
THEATRE & DISABILITY CONFERENCE REPORT



PHOTO: DAVID HEVEY

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I am delighted to welcome this report of the Theatre and Disability Conference which was supported by the TSB Foundation for England and Wales. The Arts Council is very pleased to have initiated and supported this event which will have important repercussions for the continuing development of this vital area of theatre.

Lord Palumbo
Chairman
Arts Council



The TSB Foundation for England & Wales is pleased to have supported this first National Conference on Theatre and Disability, which reflects the Trustees' general objective of assisting disabled people.

I congratulate the organisers on the success of the conference and the positive recommendations made in this report.

The Duke of Westminster
Chairman
TSB Foundation for England & Wales



THEATRE AND DISABILITY CONFERENCE

OVERVIEW

This was the first time a conference had been organised which brought together a majority of disabled practitioners to look at the issues surrounding disability and theatre. Unusually for a conference, it was widely agreed that it was a great success. As well as an opportunity to experience a wealth and breadth of talent in the performances, it gave a structured space to air sometimes quite opposing views. There was very much a shift away from a gathering which talked about how to work with 'them' (disabled people) as has happened in the past, to much more useful questions of 'What do disabled theatre practitioners want? How can these requests be put into action?'

The Disability Arts world is maturing and disabled people are now in the strongest position they've ever been in to ask for what they need to pursue a career in theatre. It was heartening to find not only a general feeling of goodwill amongst the disabled people there but also with non-disabled people.

As disability and theatre begins to hit the agenda of an increasing number of theatre companies, the input of the conference delegates distilled into this document will provide vital information on how to structure the best way forward for disabled people and theatre. Rather than becoming next year's doorstep, let us hope that action and implementation follow hard on the heels of this report.

ELSPETH MORRISON

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

* A distinction should be made between the different types of theatre companies working in the area of disability. Broadly these are theatre companies:

whose focus is on disability groups (people with learning difficulties, for example) but who do not employ or have very little contact with disabled people in any way other than as audience.

companies who actively employ disabled performers for some projects and include some targeting of a disabled audience (Red Ladder, Theatre Centre, London Bubble.)

companies whose primary focus is a disabled audience, who explore disability themes, who mostly employ disabled staff and are controlled by a majority of disabled people. (Grææ, No Excuses)

It is this last section where the funding agencies need to be concentrating their support as it has had the most direct disability input but historically has received the smallest share of the cake.

- Facilitation and access costs should be considered as an integral part of budget applications - not something that can be juggled with or cut out as a cosmetic extra. Without these costs being met, it is impossible for disabled practitioners to participate equally.
- Funding agencies should themselves be aware of and be able to provide clients with the kind of costs that may be involved in employing disabled people.
- Funding agencies should make a clear distinction between providing money for 'access grants' (ramps, tape and braille, sign language interpreters etc.) and providing money for disabled people to carry out theatre practice.
- Disability Theatre companies need ongoing support (e.g. revenue funding) in order to provide a secure base to develop the work. There are currently no full time disability companies in this position.
- A cohesive national training strategy is needed which is pulled together in close consultation with organisations of disabled people.
- Support should not only be given in terms of services and physical access, but also in terms of providing support from other disabled practitioners.
- Disabled theatre practitioners can lose essential benefits when employed full-time. Funding agencies must be prepared to be flexible about extending work over a period of time.
- Policy is needed on assessment of funding applications. Disabled people must be involved on grant committees and involved in assessment.
- Ongoing regional conferences and seminars should further the findings of the conference.
- There must be less disparity in approach to disability theatre by the RABs. ACGB should co-ordinate national policy.

THEATRE AND DISABILITY CONFERENCE REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 WHO COMMISSIONED THIS DOCUMENT

This document was commissioned by the Drama Department of the Arts Council of Great Britain. The brief was to create a report which would make recommendations for the future of Disability Theatre in the UK. The findings are based on a number of regional seminars and a weekend conference, generously supported by the TSB Foundation for England and Wales, held at Owens Park in Manchester 26th-28th June 1992.

1.2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

Throughout the report, the term 'disabled people' is used generically to describe members of all impairment groups rather than using the terms blind people, wheelchair-users etc. Also the word 'disability' is used in its social model sense - i.e. not to infer particular medical conditions or impairments, but rather to refer to the barriers experienced by disabled people, for example: steps for wheelchair-users, lack of information in suitable forms for blind and partially-sighted people, lack of sign language for deaf people and patronising attitudes towards people with learning difficulties.

1.3 WHO ATTENDED THE CONFERENCE

The majority of delegates were disabled practitioners, along with representatives from funding bodies, training agencies and a few people from other interested parties. As well as giving delegates the opportunity to explore common issues, there was space to address particular areas of interest. As Maggie Woolley, Director of SHAPE London commented in the final plenary:

'Having a workshop group about deaf theatre was not being separatist but was part of the context of this conference. It is very clear that deaf theatre is a disability issue and there are strong parallels in the experience of deaf and other disabled people working in theatre.'

2. CONTEXT FOR THE CONFERENCE

2.1 BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE

The idea for the conference and report was initiated by the Drama Department of the ACGB in response to the explosion of work in the area of drama and disability over the past five years. There has been a significant shift away from disabled people being

cast in the role as recipients of theatre practice into active and creative participants on their own behalf. It was also felt the time was ripe to give the work a higher profile. Nothing of this kind in the area of disability had previously been held.

In 1984, the ACGB had set up a national conference to look at theatre and education. The resulting document provided a clarification of the issues involved and created the basis of a funding strategy which is still in use today. The aim of this theatre and disability conference was to function in a similar way.

2.2 FUNDING

The Drama Department provided seeding money for the conference. Following the first meeting, the Arts Council's Sponsorship Unit took on responsibility to attract the balance of the funds. In particular, the TSB Foundation for England and Wales were approached and subsequently agreed to support the venture. They also indicated that they may be interested in supporting future ventures arising from the conference.

