



The Kennedy Center

OPENING STAGES

**A Quarterly Newsletter for People with Disabilities Pursuing Careers in the
Performing Arts**

Published by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

Stephen A. Schwarzman, Chairman

Michael Kaiser, President

Darrell M. Ayers, Vice President, Education

Betty Siegel, Manager of Accessibility

Edited by Paul Kahn

EDITORIAL BOARD

George Ashiotis

John Dillon

Martin English

Rod Lathim

Joy Mincey Powell

Janet Salmons

Ike Schambelan

Betty Siegel

Mimi Kenney Smith

Gail Williamson

OPENING STAGES ARCHIVES

To view past issues of the newsletter, go to:

www.quest4arts.org/company/callboard/index.htm

ISSUE #14

March -- May 2005

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Editor: Looking Back -- page 2

Letters -- page 3

Features

The Impact of the ADA on Performing Artists... by Gregg J. Donaldson -- page 4

Higher Up on the Spiral: Moving from School to the Outside World... by Marilee
Talkington -- page 7

America Needs More Visual Theatre! ... by Willy Conley -- page 10

What It Means To Be Professional... by Ike Schambelan -- page 12

Resources

UK Resource for Visually Impaired Dance -- page 14
Music and the Deaf -- page 14

News and Notes

AXIS Dance Company to Host Summer Intensive -- page 14
Maine Deaf Film Festival Set for April -- page 15
Friends In Art Scholarship Announced -- page 16
Theater Festival For The Blind To Be Held In Zagreb -- page 16
National Dance Project Accepting Nominations -- page 17

READERS' ALERT

Opening Stages is always interested in hearing from our readers about pertinent programs, resources and events, as well as ideas for articles. We can pay a modest fee for articles we accept. Contact us at access@kennedy-center.org.

FROM THE EDITOR: LOOKING BACK

It slipped by me -- the third anniversary of **Opening Stages**. Maybe I was busy. Maybe at this stage of my life I don't like to be reminded about the passage of time. Now we are well into our fourth year of publication. But, I'll allow myself a moment of reflection.

I have very much enjoyed editing **Opening Stages**. Of course, it's work -- coaxing and refining articles from contributors, assembling, proofreading, and meeting deadlines (or trying to). But my position has put me in touch with a vibrant creative community that spans the world. I have an outstanding and supportive editorial board. And, in Betty Siegel, Manager of Accessibility at the Kennedy Center, I have the ideal boss. She is deeply committed to the mission of the newsletter but leaves me to carry out that mission with the maximum of editorial independence.

We've seen slow but steady growth in the number of our subscribers. And we have received gratifying kudos from, among others, Carrie Sandahl, a leading academic in the arts and disability field; Marc Goldman, head of. Damon Brooks Associates, a booking agency for speakers with disabilities; David Roche, one of Marc's best-known clients; and Barry Corbet, former editor of New Mobility magazine.

Barry passed away not long ago, and I owe him a debt of gratitude. Not only did he do me the honor of publishing me, but he also served as an inspiring model of what an editor should be. He was generous with praises and kind when he had to be critical, and he was a wonderful writer himself. His written voice was unmistakable -- casual,



witty and trenchant. It infused New Mobility with a "crip cool" tone that was charming, irreverent, and made you want to jump onboard. He just had style! And style in the sense I mean isn't frivolous. It's the passionate assertion of personality over circumstance.

Barry always closed his correspondence with one breezy, upbeat word -- "Cheers." So, cheers to you, Barry, for making disability stylish. And cheers to everyone who supports **Opening Stages** as we, now in our fourth year, continue a commitment to taking our place in the limelight as artists with both style and substance.

Paul Kahn

LETTERS

INTERNATIONAL PIANO PARALYMPICS FESTIVAL

I was pleased to see your article about the International Piano Paralympics.

Representatives with all kinds of disabilities from all over the world, including Germany, France, China, Taiwan, U.S.A., Poland, Russia, Hungary, Italy, and Japan, participated in this event. Out of 99 participants, I was the only one from Malaysia.

I was born with Osteogenesis Imperfecta and have been chair-bound since a very bad fall at the age of 7. I started playing the piano at 10. Because of my short stature I need to use extensions on both the piano pedal and the piano stool, and this has always made me avoid repertoire that requires too much pedaling. Often, either the extension pedal will slip off the piano, or the piano stool will move backwards if I step too hard on the pedal.

I have often felt badly about the limitation that I have to put up with, but after coming back from the festival, I realized just how lucky I am and how much I have always taken for granted the things God has given me.

