



## **OPENING STAGES**

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

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**The Kennedy Center**

Opening Stages Newsletter

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## FROM THE EDITOR

In this issue of **Opening Stages**, we take a look at two theater companies with quite different visions of how artists with disabilities can take their place on stage and backstage. The Graeae Theatre Company of London is primarily exclusive. Graeae defines itself as "Britain's foremost theatre company of people with physical and sensory impairments." And, its mission is to create opportunities for theatre practitioners with disabilities. Except when working in collaboration with other theaters, all roles in Graeae productions are played by disabled performers, whether or not the character is written as disabled. On the other hand, the Amaryllis Theatre Company of Philadelphia is primarily inclusive. Its mission statement reads "Amaryllis is an inclusive professional theater company whose mission is to produce new forms of theatre and encourage a richer sense of community by bringing together artists and audiences from the most diverse community spectrum possible." To accomplish this, "Amaryllis provides universal accessibility for all people with disabilities" and "uses casting procedures that preclude discrimination on the basis of physical or cultural difference." It produces new plays, new forms of theatre and new translations of classics into American Sign Language.

This difference between a theater that strives to create a specific cultural home for artists with disabilities and a theater that strives to bring able-bodied and disabled artists together reminds me a little of the 1997 debate between August Wilson and Robert Brustein, that was sparked by Wilson's famous speech "The Ground On Which I Stand." In it the renowned African-American playwright demanded support for a specifically African-American theater. "We want you to see us. We are black and beautiful," he stated. "We cannot allow others to have authority over our cultural and spiritual products." In a similar way, disability advocates have long decried the inauthentic and stereotypical ways that our images have been used in theater, film and television and the fact that able-bodied actors are regularly cast as disabled characters, denying opportunities to disabled actors. In opposition to Wilson, Brustein declared that "theater works best as a unifying rather than a segregating medium." And he accused Wilson of coming from an unwarranted posture of victimization.

But, why should we have to choose one model or the other? Surely there is a place for both. We can stand proudly "on our own ground," displaying our culture and gifts. And, we can also intermingle our culture and gifts with those of others to create new dramatic tapestries.

The problem, as many see it, is that we are rarely given that choice. Elsewhere in this issue Pamela Walker from the Professional Enrichment Program recites a long list of reasons that theater artists with disabilities have difficulty breaking into the mainstream. High on her list are the discomfort and prejudices of able-bodied theater workers.

The big challenge is: how do we get good enough, smart enough and strong enough to make the choice for ourselves about where we want to stand? I hope that in some small way **Opening Stages** can contribute to the solutions.

Paul Kahn

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## A TALE OF TWO THEATERS

### GRAEAE THEATRE COMPANY OF LONDON

(adapted from web site)

Founded in 1980 by Nabil Shaban and Richard Tomlinson, Graeae Theatre Company bills itself as "Britain's foremost theatre company of people with physical and sensory impairments." It receives funding from the Arts Council of England, London Arts and the Association of London Government. Graeae tours nationally twice a year and sometimes internationally with innovative productions of both classic and newly-commissioned work.

Graeae's aim is to redress the exclusion of people with physical and sensory impairments from performance, and it is concerned with creating pioneering theatre in both aesthetics and content. Its work includes a commitment to training, young peoples' theatre, outreach and education. The Board of Management, staff, directors, actors and writers are constituted mainly of arts practitioners with physical disabilities and sensory impairments.

Graeae creates professional theatre, that profiles the skills, vision and excellence of disabled actors, writers, designers, musicians and production staff, and addresses the professional development needs of disabled theater artists through education, training and employment.

Graeae Theatre Company produces both existing and new plays with an innovative and accessible approach. New plays are commissioned from disabled writers. The work represents disabled people as members of the community, reflecting diversity in gender, class, age, race and sexuality. And, it contributes to the debate on representation and equality of access, both in the theatre world and society at large. Graeae also encourages new writing through training courses and mentoring schemes.

Graeae's training programs are designed to counteract the lack of opportunities for disabled people who wish to enter the theatre profession, to inspire young disabled people with an interest in theatre, and to develop the voice of the disabled community. Faculty have numbered some of Britain's best known and talented theatre practitioners, including members of the Royal Shakespeare Company, Mike Leigh, London International Festival of Theatre, Trestle Theatre Company and Radio 4 Drama.

Graeae also offers special workshops aimed at schools, volunteer organizations, youth clubs and community centers. These projects provide young people with an introductory opportunity to participate in and gain access to the arts. They are also designed to combat negative images of disabled people and to offer insight and perspective on the position and status of disabled people in society.

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### **MORE ABOUT THE GRAEAE THEATRE COMPANY AN INTERVIEW WITH JENNY SEALEY, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

**OPENING STAGES:** What do you mean by "genuinely pioneering theatre in both its aesthetic and content?" Is there a unique disability aesthetic that you seek to communicate?