2.3 THE PROCESS

The setting up of the conference started in May 1990, when the Arts Council set up a committee which involved representatives from all its clients working in the area of theatre and disability.

Unsurprisingly, given the lack of direct contact the ACGB and disabled people have had, most people attending this initial meeting were not disabled. A decision was taken at that first meeting that more outreach should be done to include disabled practitioners working directly in theatre and also other disabled people with experience in other areas of the arts. It was agreed that the conference programme should contain performances, keynote speeches, workshop and discussion groups. The ACGB Training Unit was asked to fund a training bursary for a disabled trainee to work alongside Denise Pamphlett, the conference administrator and that a conference report summarising the main issues and listing recommendations would be produced.

Seminars were set up in a number of regions. Those regions which held seminars found them extremely useful. However, there was a great disparity in enthusiasm from RAB to RAB for the conference. The few rather than the majority were very supportive and interest seemed to rely on individual officers rather than any policies.

The following priorities which accord with those agreed by the Arts Council's Drama Panel for theatre and disability work were used initially as guidelines.

1. Theatre by disabled people which may or may not be about disability.
2. Theatre with disabled people which involves non-disabled practitioners.
3. Employment of disabled artists in building-based companies.

A working party of disabled people was set up to work closely with Denise Pamphlett and Lynn Warburton, the disabled trainee conference administrator. This comprised of Mandy Colleran, Development Worker for North West Disability Arts Forum

(NWDAF), Chair, Di Christian (Mock Beggar Theatre), Neil Jarvis (ex-GYPT), Maggie Hampton (Carousel), Elspeth Morrison (DAIL Magazine), Ewan Marshall (Graeae Theatre).

The group was formed to reflect the needs of different groups and to consult with other people when expertise within the group was lacking. It was agreed that this group would have a number of meetings and then report back to the larger committee.

Key issues to be addressed by the conference were identified as:

- Access
- Integration
- Funding
- Training and education
- Employment and casting
- Evaluation
- Disability Arts
- Writing/source material

2.4 CONFERENCE DELEGATES

It was agreed that only disabled practitioners and companies which are 51% controlled by disabled people and/or have a proven shared consultation and decision-making process should be invited. If an essentially 'non-disabled' company worked extensively with people with learning difficulties but could not fulfil the criteria in terms of disabled control, the company could be asked to nominate individuals with learning difficulties to attend on their behalf with their chosen advocate if required. The conference would offer a unique opportunity to inform policy makers on the area of theatre and disability. Funding bodies, local authority arts officers, senior management of drama colleges and other educational institutions should be invited. Thus the main target groups for the conference became:

- 1) Disabled theatre and arts practitioners.
- 2) Representatives from funding bodies, training agencies, theatre managers etc.

The group was aware that this decision might exclude some companies, but it was unanimously felt that this conference was the first opportunity for a majority of disabled practitioners to get together themselves.

3. THE CONFERENCE

3.1 For the full PROGRAMME see appendix.

3.2 STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

The conference began on Friday 26th June 1992. At midday there was the official Press launch of the conference with a welcome from the Duke of Westminster (Chair of the TSB Foundation), Lord Palumbo (Chair of the Arts Council), Lord Rix (Chair of the Arts

Council's Drama Panel and Arts and Disability Monitoring Committee) and Dr. Ken Robinson, (Chair of the conference). While members of the Press were hardly tripping over themselves to attend, there was wide coverage amongst disability publications (DAIL and DAM) and radio programmes such as Kaleidoscope were present.

The programme went according to the timetable, except for the plenary which was shortened and replaced with more discussion time.

3.3 KEYNOTE SPEECHES

Opening address by Ken Robinson

The conference chair was Dr. Ken Robinson who opened the weekend with a speech on the purpose and direction of the conference. He noted the conference's uniqueness on bringing together the full spectrum of disability and theatre interests, including policy makers, arts funding agencies performers and other groups.

"The reason we're here is to take stock of the theatre and disability movement, for ourselves, and also to try to look beyond conference to policy and strategy issues for the future. As I see it, there are a number of major issues that we need to take the opportunity to address during the Conference: there are issues of artistic policy, issues of training, questions of resourcing the work and always, I think, of evaluation."

He went on to outline the structure of the two days and asked delegates to consider not only current difficulties but also to think about what solutions there might be in order to take the work forward. 'That, I think, is the creative challenge for us this weekend.....My own view is that it wouldn't be enough for the conference only to benefit the 100 or so people here. We've got to find some way of taking the conclusions of the conference out into the country at large to influence the agencies who can resource the work and to influence new companies coming into the field. For that reason, it is proposed that the conference will result in a report which will be drafted on behalf of the conference by Elspeth Morrison published with the support from the sponsors. That report gives us an opportunity, I think, to make direct and influential comments on the key issues that we are here to consider and I hope we will take it.'

3.4 Keynote Speech from Sian Vasey

The first speaker was Sian Vasey, who laid out an analysis of just what is disability, a question she felt was necessary before we defined 'disability arts'. She then outlined the difference between impairment and disability. She made it clear that the traditional meaning of 'disability' was some kind of bodily misfunction, and not the 'social model' meaning of access. Thus, she continued, the history of 'disability arts' had actually been one of 'arts and disability' in that 'art' was something 'therapeutically' done to the dysfunctionals. Now, she observed, disability arts as disabled people mean it is the art which focuses on doing something about exclusion and access. It is not about cure.

She continued to outline the role of the Regional and National Disability Arts Forums

in bringing about the above shift of disabled people. It's a way of establishing a power base within the arts field around disability and something inherent in it is that it is controlled by disabled people. that is the defining factor. Disability arts forums have particularly developed the cabaret form of theatre as one which best suits the requirements of many disabled performers.

It was important, she continued, to see that disability arts and culture involve the everyday experiences and that disability arts is a way of telling these within the wider disability rights movement. In this sense, disability arts is interesting and vital because it is political. Disability arts is a 'cultural synthesis of our issues'.