At the festival, I was able to attend performances of disabled persons of even more severe disabilities than mine. Even if they needed assistance in holding up their hands to play the piano, nothing ever hindered them from coming onstage to perform. I was glued to my seat whenever I see persons with visual impairments feeling the keyboard with their fingers before they started playing and just let their fingers run up and down the keyboard so perfectly in tune, while it's hard enough for us to do so without hitting on wrong notes with our eyes wide open following the directions of our hands. It's wondrous to see disabled persons with missing fingers or no fingers at all on one hand playing with chords and melodies just like any other pianist, and it's amazing to hear how a person with hearing problem and who wears a hearing aid could play with such beautiful and even tone. And some of the participants are even concerned and

wondered at how I play the piano with fingers hardly reaching an octave and stature that's hardly balanced sitting on a high and extension added stool!

It has been most unfortunate that all of us participants did not have the chance to know each other better during the two days of the festival. Even though we all came from so many different countries, speaking in so many different languages, with our different disabilities, the feelings of mutual respect and geniality was felt everywhere. I didn't feel homesick or lonely at all being in a foreign country, so far away from my family. Instead, I have never felt more comfortable going around the National Olympic Memorial Youth Centre, Tokyo, where we stayed, and the concert venue at Yokohama with my friends. For once, I felt I belonged to a community, and not a displaced alien landed from outer space. Rude stares were replaced by friendly nods, strangers apologized and make ways for you instead of staring harder at you with a look that says "what is she doing here blocking the way with her wheelchair?"

I think the person we all have to thank the most for is Mr. Tokio Sakoda, president of Institute for Piano Teachers & Disabled in Japan. A music professor with a heart of gold, it has been a big dream of Mr. Sakoda indeed to be making an event of this magnitude possible. Congratulations, Mr. Tokio Sakoda. I sincerely hope more countries and participants will come forward with their support and entries in the future.

Yours truly,

Lee-Chin Heng

FEATURES

THE IMPACT OF THE ADA ON PERFORMING ARTISTS: ARE DOORS OPEN, SHUT OR REVOLVING by Gregg J. Donaldson

This past fall I spoke with three performing artists about whether the ADA has opened or shut doors to people with disabilities in the arts.

Robert David Hall plays Dr. Albert Robbins on CBS' hit show *CSI*. Mr. Hall is a devoted community activist and National Chairman of the Performers with Disabilities Caucus for SAG, AFTRA and Equity. He sits on the boards of The Mark Taper Forum's Other Voices Project and The Media Access Office and is a member of the Mutual Amputee Foundation, where he visits recent amputees. Hall also serves on the board of directors of the National Organization on Disability, for which, in July, he reported before Congress on the latest N.O.D./Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities.

Wendy Wilmer has been a Washington DC area stage actress, for over 30 years. She decided to pursue a career in acting at the age of 15, in spite of having a visible limp as a result of polio, which she contracted when she was 8 months old. She studied voice

and acting in Paris, France. She received a Best Actress award from Adventure Theater for her portrayal of the Leprechaun in *Niccolo and Nicolette*. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Potomac Valley Opera Company and is Vice-President of The Polio Society. In the past she has served on the boards of Adventure Theater and Port City Playhouse.

Jade Ann Gingerich, a singer and actor, is Founder and Artistic Director of The Paradigm Players. Her career is dedicated to increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

DONALDSON: Since its passage, has the ADA opened doors for actors and creative artists?

ROBERT DAVID HALL: I see it in the "glass half empty/half full stage." It is a fluid piece of work in progress.

Getting auditions for performers with disabilities is tough. Before getting *CSI*, I got less than 50% of the auditions of my able-bodied peers. Attitudes need to change. Casting directors see a person with a disability and say, "We're going in another direction," or they want to put an able-bodied actor in a wheelchair. They don't see us as whole characters. I've been reading *Money Ball* by Michael Lewis. The book profiles Billy Beane, the Oakland Athletics baseball manager, who perfected a system of evaluating his players based on certain statistical results, rather than judging them on old school scouting methods. Beane thinks you miss a lot of true talent if you go simply by appearances. Casting directors need to see us that way,

WENDY WILMER: I have noticed an improvement in some working conditions. I think part of that is because of the ADA's influence. It has heightened awareness of accessibility issues. If a theater receives even *one dollar* of federal funding it *needs* to pay attention to the regulations. Of course, some organizations hide behind exceptions to the regulations, such as historical structures. All buildings *can* be made accessible, but that requires the will (and budget) to do so. Most theaters are accessible to the audience, but not necessarily so for the actor in terms of rehearsing and getting to and from dressing rooms. An example of this is a Washington area theater that renovated the front of the house beautifully, but left the same obstacles to the actor as had previously existed. A few years ago I found that another famous theater was not accessible to disabled actors wanting to respond to an open audition call. When they found out I used a wheelchair they made up excuses not to audition me, but it was clear what had happened. This was soon after the ADA had gone into effect. I am sure they are more careful now.