**JENNY SEALEY:** As an Artistic Director for the last 5 years I have chosen a diverse programme of work from "The Changeling" by Middleton and Rowley and "The Fall of The House of Usher" adapted by Steven Berkoff to new plays such as "Fittings: The last Freak Show" by Mike Kenny (a freak show touring with its own tent!), "Into the Mystic" by Peter Wolf (a modern day passion play looking at stigmata and atheism) and "Peeling" by Kaite O'Reilly (a play about women at war and being a disabled performer). I work on each play with a completely different approach. As I am deaf, my first thoughts are how do we make the play accessible to a deaf audience. We never have a sign language interpreter on the side. They are always integrated as a character or the deaf actor plays his or her own role and interprets part of the play. In "The Changeling" everyone has some responsibility for signing, including blind actors. The approach to the work and the input from every new cast is exactly what makes the work pioneering. No other company has to think about making the work accessible for blind, deaf and physically disabled actors AND audiences. Graeae really is in such a unique position. The passion to explore new, innovative approaches to artistic accessibility drives the company and gives us the status of having extraordinary aesthetics, which are informed by a disability sensibility, in that we explore what we can do rather than what we cannot do.

OS: Is social intervention i.e. using theater as a political tool a primary concern? If so, how do you accomplish that? And do you see any conflict between making art and making politics?

SEALEY: The simple fact of placing disabled actors in a narrative previously denied to them is political in itself. An audience might think of disabled actors being in the subplot of "The Changeling," but giving them parts which are usually played by non-disabled people subverts expectation. Similarly an audience rarely sees more than one disabled person on stage. "The Changeling" had 6 disabled actors. "Fittings" was political in that it reclaimed the word "freak" and asked the audience to feel free to look. "Peeling" not only looked at the political issue that war creates more disabled people, but also took a dig at employment practices, i.e. "cripping up" is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century answer to "blacking up." Graeae is political because of the very fact a company like us has to exist. The conflict I have is that I cannot understand why directors are so fearful of integrated casting. I really cannot see the problem. If the actors are good, then they should be allowed to be in plays.

OS: As a "theatre company of people with physical and sensory impairments" Graeae seems to be a segregated organization. What is the artistic or social importance of such a company?

SEALEY: Graeae has received extremely good funding from the Arts Council of England and London Arts. They fund us to be UK's leading company of people with physical and sensory disabilities. In the same way they fund Heart and Soul to be the leading company of professional performers with learning disabilities and Survivors Poetry to lead the way for performers who have survived the mental health system. However, all the companies meet together with the Arts Council to discuss and plan potential collaborations. Graeae does integrated work when doing co-productions and collaborations. But, because we are one of the very few companies that is artistically led by disabled people, it is important that we have space to follow our own remit.

OS: When disabled actors play able-bodied characters how do audiences respond?

SEALEY: They get used to it!

OS: What is unique about your training programs?

SEALEY: They are courses for up to 12 disabled people. The training is intensive, fully accessible and taught by high profile theatre practitioners. We teach voice, movement, improvisation, Brecht, non-text based work, contemporary text, etc. The training is the same as in any drama school, but tutors are expected to be flexible. For example, doing dance with blind students, you have to verbally explain visual movements. Or, in improv with deaf students, you have to work out how best to work with the sign language interpreter. All course documentation has to be formatted into Braille, large print, tape etc.

OS: Are opportunities for aspiring disabled performers to gain training in mainstream schools such as RADA and LAMDA limited?

SEALEY: A big part of Graeae's job is advocacy and working with organisations to change their attitude towards body fascism and disabled people and to see the potential of the performer. We have been working closely with RADA with a view for greater inclusion of disabled performers. It is a slow process, and at the moment there is much pressure on Graeae to provide training for actors and writers. London Metropolitan University is hosting our Missing Piece 3 actor training initiative. (Sadler's Wells hosted MP 1, and Manchester Metropolitan University hosted MP2.)

OS: What is the future of Graeae?

SEALEY: In an ideal world, there really should not be the need for a company like Graeae. Inclusion and integration should be a necessity. But, until more directors, casting agents, producers and training establishments start to use their creative imaginations, face up to prejudices about disability and the whole concept of "body perfect" and really see the potential of the performers I work with... Graeae is going to be around for a long time.

### **AMARYLLIS THEATRE COMPANY**

Amaryllis Theatre Company was founded in 1999 by Mimi Kenney Smith, Linda Merians and Stephen P. Smith. Amaryllis is an inclusive professional theater company whose mission is "to produce new forms of theatre and encourage a richer sense of community by bringing together artists and audiences from the most diverse community spectrum possible." To accomplish its mission, Amaryllis provides universal accessibility for all people with disabilities and uses casting procedures that preclude discrimination on the basis of physical or cultural difference. It produces new plays, new forms of theatre and new translations of classics into American Sign Language. At present, Amaryllis is the only theatre company in Philadelphia (among nearly 60 members of the Theatre Alliance), which provides complete architectural and programmatic accessibility for its audiences and includes professional artists with disabilities in its productions.

Amaryllis is an Equity-affiliated theatre company that casts from all over the country and uses award-winning directors and designers. From the beginning, the founders were emphatic about producing high quality competitive professional art to avoid any possibility of audiences and critics mistaking the work as art therapy.