She pointed out that there was a school of thought which believed simply having disabled people on stage in existing plays was enough to make a political statement. Sian disagreed 'What would be the sense of showing disabled people leading a life that it's impossible for us to lead. We just don't fit into the sort of reality, of say, bedroom farces.....most bedrooms are upstairs for instance. We need material which reflects on our experience.'

Sian raised many of the complex issues facing, in particular, disability drama. How do you deal with the overwhelming use of tragedy in drama, when this tragedy invariably involves disabled characters? How do you go beyond the impairment as the sign of a flaw? She noted that time and time again, from Richard III to the James Bond villains, the evil villain was portrayed with an impairment. As she put it:

Not only are our bodies seen inherently as a tragedy but they are also viewed as a symptom of a warped and evil personality.

She concluded by saying that the purpose and process of disability arts, including disability theatre, must be to legitimise impairment and focus on the disablement, i.e. the steps, not the wheelchair-user.

3.5 Keynote Speech from Ewan Marshall

Ewan Marshall, artistic director of Grææ Theatre Company then spoke. He took up some of Sian's themes and particularly related them to the historical role which Grææ, still the only full-time fully disabled controlled theatre company in Britain, plays in developing disability theatre. Ewan then analysed the physical mechanics of running a company like Grææ, from touring, educational work, using and commissioning writers, the funding situation and so on. He particularly noted that:

We are limited, like every theatre company, in terms of the time we have to rehearse as opposed to the time we have to perform. This does make problems as, crudely speaking, working with actors with impairments drawn from all over the country, coming from different backgrounds, who don't know each other and who may have basic difficulty in communicating with each other is a time-consuming process and is a major aspect of rehearsal that able-bodied companies don't have to contend with. This is work that has to be dealt with on top of exploring and rehearsing the piece and

developing it up to a professional standard.

He believed that 'one of the things that is most important from an artistic point of view is the time and space to be innovative and that requires funding to explore theatrical form for people with impairments'. He warned that people should see that disability companies such as Grææ have to carry a far greater burden just to get to the basic level of being fully accessed - before they can start experimentation and pushing the borders of the form. Finally, he particularly noted that 'Grææ is not an island' and that there needs to be pressure on, for example, drama colleges to take on training responsibility for disabled performers.

He noted that when Grææ advertises a post within the company, the applications are going up and the numbers of people applying - disabled people who want to get involved in theatre - are increasing all the time. 'We are almost on the brink of an explosion in disability theatre. What we all should be interested in now is how to facilitate that demand?'

4. THE WORKSHOPS

4.1 SUMMARY

The workshops explored a panorama of issues including

- * Casting and Employment
- * Exploring and Developing Training Strategies
- * Funding
- * Deaf Theatre
- * Evaluation
- * Product and Audience
- * Practical Workshop for People with Learning Difficulties
- * Deaf Theatre
- * What is Disability Theatre?

There was also a specific workshop for non-disabled delegates to explore their experiences of Disability Theatre.

4.2 STRUCTURE

Discussion/workshop groups took place for an hour and a half before lunch and the same amount of time afterwards. The groups ran twice on the Saturday giving delegates the possibility to choose two out of the eight workshops. Other workshops ran for an hour and a half on Sunday morning. Most workshops had two facilitators, both of whom were disabled (except for the non-disabled peoples workshop).

In order to allow for a smooth gathering of information, workshops where possible followed this format:

- a) What is the current situation?
- b) What changes do we want?

- c) What are the barriers to this happening?
- d) What solutions can we find?

General Comments

Many of the workshops overlapped in their concerns. For example, many noted how few job opportunities existed for disabled people and those which did exist were in the area of small-scale touring companies. There was much debate around the way forward from this and how the segregated/separate/integrated debates featured within this. Many workshops explored funding, discrimination, the distribution of information and plainly the massive amount of basic, access groundwork still to be done. In this respect, barriers expressed ranged from fear and prejudice to physical access. The same old excuses of 'old building' or 'fire risk' were used.

Other points included the note that there is a basic lack of representation of disabled people on the management committees of theatre companies. It was noted that concentrating on physical access for disabled people as audience had become a smoke screen for the lack of focus on employment for disabled performers. It was noted that some mainstream theatre companies were beginning to open up to deaf performers but, as the Casting and Employment workshop observed, access to both 'front and backstage for all practitioners is needed'. There were many questions of definition. What is 'open access?', what is 'integration'? The Training and Education Workshop noted that these words shift around and the underlying agendas need to be explored.

There were repeated calls for a structure of information dissemination, perhaps national and regional data bases or a development of the Arts Council's Directory? While the general picture was that there is still much to be done, it was clear in some workshops that there were progressive elements, such as the London Arts Board moving disability and theatre up their agenda of priorities.

The workshops also noted the possibilities of disability and Youth Theatre, the role of placements and guaranteed employment when training was finished. Again, the Training and Education Workshop noted that at the bottom of it all, disabled people's exclusion was a civil rights issue and that legislation was needed for many things to fall into place.

However, there were notes of optimism. The Funding Workshop noted that the Arts Council, the initiators of the conference had increased their disability and theatre budget.

4.3 WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

The following gives the workshop title, names of the facilitators and a precis of the discussions held. Conclusions from these workshops appear in one form or another in the recommendations at the end of the report.

What is Disability Theatre?.....Mandy Colleran and Sian Vasey

This was an ongoing discussion throughout the conference. There was broad agreement that Disability Theatre is that which involves a majority of disabled people, explores a disability aesthetic and mirrors in some way the lives of disabled people. It isn't about sign language interpretation, good access for audience members or a couple of disabled actors in a cast of four for one show with a theatre company. It is evolving and vibrant and needs to be given space to develop the work and have a frank exchange of views on the subject.

- * Priority should be given to work which has a majority of disabled people in control of the company as it is likely that they will best be able to reflect the aspirations of the disabled communities and artists.
- * Grant officers should have Disability Equality Training and Deaf Awareness Training in order to get a broad grasp of the issues involved in Disability Theatre.
- * There should be less disparity in approach to Disability Theatre by the RABs. The ACGB should co-ordinate national policy.