I have found that younger directors and technicians are more open minded about the ways in which they can incorporate disabled actors into their work. Perhaps this is partly the result of mainstreaming in education. They are more familiar with and, therefore, less frightened of or threatened by people with disabilities.

JADE GINGERICH: The ADA did not specifically create increased opportunities for artists. Title I of the ADA, the employment portion, only bars discrimination on the basis of disability and provides for reasonable accommodations during the interview and hiring process and on the job. An individual must be able to perform the essential requirements of the job and be selected through a fair hiring process. The ADA does, however, allow motivated individuals with disabilities to seek out and gain increased access to the arts.

The passage of the ADA raised the visibility of disability issues and created increased expectations and opportunities for community participation by individuals with disabilities. Physical access in particular has increased as a result of the ADA, although there continues to be a great deal of misinformation regarding access requirements. It is important for all arts organizations to ensure that they engage the disability community in their planning as well as relying on solid information regarding access requirements.

More individuals with disabilities can be seen in commercials, on stage, on the street, however more opportunities are needed.

DONALDSON: What can be done to raise awareness and improve the situation for artists with disabilities?

HALL: People with disabilities should be self-starters. I emceed a symposium earlier this year, sponsored by the Performers with Disabilities Caucus, showcasing other performers with disabilities for CBS executives. Les Moonves, President of CBS, got the executives there and was very supportive of the project. The outcome was very positive. We had a talented group of performers. Fern Orenstein, a VP of Casting for CBS, was there, and she's busy setting up auditions for some of our performers in current CBS programs.

WILMER: I take the grassroots approach to raising awareness. I try to educate directors and technicians one person at a time. It is slow work, but can be effective. I try to point out where improvements can be made. I work in the smaller houses in Washington where money is very tight. It is not always realistic to expect the same accommodations as organizations with large budgets. But it is amazing what can be accomplished if someone wants to improve conditions. Of course the will can be there, but structures can defeat that will when there is no money. I like to feel that knowing what the regulations are gives the smaller houses something to work towards.

GINGERICH: In terms of awareness, individuals with disabilities must be aware of their need for experience and training, if they are interested in a career in the arts. Arts based experiences can be therapeutic or recreational. However, these are more process oriented and, therefore, whatever an individual creates as art is viewed as being good and is a positive arts experience. These sorts of arts experiences are no substitute for high quality professional level training, as professional expectations are based on outcomes, not process. Also, a career in the arts is not for everyone, as the rate of success can be low and the number of rejections can be high. It is not for the

fainthearted, whether they have a disability or not.

There are a number of opportunities in the arts that are far more accessible and the opportunities greater---particularly those off stage or behind the scenes. Career exploration should include these sorts of opportunities as well. In addition, individuals seeking a career in the arts might be well served to find a job that allows them the time, the money and the energy at the end of the day to pursue their art, rather than seeking an arts career path. As a result of my full time job, I am able to pay for my lessons and choose what I sing, where and for whom, which to me is far preferable than being told what to sing and living hand to mouth.

On the other hand, there is a need for more professional artists with disabilities and for the greater disability community to support artists with disabilities. By supporting artists with disabilities, we send the message to arts organizations that there is an audience base out there, which will in turn lead to increased opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

The future of the arts is largely dependent on ensuring an audience base that goes to theatre, to exhibitions, galleries, readings. I encourage everyone to get involved in the arts---explore, participate, be an audience member. As for the arts for individuals with disabilities, the opportunities continue to grow---as we have discovered, anything is possible.

Gregg J. Donaldson is a freelance writer/editor based in Washington, D.C., who has written for several disability publications and e-zines and is a published poet. In his spare time, he is also a self-proclaimed movie critic. His reviews can be found at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/FilmCrazy>.

HIGHER UP ON THE SPIRAL: MOVING FROM SCHOOL TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD by Marilee Talkington

Editor's note: In 2002 Marilee shared her experiences of being a visual disabled acting student with readers of Opening Stages in an article titled "Limited Vision and Unlimited Challenges." If you would like to contact Marilee, you can e-mail her at Marileetalkington@hotmail.com

In the fall of 2001 I took a backstage tour of American Conservatory Theater's elegant 1,000 seat Geary Theater in San Francisco. And as everyone was crossing the stage, I stopped and took a moment alone to look out at the empty velvet seats. My heart burned with the excitement and hope of one day playing on this stage. And it never for a moment occurred to me that I wouldn't because I was legally blind. I had been accepted into one of the top M.F.A. Acting programs in the country and, if that could happen, then this certainly could, also. Two and half years of training later, I did step out on that stage playing Mrs. Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol*. And as I placed a pot of potatoes on the table with six Cratchit kids running around me, I took a moment to look

out at the audience, as though I were watching the snowfall. My heart burned once more with excitement and pride as I said to myself, "I'm here."