Amaryllis' first production, Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" in American Sign Language and spoken English was produced in partnership with Peter Novak. Novak developed a new technique for translating Shakespeare into a poetic equivalent in ASL and spent 16 months with the help of many of the country's best Deaf actors working on the translation. The production featured seven Deaf and six hearing actors from around the country and received local and national press and highly favorable critical and audience responses. Novak has plans to continue his partnership with Amaryllis and to translate and produce the entire Shakespearean canon.

Last season, Amaryllis produced two premieres, a non-ASL Philadelphia premiere of "Horse Country" by New York playwright C. J. Hopkins, and the world premiere of Willy Conley's play about Deaf culture, "Falling on Hearing Eyes," produced in association with the National Theatre of the Deaf and later featured at Gallaudet University and the Kennedy Center during Deaf Way II. Amaryllis also produced three performance events, which brought together professional actors with and without disabilities from all over the country.

Also, as a result of Amaryllis' work on accessibility, the company received the 2000 Access Achievement Award from the City of Philadelphia. Co-founder Mimi Kenney Smith is now a member of the Philadelphia Mayor's Commission on People with Disabilities. She has scheduled a Theatre Access Conference for February to share information about accessibility issues with other theatres.

Amaryllis is also the leader in a new Cultural Access Project. The Project has already undertaken a number of initiatives: the establishment of an Audio Description Project to train seven new audio-describers to provide accessibility to people who are blind or have low vision; the generation of a study, with the assistance of Temple University, to determine the needs and interests of people with disabilities; the development of the Theatre Access Conference, funded by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; and, with the assistance of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Project, the development and creation of a monumental outdoor mural celebrating the potential of people with disabilities.

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### **MORE ABOUT AMARYLLIS THEATER COMPANY AND MIMI KENNEY SMITH, PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

OPENING STAGES: Where did Amaryllis' emphasis on inclusiveness come from?

MIMI KENNEY SMITH: The impetus for its guiding principles -- inclusion and the celebration of physical and cultural difference -- came from two sources. First, my mother lost her leg before she was married. I also had a great aunt and uncle who were Deaf, and my twin sister's first child had Down Syndrome. So, I grew up with disability.

The other reason is because, as an actor for 35 years, the most exciting artistic opportunities I had occurred when I worked with people whose way of thinking or communicating or moving through the world was different from mine. In graduate

school in Pocatello, Idaho, in the mid-80's I saw a production of the National Theatre of the Deaf and then worked with them in class for a bit. I was blown away by the extraordinary, athletic physicality and clarity of the work. Then, just before I got my degree, I acted in a production of "Romeo and Juliet" with a young woman, Joy Mincey Powell, who later that year was in an accident at a children's camp. Joy was one of the best young actors I had ever worked with or taught, and she had been accepted into a prestigious acting program for the remainder of her college years. However, once she started using a wheelchair, the program could not accept her, because the university was inaccessible. She transferred to another university and took classes, but was unable to act in productions, because the stage was inaccessible. I knew Joy was the same extraordinary actor she had been, and I was furious at the injustice of her situation.

I also worked with people from other countries and cultures whose vision of the world, language and customs were different from mine, and I was stirred in the same way as I had been with NTD. Wonderful new artistic forms were created at the same time that cultural bridges were crossed. So, I started Amaryllis to bring together artists and audiences from a widely diverse community and try to create work that would open people's minds, hearts and imaginations to the thrill of diversity. And, to do that I would make sure that everything we did was accessible to everyone who wanted to attend, disability or not, money or not.

OS: How did you get interested in a career in theater?

SMITH: I started working in theatre as a painter in high school in 1963. In 1967, to help my Dad support our big family, I started working as a secretary at a college theatre in Philadelphia and continued to paint sets and also began designing graphic art pieces for the theatre. That fall, I also auditioned for a musical, "Take Me Along," where I met my future husband Steve. I worked there until 1971, acting, painting and designing, until we left so that Steve could attend graduate school in English at Notre Dame. He got his first college teaching position at Idaho State University in Pocatello in 1978, and I got my first opportunity to attend college and went to ISU for the next nine years, studying visual art and theatre. I received a BFA in acting and directing and an MA in theatre from Idaho State University. I then took post-graduate classes in additional acting and directing techniques at Villanova University.

OS: What have been the greatest rewards of doing your work?

SMITH: When I came to Philadelphia, I had the wonderful opportunity in 1989 to become a founding member of the Performing Arts League of Philadelphia, which eventually became the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia. I've worked as an officer, board member and committee chair ever since, learning and growing from colleagues in the field from all over the country.

I've also been amply rewarded by the responses of Amaryllis' actors and audiences, especially those who are Deaf or who have disabilities. Two of Amaryllis' actors from "Twelfth Night," Adrian Blue and Catherine Rush, moved to Philadelphia in April to work

with Amaryllis. "AB" is now Amaryllis' Associate Artistic Director and "Cap" is a dramaturg and actor. A third, Robert DeMayo, will move here in December. These three have national reputations, and I'm thrilled to have them join us.

Another, very important reward has been seeing my oldest son Steve become a brilliant actor. He completed an MA in theatre and now is in his third year as an MFA student in acting, and has already performed in professional companies. I'm very proud of him.

