

Mind's eye – a 25th birthday celebration and A Christmas Carol – experience both at the Bolton Octagon Friday the 1st of December 2017.

Audio in progress.

On Friday the 1st of December 2017 I had the pleasure of attending a very special event in audio description – A 25th birthday celebration of Mind's eye description and Anne Hornsby

25 years ago Mind's eye's was born out of a need to find a way to provide audio description for a blind patron at the Octagon Theatre – Bolton. Then Marketing manager Anne Hornsby collaborated with staff of the time to make theatre accessible for all those blind and partially sighted and the rest is history.

Over the last 25 years Anne has been an inspiration and at the forefront of accessible services in Theatre, Museums, galleries and live events and has impacted on many people's lives.

This celebration brought together service users, friends, family, fellow describers and supporters to share in this amazing accomplishment. We all munched on mince pies and chocolates and raised a glass of fizz as Anne gave a reflective speech on the birth and success of Mind's Eye.

Later that evening many of those there for the party also joined Anne for the touch tour and audio described performance of The Octagon's in house production of A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.

For the Touch tour, which was a very busy affair consisting of a large group of 13 plus who were led around the stage, for this production it was constructed in the round and had a different innovative stage design.

Anne the describer gave an overview of many of the visual elements that would be coming up during the course of show including major props and costumes including Scrooge's attire, Marley's chains and the book of ledgers. The large party touched and felt everything on offer and asked questions along the way and were all engaged and took a lot from it.

An introduction to this festive classic began around 6.45PM – 15 minutes before the action began and Anne took you by the hand with her soothing dulcet tones and set the scene illustrating every aspect about to unfold. When the show began all the visual impaired audience was equipped with an understanding of what was in store for them.

Anne is like a guide in your ear highlighting all the physical cues and punctuating what happens so her audio track becomes a perfect balancing act to the show's own soundtrack.

The actual production of a Christmas Carol was reparatory style theatre at its very best utilising unique staging and casting outside the box delivering opposite to what most might expect. As with a lot of stage productions the scriptwriter and director often go with a very different interpretation to what some may be used to but it was very effective and successful here resulting in a very fresh take on the Dickens classic and honouring the spirit of the original novel in every way.

The Octagon theatre in Bolton is a fabulous place to visit that is extremely access friendly and they go out of their way to make your visit extra special and the restaurant was really impressive too serving up creative dishes that were not only great value for money but tantalizingly tasty.

If you've not visited the Octagon in Bolton before then I seriously recommended checking out what audio described performances and touch tours are coming up in the near future by going online octagonbolton.co.uk or by calling the box office for an audio brochure on 01204 520661. It's never a bad thing in life to try something new.

The next audio described performance at the Octagon in Bolton will be *Jayne Eyre* on Thursday the 8th February at 7.30 pm with a touch tour beforehand- check with the box office for the exact time.