Much has changed since I wrote my last article for **Opening Stages**. Some dreams of have come true. And some dreams have not....yet.

Before I continue, I'll give a brief introduction of myself for those that didn't catch my previous article. I have progressive rod-cone dystrophy, which leaves me totally blind centrally, legally blind peripherally, extremely sensitive to light and partially colorblind. I discovered acting in 1996 and, though I had some tumultuous times in those first fragile years, I haven't turned back but rather dedicated the past five years to intense training and artistic exploration. Three years ago, I was accepted by the American Conservatory Theater Master of Fine Arts Acting program. I graduated this past May as one of only two legally blind actors to have completed a professional acting M.F.A. training program and moved to New York City, where I reside now.

When I started the program, I was confronted with a great deal of fear surrounding my inability to see other actor's eyes and facial reactions. Since everyone else could, would that mean they would be better actors than me? Would I be left behind? Would I fail? My teachers recognized my blocks immediately and weren't interested in dancing around my disability as though it were a glass figurine. They were interested in cultivating a great actor, so with strong but loving hands they pointed out each way in which I was defeating myself with self-pity. Through the next several months I was able to distinguish quickly when I was creating problems versus when I truly needed help. Turns out, the former was more prevalent than I could have ever imagined. I still needed accommodations from time to time, but the novelty of my disability wore off, the family familiarity set in, and I was accommodated with graciousness and non-judgment.

As I was trying to figure out what I should share in this article I made a running list of things that I had accomplished artistically and was quite surprised by the results. I've acted in 11 full-length plays (including performing on the Geary stage), 7 cabarets, 4 staged readings and 1 commercial. And I won the A.C.T. Carol Channing Award for excellence and professionalism in the craft. I started a theater company and have written, directed, and produced 5 full-length plays. One of those took me to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2002, and another brought me out to New York this summer. I've also taught acting privately and at the University of San Francisco.

The biggest change I've been facing recently doesn't have to do with my vision, although that definitely affects it. It's the necessity to redefine and adapt to life outside the nest. School was all about nurturing and evolving as artists. We were guaranteed roles in plays, space to rehearse and work, and teachers with the time and desire to help us whenever we needed it. Even creating my own work outside of school, I had developed a community of friends and actors. I had space donated, designers and people who believed in my vision as a director and were willing to commit their time. I also had people that understood my disability or at least saw me as an artist first and were willing to work around any difficulties. I left this warm nest and moved to a city where no one had seen my work, where time is money. And, although a few doors

were opened to me because I graduated from A. C. T., I'm just another face amongst the 100,000 other actors. The days of guaranteed roles, private rehearsal studios, and student loan money are long since past. I'm in the real world now. I'm in New York City, the Mecca of theater, where people come with dreams of being a Broadway star and end up waiting tables between small gigs, or just giving up their dreams altogether and becoming professional servers. It's a place where getting hit by a cab is easier than catching one, getting lost is a way of life, and spending hours on the subway to get places is a necessity. I paint a dark picture, but this is what I felt when I first arrived. I was completely overwhelmed and no matter how much I mentally prepared before I came, I was knocked on my butt and am now just starting to get up and move forward again.

Before I moved out here I told myself that things would take time, the next year would be about planting seeds and grounding myself in my new role as theater professional, rather than student. I wasn't in any hurry to produce results. I was excited, ready to work and learn what this business was all about. Well, that changed the moment I set foot off the plane. I forgot about my serenity and the vision I was holding for myself and became obsessed with desperately wanting to book that huge gig right off the bat, so that I could prove to myself and others that I deserved to be out here and that my dreams weren't fantasies. I auditioned for things that I wasn't right for, spent hours to prepare for them, and became increasingly interested in giving people what I thought they wanted, rather than just being myself. Ultimately, all this made me miserable. Putting yourself out there is a necessity in this business, but losing sight of who you are in the process doesn't serve anyone. I can't say what happened, but all of a sudden I caught on to my little detour from myself at about the three month mark and took time to re-evaluate.

