Staging Deaf and Hearing Theatre Productions

A Practical Guide

Andy Head · Jill Marie Bradbury

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Andy Head
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY, USA

Jill Marie Bradbury
University of Maryland, College Park
College Park, MD, USA

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To Katharyn, always the spark.
To Brian, who makes it possible.

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Why This Book?

In my first semester teaching at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), I directed a production of a play titled *Love's Fire: Seven New Plays Inspired by Seven Shakespearean Sonnets.* Auditions were held during the first week of classes. Halfway through the open call, a young deaf actor entered the room and gave one of the strongest auditions I'd seen all afternoon. Though she was not the first deaf person I'd met, at the time I was still quite new to deaf culture, I didn't have much experience working with deaf people, and I had *zero* experience directing a deaf actor in a play. RIT is affiliated with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). In fact, the two share a campus, so her appearance was not totally unexpected. American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters were present at the audition and helped me communicate with her.

It was apparent this actor needed to be in the show, but I found myself discounting her due to my own shortcomings. As I planned out callbacks, her audition form sat on the table, not quite in the 'yes' pile or the 'no' pile. I had many anxieties about the decision since I knew very little ASL: Would interpreters be sufficient in communicating with her? Would we understand each other? No other deaf actors had auditioned, so how would she interact with an otherwise hearing cast? How could I incorporate her deafness and culture into the play? How would we weave together two languages onstage at the same time? Where should I even begin?

All of the thoughts edging her toward 'no' were my own insecurities. She had come in and auditioned better than almost all other actors that day, and if she was a hearing person, she would've been a clear 'yes.' Not casting her, nor even offering her a callback, would be unjust and unfair

on many levels. It would be an incredible disservice to her, to the other actors, to the audience, and even to myself, depriving us all of a very unique, challenging, and cross-cultural artistic experience—especially at an educational institution. I picked up her audition form and looked it over again. I did not know how the coming weeks would unfold; I didn't have answers to the various questions banging around in my brain; I felt there were so many inadvertent mistakes that could be made; I also knew she had to be and deserved to be in the play. I put her form in the 'yes' pile. I had no roadmap for how to include her in the production, but deep down past the insecurities, I knew we would all make it work, as a team, because that's what theatre is about.

I ended up casting that actor and we *did* make it work. The play is actually a collection of seven short plays, and she was involved in four of them, each one in a slightly different way. My worries were unfounded—the cast clicked, she was involved and included, and the show came together. Throughout the process, we changed directions, we backtracked, we fixed and adjusted and tried things in new ways, and eventually we had a production to present to our audience fully in ASL and spoken English, and with captions.

Looking back, I need to credit her with extending to the rest of us her patience, understanding, and forgiveness as she overcame our ignorance. There are numerous things I could have done better in working with that cast. I now have tools and awareness that would have helped me serve that deaf actor more. I have new strategies that would have benefited her, and us all, immensely. That's why we're sharing this book. Theatre like this is happening all over the place, but no one is writing about it. No one is collecting best practices and sharing experiences on a wider scale. Nothing has been codified about what to do or not do. This is the roadmap for people who were like me back in that audition room. It is for people who want to create more accessible productions and be more inclusive of deaf artists and audiences. A guide like this would have relieved so much of the burden that the young actor shouldered to teach me about how to work with her.

—Andy

When Andy first mentioned his idea to write this book, my immediate response was "YES, this is so needed and you cannot write this by yourself." For too many years, integrated deaf and hearing theatre has been led by hearing artists. The National Theatre of the Deaf, established in 1967,

was led by hearing individuals until 1993, when Deaf actor Camille L. Jeter became a co-artistic director. The original *Children of a Lesser God* and the 2018 Broadway revival had hearing directors, as did Deaf West's smash hits *Big River* and *Spring Awakening*. The lack of deaf creative input at the highest level often leads to shows that are applauded by hearing audiences and reviewers, but leave deaf patrons dissatisfied at best and excluded at worst. Things are finally starting to change, with a deaf and hearing co-director model becoming more common and deaf directors gaining opportunities to direct outside of Deaf theatre companies. But deaf artists still do not have the same opportunities to direct or co-direct as hearing artists. To Andy's credit, he immediately recognized the importance of collaborative authorship for this topic and invited me to become part of his project.