Deaf Theatre.....Maggie Woolley

The participants were deaf and hearing. The group used a wide definition of deaf people to include born deaf people, hard of hearing people, partially deaf people and deafened people. Similarly, a wide definition was used to include any theatre which used deaf performers. The explosion of access to mainstream theatre through sign interpreted productions is influencing deaf amateur theatre. Is a National Deaf Theatre the way forward? Could it threaten funding for smaller groups if such a thing existed? Deaf Theatre should be a place to experiment with the theatricality of deaf culture and deaf people should be in charge of that development.

In the past there has been too much imposition by hearing people. Training must focus on deaf practitioners rather than on hearing people and how to 'integrate'. There should be at least a parity in funding being provided for plays translated into sign language via interpreters and funding for deaf people to create their own theatre.

- * Five people will get together to set up a working party to draft a proposal for a conference on Deaf Theatre.
- * A training school such as have been held in the USA should be arranged here as soon as possible.

Funding.....Pat Place and Maggie Woolley

There is little access for disabled people to gain experience of fund-raising. Experience shows that training can prove expensive when the costs of facilitators, interpreters etc. are added. Course organisers rarely help with these costs or provide only basic access details. Similarly, facilitation and access costs are often deemed 'expendable' on funding applications submitted by disabled practitioners. Some arts boards support disability work, some (like SW Arts) say they don't receive applications from Disability

Theatre groups, possibly because the region is so rural. Others receive applications but are not prepared to deal with them.

Funders are often still misled into believing that work which is in fact thinly disguised therapy is disability work. Funders need to be making direct contact with disabled theatre practitioners who should definitely be included in the evaluation process. These people should have wide-ranging knowledge of the arts and disability groups. Large sponsors tend to be more interested in high profile rather than grass roots work. The main conclusions were that;

- * More priority should be given to Disability Theatre in ACGB and RAB budgets.
- * Disability Theatre should be able to apply to a range of budgets not just a 'disability budget', e.g. education, training, development, touring.
- * Facilitation and access costs must be seen as integral parts of funding applications, not as 'added extras'.

Access - how do we improve it for all groups?.....Marie Oshodi and Kate Portal

Currently, among both non-disabled and disabled groups, there can be a 'hierarchy' of provision in terms of access. For example, wheelchair access may be provided but no information in braille or vice versa. In order to ensure equal access to theatre all needs must be catered for with the minimum of fuss for the disabled person.

Lack of money and lack of time are often used as an argument for not increasing access, but this can be a red herring as not all requirements are expensive or time-consuming.

- * There should not be a hierarchy of service provision, i.e. people from all disability groups should have their requirements met.
- * Information should be provided in a variety of formats and in plain English.
- * Officers of funding agencies must be aware of the basic access requirements of disabled clients and be prepared to meet them.

Training and Education.....Carolyn Lucas and Neil Jarvis

Lack of access to training was seen as perhaps the main barrier to the involvement of disabled people in theatre. There was a lack of centralised information on what opportunities are available. It was pointed out that problems like lack of available transport, poor education etc., all contributed to difficulties around training.

Training generally is currently a priority so we should ensure disabled people are involved in all new and ongoing initiatives, for example, National Vocational Qualifications. Both formal (via paper qualifications and/or courses) and informal (gaining experience on the job) routes for training can be problematic for disabled people.

- * Training opportunities should be established on all fronts, i.e. with disability theatre companies, with more 'mainstream' companies as well as lobbying for improved access to existing institutions and courses.
- * Age limits around training should be flexible. Disabled people may have had a late start in education or may have had to take a break.
- * A cohesive national training strategy is needed, covering all aspects of theatre practice, which is drawn up in close consultation with organisations of disabled people.

Casting/employment.....Mandy Redvers Higgins and Ewan Marshall

There is not enough representation on panels of influence (funding bodies, management committees of theatre companies) to ensure that the employment of disabled theatre workers is on the agenda and is implemented. Funding could be proportional to allow for periods of exploration where disabled theatre practitioners work together to explore theatrical possibilities and to provide a valuable learning experience for all concerned. Some new writing around the subject of disability is being produced before ensuring that there are actors with the appropriate disabilities to take on the parts. Disabled performers rarely have access to gain experience in lesser roles before being given larger ones - this needs to be addressed.

- * It is only by the regular employment of disabled actors in wide-ranging roles (not just where characters are specifically disabled) that the employment of disabled people becomes the accepted norm rather than a 'freakish' occurrence.
- * Funding incentives and organised lobbying are needed to create a climate where directors feel they can enter what is still perceived as new and risky territory and employ disabled actors.

Practical Workshop for People with Learning Difficulties.....Maggie Hampton and Geof Armstrong

The workshop aimed to address the themes of the conference, using drama and role play. People with learning difficulties found that much information was not accessible to them - this prevented them from being involved in the work. Although lack of funding was identified as a barrier to access, other peoples' attitudes were named as the main problem and the group had experienced not being taken seriously, being ignored or patronised. Audiences were unsure how to receive work, for example, when to laugh. Main conclusions were that;

- * People with learning difficulties at the conference agreed that positive support and constructive criticism are preferable to being patronised.
- * People with learning difficulties and their chosen advocates should be included in all discussions around Disability Theatre.
- * There should be more places for disabled people themselves to share work and ideas with each other.

EvaluationMandy Colleran and Elspeth Morrison

As Disability Theatre reflects on the experience of being disabled in some way, the work must be evaluated by the people concerned. Where the company has a majority of disabled people involved, the make up of the assessors should reflect this. Current modes of evaluation need to be assessed, e.g. reports are generally required in writing, this may not be useful for people with learning difficulties, for example. Also how do you compare work by an 'able-bodied' company where actors have had formal and informal training opportunities against companies where there has been little access? RABs and other funding agencies lack contact with disabled staff and clients and there is little recognition of a disability culture.

