

note pad

Items 247 – 252

April 2018

247 Ofcom consultation on accessibility of video on demand (VOD) services

The Office of Communications (Ofcom) has launched a crucial consultation on the provision of audio description by video on demand and catch up services. The Digital Economy Act 2017 gave Ofcom the power to require audio description on video on demand services such as BBC iPlayer, NOW TV and ITV Hub. Ofcom are asking for advice on how this should be done, and will then advise the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on how the new law should be implemented.

RNIB will recommend that anything broadcast with audio description should have audio description when watched on a catch up service, and that the video on demand industry should be moving towards full accessibility. This is an opportunity for you to also have your say.

Some of the key questions in the consultation refer to how much content should be available with audio description on video on demand services. RNIB will be asking for:

- All content that is delivered on linear television with audio description to be mirrored on video on demand services.
- VOD services to move towards full accessibility.
- In addition to this, we will also demand that the online players and apps themselves are set up in such a way that they work for people who use assistive technology, for example, JAWs, Voiceover and Talkback.

Use this link to give your response via RNIB's website:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/consultation-underway-accessibility-video-demand-and-catch-services>

Alternatively, email your response to: vodaccessibility@ofcom.org.uk

The consultation ends on 5 April 2018

248 Mind's Eye wins Manchester Theatre Award



The annual Manchester Theatre Awards announced at The Lowry on 9 March, included two Special Achievement Awards, presented to Barrie Rutter, founder and former artistic director of Northern Broadsides, and to Anne Hornsby, director of Mind's Eye Description Service, for her contribution to theatre access and audio description during the past 30 years. "It was a complete surprise", said Anne (pictured here holding her award), "and wonderful to have access recognised in mainstream awards".

Congratulations to Anne on her very well-deserved tribute – from everyone involved in the Audio Description Association, together with our thanks for all the time and expertise she has given to ADA in the last 20 years!

www.mindseyedescription.org.uk

Fact File: The Manchester Theatre Awards are the UK's largest and most prestigious theatre awards outside London. Originating in 1981, as the Manchester Evening News Theatre Awards, they were relaunched in 2011 to honour performers and productions seen in Greater Manchester during the previous year. They are judged by an 11-strong panel of independent theatre critics.

249 VocalEyes launches second survey of museum websites

VocalEyes is currently repeating its 2016 survey of museum websites, which found that 27% of the UK's accredited museums had no access information on their website, while 7 in 10 lacked information suitable for blind or partially sighted visitors. Matthew Cock, chief executive of VocalEyes, has said: "The website is a vital gateway to the museum.

Pre-planning is very important for a disabled person's visit, and the web is an obvious place to prepare". Museums without adequate online information are excluding potential visitors and failing in their duty under the Equality Act.

In partnership with organisations such as Stagertext, VocalEyes will broaden the scope of this year's survey to cover online information relevant to a wider audience, including visitors who are autistic or deaf. Volunteer researchers started work on the survey in March, and their findings will be published next autumn in VocalEyes' State of Museum Access report for 2018.

www.vocaleyeyes.co.uk/help-improve-the-state-of-museum-access-2018/

250 Our Country's Good tour features integrated audio description

Last month's Note Pad included an item on Fingersmith's current tour of Up 'n' Under featuring the describer-as-performer approach to integrated audio description, with describer/actor Willie Elliott on stage throughout the performance. Ramps on the Moon's current tour of Our Country's Good demonstrates the alternative performer-as-describer approach, with audio description written by describers Alison Clarke and Ruth James and delivered by actor Milton Lopes as an ever-present minor and (apart from audio description) mostly non-speaking character.