I am not a theatre practitioner myself, but an avid Deaf theatre-goer who has traveled around the country to see integrated productions for over twenty years. I have many thoughts about what makes for a successful and inclusive experience for deaf audiences, and have published some of my reflections. Andy and I have expanded beyond our own individual experiences by interviewing over thirty deaf and hearing theatre artists, interpreters, and audience members for this project. Their generous gifts of time and knowledge have greatly enriched this book.

—Jill

Until now, hearing theatre artists interested in working with deaf theatre artists have had very few resources to turn to. There are only a few non-academic publications about Deaf theatre in general, such as Stephen Baldwin's *Pictures in the Air: The Story of the National Theatre of the Deaf* (1993), or about integrated deaf and hearing theatre in particular. One of the few books on integrated theatre, Mark Rigney's *Deaf Side Story* (2003), is a narrative account of an integrated production of *West Side Story* at MacMurray College. In addition to being authored solely by a hearing individual, Rigney's book does not offer guidelines for practice. Some guidelines can be found in publications such as Luane Davis Haggerty's *Acting I: Del Sign Takes Stage* (2009), Dorothy Miles and Lou Fant's *Sign-Language Theatre and Deaf Theatre: New Definitions and Directions* (1976), and a handful of doctoral theses. However, these publications are out of date or not widely available. While existing publications on disability theatre, such as Stephanie Barton-Farcas' *Disability and Theatre: A Practical Manual for* Inclusion *in the Arts* (2018), have

chapters on deaf and hearing theatre, these sections are brief and do not include the experiences of deaf theatre artists and audiences.

This book doesn't have all the answers, for every production is a unique experience with unique challenges and triumphs. There are many distinct approaches to doing integrated theatre. What works in one venue, with one cast, and for one community may not work for another venue, cast, or community. Instead, we give you a starting point and a direction to work toward. Throughout the book, we include numerous examples and case studies to help you avoid common pitfalls. Out of our own personal experiences and the interviews we conducted for this book, we have developed three non-negotiable principles that are necessary for successfully producing integrated theatre. These principles are the foundation for practices that ensure your deaf artists and audiences are getting the experiences they deserve.

Ultimately, our book aims to help bridge the gap between mainstream theatre (i.e., predominantly hearing theatre) and deaf artists and audiences. It's written for those who want to create more inclusive and accessible theatre, but aren't sure where to begin. It's also for those deaf designers, directors, actors, and artists who are too often burdened with having to teach and explain and adapt in order to work with hearing colleagues. This book is a guide they can refer people to when working with a new company, producer, or director.

In our current moment, deaf stories, deaf artists, and deaf culture are making a huge splash across mainstream entertainment. Look no further than the 94th Academy Awards in 2022, in which the film *CODA* won not only Best Picture, but also a Best Supporting Actor for Troy Kotsur, the first Deaf actor to achieve this distinction. From the ABC Family series *Switched at Birth* to the Disney+ *Hawkeye* and spinoff *Echo*, deaf characters are regularly appearing on television. The theatre world is also seeing an expansion in roles for deaf actors. In 2022, Alexandria Wailes appeared in the Broadway production of *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, James Caverly in Olney Theatre Center's *The Music Man*, and Russell Harvard in the Broadway production of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Opera companies such as Los Angeles Philharmonic and Victory Hall Opera in Charlottesville, VA are experimenting with using deaf actors in productions. The list is only getting longer. We're witnessing a renaissance in deaf representation, and in many cases, deaf and hearing artists are working alongside each other to create unique and impactful work. Productions everywhere are challenging theatrical norms, shifting audience's expectations, and creating stronger community partnerships in

the process. We hope this book supports and expands this shift by educating theatre makers about informed, culturally responsible, and successful practices.