- * Disabled people, with an arts background, must be involved on grant committees and involved in assessment not just of disability work but other types of theatre.
- * Funding agencies should seek advice from disabled individuals who are attached to an organisation in order to have a more representative voice.
- * Where appropriate, people should receive induction on how committees work and supported through the jargon, structures etc.

Product and Audience (practical).....Kate Portal and Maria Oshodi

This workshop attempted to explore the interface between who creates the theatre product and how it is received. Disabled practitioners need to develop an audience and need to develop with an audience. Do disabled and non-disabled audiences receive Disability Theatre in the same way? Should disabled theatre practitioners aim to be educators or to address a peer group? Exploring the subject of disability alongside disabled theatre practitioners can be a new area for many non-disabled theatre practitioners. Particularly when a disabled writer is writing on the subject of disability, care must be taken to ensure that the terms of reference being used are understood before embarking on rehearsals. For example, the writer may include a blind character which simply happens to be how they are. A director or actor may want to 'explore' what blindness means, overlay a tragic, bitter or pathetic layer on the character which may be nowhere in the text. The writer's original intentions must be respected.

- * Disabled theatre practitioners must be provided with the appropriate services/equipment to carry out their job properly. Thus in order to reach the same starting point as other practitioners, disabled people may require sign language interpretation, wheelchair adapted premises etc.
- * Audiences should be given as much opportunity as possible to see disabled performers on stage in order to encourage the wider inclusion of disabled theatre practitioners generally.
- * New writing by disabled writers, which reflects on the experience of disability needs to be encouraged.

Workshop for non-disabled people.....Sue Timothy

Encouraging disability theatre is developmental work for any venue. Would-be practitioners should be able to see disabled people on stage. Disability access plans for new venues to front and backstage areas needed to be given a higher priority. Companies may play safe and employ less profoundly disabled people.

- * There is a need for centralised information regarding 'access' - what it means, appropriate agencies to go to for support.
- * There is a need for more discussion around evaluation and assessment of disability work. Possibly, carried out regionally?
- * Funders should acquaint themselves better with the work of disabled theatre practitioners.
- * There must be more access to Disability Equality and Deaf Awareness Training for funders.

5. THE PERFORMANCES

5.1 Central to the conference was the opportunity to experience some of the work on offer by a range of theatre companies with a high involvement of disabled people. One of the most striking features was the diversity of the work. It has often wrongly been assumed that theatre expressing the disability experience must be all about illness, 'how horrible it all is' or the benefit system. As theatre by black performers and womens theatre has shown, no group is one homogenous blob with the same hopes, aspirations and view on the world.

We had the hilarious irreverence of the all-women 'No Excuses' cabaret, and the highly polished and dynamic signed song from Sarah Scott and Ray Harrison Graham giving a whole new look to mainstream music culture. Also, there was the splendidly experimental and original 'New Breed' theatre company, the audience-grabbing vitality of music theatre company 'Heart 'n' Soul' and the down to earth comedy of the 'Lawn mowers.' The latter two companies firmly laying to rest the idea that people with learning difficulties can't produce unique and invigorating work.

6. THE FINAL PLENARY

6.1 Ken Robinson established the timetable for the publication of the report which would form the basis of Arts Council action on the future development of Disability Theatre.

The Chair noted that, before this, a full consultation period of feedback would take place, this would include consultation with the Conference Steering Group, the workshop leaders and other areas of feedback. From feedback already received he outlined the following recommendations:

- ☛ rather than another national conference, a series of regional seminars should be held once the report is available. Efforts should be made to disseminate information on the findings of the conference as widely as possible so there is some sort of parity in the way the RABs deal with theatre and disability.

- ☛ crucial to this must be a carefully structured programme of implementation which will be pulled into place by the original steering group once the recommendations have been made.

- ☛ the findings of the conference must be used as a catalyst. Mandy Colleran commented, 'all of us here must involve people who may not have been able to come to this conference but who would certainly be anxious and could contribute to the development of theatre and disability in general'.

6.2 Comments from delegates included:

- ☛ The fact that it had been a most positive and enjoyable conference, 'very often conferences are all about words, a report at the end of it and

you forget. You forget it's the arts we're talking about so the performances remind us of the arts and how well we're doing!

☛ Concern was expressed that unless the uptake of the recommendations of the report were monitored, the report may end up gathering dust and nothing would change. This was expressed in the strongest terms by many delegates. It was also felt the Arts Council would be best placed to support whatever mechanisms were put in place. It was also suggested that the RABs might be well placed to fulfil this function in their areas.

☛ Regional diversity should be encouraged but there should also exist an overall picture.

7. FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDING AGENCIES

- ☛ More priority should be given to disability theatre within budgets.
- ☛ Disability theatre should be able to apply to a range of budgets not just a 'disability budget', e.g. education, training, development, touring etc.
- ☛ Funding agencies should not only consider disabled people as advisors and clients but also as employees within their own organisations. However, they should not only employ disabled people in 'disability' posts nor expect the person only ever contribute information on that area exclusively.
- ☛ Bridges need to be built between different bodies in terms of what knowledge and resources they have to offer. For example, between training resources and funding agencies.
- ☛ ACGB and RABs should make funds available for disabled people to train as fundraisers. (ITC, for example, could run the courses.)
- ☛ Due to lack of access to training many disabled performers and writers are coming up through the Disability Arts cabaret circuit. Funding agencies need to find ways of supporting what may be cross art form packages.
- ☛ Where possible funding agencies should seek advice from disabled individuals who are attached to an organisation in order to have a more representative voice.
- ☛ Disabled people involved in assessment should have wide ranging knowledge of theatre and of disability groups.
- ☛ Disabled people with the appropriate experience to represent a particular view may be unfamiliar with arts jargon and may require some support in how to operate on a committee. This should be provided by the funding agency.
- ☛ Grant officers should have Disability Equality Training and Deaf Awareness Training before assessing applications. They should also familiarise themselves with the area by seeing different sorts of work.
- ☛ Funding agencies should ensure that more money is allocated to maintaining and developing the skills-base of disabled people than to training non-disabled people in the area of disability.
- ☛ Assessors of disability work should be encouraged to focus on the performance rather than on the impairments of the performers.
- ☛ RABs and the ACGB needs a strong policy and code of practice on all matters relating to disability which should be drawn up in close consultation with organisations of disabled people.

