in the downtown area of Bethesda, Maryland, in the spring of 2003. The theatre opened in April 2003. It provides children and youth who are deaf and hard-of-hearing and those who have deaf parents (KODAs, see Glossary) with an ongoing opportunity to use performing as one of the senses.

In the words of one of the founders:

Our mission? Well, I think here at Imagination Stage, our goal is to provide the deaf and hard of hearing with the opportunity to experience a variety of theatre. Whether it be behind the scenes, on stage, taking a class, helping to make costumes, there are so many things of interest, and many people can be involved. Hearing and deaf alike.

One of the visual dramaturgs and signing coaches had this to say:

Yes, Imagination Stage. I agree with what Lisa said, but we also make all of our services accessible, whether it be deaf, hard of hearing, KODA, or hearing, anyone who wants to participate with the group. We want to provide 100% accessibility to everyone, whether it be parents of deaf children or people who work here. I think our goal is to provide the deaf students the opportunity to enjoy theatre and to think for themselves, to be expressive, and to be more confident as deaf people. Because our program is accessible to many deaf children who are so frustrated because they provide an interpreter, but for us our staff are teachers and all of us sign. So for us to be able to interact that way is very valuable and very important.

One of the advisory board members had this to say about the theatre’s beginning:

Yes, I think the deaf theatre helps to build a bridge between the deaf world and hearing world and bring them together. We go to schools to talk about deaf culture. We talk TTYs, flashing doorbells, and different devices that would introduce people to the deaf world.

The company was awarded two grants, each spanning three years, with a $300,000 total value, from the United States Department of Education. These two grants were awarded to allow the company to expand and refine its work. They allowed the company to expand the program regionally and nationally through several projects that include Dreams to Sign, a book documenting the company’s innovations in theatre and
its community outreach program; a documentary about the student companies and high-quality videos of their productions; touring locally and out of state to community events and national conferences; and creating the company’s website. The grant also supported the survey of county residents’ reactions to the program itself and their evaluation of its ability to raise Deaf Culture awareness.9

In September 1990, the Deaf Access Program was established. Its purpose was to improve deaf students’ academic, artistic, and social skills, to raise their self-esteem and self-knowledge, and to open the culture of the Deaf to people in the hearing world through theatre performances. The program offers both education and entertainment to the public.10 During the first five years of this program there was a Deaf Access Advisory committee comprised of deaf and hearing parents, artists, and educators.11 They provided community connections, resources for marketing and publicizing programming, access to deaf educators in the region, input about the kinds of program offerings desired by the Deaf Community, and technical advice on how to implement the program sensitively, inclusively, and appropriately.12

The Deaf Access Program is run jointly by Lisa Agogliati, its founder, a hearing theatre professional who has an extensive background in dance performance and choreography, and Donna Salanoff, its co-founder, assistant director, and a Gallaudet University graduate. She also works as a Deaf visual dramaturg and sign master. The visual dramaturg looks at the script from the point of view of the deaf audience members to anticipate potentially confusing moments (that hearing people would not even perceive as confusing) and to identify places where audience participation or some aspect of Deaf Culture might be inserted.13 A sign master works to translate the English script of the play into ASL, to adapt the sign-language production of the
actors or of the interpreters to the intention of the author, and to provide these individuals with feedback.\textsuperscript{14} Salanoff also teaches the young people how to blend sign, mime, facial expression, and gesture to create theatrical sign language.\textsuperscript{15}

In 1989 Agogliati, who had never worked with people with hearing loss, discovered that drama and sign language go hand in hand after Kathy Smith, a hearing mother, enrolled her thirteen-year-old deaf daughter, Kim, in the summer Imaginations Stage’s Special Needs Program. At that time the company had no program for the deaf. The staff decided to create one and to learn sign language themselves.\textsuperscript{16}

The name of the Special Needs Program was later changed to Arts Access to take the focus away from “disability,” a concept with a generally negative connotation. The founder wanted to emphasize the real goal: making arts accessible to everyone. Arts Access answered to the philosophy of inclusion. Ever since, it has served all young people, regardless of physical or cognitive ability.

But the Deaf Theatre program wanted its own identity apart from the ARTS program for disabled children. In the words of one member of the Advisory Board:

We just didn’t feel that it would be appropriate for the deaf to be part of the Arts group. It was more important for the deaf to have an identity separate from that group and we were able to get the support to that group as well.\textsuperscript{17}

In due time, Arts Access split into two programs: the Deaf Access Program, serving young people who are deaf, hard of hearing, and KODA, and the AccessAbility Program, serving young people who have physical or cognitive disabilities.\textsuperscript{18}

Describing her vision, Lisa Agogliati said:

Everyone has dreams that they strive to achieve their journey in life. I always knew that the arts would be a part of mine. Now, after this experience, I realize that my dreams are ‘dreams to sign!’\textsuperscript{19}
The Deaf Access program has been nationally recognized for its innovative work in bringing together two different worlds through theatre, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, to create an original production by combining their talents. The Deaf Access program has been featured on CNN Headline News, in The Washington Post, and in performances at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC. The production staff includes Deaf and hearing directors, playwrights, sign masters, choreographers, composers, set and costume designers, and guest artists.

Mary Yeh, who is Deaf, has served as a Board member for Imagination Stage. Later she became a founding member of the Deaf Access Advisory Board and project co-director of the Deaf Access program. She was simultaneously involved in numerous other education and civic organizations, one of which was the National Theatre of the Deaf. The Deaf Access program hires contract employees for individual play productions. Fred Beam, who is Black-Deaf, works as a contract choreographer for the Deaf Access program. He is the founder and executive director of Invisible Hands, Inc., an organization promoting Deaf Culture awareness, which contains the international all-deaf dance troupe The Wild Zappers. Susan Robbins works as a sign master for the Deaf Access program. She is also a teacher of the deaf with the Montgomery County Public Schools.

Bernard Bragg made the following comment about the mission of the Deaf Access program:

*Dreams to Sign* describes a process for developing a theatre company in which deaf and hearing individuals can participate. I am the actor. I am deaf. I believe in what the Deaf Access company stands for. It seeks to open the culture of deaf people to people in the world through theatre performances, while building academic, artistic, and social skills; self-esteem; and self-knowledge in its young actor, both deaf and hearing. Above all else, it strives to create a “oneness” out of sign and voice, thereby fashioning an art form in itself.
The Deaf Access program provides specific activities for different age groups. These components are: the Senior Deaf Access Company, the Junior Deaf Access Company, the Fantastic Folktales, the Drama & Movement, and Just Imagine: Sign and Play Together. The Senior Deaf Access Company is geared towards grades nine through twelve, offering high-school students the chance to be involved in major season productions at Imagination Stage. The intended scope is for students to develop a professional level of expressiveness in theatre skills. The Junior Deaf Access Company offers deaf and hearing students ages eleven through fifteen the opportunity to work together in theatre. Its intended scope is for students to practice the theatrical techniques needed for combining sign language and English on stage.

The founder had this to say about the teen program:

It depends on the age. Teens for the high school group must audition and compete for their position in order for them to be a part. We practice every Tuesday for 3 hours. That is their rehearsal time and their work time to learn everything that they need to know, from learning sign language and becoming skilled, to movement on stage and makeup. Suppose they don’t know a lot of signs and they need to take some workshops so they can learn quickly. Also to learn sign they need to socialize with Deaf people. So that is their time to work on those skills, for 3 hours a week.22

The visual dramaturg added this:

We want them to experience that and to know how it feels to go through an audition. We accept all of them, but we still want them to go through that, just like the other group does. But in the other group not everyone gets in. We want to give them an opportunity to audition and then, as in the other group, they are expected to take workshops and to learn more about other countries, other cultures and customs. We want them to learn more about the languages in those different countries, about the signs in Russia, China, Japan, Yugoslavia, and in many other different countries. We teach them things like that in the workshops. We think it is important to know these things in order to give a good performance. It also gives them time to maybe be more open to the public as well.23
There are also programs for ages six and younger. Fantastic Folktales gathers children ages five and six in a class designed for deaf and KODA students to explore folktales from around the world in sign language and English. This class is supposed to build students’ interpersonal skills and self-esteem. Drama & Movement leads children ages three and four to explore stories and characters from a wide of variety of children’s literature and to experience dramatic play and movement. Just Imagine: Sign and Play Together is offering toddlers from twenty-four to thirty-six months old storytelling, finger-play, art, and movement to expose them to the beauty of sign language.24

List of Plays and Workshops

The Deaf Access staff consists of both Deaf and hearing artists. These individuals grew cohesive first by learning from and about each other--language, culture, mode of communication--then by learning to value and respect each other’s abilities and talents. Lisa Agogliati realized that cultural competency was achieved through theatre. Thinking beyond the scope of bridging the Deaf and hearing communities in the United States, she realized that, through theatre, these communities could also learn to appreciate Deaf and hearing cultures from around the world.25 (See also Appendix 3.)

Jessica Baldi, a Deaf actress and a cast member with the Deaf Access Company, commented:

It’s extremely inspiring for me to think that they [the audience] want to learn more about my culture. I’m very impressed. You know, long ago deaf people were so put down, and now they think our culture is beautiful. That gives me a lot more motivation to teach others.26

The Deaf Access program seeks advice from cultural experts in order to offer many productions oriented toward multiculturalism, thus
providing both cross-cultural and multicultural education. After Lisa Agogliati initiated the first multicultural production *Coyote and the Circle of Tales*, which explored the diversity of Native American folklore, other productions explored cultural traditions from four different geographical regions in the United States: *Stories from Tlinget* (from the Pacific Northwest), *Apache* (from the Southwest), *Iroquois* (from the Northwestern Woodlands), and *Cherokee* (from the Eastern and Southern regions). These productions also represented the Four Directions of the Medicine Wheel.

**Participants and Audiences**

The Deaf Access company chooses a new play each year. High-school teenagers from across the country audition in September and make a nine-month commitment to researching, rehearsing, and performing in Bethesda during the winter and at other venues in the spring. Half the performers are Deaf or hard-of-hearing, and the others are hearing teens, often children of Deaf parents (CODA). They attend advanced classes and workshops related to the production. The plays are also toured to local arts festival and national conferences and symposia during the spring and early summer. They have, for example, been presented at the National and Worldwide Deaf Festival under the auspices of the National Theatre of the Deaf in Connecticut, bringing the group’s artistry and message of cross-cultural collaboration to a wide range of children and adults.27

The Junior Deaf Access Company focuses on children ages eleven through fifteen, both deaf and hearing. Its purpose is to give children the opportunity to work together in theatre. Students also develop visual skills: signs, facial expressions, and mime. The cast performs
for an invited audience of family and friends at the end of the rehearsal period. The students are enrolled through audition. Creative Arts Residencies, yet another Deaf Access component, spans eight to ten weeks. These yearly residencies are conducted for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, ages three through eighteen, who attend Montgomery County Public Schools. The emphasis is on developing students’ expressive communication skills by using a combination of sign language, mime, and acting techniques, and on working with classroom teachers to incorporate drama into the curriculum as a learning tool.

Weekend drama classes are also offered to deaf, hard-of-hearing, and CODA students, ages three through twelve, at the Bethesda Academy. These sessions focus on teaching expressive communication, teamwork, and learning how to tell stories through words, body movement, facial expression, and action. A Deaf drama teacher instructs the expressive-arts classes, assisted by members of the Deaf Access Company.

The Deaf Access program also has an adult educational touring company that uses an interactive performance style. The productions explore the beauty and richness of sign language and of Deaf Culture while breaking down barriers between the Deaf and hearing worlds. Participation in the Deaf Access program is determined by audition.

Kinds of Skills Taught

Imagination Stage provides theatre-arts classes at elementary schools in the Washington, DC area. These classes are aligned to the philosophy and curriculum of the programs offered on site at Imagination Stage. Sally Bailey, the Arts Access director, and Lisa Agogliati used the grant from the United States Department of Education
to develop *Dreams to Sign* as a unique educational theatre program for deaf and hearing teens through the Deaf Access program. Its performances blend voice and sign language, bridging the cross-cultural divide between Deaf and hearing communities. The performances cover multi-cultural tales from around the world. The accompanying book and videotape *Dreams to Sign* describes the Deaf Access process and production guidelines in a well-structured manner. It is illustrated with production photos, scripts, scenario excerpts, and video clips. The book is a valuable resource for hearing and Deaf educators and practitioners working with deaf children, as well as for children’s-theatre professionals.31

Donna Salamoff, the Deaf visual dramaturg and sign master, teaches the young people how to blend sign, mime, facial expression, and gesture in creating a theatrical sign language. She commented on the role of sign master:

I can tell you that the role of sign master in deaf theatres takes time and energy, but I can also say that it reaps many rewards. The individuals who occupy that position in deaf theatre should be armed with at least three basic qualifications: they should be native to the language, be well-versed in theatre, and be well-versed in deaf culture. As well, they need to be very patient!32

Lisa Agogliati and Donna Salamoff work together to select the script. Then literary and visual dramaturgs help review and analyze the script. Donna Salamoff created these positions in 1999. The literary dramaturgs understand the structure of the script and its function, and then adapt the script by strengthening certain parts while eliminating others. They build clear characters and actions and bring the artistic touch of an appropriate pacing and dramatic progression.

The visual dramaturgs analyze the script from the perspective of the deaf audience. They foresee potentially confusing moments and initiate changes to make the deaf audience feel involved in the
performance by inserting aspects of Deaf Culture. For example, a key component might be the use of foreign sign language from the featured foreign culture. *The Magic Babushka and Other Russian Tales* used gigantic Russian dolls as a key visual element to introduce each character at the beginning of the play. The featured artist was a Russian-born guest Deaf actor, Iosif Schneiderman. The founder had this to say about guest actors from other countries:

> We have been very fortunate because most of our guest artists from other countries have homes in the United States. For example, one man from Brazil has a home in the United States, so it was easy to host him. But for the others, who do not have a place of their own in the United States, we buy the plane tickets, then they stay with one of us. We just recently got some funding support from a local hotel offering lodging for our guests. So they can either stay with us or stay at that hotel. Next year we hope to have a woman from India as guest artist. ... We are trying to raise funds for her plane ticket. It has been difficult. We are still struggling. But most of our guest artists also have homes here in the United States.

The goal of Imagination Stage is to bring together the Deaf and hearing worlds in a nurturing environment where they can learn about each other and work with each other. The six-month long rehearsal and performance period allows students to conduct research for the production, to attend special workshops taught by Deaf and hearing guest artists, and to enjoy socializing together. Each year the company studies a different culture. In previous years they have focused on China, Japan, Russia, Mexico, Spain, India, and other countries. The company works with both Deaf and hearing guest artists from the selected country, learning about their culture, storytelling traditions, visual arts (which are incorporated into the productions), and about the foreign sign language from that country.
Conversations with Actors and Participants

Donna Salamoff, the visual dramaturg and sign master, commented:

We make all of our services accessible, whether deaf, hard of hearing, KODA, or hearing, anyone who wants to participate with the group. We want to provide 100% accessibility to everyone, whether parents of deaf children or people who work here. I think our goal is to provide the deaf students the opportunity to enjoy theatre and to think for themselves, to be expressive, and to be more confident as deaf people. Our program is accessible to many deaf children who are so frustrated by having to communicate through an interpreter. But our staffs are teachers and all of us sign. It is very valuable and very important to be able to interact in a direct way.36

Summary

As the Deaf Access program continues to grow, it attracts playwrights and theatre professionals from all over the world, such as Susanna Suatonni and Paolo Tilli from Italy, mime Antonio Rocha from Brazil, Shitzumi Shigeto Manale from Japan, and other Deaf guest artists.37 Deaf Access performs children’s stories from different countries’ cultural folklore in a unique theatrical style, which blends sign language and mime with spoken voice, music, and dance. The theatre troupe is composed of deaf and hearing teenagers who work side by side. They showcase their talents in a production that combines the best communication skills of both Deaf and hearing worlds. The audience is equally diverse. At the end of the performance there is a medley of resounding hearing applause—hand clapping—and uplifting sign-language applause—hands wiggling enthusiastically in the air above the head. The Dreams to Sign book and videotape may help many other clubs, schools, and organizations to start a theatre program for their young deaf and hearing individuals.38
Endnotes for Chapter 6


2. Ibid.


8. Mary Yeh, project co-director of the Deaf Access Program, Baltimore, Maryland, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 22, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


10. Ibid.


13. Ibid., 35-36.


17. Mary Yeh, project co-director of the Deaf Access Program, Baltimore, Maryland, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 22, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


19. Ibid.


26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 10.

28. Ibid., 11.

29. Ibid., 13.

30. Ibid., 14.


33. Ibid., 35.

34. Lisa Agogliati, founder and director of the Deaf Access Program, Baltimore, Maryland, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 22, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

36. Donna Salamoff, sign master and visual dramaturg with Imagination Stage, Baltimore, Maryland, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 22, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


Illuminations Arts started as a small company with big goals, to provide theatre accessibility to deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the Houston area. Beginning in 1990, it has progressively become known in the greater Houston area and has continued to develop its program for deaf children in school districts in and around Houston. It has brought a “unifying force” to Houston’s Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing communities, which are quite diverse.

Jill Beebout, Production Coordinator, stated:

Before Illuminations, there wasn’t an organization in town that appealed to their differences and brought them together. Everything we do is truly accessible. We always have sign language voicing interpreters and we almost always have captioning for movies, so everyone is accommodated.¹

Beginnings and Organization

In the 1980s, Clarence Russell, a Deaf actor and director, originally from Washington, DC, moved to Austin, Texas, where he helped found the Spectrum Deaf Theatre with Deaf artists. It folded after a few years. He then moved to Houston, where he founded the Houston Theatre of the Deaf (Chimaeras). He had gathered a group of talented amateur actors and interpreters involved in the Deaf Community, and they worked in cooperation with local theatres.²

Suzie Phillips, administrator of the Alley Theatre in Houston, went to a theatre stage company called StageHands in Atlanta, Georgia. She witnessed the recent innovation in signing and theatre arts—the shadow interpreting—at its source. (see Chapter 2)
The art of shadowing was introduced in Houston in the summer of 1982. The Alley Theatre, with the underwriting of the Pennzoil Corporation, produced Houston’s first shadowed performance, *The Unexpected Guest*. Most of the original pioneering professionals are still today involved with Illuminations.3

The Illuminations theatre group was established formally in 1984. The original ten board members are Carol Anderson-Bradley, Deaf Education teacher; Debbie Gunter, interpreter; Eric Kantor, tour director of Texas Opera Theatre; Brian and Jackie Kilpatrick, Deaf professional actors from Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf; Alice Morewitz, deaf consumer; Suzy Philips and Mike Serkess, grant writers; Gary Scullin, Stages Repertory Theatre actor; and Charles Trevino, interpreter. Together they formed Illuminations Theatre with the Deaf. As related by its director, Illuminations’ mission is “to bridge the gap between the Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing communities through artistic activities.”4

Using the phrase “with the Deaf” in the group’s name was of particular significance because its fundamental performance principal stated that, whenever possible, actors’ signing is voice interpreted—making it is truly theatre by the Deaf for the Deaf. By employing Deaf actors and American Sign Language, their native language, Illuminations Arts focuses on spreading Deaf Culture through artistic and educational expressions. This enhances the cultural significance of Illuminations Arts to the people it serves. The group remains the only professional performing-arts organization in Texas open to the Deaf Community today.

The Illuminations Theatre has provided the Deaf Community with productions in ASL through Theatrical Interpreting and Shadowed Performances, in cooperation and collaboration with Houston area theatres as such as the Alley Theatre, the Express Theatre, the
University of Houston Children’s Theatre Festival, and A.D. Players.® Illuminations Theatre’s goal is to make arts accessible to all hearing, deaf, and hard-of-hearing people.\textsuperscript{5}

In 1987, Illuminations established a new organizational structure in order to provide the opportunity for every person to participate in productions and to establish a training hierarchy for different levels of proficiency. For this reason there are three groups within Illuminations: a Professional group, a Small Professional group, and an Amateur group. This last gathers interpreters and Deaf educators who have had little or no experience in theatre arts, to provide them a chance to learn through workshops provided by Illuminations. Jackie and Brian Kilpatrick are the only Deaf professional actors, owing to many years of theatrical training with the summer school of the National Theatre of the Deaf and the Gallaudet University Theatre, and to the experience gained with the theatre they have founded--the Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf in Cleveland, Ohio.

Illuminations has worked diligently on behalf of the Deaf Community, advocating accessibility to a variety of Cultural activities and opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing children and adults. The group has brought a unifying force to Houston’s diverse Deaf Community. As Jill Beebout remembers, “before Illuminations, there was not an organization in town that appealed to their [Deaf people’s] difference. It brought them together.”\textsuperscript{6} All Illuminations workers were volunteers who wanted to make something happen for the Deaf Community and gave their time and energy, although they had their own full-time jobs.

\textsuperscript{5} The A. D. Players, founded in 1967 by Jeannette Clift George, pioneered a unique style of theater committed to producing plays and programs that uphold human value, offer creativity, and promote literacy and education. In this theatre’s name, “A.D.” signifies “Anno Domini.”
Illuminations worked with hearing theatres in the Houston area, theatres that need small grants to provide shadow-interpreted productions. These theatres included the Texas Opera Theatre, Shakespeare’s Globe Outreach at the University of Houston, Children Theatre’s Festival at the University of Houston, and A.D. Players.

In 1993, Illuminations officially became a 501-c3 non-profit organization. In 2002 it became a registered business in Houston. This change in status was due to the newly passed Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. ADA resulted in the theatre groups having to search for funding to support the shadow interpretation production expenditures. The production costs consist mainly of stipends given after the performance to the crew working on the shadowed interpretation part of the production, i.e. the shadowing director, shadow actors, and the two interpreters for the shadowing director and the Deaf cast. For each production, grant money was available after Illuminations made an agreement with the hosting theatre about providing a shadowed production. Part of that grant money is used for the shadow-interpreted part of the performance, and is split to provide the stipends for the Illuminations crew. In 1999 Illuminations was offered an Occupancy Agreement with the City of Houston to have designated office space at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, a center that provides special services for the community.