If you are a hearing theatre maker reading this book, we embrace your openness to the idea of working with deaf artists. We want you to have the knowledge and tools to make your integrated production a good experience for all involved. The ideas, opinions, and insights in this book come from a variety of sources, from directors to educators to actors to designers to patrons, some deaf, some hearing, many with long performing arts careers. We've included many perspectives to give you the most information to pull from. This book will help you figure out where to start, how to find the resources you need, and how to set yourself and your team up for success.

Contents

About the Authors

Andy Head (he/him) is an assistant professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology and National Technical Institute for the Deaf. Andy has published two articles in *Theatre/Practice*, has worked professionally as an actor, and is an award-winning director. This is his first book. He completed his graduate work in acting at Michigan State University and is a proud Returned Peace Corps Volunteer.

Jill Marie Bradbury (deaf) is Professor and Director of the School of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, USA. She received her PhD in English from Brown University. Dr. Bradbury is a five-time National Endowment for the Arts grant-winner, including $25,000 for a DeafBlind Theater Institute. This project resulted in the documentary video, Protactile Romeo and Juliet: Theater by/for the DeafBlind and the collaborative essay "Protactile Romeo and Juliet: Theater by/for the DeafBlind" (Shakespeare Studies 47, 2019). Other relevant publications include "Deaf Theater" (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature, 2024), "Disability Embodiment and Inclusive Aesthetics" (Inclusive Shakespeares: Identity, Pedagogy, Performance, 2023) and "Audiences, American Sign Language, and Deafness in Shakespeare Performance" (Shakespeare Bulletin 40.1, 2022).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Framework

Essential Background

Defining Common Terms

Several common terms should be understood from the start. First, it is a longstanding convention to use *Deaf* (emphasis on the capital D) to refer to people who use ASL and consider themselves part of a minority language community; and *deaf* (emphasis on the lower case) or *hearing impaired* for people who tend to use spoken English and identify with the hearing world. People who identify as Deaf reject the framing of being impaired or having 'lost' something. They see their deafness as a positive and essential part of their self-identity, not as a medical status—as Deaf gain, rather than hearing loss.[1] Such individuals typically socialize primarily with other Deaf people and use ASL, though they may also use spoken language and have hearing friends and family. It is important to realize that Deaf in this context is primarily a statement about identity, not about how much one can hear. People may describe themselves as Deaf and yet have a high level of functional hearing, read lips well, and be able to carry

[1] Many hearing people view deafness as a loss. Deaf gain is an outlook that shifts the paradigm of hearing impairment toward viewing deafness as a valued identity. If you are interested in learning more about Deaf gain or any other topics discussed throughout the book, check out the Further Reading section at the end.

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on conversations in spoken English in some situations. They may or may not use assistive listening technology, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants. In the Deaf community, *hard of hearing* is sometimes used to describe someone who has sufficient hearing to function easily in the hearing world or who feels they exist between hearing and Deaf worlds. ASL users have a strong preference for the term *hard of hearing* over *hearing impaired*, because they view the latter as a term coined by hearing individuals that cannot be signed easily.

Lower case deaf has typically been used in the Deaf community to describe people who are more likely to use spoken English and to socialize primarily with hearing people. However, this group of people tends to prefer the term *hearing impaired* over *deaf*, because they affiliate more strongly with being hearing, and view hard of hearing as an outdated term. They are more likely to describe their hearing status as a disability,[2] to use assistive listening technology, and to reject the idea that deafness is a defining part of their identity. *Late-deafened* is sometimes used to acknowledge the unique experiences of those who undergo a change in their hearing ability as adults.