This is what I came up with. I am now confronting new fears about whether I have what it takes to make it as a professional in this business. I'm confronting fears about where my next paycheck or financial resources for my next show will come from. I'm working with the challenges that come from auditioning for people who don't know me. I'm realizing that whenever there is text involved at auditions I have to explain my disability and my need for accommodations and that it's quite precarious asking for help here. If I ask too gently, they will often not take me seriously and roll right over me. If I'm too aggressive and demanding, then they become defensive and resentful, and inform the producer that I'm a problem actor. I'm discovering when it's more important for me to take the role of an advocate rather than actor. I'm realizing now that I'd rather be without an agent than with one who I don't believe in. And I'm finally remembering that I do my best work, when I walk in as me, not the me I think they want to see...just me.

I am totally in process right now, and am becoming more and more okay with that. It's difficult to nail down all that I've learned and gone through since I've been here because I'm still going through it. What I have reconnected to is the immense possibility of things -- the people that I've met who have been extraordinarily generous and giving of themselves, the realization that I actually am planting seeds right now, however long they may take to germinate and grow. And although I haven't been cast in a show yet, I feel like each relationship I form -- for instance by volunteering my time for casting

directors or producers -- is another seed planted in my career garden and more importantly another friendship I'm cultivating just for myself.

I do wish I had some answers about how to get through the transition from school to the outside world or an overarching solution that would apply to any future challenges I may face because of my disability. But right now I'm still just trying to figure out how to get from the F train to the N train. It's funny, as much as things have changed, it feels like I'm in exactly the same spot I was when I wrote the first article for **Opening Stages**. I'm just higher up on the spiral.

So where am I right now? I just found an awesome apartment in Astoria, Queens, just finished a gig working as assistant stage manager on an Off-Broadway show and am looking for a new agent. I'm writing a new play and am forming a partnership with another artist to begin collaborating on new work together. I still need to find a new job. And, in terms of actually producing the work that we will be writing, well as my friend says, "Marilee, your job is to envision and write these pieces. When the time is right the resources or the path to the resources will present themselves." It always has in the past, so I guess my job now is just to keep the faith, keep listening to my heart, be patient and gentle with myself when I make mistakes or go off course, continue to persevere, and keep taking one step in front of the other. That's all we can really ask of ourselves, isn't it?

"AMERICA NEEDS MORE VISUAL THEATRE!"
by Willy Conley

This was the headline used on a poster announcing a call for scripts written by deaf playwrights for the Visual Playwrights Retreat, produced over the past two summers by Quest: Arts for Everyone and Gallaudet University Theatre Arts Department. The retreat offered deaf playwrights a rare opportunity either to enhance the visual elements of their scripts or to explore alternative ways to build scripts other than sitting alone writing in the traditional sense word by word in English, which is a second or third language for some. What prompted me to come up with the retreat slogan was that there had been way too much talking and very little physical movement going on in theatres nationwide. There seems to be a lot of actors in fantastic costumes standing around talking to each other for long periods of time on large stages with gorgeous sets. As I sat in various theatres – obviously a minority among hearing audience members – I thought: "These actors are getting away with wasting all of that space on stage with their almost holy ability to speak the English language to those who adore hearing it. Why isn't this play on the radio? Theatre should be a physical and visual medium."*

I am well aware that "talking-heads" theatre and musicals have their place in our society, but a number of my deaf and hearing theatre colleagues and I feel that Visual Theatre deserves to have equal opportunity, funding, and recognition in the United States. Why not? Visual Theatre is very popular in Europe, Asia, and the United Kingdom. According to the 2000 U.S. Census about 12 million Americans were linguistically isolated. That's up from 7.7 million in 1990, an increase of more than half. This indicates that more than ever American theatre companies need to vigorously

explore ways to provide total theatre access to those who are linguistically isolated. An excellent way of providing access would be a visual, non-verbal production that would entertain any foreign language audience member. Good examples of visual theatre presenters are: Cirque du Soleil, Blue Man Group, Bill Irwin, Mark Jaster, Robert Wilson, Pilobolus Dance Theatre, Squonk Opera, and Synetic Theatre.

So what is Visual Theatre? A decent explanation of it is on the website of the School of Visual Theatre in Jerusalem, Israel (<http://www.visualtheater.co.il/visual.html>). Basically, it points out that the primary language of Visual Theatre is physical movement and/or visual image; and that verbal language is secondary or non-existent. One would find this form of theatre interdisciplinary, fusing various modes or elements of performance such as: Puppetry, Circus Arts, Mime/Gestures, Multi-media, Objects/Props, Lighting, Sets, Visual Arts, Masks, Performance Space, Dance, Sign Language, Audience Participation, Improvisation, Music, and Costumes.