OS: Can you describe your disability?

SMITH: Last January, two years after starting Amaryllis, I was diagnosed with post-polio syndrome. I had had polio when I was 12 but completely recovered. I had begun having mild feelings of weakness during the summer of 2000 while we were rehearsing "Twelfth Night" but didn't have time to pay much attention until after that production. By then, I was beginning to limp, but I acted in another production, "Uncle Vanya," here in Philadelphia in December. Finally, I decided to check things out and in January was diagnosed and started wearing a short leg brace on one leg. By April, I needed a second brace and forearm crutches, and in June I was fitted for a power wheelchair for distances.

It's been suggested that "overuse abuse" from a lifetime in theatre and the grueling, sometimes 20-hour days putting a new company and a huge first project together ironically triggered the condition. That irony of personal disability, after working with others with disabilities, has been more difficult to reconcile and accept than the disability itself. It has been a weird shock for everyone. But, I couldn't be in better company.

OS: Has your disability impeded your career?

SMITH: The past year and a half have been a real eye-opener, even though I lived with and worked with people with disabilities before then. The day-to-day challenges are something I never fully understood until now. I learned, for example, how inadequate the health care system is. My HMO, Independence Blue Cross, allows a maximum of two months physical therapy for any diagnosis. So, when I began losing strength in my arms, I was unable to return to PT, even though I had only had PT for my legs before. They also refused to cover the cost of the power wheelchair, even after a series of humiliating appeals that took six months and cost additional strength. And they pay for only the first braces or crutches, even though the condition will last a lifetime.

After "Twelfth Night," founding partner Linda Merians resigned to accept a position in a New York university closer to her family. My concurrent challenges with my new disability left the company with unmet funding deadlines in the spring and summer of 2001. That resulted in my decision to forego a salary in order to keep the company going until I could raise enough money to hire additional staff and get our fundraising capacity back to normal. I've just hired a new Managing Director, so we're on the road to renewed organizational strength, but I haven't been paid for the last two years. However, I don't see this as permanent. My hope is that our support base will continue

to increase and that by next season I will again be able to make a living as a practicing theatre artist.

Within the theatre community, I haven't noticed much change in the way I personally am treated, at least as a member of the Theatre Alliance and a colleague. I haven't had much time to do any set painting, so I haven't yet encountered the scores of challenges that will appear once I attempt that highly physical work again. I may get an opportunity to test those waters as the Mayor's Commission and the Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program attempt to create a monumental outdoor mural on the subject of people with disabilities. As chair of the Commission's Arts and Culture Committee, I'll be helping to coordinate this project and presumably could also work on it as an artist. Those challenges obviously would be enormous. So, no decisions yet.

Neither have I acted since my use of assistive equipment, but the artistic director of another company where I've acted many times recently asked if I were interested in auditioning for the role of Rosemary Kennedy in an upcoming new play about her and the Kennedy family. I will audition.

As a director, systemic fatigue has been my greatest obstacle. I've still not been able to balance disability with the leadership of a fairly new company and a lifetime of overwork, juggling family and a career in the arts. But, I'm working on it.

OS: Has your personal experience with disabilities change your approach to your art?

SMITH: My personal experiences and my work with Amaryllis have turned me from a theatre artist alone into an activist. Last spring, I decided to use my knowledge of the theatre community and my position on the Mayor's Commission to develop what I think is a unique national model for accessibility advocacy. I created two interconnected committees, the Arts and Culture Committee on the Mayor's Commission and the Theatre Access Project through the Audience Development Committee that I chair for the Theatre Alliance. The intention of the joint committees is for theatre artists, people with disabilities and people who lead companies that provide services to people with disabilities to work together to make all of Philadelphia's theatres -- and eventually, all cultural institutions -- more accessible. So far, it's working great.

OS: What advice would you give to other people with disabilities who want to pursue a career in the theatre?

SMITH: Don't underestimate yourself. Don't take "no" for an answer when attempting to find the best training; get the ADA behind you and, if all else fails, activists and the press. And then get in there and do the work you need to do to learn your craft. Always be prepared when you audition or apply for design or directing work. Don't ask for special consideration -- except accessibility -- unless you're prepared to be marginalized. So, that means don't! Make your ability, not your disability, your most recognizable feature. Don't give up. And don't forget to laugh.

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## PROGRAMS

### **THE PROFESSIONAL ENRICHMENT PROGRAM A COMMUNITY MODEL FOR BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN THE DISABILITY AND THEATER COMMUNITIES by Pamela K. Walker**

Many talented theater artists with disabilities are unable to reach a competitive level in theater because of a lack of opportunities to practice their craft in professional settings that would provide them with skill-building experiences. More and more, doors are opening to non-traditional hiring and creative casting, but few people with disabilities (PWDs) have been able to reach a professional enough level to go through those doors. Those who are able to become competitive, despite the obstacles, continue to encounter difficulties because the majority of their non-disabled peers in the theater industry are unfamiliar and, therefore, often uncomfortable working with PWDs.

The Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) is a coalition of leading arts organizations partnering to remedy these problems. As a coalition of community groups, PEP represents a relatively untried model towards inclusion of people with disabilities. PEP brings together parties from two worlds, the disability community and the theatrical community, and builds bridges between them.

#### **The History of PEP**

In 1997, three women met at the national conference of the Association for Theatre Accessibility (ATA). These women, all from the San Francisco Bay area, made a commitment to stay in touch and to network their programs to support theater workers with disabilities. The women were: Rica Anderson, then at Theatre Bay Area (TBA), Deborah Cullinan from Intersection for the Arts, and Pamela Walker, representing both the National Arts and Disability Center and Talent Bridge, a talent agency for PWDs. Before long, the Corporation on Disabilities and Telecommunication and the Coalition for Inclusive Performing Arts joined the group. PEP was born!

Within a few years, other coalition partners were added. Also on board now are: Isis Arts Collective, Julia Morgan Center for the Arts, the Media Access Office North, and Yerba Buena Gardens. PEP coalition partners are selected from groups with a focus on theater and on professionalism. PEP is not about providing theater experiences to PWDs but about advancing the careers of existing professional theater workers with disabilities. It is also important for PEP partners to be interested in impacting the big picture, not just their own mission.

## **PEP Goals**

Each partner determines three individual goals per year to further the mission of PEP, individually or through his or her organization. Additionally, there is at least one group goal each year.

The 2000 group goal was to outreach to PWDs, to encourage them to become involved with TBA, the primary theater service organization in the Bay Area. Steps to reaching this goal were (1) to encourage them to become TBA members, (2) to encourage them to attend TBA workshops by offering discounts, and (3) to get them to apply to be part of TBA's annual general auditions. These steps were taken through individual contacts and through the distribution of information materials.

The 2001 group goal was to produce a workshop production, thereby providing an opportunity for disabled theater artists to practice their craft with professional peers. To accomplish this, PEP created *Alchemy Works*, an alliance of disabled and non-disabled theater artists. A cast of 14 performers with and without disabilities performed three one-act plays by playwrights with disabilities. Half of the crew and production team were people with disabilities.

The 2002 group goal was for *Alchemy Works* to do another workshop production. To stretch the actors' theatrical muscles in a new direction, three literary works by Roald Dahl were adapted for the stage. Again, the group of people making the production possible was a mix of professionals with and without disabilities.

Also in 2002, PEP began The PEP Club, which meets twice monthly. One monthly meeting is to practice improv exercises, and the other meeting is a workshop related to building theatrical skills. Down the road *Alchemy Works* may include a conservatory element with trainings, as well as a performance wing, presenting both contemporary classics and new works from members of the company.

A broad goal of PEP is to fill gaps in the professional development of performers with disabilities by building bridges. Some bridges that have been considered are: providing basics workshops and materials; getting PWDs involved in existing, integrated classes; a mentor program; an audition assistance program; opportunities to view and discuss performances; internships; and more performance projects.

## **PEP as a National Model**

PEP provides a model towards integrating theater workers with disabilities into mainstream professional theater. The need for this integrated approach has been identified over and over. In 1998, the National Endowment for the Arts held a three-day Career in the Arts Forum for artists with disabilities and published a final report that came to the same conclusion: isolated and segregated settings do not provide a productive approach for learning professional skills. When PWDs only learn theatrical

skills in isolated settings outside the larger context of the general theater community, they are shut off from access to further opportunities.

On the other hand, several goals can be achieved by striving toward an integrated theater community with non-disabled actors working side-by-side with PWDs. People re-examine stereotypes and preconceived attitudes about disabilities; PWDs have the opportunity to practice and improve their craft by working with experienced performers and directors; relationships are built within the theater community that foster further opportunities; members of the mainstream theater community become more comfortable working with PWDs and cast with an eye toward diversity; and performance venues improve access for both performers and audience members.

The obstacles to integrating PWDs into theater work include transportation barriers, financial barriers, social barriers, underestimating the need to develop one's craft, disability related needs, fear, isolation, lack of information (such as about accessible workshops), internalized oppression (i.e. that being an artist is not an option if one is disabled), and physical and attitudinal barriers to classes and internships. Also, many performers with disabilities have performed their own stories through solo work, and have difficulty moving from that style to ensemble work. Even basic understanding of common things (such as what "blocking" means, the role of the director, and what is meant by "the Method") can create a gap, because people with disabilities feel self-conscious about admitting that they don't know these things.

There are several reasons why the PEP model is different than most models that have been tried:

- PEP originates from the *community* that it is aiming to empower and support. The ATA conference that birthed the concept of PEP was planned and presented by members of the disability community and their allies. "Nothing about us without us" is a cornerstone of PEP.
- PEP is a coalition of groups working together on the mission. This is different than one organization taking it upon itself to create theater opportunities for people with disabilities. PEP brings the mainstream theater community together with the disability art community.
- PEP is not intended to provide the only performance venue for theater workers with disabilities. Unlike many programs that build a structure that includes dependency, PEP moves people into integrated theatrical work. Although some people may work with PEP programs for a long time, the goal is for them to also find opportunities in mainstream theater because of their experiences with PEP.
- As simple as it seems, the idea of putting disabled and non-disabled folks to work together equally is a rare approach. Usually both communities have functioned separately from each other. Unfortunately, funding streams perpetuate this segregated approach. Eligibility for "disability monies" is often dependent upon serving only PWDs. Also, art and theater funders have not yet begun to see disability in their field of vision.