Although initially proposed to advocate for an understanding of deafness from a cultural, rather than a medical perspective, the Deaf/deaf binary quickly became perceived as reductive and exclusionary. As more and more people find their way to the community of ASL users later in life, due to the rising prevalence of cochlear implants and the impact of mainstreaming educational philosophies, many find that neither Deaf nor deaf fits how they understand themselves. Deaf Studies scholar Paddy Ladd instead proposes the more inclusive term *deafhood*, understood as "the struggle by each deaf child, deaf family and Deaf adult to explain to themselves and each other their own existence in the world" in ways that may or may not align with clearly identified communities, cultures, or language practices (2003, p. 3). For Ladd, deafhood is a continuum of experiences across auditory, linguistic, and cultural spectrums. Throughout this book, we have adopted Ladd's perspective. We use *deaf* to refer to individuals across the spectrums whose hearing abilities diverge from the norm. Going forward, we use *Deaf theatre* to acknowledge the artistic role of ASL and themes related to the experience of deafness in this particular form of

[2] There is a complex debate within the deaf community surrounding the word *disabled*. Many prefer to view themselves as a language minority group. Recognizing the legal protections that come with being considered disabled, however, other deaf people do identify as disabled. Nonetheless, they still reject the notion that disability is a wholly negative condition or experience.

dramatic practice, as well as its cultural importance for the community within which it originated. And, we use *Deaf* when referring to specific theatre makers who we know prefer to identify themselves in this way.

The deaf community contains many individuals with additional disabilities. They may identify as *Deaf+* or *Deaf-plus*. People with vision and hearing disabilities are known as *deaf-blind*. Recently, some in this community have adopted *DeafBlind* as an identity related to, but separate from deafness. Alongside this change, *Protactile* has emerged as a distinct sign language grounded in the unique communication needs of the DeafBlind community, as well as a philosophy promoting DeafBlind autonomy and culture. Protactile is discussed in more detail in Chap. 2—"A History of Deaf and Hearing Integrated Theatre".

Another term commonly used in the deaf community is *CODA*, which stands for Child of Deaf Adults (sometimes *KODA*, for Kid of Deaf Adults). CODAs grow up in both worlds. Their first language may be sign and they may not understand that their audiological status differs from their parents until they begin school. CODAs may share similar experiences such as interpreting for their parents or feeling as though they belong in neither the hearing nor the deaf communities. Other abbreviations have been coined to express family bonds with deaf people and the deaf community, including *SODA* (Sibling or Spouse of Deaf Adults) and *GODA* (Grandchild of Deaf Adults). As adults, CODAs and others who have grown up with deaf family members often feel a strong connection with the deaf world and find careers that keep them within it.

Other members of the deaf community include *sign language interpreters*. Translator is not used to describe people who facilitate communication between deaf and hearing individuals. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf defines interpreting as "the act of conveying meaning between people who use signed and/or spoken languages" (Registry, n.d.). In other words, interpreters are there not just for the deaf person but to facilitate communication between users of two different languages. Interpreting requires a number of skills, including high-level fluency with sign language, ability to continually receive and comprehend information in one language, hold information in the mind while making appropriate conceptual choices for the context, and express the information in a different language. Certain interpreting fields require extensive background knowledge for interpreters to facilitate communication effectively, such as medical, legal, educational, and performing arts. Interpreters must also be able to adjust to the communication preferences of deaf clients, which may range from more spoken language-influenced sign language to more

'pure' registers. In addition, there are regional and racial variants of sign language within countries. Interpreters can vary widely in their cognitive abilities, background knowledge, and familiarity with the continuum of sign languages. A newer development is the use of *deaf interpreters* (DIs or CDIs). DIs often work with low-vision or deaf-blind clients, but more recently, have been teaming with hearing interpreters to work in spoken English communication contexts. DIs can also work effectively in situations involving scripts, such as theatrical performances. Working with interpreters will be discussed further in Chap. 3—"Guidelines for Designers".