Lynn Gardner, a theatre critic for *The Guardian*, wrote this on the website of the British Arts Council:

“...there is a strand of theatre - the physical and the visual - that speaks a completely different language from the traditional well made play and spans theatre, puppetry, dance and visual arts. This work uses the language of gesture, an area of theatre that in the past was dubbed mime and thought of as entirely silent. Nowadays such pieces frequently include spoken text, but the body speaks as eloquently as the voice, and one of the great strengths of this form is that it can often mine the emotions that fall in the silences between words. Much of this work is devised not scripted....” <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-drama-physical-and-visual.htm>

As part of the 2004 VSA arts Festival at the Kennedy Center, I was a panelist for a roundtable discussion, called "Access Deaf Theatre: Looking to the Future." We talked about the idea of creating an international visual theatre alliance or consortium, but nothing has been developed to date. Tim McCarty, president of Quest: Arts for Everyone in Lanham, Maryland, has begun organizing a mini visual theatre consortium involving the MFA Intercultural-Interdisciplinary Theatre program at Towson University, The Theatre Project (in Baltimore), and Creative Alliance (also in Baltimore). The plan is to mount "Questfest" in 2006, a festival of visual theatre in Baltimore, to showcase the need for more visual theatre in our country. We are hoping that by starting out on a small scale this may help spark interest leading to a larger visual theatre consortium someday that would eventually turn some of the bigger U.S. theatre organizations onto incorporating some visual theatre into their seasons. For selfish reasons – being a Deaf theatre artist – I would like to see more opportunities created for folks like myself.

One day during the Visual Playwrights Retreat, we invited three influential Washington D.C. theatre artists who reviewed script submissions for their theatres. They were asked: “What would you do if you received a non-traditional or visual script of some type on a videotape, a CD, or a DVD? One of the artists replied that it would be a waste

of his time. It would take too long to pop in a videotape and watch the work for one or two hours. Many of us were taken aback, since we all know that it usually takes at least an hour to sit down and read a full-length typewritten script. Why would sitting down to watch a videotape for an hour be much different? I would not be surprised if there were many other influential "gatekeepers" with similar attitudes in major theatres across the country. That was a signal to me that we have our work cut out for us.

* You may wonder what I was doing watching plays that were mostly verbal. Occasionally, I work as a Sign Master for ASL Interpreters who are booked to sign interpret for a deaf audience during an evening or two at theatres in metro D.C. Typically, Sign Masters coach and conduct rehearsals for interpreters by attending the same show four or five times.

Willy Conley is a playwright and teaches theater at Gallaudet University.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PROFESSIONAL **by Ike Schambelan**

Editor's note: When we were putting together the cluster of articles about professionalism for the previous issue of Opening Stages we inadvertently left off several paragraphs of Ike's excellent contribution. We deeply apologize for the omission and reprint it here in its entirety.

I keep trying to come up with incontrovertible rules and then think of something that contradicts them. So, I only come up with two hard and fast ones: be on time and do what you sign on for.

I once met Ian McKellan and talked a little about Theater By The Blind. He asked if we were professional and I started hemming and hawing and said, "well we certainly try to be." And he said, "no, do you get paid?" So that is certainly one definition.

But some of the most professional work I've done has been with community theaters, some of the best, some of what I'm proudest of.

And for seven years I directed plays in a psychiatric hospital, Austen Riggs in Stockbridge, where we did plays with patients mixed with non-patients, sold tickets, got reviewed, the whole shebang. And we did some great work, a *Macbeth* that made the Berkshire Eagle's 10 worst list for the year, a wonderful *View From the Bridge*, a super *To Grandmother's House We Go*.

Admittedly Peter used to hallucinate in the wings, but never onstage. Sam was an architect who did one play, fell in love with it and came to New York to be an actor where he immediately got work because he was so darn good. I get him whenever I can, but he's busy. His first try he was excellent, rigorously disciplined, had variety and range, did his homework, was businesslike but friendly. Go figure.

I've worked with professional actors who should be shot for making trouble, being late, blaming everyone else for their problems.

Meryl Streep said do your best on the other person's close up. Which I take to mean be responsive to others' needs. Be collegial, be friendly or at least not actively hostile.

We go to an international blind theater festival in Croatia with companies coming from England, Belgium, Poland, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and our host country. Our hosts' work was excellent, highly professional, and they have great government support. But you cannot be a "professional" actor in Croatia or Slovenia if you have vision or hearing problems. You cannot even get into a training academy. You remain separate but not equal.

