

# Audio Description Association

## note pad

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October 2013

### 54 Panto Workshop

Join us in the sleek modern setting of Norwich Theatre Royal for a second ADA workshop on describing pantomime. Last year Anne Hornsby and her talented team entertained and enlightened their audience with demonstrations and practical advice based on long experience of working with this rule-bending genre. Now the stage is set for a repeat performance! Come early and network with fellow describers before the workshop begins....

Further information is given in the attached flyer – the essential details are:

**Date/Time** Monday 18 November 2013, (1.00 for) 2.00-4.30pm

**Venue** Town Close Room  
Norwich Theatre Royal  
Theatre Street  
Norwich NR2 1RL

**Cost** ADA/ADA (Scotland) members: £17.50  
Non-members: £35.00

**BOOK NOW** - email [office@audiodescription.co.uk](mailto:office@audiodescription.co.uk) to reserve a place and arrange payment.

### 55 Admit all: better access builds bigger audiences

The Theatrical Management Association (TMA) is running a one-day course with this title on developing and marketing assisted performances. It is aimed at general managers, access officers, marketing and education staff, and all those working on accessible performances. Judy Dixey of VocalEyes says:

“We know that there are lots of really great assisted performances going on up and down the country, but we also know that there are gaps there too. This day is for:

- anyone who wants to hold a relaxed performance but has no idea where to start,
- anyone who is getting good audience numbers for their captioned shows, but their BSL-interpreted show audiences have disappeared and they don't know why,
- anyone who is getting really amazing feedback from their audio described performances but is being threatened with access budget cuts from their manager and don't know if they can carry on with them.

If you are passionate about access and want to do it even better, then this training day is for you.”

See [www.tmauk.org](http://www.tmauk.org) for further information. Here are the essential details:

<b>Date/Time</b>	Tuesday 12 November 2013, 11.00-5.00pm
<b>Venue</b>	Theatrical Management Association (TMA) 32 Rose Street London WC2E 9ET
<b>Cost</b>	TMA members: £125.00 + VAT Non-members: £175.00 + VAT

## 56 Relaxed Performances

ADA's current newsletter carries an article by Bridget Stevens on audio describing Scotland's first relaxed performance at Edinburgh Festival Theatre last December, when 300 local children with a broad range of physical, sensory, learning and behavioural difficulties attended a special performance of *The Snowman* in relaxed conditions.

As Bridget reports, it was not only the performance that was relaxed – with reduced sound and lighting levels and front of house adjustments that included extra space for wheel chairs, hoists, changing beds and chill out areas – so too was the audio description. Language levels were adjusted to learning age and a more explanatory approach adopted.

Bridget's article inspired us to take a closer look at the role of audio description in the context of relaxed performances, and what we discovered appears in the newsletter as a topic for comment. It is reproduced here with an additional plea for anyone involved in audio description or sensory/touch tours at relaxed performances during the coming months to email [office@audiodescription.co.uk](mailto:office@audiodescription.co.uk) to tell us how they tackled the job and how their audience responded. Or simply to let us know it happened!

## Comment: Relaxed Performances

“Relaxed performances are not a new feature of theatre life” commented Kevin Berry in *The Stage* last summer. “At the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, Nicky Taylor has been setting up relaxed performances since January 2010. Her pre-show information pack is exemplary, and includes the promise of ‘having your picture taken with the actors’.”

His article was prompted by the first relaxed performance in London’s West End, a special staging of *Shrek: the Musical* by Mousetrap, the theatre access charity, for 500 families with children whose physical, sensory, learning and behavioural difficulties made ordinary theatre going a challenge too far.

Eight months later, the Relaxed Performance Project was launched at the RSC’s relaxed performance of *The Mouse and His Child* on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Ten theatres across the UK are involved in the Project, which is being piloted by the Society of London Theatre (SOLT), Theatrical Management Association (TMA) and The Prince’s Foundation for Children & the Arts. They include the Globe Theatre, Royal National Theatre, Newcastle’s Theatre Royal, Nottingham Playhouse, West Yorkshire Playhouse, and venues in Bromley, Grimsby and Richmond, Surrey belonging to the Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG) which is taking an active interest in the Project.

A representative range of family shows was selected – pantomimes, musicals, drama and comedy – in order to develop a robust body of experience on which to base a best practice model, to be circulated with the rest of the Project’s findings during autumn 2013. The ultimate aim is to encourage more venues to make relaxed performances a regular feature of their work.

Where audio description is concerned, two questions spring to mind. Is Edinburgh the only venue to have offered audio description with its relaxed performance? The answer is no – but only one other report has reached us. It comes from the Mayflower Theatre in Southampton which was specifically asked to provide audio description for visually impaired members of a group coming to the relaxed performance, and laid on a touch tour as well.

Neither the National Theatre nor the RSC have mixed their services, and other venues south of the Border appear to have taken the same approach. But at least two venues in addition to Southampton – Norwich Theatre Royal and Birmingham Hippodrome – are advertising audio description with the relaxed performances of their pantomimes this year, and this may be the beginning of a trend.