Susan Jackson, who is Deaf, is the artistic director. Prior to joining the Illuminations team, Susan worked for the National Theatre of the Deaf and the Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf (now the Cleveland Sign Stage Theatre). She was a National and Worldwide Deaf Theatre conference administrator at the National Theatre of the Deaf in Chester, Connecticut for two and a half years. She has spent thirty-
five years in the performing arts: on stage, in television and film, touring internationally with the National Theatre of the Deaf, and as a freelance artist.⁷

Jill Beebout, who is hearing, was the production coordinator between 1999 and 2003. Jill had fifteen years of professional experience in theatre and opera, working in production and management positions with regional theatres around the country, including the Dallas Shakespeare Festival, the Dallas Theatre Center and the Alley Theatre. She holds an Associate of Arts and Sciences degree in Interpreting and Transliterating Technology. She is also a state-certified interpreter for the deaf and a member of the Houston Storyteller Guild, a corporation committed to the educational aspects of storytelling.⁸ She commented:

Most hearing people don’t fully understand that Deaf Children’s Theatre differs from hearing children’s theatre. Most of the time, all the technicians are Deaf and most of the time the acting coaches are Deaf.⁹

In 1998 Illuminations was awarded a five-year grant called “Our Path: Together Initiating Culture Access” (OPTICA). OPTICA aims to unite all children with hearing loss in artistic expression and creates accommodation media for cross-cultural communication. At that time Illuminations hired its first full-time staff and established an office in Houston at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center*, which provided a central location for the expanding programs offered to the Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing communities. Included in this expansion was the creation of ASL Children’s Story Hour, Illuminations’ most sought-after program to date. ASL Children’s Story Hour brought in front of deaf and

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* The Metropolitan Multi-Service Center provides special services for the community of people with disabilities and the elderly.
hearing children a Deaf performer and a hearing performer simultaneously storytelling in ASL and telling the story in English.

Throughout this and other programs, the Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing communities are provided with the opportunity to see and associate with successful Deaf and hearing role models in the arts. Beginning with the Mother/Daughter Storytelling Celebration, Illuminations encouraged teams of deaf and hearing mothers and daughter to share stories during the performance. When confronted by fathers who wanted to participate, Illuminations created the Family Fun event, which showcases stories by any family group that includes at least one deaf and one hearing member.10 Illuminations Arts is not specifically a children’s theatre, although much of its programming is addressed to all ages.

Jackie Kilpatrick, a Deaf actress and former kindergarten to eighth grade drama teacher at T.H. Rogers Elementary School, a regional day school program for the deaf and hard-of-hearing in Houston, commented:

They [Illuminations Arts] are not really a Deaf Theatre, but a performing arts organization that provides Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing people with performing-arts exposure and opportunities.11

About the imminent end of the teaching of drama at T.H. Rogers, Jackie Kilpatrick commented:

I have been teaching drama classes from kindergarten to eighth grade deaf students from 1990 to 1995, and from 1998 to 2001. I was transferred to the regional day-school program to teach in a deaf classroom because I have a teacher certificate. I knew that the school would not continue to use drama classes for the deaf. The school has to follow the system of certificates for the teacher position, but it is not fair for the deaf class to not have a drama class, while the Vanguard’s drama class is still in place. I heard that the school will hire a drama and sign-language teacher in the fall because the Parent-Teacher Organization wants a sign-language teacher to teach Vanguard students ASL as a foreign language.12
Kathy Weldon, the Deaf counselor at T.H. Rogers, saw the demise of teaching drama to deaf children and noted its negative impact. She had these comments:

I arrived at T.H. Rogers as a new guidance counselor in 1994. I quickly saw that the drama teacher was ineffective in teaching deaf children. She told me that deaf children could not memorize their lines. Therefore she had to sit in the front row of the auditorium to feed them the lines. It was not normal for deaf children to continue looking to this teacher for their cue lines. I knew that they were able to do better than this. I saw this same teacher yelling at the deaf kids and treating them with lack of respect. I quickly informed the principal that this treatment could not be tolerated. I took upon myself to teach eighth grade girls to sign-dance the song *The Impossible Dream*. At first the girls were not used to memorizing their signs and movement. On the day of the performance, they came to me and said “We cannot remember.” I made them try to remember and they finally did, then they performed the 15 minutes dance. The pride these girls felt after discovering that they were able to remember their dance was priceless. They only needed me to cue the beginning of the song. They performed on their own. The assistant principal was impressed and said to me, “I felt like I was watching a masterpiece!”.

In 2002 Illuminations registered and started to operate under the name Illuminations Arts to reflect the greater scope of the theatre’s growing interests in the Deaf-arts community. Illuminations’ director defines its artistic mission in this way:

Illuminations Arts strives to bridge the gap between the deaf/hard-of-hearing and hearing communities through artistic activities. By offering independent programs as well as collaborative projects with other organizations, Illuminations provides an artistic and cultural experience beyond language. Performers and audiences have the opportunity to encounter the performing arts in a dramatic new form, regardless of their ability to hear or sign.

Illuminations Arts continues to grow as their programs are requested across the state of Texas, reaching an extensive and diverse population in search of the chance to experience the arts in a dramatic new form.

Through a three-year grant (2002 through 2004) from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County (CACHH), Houston’s fine arts
funding council, Illuminations has been able to utilize *Hand Held Tales: Stories in ASL & English* and the original program *ASL Children’s Story Hour* as educational tools for children and adults alike. Illuminations offers children and adults the opportunity to experience a whole variety of cultural activities that are accessible for the deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing. It encourages all groups to get involved and intends for people to realize that the Deaf are not disabled, but rather constitute a cultural and linguistic minority.\(^\text{17}\)

Jill Beebout comments:

> It’s especially interesting to see hearing kids’ responses, because they’ll just sit there completely enamored with the story. Often this is the first time they’ve seen deaf people, especially when they’re signing together. It’s great for them to see that it doesn’t matter if you’re different, and that we all enjoy the same things.\(^\text{18}\)

The OPTICA program fosters cooperation and learning for both deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals so that they can share their cultures as well as building teams to open doors to Deaf arts, culture, and heritage in the hearing community. OPTICA offers classes in American Sign Language theatrical presentation for adults and children, training in video filming to develop skills enabling them to promote their events and culture as well as gaining access to hearing-community offerings, classes for non-actors in theatre crafts and production, classic movie night monthly services—a cultural-awareness learning activity for both people with hearing loss and for hearing people in Houston, and Little Hand Theatre—an activity that focuses on the theatre arts. These classes and activities have opened the door into the Deaf World for children with hearing loss from many different milieus.\(^\text{19}\)
List of Plays and Workshops

In 1982 Clarence Russell moved from Houston back to Washington, DC. The Houston Theatre of the Deaf folded, and Illuminations... Theatre with the Deaf was born. As was mentioned before, their first performance was shadow-interpreted and took place at the Alley Theatre—The Unexpected Guest. It was the Alley Theatre’s first and last shadowed performance.

In their first season, two shadowed productions were presented with the Texas Opera Theatre: The Fantasticks and Madame Butterfly. Lucille Maxwell, a certified interpreter, commented about the shadowed performance of Madame Butterfly:

On March 18, 1984, I had the privilege of attending the shadowed performance of Madame Butterfly. Brian Kilpatrick and Deborah Gunter were both just fabulous as the “shadows” of the two principle characters in the opera. ... I overheard comments, from people who did not know sign language but were obviously familiar with opera, that the grace and beauty of their signs enhanced the drama for them. The deaf people who were in attendance were enthused and enthralled.20

La Traviata, produced by the Texas Opera Theatre, provided Illuminations its first shadowed tour to Lafayette, Louisiana; El Paso, Texas; and San Antonio, Texas. The El Paso Times newspaper noted:

Brian Kilpatrick is an opera star. He is deaf. ... Upon invitation of Texas Opera Theatre, Kilpatrick transformed the English libretto of La Traviata into U.S. sign language as a project of his deaf acting company, Illuminations.21

He won the Bravo Award for this performance.

Illuminations Arts, with the University of Houston’s Shakespeare Globe Theatre/Outreach, produced The Taming of the Shrew and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. In 1985 Illuminations shadowed A Midsummer Night’s Dream in the opening gala of the Heinen Theatre at Houston Community College System’s Central College.
Bob Ives, a hearing actor in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, said:

Most of my job was to make sure I was consistent on the cues that he [Billy Koch, a Deaf actor] was looking for. ... Sign language puts a different perspective on things. Sign language is very visual, and Shakespeare is very visual. ... But for the play to be successful, [Suzi] Cravens [the shadowing director] says that the shadow actor and speaking actor have to mesh as a dramatic unit. “Two separate people become immersed in one concept,” she says. “People have to relinquish a major part of their egos, which is something you don’t see a lot in the theatre,” she added.\(^{22}\)

*Quilters*, produced in 1987 by the Heinen Theatre in collaboration with Houston International Quilt Festival, was an all-sign-language performance with off-stage voicing actors. Brian Kilpatrick was the first director. Carole McCann, executive director of Humphreys School of Musical Theatre, choreographed the dance with the help of Jackie Kilpatrick and Kathy Weldon.

In 1996 the Express Theatre’s Education Department had a dynamic season of events, workshops, and residencies. Kathy Weldon is a Deaf counselor for gifted children and for deaf and hard-of-hearing children and former President of Illuminations coordinated with the Express Theatre. She worked to facilitate a theatre-arts residency at T.H. Rogers Elementary School for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the seventh and eighth grades. This ground-breaking project presented deaf children with the opportunity to be involved in the creative process, as well as to work with an artist who shared their unique physical abilities.\(^{23}\) Kathy Weldon expressed these observations of the drama activities:

When the Deaf children started in the drama program with Brian, it was the first time that they would use their creativity skills on their own. For instance, the teacher would tell them what to do in a structured manner. But the deaf would be challenged to create their own mime, acting, or skit. ... During the learning process of the activity, each pretended that he would go to the store, and Brian emphasized to them that the real-world experience which would accidentally happen as a mistake was just like real human life in any setting. They were taught what real life would look like when “making mistakes”
rather than when “being perfect.” This “mistake” would help them be more “imaginative” and real. For example, in the Pizza skit, the young kid acted “perfectly” in making a pizza, but in the real world, one may realize that some mistakes would happen, like burning the pizza, or dropping a pizza piece on the floor. It had to be real!24

Kathy Weldon was really amazed at the young girl who had a problem with the ASL handshape of the letter “P”:

She was very shy and had a problem memorizing. That’s why she had a very low self-esteem and didn’t have any confidence in herself. But Brian noticed her problems, so he challenged her, encouraging her to do one small piece with “P” using her own creativity. During the performance, she did an excellent job on using mime skills with the same hand-shape “P.” She exuded more confidence. She was very proud that she had challenged herself. The kids did a miraculous job on their own without depending on Brian’s stage directions. During this time, he sat in front of the auditorium stage. In the past, the teacher would sit in front of them, telling them what to do or where to go on the stage. But with Brian’s innovative methods, they did perform the skits on their own, without depending on him for directions.25

Paula Godinich, a Deaf Education teacher, commented:

My classes really enjoy working with Brian Kilpatrick in the performing-arts class. They look forward to going there. They make sure that I know when it’s almost time to leave, so they won’t be late. And somehow, they’re always about 5 minutes late coming back. So you can tell it’s something the students really enjoy participating in. I have noticed that in the classroom they use a lot more expression, hm... they have become more expressive in their ideas and in their feelings. I really think this program is helpful to Deaf students, to improve their language and their communication skills. I hope that we will continue working with this program and working with Express Theatre.26

In 1997 Illuminations performed The Yellow Boat on two nights, a second sign language production in conjunction with Express Theatre and DiverseWorks, courtesy of the Seattle Children’s Theatre. About one hundred deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing patrons attended the two-nights run. The plot was touching, dealing with the experiences of an eight-year-old boy diagnosed with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and his parents’ support during his final days.27
In addition to using sign language in their shows, illuminations has also provided closed-captioning for larger performances in productions of the Alley Theatre, the Wortham Center, and the Miller Outdoor Theatre. Illuminations has also offered workshops and classes to teach other performers the art of shadow interpreting and storytelling using American Sign Language and Art-Sign (see Glossary).

In 1999 the Houston Endowment for the Arts awarded Illuminations Arts a three-year grant for OPTICA’s Little Hands Theatre Activity. This was a theatre camp where children were taught theatrical expression through sign, mime, dance, and song. The first summer activity was the 1999 ASL Kid’s Camp, followed by the 2000 Kid’s ASL Theatre Day Camp, and the 2001 Hands Can, Too. The thirty students were divided in the three sections according to their grade level: first through third grade, fourth through sixth grade, and seventh through eighth grade.

The two-week activities consisted of four different classes: an exercise class to help the body and mind coordinate together; a storytelling class to help children express themselves using ASL, body movements and facial expressions; an acting class to help the kids express their creativity using general mime, finger mime, and rhythm; and a class teaching play development, scenery construction, and makeup. For example, Brian Kilpatrick, a Deaf guest artist, taught the students how to apply and arrange makeup to make an actor in his fifties to look like an eighty-year-old man. The guest Deaf artists were Jackie Kilpatrick, Mindy Moore (the founder and performer of Just Mindy Company), and Kathy Weldon, a Deaf dancer. Deaf and hearing volunteers with good American Sign Language skills teamed with the guest artists. The children attending the camp developed their own play
to be performed for their families and friends at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center festival night.

After the three-year funding ended, Illuminations Arts has not been awarded any other funding due to a decrease in the Deaf Community’s support and the existence of the Deaf Education program in Harris County. Also, the deaf children’s parents found the required transportation to be inconvenient. Illuminations was not equipped with its own transportation means. The parents erroneously thought that the use of sign without voice would hamper the children’s speech and language acquisition. Research does not support this myth. In fact, research shows that sign language supports speech rather than hindering it.

The Illuminations Arts group has provided interpreters for a variety of cultural events and has coordinated social events for deaf and hearing. They have worked with area schools to bring literacy and literature to deaf children and hosted Ear News, a monthly television show that provides a forum for Deaf and hard-of-hearing issues through Houston MediaSource (HMS). Illuminations Arts has an educational mission to serve the public’s communication needs by programming educational, political and community shows on cable TV.

During the 2000-2001 season Illuminations Arts collaborated with the Interpreter Training Program and Show of Hands, the Sign-Language club, at North Harris College to present the world-renowned Invisible Hands Wild Zappers, and the African American and Hispanic Deaf dancing troupe from Washington, DC. Along with the Aurora Picture Show, Illuminations presented the first Deaf Film Festival in the country with Spotlight: Deaf Films, and premiered Interpretations: A Language

*Aurora Picture Show is a Houston based art center for film, video, and new media. Information can be found at http://www.aurorapictureshow.org*
of Loss by Deaf playwright Raymond Luczak in honor of World AIDS Day. The group has achieved statewide appeal performing at Southwest Texas State University and at the Texas Storytelling Festival in March 2004.32

Participants and Audiences

Illuminations Arts provides accessible theatre to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community in Houston. Illuminations Arts has worked with the University of Houston in the Children’s Theatre Festival to provide accessibility to public performances.

In October 1999, Illuminations’ OPTICA began presenting Classic $1 Movie Night once every month on a Friday evening. This series ran until May 2000. These events were open to the general public, deaf people, interpreters, and children, both hearing and deaf. Featured classic movies included *Deaf President Now!* (the history of self-led Deaf protest directed toward instituting the first Deaf President of Gallaudet University), *Mime Time II* (a short film about the art of pantomime, hosted by Robert Panara And Bernard Bragg), and *Sign Mime: The Art of Visual Imagery*.

Illuminations Arts’s most lauded effort to date has been the addition of Hand Held Tales, the storytelling troupe that has traveled across the state of Texas and performed stories in American Sign Language and spoken English for audiences young and old. The list of Hand Held Tales performances can be found in Appendix 3. Jill Beebout brought together several teams of one Deaf and one hearing storyteller to work together to reach hearing and deaf audiences through performances that present stories on a variety of children’s classic themes.
In April 2005, Illuminations Arts collaborated with A.D. Players for the shadow-interpreted and captioned production of *The Wind in the Willows* at the Miller Outdoor Theatre. The morning performance was free and open to the public. Over 750 deaf and hard-of-hearing children from the Greater Houston Area school districts and more than 600 other spectators gathered at the outdoor theatre to witness this event.33

**Kinds of Skills Taught**

Operating since 1993, Hand Held Tales is a pilot project that offers storytelling in the Fort Bend Independent School District to supplement the existing classroom curriculum. Nearly any subject that is taught in school can be enhanced through story, both signed and spoken. In addition to the storytelling performance, the teacher is provided with printed copies of the stories as supplemental documentation for activities that will reinforce the information and vocabulary introduced through the storytelling performance.34 A sampling of these programs include *Stories to Be Thankful For*—stories about Native Americans and colonists at the time of first Thanksgiving; *Festival of Light*—stories about the winter festivals of various cultures; *African American Tales*—biographical stories about famous African Americans and African folklore; and *Texas Wildflower Legends*—legends based on wildflowers found in Texas (see Appendix 3).

In 1993 Pedro Solis, a graduate of the Texas School for the Deaf in Austin, began his first involvement with Illuminations and became interested in ASL storytelling, although he was not eager to perform in front of large audiences. After he realized that he had the skill, he participated more in Hand Held Tales. Solis commented:
Hearing people often think that Deaf can’t do anything, like drive and read, so it’s important for them to see us in action.\textsuperscript{35} 

Solis encouraged more deaf and hearing children and their families to get involved with Illuminations because there is so much to learn from ASL storytelling.

In 2005 the Humphreys School Musical Theatre, a wing of Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS) in Houston, in collaboration with Illuminations Arts, provided for the first time a one-day theatre workshop. This workshop interweaved American Sign Language and spoken word with choreography and staging to present The King and I, a thirty-minutes song and sign performance, to friends and families.\textsuperscript{36} The Humphreys School of Musical Theatre works to find young performing-arts talents in the Greater Houston Area and offers them training opportunities to develop their skills. The one-day acting workshop was open to deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing children separately for two age groups: ages seven through twelve and ages thirteen through eighteen. The workshop participation was limited to 15 students per age group. This workshop did not require previous training in signing, dancing, acting, or American Sign Language. Instructors from the Humphreys School along with Susan Jackson and Jackie Kilpatrick, interpreters Debbie Teague and David Hays, and other volunteers from Illuminations worked with the thirty-six hearing and four deaf students to teach songs and signs and to teach students to choreograph numbers and translate and memorize dialogues in only five and a half hours. \textsuperscript{37} 

Throughout the United States, hearing theatres’ demand for interpreters has steadily increased over the last few years. Only a few interpreters had theatrical experience, however; hence the need of providing workshops to train both seasoned and recently certified interpreters for theatrical performances. A Houston-based interpreter
agency, Sign Language Accessible Interpreters, decided to sponsor Illuminations Arts to organize three consecutive and progressive workshops about the art of theatrical interpreting. The first workshop was offered in June 2005, entitled Get On Stage. Deaf and hearing participants from the greater Houston area and from Austin enjoyed this dynamic theatrical interpreting workshop presented by Brian Kilpatrick and Susan Jackson. This workshop covered shadowing techniques, creative signing etiquette, and stage vocabulary. The participants were actively involved in a sample of theatrical interpreting.38

The second workshop, entitled Get On Stage, Encore!, was offered in March 2006. One more interpreter agency, Communication Axess Ability Group, along with the Visual Communication Services organization, decided to sponsor this workshop series. Brian Kilpatrick and Susan Jackson presented more in-depth techniques of script analysis, character development, and blocking on stage. The workshop was followed by a one-hour audition for Illuminations theatre shadowing-performer positions, theatrical-interpreter positions, and Hand Held Tales storytelling voice performers.

The third and last workshop, Get On Stage, 2!, was offered in September 2006. This workshop required participants to hold a Texas Board of Evaluators for Interpreters certification at level 3 or above,39 or to have participated in the previous workshops. Here Brian Kilpatrick and Susan Jackson focused more on the interpreting process applied to a theatrical script with emphasis on the creative visual part of the interpreter’s performance.
Conversations with Actors and Participants

Kathy Weldon, past President of Illuminations Arts, who attended
The Yellow Boat show, said:

We were pleased to introduce a number of first-time actors
and actresses. My hat is off all the people involved. Countless
hours of rehearsal time paid off in this history-making event.
For the first time, a theatre allowed Illuminations ... to "take
over." The voice cast did a remarkable job as they gave vocal
expressions to the beautiful signs on stage. Hopefully, more
sign-language performances will be undertaken, and the Deaf
actors and actresses can help their hearing cohorts to give
American Sign Language its proper place in the world of drama. If
you never have experienced the ambiance and spirit of a sign
language performance, be sure not to miss the next one! Theatre
will take on a new meaning.40

Susan Jackson, the artistic director and a Deaf actress,
commented:

My opinion of the importance of theatre for Deaf Students
is "4 (four) R" meaning Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Arts. I
strongly believe that deaf children should be exposed more to the
creativity specific to different arts, in the same way that
hearing children are exposed to visual arts, music, and
performing arts. ... I notice that some residential schools for
the deaf have drama classes as part of the Deaf Studies
curriculum, while the mainstream schools do not. I remember when
I was growing up, in my residential school, the Deaf teacher,
after the school program was over for the day, would spend some
more time with us after school, signing stories to us, arranging
drama skits, and even setting up performances open to deaf
children and adults. We even practiced on weekends. But today,
the teachers are not willing to give of their own free time; when
the school day is over, their work is done.41

Mindy Moore, a Deaf actress from Austin, Texas, commented:

I feel that Deaf children will build their own self-esteem
and self-identity into a strong positive model. I would like to
see more theatrical classes offered from preschool years to high-
school years, but unfortunately, the school curriculum is very
strictly structured as far as the planning of the school year is
concerned.42

In June 2003, at the Children’s Museum of Houston, after
attending the Mother/Daughter Storytelling Celebration, a deaf girl’s
parent (who desired to remain anonymous) commented:
I would like to thank you for inviting us to participate with the performance. I think it is such a good idea to boost the kids’ self-esteem and confidence.43

A Deaf Education teacher said:

The entire morning my students would come to me about yet another deaf student they had met from another school. They had so much fun! Thank you for the experience you provided for our students. It was amazing!44

After The Princess and The Pea performance in April 2004, Ms. E. Whitley, a teacher in the Pasadena Independent School District, noted:

It was absolutely wonderful for my kids to see a whole audience of people using sign. Too often the younger kids think they will become hearing because they never have the opportunity to see deaf and hard-of-hearing people.45

Summary

Illuminations Theatre with the Deaf began as a small, dedicated group of theatre enthusiasts, Deaf Educations teachers, interpreters, and deaf people from the community, on a volunteer basis, under the leadership of two professional Deaf actors: Brian Kilpatrick and Jackie Kilpatrick. Illuminations Arts has worked diligently on behalf of the Deaf Community, advocating accessibility for deaf and hard-of-hearing children and adults to a variety of cultural activities and opportunities.

