

## THE THEATRE OF THE DEAF

The Theatre of the Deaf, which is based in Sydney, is the only professional deaf theatre group in Australia, though there are amateur groups in most capital cities. The company had its origin in the early seventies under the guidance of the Adult Deaf Society of NSW and most especially through the efforts of one of its Welfare Officers, Mr Nick Neary, a man with experience of deaf theatre in England.

In 1979, with the backing of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and the Australia Council, the Theatre of the Deaf was launched as a fully professional theatre company. From that time the company has continued to develop, working in schools, with community groups, in theatres and even on television.

The company consists of deaf and hearing actors working together in a theatrical form which interlinks sign language, mime, visual communication, gesture and voice. This format has proved very popular with both hearing and deaf audiences.

The company really came into its own during IYDP in 1981 with a number of community performances to mark the occasion. The highlights of the year were the company's performance of The Unheard World of Jasper Lawson for HRH The Prince of Wales, and the awarding of the Order of Australia Medal to Mrs Nola Colefax for services to deaf theatre.

In addition to visits to a number of schools in the Sydney metropolitan area, the company toured country areas and went interstate for performances at Moomba and a tour of Tasmania. This policy of country touring was continued in 1982 with an expanded and enriched repertoire.

Colin Allen has recently returned to work with the company after spending a year in America studying with the National Theatre of the Deaf in Connecticut and working with the Fairmont Theatre of the Deaf. The company also has the benefit of the services of Carol Lee Aquiline, an actress from the National Theatre of the Deaf.

This year, 1983, the company has welcomed Ben Strout from the National Theatre of the Deaf in America as the new Artistic Director. Hilary Beaton, an experienced playwright and actress, has been awarded a Playwright-in-Residence Grant to work with the company. Hilary is planning to write the first Australian adult play specifically for deaf actors. The company will surely benefit from the talents and experience of both Ben and Hilary.

In January, the company presented workshops in Hyde Park for the Festival of Sydney, and appeared at the Orange Festival of Arts in March. The Theatre of the Deaf will also be working in schools throughout NSW.

The Theatre of the Deaf is a division of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. It is assisted by the Theatre Board and Literature Board of the Australia Council, a statutory body of the Commonwealth Government, by the NSW Government's Premier's Department through the Division of Cultural Activities, by ESSO Australia Ltd., and by the Sydney County Council. The Theatre of the Deaf is a member of the Educational Performing Arts Companies of NSW and the Confederation of Australian Professional Performing Arts Ltd..

The Company employs five deaf actors and three hearing actors who between them have four shows for schools plus visual communication workshops and sign language workshops. We perform for all age groups and for both deaf and hearing audiences. If you would like more information about our work, the Company's number is 02-3571200.