- PEP's diverse group of coalition members gives us many "in-house" experts and enables us to serve as a resource for other groups working toward diversity and integration. In addition to performers, PEP invites playwrights with disabilities and other theater workers with disabilities (such as technicians, stage managers and designers) to work on projects. The PEP website features information and resources for artists and theater groups working toward diversity and integration.

### **Partner Impact**

Through the PEP coalition the concept of integration has rippled through the theater community. Some examples of positive change are:

- TBA's monthly publication, Callboard, has published several articles on disability issues as well as "Monologues" (artist's experiences told in the first person) by artists with disabilities.
- Julia Morgan Center for the Arts began applying for grants and planning with an architect on how to make their historical theater more accessible. They also hired a lighting and sound intern with a disability.
- Intersection for the Arts is researching the installation of an elevator to their exhibit area and is displaying photographs of the exhibit downstairs as a way to achieve some interim access.
- Isis Arts Collective made it part of their vision to cast with a focus on diversity and integration.
- Central Works Theater Ensemble (a theater company with whom one of the individual PEP representatives works) realized the need to perform in accessible venues and also began doing outreach to the disability community.

### **In Conclusion**

A member of the production team wrote the following after auditions for *Alchemy Works*: "At the auditions, the director asked two people to read a scene together: A young man who is a chair user (Joe) and a woman who is not disabled (Jane). Joe has raw talent and presence, but is unpolished; he has wanted to pursue acting, but has not had opportunities. Jane is an experienced actress, able to present a wide range of emotions and nuances. At the beginning of the reading, Joe read without expression. His performance improved as the scene progressed. The skills that Jane brought gave him something to work off of, and he was pulled into the character; he began responding and being in the role. It was true alchemy and it showed just a glimmer of what Joe can pull from himself. He not only had someone to build energy with, but he became challenged to give energy back. It was a wonderful process to watch. *Alchemy Works!*"

PEP and *Alchemy Works* continue to support the need for professionally oriented theatrical activities that are inclusive of people from non-traditional groups, particularly members of the disabled community. The aim is to do this in a way that does not create a dependency, since empowering theater workers with disabilities to work in the mainstream world is the ultimate goal. PEP continually looks for ways to impact the theater community at large and, as a national model, is documenting methods used for

adaptation and integration. Information is posted for the benefit of interested persons on the PEP website at <http://www.madknight.com/pep>

The social and funding terrain that we function in does not welcome programs such as the PEP project. The history of our society is one of isolating, hiding and segregating PWDs. Even though we have laws intended to integrate PWDs into the mainstream, the mechanisms that would make that possible are still based in an old way of functioning. However, despite these obstacles, PEP emerges to try a new approach. The arts are a good place to try something new, because people in the arts are receptive to creative thinking and experimental work. Alchemy is possible and PEP is searching for the formula for gold!

*People with disabilities were not encouraged to work in theater when Pamela Walker was a teenager, so she gave up her thespian dream and became an audience member for many years. Time changes things, and fifteen years ago she took that dream off the shelf, dusted it off and has been performing, writing, and directing ever since.*

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## RESOURCES

### UK WEB GUIDE TO TRAINING IN DANCE AND DRAMA

<<http://www.cdet.org.uk/leaflet.htm>> is a comprehensive site that offers a practical guide to vocational training in dance and drama in the United Kingdom. Directed at students, parents, teachers and anyone who might be offering career advice, it was compiled by the Council for Dance Education and Training and the National Council for Drama Training. Included are charts of courses in dance and drama, the qualifications they lead to, and funding sources.

### FRIENDS-IN-ART CREATES LISTSERVE

Friends-in-Art (FIA), an affiliate of the American Council of the Blind (ACB), has created a listserv for aspiring artists and those interested in the arts. List members will be able to share information and opinions on topics related to the connection between visual impairments and the arts. To subscribe, send a blank message to: [fia-acb-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:fia-acb-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

FIA members are blind and vision impaired. Some are artists of one kind or another and others are simply interested in promoting access to all kinds of arts, such as audio description of drama and musical theater and access to museums. FIA aims to advocate for the needs of artists and audiences with visual impairments. It also provides educational and networking opportunities for artists, mostly in conjunction with ACB's annual convention. At the convention each year, FIA has a showcase of

performing arts, a prose and poetry reading, a visual art gallery, museum tours and workshops on various subjects.

Membership dues for FIA are \$12 per year. To join send a check to Arlo Monthei, Treasurer, 1304 39th Street, Des Moines, IA 50311. Accompany the check with a note expressing your interest in joining, along with your name, mailing address, e-mail address, and preferred format for the semi-annual newsletter (Braille, large print, or e-mail).