During the last 23 years, Illuminations has grown and developed many different programs: shadow interpreting with many different theatres, theatrical interpreting (with zoned placement), and a few American Sign Language productions with voice interpreting off-stage, such as the world premiere of Interpretations: A Language of Loss by the Deaf playwright Raymond Luczak, in the fall of 2001. Illuminations has also offered many shadowed performances in collaboration with the Children’s Theatre Festival at the University of Houston. Their
shadowed performances have attracted many deaf and hard-of-hearing children, who had a unique opportunity to see sign language alive on stage.

Beginning in 2001, Hand Held Tales offered the Mother/Daughter Storytelling Celebration (later named Family Fun), where hearing parents with deaf children were encouraged to present stories.

In 2003 Hand Held Tales started an outreach program by performing in schools in the greater Houston area. The stories are performed in American Sign Language by a Deaf signing actor and voiced in English by a hearing performer.

In 2004 Illuminations Arts offered HandSpeak, an exceptional performance to celebrate twenty years of activity. It included skits and storytelling excerpts from previous performances and Hand Held Tales presentations. A surprise rendition was the creative adaptation of The House that Jack Built, performed by two of the Illuminations founders: Brian Kilpatrick and Charles Trevino.

Since its inception, Illuminations’s work has been made possible through grants and private and corporate funding. Due to current financial difficulties, the 2006-2007 Hand Held Tales season has been suspended. As of today, funding has not been renewed. Two full-time employees have been laid off. Although Illuminations Arts stands in jeopardy, the group has vowed to keep working, perhaps not on the scale of the past few years but it remembers its roots and is determined to survive.
Endnotes for Chapter 7


5. Ibid.


18. Ibid.


25. Ibid.


31. Jackson, “OPTICA.”


34. Tom Burger, *Story is the Cornerstone of Literacy; Storytelling, the Foundation of Communication*, Hand Held Tales: Stories in ASL & English, Illuminations Arts, Houston, Texas, 2003.


37. Ibid.


42. Mindy Moore, director of JustMindy theatrical company, Austin, Texas, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, July 10, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

43. Mother/daughter, members of the audience, Children’s Museum of Houston, Houston, in discussion with Brian Kilpatrick, June 2003.


CHAPTER 8

SEATTLE CHILDREN’S THEATRE

The Seattle Children’s Theatre, through its Deaf Youth Drama Program has opened new worlds of theatrical expression for deaf and hard-of-hearing youth in the Puget Sound region in Washington State.

Linda Harzell, the artistic director, commented:

I marvel at, and am humbled by, the volume of children and adults--more than four million--who have come to our plays and have shared the communal experience of live theatre. We feel that we have enriched the theatre community in the Pacific Northwest by raising generations of theatre-loving kids, of all colors, ethnicities, and ages.¹

Beginnings and Organization

Billy Seago, the co-founder and director of the Deaf Youth Drama Program, said:

From then on, their perception of deafness will be changed. From, oh, the sort of pity that deafness is a disability, changing to a more positive view--that these are wonderful, intelligent, creative kids, that they are no different from other kids in that they are fully functioning in society. I want them to see who they are and not what they should be like.²

Founded in 1975, the Seattle Children’s Theatre is the second largest resident theatre for children and their families in Seattle, Washington. It is based on culturally and thematically diverse themes and crafted to capture the attention of children and adults alike. The Seattle Children’s Theatre is infused with the belief that theatre is a necessary component in the education of young people, promoting literacy, creativity, self-esteem, and humanitarian values.³

In addition to educational programming through a drama school, the Seattle Children’s Theatre offers theatre classes. Young people expand their imagination, build self-confidence, and develop their
creative abilities. The Seattle Children’s Theatre also maintains a touring Education Outreach program that brings theatre directly to students and young people in cities and towns throughout Washington State, such as Seattle, Spokane, Vancouver, Tacoma, Everett, and so on.  

Linda Hartzell, a hearing woman, has been the Artistic Director of the Seattle Children’s Theatre and head of its Education Program since 1984. Hartzell was formerly on the board of the Theatre Communications Group, an organization whose goal is to strengthen, nurture, and promote the professional not-for-profit American theatre. Hartzell is a former vice-president of the United States Center for the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young people. This is the national service organization promoting the power of professional theatre for young audiences through excellence, collaboration, and innovation across cultural and international boundaries. The Seattle Children’s Theatre was surviving on minimal budget when Hartzell took over. Under her leadership the audiences grew, and memberships and profits increased. Hartzell used the increasing budget to raise actors’ pay and to add popular and educational programming such as Deaf Youth Drama classes. In addition, two theatre buildings were added to the Seattle’s Children Theatre complex— the Charlotte Martin Theatre, completed in 1993, and the new technical facility, Allen Pavilion, in 2000.  

The Seattle Children’s Theatre had provided ASL-interpreted performances before the establishment of the Deaf Youth Drama Program. In 1992 Billy and Howie Seago, two Deaf brothers who are actors and ASL storytellers, approached Linda Hartzell about establishing a Deaf Youth program. The Seago brothers are the founders and the first program managers of the Deaf Youth Drama Program (DYDP) of the Seattle Children’s Theatre, which began in 1993. Before DYDP, the Seagos had
also founded the Deaf Moose Theatre in Seattle. The Deaf Moose Theatre was put on hold because the DYDP children group was growing and more time and energy needed to be invested in DYDP.8

Billy Seago, the current DYDP director, has acted in professional productions with the National Theatre of the Deaf. He was the featured artist in Stories in the Attic, the series produced by Visual Tales Sign-A-Vision Institute. Stories in the Attic is a series of signed productions of stories for children and adults. Seago is a nationally renowned master storyteller and has conducted workshops in drama, storytelling, the creative use of American Sign Language, and Deaf Culture. As the program director he has been artist-in-residence in dozens of deaf and hard-of-hearing classrooms and has directed several Deaf Youth Summer Theatre productions.9 The artist-in-residence program is organized twice every year. Between eight and ten schools within the Puget Sound region and two schools in the rural area are selected for the Deaf Youth artist-in-residence program. The Deaf Youth Summer Theatre program offers classes and mounts a production. It takes place every summer, from June to August, at the Seattle Children's Theatre.

Howie Seago has won the Helen Hayes* and the Drama-Logue† awards as actor, producer, and director over the past twenty-five years.10 Seago has also performed with the National Theatre of the Deaf. He has appeared in popular television shows such as Star Trek: The Next Generation, The Equalizer, Hunter, and Rainbow’s End. In the San Francisco Bay area, Rainbow’s End was produced by D.E.A.F. Media. It is

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* A Helen Hayes Award is a theater award recognizing excellence in professional theater in the Washington, DC/Potomac area since 1983. The awards are presented by the Washington Theatre Awards Society.
† The Drama-Logue Award was a theatre award established in 1977, given by the publishers of Drama-Logue, a weekly West-Coast theatre trade publication. In May of 1998 Back Stage West bought the Drama-Logue publication, and the two publications merged. The Drama-Logue Award was retired and was replaced by the Back Stage West’s "Garland Award."
an Emmy-Award-winning Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) series for deaf children, similar to the *Sesame Street* educational PBS series. All actors and actresses, storytellers, and poets performed using American Sign Language as positive Deaf role models in humanities—history, literature, and Art-Sign.\textsuperscript{11}

Ryan Schlecht, a former actor with the Deaf Youth Drama Program, made his big debut in *Big River*, the first American Sign Language musical production, produced by Deaf West Theatre in Los Angeles, and performed in 2003 on Broadway. Ryan commented:

> Many [deaf] children who watched *Big River* on Broadway came up to us after the show and wanted to talk. ... It showed me that these children have felt isolated, that they haven’t been exposed enough to role models sharing the Deaf culture and language.\textsuperscript{12}

The Deaf Youth Drama Program has many benefits. It not only empowers young Deaf actors, but it reveals their talents to the hearing world through American Sign Language. DYDP also provides personal and artistic opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing youth through theatre-education and theatre-arts training with Deaf theatre professionals. Deaf and hard-of-hearing children in the Puget Sound region and throughout western Washington, who may have little or no experience beyond their hearing family and schools, attend DYDP to build their self-esteem and interpersonal skills with Deaf artists, volunteers, and peers from other schools. The Deaf Youth Drama Program includes four different programs: the local artist-in-residence program for the Deaf Kids Drama Festival, the outreach artist-in-residence program, the Deaf Youth Summer Theatre, and workshops. Most participants in the Deaf Youth Drama Program are in grades kindergarten through twelve. DYDP also serves their hearing peers, their families, and the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities.\textsuperscript{13}
DYDP has two full-time staff employees. Jacob Fisher is a Deaf theatre major from Gallaudet University. He works as artistic and literary assistant. In addition, he has assisted Billy Seago in his school outreach teaching. Lisa McIntosh, hearing, is the program coordinator. She graduated from the Interpreter Training Program at Seattle Central Community College. She has worked as volunteer for DYDP and as a voice interpreter for the children’s festival.

Each summer Nat Wilson, a Deaf theatre major from Gallaudet University, who performed with the National Theatre of the Deaf for a long time, was sign coach for the Deaf Youth Summer Theatre production. In addition, he has taught American Sign Language classes in Seattle Central Community College’s Interpreter Training Program.14

List of Plays and Workshops

The Deaf Youth Drama Program has produced many American Sign Language performances, among which are Our Town, West Side Story, The Three Musketeers, and The Crucible. A comprehensive list of the Seattle Children’s Theatre performances can be found in Appendix 3.

Participants and Audiences

Seattle has a large proportion of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in its population.15 Therefore it is a ripe area for Deaf Theatre. Under the Seattle Children’s Theatre, the Deaf Youth Drama Program teaches drama to deaf and hard-of-hearing students from kindergarten through grade twelve.

The Deaf Kids Drama Festival, which began in 1993, is part of the Seattle Children’s Theatre educational outreach department. Some of
DYDP’s Deaf artists, such as Howie Seago, Dawn Stoyanoff (Deaf dancer), and Nat Wilson went to several different schools (mostly to mainstreamed schools in the Puget Sound region, but also to residential schools for the deaf) to select the children for the festival. Each residency lasts twelve weeks with one-hour classes two or three times a week. At the end of each residency, deaf students perform short pieces at the Seattle Children’s Theatre, where their families, peers, and people from the Deaf Community come to attend the show.

Billy Seago commented:

To see the transformation between day one and the last day is great. They become more confident, and it gives them a working knowledge of theatre.16

The Deaf Youth Summer Theatre offers a four-week training program each summer, customized for four different age groups. Participants come mostly from Washington, and especially the Seattle area. However, some out-of-state participants are willing to pay the travel and lodging expenses to benefit from training with DYDP. Participants learn the basic skills of performing on the stage: acting, improvisation, stage combat (see Glossary), movement, and dance. When the author attended their training in 2003, the older participants’ group remained on campus for three more weeks to rehearse the American Sign Language production West Side Story. At that time, all the instructors were Deaf. The author had the opportunity to attend the rehearsals for three days before the show opened. The group rehearsed the stage blocking and the dialogue exchange, and hearing and Deaf actors worked together as a team. The rehearsal unfolded the same way as a regular hearing play rehearsal. The performance lasted three days, and every day the auditorium was packed with family members (mostly hearing), peers, Deaf families, and with people from the Deaf Community.
Actors, directors, and stagehands of the Deaf Youth Drama Program staff have traveled to national conferences and theatres. For example, Howie Seago presented the keynote address *Literacy in Life* at the Illinois Teachers for Hard-of-Hearing/Deaf Individuals (ITHI) Conference on March 2, 2007, in Bloomingdale, Illinois.\(^\text{17}\) DYDP has became a national model for arts-education programs, sharing information about DYDP strategies with various Deaf Communities. Each Deaf community learned how to implement a Deaf Arts curriculum into their local theatre-education programs.

The transmission of Deaf Culture through theatre is a goal of this group. Billy Seago commented on this matter:

> Theatre for the Deaf must be delivered in a way that fits in with Deaf culture. Certain aspects of the play must be modified to fit in with the sight lines that the Deaf must use. Sounds that otherwise would be delivered just as sounds in a hearing play must be shown, or rather must be visual for the Deaf audience. For example, if a police car is coming, it can’t only be the sound, but you must show the flashing light of the police car approaching. If there is a knock on the door, it’s modified to be a flashing door light. In other words, we use modifications to fit in with Deaf culture. If there is a story about a hearing person we want to portray, that’s fine, we just modify it to fit in with Deaf culture. We have to of course be concerned with sign-language accuracy as well as its clarity.\(^\text{18}\)

**Kinds of Skills Taught**

Acting skills--basic acting, clowning (see Glossary), improvisation, and stage combat (see Glossary) are some of the skills taught at the Seattle Children’s Theatre in the Deaf Youth Drama Program. The program offers literature-based workshops, i.e. *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*, a children’s adaptation of *Animal Farm*, and other children stories. They also have educator-training workshops and educational professional-development sessions, where classroom teachers are taught drama activities and explore styles...
of plays, themes, and subjects. The workshops cover a variety of themes such as acting, creative drama, and other specialty workshops. Teachers and educators learn techniques for increasing self-esteem and confidence in students.

Lisa McIntosh, the hearing program coordinator, explains the educational goal of the Deaf Youth Drama Program:

Our philosophy is that those instructors who go to the schools must be Deaf in order to be good role models for the students. This helps deaf students to increase their self-esteem. ... Our program has apparently aided in improving the students’ reading and language levels in all the school programs. This happens because the students must read the scripts and memorize the lines on their own. This helps them understand the meaning and how to translate between ASL and English. If they encounter difficulties understanding the English, they can ask someone without feeling embarrassed. When they understand the concepts through ASL, they can understand the English they have previously read.19

Nat Wilson, ASL consultant for the program, emphasizes the more general influence of theatre on education:

I also believe that both hearing and deaf should take theatre classes. Theatre applies to so many aspects of our everyday lives. It helps people with their self-esteem. People who become, for example, lawyers and preachers take theatre classes to aid in their professions. It helps them to use language more eloquently. It is especially important for deaf children to learn the differences between ASL and English in theatre. Then they can enjoy watching other performances and appreciate other plays.20

The Deaf Youth Drama Program also offers training for teacher assistants for drama schools.21 Internships are available. University students are encouraged to act as teacher assistants in drama classes, to teach workshops, and to participate in the plays. Dance and signing songs that are translated to ASL are also skills taught to the actors.

Billy Seago comments on this matter:

We performed West Side Story. We, of course, portrayed the fight scenes and the songs. Oh, it was so much fun portraying the songs and changing them over into sign language for visual clarity for Deaf audiences. People might think that Deaf actors couldn’t perform the songs from West Side Story, but through a good bit of practice we did it. Of course there was dancing, and
many think Deaf actors can’t dance. Oh yes, they can! And of course, there was the acting itself. As you know, *West Side Story* is based on the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, and it can be effectively portrayed by Deaf signing actors as well as hearing actors. It doesn’t matter.22

**Conversations with Actors and Participants**

Nat Wilson, sign coach for the Deaf Youth Summer Theatre, commented:

I have been involved with the Deaf Youth Drama Program for nine years. I have seen many of the children grow up through the program, and I believe it is a definite plus for those involved. It assists them in becoming much more expressive individuals.23

Billy Seago commented:

I feel that it is very important to have deaf people in charge of the Theatre for the Deaf. It is okay to have hearing people involved, and perhaps in some positions of authority in operating certain aspects, but I believe that it is ultimately important to have deaf people running the show, as it were. I feel this prevents people from looking and saying:

“Oh it’s Theatre for the Deaf, but hearing people are running it. I guess they have deaf people involved who are the Token Deaf.”

No! It must be theatre FOR the deaf, OF the Deaf, run BY the Deaf.24

Billy Seago clarifies the perspective of The Deaf Youth Program on the meaning of Deaf Theatre:

Theatre for the Deaf must be delivered in a way that fits Deaf Culture. ... I also feel that Deaf Theatre does not always have to focus on Deaf themes. ... Many Deaf people do not know Shakespeare or other famous playwrights. There are so many beautiful plays that can be performed not just by hearing performers. ... These plays can be modified for Deaf audiences to understand the play and the performance on stage. That is my idea about Deaf Theatre. We do not always have to perform plays with Deaf themes.25

In addition, this theatre group attempts to change the attitude of the hearing community toward deaf people through theatre.
Billy Seago comments on the pathological view versus the cultural/linguistic view:

We don’t want them [hearing children] to just simply view us pathologically as not being able to hear but to help mold positive social views about the Deaf. Often the deaf children will have hearing friends from school who want to become involved. They may not know how to sign very well at first, but they learn rather slowly as we go along. Even if at first they are unable to sign well, that is fine. This is an educational process for us all. We are not professional actors. It is an education both in acting and in deaf culture.26

About the kinds of participants in the Deaf Youth Drama Program, Billy Seago expressed his openness:

We allow hearing children to be involved. However, the majority of children have to be deaf. ... The main thing is their attitude and desire to be involved with deaf people and not simply just sit back and pity them. We hope that these hearing children will be our ambassadors to the hearing world to help change their perspective on the Deaf.27

Howie Seago commented on his attempt to reach out to educators of deaf children for the play The Skin of Our Teeth:

I would like drama teachers in mainstreamed schools and others in the community to realize, through this play, the various ways the Deaf can be accommodated for performing onstage. ... I hope this play will inspire Deaf students to perform, as well.28

Several staff members have commented on the accessibility of the Seattle theatre group as it involves shadowing, captioning, and interpreting. Lisa McIntosh made these comments:

Brian: Earlier it was said that the SCT provides interpreters for performances. What about shadowing for any of the performances?

Lisa: No, that hasn’t been done, at least not in the short time I’ve been here. Previously Billy himself was on stage and provided some signing and shadowing. He did several different characters all by himself. How he did it I don’t know. It was pretty amazing, I’m sure.

Brian: What about captioning for the plays?

Lisa: No, we have the captioning equipment and have used it from time to time during rehearsals to help the students learn their lines and learn words to the songs. To my knowledge it’s never been used during any performances.29
Lisa McIntosh also commented on deaf audiences’ views of sign interpretation:

Brian: In, general, do you believe Deaf people would prefer a sign-language performance to an interpreted performance?  
Lisa: Yes. I believe so. For one thing, it cuts down on looking back and forth from the stage to the interpreters. However, some deaf people that I have met seem not to care one way or the other. They seem to be able to enjoy the play with the interpreter off to the side equally as well. However, I think it’s obvious that most deaf people would prefer to watch theatre signed in their language and not have to depend on it being interpreted.30

Nat Wilson, the ASL coach for the Seattle Theatre group, has this to say about shadowing and sign language interpretation of plays:

About four years ago at a performance of The Cider House Rules. I was asked to be an advisor for the shadowed interpreting for this play. There were some difficult times in matching the interpreting with the acting, but I still feel that shadowing is better than having the interpretation off to the side. If the signing is being done on stage, it’s much easier for the deaf person to keep up with what’s going on in the performance.

I know of another time, at Central Park in New York, at a Shakespeare festival. They had special bleachers set up for the deaf audience members. An interpreter stood in front of the bleachers, and it was easier to see the stage behind the interpreter. I thought that was a very good design for interpretation of those plays.31

Summary

The Seattle Children’s Theatre is committed to bringing innovative and artistically challenging works to the community and especially to children. The Deaf Youth Drama Program was set up to reach the often-neglected matter of arts education for the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals have developed their self-esteem and interpersonal skills while participating in learning about theatre and literature, using American Sign Language. Their interaction with Deaf professional artists, peers from other schools, and volunteers has increased their knowledge of
Deaf Culture. They have also striven to enhance the skills they learned in the Deaf Kids Drama Festival and the Deaf Youth Summer Theatre. The Deaf Youth Drama Program encourages deaf and hard-of-hearing students to develop creative skills. In general, this program introduces children to the Deaf Culture, fostering pride in their Deaf identity.\textsuperscript{32}

Since 1993, the Deaf Youth Drama Program with Billy Seago has led over one hundred residencies, staged twenty-three Deaf Kids Drama Festivals, and directed over seven Deaf Youth Summer Theatre productions.

Due to federal art funding cuts, the Seattle Children’s Theatre made a difficult and painful choice to discontinue DYDP after its twenty-fourth Deaf Kids Drama Festival on June 14, 2007.
Endnotes for Chapter 8


4. “A Profile of Seattle Children’s Theatre” (documentation), Seattle Children’s Theatre Documentation (February 13, 2003).


14. Nat Wilson, American Sign Language assistant, American Sign Language sign coach with the Deaf Youth Drama Program, former actor with the Little Theatre of the Deaf, interview by Brian Kilpatrick,
August 7, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


20. Nat Wilson, American Sign Language assistant, American Sign Language sign coach with the Deaf Youth Drama Program, former actor with the Little Theatre of the Deaf, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 7, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


23. Nat Wilson, American Sign Language assistant, American Sign Language sign coach with the Deaf Youth Drama Program, former actor with the Little Theatre of the Deaf, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 7, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

29. Lisa McIntosh, program coordinator and interpreter with the Deaf Youth Drama Program, Seattle, Washington, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 7, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

30. Ibid.

31. Nat Wilson, American Sign Language assistant, American Sign Language sign coach with the Deaf Youth Drama Program, former actor with the Little Theatre of the Deaf, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 7, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

Paul Kahn, a freelance writer and a playwright, stated in Opening Stages, the quarterly newsletter of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts:

Expose your children to the best in art. Share with them what you love. It will inspire them. It will keep them coming back to the arts. It will even--forgive us our frivolity--make them joyous.