Theater By The Blind went on Actors' Equity's Letter of Agreement contract this past season, making us officially off-Broadway. So we pay our actors weekly salaries with health and pension benefits, and those not yet in the union could join; five did. Before, under the Showcase Code you could not use a show to get in the union. You might say we just became fully professional. But I think we've been professional for years.

What about training? Well, sure it's good. I went to Yale Drama from a very intellectual college, and they beat the over-intellectualizing out of me. I learned a lot. But not a thing about how to do a resume or get a job. And then there's Sam, no training and instantly excellent.

So I go back to show up on time and deliver what you promise. Try to work well with the other artists and understand their needs. And, if possible, try to give your director, or choreographer or whoever, some of what they want. I've heard Tom Cruise would always ask directors: do you want it another way, is there anything else I can do for you? Didn't hurt his career.

Does disability interfere with professionalism? Not at all in and of itself. I certainly don't think blindness or visual impairment does. It may require getting a script in a certain format and a little more prep time. But when isn't preparation part of an artist's job.

We now have Board and company members with MS and Parkinson's and, though adjustments are necessary, they work fine. But recently I had to fire an excellent and long time company member who was on dialysis, which he'd been before when we'd worked, but which had finally drained him, so that it was all about could he stand up and move about and learn his lines, nothing about acting in any artistic sense. We're more "professional" now, so he was on contract and got paid five weeks salary. And I'm glad he did. It hurt like hell to do that, me, the company, and most especially the actor. But it had to be done. His work was no longer professional.

To know when you are or not, what you've done that wasn't professional over your career, and I've done plenty, and to try to correct what you can, to be better at dealing with people, to be more prepared, more equipped, more aware of your strengths and

weaknesses and to build the former and limit the latter, to grow, to get better, seem to me the ideals, the goals to strive for.

Ike Schambelan is Co-Artistic Director of the Theater By The Blind.

RESOURCES

UK RESOURCE FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED DANCE

Touchdown Dance is an integrated professional performance company of visually impaired and sighted dancers working regionally, nationally and internationally. Based in Manchester, England, Touchdown has presented dance workshops in Poland, Germany, Australia, and the USA on the use of touch and sensory feedback techniques. The company has produced a selection of accessible resource and information packets on dance methods and processes. Contact them for further details:

E-mail: info@touchdowndance.co.uk

Website: <http://www.touchdowndance.co.uk>

MUSIC AND THE DEAF

Music and the Deaf defines its mission as "to help deaf people of all ages and degrees of hearing loss to access music and the performing arts through workshops, schools projects and signed theatrical performances throughout the United Kingdom." It has a range of publications available on various topics associated with music and deafness.

Contact information:

E-mail nationalcurriculum@matd.org.uk

Website: <http://www.matd.org.uk/merchandise.html>

NEWS AND NOTES

AXIS DANCE COMPANY AND UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TO HOST PHYSICALLY INTEGRATED DANCE SUMMER INTENSIVE

AXIS Dance Company will present its first ever Physically Integrated Dance Summer Intensive August 19 – 28 at the University of Washington in Seattle. AXIS, Jürg Koch of the University of Washington Dance Dept., and Olive Bieringa of the Body Cartography Project will teach physically integrated contact improvisation, technique, choreography, performance, as well as site-specific dance. The intensive will culminate with an informal performance by workshop attendees and faculty.

Jürg Koch is currently a full-time lecturer and faculty member of the dance department at the University of Washington. He studied dance in Bern, Amsterdam and London,

where he completed his MA in Performance. From 2000 to 2003 Koch danced for CandoCo, one of the world's leading dance companies integrating disabled and non-disabled performers.

Olive Bieringa, Co-director and dancer for the Cartography Project, devotes her work to exploring the body's relationship to land, weather and place. Her work involves improvisational dance and performance forms, somatic movement practices and video creation. She holds a BFA in Improvisational Dance from the Netherlands, is a trained DanceAbility teacher, Shiatsu practitioner, and Somatic Movement Educator from the School for Body-Mind Centering.

People ages 16 and up, of all dance levels and experience, with and without physical disabilities are invited to attend the Intensive. Participants may be considered for future part-time dancer positions with AXIS Dance Company.

Tuition is \$500. Register by visiting <http://www.axisdance.org/education/schedule.html>, or by contacting the AXIS office at (510) 625-0110, info@axisdance.org. The registration deadline is April 30. Limited full and partial scholarships will be made available through an application process. To apply for a scholarship, send a letter of interest, curriculum vitae or resume of dance, theater, and/or athletic experience, plus a 10-15 minute VHS or DVD of yourself dancing to the AXIS office at 1428 Alice Street, Ste. 200, Oakland, CA 94612. The postmark deadline for scholarship applications is April 15.

