



The Fringe Guide to Adapting Events for Deaf and Disabled Audiences

Introduction.....	3
What areas of support are available?	
BSL interpretation.....	4
Captioning.....	5
Touch tours.....	6
Relaxed performances.....	7
What next?	
Resources.....	8



The High Street (2012)
© Chris Scott



Taking Part, a report published by the Scottish Arts Council in 2008, found that 49% of disabled people surveyed attended an arts or cultural activity in the previous year as compared to 77% of non-disabled people. There are currently over 758,000 people with hearing impairments in Scotland (Action on Hearing Loss, 2011) and up to 188,000 people with significant sight loss (RNIB, 2011).

Our vision is that the Edinburgh Festival Fringe can be the most inclusive open access arts festival in the world. The Fringe Society is working to provide greater access to a wider audience across all of the diverse events of the festival. This short guide explains the benefits of providing communication support at performances and tells you how you can start engaging with audience members with hearing or visual impairments.

BSL interpretation

British Sign Language (BSL) is the sign language used in the United Kingdom and is the first or preferred language of deaf people in the UK. Action on Hearing Loss estimated that, in 2010, approximately 50,000 people in the UK used BSL. Additionally, many people across the country use BSL including hearing relatives, friends of deaf people, interpreters or through other interaction with the British Deaf community. It is a language that uses movement of the hands, body, face and head to convey information. Just recently, The British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill was passed on 17 September 2015 in the Scottish Parliament recognising BSL as an official language every bit equal to Gaelic in Scotland. A BSL interpreter can be hired to translate or interpret your show from English for the benefit of audience members with hearing impairments.

What is required?

In many cases, those providing this service will need to have seen your show beforehand. Ideally this will be from having a copy of a DVD, script or some other kind of recording. BSL interpreters generally work in pairs due to the length and complexity of a show; most work best up to around thirty minutes on their own. After this time, the second interpreter will act as a feed of language and will prevent interruptions to the flow which can become a distraction.

What types of performances does this suit?

Different providers may specialise in particular genres. Ideally your performance will have a longer run at the Fringe to allow the provider to see it beforehand and become accustomed to timings. However there are some BSL interpreters who can work in live, unscripted environments.

What types of venues does this suit?

This is a very flexible type of adaptation and will work in a wide variety of venues – you simply need to have space for the BSL interpreter at the side of the stage during the performance. It is important that your venue is able to light the interpreter effectively, so make sure you discuss this with your venue manager when planning a BSL interpreted performance.



Captioning

Similar to subtitles in a foreign language film or surtitles in opera, captioning displays dialogue, sound effects and off-stage noises in text format. A caption unit, close to the stage, can be watched simultaneously with the performance so that hearing impaired audience members can follow what is being said and by whom. The captions roll in time with the performance and are generated by a trained operator who is familiar with the show. Audience members with learning disabilities can also benefit from the added information provided by captioning.

What is required?

In many cases, those providing this service will need to have seen your show beforehand. Ideally this will be from having a copy of a DVD, script or some other kind of recording. They will then need to have seen your show in the theatre in which it will be shown at least three times. This allows the operator to work out timings. As such, you may want the adapted performance of your show to be towards the end of your time at the Fringe.

What types of performances does this suit?

As the operator needs the chance to become familiar with the timings of your show, this service is better suited to shows with longer runs. Additionally, it has a greater impact on shows with dialogue or significant audio cues – physical theatre or dance may not find the service necessary.

What types of venues does this suit?

The equipment needed for captioning is large and requires set up and technical time, so this will only work if your venue has enough space for the captioning screen to be set up in front. You will also need to ensure that the equipment can remain up through other performances, or that you have sufficient get-in and get-out time to set up and take down the equipment for each performance that you plan to use the captioning service.



Touch tours

Touch tours, conducted before a performance, give visually impaired people an opportunity to touch parts of the set, costumes or props, involved in a show. Actors and/or stage managers can be present to guide audiences through the various visual elements of the production. This experience greatly contributes to a visually impaired person's understanding of the performance and is often done in conjunction with an audio described performance.

What is required?

You will need to have your set and props in place before the show to allow the touch tour to take place. You will also need to have someone present to lead the tour, and assist the audience members who attend. Ideally, you should have a trained audio describer present to lead the tour and other members of the production team to provide expertise on the visual elements of the show itself.

What types of performances does this suit?

As with audio described performances, this service has its greatest impact with shows that have a visual element such as sets, costumes and props. Ideally, a touch tour will work in conjunction with an audio described show.

What types of venues does this suit?

Touch tours can be conducted in any type of venue, provided it is done safely. Extra care must be taken to clear walkways of any obstructions or trip hazards and extra staff should be on hand to assist any audience members who require it.



Relaxed performances

Relaxed performances are designed to make the experience of visiting the theatre and seeing a show more comfortable and fulfilling for those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or learning disabilities. ASD is a disability that affects how a person might communicate with and relate to other people around them.

What is required?

There are many approaches to creating a relaxed performance that can be taken. You will need to make allowances for some aspects of autism which can become more manifest when in a theatre setting. Often people with autism can become frustrated or anxious when they are unable to understand the world around them.