Audism is another common term in the deaf community. Coined in the 1970s by Deaf Studies scholar Tom Humphries, audism is the belief that the ability to hear and speak makes one superior to those who do not have these abilities (1977). Audism is more broadly used to mean any attitude or behavior that is discriminatory toward or biased against deaf people. Audism can be expressed in institutions and by individuals in a variety of ways. Examples of institutional audism include pulling a deaf child out of classes for speech therapy, which takes time away from learning subject matter content; or not hiring a deaf person to do a job because they cannot speak, even if the job could be done using written communication. Examples of individual audism include expecting the deaf person to read lips and being unwilling to write things down, or having spoken conversations while ignoring what deaf participants need to be included. The prevalence of audist attitudes and behaviors in deaf and hearing integrated theatre was a recurrent theme in almost all of the interviews we conducted. Anyone considering an integrated theatre project should take the time to educate themselves about audism before beginning any planning. See the Further Reading section for suggestions.

Finally, readers should be familiar with language variation within the deaf community. Grammatically, ASL and English are very different languages. ASL grammar is discussed in Chap. 2—"Sign Language Linguistics, Poetics, and Musicality". Many individuals in the deaf community use what is sometimes called 'pure' or grammatically correct ASL. Many others use what linguists call *contact languages*. In the United States, these developed in the 1970s when researchers began to show that ASL was a true language. As a result, the resistance to manual approaches to deaf education (manual = using sign language, oral = speaking and listening) began to break down. Educators concerned with supporting deaf children's acquisition of spoken language developed and popularized

language mashups such as *signed English* and *SimCom*. In signed English, ASL signs are used but with English grammar. English words are typically mouthed as well. Because it results from contact between two languages, Signed English is also called *Pidgin Signed English* or *PSE*. Another variant, *Signed Exact English* or *SEE* uses invented signs for articles, gerunds, and other elements of English grammar not present in ASL. It has fallen out of favor and is rarely used. When people both speak and sign at the same time, this is called *SimCom*. SimCom has been popular in educational philosophies for decades because it is thought to provide access to both languages. However, recent linguistic research has shown that when people SimCom, they favor one language over the other. Typically, this is their native language. Most of the time, English grammar dominates sign production when SimCom is used, resulting in degraded access to ASL (Tevenal and Villanueva 2009). Due to their educational experiences, however, many deaf people use SimCom.

Language variation within the deaf community also results from geographical, age, gender, and racial differences. ASL users in the northeastern United States have syntactical patterns that differ from those in the southern United States (Bayley et al. 2011). ASL vocabulary varies across the country, with different regions having their own unique signs for certain words and phrases. SOON is signed differently on the west and east coasts, for example. Generational differences are also present, reflecting language changes over time. One example is the sign for VIDEO. The older version incorporated V and T handshapes, reflecting the days of videotapes. Younger generations produce the sign with only the V or use a sign that mimics the YouTube symbol. Men and women tend to sign differently, as well, with men typically having a bigger sign box. In addition, there are racial variations in sign language use in the United States, such as Black American Sign Language, which developed out of school segregation (McCaskill et al. 2011). Finally, as this discussion implies, sign languages are not universal. Every country has its own sign language.[3] While there is an International Sign Language that is used in settings such as the World Federation of the Deaf meetings, this is an invented *lingua*

[3] Because the United States was for a long time the only country where deaf individuals could receive advanced education, ASL has had a significant impact on sign languages in other countries. ASL itself arose from a merging of French Sign Language brought to the country in the nineteenth century by Laurent Clerc, who helped establish the first permanent school for the deaf in the United States, and existing regional signs.

franca. With social media and the Internet, of course, more and more exchanges take place between different national sign languages.

Defining Integrated Theatre

Many complexities exist in the process of taking any play from the script to the stage. All theatre artists know and have lived this fact. Deaf and hearing theatre is a unique genre that adds even more layers to that already elaborate process. Throughout the book we use the term *integrated theatre* to mean a very specific version of deaf and hearing theatre. This kind of theatre and the term itself need some unpacking so that we're all on the same page as we move forward.