A focus on young artists is somewhat of a departure for us, but hopefully not inconsistent with our mission. Young artists become the professionals of tomorrow. And they also become the enthusiastic audiences who support other artists.¹

Before their experience at PAH!, most students consider that all their professional future holds is working at a grocery store, or in hotel laundry, or that they will have to depend on Social Security. PAH! opens their horizons, and after graduation they start considering careers in teaching, nursing, and technical theatre.²

Beginnings and Organization

PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre is based at the Wheelock Family Theatre, established in 1981 by Andrea Genser, Anthony Hancock, Susan Kosoff, the artistic director, and Jane Staab. Wheelock Family Theatre was the recipient of the StageSource’s 2002 Theatre Hero Award for its impact on Boston’s cultural life. It is a non-profit professional organization performing in a 650-seat auditorium located on the campus of Wheelock College in Boston, Massachusetts.³

This Theatre Hero Award is presented to Wheelock Family Theatre’s impact on Boston’s cultural life by educating and nurturing new generations of theatre artists and theatre goers to celebrate art, education, diversity, and access.⁴
The Wheelock Family Theatre produces at least three main stage productions each season. Productions include family-oriented modern drama, children’s classics, musicals, and original works. The Wheelock Family Theatre offers selected performances interpreted in American Sign Language or open captioned for the deaf, broadcasted through infrared assisted-listening devices for the hard-of-hearing, and audio-described for the blind. Special projects have also provided interpreting for the deaf-blind.\(^5\)

Jodie Steiner, the access coordinator, who is not deaf but who learned signing as an actor with the National Theatre of the Deaf during the 1980s, said:

The Wheelock Theatre has always strived to be accessible to all people. ... I had been interpreting shows here for the deaf for four or five years but got to the point where I did not think that was enough. I not only wanted deaf people in the audience but onstage--expressing their own hopes and dreams. When I suggested we create a theatre project for deaf teens, the head of the theatre, producer Susan Kosoff, agreed.\(^6\)

PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre is an after school program in theatre arts based at the Wheelock Family Theatre. It fosters artistic expression and a sense of personal achievement in young deaf teenagers. PAH!’s goals are to

1. produce proud Deaf adolescents with healthy self-esteem
2. teach theatre arts
3. enhance healthy peer relationships and social skills
4. foster relationships between deaf students and the Deaf Community.\(^7\)

The name of the theatre, PAH!, is an American Sign Language expression that means "Success!" or "Finally! We did it." The theatre has been using theatre arts to develop communications skills and build personal and social strengths among the area’s deaf adolescents.\(^8\)
Jodie Steiner, the access coordinator, said:

No one believes me when I say their families don’t speak American Sign Language, ... but families are struggling already, they don’t have time to learn a new language.9

Barbara Jean Wood, Massachusetts Commissioner for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, said:

Because communication opportunities for deaf young people are limited, they are often left out of everyday activities and their abilities frequently go unacknowledged. ... PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre provides a milieu where they can explore their own creativity, develop problem-solving techniques, and realizes their potential as they internalize their natural language.10

Parents of deaf children support this theatre as well. One commented:

My daughter is deaf. She is ten years old. She started going to the theatre camp, the summer school, and she has been involved in theatre ever since. Here in Boston, the Wheelock Family Theatre is accessible, is open; it is a good theatre. She started with WFT last year. She appeared in a TV commercial. She also tried to get into Zoom theatre. They called her back several times, and she passed the screening process up until the last group. She was not chosen in that final group.11

The theatre’s co-founders, Jody Steiner (hearing) and Janis Cole (Deaf), have extensive backgrounds in the theatre and care deeply for children. Steiner, the executive director, stood in front of a roomful of potential sponsors from federal agencies such as the Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). For the first two minutes Steiner spoke to them without talking, using American Sign Language. About halfway through, she observed that the audience began to shift in their seats, “I like to make everyone uncomfortable for a little while, so that you know how it feels to not be able to communicate.”12 Steiner is a professional American Sign Language interpreter with a strong background in theatre, who worked a few years as an actress at the National Theatre of the Deaf.

Janis Cole, a graduate of Rochester Institute of Technology, is a former actress with the National Theatre of the Deaf and a teacher of
the deaf. She had found time to organize and run the Deaf Youth Theatre while teaching American Sign Language, Deaf Culture and History, Deaf Literature, and American Sign Language Literature at Boston University in the Deaf Studies Department. Cole serves as a practicum supervisor for graduate students. She also interprets for deaf-blind clients in the Boston community and works as an American Sign Language consultant for the Boston Center for Deaf and hard-of-hearing Children. As a former actress and board member of the former Boston Theatre of the Deaf, she commented:

I was very sad when BTD folded. ... Someday, I hope we can bring back a professional Deaf Theatre to Boston.13

Cole left in the middle of her schooling to spend a year with the National Theatre of the Deaf. She returned to complete her social-work degree requirements.14 Cole said:

A crucial aspect of PAH! is the opportunity for students to learn from deaf adults who are especially articulate in ASL. Most deaf children come from families where parents and siblings do not sign, so their opportunities to develop language sophistication are limited. ASL is a language of its own with many nuances and subtleties. We’re very visually oriented people. The learning process is different. We use space, we use our bodies.15

Although only half of PAH! staffers are Deaf, all are theatre professionals fluent in American Sign Language. Among them are Patrick McCarthy, Deaf professor at Wheelock College in the Interpreter Training Program. He is an actor and ASL consultant for theatre interpreters across Boston. Katy Burns is an experienced teacher of deaf children and children with special needs at Horace Mann School for the Deaf. Adrian Blue is a Deaf playwright. He was guest artist who directed and designed the set for the play A Nice Place to Live. PAH! also hosted guest artists like Clayton Valli, an ASL poet; John Kovacs, a Deaf actor and the director of the Rathskellar Tour Company; Rosa Lee Gallimore, a Black-Deaf actress who runs her own company (The Rosa Lee
Show); and Mike Lamitola, a Deaf former actor and artistic director of the National Theatre of the Deaf.\textsuperscript{16}

PAH! receives strong support from numerous organizations, from schools for the deaf in the Boston area, and from local colleges that provide deaf interns as staff support. The organizations collaborating with PAH! Include the Comprehensive School-Age Program; D.E.A.F., Inc.; Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH); Massachusetts State Association of the Deaf (MSAD); and Northeastern University ASL Department.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1998 PAH! received national recognition for its exemplary programs in the areas of art and social service. It won the Coming Up Taller Award from the President’s Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.\textsuperscript{18} On October 7, 1998, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton presented the Coming Up Taller Award to Jody Steiner, Executive Director, and to Baranda Bacigalupo, a teen representative, at a ceremony in the White House.\textsuperscript{19} Bacigalupo said:

\begin{quote}
PAH! Changed my life. ... I used to be very closed and felt ashamed of myself. Now, after these three years, I have come out ready for anything! I am certain I will go to college--I will be successful!\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

The Coming Up Taller Award recognizes arts and humanities programs that celebrate the creativity of America’s young people. It provides them learning opportunities and chances to contribute to their communities.\textsuperscript{21} The award not only focused national attention on this organization but it also provided additional funding in support of its continued work. Each year only ten awards are presented to selected honorees.\textsuperscript{22}

Although PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre is based at the Wheelock Family Theatre, each year PAH! creates an original production and conducts a
public performance which is performed by the PAH! actors in American Sign Language, at the Wheelock Family Theatre.

**List of Plays and Workshops**

A few of the original productions performed by PAH! include *Bird of a Different Feather*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Legacy*, and *A Nice Place to Live*.

Ben Bahan, a Deaf professor of Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University, after learning different skills such as dancing, blocking, painting, acting, storytelling, and ASL poetry, adapted and directed *Bird of a Different Feather* to make it into a Deaf story. PAH! students studied the story for one year. They incorporated their own improvisations and ideas, thus gaining experience with Deaf story productions.

The College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, offers the After School Special program that runs one day a week. Some elementary school children from the Deaf Program are bussed after school to Holy Cross, where they paired with ASL students for theatre workshop activities. At the end of the workshop, the PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre group performed *Bird of a Different Feather* free to the public. It was a treat for the children to see the Deaf actors perform on stage.

*Legacy* is considered one of the group’s most ambitious projects, because it was a unique attempt to document the history of Deaf life in the area. In an effort to elicit stories that would be used for the production of the play, nineteen members of PAH! were bussed to the New England Home for the Deaf over the course of three months to interview the senior citizens about their past life experiences.
The New England Home for the Deaf has the following mission statement:

The mission of the New England Home for the Deaf is to provide communication, accessible housing, health care, social support and recreational activities for Deaf and Deaf-Blind people. Priority is given to those who are either born Deaf or deafened prior to the acquisition of language who, because of advanced age, economic, social and/or physical constraints will most benefit from the unique linguistics and cultural support offered through the New England Homes for the Deaf residential and community based programs.25

The Wheelock Family Theatre’s The Island Project--Martha’s Vineyard, by Jodie Steiner, producer, was staged between the beginning of September 2003 and June 2004. Martha’s Vineyard is an island situated in southeastern Massachusetts, off the southwest coast of Cape Cod. Settled in 1642, it was a whaling and fishing center in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and is now a popular resort area. In the early days, hereditary deafness was common on the island. The sign language used by the Deaf islanders was Martha’s Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL), which has roots in the sign language used in the Kent region of southern England.26 The inhabitants of Martha’s Vineyard called their sign “Chilmark Sign Language” after the village of Chilmark, where there was a good-sized Deaf Community. Chilmark Sign Language was then used in the Hartford School for the Deaf in Connecticut. Later, in Hartford, it was combined with French Sign Language and with the signs used by the Deaf Community in New York to form the basis of ASL.27

PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre helped preserve stories and enhance Deaf history through The Island Project. This multi-disciplinary program involved students, teachers, artists, and professionals, and was funded by the Peabody Foundation Massachusetts Cultural Council and VSA Arts of Massachusetts (formerly named Very Special Arts; VSA arts changed its name in 1999, eliminating the use of the word “special” to honor
the progress made by members of the disability community since the organization’s inception. Their goals are:

- to teach Deaf students about a time and place in the history of Deaf Culture where deafness was an everyday fact of life, when both Deaf and hearing people used sign language to communicate; contribute to Deaf student’s academic achievement by strengthening history/social studies skills; improve Deaf student’s self-awareness, self-expression, and self-confidence; broaden Deaf student’s horizons and aspirations through contact with Deaf role models; and provide opportunities for Deaf and hearing students to work together.

A Nice Place to Live was a new play by Adrian Blue, a Deaf playwright and director. The play was directed by his wife Catherine Rush, a hearing playwright. It is the resulting showpiece that has toured the Cape and Islands. It is based on the book *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on the Island of Martha’s Vineyard* by Dr. Nora Ellen Groce and Joan Poole Nash, the last family generation of Martha’s Islanders who uncovered this rich heritage on Martha’s Vineyard.

A Nice Place to Live recounts a late nineteenth-century time in the town of Chilmark on Martha’s Vineyard, when for almost three hundred years nearly one in four people had been born Deaf and everybody used a manual language that was unique to the island. Martha’s Vineyard Sign Language was used at church and at town meetings. Neighbors signed across fences, fishermen signed from boat to boat, farmers signed at market, and everyone visiting the town store signed the local gossip.

A Nice Place to Live tells the story of a hearing boy who moves to the island with his family in 1890. He falls in love with a young Deaf woman and must learn to understand a world where deafness is seen in an entirely different light than on the mainland. The production was performed simultaneously by signing actors and voice interpreting actors.

PAH! public productions are created and performed in American Sign Language, with interpreters providing translations in spoken
English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. It truly represents a theatre meeting
the needs of a diverse audience.

A Visual Language is a two-videotape package that resulted from
the collaboration between PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre and VSA Arts of
Massachusetts. The first videotape is the Legacy project in which
different generations of Deaf men and women tell their stories, and the
second videotape is Little Red Riding Hood. These videos are signed in
ASL and open-captioned.34

Participants and Audiences

In addition to creating and performing original productions, PAH!
has presented workshops and drama camps for area schools and interested
deaf youth. PAH! also has a touring company, PAH! Troopers, which is
composed of recent graduates. This group performs original pieces
celebrating Deaf Culture throughout the Boston region. The extent of
students’ participation ranges from one to four years.

The majority of PAH! students come from hearing families in which
there are no deaf siblings. Most of their families do not know sign
language. This program is available to deaf people who would not
otherwise have an easy access to training in the arts, due to
geographical location, disability, economics, and so on.35

For the production of A Nice Place to Live, the Wheelock Family
Theatre selected a team of highly qualified artists and teachers to
develop a ten-week curriculum based on a unique period of time in the
history of Martha’s Vineyard. Damon Timm, a sign-language interpreter,
actor, and teacher; Norma Tourangeau, a Deaf actress and a kindergarten
teacher at the Learning Center for Deaf Children; and Melanie Von
Bitten, a teacher and historian, were the staff. For ten weeks, seventy
students from the Horace Mann School for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing in Brighton, Massachusetts, and the Learning Center for Deaf Children in Framingham, Massachusetts, combined social studies and history with American Sign Language storytelling and poetry. During the April 2005 school vacation, nine of those students, cast in the play, traveled to Cape Cod and Martha’s Vineyard for staged readings at the Harwich Junior Theatre and the Vineyard Playhouse. Steiner commented:

To the people who lived there, deafness was never considered a disability...because everyone on the island knew sign language, from the postmaster to the deacon of the church.

On Monday, June 7, at the matinee performance, there were approximately 480 deaf and hard-of-hearing children from five state residential schools for the deaf (oral and sign language), but also children from mainstreamed schools and some hearing students from public schools. After the play, the cast panelists connected with the audience in an open forum that allowed school children to approach the actors who shared the same school background and exchange questions and ideas.

Kinds of Skills Taught

PAH! classes include the following: acting, African dance and drumming, theatre crafts, poetry, and storytelling. Students meet after school, twice a week, for ten months--the school year--at the Wheelock Family Theatre. This program has included up to forty participants that are generally eleven to seventeen years old. Their participation ranges from one to four years.

Although many of the students begin PAH! without much proficiency in signing, the lessons in acting, storytelling, and stage design are conducted entirely in American Sign Language. Instructors, half of whom
are Deaf (theatre professionals fluent in American Sign Language),
teach communication techniques and build students’ self-confidence.
Thus the students will develop skills and raised expectations of what
they can accomplish in life. PAH! Has created an environment where
students can be challenged, express themselves, and grow. In addition
to teaching the fundamentals of theatre including lighting, set
building, costuming, and performing, instructors also train the youths
in conflict resolution and behavior control. Understanding the
importance of their Deaf identity and self-respect is what drives PAH!
students to expand their horizons in the wider community. PAH!
participants interpret other productions, usher at performing-arts
centers, and audition for professional productions. Ultimately this
program has encouraged deaf youth to embrace American Sign Language and
pride in their Deaf Culture.38

Although PAH! receives a lot of support for this program from
parents, their largest financial and logistical challenge is finding
transportation for participants. The program directors must also handle
problems dealing with the Boston public school system and a chronic
lack of Deaf artists and staff members who are willing to work with
children for low pay.39

PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre is not just a children’s theatre, but a
place where students can learn about Deaf Culture and American Sign
Language. Students are provided with social interaction that is more
useful and less dangerous than the no-control street socialization that
our society tends to lean toward nowadays. In this safe environment,
they learn better communication skills as well as many different
aspects of the art of theatrics, which will help them in their future.
Students learn to take pride in their identity as Deaf people and are
given an opportunity to take risks and express themselves.40
Horace Mann middle school teacher Katy Burns accompanies the students to all the PAH! activities and strongly supports the program. "As willing as the students are to learn in the classroom," she says, "the advantages of having them learn from Deaf role models and to develop skills that go untapped in a classroom setting are phenomenal."41

The Legacy Project had a tremendous impact on the language skills of the deaf children who participated. It also provided them with a unique social experience in that they had contact with people two or three generations apart from them, who had a different style of signing or limited signing skills, as most of them were raised with the oral method.42

During the first five weeks of the project, students learned techniques for interviewing and video recording. About forty residents of the Home for the Deaf, some well into their eighties and nineties, answered students’ questions and contributed to building a collection of oral histories. During the next five weeks, students trained both at the New England Home for the Deaf and at the Wheelock Family Theatre. They built storytelling skills by watching Deaf elders sign their stories and then signing these stories themselves. The last five weeks were dedicated to mounting a production from the stories gathered at the New England Home for the Deaf. Five stories were chosen for inclusion in Legacy: a talk between a black child and an elderly deaf resident who had never met another deaf black person; a tale of injustice at a Connecticut sewing factory; the reunion of an immigrant daughter with her father at Ellis Island; social interaction at a Deaf Club; and an episode in which a deaf boy’s hearing parents take their son to a deaf school without telling him where he is going.
Participants underwent tedious rehearsals in the development of the final production, a process of building up communication skills and breaking down fears. More than three hundred members of the community attended the performance, including proud PAH! parents and a significant number of enthusiastic residents from the New England Home for the Deaf. The Legacy Program also benefited the senior Deaf citizens, who had the opportunity to socialize and to pass their knowledge to young generations by having their stories recorded.

Conversations with Actors and Participants

Jody Steiner, the executive director, said:

We, PAH!, wanted to see the children creating their own stories, using their own expressions, feelings, ideas and working with deaf or hearing adults who can sign. Together we create from the children’s experiences and go through the important process of developing the final product that will be performed for the parents and the community. The parents and the community generally respond in awe at what the children can do, and it is very empowering for the children.

Rosa Gallimore is a Deaf woman from a four-generation Deaf family. Her parents encouraged her and her siblings to be involved in theatre when they were little. Gallimore is guest artist in the summer drama at The Learning Center for Deaf Children in Framingham, near Boston. Gallimore said:

I support children’s theatre for sure. Not only does it help build their self-esteem, but it also helps them develop their language and creativity. Theatre improves their reading skills, because they have to memorize lines. They get to work in groups and learn how to work together. They learn directing skills, writing skills, and reading scripts. This really helps educate the deaf children. I support that.

Janis Cole, Deaf actress, said:

The Wheelock Family Theatre supported us in forming our own troupe with children from the school, to take on tour. We have a dual program and a dual philosophy with regard to Deaf and hard-of-hearing working together. Some of that stems from the
Bilingual-Bicultural philosophy. I teach Deaf Studies and Deaf Education in the graduate program at Boston University. Jody’s philosophy is Bilingual-Bicultural, meaning that children can read and write English and also know ASL. It is important for them to be adept in both cultures and to truly become Bilingual and Bicultural. They should not be immersed only in the Deaf World, because we are mainstreamed with the hearing society, and it would benefit them to learn from other cultures. Although we do primarily focus on the Deaf World.

Todd Czubek, a hearing teacher and CODA, the creative language director from The Magical Literacy Camp (TMLC) and teacher of language arts at Scranton School for the Deaf in Pennsylvania, said:

The Deaf Children’s Theatre gives them an opportunity to really analyze the language and to understand how powerful ASL is. It germinates the idea of using ASL to make a statement. ASL can be powerful, whether used for political statements, for fun, or for play. Theatre for both adults and children means to me that the impossible becomes possible. Theatre elicits ideas from one’s mind, thus releasing creativity. Once the kids understand that they can use ASL to express their creativity and their imagination, there is just something about the theatre that makes the impossible possible. It makes teaching possible. It also frees their emotions, causing them to cry, to laugh, and to feel many other emotions. It’s magic. Deaf children’s theatre is magic.

Elbert Joseph, a PAH! Deaf actor, proudly exclaimed:

PAH! has taught me so much about acting, techniques, directing, and teamwork. You have to leave your ego at the door and work together at Wheelock! I am determined to go to New York University and join their directors program. That’s it! I’m going to do it!

Summary

Rosa Gallimore has this to say about Deaf Children’s Theatre:

I support the idea of Deaf Children’s Theatre. Not only does it help them to develop their self-esteem, it also supports their language development, their reading and writing skills. It enhances their creative expression, teaches them to work in team. It teaches them directing skills and so on. All this is educational for deaf children. I support this idea.

What does Deaf Children’s Theatre mean? I think it is a theatre run by deaf children, their own theatre. They act, they bring their own creative ideas, they create an artistic image themselves. It means that deaf children are exposed to theatre and expose their theatre for the world to see.
“PAH!” is an American Sign Language (ASL) expression that means “Success!” or “Finally! We did it.” PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre has had many accomplishments in five years. The Deaf staff employees--Deaf and hearing, teachers and artists, dancers and professional actors--are skilled in American Sign Language and teach communication techniques, building participants’ personal and social strengths to develop skills applicable to everyday life.

PAH! students mostly come from the Boston region and from hearing families with no deaf relatives. Ninety-five percent of their families do not know sign language, and many students themselves begin the program with limited signing proficiency. However, they acquire more advanced ASL skills as they interact with Deaf adult language role models.

PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre proudly developed the Legacy project and The Island Project--A Nice Place to Live--by encouraging the use of drama as a vehicle for teaching history and recognizing the loss of oral history in the Deaf Community.

In addition, the Legacy project video production shows a series of documentary vignettes of the seniors’ lives. Stories include entering America through Ellis Island in 1926, working in textile factories during World War Two, Deaf-Club life, and attending residential schools for the deaf. The Island Project preserves Deaf stories and Deaf History by involving students, teachers, artists, and theatre professionals. Nine students were selected for a ten-week curriculum on the history of the Martha’s Vineyard community. They spent time on Martha’s Vineyard Island researching the project. The curriculum combines social studies and history with American Sign Language storytelling and poetry.
Damon Timm, a sign-language interpreter from New Hampshire who has been working with the deaf students participating in The Island Project, noted:

The idea of a whole town that knows sign language was hard for them to imagine, so we would do role-playing activities to make it a bit easier to understand.51

After the completion of The Island Project, in 2006, PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre has suspended its activity until further notice.
Endnotes for Chapter 9


4. Ibid.


8. Ibid.


11. Jerry Agte, deaf girl’s (Katy Agte) mother from Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


20. Ibid.


29. “A Nice Place to Live: A New Play by Catherine Rush and Adrian Blue about Martha’s Vineyard” (program), The Island Project and PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre (June 6, 2004).