- ☛ When a policy and code of practice have been agreed, information and resources should be made available to implement them. For example, if it has been recommended that clients have Disability Equality Training, the funding agency should be able to give them a list of approved trainers.
- ☛ Funders should make themselves aware of publications relating to disability theatre and of where to get services in their locality, e.g. sign language interpreters, braille services etc.
- ☛ Funders should be able to inform clients on how to get hold of appropriate technology to assist disabled people in their work.
- ☛ When requiring clients to adhere to a code of practice, funding agencies should monitor themselves to ensure they are doing likewise.
- ☛ There needs to be a central resource providing information to close the gap between the non-disabled network and the dissemination of information to disabled companies.
- ☛ As well as high profile work, funding agencies should be prepared to see through low key local projects which may become the seed bed for future work.
- ☛ Regional centres should be created that strive for full access and be used as models of good practice for other venues, e.g. fully accessible receiving venue.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING AGENCIES

- ☛ Much 'training' for disabled people happens accidentally once a person is in a post. Structures should be in place so that disabled people have the same access to existing provision as non-disabled people.
- ☛ As many disabled people may have taken a longish time to get through the education system or may have had to take an extended break (in the case of people who become disabled later in life for example) there must be flexibility with age limits for courses - older people shouldn't be excluded.
- ☛ Experience as well as paper qualifications should be taken into account.
- ☛ All courses must endeavour to make themselves accessible to disabled theatre practitioners.
- ☛ It should be ensured that any paper qualifications are accessible to a wide range of disabled people. For example, a course requiring a lot of written work may exclude people who may wish to communicate verbally or on tape or via sign language.

- ☛ Training agencies should look to place disabled trainees in placements with the appropriate support for the person to carry out their post.
- ☛ Training should be made accessible in all areas of theatre, for performers, technicians, administrators, writers, directors etc.
- ☛ As well as providing training opportunities, agencies should be working alongside other bodies to ensure disabled people can compete equally when training is complete.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEATRE COMPANIES

It was felt that companies which did not have a particular disability remit should be considering the following recommendations in order to increase the inclusion of disabled people across the board.

- ☛ When considering access, building-based companies should take into account both front and backstage areas.
- ☛ Touring and building-based companies should ensure that all information about the company is provided in a range of forms, e.g. on tape.
- ☛ If a play involves a disabled character, particular efforts must be made to employ a disabled actor.
- ☛ Designers should take on the needs of disabled performers when creating a set. Particularly when touring the set should be easily transferable.
- ☛ Companies should make demands on funding agencies to cover the extra costs of disability when applying for projects, e.g. transport, interpreters.
- ☛ When taking out work which is particularly aimed at disabled people or tackling disability issues (T.I.E., for example) companies must ensure that disabled people are represented in a majority in the cast.
- ☛ Programming and marketing should actively seek to encourage disabled audiences.

7.4 IMMEDIATE ACTION POST CONFERENCE AND PUBLICATION OF REPORT

- ☛ It was agreed that a working party of five people would be set up to draft a proposal for a conference on deaf theatre which would bring together deaf, hard of hearing and partially deaf actors and theatre practitioners to share presentations and establish the deaf theatre agenda, its programming priorities and key needs.
- ☛ Ongoing regional conferences and seminars should further the findings of this conference.

- ☛ A body, like the ACGB in conjunction with organisations of disabled people, should take responsibility for setting up a body to monitor the implementation of the report.
- ☛ In the immediate aftermath of the conference, the original steering group supported by the Arts Council will be the monitoring body.
- ☛ Information about the recommendations from this conference should be disseminated as widely as possible.
- ☛ The ACGB should fund a consultancy paper on just what is a Disability Theatre, who is in it, where they are, what money is available which touring venues are accessible etc.
- ☛ The primary focus of consultation must be with bona fide organisations of (as distinct from 'for') disabled people.

8. Appendices

8.1 Conference programme.

8.2 Theatre companies at the Conference.

8.3 Short biographies of speakers and workshop facilitators.

8.4 Conference Delegates.

8.1 THEATRE AND DISABILITY CONFERENCE

PROGRAMME

26th-28th June 1992

OWENS PARK, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Friday 26th June

Noon. Official opening of the Conference
4.00p.m. Registration
6.00p.m. Dinner
7.30p.m. PERFORMANCE: HEART'N'SOUL: 'The Power of Life'
9.00p.m. Bar open

Saturday 27th June

10.00a.m. WELCOME: DR. KEN ROBINSON, CONFERENCE CHAIR
10.10a.m. SIAN VASEY, CHAIR OF THE NATIONAL DISABILITY ARTS FORUM
10.35a.m. EWAN MARSHALL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, GRÆÆ THEATRE COMPANY
11.00a.m. Refreshments
11.30a.m. DISCUSSION/ WORKSHOP GROUPS
1.00p.m. Lunch
2.30p.m. PERFORMANCE: NO EXCUSES THEATRE COMPANY
2.50p.m. PERFORMANCE: BASIC THEATRE, SIGNED SONG
3.15p.m. Refreshments
3.45p.m. PERFORMANCE: THE LAWNMOWERS, FULL HOUSE - FLAT BROKE
4.30p.m. DISCUSSION/ WORKSHOP GROUPS
6.00p.m. Break and dinner
8.00p.m. PERFORMANCE: NEW BREED THEATRE COMPANY, BIRDS ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE, WITHOUT A MESSIAH, AWAITING ARMAGEDDON
9.30p.m. Disco and bar

Sunday 28th June

10.00a.m. DISCUSSION/ WORKSHOP GROUPS
11.45a.m. Refreshments
12.15p.m. FINAL PLENARY
1.00p.m. Lunch and depart.

