



HISTORY OF THEATRE OF THE DEAF

The appearance of talented Deaf performers on stage and in film around the world has increased public awareness of Deafness and the international Deaf Community over the past twenty years. Major acting awards in England and the United States have been won by Deaf actors. There have been numerous appearances by Deaf actors on television serials, while Linda Bove, a Deaf American actor is a regular 'resident' on **Sesame Street** and Marlee Matlin is the lead actor in the series **Reasonable Doubt**.

There are now several professional theatres in the world which employ a company of Deaf actors. Russia houses the oldest company, the MOSCOW THEATRE OF MIMICRY GESTURE, which has been in operation for sixty years. The USA hosts perhaps a half-dozen theatres of the Deaf. The most famous of these is the long-standing NATIONAL THEATRE OF THE DEAF (NTD). The NTD has performed on Broadway, national and international television, and hundreds of stages around the world. There are also professional theatres of the Deaf in England, Scandinavia and Japan.

Australia's THEATRE OF THE DEAF had its origins in the early 1970's under the guidance of the then Adult Deaf Society of NSW. The group provided an opportunity for local members of the Deaf community to perform in and view theatrical productions - it was a theatre for the Deaf. Similar groups were started up in Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane - though none has shared Theatre of the Deaf's good fortune in securing government arts funding and they remain amateur theatre groups.

Following a tour of Australia by the NTD in 1974, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust began its long commitment to the development of a professional theatre of the Deaf in Australia, hiring a hearing director to work with the NSW group. Early years were spent taking mime, acting, dance and mask classes and later, performances of **KING LEAR, OF ROGUES AND CLOWNS** and **FIVE FLIGHTS TO FREEDOM** were staged in major Sydney venues.

In 1979, with backing from the Australia Council's Theatre Board and the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, the company was launched as a fully professional theatre company - of the Deaf. Its unique style of performance is based on the expressive skills of its Deaf artists. The perception of the world through Deafness is both a physical and visual one. By the use of movement, physical expression, acting and a visual language, the company is dedicated to the ideal of producing a form of theatre that can communicate to and excite both Deaf and hearing audiences.

By 1986, the company had developed 16 original productions for school children with performances in Tasmania, Melbourne, South Australia and the ACT plus regional centres and towns throughout NSW. Over the next few years, the Company expanded its touring to include Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia. In 1991, the Company performed at the World Federation of the Deaf Congress in Tokyo, Japan and was chosen as one of the most successful Deaf theatre companies there.

There have been appearances on local and national television (notably ABC TV's GP, THE MONEY OR THE GUN, and A COUNTRY PRACTICE), a performance before HRH The Prince of Wales, an Order of Australia Medal for founding member Nola Colefax and mainstage productions such as **THE WINTER'S TALE**, **THE THREEPENNY OPERA**, **MAN EQUALS MAN**, **WAITING FOR GODOT**, **SGANARELLE** and **THE LADY OF LARKSPUR LOTION**.

1989 saw the appointment of Carol-lee Aquiline, herself Deaf, as Artistic Director and in that same year, the highly successful **WOLFMoon** launched the company's new visual style. Since then THEATRE OF THE DEAF has produced many shows for primary and high schools such as **CULTURE SHOCK**, **TUNNEL VISION**, **SHAPE UP!**, **A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ANGELS**, **SAME DIFFERENCE** and **THE VERY FIRST DAY** using this unique style which has become the Company's trademark.

In 1993 Julia Cotton was appointed Artistic Director with Mike Canfield as Associate Director. **SAVANT**, the mainstage production for that year featured Sofya Gollan, the first Deaf actress to graduate from NIDA. 1994 saw three firsts for the Company - performing in The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, touring to Singapore to perform with another Deaf theatre company HI ! THEATRE at the Singapore Fringe Festival and touring to New Zealand.

This year, 1995, Mike Canfield was appointed Artistic Director - the second ever Deaf person to hold such a position with the company.

THEATRE OF THE DEAF remains the only professional Deaf theatre company in Australia and is one of the country's premier theatre-for-young-people (TYP) teams.

THEATRE OF THE DEAF is assisted by the Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council and the NSW Government through the Ministry for the Arts.