31. Ibid.


33. “A Nice Place to Live: A New Play by Catherine Rush and Adrian Blue about Martha’s Vineyard” (program), The Island Project and PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, June 6, 2004.


39. Ibid., 5.


43. Ibid., 6.


45. Jody Steiner, co-director and founder of the Wheelock Family Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

46. Rosa Gallimore, acting and improvisation staff member with PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

47. Janis Cole, co-director and founder of PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

48. Todd Czubek, director and founder of The Magical Literacy Camp, Pittsburgh School for the Deaf, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.


50. Rosa Gallimore, acting and improvisation staff member with PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

During the 1960s, William Stokoe demonstrated that American Sign Language is itself a language. Thus American Sign Language (ASL) gained the status and academic credibility as spoken languages have. Furthermore, Ursula Bellugi has shown that the grammatical form of the ASL language changes when employed for poetry, drama, or any other language-related artistic domain. Together with Edward Klima, she has labeled “Art-Sign” the sign-language part of ASL that is not used in everyday communication processes, but used exclusively in poetry, storytelling, and other forms of artistic expression. In the 1980s Clayton Valli researched more in depth the structure of poetry in sign language, supported by his background in linguistics. The artistic forms of ASL were and still are pivotal to the transmission of the Deaf Culture’s core values and to the societal structure of the Deaf Community.

This Art-Sign originated in response to the need of deaf children in residential schools to entertain and socialize. Ever since, Art-Sign has had also the function of passing down knowledge pertaining to the Deaf World from generation to generation, and the function of the education of deaf children who could not receive this kind of knowledge in their own homes. Only in the last few decades, the technology of recording on videotape has been available so that people can record their own videotapes. Nowadays, Deaf people have a way to preserve their stories, creative visual art, political perspectives, and history for future generations.
When ASL was formally declared a language, deaf people realized that being Deaf meant only belonging to a minority who had been muted by political interests. In the following decade, Deaf people gained pride in their language and in their Culture. Deaf Theatre, which until then had been just a cultural survival tool, was regarded now as an institution on a par with hearing Theatre. Deaf people wanted the world to see and acknowledge this reality.

In the meantime the Civil rights movement was escalating in the hearing world. The Deaf Community realized that they are a minority, just like other minorities, and that if other minorities could have rights, so could the Deaf Community. The end of the Civil Rights movement was the beginning of a new era for deaf people: the Golden Age, or the Age of Access, under the auspices of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the law sanctioning the rights of deaf people in the larger frame of the right of people with disabilities.

The ADA mandated that deaf people have the right to equal access to information, education, entertainment, employment, and so on. And it specified ways the equal access should be provided. Among other things, this legislation opened hearing theatres to deaf people. But hearing theatres offered insight only into hearing culture, not specifically into Deaf Culture.

Access for deaf people to hearing performances can be provided in three ways: open or closed captioning, interpreting, or shadowing. The shadow-interpreted plays are better suited to deaf visual needs, but the process is more expensive and requires more work. For instance, care must be taken to assure a proper blocking of the movement on stage, to be sure that the Deaf cast participates in rehearsals with the hearing actors, and to see that both the actor and the respective shadow form a unit of expression on stage. Deaf people prefer shadowing to
interpreting or captioning, but most Deaf people feel “at home” in sign-language productions. Accessibility also means providing voice interpreting of sign-language performances for hearing people, particularly those who are studying ASL.

After the Civil Rights movement, with the understanding of Deaf Cultural identity came the understanding of the necessity of educating and initiating the young deaf generations. Even though deaf children are mostly born into hearing families, the Deaf Community cares deeply for their welfare and tries to provide them with Deaf role models.

Although Deaf Theatres started to flourish throughout the United States and wanted to expand their performances to include children’s plays, they had no control over the decisions of the hearing families who had deaf children or of the public schools who could have brought deaf children to the Deaf Theatre. In these conditions, Deaf Theatres found it financially impossible to provide educational support for deaf children.

The accessibility provided through captioning, interpreting, or shadowing is not suited for young deaf audiences in the case of standard plays that employ a linguistic level inaccessible to children in general. In the case of plays for children, even with captioning or interpreting or shadowing at a more child-appropriate linguistic level, the linguistic background of deaf children is so varied that it is hard to predict whether the deaf children will benefit from the theatrical experience. The only way that deaf children could arrive at an appreciation of theatre is for them to become involved in the theatrical experience at an early age, to be provided in advance with a simple script that would ease their entrance into the theatrical experience, and to become involved in the theatrical experience itself, so that their questions would be answered and clarified before they leave the
theatre. This would be a suitable educational way to expose deaf children to theatre and to language in a way that would strengthen and build their knowledge through continuous exposure and feedback.

Hearing people who initially worked in different professions in contact with deaf people, realized the need for educational activities suitable for deaf children. Based on the deaf children’s need for a strong visual communication process and a deaf-friendly environment, the best way to teach deaf children proved to be through theatre and creative drama activities with Art-Sign and ASL. Hearing people had the financial resources and the structural support to establish Deaf Children’s Theatre companies.

However, hearing people needed the innate knowledge and creativity of Deaf people to be able to provide the proper education for deaf children. So it came about that Deaf actors and teachers became role models for the young deaf generations.

In some cases, hearing people took on the responsibility of teaching deaf children themselves. Although they had a noble mission, they could only teach deaf children the way hearing culture perceives deaf people and deafness. This was not a passage for the children to enter the Deaf World but rather to become fit for the hearing world.

In the meantime, Deaf theatres started to lose the support of the Deaf Community because of the technological advances that allowed people to communicate from the comfort of their homes, and provided easy entertainment by the way of television stations. The new technology offering movies with closed captioning on DVD also had a negative influence on deaf people’s willingness to attend theatre performances.

Hearing theatres and Deaf theatres find it hard to make a profit by providing deaf people with accessible performances. Deaf theatres had no other choice than to function under the patronage of hearing
theatres, hoping to attract more hearing audiences, so as to be able to continue their operations.

Deaf Children’s Theatre had even fewer opportunities and less attention. If Deaf theatres were struggling to stay in business because of the scarcity of a deaf audience, what about trying to attract deaf children who depended on their hearing parents, or on their schools to be able to attend theatre performances? This was nearly impossible. In spite of the financial difficulties, however, the availability of state and federal grants made it possible for Deaf Children’s Theatre to come into existence.

The National Theatre of the Deaf (Hartford, Connecticut) had the initiative to diversify its activity by establishing the Little Theatre of the Deaf (LTD), dedicated to educating deaf children and also hearing children about Deaf Culture. They toured nationwide and internationally with the hope that deaf children would take the baton and become role models to represent Deaf Culture. The Little Theatre of the Deaf was born into the Deaf Culture and opened to the rest of the world. But it employed adult actors to perform for young audiences. Deaf children themselves did not participate as actors.

Another international Deaf Children’s Theatre is the International Center on Deafness and the Arts (ICODA, Chicago, Illinois). They are the first theatre to provide deaf children with the opportunity of developing language and creativity through acting on stage, dance, and the educational activities offered by the international Arts Festival. The children who start working with ICODA will feel at home throughout the program and will go back after graduation to get involved again with ICODA, only this time as role models for younger generations of deaf children. Hearing parents are also invited and learn how to best
communicate with their deaf children. The deaf children’s siblings are welcome in the program. ICODA is open to anyone who wants to be involved in their activities.

Imagination Stage (Bethesda, Maryland) offers deaf children the Deaf Access Program, coordinated by a hearing director working in team with a Deaf visual dramaturg and ASL coach. Deaf children participate in the multicultural productions offered by the Program to bring to deaf children the awareness of other countries, other people, other customs. The Deaf Access Program also invites Deaf actors to impart their knowledge and their Deaf experience and to bring deaf children closer to Deaf Culture. They have toured across the United States in an effort to reach more deaf children. The program also produced the “Dreams to Sign” videotape accompanied by the book with the same title as an educational tool and as a way to stimulate international awareness of Deaf Culture.

Illuminations Arts (Houston, Texas) is an organization that provides accessibility through interpreting and shadowing for plays produced by theatres in the Houston area. Illuminations Arts also provides Hand Held Tales, a program providing culturally diverse stories through Deaf storytelling with English voicing at various places throughout the area. The program is supposed to educate hearing children and adults about the beauty of ASL, and to provide deaf children with the Deaf experience of storytelling coming from Deaf role models. One unique type of performance brings on stage a deaf child to sign a story in sign language while the rest of the child’s hearing family provides the English voicing. In 2007 Illuminations Arts has suspended the Hand Held Tales activity until further notice.

The Seattle Children’s Theatre (Seattle, Washington) offered deaf children the Deaf Youth Drama Program, coordinated by its Deaf director. The Deaf Youth Drama program invited Deaf actors and Deaf teachers to
participate in the Deaf Kids’ Festival, Artist in Residence Program and in the Deaf Youth Summer Theatre camp. Due to recent funding cuts as a consequence of new legislation concerning education, the Deaf Youth Drama Program ceased its activity after the twenty-fourth Deaf Kids Drama Festival on June 14, 2007.

The Wheelock Family Theatre (Boston, Massachusetts) provides the most diversified range of accessibility options, including deaf-blind interpreting for theatrical performances in collaboration with the Interpreting Training Program at Northeastern University. They have also developed an information booklet about the provision of accessibility for deaf-blind persons. A unique Deaf Children’s Theatre group was developed in the Wheelock Family Theatre: the PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre. It is the most innovative educational Bilingual-Bicultural program, offering a wide variety of project themes for deaf children to learn from. It also emphasizes the necessity of bringing deaf children to the creative process and allowing them to express themselves. The PAH! staff works together with schoolteachers to develop the Drama Project in order to include theatre in Deaf Education and in the regular school curriculum. Deaf guest artists are regularly invited to teach, direct, create, and provide deaf children with Deaf role models. As of 2006, PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre has suspended its activity until further notice.

As can be seen, across the United States many different approaches have been successful in complementing and completing the education of deaf children through theatre and drama.

In competition with all the media entertainment choices, theatres manage to attract less and less audience. In general, there are not many children’s plays compared to the number of theatrical productions addressed to the adult public. And even less common is for theatres to
produce plays with children actors. Children’s theatre may be hence considered a “minority enterprise.” This means that the next generation is not trained to appreciate, first, children’s theatre, and naturally, later on, theatre in the larger sense of the concept.

Already we have experiences the Deaf Theatre dwindling due to lack of financial support and to diminishing support from the Deaf Community itself. Will Deaf Children’s Theatre companies suffer the same fate? Will there be any Deaf Children’s Theatre or Program in the school system? Is there any way to sustain the idea of training with theatre and drama, a very visual medium, to support deaf children’s appreciation for theatre as well as language acquisition process for both ASL and English?

These and other questions are critical for the future of Deaf Theatre and of deaf children’s education. Future research in the fields of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education could start from trying to answer these questions and to open avenues for implementing solutions. Deaf children deserve access to theatrical experiences, to arts in general, through their own Deaf cultural perspective and their own language, American Sign Language. They also deserve equal opportunities to access knowledge and to become successful individuals by observing Deaf role models in the theatre.
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APPENDIX 1
TIMELINE OF THE HISTORY OF DEAF THEATRE

Timeline of the History of Deaf Theatre in General

1860s - 1900s

ASL Storytelling was held at the Deaf bananas, the Deaf Club, the Residential School for the Deaf, and at social gatherings.
1874  - Men’s Literary Society at Gallaudet College, Washington, DC.
1890  - St. Ann Church for the Deaf, an active dramatic group by Thomas Gallaudet, pastor;
1891  - Men’s Saturday Night Dramatic Club, Gallaudet University, Washington, DC.
1895  - Women’s The Jollity Club, Gallaudet University, Washington, DC.

1920s

Vaudeville entertainment was performed at the National Association of the Deaf Conventions, at the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf bananas, at Deaf Clubs, and at the Residential School for the Deaf.

Emerson Romero, Granville Redmond participated in silent films.

Early 1930s

New “talkies” entered the silent film in 1929.
Middle 1930s

New York Hebrew Association of the Deaf.

1935 - Men and Women joined together the Silent Night Dramatic Club at Gallaudet College.

1937 - The Chicago Silent Dramatics Club.

1940s

1947 - The Philadelphia Theatre Guild of the Deaf was established in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Gallaudet College started the first Drama Theatre Club.

1950s


1960s

Drama groups prosper in the Deaf Community.

Dr. William Stokoe, the Father of ASL Linguistic Field published the book *A Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles*.

1965 - National Theatre of the Deaf, first professional touring company.

1967 - Gallaudet College approves Drama Theatre as a major.


1970s


1975 - Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf, Cleveland, Ohio, renamed in 1993 Cleveland Sign Stage Theatre (the first professional repertory Deaf theatre);

1976 - Spectrum: Focus on Deaf Artists, Austin, Texas.


1978 - Urban Arts Project in Deafness;

Massachusetts Theatre Group for Deaf Audience, Boston, Massachusetts;

Boston Theatre of the Deaf;

Florida Theatre of the Deaf, Tampa, Florida;

Callier Theatre of the Deaf, Dallas, Texas;

Pittsburgh Theatre of the Deaf, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania;

Hartford Thespians Theatre, Hartford, Connecticut;

Theatre of Silence, Bozeman, Montana.

1979 - New York Deaf Theatre, New York;

1980s


1982 - Deaf Bailiwick Artists (Hearing Theatre), Chicago, Illinois.
1986 - Hughes Memorial Theatre, Washington, DC.
1987 - Northern Sign Theatre, Salem, Oregon.

1990s

1991 - Deaf West Theatre, First Professional Deaf Theatre, Los Angeles, California;
SignRise Cultural Arts, Inc., Silver Spring, Maryland.
1996 - Deafywood, Sherman Oaks, California.
1997 - Deaf Drama Project, Seattle, Washington.

Defunct Deaf Theatre Groups

Chicago Theatre for the Deaf, Chicago, Illinois;
Dayton Community Theatre of the Deaf, Dayton, Florida;
LIGHTS ON! Deaf Theatre, Rochester, New York;
Minnesota Theatre of the Deaf, Minneapolis, Minnesota;
Musign Theatre Company, Washington, DC;
New Dominion Theatre of the Deaf, Richmond, Virginia;
New York Deaf Theatre, New York;
North Carolina Theatre of Gesture, Greensboro, North Carolina;
Sign of the Times Community Theatre Group, Springfield, Massachusetts;
Spectrum Deaf Theatre, Austin, Texas;
Theatre of Silence, Bozeman, Montana.
Timeline of the Deaf Children’s Theatre

1970s


1980s

1985 – Illuminations... Theatre with the Deaf, renamed Illuminations Arts, Houston, Texas.

1990s

1992 – PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts.

2000s

2005 – Deaf Austin Children’s Theatre (Deaf ACT), Austin, Texas.

Defunct Deaf Children’s Theatre Groups

APPENDIX 2

CHRONOLOGY OF THEATRICAL INTERPRETING ARTS

Timeline of the History of Theatrical Interpreting

1930s

1932 - Saturday Night Dramatic Club (at Gallaudet College) presented the first sign-language performance with an "interpreter" (a hearing actor placed offstage to voice the lines performed by signing actors).

1960s

1963 - Texas Society of Interpreters for the Deaf was formed.
1964 - Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), Inc. was formed at Ball State University.

1970s

1973 - Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504.
1973 - RID and NTD grant Performance Arts Specialist certifications to ten interpreters.
1977 - Development of shadow interpreting technique for theatrical performances, StageHands program and Debra Brenner, VSA Arts of Georgia, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia;
1979 - Theatre Development Fund, New York, the Theatre Access Project and The Julliard School (intensive training for theatrical sign-language interpreters).
1980s

1981 – Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities, Arvada, Colorado (shadow-interpreted musical *Godspell*).


1990s

APPENDIX 3
PRODUCTION HISTORY

National Theatre of the Deaf

1967  establishment in Waterford, Connecticut
1967-68  Experiment in Television
1967-68  The Man with His Heart in the Highlands
1967-68  The Tale of Kasane
1967-68  Tyger! Tyger and Other Burnings
1967-68  Gianni Schicchi
1967-68  On the Harmfulness of Tobacco
1968-69  The Critic
1968-69  The Love of Don Perlimplin and Belissa
1968-69  Blueprints
1969-70  Sganarelle
1969-70  Songs from Milk Wood
1970-71  Woyzeck
1970-71  Journeys
1971-72  My Third Eye
1972-73  Gilgamesh
1973-74  Optimism: The Misadventures of Candide
1973-74  A Child’s Christmas in Whales
1974-75  The Dybbuk
1974-75  Priscilla, Princess of Power
1975-76  Parade
1976-77  On the Harmfulness of Tobacco
1976-77  Four Saints in Three Acts
1976-77  Children’s Letters to God
1977-78  The Three Musketeers
1977-78  Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
1977-78  Who Knows One
1978-79  Volpone
1978-79  Quite Early One Morning
1979-80  Our Town
1979-80  The Wooden Boy
1980-81  The Iliad: Play by Play
1980-81  The Silken Tent
1981-82  The Ghost of Chastity Past
1981-82  Gilgamesh
1981-82  The Road to Cordoba
1981-82  Issa’s Treasure
1982-83  Parzival, From the Horse’s Mouth
1983-84  The Hero with a Thousand Faces
1983-84  A Child’s Christmas in Wales
1984-85  All the Way Home
1985-86  In a Grove
1985-86  Farewell, My Lovely
1986-87  The Heart is a Lonely Hunter
1986-87  Gift of the Magi
1987-88  The Dybbuk: Between Two Worlds
1987-88  A Child’s Christmas in Wales
1987-88  The Light Princess
1988-89  King of Hearts
1989-90  The Odyssey
1990-91  One More Spring
1990-91  Pilobolus
1991-92  Treasure Island
1992-93  Ophelia
1992-93  Farewell, My Lovely (in South Africa)
1992-93  In a Grove (in Venezuela)
1993-94  Under Milkwood
1994-95  An Italian Straw Hat
1996-97  Curiouser & Curiouser
1997-98  Peer Gynt
1998-99  Year of the Child
1999-00  The Christmas that Almost Wasn’t
1999-00  The Curse of Sleepy Hollow
2000 relocated in Hartford, Connecticut
2000-01  A Child’s Christmas in Wales
2000-01  The Curse of Sleepy Hollow
2001-02  Profile of a Deaf Peddler
2002-03  Oh, Figaro!
2003 production stopped due to finance embezzlement
2004 relocated to the campus of the American School for the Deaf, in West Hartford, Connecticut
2007-08 Beware the Brindlebeast

Little Theatre of the Deaf

1968 establishment
1968-69 Camera 3
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<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>Four Thurber Tales</td>
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<td>1982-83</td>
<td>Big Blue Marble</td>
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<td>1985-86</td>
<td>Race a Comet, Catch a Tale</td>
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<td>1992-93</td>
<td>Sports</td>
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<td>The Wonderful “O”</td>
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<td>Story Bag</td>
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<td>1996-97</td>
<td>America’s Wild, Wild Wits</td>
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<td>1996-97</td>
<td>Shakespeare Unmasked</td>
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<td>1998-99</td>
<td>World of Whys</td>
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<td>1998-99</td>
<td>Shakespeare Unmasked</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>Where in the World</td>
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<td>1999-00</td>
<td>Dragon Stories</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Rope Stories</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Giving Tree and Other Stories</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Poetry in Motion</td>
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<td>2004-05</td>
<td>Fingers Around the World, The Orient</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Fingers Around the World, South of the Border</td>
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<td>Fingers Around the World, Next Stop: Africa</td>
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**International Center on Deafness and the Arts**

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<td>1973</td>
<td>establishment in Northbrook, Illinois</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>Oliver!</td>
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<td>1998-99</td>
<td>The Odd Couple</td>
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<td>1998-99</td>
<td>Cinderella</td>
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<td>1999-00</td>
<td>Nunsense</td>
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<td>1999-00</td>
<td>Annie</td>
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<td>Rhythms</td>
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<td>1999-00</td>
<td>Crimes of the Heart</td>
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<td>The Velveteen Rabbit</td>
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<td>2000-01</td>
<td>Memories, a Revue and Celebration</td>
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<td>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</td>
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<td>2000-01</td>
<td>Scapino!</td>
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<td>2000-01</td>
<td>Visions</td>
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<td>Mother Goose / Return to Broadway</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Showbiz</td>
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<td>A Christmas Carol</td>
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<td>The Snow Queen</td>
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<td>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</td>
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<td>Emotions</td>
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<td>Annie Get Your Gun</td>
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<td>Nunsense 2 The Second Coming</td>
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<td>Peter Pan</td>
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<td>Momentum</td>
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<td>Pinocchio</td>
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<td>Charlie &amp; the Chocolate Factory: The Golden Ticket -</td>
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<td>CenterLight Theatre</td>
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<td>&quot;Sensation&quot; Icodance Company</td>
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<td>Spring Benefit - Icodance Company, Children’s Theatre,</td>
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<td>Traveling Hands Troupe, Story-N-Sign</td>
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<td>Camp Performance - International Creative Arts Camp</td>
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<td>Alice in Wonderland - CenterLight Family Theatre</td>
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<td>Holiday Fun - CenterLight Family Theatre</td>
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<td>2004-05</td>
<td>Unique BUT United - International Creative Arts Camp</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Hercules: A Star is Born - CenterLight Family Theatre</td>
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2005-06  Unique BUT United - International Creative Arts Camp
2006-07  Fall Gala & Bernard Bragg Award Ceremony - CenterLight
         Family Theatre, Traveling Hands Troupe, Story-N-Sign, Guest
         Performers
2006-07  Variety: Volume I - CenterLight Family Theatre
2006-07  Unique BUT United - International Creative Arts Camp

Imagination Stage

1979  establishment as Bethesda Academy of Performing Arts (BAPA), in Baltimore, Maryland.
1989  Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (summer camp)
1990  Summer Camp - Carnival
1991  Summer Camp - Carnival
1992  establishment of Deaf Access Company
1992-93  The Fisherman and His Wife (debut) - Deaf Access Company
1993  Once on This Island (summer camp)
1993-94  Rumpelstiltskin
1993-94  Aesop’s Fables
1994-95  The Sorcerer’s Apprentice
1994-95  Kid’s Clubhouse
1995-96  The Snow Queen
1995-96  Mother Goose in Rhyme and Sign
1996-97  Stone Soup and Other Stories
1996-97  Sneakers
1997-98  Mother Goose Mystery
1997-98  Coyote and the Circle of Tales
1998-99  Adventures of Chadwick the Crab
1998-99  Dragons: Travels Through the Far East
1999-00  
Tales from Japan: Parts I and II

2001  
Bethesda Academy of Performing Arts is renamed Imagination Stage

2001-02  
The Magic Babushka and Other Russian Tales

2001-02  
The Party in the Sky and Other Tales from Brazil

2002-03  
Pinocchio Commedia

2003-04  
India: Tales from India

2004-05  
Mexico: The Magical Piñata

2005-06  
Jewish Culture: Capture the Moon – Deaf Access Company

2006-07  
Ireland: Journey to the World’s Edge: A Folktale Told in the Irish Tradition

Illuminations Arts

1984  
establishment in Houston, Texas.

