



NSW Theatre of the Deaf

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This is an outline of the future goals of the Australian Theatre of the Deaf. The change of name from the NSW Theatre of the Deaf to the Australian Theatre of the Deaf is a reflection of our desire to increase our human and material resources, and of our commitment to be professional representatives of the theatre and deaf communities throughout Australia.

Many of the details of these plans will depend to a great extent on the clarity of our artistic vision and upon the depth of support given by our government and private sponsors. We are grateful for the assistance they have given in the past and wish to impress upon them the need for their continued support. We rely on these contributions to help us in our endeavours to produce quality theatre.

At present, one of our greatest areas of concern is in locating and training deaf talent. As there are few avenues open for the deaf to obtain experience in professional theatre, we must be able to provide the resources necessary to train and develop the potential of a number of deaf artists in the Theatre Arts. This year, we are beginning our season with a training week in which a dozen deaf and hearing performers will participate in classes and workshops led by experienced members of the Company. Areas of study will include; acting skills, movement, methods of story-telling sign-mime, and script interpretation. In the future, we hope to be able to extend the training period and to invite other professional artists to lead guest workshops in their particular fields of expertise. The purpose of these training periods is to help develop a stronger, more proficient company, and to build a reserve of talented performers, experienced in the use of sign language as a theatrical art.

The ATD shall continue to pursue Theatre-in-Education as a major means of support. Theatre of the Deaf, by virtue of sign language being a visually open and active means of communication, is well suited to the inventive imaginations present in school audiences. We must highlight the expressiveness of what is normally considered a handicap and keep sign language at the core of our work. The concern here is to insure the professionalism and freshness of the production values, the scripts, and the actors' performances.

We are now searching out a greater number of residencies in which we would spend a period of time in one area providing theatre workshops to any number of affiliated schools and organizations before, between, or after performances. A workshop is a chance to demonstrate and explain our art form, to introduce ourselves to new audiences and to encourage their support. Each member of the Company should be well versed in leading workshops for any kind of group; actors, students, children, and adults.

It is also necessary to develop a series of plays aimed at adult and college level audiences. Whether these be full scale classics, shorter one-acts, or our own original material, will depend on the production capabilities of the Company. These "night seasons" broaden the scope of our actors' performance skills and are a means of presenting ourselves before more enlightened audiences. We wish to explore the possibility that these programmes be toured to colleges, clubs, and festivals throughout Australia.

Finally, it is of great importance that the ATD, a professional performance-oriented theatre troupe, pursue a relationship with the television broadcasting stations. Sign language is a strong visual tool, useful in the exploration of any theatrical or language-oriented venture. Signed words take on a visual shape that lends clarity and support to written or spoken words. This has been shown with great success in

the United States on all the major networks, SESAME STREET, and the Public Broadcasting System. Here in Australia, there should be an interest in documentary specials, research of feature programmes on prose and poetry or educational language series. Such programmes would generate interest in sign language and foster a greater understanding of the capabilities of deaf performers. In any event, whether filming a stage piece or developing a programme targetted to a specific use, the ATD would be before the public and critical eye in a medium well suited to its skills. It is our opinion that we should invite, encourage, and entertain relationships with television programming.

The greatest goal for the ATD is the promise of continued popular and financial support. The value of a professional theatre company of deaf and hearing performers must be constantly examined and reaffirmed, and the theatrical vitality of the company must be continually honed and replenished. We are breaking through years of preconceptions about deafness and pioneering an awareness of sign language as a communication art. We must keep inventiveness and simplicity our top priorities and strive to earn national respect in the fields of both education and entertainment.