The performer-as-describer approach was first used by Ramps on the Moon in its 2016 tour of The Government Inspector, with describer/actor Amanda Wright delivering her description from the stage. In an article entitled Audio Description: Ramps on the Moon, published in Exeunt Magazine on 27 June 2016, visually impaired reviewer Amelia Cavallo applauds the audio description itself, but is critical of its staging and the use of traditional technology. Her comments reflect the view that integrated audio description is only truly inclusive if it is embedded in the production in such a way that the whole audience experiences it as part of the performance, and the headsets which isolate wearers from the rest of the audience are no longer necessary.

www.exeuntmagazine.com/features/audio-description

www.rampsonthemoon.co.uk/show/our-countrys-good

Fact File: *Our Country's Good* was written by Timberlake Wertenbaker in 1988, and based on Thomas Kenneally's novel *The Playmaker*. Set in a New South Wales penal colony in the 1780s, it tells the true story of a young officer and a group of convicts who rehearse and perform *The Recruiting Officer*. This co-production with Nottingham Playhouse was given a 4-star rating by *The Times* and *The Stage*.

251 Sightlines describes its first relaxed ballet

A first for Birmingham Royal Ballet and a first for Sightlines Audio Description Services, the relaxed performance of *The Sleeping Beauty* with audio description at Birmingham Hippodrome on 20 February made ballet accessible to all.



Northern
Ballet
symbol

Relaxed performances of all types are on the increase, but those with audio description are still rare, which makes it difficult to accumulate practice-based evidence of how audio description functions in the context of a relaxed performance. For this reason, we asked Jonathan Nash of Sightlines to share his experience of describing Birmingham Royal Ballet's relaxed version of *The Sleeping Beauty*. Over to Jonathan!

The ballet was shortened, with the removal of the final celebratory wedding dances, and ended two thirds of the way through Act II, when *Sleeping Beauty* was awoken with a kiss. Each segment of the ballet was preceded by an explanation from First Soloist Jonathan Payn, who for that performance was dancing the role of Catalabutte, the Master of Ceremonies at the Palace.

Both I and my fellow Sightlines describer Julia Grundy had audio described a full three hour performance of the ballet, plus an hour and a half introduction and touch tour, at the previous Saturday matinee. However, it was felt that for a relaxed performance a single voice, without change or interruption, was the best way forward. I spent eight hours the following Sunday, cutting down the amount of description and simplifying the language to become more user friendly – in essence, removing all the richer descriptive phrasing and stripping the description back to a 'need to know' basis.

There was an audience of 1,200 and over a dozen headsets were distributed to different service users. In the end, there were only two visually impaired audience

members, but several takers from patrons on the autistic and Asperger spectrum. This meant a last minute change of plan, and despite all my preparation, I barely glanced at my I-pad, choosing instead to describe 'on the hoof' as the story unfolded. That did not mean my preparation time had been a waste, as it all helped to give me the confidence I needed to feel familiar with the ballet and anticipate what was coming next.

The focus changed from just telling the story to the additional signposting of where to look, and when to pay attention. The dance steps took a back seat to offering an explanation of the mood and the reason for each individual dance. Passages of music remained untouched for longer, allowing it to assist and reinforce the story-telling.

The feedback post-show was extremely positive. The headsets themselves helped to isolate service users on the autistic spectrum (who often struggle with crowds and loud noise), and with a calm, reassuring and slow paced delivery, it all contributed to focusing the whole experience on the here and now, and helped avoid any worries about what might happen next.

All in all, a wonderful experience for both service users and the describer alike.

www.sightlines-audio-description.com

Fact File: A quick search of Google Images reveals several symbols in use for relaxed performances, based on a single R or RP. The variation used by Northern Ballet (shown above) seems to be the most popular version.

252 Calling Equity members!

Equity (the trade union for professional performers and creative practitioners working in the UK's entertainment industry) is interested in finding out how many of its current members work as audio describers. Some freelance describers have joined Equity as audio describers so should be identifiable, but some may have joined as actors or other performers, and are therefore less easy to trace.

We last carried out a headcount in 2011 and now need your help to update it. If you are a current member of Equity and your paid work includes audio description, please would you email back to: office@audiodescription.co.uk confirming you are an Equity

member and under which heading you joined. No other details are needed: we will send Equity the total number and a list of names if requested.

Many thanks!

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