8.2 THEATRE COMPANIES

(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

HEART 'N' SOUL is the dynamic music theatre company at the forefront of the Disability Arts scene. Their self devised musicals astound and delight audiences throughout Europe, bringing Disability Arts into the mainstream. Vibrant, infectious music and boisterous acting combine to create an amazing energy which is rarely witnessed on stage. Contact 081-694 1632.

NO EXCUSES is a disabled Women's cabaret company started in 1989 by Mandy Redvers Higgins, Mandy Colleran and Natalie Markham. The three knew each other through their involvement in Disability Arts in Merseyside. No Excuses devises its own work which takes the form of satirical sketches rather than whole theatre pieces. Contact 051-639 7549

BASIC THEATRE's unique style and approach to signed song has been widely acclaimed in the five years that the company has been together. Basic Theatre has performed extensively both in Europe and the USA; its work has also been featured on network TV including Channel 4's 'Hand in Hand' and more recently 'D'Art'. Basic Theatre has recently had a major success with the award-winning play 'Gary'. Contact 071-916 5427

THE LAWNMOWERS are a company from Marquis Way Adult Training Centre in Gateshead. They meet weekly with 'Them Wifies' (a women's Community Arts Collective) to devise and rehearse their plays. They have taken shows to adult training centres, schools, theatres and festivals and run drama workshops with groups from adult training centres and day centres. Contact 091-261 4090.

NEW BREED THEATRE COMPANY was formed in 1989 as a result of a collaboration between Sue Napolitano, Gabriel Gawin and the Green Room in Manchester. The show at the conference is its third production. New Breed involves a wide-range of disabled people and there is a high level of input from non-disabled theatre practitioners. Music is a strong element in New Breed's work which in theatre terms is quite experimental. Contact 061-236 1676.

8.3 FACILITATORS AND SPEAKERS

GEOF ARMSTRONG has worked extensively with Graeae Theatre Company and other theatre groups throughout the country. He is now the Development Worker for the National Disability Arts Forum but maintains a professional interest in the theatre of disabled people.

MANDY COLLERAN works currently as Development Officer with North West Disability Arts Forum. Mandy has been active in Disability Arts since 1986 when she

was first employed by Arts Integration Merseyside. She is a member of 'No Excuses'.

MAGGIE HAMPTON has worked as an actress and workshop leader in Deaf Children's Theatre and with Grææ Theatre Company. She is now an arts practitioner with the Carousel Project in Brighton.

NEIL JARVIS was Development Worker for the Green Jam Theatre Project with Greenwich Young People's Theatre (GYPT) from 1989-91. He has worked with a variety of disability and arts groups and has worked as an arts fund-raiser. He is currently on the Board of Grææ Theatre Company.

CAROLYN LUCAS has worked in theatre for many years as a teacher and administrator, and occasionally as a performer. She is now Training Development Co-ordinator for Grææ. She is a member of the Arts Council's Drama Panel.

EWAN MARSHALL graduated from Bretton Hall College with a degree in Drama in 1984 and has since been employed as a theatre worker, director and actor. Companies he has worked with include 'Interplay', 'Theatre Venture' and 'London Bubble'. He is currently Artistic Director of Grææ.

ELSPETH MORRISON is Editor of 'Disability Arts in London' (DAIL) magazine. She is Chair of Grææ Theatre and author of the Independent Theatre Council's book on how to get more disabled people involved in theatre. As a Disability Equality Trainer she works with arts organisation nationally.

MARIE OSHODI's first play 'The S Bend' was produced as part of the Royal Court young People's Writing Festival in 1984. She is also author of 'From Choices to Chocolate', put on at the Riverside, 'Blood, Sweat and Tears' toured by Harmony Theatre and 'Here Comes a Candle' produced in 1989. She has also written for television and her most recent play 'Hound' for Grææ completed a national tour last year.

PAT PLACE has been working with Shape London for the past six years. She is now full-time co-ordinator of Artsreach, an arts and education project based at Jackson's Lane Community Centre in North London.

KATE PORTAL performed with Grææ in its recent production of 'Hound'. She has undertaken music workshop training and runs workshops in music, drama and storytelling. Kate sings and plays guitar on the Disability Cabaret circuit.

MANDY REDVERS HIGGINS is Assistant Director of the Youth Arts Department of Liverpool Playhouse. Before this she worked as a freelance arts practitioner, touring nationally as a performer with Red Ladder Theatre Company and directing productions in Liverpool and Manchester. She has worked with 'No Excuses' since 1989.

KEN ROBINSON is the author of the Gulbenkain 'Arts in Schools' report. He was Director of the National Curriculum Council's Arts in Schools project and a member

of the Carnegie Council. He is Chair and Professor of Arts Education at the University of Warwick and a Governor of the Central School of Speech and Drama.

SIAN VASEY performed with Grææ in 1983 and has subsequently been on the company's Board. She worked for Artsline and co-founded the London Disability Arts Forum. Sian also co-founded the National Disability Arts Forum and is currently Chair of NDAF. She works as presenter/director of the 'Link' TV programme and was Editor of the glorious but short-lived 'Link' magazine.

MAGGIE WOOLLEY trained as an actress and teacher at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and graduated from Glasgow University with a dissertation on Deaf Theatre. She has worked as a teacher and actress and then became a presenter and assistant producer on the BBC's 'See Hear' programme for seven years. Since 1988 she has been the Director of Shape London.