1984  
Access to the Handicapped (workshop) – at the Thirty-seventh Annual Southwest Theatre Conference, Houston, Texas

1984  
Outreach – Houston Association of the Deaf – sponsored by HAD Women’s Club, Affiliate Artists, Houston Opera Guild, Texas Opera Theatre and HCIL

1984  
Intermediate Shadowing (workshop) – Texas Opera Theatre

1984-85  
Talking With (opening reception with Jane Martin) – Stages Repertory Theatre

1984-85  
La Traviatta (first shadowed opera) – Texas Opera Theatre

1985  
Introduction to Shadowing (workshop) – El Paso, Texas

1984-85  
La Traviatta (first shadowed tour – Lafayette LA, El Paso and San Antonio TX) – Texas Opera Theatre

1984-85  
Outreach – Romeo and Juliet / Taming of the Shrew / A Midsummer Night’s Dream – Shakespeare Globe Theatre, University of Houston

1984-85  
Del Mar Stadium, Houston / Opera Informance (shadowed performance) / Shakespeare Shadowed Performance – Outreach, Very Special Arts Day
1984-85  *Shakespeare Outreach* (shadowed performance) - Aldine High School

1984-85  *Shakespeare Outreach* (shadowed performance) - University of Houston

1985  Convention - Texas Association of the Deaf - Austin, Texas

1985  Introduction to Shadowing / Intermediate Shadowing (workshop) - Houston Community College

1985-86  *Romeo and Juliet* (excerpt) - in *That’s Entertainment*, Wortham Theatre

1985-86  *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (opening Gala of Heinen Theatre) - Houston Community College

1985-86  *Peter and the Wolf* - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston

1986-87  *Who’s Who?* (original piece of Deaf heroes, conceived by deaf people in Houston) - Deaf Awareness Week, Astroworld, Texas

1986  Theatre in Sign Language (workshop)

1986-87  *Big Bad Wolf and the Three Little Pigs* - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston

1987  Renaissance Festival, Houston, Texas

1987-88  *Quilters* (first Sign Language production) - Heinen Theatre, Houston Community College

1987-88  *Myrtle* - A.D. Players

1987-88  *Superboy* (musical) - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston

1988  Renaissance Festival, Houston, Texas

1988-89  *Comedy of Errors* (Sign Language play) - Shakespeare Outreach Cast, Texas Society of Interpreters for the Deaf Convention, Galveston, Texas

1989  Shadowing (workshop), TSID Convention at Galveston, Texas

1988-89  *Jack and the Giant from Planet X* - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston

1989  Deaf Awareness Week, hosted by Illuminations, Houston, Texas

1989-90  Main Street Festival, La Porte, Texas

1989  Renaissance Festival, Houston, Texas
1990  You and Your Shadow (workshop) – Illuminations and Shakespeare Outreach, Texas Educational Theatre Convention, hosted by HCCS

1989-90  Artwork (featuring Illuminations and Shakespeare Outreach cast), Access Houston with Warner Cable’s Channel 10

1989-90  Rapunzel – Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston

1990  Rapunzel / Shadowing (workshop) – Statewide Teacher Conference for the Deaf in Houston, Texas

1990-91  Assorted Scenes – CASA/Children’s Festival, George R. Brown Convention, Houston, Texas

1990-91  An Evening with Clayton Valli – A.D. Players

1990-91  Narnia – A.D. Players

1991-92  The Woman Who Knew the Language of Animals – Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston

1991-92  Assorted Scenes – Second CASA/Children’s Festival

1991  Shadow Interpreting and Signing Music (workshop) – performance given by Lamar University workshop participants

1991  Renaissance Festival, Houston, Texas

1991-92  The Velveteen Rabbit – Children’s Museum “Backyard Extravaganza”

1991  Celebrating the Arts Showcase

1991-92  A Variety Revue (Mardi Gras celebration), hosted by Bay Area Deaf Club

1991-92  The Gin Game – Theatre Suburbia

1991-92  Yushi and the Thunder Dragon – Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston


1992  Clayton Valli (workshop / performance) – Valli was not able to attend for health reasons, but the reception and performance were still held in his honor

1992  Deaf Awareness Week celebration

1992-93  Deaf World, First Annual Statewide Substance Abuse Conference

1992-93  The Diary of Adam and Eve Leguture – A.D. Players Theatre
1992-93  Western Style Play / Celebration
1993  Clayton Valli (workshop)
1992-93  Assorted Scenes - Child of Advocates, Inc. Festival
1992-93  Deaf Can Do! - Disability Day, Houston Community College
1992-93  The Magic Machine - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston
1993-94  ASL Show - Deaf Awareness Month
1993  Gill Eastman (workshop / performance)
1993  Shadowing (workshop) - Lamar University
1993-94  Deaf Community Reception / performance Night - Second Drug Conference/HCCS, Westchester campus
1993-94  Cinderella - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston
1995  American Deaf Culture and Deaf Entertainers - (workshop / storytelling), Deaf Awareness Day
1994-95  The Giving Tree / Thank You (skit) - 50th Anniversary of VGS, Inc.
1994-95  Addiction and Hope (written by Deaf cast) / Community Night with Miss America, Heather Whitestone - 1995 National Substance Abuse Prevention Conference for the Deaf/HH
1995-96  The Snow Queen - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston
1995-96  Cats - CARRS, retirement party for Charles G. McCarthy
1995-96  The Tree that Grew Human - Express Theatre, Children’s Museum of Houston
1996-97  Puss 'n Boots - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston
1996-97  Cats / The Giving Tree - Deaf Awareness Banquet Award, Houston Deaf Caucus
1996-97  Pobre Pablo’s Wondrous Wishes - Express Theatre, Children’s Museum of Houston
1996-97  Pobre Pablo’s Wondrous Wishes - first school tour, T.H. Rogers
1996-97  Deaf Way Festival (scene performance with Brian Kilpatrick) - Texas Deaf Caucus, Leaky, Texas
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<td><em>Pobre Pablo’s Wondrous Wishes</em> - High School for the Visual and Performing Arts</td>
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<td>Founder’s Dinner - Metropolitan Multi-Service Center</td>
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<td><em>The Yellow Boat</em> - Express Theatre (DiverseWorks)</td>
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<td><em>A Christmas Carol</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1996-97</td>
<td><em>The Ghost of La Llorona</em> - Express Theatre, Children’s Museum of Houston</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Children’s Theatre Festival</em> - Goldilocks and the Three Bears - University of Houston</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>American Deaf Culture and Deaf Entertainers / ASL Storytelling (workshop) - University of St. Thomas</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Death of a Salesman</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Bella Sfortuna</em> - Express Theatre, Children’s Museum of Houston</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>A Christmas Carol</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Angel Street</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Having Our Say</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Seven Guitars</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td><em>Hydriotaphia</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>El Caballito of Seven Colors</em> - Express Theatre, Children’s Museum of Houston</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Noises Off</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Spider’s Web</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Various Scenes</em> - Disability Arts Festival, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center</td>
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<td>1997-98</td>
<td><em>Sherlock’s Last Case</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>1998-99</td>
<td><em>Winnie the Pooh</em> - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston</td>
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<td>1998-99</td>
<td>Optica Christmas Kick-off Party</td>
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<td>1998-99</td>
<td><em>A Christmas Carol</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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1998-99  The Beauty Queen of Leenane (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre
1998-99  Sweet Nothing in My Ear (auditions)
1999     First ASL Kid’s Camp
1999-00  Hansel and Gretel (shadowed performance) - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston
1999-00  Sweet Nothing in My Ear (excerpt) - Theatre District Open House
1999     Optica ASL Classes (Media, ASL Acting, Stage Craft)
1999-00  A Christmas Carol (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre
1999-00  Mother Goose Stories - First ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
1999-00  Wit (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre
1999-00  Aesop’s Fables - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
1999-00  Hans Christian Andersen Stories - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
1999-00  Arnold Lobel Stories - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
1999-00  Shel Silverstein Stories - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
1999-00  Grimm’s Fairy Tales - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
1999-00  Little Hands Theatre Activity - Optica Second ASL Summer Camp, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
1999-00  Little Hands (performance) - Optica Second ASL Summer Camp, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
2000-01  Magic Journey (shadowed performance) - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston
2000     Optica Fall Classes (ASL Storytelling, Media) - Metropolitan Multi-Service Center
2000-01  Ear News - Optica, First Deaf Talk Show, Houston Media Source
2000-01  student competition - Career Day at Southwest Deaf Festival, Trade Show II
2000-01  Gin Game (ASL performance) - Southwest Deaf Festival, Trade Show II

2000-01  A Midsummer Night’s Dream (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre

2000-01  Diverse Nations (storytelling) - Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day

2000-01  Ear News - Optica Talk Show, Houston Media Source

2000-01  The Magic Pasta Pot - Optica Classes, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

2000-01  A Christmas Carol (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre

2000-01  Optica Spring Classes (ASL Storytelling, Media)- Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

2000-01  Lucy Dove - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

2000-01  Equus (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre

2000-01  African American Tales - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day

2000-01  Illuminations Day - Houston Media Source

2000-01  African American Tales - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

2000-01  Ear News - Optica Talk Show, Houston Media Source

2000-01  A Flea in Her Ear (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre

2000-01  Tricia Tusa Stories - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

2000-01  Hands On: ASL Storytelling - Optica student showcase, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

2000-01  Favorite Children’s Stories - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day

2000-01  First Annual Mother/Daughter Storytelling Celebration - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

2000-01  Dinner with Friends (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre

2001  Invisible Hands’ Wild Zappers / Ear News (episode) - (workshop / performance) - co-produced with North Harris College Theatre, Houston, Texas
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>Classic Fairy Tales - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center</td>
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<td>2000-01</td>
<td>World-Wide Tales - ASL Children’s Story Hour, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center</td>
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<td>2000-01</td>
<td>Little Hands Theatre Activity - Optica Third (and last) ASL Summer Camp</td>
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<td>2000-01</td>
<td>Hands Can Too! (final performance) - Little Hands Theatre Activity, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>The Woman in Black (theatrical interpreting)</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Texas Legends &amp; Greek Myths - Hand Held Tales (formerly ASL Children’s Story Hour), Immanuel Temple</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Ear News, Filmmaker Anne Marie Bryant - Optica Deaf Talk Show</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Deaf Filmmaker Festival - first in the US, Aurora Picture Show</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Texas Legends &amp; Greek Myths - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>The Glass Menagerie (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Scary Stories - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Art (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Cultural Celebrations - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Cultural Celebrations - Hand Held Tales, Children’s Museum of Houston</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Interpretations: A Language of Loss by Raymond Luczak (Sign Language production) - an Illuminations world premiere production at Metropolitan Multi-Service Center</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>First Annual Family Fun - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>Cultural Celebrations - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>A Christmas Carol (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Today’s Favorites - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Jitney (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>African American Tales - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Legends of Wildflowers - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>Legends of Wildflowers - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>Second Annual Mother/Daughter Celebration - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Trans-Atlantic Tales - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Trans-Atlantic Tales - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Gumbo Teller (storytelling festival) - A Tiger’s Tale Storytelling Festival, Atrium 10 Tower</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Talk to the Animals - Hand Held Tales, Children’s Museum of Houston</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Sleeping Beauty (shadowed performance) - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>World-Wide Tales - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Diverse Tales - first school tour, Hand Held Tales, T.H. Rogers school</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Traditional American Tales - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Diverse Tales - Hand Held Tales, Houston Federal Executive Board, Hispanic / Disability Awareness Day</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Traditional American Tales - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>The General from America (theatrical interpreting)</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Second Annual Family Fun - Hand Held Tales, Children’s Museum of Houston</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Diverse Tales - Hand Held Tales, IBM Diversity Day</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Tales of Life and Death - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Diverse Tales - Hand Held Tales, University of Houston Diversity Festival</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>Festivals of Lights</em> - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>Festivals of Lights</em> - Hand Held Tales, Children’s Museum of Houston</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>A Christmas Carol</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td><em>Today’s Favorites</em> - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td><em>Diverse Tales</em> - Hand Held Tales, North Harris College, Show of Hands</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>African American Tales</em> - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>Diverse Tales</em> - first all hearing school tour, Hand Held Tales, Post Oak school</td>
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<td><em>Wildflower Tales</em> - Hand Held Tales, Central Market</td>
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<td><em>Wildflower Tales</em> - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>Diverse Tales</em> - first out-of-town tour, Hand Held Tales, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>Diverse Tales</em> - Hand Held Tales, Texas storytelling Festival, Denton, Texas</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td><em>You Can’t Take It with You</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>Third Annual Mother/Daughter Celebration - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td><em>The Trip to Bountiful</em> (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td><em>Winnie the Pooh</em> (shadowed performance) - Interactive Theatre Co.</td>
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<td><em>Tales of Mexico</em> - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td><em>Diverse Tales</em> (workshop / performance) - Hand Held Tales, A Tiger’s Tale Storytelling Festival</td>
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<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Big ASL Event (introduction) - Hand Held Tales, Knights of Columbus</td>
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<td><em>Animal Tales</em> - Hand Held Tales, Katy Branch Library</td>
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<td>Once Upon a Time... / Mastering the Art in ASL (workshop) - Hand Held Tales, UMCD Conference, Dallas, Texas</td>
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<td>Magic Theatre (shadowed performance) - Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston</td>
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<td>Diverse Tales - Hand Held Tales, Conroe RDSPD Inservice</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Tales of Mexico - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>Diverse Tales - Hand Held Tales, T.H. Rogers school</td>
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<td>Scary Stories - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>American Ghost Stories - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Sherlock Holmes (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>Third Annual Family Fun - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Stories to Be Thankful For (pilot program) - Hand Held Tales, First Colony Middle School, Sugarland, Texas</td>
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<td>Tellebration! (interpreted storytelling) - Hand Held Tales, Houston Storytellers Guild, Houston Baptist University Mabee Theatre</td>
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<td>Love in My Veins - Illuminations Arts world premiere, Talento Bilingue de Houston</td>
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<td>Fiesta Navideña (theatrical interpreting) - Hand Held Tales, Dionysus Theatre, Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>Festivals of Light - Hand Held Tales, First Colony Middle School, Sugarland, Texas</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Festivals of Light - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>American Festive Traditions - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>A Christmas Carol (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>Worldwide Tales - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>African American Tales - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Mardi Gras Stories - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day</td>
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<td>African American Tales - Hand Held Tales, First Colony Middle School, Sugarland, Texas</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Mastering the Art in ASL (workshop) - Houston Community College, Interpreter Training Program</td>
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<td>Today’s Favorites - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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2003-04  *Spring-y Stories* - Hand Held Tales, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Family Day

2004  Texas Storytelling Festival (workshop / performance) - Hand Held Tales, Denton, Texas

2003-04  *Eggstra Special Stories* - Hand Held Tales, Children’s Museum of Houston

2003-04  Fourth Annual Mother/Daughter Celebration - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2003-04  Second Annual Ladies Garden Tea Fundraiser – Beebout/Skeehan Home

2003-04  Second Annual Men’s Night Out Fundraiser – Beebout/Skeehan Home


2003-04  *Wildflower Legends* - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2003-04  *Legends of Texas Wildflowers* - Hand Held Tales, First Colony Middle School, Sugarland, Texas

2003-04  *Diverse Tales* - Hand Held Tales, Deaf/Hoh Awareness Day, Astroworld, Texas

2003-04  *Diverse Tales* - Hand Held Tales, ASL Club Party, Alief Taylor High School

2003-04  *Diverse Tales* - Hand Held Tales, Sugarland Public Library

2003-04  *Diverse Tales* - Hand Held Tales, A Tiger’s Tale Storytelling Festival, Encore Theatre

2003-04  *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (theatrical interpreting) – Alley Theatre

2003-04  *Diverse Tales* - Hand Held Tales, Pasadena Central Library

2003-04  *Aesop’s Fables* (shadowed performance) – Children’s Theatre Festival, University of Houston

2003-04  ASL/Deaf Culture Class (preparation for *Big River*) – Theatre Under The Stars

2003-04  The Broadway Musical as a Moral Compass (panel discussion – *Big River*) – Ensemble Theatre

2003-04  Big River (shadowed performance) – Off-Off Broadway Touring Play, Miller Outdoor Theatre, Houston, Texas

2004-05  I Do! I Do! (shadowed performance) – A.D. Players, Grace Theatre

2004-05  Grand Story Fest (interpreted storytelling) – 1904 Grand Opera House, Galveston, Texas

2004-05  Tales of Mexico – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004  Handspeak: Celebrating 20 Years of Illuminations

2004-05  Scary stories – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004-05  Leading Ladies (theatrical interpreting) – Alley Theatre

2004-05  Fourth Annual Family Run – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004-05  Festivals of Light – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004-05  A Christmas Carol (theatrical interpreting) – Alley Theatre

2004-05  Worldwide Tales – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004-05  African American Tales – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004-05  Spring-y Stories – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004-05  Fifth Annual Mother/Daughter Celebration – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004-05  The Wind in the Willows (shadowed performance) – A.D. Players

2004-05  The Underpants (theatrical interpreting) – Alley Theatre

2004-05  Traditional American Tales – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2004-05  Steel Magnolias (theatrical interpreting) – Alley Theatre

2005-06  Signs & Stories – Hand Held Tales, AstroWorld

2005-06  Signs & Stories – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2005-06  Scary Stories – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2005-06  5th Annual Family Fun – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2005-06  Festivals of Light – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2005-06  Tales of the Orient – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books

2005-06  African American Tales – Hand Held Tales, Borders Books
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Native American Tales - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>Traditional American Tales - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Tales of Mexico - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Be My Baby (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>Align (shadow interpreting) - A.D. Players, Grace Theatre</td>
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<td>Born Yesterday (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>The Miser (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>Witness for the Prosecution (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>Get on Stage! (theatrical interpreting workshop, part 1) - Metropolitan Multi-Service Center</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Get on Stage Encore! (theatrical interpreting workshop, part 2) - Metropolitan Multi-Service Center</td>
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<td>Thrills, Chills, Giggles &amp; Goosebumps - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>Myths &amp; Monsters - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>Around the World in Holidays - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>Fairies, elves &amp; Princesses - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>March to Freedom - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>Luck 'O' the Irish - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>April Showers Bring May Flowers - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>Nightie, Night - Hand Held Tales, Borders Books</td>
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<td>2006-07</td>
<td>A Christmas Carol (theatrical interpreting) - Alley Theatre</td>
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<td>2006-07</td>
<td>The Gingerbread Man (shadow interpreting) - Heinen Theatre, Houston community College, central Campus</td>
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<td>2006-07</td>
<td>Amahl &amp; the Night Visitors (sign language production) - in partnership with Sandra Organ Dance Company</td>
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<td>Where the Red Fern Grows (shadow interpreting) - A.D. Players, Miller Theatre - Cancelled</td>
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2006-07  *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (theatrical interpreting) – Theatre Under The Stars, Hobby Center - cancelled

2006-07  *To Kill a Mockingbird* (theatrical interpreting) – Alley Theatre - cancelled

2006-07  *Terms of endearment* (theatrical interpreting, world premiere) – Alley Theatre

2006-07  *Treasure Island* (theatrical interpreting, world premiere) – Alley Theatre - cancelled

2006-07  *A Raisin in the Sun* (theatrical interpreting) – The Ensemble Theatre

2006-07  *The King's New Robes* (shadow interpreting) – Express Children's Theatre, Miller Outdoor Theatre

2006-07  *Get on Stage 2!* (theatrical interpreting workshop, part 3) – Metropolitan Multi-Service Center

2006-07  *ABC’s & 123’s of Storytelling* (storytelling workshop) – Metropolitan Multi-Service Center


2007  Illuminations Arts has reduced its activity for the season. Hand Held Tales activity has been suspended until further notice.

**Seattle Children’s Theatre**

1993  establishment in Seattle, Washington

2002-03  *Our Town*

2003  Fourteenth Deaf Kids Drama Festival

2002-03  *The Outsiders*

2002-03  *Go, Dog. Go!*

2002-03  *Shakespeare Stealer*

2003  Fifteenth Deaf Kids Drama Festival

2003-04  *West Side Story*

2004  Sixteenth Deaf Kids Drama Festival

2003-04  *Our Only May Amelia*
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>The Big Friendly Giant</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Nicky Somewhere Else</td>
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<td>2004-05</td>
<td>The Three Musketeers</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Nineteenth Deaf Kids Drama Festival</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Scapin</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>The Crucible</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Twenty-fourth Deaf Kids Drama Festival</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Deaf Youth Drama Program discontinued</td>
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**PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>establishment in Boston, Massachusetts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>Bird of a Different Feather</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994-99</td>
<td>Legacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Trumpet of the Swan</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>The Island Project, A Nice Place to Live</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre has suspended its activity until further notice.</td>
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The History of Theatre for Deaf Children in the United States

I. Deaf Children’s Theatre: Beginnings and Organization

1. How would you define Deaf Children’s Theatre?

2. In what month, day and year was your Deaf Children’s Theatre group set up?

3. Approximately how many deaf adults and deaf children have participated in your Deaf Children’s Theatre as actors/actresses? As workshop participants?

4. Did the actors/actresses earn money for their performances? Did they stay longer when they were paid? Or was their work all-volunteer?