More importantly, is there a definite role for audio description in the context of a relaxed performance? The answer is a cautious yes – cautious because in the absence of research and very little in the way of actual practice, audio description’s contribution is still largely speculative. Kirsty Hoyle, the Relaxed Performance Project Manager, says she considered both captioning and audio description as an option for research but did not have the capacity under the Project.

Anecdotal evidence relates mainly to autism, and ranges from people who argue that adding yet another stimulus would only be counterproductive to the mother who felt audio description had a calming effect on her son, since he could close his eyes to block out disturbing visual stimuli and still know what was happening on stage. In her online article *Autistic spectrum, captions and audio description*, Judith Garman mentions a participant with ADHD in the IPTV user trials she carried out with the BBC in 2010/2011 who found audio description “massively helpful”.

There was no uptake for the audio description at Edinburgh’s relaxed performance of *The Snowman*, but the Southampton experience confirms there is a potential demand for audio description from its

traditional audience of children and adults whose sight or sightlines are impaired. And the anecdotal evidence suggests it may also be a valid option for at least some participants with learning and behavioural difficulties because of the additional explanation and reinforcement it can provide. Unlike the blanket audience exposure of captioning and signing, audio description is designed for individual use, to be selected or rejected depending on personal choice. Stimulus overload is easily avoided,

Admittedly, audio description involves wearing a headset which could be a deterrent in itself. In which case (thinking outside the describer's box), roving describers, offering audio description directly to the user in a suitable space in the auditorium, might be a feasible alternative. Clearly, this is an option that would need to be discussed in advance with parents and teachers, to identify potential users, and with the theatre staff and describers involved in the additional planning.

All your comments on this topic are welcome, especially from theatre staff, audio describers and participants at the relaxed performances with AD scheduled for the 2013/14 Christmas season. Hopefully, we can pool experience and arrive at a more informed assessment of audio description's potential role than is possible at present.

**Footnote:** *Relaxed* and *autism-friendly* are British and American terms for the same concept. The Relaxed Performance Project initially used *autism-friendly* but changed to *relaxed* in order to reflect the diversity of audiences more accurately.

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[www.audiodescription.co.uk](http://www.audiodescription.co.uk)

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[office@audiodescription.co.uk](mailto:office@audiodescription.co.uk)

Flyer and booking form for next month's Panto Workshop are attached!

# AUDIO DESCRIPTION ASSOCIATION

## PANTO WORKSHOP

**Monday 18 November 2013**

**2.00-4.30pm**

**Town Close Room, Norwich Theatre Royal  
Theatre Street, Norwich NR2 1RL**

The panto season approaches fast - so join us in the contemporary setting of Norwich Theatre Royal for a workshop on describing pantomime and farce led by audio description's Queen of Panto (oh yes, she is!) Anne Hornsby.

We will look at the unique combination of challenges that pantomime throws out to describers: the slapstick, the chases, the fights, the costumes, the sets, the sound and visual effects, the audience participation, the song-sheet, the ad libbing, the noise - all the magic and chaos that is panto. Explore with us how best to describe the fun and make it accessible to our younger listeners.

The format is similar to previous workshops. Anne's presentation on how she approaches the challenges of describing panto will be followed by a chance for you to comment and question, before splitting into small groups to experiment with describing extracts from pantos recorded on dvd. Feedback from the groups will be incorporated into a general discussion of issues raised during the afternoon, with a further chance to share experience.

Anne's career as an audio describer spans more than two decades. Each year she tackles around a dozen pantomimes and Christmas shows. Not all the challenges she meets are purely descriptive: at Liverpool Everyman, the average number for a pre-panto touch tour is 150 .....

- For **directions** to Norwich Theatre Royal, see the theatre's website:  
[www.theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk](http://www.theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk)

Come early for a chance to network from 1.00-2.00pm before the workshop begins. Coffee will be provided on arrival and mid-afternoon and food can be bought in the theatre's café restaurant - or bring your own.

- For the workshop **booking fee** and **closing date**, see the attached booking form.
- For further **information** about the workshop itself, contact Anne Hornsby at Mind's Eye Audio Description Service:  
[mindseyedescription@gmail.com](mailto:mindseyedescription@gmail.com)
- For all other queries, contact:  
[office@audiodescription.co.uk](mailto:office@audiodescription.co.uk)

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## PANTO WORKSHOP

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**Town Close Room, Norwich Theatre Royal**

**Theatre Street, Norwich NR2 1RL**

### BOOKING FORM

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

I enclose a cheque for (please tick as appropriate):

- |                          |   |        |
|--------------------------|---|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Workshop fee – ADA/ADA(S) Member              | £17.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Workshop fee – Non-member                     | £32.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Workshop fee + Membership of ADA<br>(2013/14) | £35.00 |

Please make your cheque payable to **Audio Description Association** and send it with this form to:

Audio Description Association, Box 306, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans AL1 1DT

If you prefer to pay by bank transfer, ADA's account details are available from:  
[office@audiodescription.co.uk](mailto:office@audiodescription.co.uk)

Please note that workshop fees are non-refundable unless the place can be reallocated or the workshop is cancelled.