

THEATRE OF THE DEAF

JANUARY 1988 REPORT

As the recently appointed Administrator of the Theatre of the Deaf addressing my first report to the Board, I will take up a little space explaining something about the history and purpose of the company.

Australia's Theatre of the Deaf had its origins in the early 1970s, under the guidance of the Adult Deaf Society of N.S.W. It provided an opportunity for local members to perform in amateur productions, and similar groups started up and still exist in Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Following a tour of Australia by the American National Theatre of the Deaf in 1974, the A.E.T.T. committed itself to developing a professional theatre of the deaf in Australia. Since 1979, with subsidies provided by the Australia Council and the N.S.W. Government through the Office for the Minister for the Arts, the Theatre of the Deaf has been functioning as a fully professional company under the auspices of the Trust.

The company comprises both deaf and hearing actors, who use a blend of sign language, visual communication, voice, mime and gesture in its performances. 75% of the year is spent performing in schools reaching an estimated audience in excess of 36,000 annually. In addition, each year Theatre of the Deaf mounts a production in a major Sydney venue, aimed at an adult audience, with appeal to both the hearing and deaf. The Company has toured throughout N.S.W., South Australia, the ACT, Tasmania and Melbourne, as well as appearing on local and national television. Workshops and sign language classes are also held throughout the year, with a summer school mounted each January for 2 weeks.

In 1988 the Company will comprises 5 actors - 4 deaf, 1 hearing; an administrator, an artistic director, an assistant director and a project co-ordinator.

1. CURRENT ACTIVITIES

a) SUMMER SCHOOL Jan. 11-22

This year the summer school is being held at the North Rocks Deaf & Blind School. Participants are offered the option of a residency or non-residency at \$400 and \$250 respectively. The residency has attracted enrolments from New Zealand, Queensland and Victoria. Classes range from dance, acting and mime to Theatre lab., directing and clowning, all conducted by professional teachers. Carol-lee Aquiline (T.O.D.'s assistant director) has been responsible for organising and co-ordinating this year's very successful summer school. A near break-even is anticipated.

b) SEYMOUR CENTRE SEASON 4/3 - 2/4

Much time and thought has gone into the choosing of the Theatre of the Deaf's adult season for 1988. SGANARELLE by Moliere, and The Lady of Larkspur Lotion by Tennessee Williams have been chosen. These are good contrasts in style and content, and will demonstrate the comedic and dramatic versatility of the company. Carol-lee Aquiline will direct and act in the Moliere and act in the Williams; Patrick Mitchell will direct the Williams and act in Sganarelle. Maggie Johannsen (Project co-ordinator) and I could possibly be called upon to voice in one of the productions as budgetary constraints do not allow for the employment of 2 additional actors. Rehearsals commence on Jan 25.

c) BROCHURE for 1988

Artwork & typesetting is being finalised for the poster, offering performances in schools. These are due to be sent out the first week of the school semester, and a mailing list of Government schools has been obtained from the Education Department.

2. FUTURE PLANS

a) BEHIND THE WINDOW 7/3 - 15/7; 22/8 - 2/9

This is mainly a secondary school show, and will continue in schools after an initial week of rehearsals.

b) SIGNPOSTS 21/3 - 15/7; 22/8 - 9/12

A new primary school show by american Margaret Bachus will be ready for performance from Term 2. We are looking for an inventive designer to make a functioning machine to be used in the production. It will be directed by Patrick Mitchell.

c) T.I.E. TOUR - SOUTH COAST 18/7 - 19/8

Utilising funding of \$9,000 from the N.S.W. Bicentennial Authority, Theatre of the Deaf proposes to take both theatre-in-education shows to schools in the South Coast region.

d) FIVE STEPS BEYOND 5/9 - 9/12

This is a working title only for a new high school show to be presented in Term 4 (replacing Behind the Window) We propose to use all deaf actors.

e) MUSICIAN-IN-RESIDENCE

We have been granted \$5,000 for Charlie Chan to develop music/music skills within the company. She will be responsible for assisting with music for the Seymour season, as well as working with company members on developing response to sound vibrations.

f) PLAYWRIGHT-IN-RESIDENCE

The Literary Arts Board has awarded a grant of \$6,225 to Graham Pitts to develop a play around the cochlear implant. He will workshop with the company later in the year for 8 weeks, and it is hoped to mount a production of the play in 1989.

g) WORKSHOPS/SIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

Will continue to be available to interested parties throughout the year.

h) COMPANY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Time and funds have been set aside to develop Theatre of the Deaf skills in movement, acting etc. These classes are extremely valuable in developing the standard of the company and its profile.

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3. BUDGET for 1988

Theatre of the Deaf only received 48% of its application to the Australia Council for funding in 1988. It is looking for a minimum of \$40,000 sponsorship to have a viable programme this year.

- a) Worst likely result (without any sponsorship) would mean a loss of \$44,000.
- b) Most likely - breakeven (even without full sponsorship).
- c) Best - A small profit to cover 1987 deficit.

4. STAFF PROBLEMS/RECOMMENDATIONS

James Kerwin (18) will join T.O.D. as an actor. He is deaf and has just left school. As we are unable to meet a full salary for him, we are applying to social services for assistance.

Jean St. Clair has been with the company for 18 months. Originally from England, Jean would like to stay permanently in Australia. We are applying for another extension to her temporary visa.

Patrick Mitchell has applied to participate in a Director's course later in the year in Melbourne. If he is accepted, Patrick will be absent for 2 months later in the year.

5. RISKS/CONCERNS

Theatre of the Deaf wants to expand its horizons by:-

- 1 Establishing a National Theatre of the Deaf incorporating other states.
- 11. Tour overseas
- 111. Present more than one night show per year.

We require that a good sponsorship drive be made to raise not only \$40,000 needed to survive, but additional support to raise the profile of the company through its extra activities.

6. THREATS TO THE TRUST & SUGGESTIONS

It has been my observation, not only as the Administrator of the Company, but having worked for the Trust over a number of years, that Theatre of the Deaf has received and continues to receive a very low profile within the A.E.T.T. Most people outside the Arts do not realise that Theatre of the Deaf :-

- 1. Was established under the auspices of the A.E.T.T.
- 2. Is Australia's only professional deaf theatre company.
- 3. Draws its actors from the community.
- 4. Trains them and gives them status/purpose.

All this and more must surely give great accreditation to the A.E.T.T.'s profile.

Liz Marshall
ADMINISTRATOR

18th January, 1988