5. How many years has it been in existence? Was it active each year? Why or why not?

6. If it dissolved during a year, give the reasons why?

7. What was it first named? Was the name changed? Why?

8. In what city and state was it set up?

9. Was it set up in a school, church, and public theatre? Other?

10. Who was the leader who brought up the idea to set up the Deaf Children’s Theatre group? Was the leader himself/herself experienced with theatre? If so, how much? Was he/she an actor/actress in college? In deaf community theatre? Were they children of deaf parents? From residential schools or mainstream schools?
11. Why was the deaf children’s theatre group set up? Was it because of parents request? School request? Deaf community request? Individual deaf persons’ request? Request of hearing theatre groups for adults? Hearing theatre groups for hearing?

12. Who is the administrator of your deaf children theatre? Is there a board? Who is on the board?

13. Do you have copies of memos, brochures, playbills, minutes that I can copy?

14. Do you have copy of the rationale or the proposal that was written to set up your Deaf Children’s Theatre?

15. How do you get your funding? Do you have special grant money? A private donor? Do you have to host fundraisers for your Deaf Children’s Theatre?

16. Do you have an advisory board? Who is on the board? How many members of the advisory board are Deaf and how many are hearing?

17. Did the Deaf Children’s Theatre group emerge from adult Hearing theatre group? Or Deaf theatre group? Or Hearing children theatre group? Explain its origins.

18. What is the primary purpose of your Deaf Children’s Group? To entertain? To spread Deaf Culture, to teach hearing people about deaf people and deaf culture? To make hearing theatre accessible to deaf people by adding shadowing or sign language translators? Actor interpreters?
II. Lists of Plays and Workshops

1. Please provide lists of all workshops and plays given with the full title and dates. (Can be taken from playbills if you have copies.)

2. List of all actors/actresses in plays (if possible). How many are deaf? How many are hearing? How many are CODAS, or SODAS.

III. Deaf Children’s Theatre: Participants and Audience

1. Is your Deaf Children’s Theatre primarily for deaf audiences or hearing audiences or both?

2. Do you have deaf children actors/actresses in your Deaf Children’s Theatre or only adults?

3. Do the deaf children who participate in Deaf Children’s Theatre, have to pay to participate?

4. Is your child audience primarily from mainstream programs or residential schools?

5. Who pays the actors/actresses?

6. Do you offer theatre workshops for deaf children? If so, how often? Each month, each year, each summer? After school or on the weekend?

7. Are the deaf children who are involved in the workshop also involved as participants in the plays?

8. Besides the acting, do the deaf children get involved with costumes, makeup, and construction of sets?

9. After the deaf children are involved in the first workshop, can they come back again and be involved in more plays?

10. Are their schools involved in coming to the plays the deaf children participate in with the Deaf theatre company or is this separate from school activities?
IV. Kinds of skills taught


2. How often do deaf children (or hearing children) have to come to rehearsals for a typical play? Do their parents come to supervise them?

3. Is transportation an issue for some of the deaf child actors?

4. Are rehearsals after school hours? And/on weekends?

Directory of the Six Deaf Children’s Theatre Groups

1. Little Theatre of the Deaf
   Becky Beekman
   Tour Department
   139 North Main Street
   West Hartford, CT 06107
   Phone: 860-236-4193
   Fax: 860-236-4163
   www.NTD.org
2. International Center on Deafness and the Arts (ICODA)
   Patricia Scherer, Founder
   Patricia A. Building
   3444 Dundee Road
   Northbrook, Illinois 60062
   847-559-0110
   icoda@aol.com

3. Imagination Stage
   Ms. Lisa Agogliati, Director of Deaf Access Program
   7300 Whittier Blvd
   Baltimore, Maryland 20817
   www.imaginestation.org

4. Illuminations Arts
   Mr. Jim Lawrence, President of the Board of Trustees
   3201 Allen Parkway, Ste. 150
   Houston, TX 77019
   713-529-6909 VP
   713-529-6910 Voice

5. Seattle Children’s Theatre, Deaf Youth Drama Program
   Defunct as of June 2007.
   Last known coordinates:
   Billy Seago
   201 Thomas Street
   Seattle, Washington 98109
   206-443-0807
   dydp@sct.org
6. PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre

Wheelock Family Theatre

Jody Steiner

180 The Riverway

Boston, Massachusetts 02215

617-566-7369 x2147

jsteiner@wheelock.edu
The following interview was recorded in Janice Cole’s house, in Boston, Massachusetts, while Rosa Lee Gallimore was a guest artist for The Magical Literacy Camp.¹

Rosa Gallimore: Hi. My name is Rosa Gallimore, I am from Seattle.

Brian: What is your background in theatre? How did you get formally involved in theatre?

Rosa: I went to Indiana School for the Deaf. My home is in Indiana, but I traveled across the United States. Now I am in Seattle. How I got involved in Performing Arts? In my childhood I have always been involved in theatre. I started a small theatre troupe in Indiana and moved around afterwards. But formally involved?

Brian: What do you mean by small theatre troupe?

Rosa: In church... I was in an acting group at our church. It was not a community theatre, but a small group in church. We played different plays with Native Americans, Pilgrim, we played Thanksgiving stories, and so on. My parents are Deaf. In fact I am from a four-generation Deaf family. Because my parents are artists themselves, they encouraged me to get into Arts. I haven’t searched an artistic avenue in particular. I just got into the drama classes in my school. That school offers a variety of creative theatre classes: traditional, comedy, etc. All my class was “addicted” to theatre. Other children are not so consistent in their choices. They try something for a while, then pass on to something else. In my senior high-school year, we formed a group named PAH! Six. In fact the name was initially Story West Six, and then changed to PAH! to better represent the Deaf. We toured in Indiana, Illinois, Ohio. We went to Gallaudet, where we performed for a whole week. Touring was our preference. After I graduated from high-school, I went to college at NTID and joined their theatre. After that, I joined other theatres, until finally I established my own theatre, along the same lines as Rathskellar. Our performances incorporated humor, dance, sign and poetry. This went on for three or four years. Other than that, I worked with Janice Cole and I worked in camps for two years. This is my theatrical background.

Brian: Did you see at NTID deaf students coming from mainstreamed schools who have improved their signing skills through theatre?

Rosa: Oh, yes. At NTID there were many students coming from mainstream schools. We had established our own theatre troupe and many wanted to join us. Some quit, some stayed, but the ones who
continued with us developed their signing skills. We brought in the open their inner skills. We pushed them to better their skills, we exposed them to theatre. They became more creative, more expressive, and they became proud of who they were. Theatre also helped them better their academic achievements and make social connections.

Brian: Do you have experience in directing plays?

Rosa: I directed a play for the North West Deaf Theatre (NWD) in Oregon. It has been active for thirty years and is still active. It had suspended its activity for one year, when Hank died, in July. Hank was the founder of North West Deaf Theatre. And the Theatre wanted to honor him with a period of silence till fall. They were in discussions to find a theatre director. The stage production that I directed was nice. But I just recently started working with them. We'll see how this develops.

Brian: As an actress, do you prefer to work with community theatres or with professional theatres?

Rosa: Community theatre, not professional theatre. I believe that community theatre is more suitable for the Deaf World. Professional theatres are colder, less sensitive to the Deaf perspective. Deaf people want to feel that the theatre belongs to them, is part of them, is something that brings them together and that they enjoy. I strongly believe in community theatre.

Brian: Have you seen interpreted performances?

Rosa: Interpreted performances? Yes, I have seen. Deaf West Summer School is held every year. I have attended their first summer school and watched an interpreted performance.

Brian: What do you think about these?

Rosa: Interpreted plays are not my cup of tea. There is only one interpreter for many characters. I want to connect with the characters. For me, the expressiveness of the actors is more important. During an interpreted performance I have to shift visual focus from the actors to the interpreter. And the interpreter is delivering everybody’s line. The performance becomes in a way “naive” because what the actors say seems more important than how they act. I was curious to see how an interpreted performance is mounted, and it did not attract me.

Brian: How often do you attend interpreted performances?

Rosa: From time to time. I prefer sign-language performances, but if it is an exceptional performance, even if it is interpreted, I will not miss the occasion to see it. And I will enjoy it.

Brian: Sometimes deaf people say they prefer to attend interpreted performances if there is a lively action on stage. What is your opinion?

Rosa: Talking about action... I prefer plays rooted in my Culture. I would still go to see a hearing play if it has application in my Culture. Otherwise, I do enjoy action and humor.

Brian: What do you think about shadow-interpreted performances?
Rosa: Shadowed plays are better than interpreted plays. It is easier to follow the interpreters and the actors when they move on stage keeping in close proximity. However, there is still a feeling that the line does not come from the actor. At first, it seems that there are too many characters on stage. It takes a while to realize that the interpreters are not characters in the play. That is bothersome. But I prefer shadowing to interpreting. A shadowed performance makes me feel more involved in the play. The interpreters’ signing style is more theatrical, with enhanced facial expressions and display of emotions. In contrast, in interpreted performances, the interpreter abstains from acting, and delivers a dry story.

Brian: Do you prefer shadowed plays or interpreted plays?

Rosa: I like shadowed plays. Interpreted plays seem naive.

Brian: What do you think about Deaf Children’s Theatre?

Rosa: I support the idea of Deaf Children’s Theatre. Not only does it help them to develop their self-esteem, it also supports their language development, their reading and writing skills. It enhances their creative expression, teaches them to work in team. It teaches them directing skills and so on. All this is educational for deaf children. I support this idea.

Brian: What does Deaf Children’s Theatre mean?

Rosa: What does Deaf Children’s Theatre mean? I think it is a theatre run by deaf children, their own theatre. They act, they bring their own creative ideas, they create an artistic image themselves. It means that deaf children are exposed to theatre and expose their theatre for the world to see.

Brian: Should hearing children be allowed to perform with deaf children in Deaf Children’s Theatre?

Rosa: Do you mean theatre with ...? Deaf children should act themselves. Maybe if the hearing children are CODAs, they could be part of Deaf Children’s Theater. Having hearing children in the audience, yes. Otherwise, maybe for one particular performance it might be appropriate to have hearing children in the cast, but not in general. Deaf Children’s Theatre is deaf children’s own theatre, where they are comfortable. This is my opinion.

Brian: How would you define Deaf Children’s Theatre? Why is it important for deaf children?

Rosa: I am not sure I understand... What theatre means; Why is theatre important for children? It is fun. For example, clowning is fun and funny, but the profound meaning of theatre is pure Art. It is important to see that children enjoy being involved in theatre. What do you mean by theatre being part of their education? Does your research show that theatre is absolutely needed in deaf children’s education, not only as a hobby?
The following interview was recorded at The Learning Center, in Framingham, Massachusetts, where Todd Czubek was coordinating The Magical Literacy Camp.2

Todd Czubek: My name is Todd Czubek.
Brian: What is your position?
Todd: Here at TMLC (The Magical Literacy Camp)? I am the coordinator and the artistic director.
Brian: How did The Magical Literacy Camp start?
Todd: Now, we are having our sixth camp. TMLC started four years ago. We toured three times. We are at Scranton School for the Deaf, in Pennsylvania. I work there as a bilingual mentor. They told me that they received a big grant to develop a literacy program for minorities. I was asked to search a way to establish the Literacy Program. After searching and thinking about this, I came up with the idea of a Literacy Camp. Together with my wife, Janey Greenwald, we founded this camp. Now, this is the sixth camp. Things have changed since the first camp, but the main idea remained the same. Literacy implies both English and ASL, and how language is used in Arts.
Brian: How is The Magical Literacy Camp funded? What is the rationale of this camp?
Todd: We had money from a federal grant. The money was destined to establishing a literacy program. So I thought about developing a program to build ASL literacy and language skills. In ASL, literacy skills involve: expressive and receptive skills, and the use of language in different situations, as for example on stage. Establishing a theatre summer camp seemed a lot of fun. The camp has 4 classes going on in the morning: ASL, English, Looking Ahead into the Deaf World--this class is the foundation of this camp, and a new class that started this year--Language in Arts. These classes involve playing with language and using the language in different situations. In the afternoon, the children work in teams. We teach them the Gallaudet rhythm: "and one, and two, and one two three." Children do not know it, and are happy that we teach this kind of knowledge. They know it is worth the money. We teach them acting, we teach them English to be able to translate from ASL. This is the daily program in HP ... sorry, it is not HP anymore. Initially the name of this camp was Harry Potter. Now it is called The Magical Literacy Camp.
Brian: Why was it called Harry Potter? And why did the name change?
Todd: It was called HPLC, or Harry Potter Literacy Camp, because it offered the opportunity to search and find meanings, so we borrowed the idea from Harry Potter. Now we changed the name to TMLS. I like this name because we are not bounded to only one book. Now, we can bring in different kinds of literature.
Brian: How many children do usually sign-up for this camp? Did many children attend your first camp?
Todd: Oh, it was a big camp. We had 50 children. Or maybe 51. The second camp was held at Scranton. We had 55 children, more than at the first one. The third camp was also held at Scranton. We had 47 children, less, but not bad. We had 30 children at the fourth camp because the school was small. The fifth camp, again at Scranton had 50 children. And now, here, we have 43 children.

Brian: Do you offer the TMLC camp during the school year?

Todd: School? No. We only hold the summer camp.

Brian: Do you offer the camp at other schools besides The Learning Center and the Scranton?

Todd: Yes, we go to different schools.

Brian: Taking into consideration the funding of the camp, do you provide the camp free of charge to schools?

Todd: No, they pay for the camp. I sign a contract with the school. I provide them the program with all the activities and the price. The proceeds are split fifty-fifty. We use both our staff and their staff. Half of the proceeds are ours, to pay my staff. My staff is a close-knit group that has worked together since the beginning: Janice Cole, my wife, and in part ASL representatives. Our core group goes to the respective school and we work with two or three of their teachers. The school benefits in the sense that their teachers practice with us before the camp starts. The camp is bilingual English and ASL. The school assists us with the organization of the camp and they get to practice before the camp and everyday during the camp. So, during the following year, the teachers would be able to apply what they learned from us to their curriculum. This idea is a nice sales pitch! Teachers benefit, children love it, the school gets some money. We advertise in the newspaper and we invite the local TV station. People are attracted to the camp; it is popular. Everybody considers it interesting. People learn something new. It is accessible and has many advantages. Children have fun and their parents are thrilled. Right now, over two hundred children participated in our camp during these four years. That is neat!

Brian: Do you allow hearing children to participate in TMLC?

Todd: We have hearing children in the camp. Yes. But, if they are going to participate, they have to know ASL.

Brian: Is TMLC reserved for deaf children?

Todd: True, the rules say that the camp is exclusively for deaf children. But schools have their guidelines. If they need for a deaf child’s hearing siblings to attend too, then we allow them. It is a good idea. It may be difficult on us if the hearing children are not skilled in sign language. In this case we have to teach them ASL, while the deaf children wait for us to pay attention to them. Really, the camp is for deaf children. If hearing children are skilled in sign language, they can participate. That is the general rule.

Brian: How does the school, or how do the parents feel about the camp policy?
Todd: We had no problem since we started. Our school had no problem whatsoever.

Brian: Do hearing children perform on stage in this camp?

Todd: Yes, hearing kids can voice interpret. This is for deaf children, period! The concept of deaf and hearing together is nice in other environments. This is for deaf children only, to give them a Deaf experience, with Deaf language, Deaf literature, Deaf perspectives. Here, deaf children come to catch up on their concepts through ASL. And they benefit from an all-day-everyday artistic program. They will remember it for a long time. And they train to bring creative ideas. Of course, after teaching all this for one week, I am exhausted, but I enjoy it, and the results are all positive. It is nice!

Brian: How many children return to this camp every year?

Todd: Many, many. We have several children who attended the camp every year, for four years. They are all from Scranton. We have a progressive program for them.

Brian: Who assures the transportation for the children during the camp? May children be boarded at the school?

Todd: It depends on the school. Scranton has dorms. We can lodge the children during the night. This school doesn’t have dorms, so our program is only during the day. If we spend the nights with the children, it is tiresome for us, because we have to supervise them. However, the activities before bedtime are fun. Plus, the school gets more money. The 8:30am till 5:00pm suits me just fine.

Brian: Do the children manage to dramatically improve their signing skills and increase their self-esteem during the camp?

Todd: Yes. I agree. Yes, but speaking for myself. If I really improve my ASL and get immersed in the culture, I would be enthralled. But in one week, this is not really possible. One week of training certainly helps though. You know that there are some children who think that the ASL classes in school are for mental development and for children who lag behind in language. Some children told me that they don’t need to pass through ASL because their English reading skills are good. There is this conception that if the deaf child is skilled in English, he/she doesn’t need to know ASL. ASL is for Deaf people what English is for hearing people. Deaf people need to study ASL, to learn about writers and artists, to analyze language. Then they can feel proud of being bilingual. They can definitely achieve this... being proud of having improved their language and being proud of themselves. Can we change their lives through this camp? Hopefully! Although there is no proof.

Brian: Is Janey working with you at TLMC?

Todd: My wife? She is on staff here. The staff here is Deaf. I prefer the staff to be Deaf. I am the only hearing person on staff. This is interesting! A hearing person can be staff if they are fluent in sign language. My goal is a bilingual environment. If a person is bilingual, this is fine. A deaf person, who is naturally skilled in sign language, must also be fluent in English. The
same goes for a hearing person who is naturally skilled in English and has to be fluent in sign language. Artists, on the other hand, absolutely must be Deaf, because being an artist means being creative. If a Deaf person and a hearing person are both qualified, equally qualified, we will employ the Deaf person. But if the hearing person were a native signer and more qualified than the Deaf person, maybe in that case, we would hire the hearing person. It also depends on their skills, their knowledge, their attitude, and so on.

Brian: I remarked that most TLMC were held at the Scranton. Is there a reason?

Todd: There is one advantage at Scranton school. In this camp, I get children from all over the state of Pennsylvania, from the communities throughout Pennsylvania, from central Pennsylvania, from Pittsburgh. Sometimes, I get children who, although are in school, haven’t been taught much. Parents bring them at the camp having no idea how much knowledge the children have to catch up with. The knowledge that the children acquired prior to the camp varies widely. But we are successful with each one of them. This is the reason I emphasize the acquisition of two languages. And it pays off. Sometimes we do encounter problems, naturally, same as the other camps. But, right now, at this particular camp? I cannot think of any. I’m proud! We do have a variety of skill levels to deal with, but children are learning and building their ASL skills. We had hard-of-hearing children who knew no sign at all when they came to the camp. Their parents were hearing. They brought the children to the camp. At first I was concerned for those children. In one week, they were fluent in sign. They transferred to a Residential School for the Deaf. That was wonderful! This camp brings children to Deaf Culture, to the Deaf World. This is one big advantage of this camp. And we do not turn down children; every child is welcome.

Brian: What is your position at Scranton?

Todd: My job title is Bilingual Mentor. I work with the staff to make sure that both ASL and English are taught properly so that the children develop their skills. I also evaluate. At Scranton, I ...

Brian: Is Scranton a residential school?

Todd: Right, Scranton is a Residential School, SSSS--Scranton State School for the Deaf. In reality, I do not coordinate the Bilingual program; I make sure that teachers follow it in every department. I organize meetings with teachers; I evaluate teachers to make sure that students develop in both languages. I also have meetings with advisors to find ways to improve the program.

Brian: Do your children sign well?

Todd: I have one son. He is hearing, but he signs fluently. I am from a four-generation Deaf family. We must communicate in sign language. My brother and sister are Deaf too. We have a big family. My son needs to sign fluently to communicate with them and with his grandmother. So he signs very well.

Brian: What does Deaf Children’s Theatre mean for you?
Todd: What does Deaf Children’s Theatre mean? Hm... I think that Deaf Children’s Theatre represents an opportunity to analyze language, to understand the power of ASL, to know that depending on how one uses ASL in politics, in comedy, in any context, this language can become a powerful tool for discourse. Theatre, either for adults, or for children, is a medium. It makes the impossible possible. It brings life to abstract ideas. It is a way children can understand, acquire ASL, and then use it to express their creativity. Theatre makes the impossible happen. Theatre can teach, can make people cry or laugh, or have all kinds of emotions. Theatre is magic. Deaf Children’s Theatre is magic.

Brian: Have you ever attended an interpreted play?

Todd: On Broadway... only once.

Brian: Are interpreted plays proper for Deaf audiences?

Todd: For Deaf? I only saw one interpreted play, one time only. The play was Annie Get Your Guns, on Broadway. This was two or three years ago. At first, I had no idea that there was an interpreter there. There was a group of Deaf people and a group of deaf children that the school brought to see the play. The children looked mostly at the stage, fascinated by the action, and only sometimes at the interpreter. Without an interpreter, though, it would be hard for Deaf people. If I were Deaf, I would want to have an interpreter there. However, the stage is more animated than the interpreter. I think Deaf people appreciate more Deaf Theatre.

Brian: By Deaf Theatre, do you mean theatre performed in sign language?

Todd: Yes, Sign Language Theatre, with actors signing on stage. Definitely! If I were Deaf, I would rather see sign language on stage with all the action instead of having to constantly shift between watching the stage and watching the interpreter. Interpreted performances do not feel natural. But we have to have interpreted plays. I mean, if Deaf people go to see a play on Broadway, they have to have interpreters. Not having interpreters could infringe the right to equal access. Equal service is a must. But to really enjoy themselves, Deaf people prefer Sign Language Theatre.

Brian: What do you think of shadow interpreting?

Todd: I have seen videotapes of shadow-interpreted plays. And I absolutely do not like shadow interpreting. It is really confusing. It ruins the dynamics.

Brian: Thank you for interviewing with me on such a short notice and in record time.

Todd: Good luck! Write your dissertation and I would like to get a copy. It is about Deaf. Nice!
The following interview was recorded at The Scherer Center, in Northbrook, Illinois, where Dr. Patricia Scherer has founded the International Center on Deafness and the Arts.³

Jonalee Polerzynski: I am the director for the Children’s Theatre program here, at ICODA. I am deaf.

Patti Lahey: I am the Artistic Director of Centerlight Theatre. I am hearing.

Jonalee: My family is deaf, except for my daughter who is hearing.

Patti: I am hearing, my entire family is hearing, but I was interested in sign because one friend of mine from high-school has deaf parents. So I learned sign 8 years ago.

Brian: Is ICODA geared towards adults’ theatre or deaf children’s theatre?