Tuition does not include the cost of accommodations. AXIS is reserving a block of hotel rooms in Seattle at a competitive room rate. Hotel information will be made available to workshop registrants in early May. AXIS will make every effort to assist people in finding affordable accommodations, including providing registrants with contact information of others who may wish to share a room for the length of the summer intensive.

Since 1987, AXIS Dance Company has created work developed by dancers with and without disabilities. It is in the forefront of the inclusive dance form, "physically integrated dance." AXIS has performed in theaters and dance spaces at its home base in the Bay Area, on tour throughout the U.S., as well as in Germany and Siberia. For more information on AXIS Dance Company visit www.axisdance.org.

MAINE DEAF FILM FESTIVAL SET FOR APRIL

The University of Southern Maine and the ASL Club of Maine will present the Third Annual Maine Deaf Film Festival on Saturday, April 16, at the Luther Bonney Auditorium, University of Southern Maine in Portland. It will feature Deaf films from around the world, celebrating Deaf culture and creativity. For more information go to Deaffilmfest.tripod.com, or e-mail deaffilmfest@yahoo.com.

FRIENDS IN ART SCHOLARSHIP ANNOUNCED

Blind or visually impaired high school seniors and college students are invited to apply for the Friends In Art Scholarship for the school year 2005-2006. This \$1000 scholarship is offered annually for achievement, talent, and excellence in the arts. If you are planning to, or are currently majoring in the field of music, art, drama, or creative writing, and are a blind or visually impaired student, you may apply. You may obtain an application form by writing to: Harvey Miller, 402 East French Broad Street, Brevard, NC 28712-3410. Include a self-addressed-stamped envelope when requesting the application. Applications are due by April 15, 2005.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL THEATER FESTIVAL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED TO BE HELD IN ZAGREB

The Theatrical Company of the Blind and Visually Impaired New Life is organizing the Fourth International Festival of the Blind and Visually Impaired -- the Blind in Theatre -- scheduled to take place in Zagreb, Croatia from October 7 to 14. As at the first three festivals, the organizer will meet the expenses of accommodation and performance in Zagreb, while the participants should cover their own travel expenses and the transport of set and costumes.

The main guidelines of the Festival are:

1. The ensemble participating in the festival must have at least 50% blind and visually impaired actors.
2. The project applying for the festival can be an all-evening theatrical production, a performance or any other theatrical form.
3. Every group can participate in the technical part of the festival with workshops, lectures or presentations.
4. No group can participate in the festival with only a workshop, that is without an artistic program.
5. The groups participating in the festival can have no more than 15 members, unless agreed differently with the organizer.
6. All the participants renounce any kind of performance fee.
7. Confirmation of participation in the festival is to be delivered to the organizer in writing not later than April 1, while the complete application documentation should be sent not later than June 1, 2005.

The official languages of the festival are Croatian and English. For the technical part of the festival simultaneous translation will be provided.

Contact information

Theatrical Company of the Blind and Visually Impaired New Life
Senoina 32
10000 Zagreb
Croatia
Phone: ++ 385 1 48 12 502

++ 385 1 48 12 066
Fax: ++ 385 1 48 40 091
E-mail: teatar-slijepih@zg.htnet.hr

NATIONAL DANCE PROJECT ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS FOR PRODUCTION GRANTS

The National Dance Project (NDP), funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, provides a system of support for contemporary dance by supporting the production and distribution of dance in the United States. Every season, NDP awards fifteen to twenty Production Grants for the creation of new dance work that will tour nationally. Grants are awarded to dance projects based on nominations from presenters, artists, artist managers, and agents. The deadline for nominations is April 1. Grant amounts generally range from \$15,000 to \$35,000. Program guidelines are available at: <http://www.nefa.org/grantprog/ndp/index.html>.

Opening Stages is produced and copyrighted by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. You are welcome to copy and distribute this newsletter and articles from it, if you credit the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Use the following when crediting the Kennedy Center: "**Opening Stages** is a newsletter produced by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts at www.kennedy-center.org."

To **become a subscriber** and receive the free quarterly **Opening Stages** newsletter:

- e-mail your request for a subscription to Opening Stages along with your name, e-mail address and snail mail address to access@kennedy-center.org, or
- mail the same information to Accessibility Program, Opening Stages, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 2700 F. Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20566-0001, or
- fax your request to: (202) 416-8802.

If you do not want to receive your newsletter via e-mail, please request a hard copy and let us know if you need it in large-print or Braille.

For more information contact: The Accessibility Program at (202) 416-8727 (voice) or (202) 416-8728 (TTY), or via e-mail at access@kennedy-center.org