## **NEW TECHNOLOGY EXPANDS OPTIONS FOR MUSICIANS WITH DISABILITIES**

The Drake Music Project, a London-based organization, has announced the development of new software called E-Scape. E-Scape is said to enable people with any degree of physical disability to compose and perform music unaided.

With E-Scape a person can use the computer -- even with a single switch -- to write a piece of music, play it back, or perform it live in several ways. E-Scape can also be controlled from the computer keyboard, trackball, joystick or using musical (MIDI) equipment. E-Scape also speaks and can have the menu text size increased, enabling people with some visual impairments to use it.

The Project web site ([www.drakemusicproject.com](http://www.drakemusicproject.com)) advises that E-Scape tries to give users as little work as possible by guiding them through operations. The degree of choice and flexibility can be altered, and each user can select a "user level" to work at. The lower levels have fewer choices, simpler language and more guidance. People do not need to know anything about musical terminology, music technology or computer operation to start using E-Scape.

E-Scape is now available for PCs and some Apple computers. For further details contact [Technology@DrakeMusicProject.org](mailto:Technology@DrakeMusicProject.org) or write to Drake Music Project, 79 East Road, London N1 6AH.

The Drake Music Project is dedicated to giving everyone the opportunity to make music. Using adapted music technology, Drake enables disabled children and adults who are unable to play conventional musical instruments to compose and perform their own music. The technologies that Drake users include electronic musical instruments, computers, specialist computer hardware and specialist computer software. Drake also provides training in music technology and music education for people with special needs to classroom teachers, workshop leaders and medical professionals.

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## **NEWS AND NOTES**

## PERFORMERS WITH DISABILITIES INVITED TO AUDITION FOR VSA *arts*

VSA *arts* is auditioning performers with disabilities for inclusion in a Performing Arts Registry database.

### **Audition Guidelines**

Artists from all performing arts genres are invited to submit the following audition materials for review:

- An audio or video recording of at least 5 minutes of performance showing the artist to the best advantage. Recordings of live performances are preferred. Submissions without a recording will not be considered.
- A brief 1-2 page biography
- A listing of performances in the past 18 months, including date and venue
- A list of upcoming performances or events
- An 8" x 10" photo
- Contact information including the group representative's name, address, telephone, fax, and e-mail information

All submitted material becomes the property of VSA *arts*.

Materials should be sent to:

Elena Widder  
VSA *arts* Auditions  
1300 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Contact Elena Widder with any questions at [elenaw@vsarts.org](mailto:elenaw@vsarts.org) or 800-933-8721 ext. 3895.

## APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR ARTS MENTORING PROGRAM

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts has announced a request for proposals to implement mentoring programs for individuals with disabilities. Proposals must be received by January 6, 2003. They may include a request for between \$1,000 and \$15,000 in support of projects to be executed between January 2003 and December 2003.

The mission of this Careers in the Arts Initiative Mentoring (CAIM) program is to support arts and arts service organization in creating experiential educational opportunities. CAIM is an outgrowth of the recommendations made at the National Forum on Careers in the Arts held in June of 1998 at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

and sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, the US Department of Education, the US Department of Health and Human Services and the Social Security Administration.

Through the CAIM project arts organizations will offer individuals and students with disabilities, who are interested in exploring or advancing their careers in the arts, the opportunity to work in a professional arts or arts service environment and be mentored by a working arts professional. CAIM projects will create opportunities for the individual with a disability to partake in professional development opportunities and career enhancement opportunities, and to build experiences and resume credit, which enhance their potential for future competitive employment. These experiences can be in any field of the arts including but not limited to:

- Administrative: development, marketing, education, advertising, human resources, information systems/technology, retail operations, special events, box office, and programming
- Production: stage management, stage crew, costuming, construction, directing, choreographing, design, museum practices including research, collections, management, and conservation
- Design/Arts: exhibits, costuming, sets, props, lights, sound, painting, sculpting, visual arts, film, graphics and multi-media
- Performance: dancer, actor, and musician.

Qualifying art organizations must:

- Be a tax-exempt nonprofit 501-C-3 cultural arts organization, cultural arts service organization or a state/local government arts agency
- Identify a full-time employee of the organization to mentor the individual with a disability
- Select a qualified individual with a disability to be mentored (see definition of "qualified" below)
- Complete and return an application including a budget, which accounts for the amount requested. Organizations may request from \$1000 up to \$15,000 in support for a CAIM project. No matching funds are required but organizations are encouraged to supplement their CAIM project with other funds.
- Experiential education mentoring projects may be up to nine months long but must be at least one semester long (approximately 4 months), 15 to 40 hours a week, and occur between January 2003 and December 2003.
- Submit a mid-term report within 90 days of receipt of funds
- Submit a final report including completed evaluation tools provided by the Kennedy Center within 30 days of the completion of the CAIM project.

Qualifying individuals with a disability must:

- Be undergraduate or graduate students, or within 2 years of graduation with any major

- Have a documented disability (Documentation of a disability includes but is not limited to letter or other documentation from a vocational rehabilitation agency, college or university office of disability services or a physician.)
- Be a U.S. citizen or have a right-to-work permit
- Have a C+ or higher G.P.A.