Integrated deaf and hearing theatre can take many different forms. This variety makes it complicated to name and define it. Ask thirty different theatre artists to define integrated deaf and hearing theatre and you will end up with many different answers (with various points of overlap). Some people we interviewed favored the words *blended* or *mixed* instead of integrated. Some suggested a moniker that relates to *fusion*. Some preferred to call it simply *theatre*. To further complicate naming and defining integrated theatre, each production is its own entity with unique goals, team members, and audience bases. These factors greatly affect the type and level of integration of each production.

In our view, integrated theatre does not simply cast deaf and hearing actors and use both ASL and spoken English on stage. Instead, integrated theatre creates equality between deaf and hearing personnel, perspectives, and audiences. This is achieved when the production team includes multiple deaf individuals; when their unique contributions and access needs are respected; when the production processes are imbued with principles of deaf culture; when ASL and English are given equal prominence on stage; and when deaf and hearing audiences have equal levels of access to the production.

We want to acknowledge that the words *integrate* and *integration* will resonate differently among readers. They are politically charged words that conjure the mid-twentieth-century Civil Rights Movement in the United States. They bring to mind images of Black children being forced to attend white schools in the American South, of signs imposing racial discrimination at lunch counters, of police dogs and fire hoses being turned on human beings. They remind us that we are still a deeply divided

nation reckoning with its history of racial inequality and white supremacy. We respect the legacy of these words.

Another legacy is the long history of discrimination and oppression toward deaf people in the United States. The ASL sign for integration is the same that is used for the word *mainstream*, which refers to the practice of sending deaf children to hearing schools. Until the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, children with disabilities had no legally recognized right to be accommodated in public schools. Thus, most deaf children attended residential state schools for the deaf rather than their local school. If parents chose to keep their children at home, they made do without services such as interpreters or captioning, relying on their children's ability to lipread. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability in programs or activities that receive financial assistance from the federal Department of Education. Public schools thus became obligated to accept and accommodate deaf students. The Rehabilitation Act, followed by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, and the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, resulted in the growth of mainstreaming. While mainstreaming unquestionably has had benefits, it often results in social isolation (Oliva 2004). Many mainstreamed deaf students who later find their place in the deaf community express a feeling of 'coming home' (Christie and Wilkins 2006).[4]

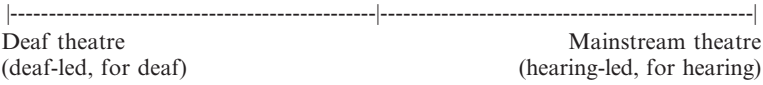
For successful integrated theatre to occur, this past (and present) must be recognized. In many places, barriers to inclusion and accessibility are still as strong as they've ever been. The long history of discrimination against deaf people and against ASL is one reason why integration in theatre doesn't always translate to true equality. That discrimination is still ongoing. The system itself, on the whole, is still set up for hearing artists and hearing audiences. If a company truly wants to create powerful and successful integrated theatre, it is incumbent on the hearing artists to give space to deaf perspectives. This is especially true of those at the top: the decision makers, the producers, the funders, the directors. Their actions set the tone in an integrated production and what they choose to invest in will affect how everyone else on the team decides to invest their energy too.

[4] This is changing in some respects, due to the advances in cochlear implant technology that allow implanted students to interact socially with their peers without mediation by interpreters or captioning.

Deaf/Mainstream Theatre Spectrum

We propose to view the current theatre landscape in the United States on a spectrum ranging from Deaf theatre to mainstream theatre. Others have proposed different continuums. Dorothy Miles and Lou Fant's distinction between sign-language theatre and *deaf theatre* has been particularly influential (1976). For Miles and Fant, sign-language theatre describes productions of texts originally written for spoken theatre, but presented simultaneously in sign language and spoken English. Deaf theatre, in contrast, refers to the presentation in sign language of material adapted to express the experience of deafness or created by deaf individuals. Miles and Fant also emphasize "a logical explanation for the presence of narrators and for the use of sign language by hearing characters" (p. 12). Another classification scheme has been suggested by Donald Bangs, who categorizes productions on a continuum between deaf and hearing cultures as expressed in the production language, performance style, and subject matter (1992).

