Audio Description Association

note pad

288   Reinventing Audio Description
ADA Professional Development Session, Derby Theatre, July 2019

A reminder that ADA's next Professional Development Session is an opportunity to find out more about the Rationale Method – an important and innovative approach to audio description based on the user's perception of movement and sound. It promises to be a stimulating afternoon led by Nathan Geering, dancer, choreographer, and director of Rationale Theatre Company, who specialises in promoting accessibility to dance and physical theatre through creative audio description. Full details of the session below:

Title	Reinventing audio description: an introduction to the Rationale Method
Date	Monday 22 July 2019
Venue	Derby Theatre (formerly Derby Playhouse) 15 Theatre Walk, St Peter's Quarter Derby DE1 2NF

Audience	Audio Describers, Users, Venue Staff, Dance and Movement Specialists
Time	2.15-4.15pm (doors open 2.00pm)
Directions	The theatre is located inside Derby's Intu Shopping Centre, with a café on site and other eating places nearby. For directions, visit the venue's website:

www.derbytheatre.co.uk/your-visit/how-to-find-us

Workshop programme

The afternoon session will cover various approaches to developing audio description, and feature the many different aesthetics of how audio description can be presented. The workshop element will involve participants in practical tasks which will give them an introduction to the following topics:

- Audio description as part of the creative process

- Aesthetics and dynamics

- Movement visualisation

- Vocal percussion/beatboxing

- Going beyond objectivity.

Workshop bookings

Reservations   To reserve a place, please email office@audiodescription.co.uk

Booking fees   £25 (ADA members)
£35 (non-members)
(includes coffee/tea)

Payments   - Please make cheques payable to Audio Description Association and send to ADA Treasurer, 5 Greenbanks, St Albans AL1 1JA
- For bank transfers, ADA's bank details can be obtained from office@audiodescription.co.uk when booking
- PayPal payments should be referenced Derby PDS 2019 and sent to accounts@audiodescription.co.uk

Please note that payments should be made in advance and are non-refundable unless the event is cancelled.

Enquiries   For all other enquiries, please email Emily Malen, PDS Organiser at: emily.malen@nottinghamcity.gov.uk or phone: 0115 989 5609.

Speaker profile

Sheffield-based Nathan Geering is artistic director and chief executive of Rationale Theatre Company and creator of the Rationale Method. He has reinvented audio description utilising the sound effects of beatboxers, emotive text and poetic text to create a richer soundscape for people with visual impairment. His company has worked with the British Paraorchestra, the Royal Opera House and the 2017 Special Olympics Opening Ceremony.

Nathan Geering has also collaborated with neuroscientists at Sheffield University on research into blind and partially sighted listeners' neural responses when exposed to ballet, contemporary and break dance, with the aim of enhancing accessibility to physical theatre and dance. Recently he returned to his home town of Ipswich to work with Unscene Suffolk, Ipswich's resident theatre company of visually impaired people, on their new ensemble show *The Tree of Dreams*, which will be staged at the New Wolsey Studio on 6 July 2019 before going on tour in the local community.

https://rationalemethod.com

---

289   Describing Diversity
VocalEyes research project on audio description of race, disability, and other personal characteristics

How audio describers handle physical characteristics such as race and disability in their character descriptions is a debate almost as old as audio description itself. To explore the complex issues involved, VocalEyes, in partnership with Royal Holloway, University of London, is inviting input from a wide group of people – users of AD, describers, actors and other theatre professionals, anywhere in the world.

The research team are interested in people's opinions about when and how audio description should cover human characteristics such as race, disability, age, body shape or gender. Responses to the survey questionnaire will feed into a report and guidelines to be published later this year.

To take part in the survey, visit: https://vocaleyes.co.uk/describing-diversity-survey/

You can also download and complete the survey in a Word document (Describing Diversity Questionnaire Large Print Arial 16 pt). Please note that some of the questions differ depending on your relationship to audio description. If you are answering the survey primarily as an audio describer or theatre professional, and wish to use a Large Print version, please contact VocalEyes (email address below) to request an appropriate version. The Large Print version above is intended for respondents who are not audio describers or theatre professionals.

The research team will be undertaking some more in-depth face-to-face or phone interviews at the next stage of the project. If you feel you have more to say about audio description of human characteristics and diversity, there is a place to indicate this within the survey questionnaire, and they will contact you to discuss.

To submit the Large Print version, or for any enquiries about the research project and how to take part in it, please email: describingdiversity@vocaleyes.co.uk

Deadline for survey: **Wednesday 31 July 2019, 17.00 (London time)**

Please feel free to share this item with your networks and anyone else with an interest and/or involvement in audio description.

290   AD*LAB* PRO training materials available online

AD*LAB* PRO is a three-year (2016-19) project funded by the European Union and coordinated by the University of Trieste, to create a curriculum and accompanying materials for training audio describers. The course materials developed by the project were launched at ADLAB PRO's concluding event in Ljubljana last month. They cover all areas of audio description and are freely available on the project's website at:

https://www.adlabpro.eu/

Contents include: six modules (listed below) divided into units which can be selected and matched according to the needs and educational and professional backgrounds of

trainees; training materials (videos, PPTs, transcripts, tasks, reading lists); a trainer's guide; and introductory videos to the modules, giving an overview of each.

Module 1: General introduction

Module 2: Screen AD

Module 3: AD of live events [covers live performances and touch tours]

Module 4: (Semi) live AD and recorded AD for static arts and environments

Module 5: Additional services [covers audio subtitling, dubbing and voiceover]

Module 6: Additional technical issues, developments and change.