Or alternatively the individual must:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Have a documented disability
- Be a U.S. citizen or have a right-to-work permit
- Have three years of successful work and/or training experience in the arts (A combination would be accepted.)
- Have demonstrated experience in the arts.

Eligible activities for funding include but are not limited to stipends for the individual with a disability to participate in the project, auxiliary aids and accommodations necessary for the individual's successful participation in the mentoring program, and related expenses. Ineligible activities include commercial (for profit) enterprises or activities, general office equipment, travel and relocation costs.

To apply organizations must fill out an application form. E-mail your request for an application to: [access@kennedy-center.org](mailto:access@kennedy-center.org). Be sure that you put "CAIM Application Request" in the subject field, and please indicate in the e-mail whether you would like the application e-mailed to you as an attachment (PDF file), faxed or mailed to you. Completed applications must be received by close of business on Monday January 6th, 2003 and must be submitted by mail to:

Accessibility Program  
The Kennedy Center  
P.O. Box 10808  
Arlington, Virginia, 22210.

Applicants will be notified of whether or not they have received funding by February 16, 2003. Projects must be completed by December 31, 2003.

For additional information contact:

The John F. Kennedy Center Accessibility Program by:

Phone: (202) 416-8727

Fax: (202) 416-8802

TTY: (202) 416-8728

E-mail: [access@kennedy-center.org](mailto:access@kennedy-center.org)

**APPLICATIONS NOW BEING ACCEPTED FOR THE YEAR 2003 STATEWIDE FORUMS ON CAREERS IN THE ARTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

The National Arts and Disability Center at UCLA (NADC) requests competitive proposals from state arts agencies and VSA arts affiliates for convening a statewide forum on careers in the arts for people with disabilities. The purposes of the Statewide Forums are to (1) assess the education and career needs and barriers of artists and arts administrators with disabilities; and (2) develop and implement strategies to overcome barriers and advance careers in the arts for individuals with disabilities. The specific focus and activities to be conducted should be responsive to the opportunities and challenges of artists with disabilities within the individual states.

Funding amount: up to \$15,000

Application deadline: January 6, 2003

For a copy of the application please go to <<http://nadc.ucla.edu/StatewideForums.cfm>>.

For additional information and questions about the application process contact:

Dr. Olivia Raynor

E-mail: [oraynor@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:oraynor@mednet.ucla.edu)

Phone: 310-794-1141.

The Forums are sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and VSA arts. They are administered by NADC. For more information about the Center contact

Beth Stoffmacher

Technical Assistance Coordinator

Tarjan Center for Developmental Disabilities

National Arts and Disability Center

300 UCLA MP Ste. 3310

Los Angeles, CA 90095-6967

E-mail: [bstoffmacher@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:bstoffmacher@mednet.ucla.edu)

Phone: (310) 825-5054

Fax: (310) 794-1143

Web site: <http://nadc.ucla.edu>

## **VSA ARTS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL SLATED FOR WASHINGTON D.C. IN 2004**

The International VSA arts Festival (IVSAF) is VSA arts' largest and single most important educational event. Held every five years, it attracts thousands of participants from all over the globe. The next festival will take place in June 2004 in Washington, D.C. Hosting over 2,000 affiliate delegates, the IVSAF will showcase the creativity and talents of national and international artists with disabilities, share adaptive techniques that facilitate access and inclusion of people with disabilities in the arts, and facilitate the exchange of valuable information related to the arts and arts education. The IVSAF is a signature event that highlights the achievements of people with disabilities, as well as the diversity of the arts and cultures of the participants. For more information contact VSA arts at 1-800-933-8721 (phone), 202-737-0645 (TTY), [info@vsarts.org](mailto:info@vsarts.org) (e-mail), or check out the web site at [www.vsarts.org](http://www.vsarts.org).

Invitations for performing artists to showcase their talents at the festival will be announced at a later date, and **Opening Stages** will bring you information as it becomes available.

Meanwhile, a formal International Call for Nominations in the Visual Arts has been announced. As a preface to the festival, VSA arts is seeking nominations of signature artists with disabilities who are committed to community projects that will culminate in 2004. VSA arts recognizes that visual artists, when engaged, make a meaningful and lasting impact on the cultural life of their communities. In particular, VSA arts is looking for artists who are articulate about their work and who embrace the organization's mission to promote the arts for children and adults with disabilities, strengthening the human spirit and improving quality of life for everyone. Nominations are open to artists with disabilities, ages 21 and above, who possess a refined artistic vision and have remained committed to their chosen media for at least 5 years. Nominated artists must currently be practicing and able to travel to Washington, D.C. for the 2004 International VSA arts Festival. The postmark deadline for submissions is December 6, 2002. For more information go to <http://www.vsarts.org/gallery/callsforart/nom/index.html>, and for questions, please contact:

Stephanie Moore  
Director of Artist Services  
[stephaniem@vsarts.org](mailto:stephaniem@vsarts.org)  
VSA arts  
1300 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC, 20036  
(voice) 1-202-628-2800 x3887  
(TTY) 1-202-737-0645

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- 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](mailto:access@kennedy-center.org).

