



A u d i o D e s c r i p t i o n A s s o c i a t i o n

I t e m s 301-305

A u g u s t 2019

301 ADA AGM and Post-Meeting Session

The Library, Reform Club, London, 23 September 2019, 12.00-4.00pm

Please note a slightly later start than previously announced for ADA's 20th Annual General Meeting to be held at the Reform Club, 104 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5EW, on Monday 23 September 2019 from (11.15 for) 12.00-12.45pm. The meeting is open to all ADA members and non-members are welcome to attend in a non-voting capacity.

This year's post-AGM event is *The Long View*, a double session combining a preview of the findings of the Describing Diversity survey carried out by VocalEyes and Royal Holloway, University of London, with Matthew Cock from VocalEyes and researcher Rachel Hutchinson bringing new evidence to an old debate – and a 20th-anniversary celebration of ADA past and present, with the chance to add your views on ADA's future direction to those of our Panel of Speakers.



The Long View is timetabled for (1.30 for) 1.45-4.00pm. Light refreshments will be available in the interval between the AGM and the double session for people leaving after the meeting or staying on/arriving early for the afternoon.

We look forward to seeing you there – for planning purposes, we need the names of attendees in advance, so please would you **email** office@audiodescription.co.uk **by Friday 13 September 2019** to book your seat at either or both the AGM and the afternoon session.

For **directions**, **accessibility** and **dress code**, please consult the Reform Club website at www.reformclub.com.

For **general enquiries** about the AGM, please contact Carolyn Smith, ADA Secretary, at adasecretarycarolyn@gmail.com, and for enquiries about *The Long View*, please email Emily Malen, ADA Events Organiser at emily.malen@nottinghamcity.gov.uk.

302 Pre-recorded audio description at Opera North – update



Tim Albery's acclaimed production of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* returns this autumn with recorded audio description at every performance except the opening night, as Opera North perfects its recently developed system for delivering pre-recorded audio description to the listener's smartphone.

Venues and dates for *Giulio Cesare* are listed below. If you would like to contribute to the system's ongoing development by giving feedback on your listening experience, Opera North's Access Officer, Alice Gilmour, would be delighted to hear from you – please email her at alice.gilmour@operanorth.co.uk or phone on 0113 223 3629.

Leeds Grand Theatre

28 September (no AD)

5, 11, 15, 17 October

www.leedsgrandtheatre.com

Theatre Royal, Newcastle

30 October

www.theatreroyal.co.uk

Theatre Royal, Nottingham

6 November

www.trch.co.uk

The Lowry, Salford Quays

13 November

www.thelowry.com

Giulio Cesare will not be described live, but an audio described performance plus touch tour is scheduled for Phyllida Lloyd's landmark production of Puccini's *La Boheme* at each of the four venues during Opera North's autumn season. For dates and times of audio described performances, visit your selected venue's website and/or Opera North's website at:

www.operanorth.co.uk

303 The Difference Engine – taking captions outdoors



“A great success” was the verdict on the Difference Engine from caption users at the Stratford Shakespeare Company’s performance of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in The Dell – the RSC’s free open air theatre on the banks of the Avon – earlier this month.

Developed by Coventry-based theatre company Talking Birds, and named after Charles Babbage’s 1822 computer, the Difference Engine delivers captions direct to the user’s mobile device via a free app or browser. It can be used in conventional venues but was designed primarily as a portable access solution for site specific or experimental work, and for outdoor and promenade events. The system is operated by the venues or organisations that hire it, making it an affordable option for small-scale companies.

The Difference Engine uses its own wireless local area network, so is not reliant on a WiFi connection, and can be run off a battery pack where no power supply is available. Captions are generated by the hiring company, which edits the play script into caption-sized chunks, adds descriptions of sound effects, and uploads the captioning script to the system for live delivery on the day.

Talking Birds encourages involvement of the artists in theatre access delivery, and recommends that script editing is done by one of the creative team. Companies new to captioning are advised to work with a professional captioner initially – as happened at Stratford where an RSC captioner was on hand. The company performing in The Dell were as enthusiastic about the Difference Engine as their audience, describing the technology as “easy to use”, and the process of creating and delivering the captions as “a wonderful learning opportunity”.

After the Edinburgh Festival, the Difference Engine returns to The Dell on 25 August for two hour-long plays from BMH Productions, *Richard III* at 12 noon and *Romeo and Juliet* at 3.00pm. Next is Talking Flight’s play for children, *You’ve Got Dragons*, at Derby Theatre on 15 September, followed by Paul O’Donnell’s laugh-out-loud show, *We’ve Got Each Other*, at HOME Manchester on 19-20 September 2019.