Patti: It is really a children’s theatre, both deaf and hearing children, their own theatre. We teach them equally. I have more experience with adults’ theatre. I think it is important to teach children to value theatre and the arts.

Jonalee: In my childhood, hearing theatre was inaccessible to me, because I am deaf. My professional goal has been to become a drama teacher. I wanted to teach deaf children that they are not alone and that they don’t need to hide because they are deaf. Each one of them is special. So I bring them here for them to shine like stars. Their parents are astonished and proud when they see them perform. And this is not for deaf children only. Hearing children also join. Deaf and hearing children act together, form friendships and shine together.

Brian: What do you understand by ICODA being deaf children’s “second home”?

Jonalee: Christine talked about the “second home.” The children really feel that this is their “second home.” They have no other place to go to. Like myself, when I was growing up, hearing theatres would only offer small roles, here and there. Then I heard about this place and from the moment I stepped in, I settled here. It has been 11 years now. This program is wonderful for people to get together, and it helped many people, especially children, to grow up and become successful adults. Also, deaf and hearing children from deaf families work together and bond. This program helps the family to understand how special their child is.

Brian: Approximately how many deaf adults and deaf children have participated in ICODA as actors/actresses or in ICODA workshops?

Patti: Since the beginning or now?

Brian: Every year.
Patti: (to Jonalee) every year, do we have about 50% deaf and 50% hearing children? Do you know how many deaf children we had in our last show?

Jonalee: Of all the children who perform, there are about fourteen deaf and about ten hearing. The hearing children shadow the deaf children to provide voicing. But each year we have more and more deaf children. And the same goes for the Dance program.

Patti: During the performance, most times, one character is played by two actors. The signing actors are in foreground because their roles are more visual. The voicing actors are in the background, hidden, to be able to provide voicing for more than one character. This is one setup. Another setup is to place the voicing actor to one side of the stage, with a microphone. We want to make sure that the voicing doesn’t capture the attention more than the signing. This should never happen. We do add some spice to the voicing actors through cute or funny costumes and makeup, to make the character more interesting while the voicing actor follows the lead of the signing actor on stage. The audience enjoys this idea. And I like that a lot.

Brian: Who pays the actors/actresses?

Patti: For the adult theatre, we pay stipends to the actors. If they are young, we give them only, maybe fifty dollars or a hundred dollars, depending on the role. But for children’s theatre, the actors are volunteers. Their benefit is the chance to perform and to learn how to work in theatre. They perform in exchange for the time and energy we spend teaching them. It is similar to an after-school activity.

Brian: Can you afford to pay professional actors from the proceeds and from the funding of ICODA?

Jonalee: Sometimes, the professional actors who get paid to perform for the adults’ family theatre volunteer to get involved in the children’s theatre as a way to show their appreciation for the wonderful training and experience they had with Centerlight Theatre.

Brian: Do children tend to come back to ICODA? And do their parents support this idea in any way?

Patti: Many parents, even after their children graduate and eventually relocate, continue to come here to help.

Brian: How would you compare ICODA with other Deaf Children’s Theatres?

Patti: Some community theatres, for no apparent reason, like to categorize, to find “pigeon holes”. So enter in competition with other hearing theatres. They find this entertaining and interesting, but it is impossible to compare. I wish it were. An actor is still an actor, not depending on the language used. The theatre community is often fascinated with our theatre. Other theatres want to get connected with us, but they don’t know how to ask. Plus there is the money issue. On one hand, the theatre community accepts and respects us, on the other hand we are still seen as “different.”

Brian: What do you think other theatres think of ICODA?
Patti: I know that other theatre companies do not understand in depth the production of a signed performance. The work behind the performance, the philosophy, and the psychological process are the same for deaf and hearing actors. Only the language has to be the right language, provided that most scripts are hearing scripts, and there are only a few deaf scripts. We want to produce popular scripts and bring the productions to the Deaf Community, not as hearing shows with an interpreter on the side, but as shows addressed directly to the Deaf Community. Anyway, I divagated... So, sometimes, the theatre community thinks that using the right language only requires translation. It is not that simple. There is more art involved. I wish they could experience the artistic process. They would enjoy it.

Brian: Do you allow hearing children to perform on stage or acting is reserved for signing actors?

Patti: It also depends on the director’s vision. If the director wants to try something new, we try and see what happens. Some directors want a simple, clean picture of the stage. In this case, the voicing actors are placed off-stage. Other directors feel more comfortable trying to play around with the blocking, so they are willing to incorporate the voicing actors in the stage movement. It depends on the scene; it depends on the show. For example, if the scene were Hamlet’s monologue, having two actors on stage would seem awkward. Better to hide the voicing actor, to avoid confusion in the story.

Brian: What is the mission of ICODA, of the children’s theatre?

Patti: If I understand correctly, her [Dr. Scherer] goal is to simultaneously provide the deaf with their own place and the hearing with knowledge about the Deaf World and with the understanding that deaf people have the same feelings, emotions, and the same desires as hearing people. The Deaf World was never before displayed for hearing people to see.

Jonalee: Many times we have hearing actors who are very skilled signers. The audience finds hard to believe that they are not deaf after seeing them perform. That is the whole point--to create a deaf performance.

Patti: I like to watch the deaf people in the audience. They see the hearing people in the process of learning and being inquisitive about the deaf ways. Deaf people feel very proud of being there and of having a deaf performance, and of being able to teach the hearing audience, this is a sort of “lobbying.” I think it is an interesting exchange for both sides.

Brian: How old are the children who get involved with ICODA?

Patti: Sometimes, it depends on the show. We have had in some shows actors between 5 and 15 or 16 years of age. In other shows, we had actors between 5 and 80 years of age. (to Jonalee) How old is Newman? Yes, 80 years old. It is wonderful to see an older deaf person communicating with a really young deaf person, or a hearing child becoming very comfortable communicating with an older deaf person. It makes children feel more comfortable with the concept of deafness. They don’t see deafness as being different. I enjoy seeing them all coming together and learning.
They even stop noticing that there are two worlds coming together. I know for myself that if I never learned the language, I would feel apprehensive about getting involved because I would feel that I don’t fit in. Most deaf people are happy that you try to learn and they help you learn more. There is the misconception about lipreading because hearing people are not taught that not all deaf people can read lips. Even myself, as I was growing up, I thought that deaf people just read lips, or just write things down. It is completely untrue. Why don’t children learn that before becoming adults? I was 25 years old when I learned that. Even in high school, my friend’s parents were both oral. And that kept me oblivious; I thought that was the norm. Learning about Deaf Culture is just as important as learning about French or Italian people, and we need to add that to American education. I wish every one, in every college would have this option as a foreign language. Still, there are some colleges that persist in refusing to offer this option. Why offer foreign languages that people never use, like French or from other countries, instead of offering the language of these deaf people who are Americans, so people would be able to communicate with them? I know, I’m lecturing, I’m done.

Brian: Are there any mainstream or residential schools who bring deaf children to ICODA?

Jonalee: There is a middle school nearby, they come here often, and there is also a renowned high school that always comes to our shows because the students are learning sign language. High school children have a bit of an attitude, so it is wonderful to see them show up and actually watching the show.

Patti: Since a short while ago, people started to come here for ‘Diversity week.’ They study about other races, people, maybe about people with disability, different cultures... It is nice to get involved in that.

Brian: Where is the funding for ICODA coming from?

Patti: We write grants. One of our most substantial grants is from the Board of Education. We also sell tickets. They are not expensive, but the proceeds help support that cost. On most of our shows we break even. All the proceeds go into producing the show, all the actors are paid on the last day, and again, we only pay them stipends, not salaries. We do not pay actors salaries yet.

Patti: We also have some profits from our bookstore--a regular retail shop--and those help to self-support the bookstore and also our programs. We also get support from individual donors and other grants, from some foundations, and we organize fundraising activities. Every donation, five dollars or ten thousand dollars, is equally precious.

Brian: What theatrical skills do you teach deaf children?

Jonalee: Children’s Theatre is different. During the summer time and during the fall, rehearsals are twice or even once a week. But children can take either a six-week acting class, or a six-week clowning class. These classes are good for new participants. We teach them acting, mime, facial expressions, to get them ready to audition for the family theatre. If they are too afraid to
audition or do not want to be part of the family theatre, they can take the clowns class and I teach them makeup, mime, facial expressions, costumes. At the last class, their families will see them perform on stage. So they get used to the idea of being on stage and focusing on the audience. This class is a lot of fun. And the children become more confident in themselves. The next step is to take a dance workshop or an acting workshop to prepare for what direction they choose to pursue. They need to be motivated. It is their decision.

Patti: (to Jonalee) What about school?

Jonalee: Once a year I go to a big school in Chicago. There are sixty-five children there. The school has a deaf program and a hearing program. They hired me to direct a big show, a play based on the Snow Queen. They have a mainstream class with thirty children and we had three months to prepare the show. This was an after-school program. We would rehearse from about 3:30 pm to 5:00 pm. We studied the script, memorized the lines, and performed with music. We had one big show for their school, and performance for the community on two nights. It was a big success.

Patti: That was the first opportunity any child had to be part of a show. Sometimes public schools produce plays, but they are hearing plays. Maybe deaf teachers don’t know how to produce a show. She [Jonalee] would go there and show them the best way to set up the show. It is nice for deaf children to get involved and show the other half of the school that they are no different from hearing children. Again, this was their first chance. They either get excited about theatre, or they decide they would rather play basketball. It is something new and it is a nice connection for us.

Patti: Last summer we got in touch with another organization, a hearing theatre, called Goat Island. They taught an acting workshop for the people in our theatre. That was a new experience. Our people are used to organizing the same workshops over and over again. So this was interesting because an outside group presented something new. Hopefully more theatres will open up to this idea, and open to all ages.

Brian: I notice that you have a full schedule teaching. Who takes care of the administrative job?

Patti: And we also have to take care of business—administrative work. But we have to work overtime to set up the lighting, or to get ready for the next day. But this is the nature of the job. Sometimes, when there is no show, or right after a show, we take our time and slow down before the next rush for the next show. ... You can see the dark shades under our eyes.

Brian: After the performance is over, are the children usually coming back to ICODA?

Patti: Children keep coming back until they go to college. Sometimes they come back after graduating from college to help or just to get involved again with IODA.

Patti: (to Jonalee) Do you think they want to do more than one show?

Jonalee: Most of them come back.
Patti: And they bring their friends.

Brian: I noticed that ICODA provides musicals and poetry. Do you use ASL?

Patti: Sometimes, strict ASL doesn’t match the music, so we change the signing a bit to be clearer from a theatrical perspective. It is not perfect ASL, but theatrical sign, that everyone understands. It also helps if the signing matches the music.

Brian: I notice that some of the plays are performed repeatedly. Is it difficult to perform new plays?

Patti: In part, choosing the script depends basically on the funding we have available for the show. It is hard to attract people with new plays. We cannot afford to waste money, so we prefer to be sure that we would have a significant audience. This is the risk a new play involves. Some other theatres can afford to take risks. We would accept the risk of having a smaller audience for a new show if the children are really interested on that play. We cannot take a chance with the money we have, and this is the only reason why we haven’t had a new play in five years.

Brian: Is it because the children’s after-school time is hard to manage, or because a three or four month rehearsal period would be too long?

Patti: Honestly, last year, when I decided to change the whole schedule, thinking it was the best idea, the results were disastrous. Children’s show was schedules for winter, when the transportation was terrible. Also it snowed, so we didn’t have much of an audience. The big show was in spring, when usually people celebrate graduations, marriages, or get busy with other spring activities. The show was supposed to be five weeks long, but the actors also had schedule conflicts. It was terrible! Now we would rather have the children’s show for two weeks, ending on Mother’s Day. People love the timing because it is a family celebration.

Jonalee: Last year we had just too many shows for one year. From summer to fall we prepared the Christmas music then we had variety shows. The big show was in November, then the dance performance in December. The big adult play was in February, followed by the children’s play... There were just too many performances. At the end of the season, the children were exhausted. It was a full load for us, too! Now the timing is much better: first the big show, second the big dance performance, and last the big children’s play. Planning for one show at one time is easier, and it doesn’t put as much stress on children. This allows us to help each other and work in sequence.

Brian: Is there an age limit to get involved in ICODA?

Patti: Participation in ICODA does not have a beginning and an end. We work project by project. If someone wants to get involved in a project, then focus on other things, they can come back afterwards and participate in other projects. There is no graduation for ICODA.
Patti: Children’s Theatre is not only for ages 3 through 18. A 60
years old first time actor would have to start learning the same
way, and pass through the same process.

Brian: What is the difference between ICODA and other Deaf
Children’s Theatres?

Patti: I can only compare our classes with other children’s theatre
classes, offered by renowned names like Stephen Wolf or Goodman.
Children may go for these classes to Northwestern University
during the summer. The quality of the teaching in those classes
is the same as in our classes, although the teaching methods
differ. I can say that our classes par other theatre classes. But
I don’t know much about theatre classes.

Brian: How did you get into theatre and why?

Jonalee: Eleven years ago, my dream was to be a deaf actress, but my
signing skills were not sharp, I was signing more English. Even
though, at first, people here would pick on me because of my
signing, working here taught me to be a better actor, director,
and to work with people.

Patti: Working for hearing theatres was just a job to get a paycheck.
I do not feel this way working here. People are not here for the
money; they are here for people and to gain experience. They
value sign language and Deaf Culture. This job is just as
demanding as other jobs. However it is less “temporary”. When
working for, let’s say, a carnival show, the job ends when the
show ends. While the ICODA experience becomes part of you,
lingers more than working for quick-money shows or popular,
famous shows. And for the same reason, people who come here get
involved at a deeper level than just to develop a certain skill,
such as dancing; they want to be part of something special. This
feeling builds the family web.

Brian: Does your policy require children have be skilled in sign
language before enrolling in ICODA?

Patti: We can offer sign language classes for free, in partnership
with the Center on Deafness, for anyone who works with ICODA. We
don’t want to upset children’s families. Nevertheless, the
families see how happy their children are here, and they start
changing on their own. They also see many deaf adults and they
start to understand and to want to learn. I also witnessed when
the spirit of competition pushed some parents to want to know to
sign like other parents.

Jonalee: That girl’s cousin was also in the play. She learned to sign in
the same time with her cousin, and they acted together in the
play. It was wonderful to see them together, growing and learning
to sign outside their family.

Patti: Sometimes the process starts naturally when parents are waiting
for the rehearsals to finish, and they start to converse with
each other. The exchange begins, if not for other reason but
because of being stuck in the same room for a while, every
Tuesday and Thursday. Parents also formed a support group, the
Boosters. It just happened. Of course, Christine asked them to
form a group, and they accepted naturally. It was going to happen
anyway.
Patti: Even after the child has gone to college, or got married, the parents still come here to help us in some way: by sowing something or just by buying tickets and attending our shows.
Endnotes for Appendix 5

1. Rosa Gallimore, acting and improvisation staff member with PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

2. Todd Czubek, director and founder of The Magical Literacy Camp, Pittsburgh School for the Deaf, Boston, Massachusetts, interview by Brian Kilpatrick, August 5, 2003, interview, transcript, personal collection, Houston, Texas.

The following list has been categorized by decade to show the growth of the number of plays with Deaf themes.¹

1910s

1912 Howard L. Terry  The Dream

1950s

1955 Eric Malzkuhn  Sounds of Silence

1960s

1961 Douglas Burke  The Good Peddler
1966 Eric Malzkuhn  Moments Preserved

1970s

1971 NTD Deaf cast  My Third Eye
1973 Dorothy Miles  A Play of Our Own: Part I
1973 Gilbert Eastman  Sign Me Alice
1975 Gilbert Eastman  Hands
1975 Jeff Wanshell  Parade
1976 Donald Bangs  The Touch
1976 Gilbert Eastman  Laurent Clerc: A Profile
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Director/Producer</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Ray Kennedy</td>
<td>Deafia</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>E. Lynn Jacobowitz</td>
<td>Deafective</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>E. Lynn Jacobowitz</td>
<td>Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>E. Lynn Jacobowitz</td>
<td>Solar System</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>E. Lynn Jacobowitz</td>
<td>Deaf History: Time Machine</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>Rico Petersen</td>
<td>A Play of Our Own: Part II</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Shanny Mow</td>
<td>The Spanking Machine</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Donald Bangs</td>
<td>Different Worlds</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>E. Lynn Jacobowitz</td>
<td>Theatre House</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>E. Lynn Jacobowitz</td>
<td>Voyage</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Bernard Bragg</td>
<td>That Makes Two of Us</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Steve Baldwin</td>
<td>A Play of Our Own: Part III</td>
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**1980s**

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Director/Producer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Donald Bangs</td>
<td>Sea Princess</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>Eugene Bergman</td>
<td>Tales from a Clubroom</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>and Bernard Bragg</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Shanny Mow</td>
<td>The Iliad: Play by Play</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>Steve Baldwin</td>
<td>Borderline</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>Steve Baldwin</td>
<td>Christmas Oasis</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>Steve Baldwin</td>
<td>Sign and Sound A Lovin'</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Gilbert Eastman</td>
<td>Sign Me Alice II</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Mary Beth Miller</td>
<td>A Play of 1,000 Words</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Mark Medoff</td>
<td>Children of A Lesser God</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>and Phyllis Frelich</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>The CHALB Productions</td>
<td>Deaf-Pa What?</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>Donald Bangs</td>
<td>Dracula</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>Donald Bangs</td>
<td>The Miser</td>
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</tbody>
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1981  E. Lynn Jacobowitz  Oh, Stop! Oh, Stop!
1981  Gilbert Eastman   What
1981  Shanny Mow        The Ghost of Chastity Past, or Incident at Sashimi Junction
1981  Steve Baldwin    A Play of Our Own—Part IV
1981  Donald Bangs      The Miser
1981  Ray Kennedy       Contract with the Devil
1982  Adrian Blue       Circus of Signs
1982  Shanny Mow        Parzival: From the Horse's Mouth
1982  Adrian Blue       Circus of Signs
1982  Terry Galloway    2 Women Writers
1983  Gilbert Eastman   Sign Me Alice II
1983  Steve Baldwin     How to Pick a College President
1984  Eugene Bergman    Fish nor Fowl
1984  Terry Galloway    Heart of a Dog
1984  Terry Galloway    Out of Their Minds
1984  Bruce Hlibok      Woman Talk
1985  Donald Bangs      Jealousy
1985  Terry Galloway    Hamlet in Berlin
1985  Tom Holcomb       Deafasty
1986  Terry Galloway    Out All Night and Lost My Shoes
1987  Terrylene Theriot-Sacceti Molded
1988  Shanny Mow        The greatest Little Sign Show on Earth
1988  Raymond Luczak    Snooty
1989  Bruce Hlibok      The Deaf Man Howl
1989  Gilbert Eastman   Can Do: A Revue
1989  Shanny Mow        The Odyssey
1989  Terrence J. O'Rourke Appointments with Fred
1990s

1990 Willy Conley  Broken Spokes
1990 Willy Conley  The Hearing Test
1990 Willy Conley  The Water Falls
1990 Willy Conley  Falling on Hearing Eyes
1990 Raymond Luczak  A Language of Our Own
1990 Raymond Luczak  A Language of Loss
1990 Raymond Luczak  Love in My Veins
1990 Shanny Mow  Counterfeits
1990 Shanny Mow  Cat Spanking Machine
1990 Michelle Verhoosky  Middle of Nowhere
1990 Michelle Verhoosky  I See the Moon
1990 Bob Daniels  Foot in Mouth: An Unmusical
1990 Bob Daniels  Hand in Hand
1994 Donald Bangs and Patrick Graybill  A Deaf Family Diary
1990 Bob Daniels  I Didn't Hear That Color
1990 Shanny Mow  Legend of La Llorona or the Weeping Woman
1990 Willy Conley  The Hearing Test
1990 Willy Conley  Broken Spokes
1991 Shanny Mow  Letters from Heaven
1991 Donald Bangs  The Phoney
1991 Bruce Weir  Twenty-five Cents
1992 Bob Daniels  Am I Paranoid?
1992 Shanny Mow  Myths: Baked, Boiled, and Fried
1992 Raymond Luczak  The Rake
1993  Donald Bangs
      and Jan Delap  Institutional Blues
1993  Terry Galloway  Lardo Weeping
1993  Michele M. Verhoosky  A Laying of Hands
1993  Patricia Durr  Meta

2000s

2002  Raymond Luczak  A Pair of Hands: Deaf Gay Monologues
      (two one-act plays: Hippos & Giraffes
      and Interpretations)
2004  Adrian Blue
      and Catherine Rush  A Nice Place to Live
2005  Raymond Luczak  In Love and Lust We Trust
2007  Adrian Blue
      and Catherine Rush  This Island Alone
Endnotes for Appendix 6

Brian Kilpatrick was born on August 28, 1947, in Birmingham, Alabama. He went to Atlanta Speech School in Atlanta, Georgia. His family moved to Houston, Texas, where he graduated from Robert E. Lee high school. He continued his education to obtain a B.A. in psychology with a minor in Theatre Arts from Gallaudet University and an M.A. in Deaf Education from McDaniel's College (formerly Western Maryland College). In parallel, he studied extensively with the National Theatre of the Deaf. Mr. Kilpatrick became a professional actor. He co-founded the Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf (FTD) in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1974. Later on the name changed to Cleveland SignStage. Mr. Kilpatrick was highly acclaimed for characterizing the role of Harper in FTD’s Wild West version of Molière’s *The Miser*. This play and each of other four plays were adapted for one-hour special programs on WVIZ/PBS television in Cleveland, Ohio. All five plays won the Emmy Award for the best production.

In 1984 Mr. Kilpatrick co-founded Houston’s own Illuminations... Theatre with the Deaf. Since then he has performed in the Texas Opera Theatre’s shadowed production of *La Traviata*, winning the Bravo Award for the interpretation of Alfredo Gremont. His other credits include performing in the Shakespeare Outreach Company of the University of Houston, in the Children’s Theatre Festival, in Stages, and in other productions. He has directed the sign-language productions *The Quilters* and *The Yellow Boat*. He also has participated in several television and film productions.

Mr. Kilpatrick is currently an ASL professor in the Interpreter Training Program at North Harris College, Houston, Texas.