Having a get together with some of the audience before the show to explain what will happen during the performance is beneficial. Even having the actors come on stage and introduce themselves and explain a little about the show, will be very helpful. Maybe think of putting together a visual guide that can be handed out before the show so that it may be referred to in order to lessen any stress.

Some with autism experience discomfort around sensory issues so removing or camouflaging excessively bright lights and colours, loud, sudden or sharp noises and even strong odours can help alleviate the stress associated with unfamiliar environments.

Language and communication can also be taken quite literally; phrases like 'it's raining cats and dogs' can be very confusing. So, be wary of any communication directed solely at the audience (like the interaction during a panto) as this might be taken literally.

What types of performances does this suit?

Think of how important elements like sound, light (both too little and too much) and strong contrasting situations are to the integrity of your show. Sometimes, omitting or changing these can have a great impact. It has been found that previously performed work or well-known storylines also work best and are better attended due to their familiarity.

What types of venues does this suit?

Relaxed performances can be adapted to fit almost any venue space. Many of those accompanying someone to the theatre might also be under considerable stress, feeling that they may be interrupting the show if the person they are with is making noise or wants to leave.

Things to think about would be to have an area outside of the performance space set aside for those who might want to leave and return a bit later. This also needs to be communicated to all Front of House staff that might as a rule prevent comings and goings throughout a performance; so ensuring you have the venue onside is essential. It would also be helpful to keep the house lights up, or at half, so that the familiar is always visible.



Bottle Mail (2014)
© James Ratchford www.shoothemagic.com

Once you have decided the ways in which you would like to adapt your performance, please get in touch with the Fringe Society at equalities@edfringe.com. If you do not already have a relationship with a service provider, we can help with guidance on securing a BSL interpreter, captioning or audio description equipment and operators. We can also provide advice on the ways in which your accessible performance can be promoted through relevant media as well as in your Fringe listings. It is important not only to provide the service of an adapted show, but also to reach out to your intended audience and make sure they know about it! You can contact us at any step in the process, from show registration to performance, if you have any questions.

Resources

For BSL interpreters

Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI)

www.sasli.co.uk

Our aim is to foster and enhance British Sign Language (BSL)/English interpreting services in Scotland. SASLI provide contact details for BSL interpreters throughout Scotland, by region, on their Find an Interpreter page.

Independent Translation and Interpreting Service – Scotland

www.itiss.co.uk

ITISS is a not for profit service that gives you the opportunity to book and choose your own British Sign Language/English interpreter without any third party involvement.

For captioning

STAGETEXT

www.stage-text.org

STAGETEXT is a registered charity, and a company limited by guarantee, delivering captioned performances and promoting the use of captioning in cultural venues throughout the UK.

For audio description

Audio Description Association (Scotland)

www.adascotland.com

ADAS is a Scottish charity which supports the work of theatrical audio description through training, equipment hire and advice.

For touch tours

Art Beyond Sight

www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-touchtools.shtml

Coordinated by Art Education for the Blind, Inc., Art Beyond Sight Collaborative is dedicated to making the visual arts play a vital role in the lives of people who are blind and visually impaired. Though focused on the visual arts, their educational resources have applications to the performing arts.

Pesky People – Blog on NT Touch Tour

www.peskypeople.co.uk/2011/09/national-theatre-accessibility-experts

Pesky People harnesses digital media, content and social networking to profile, challenge and change the lack of inclusion and access for disabled and deaf people. A user blog post on a touch tour for the National Theatre's production of Frankenstein provides a first-hand account of a successful touch tour.

For relaxed performances

The Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts

www.childrenandarts.org.uk

The Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts is the only national educational charity committed to ensuring that all children in the UK are inspired by the arts. Their mission is to reach out to the many children who are denied access to cultural venues.

Society of London Theatre

www.solt.co.uk/relaxed-performances

The Society combines its long-standing role in such areas as industrial relations and legal advice for members with a campaigning role for the industry, together with a wide range of audience development programmes to promote theatre-going.

The National Autistic Society

www.autism.org.uk/working-with/leisure-and-environments.aspx

The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for people affected by autism.

For reaching audiences

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

www.rnib.org.uk

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) is the UK's leading charity offering information, support and advice to almost two million people with sight loss. Their website holds listings of audio described performances throughout the UK by region.

Artlink

www.artlinkedinburgh.co.uk

Artlink supports a range of opportunities for individuals to get involved in the arts – as audience members, through arts programmes in local communities and in hospitals. Deaf and disabled audience members can use Artlink's services to book tickets for events which meet their access requirements.



Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society
180 High Street
Edinburgh
EH1 1QS

Telephone: +44 (0)131 226 0026
Fax +44 (0)131 226 0016
Email: admin@edfringe.com

© 2016

Produced by the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, Ltd

Revised editions published 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the written prior permission of the Festival Fringe Society.

The Festival Fringe Society Ltd is a company limited by guarantee and incorporated in Scotland (No SCO46605). Registered Charity No SCO02995.