Audio description is also being developed and tested, based on a single operator cueing pre-recorded audio description in tandem with the captions. For more information, see Talking Birds’ website at:

www.talkingbirds.co.uk/DE

304 AD training opportunity at VocalEyes

VocalEyes is offering a training course for up to 12 new theatre describers, with the aim of expanding its own pool of freelance describers and generally increasing the professional workforce. It is particularly keen to attract applicants who reflect the diversity of the British population in order to broaden diversity among the current workforce.

Course outline:

- 1 Classroom teaching: based at Shakespeare's Globe, London (18-19 and 25-26 November 2019)
- 2 Assessment: based on rehearsal/delivery of audio description at a live performance in a London theatre
- 3 Shadowing: (depending on a satisfactory assessment) shadowing a VocalEyes describer throughout the process of preparing/delivering an audio described performance (December-January 2019/20)
- 4 Co-delivery: preparing/delivering an audio described performance in partnership with an experienced describer (dates tbc)

Fee: £200 (Thanks to generous funding, the course fee is heavily subsidised.)

Enquiries: enquiries@vocaleyeyes.co.uk headed Audio Describer Training

Full information and application process:

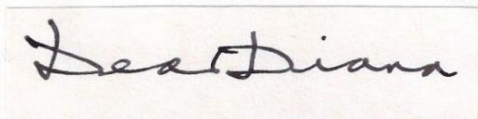
<https://vocaleyeyes.co.uk/theatre-audio-describer-training-course-november-2019/>

Deadline for applications: 09.00 on Monday 16 September 2019

305 Describing diversity – then and now

This summer's Describing Diversity survey prompted a trip to the archives to uncover the origins of the diversity debate. The following extract comes from the newsletter of the London Audio Description Service, dated August 1994, in which Diana Hull, senior tutor on the RNIB's early training course, replies to describers' questions on her *Dear Diana* page.

The Restoration comedy mentioned was the Royal National Theatre's 1992 production of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, one of two AD demonstrations that LADS put on for the National during its pre-launch phase.



There is a tendency nowadays to cast black actors in classical drama, despite the textual evidence and historical probability. Should audio description reflect the director's intentions and ignore their colour or should we faithfully report what we see?

WE DESCRIBE WHAT WE SEE - if something is visually accessible to a sighted audience then we describe it. There is sometimes a clash between the needs of audio description and political correctness - theatres may not want us to describe an actor's colour for reasons of their own.

For example, we had an amicable but lively discussion with one theatre over colour blind casting in a Restoration comedy. In our programme notes we stated who was white and who was black. One of the most immediately perceptible things about anyone is their colour, so we couldn't ignore it, and there was also a purely practical reason why we wanted to describe it. Colour blind casting is not universal in the theatre and this was a talking-point: people discussed it in the interval, reviewers devoted column inches to it. It is part of the describers' job to enable their audience to participate in that type of discussion.

So how should we describe it?

In principle, we should include the racial characteristics of every character in the programme notes. In practice, few of us do, saying, for example, this is an all-black cast (when an all-white cast would be more usual) or, if the cast is mixed race, only describing the actors' colour when there are

differences from what an audience might expect.

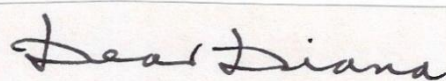
What terminology do we use?

Often it's sufficient to say *black*; but we can describe colour as we do other physical characteristics - in terms of what we see - so, *coffee-coloured complexion, olive-skinned, slanting eyes*. It's better to do this than to make assumptions about an actor's ethnic origins that may be wrong, that someone is Chinese, for example, when they may be Malaysian.

And dealing with the theatres?

In the case of the Restoration comedy they said: "We deliberately made this cast colour-blind, and now you're describing their colour!" But they accepted our reasons - that our job was to give VIPs the same visual information as the rest of the audience.

I think the problem is the conflict between two things we all value: equal access for disabled people, in this case VIPs, and a fair deal for all races. You must bear in mind which hat you are wearing at the time. And remember that this is one of the areas where describer independence is paramount.



A topic which keeps cropping up in team discussions and feedback sessions is stage terminology - should we or shouldn't we use it? Please advise!

DON'T USE STAGE TERMINOLOGY as a general rule. Your audience may understand *downstage* but it's

Diana's response sums up the position a quarter of a century ago. Terminology has changed since then, with 'colour blind' and 'gender blind' dropping out of use – but what else has altered? Join us for *The Long View* at the Reform Club on 23 September to hear what the results of the VocalEyes/Royal Holloway survey reveal about the position today.

Details of the Describing Diversity project report and guidelines will follow when published later this year.

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