291   Screen describer seeks audience feedback

ADA member Sonia Castelo Branco first became involved with audio description eleven years ago when the company for which she was working as a tape librarian needed an AD voiceover at short notice and she volunteered to help. After lending her voice to a few more ADs, she realised this was the career for her and went on to learn how to script AD for TV programmes, then became a freelance film describer. In her own words,

"Ever since starting to audio describe feature films, I've been keen to get an insight from people who are using AD, specifically at the cinema, so that I can improve my work and provide a better service. I don't have any contacts with visual impairment who also go to the cinema and this is something I would like to change. I'm keen to hear their thoughts on the ADs they've heard at the cinema, and if there's any interest I'd like to arrange some cinema trips to get face to face feedback as well. I love what I do but think it's really important to have more contact with, and feedback from, the people I'm doing it for."

If you are a regular user of audio description at the cinema and would like to share your experiences, then Sonia would love to hear from you, especially if you live in London and frequent Cineworld cinemas. You can reach her at describagram@gmail.com

Describagram is Sonia's fledgling Instagram account describing memes, GIFs and videos. Her aim is to build a platform where visually impaired users can get the most out of social media.

292   VocalEyes State of Theatre Access Survey 2019

MESSAGE FROM

We've just started our two-yearly survey of theatres to see what access they offer. We'll then use this in our 2019 State of Theatre Access report to campaign for better and more access. We want to include your views. If you'd like to contribute, drop Matthew Cock an email at:

matthew@vocaleyes.co.uk

---

293   Pre-recorded audio description at Opera North

Below is the summary of an article by ADA member Alice Gilmour on her experimental use of pre-recorded audio description at Opera North. The full article will be published in ADA's newsletter.

Making opera accessible is my role at Opera North and yet I was aware that our increasing use of concert halls for our very well-received, semi-staged productions of *Turandot*, *Salome* and more recently *Aida*, had meant that we were not accessible to anyone who cannot see the displayed surtitles, as they have all been sung in their original languages. So as an audio describer myself, I wondered if pre-recording audio description could be a way of making them accessible to people who are blind or partially sighted.

A look at Opera North's show reports for a couple of recent productions revealed that timings only deviated by a maximum of one to two minutes over each half of a performance. And with *Aida*, there was a pause in the first half of the performance between acts one and two, which meant I could divide up the audio description into three audio files. Also, I would read sections of text a bit earlier than I might in a live situation, so that even if the synchronisation was slightly out, I would not be talking over the first few notes of a well-known aria for instance. And given that the detail of the sets, costumes and characters was already outlined in the preshow audio notes, I just needed to summarise who was singing, where they were standing and what they were about to sing.

Once the recordings were finished, the users were emailed links to the three files, and some simple instructions for operation: press pause after hearing me saying 'Act one', 'Act two' etc at the beginning of each file so they could be sure they were on the correct one, and press play again when they heard the first notes from the orchestra. The concert halls were contacted to inform them that that the trial was taking place and to share the Wi-Fi with users – they needed a reliable and free link. And front of

house staff were also informed so that the users would not be asked to turn off their phones!

The feedback from Tom Maley and his wife Caroline after the performance in Nottingham was fantastic. Tom said,

"In this trial run it was quite obvious that using a phone with our own headsets and a reliable production assistant (Caroline) was much better than anything that we have had in any theatre anywhere in Europe.   I could hear your voice clearly without impinging on the neighbours and everything ran as smoothly as one could hope for."

Another customer trialling it in Leeds said,

"I would say it is one million times better than the old system. The sound was much clearer and it did not cut off if I or somebody nearby moved at all. I would imagine it would be impossible to get the timing 100% in sync, as it does depend on exactly when you press the play button, but it was very good. Personally, I liked the way you only said what was necessary to help understand what was happening, without interrupting the music."

So the main improvements were sound quality, ease of use, and lack of sound-bleed to nearby audience members. Operational issues such as stopping and starting each file could be mitigated in future by using a system like Sennheiser's MobileConnect to broadcast the audio. Or if someone doesn't own a smartphone, they (or a helpful friend or family member) could download the audio files ahead of time and copy them onto an mp3 player. Clearly if a performance had to stop, there would be issues in restarting the audio at the correct point which is one of the main reasons why live audio description is still the best option, not least because of the invaluable touch tours.

However, for productions that do not vary too much in timings, pre-recording audio description would be a great way of allowing blind and partially sighted customers to attend performances in spaces that don't have the technology to broadcast it. And for venues that *do* have the technology, in addition to offering a live audio described performance, the script could be recorded and made freely available, thus allowing people to choose any performance, which I know for most users of accessible services, is the holy grail.

Alice is Opera North's Community Programmes Assistant and Access Officer. She is also a freelance audio describer and voiceover artist with her own home recording studio.

www.alicegilmour.com

294   ADA AGM 2019 and Post-Meeting Event

DATE FOR

September

23

2019

YOUR DIARY

The Audio Description Association's 20th Annual General Meeting will be held at the Reform Club, 104 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5EW, on Monday 23 September 2019.

Two strands are planned for the afternoon event which traditionally follows the AGM: an anniversary celebration of ADA's twenty-year journey and exploration of future pathways, and a discussion of the preliminary findings of the Describing Diversity research project carried out by VocalEyes in partnership with Royal Holloway, University of London (see item 289).

Full details will follow shortly.