8.4 THEATRE AND DISABILITY CONFERENCE: LIST OF DELEGATES

TANVEER AHMAD Multicultural and Disability Officer, NWAB
GEOF ARMSTRONG Development Worker, National Disability Arts Forum
PAUL BARNARD Deputy Drama Director, Arts Council
SARA BEER Panel member, SE Wales Arts Association
CHARLES BELL Drama Officer, Scottish Arts Council
SUE BRADFORD Drama Assistant, Arts Council
PETER BROWNLEY In the Boat theatre, Barnsley
JOHN BYRNE Strathcona Theatre Company
THOMASINA CARLYLE Trading Faces, Oxon
RACHEL CARTER Secretary to Committee of Disabled Performers, British Actors Equity
BECKY CHAPMAN Theatre Centre
MANDY COLLERAN NW Disability Arts Forum/ No excuses Theatre company
RUTH COLLETT Project Worker: Theatre, In-Valid
SHEA CONNOLLY Drama Officer, Yorkshire and Humberside Arts
TESS COURSE In-Valid, Bradford
MARY DUFFY Wet Paint Arts, Dublin
KATHLEEN DUNCAN Director General, TSB Foundation for England and Wales
SIAN EDE Drama Officer, Arts Council
DAVID ELLIS Area director, TSB Banks
DIANE FISHER Them Wives, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
HELEN FLACH Head of Performing Arts, EMAB
ANDREW GALSWORTHY Fountain Theatre, Coventry
HILARY GARNHAM Theatre Officer, South West Arts
JOHN GLOSSOP NW Shape Management Committee Member
LAURA GUTHRIE Advocate/facilitator
BRENDA HAMILTON In-Valid
MAGGIE HAMPTON Arts practitioner, Carousel Project, Brighton

WENDY HARPE Head of Arts and Disability, Arts Council
 SHARON HARRISON The Lawnmowers, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
 SUE HARRISON Deputy Executive Director, Yorkshire and Humberside Arts Board
 RAY HARRISON GRAHAM Basic Theatre Company
 NICK HENNON The Lawnmowers, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
 ANGIE HETHERIDGE Asst Programme Manager, Garage Arts and Media Centre
 DAVID HEVEY Conference photographer
 MANDY REDVERS HIGGINS Liverpool Playhouse/No Excuses
 CELIA HILL Music and Disability Assistant, Arts Council
 BRIAN HILTON NW Shape, Disability Arts Fieldworker
 ROSAMUNDE HUTT Artistic Co-ordinator, Hi Jinx, Cardiff
 LINDA INNES Arts Equality Officer, Cleveland Arts
 NEIL JARVIS Ex Green Jam, Greenwich Young Peoples Theatre
 JUNE KEENLEYSIDE The Lawnmowers, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
 SARAH KERSHAW Humberside Disability arts Forum
 PAUL KING The Lawnmowers, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
 KEITH LAWRENCE Co-ordinator, Lilian Baylis Theatre
 VERONICA LEE Carousel, Brighton
 GERALDINE LING Them Wifies, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
 ANNIE LLOYD Studio Theatre, Leeds Polytechnic
 CAROLYN LUCAS Training Development Co-ordinator, Graeae
 VERA LUSTIG Plays and Players
 JEAN McCONNELL Community Field Worker, Libra Theatre Company
 IAN McCURRACH Director, Strathcona Theatre Company
 ROSALEEN McDONAGH Wet Paint Arts, Dublin
 TERRY McGINTY Development Worker, East Midlands Shape
 DEIRDRE McMAHON New Breed Theatre Company
 SHARON MACE Oxford Disability Arts forum
 PADDY MASEFIELD Disability Arts Activist
 NATALIE MARKHAM No Excuses Theatre, GMCDP
 EWAN MARSHALL Artistic Director, Graeae Theatre Company
 JUDY MEERWESEN Times Educational Supplement
 ELSPETH MORRISON Editor, Disability Arts in London Magazine
 DAVID NEWLAND Royal Theatre, Northampton
 SUE NAPOLITANO NW Shape, Disability Arts Fieldworker
 SUE O'BRIAN Administrator, Mockbeggar Theatre
 MARIA OSHODI Writer
 DENISE PAMPHLETT Conference Administrator
 PAT PLACE Artsreach, Jacksons Lane/Shape London
 ANN POINTON Disability Equality Trainer
 KATE PORTAL Performer
 ROY PURKIS Committee of Disabled Performers, British Actors Equity
 ANN RAE NW Shape, Management Committee Member
 CHRIS RICKETTS Administrator, Theatre Powys
 KEN ROBINSON Professor of Arts Education, University of Warwick
 ISSY SCHLISSELMAN Deaf Actor, London
 SARAH SCOTT Co-ordinator, London Disability Arts Forum

JENNY SEALEY Half Moon Young Peoples Theatre
STEPHEN SELBY Writer and Administrator, Not On Theatre Company
PALMINDER SINGH Fountain Theatre, coventry
JULIA SMITH Head of Outreach, Leicester Haymarket
JULIE STOREY Sign Language Tutor/ freelance acting
ANDY STAFFORD The Lawnmowers, Newcastle-upon -Tyne
DAVID THOMPSON Artlink, Walsall
ROGER SYMES Administrator, London Disability Arts Forum
LAWRENCE TILL Artistic Director, Octagon Theatre
SUE TIMOTHY Drama Officer, London Arts Board
MARY TURNER/ROSIE CARTWRIGHT In the Boat Theatre
SIAN VASEY Chair, National Disability Arts Forum
YVETTE VAUGHAN JONES Drama Officer, Welsh Arts Council
JO VERRANT Director, Token Gestures, Bradford
LYNN WARBURTON Assistant Conference Administrator
MATTHEW WATTS Assistant Co-ordinator, Fountain Theatre
NATASHA WELLS Actor, Nottingham
RICK WELTON Project Director: Arts and Entertainment Training Council
CHRIS WILKINSON Artlink, Walsall
MICHAEL WILLIAMS Trading Faces, Oxon
SIAN WILLIAMS Disability Arts Magazine
SARAH WILSDON Arts Programmes , The Leadmill, Sheffield
JOHN WILSON Shape London, Deaf Arts Development Worker
MAGGIE WOOLLEY Director, Shape London
MICK YATES Drama Officer, West Midlands Arts Board



PHOTO: DAVID HEVEY