Our spectrum includes presentation languages and cultural content, but also highlights the ratio of deaf/hearing people in production roles, as well as audience accessibility.

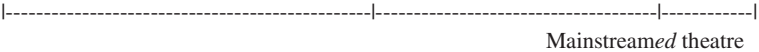


Prominent Deaf theatre companies exist throughout the United States, where deaf artists bring deaf culture and a deaf aesthetic to the creation of plays, which are intended primarily for deaf audiences. ASL is likely the primary language for the production team and artists are likely members of the deaf community. Pride in deaf culture resonates strongly and the production is shaped by a deaf perspective. Deaf theatre that is made by and for the deaf community and performed solely in ASL, without access for hearing audiences, is to the farthest left of our horizontal scale. This extreme of Deaf theatre by deaf, for deaf, without consideration for hearing audiences, is more of an ideal than an actual practice. Historical research shows that Deaf theatre productions have often sought hearing audiences. Even at Gallaudet in the 1890s, plays were often performed with voicing for hearing members of the Washington, DC community. It is likely that 'pure' Deaf theatre has only existed in the form of skits

performed at deaf clubs. Full theatrical productions have almost always had hearing audiences in mind. These productions may include sign language interpreters or actors who speak (or voice) the lines, thereby making the play accessible to patrons who don't know sign language. Depending on how these voices are incorporated, the production may begin to enter integrated theatre territory. In general, productions on this end of the spectrum are more accessible than those on the farthest right because the deaf community has dealt with issues of accessibility for a long time and is therefore better equipped to consider accessibility for everyone in the room.

On the opposite side of the scale is mainstream theatre. This is the dominant form of theatre in the United States—made by hearing artists and consumed by hearing audiences. In most cases, one spoken language (often English) is used throughout the show. To comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, one or more of the spoken performances may be made accessible to deaf people via ASL interpretation and/or captions. Typically, if interpreters are working or captions are implemented, they exist as an 'add-on' and are set to the side of the stage. This poor placement creates sightline issues for patrons relying on either interpreting or captions, and reduces the quality of actual accessibility. Oftentimes, theatre companies cite high costs and don't offer captions or interpreters for more than one performance in the run of a play, even further reducing accessibility. The accessible performance may also be scheduled on a day when ticket sales are low, such as a weekday evening or holiday evening, which limits the choices for deaf patrons. This form of theatre does not include deaf artists and is not integrated theatre.[5]

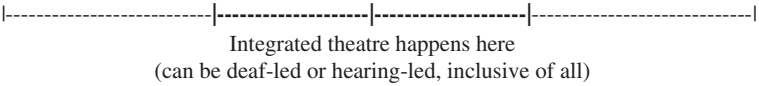
More and more common in recent years is a kind of theatre we call 'mainstream*ed*' theatre.' The *ed* is important and invokes the practice of placing deaf students in hearing school systems, rather than in state schools for the deaf. This kind of theatre is situated to the left of mainstream theatre.



[5] Individuals producing mainstream theatre can still benefit from reading this book, especially Chap. 5—"Guidelines for Stage Managers and Front of House Staff".

Mainstream*ed* theatre does include at least one (but oftentimes only one) deaf artist. That person may be an actor, a lighting designer, or a dance choreographer. Any involvement by a deaf artist, even in a hearing-led, hearing-funded, hearing-attended production, touches upon integration in some way. While not integrated theatre as we define it, the presence of this artist on the team initiates (or should initiate) the process of considering language and cultural differences. The actual level of integration depends on many other factors such as the role and background of the deaf artist(s) involved and the goals of the producing organization. But the deaf artist's involvement alone means an exchange of languages, cultures, experiences, and perspectives takes place. Their deaf identity impacts their work and their work impacts the production. The key missing ingredient separating mainstream*ed* theatre from integrated theatre is that while mainstream*ed* theatre may have a deaf artist onstage or backstage, the full production may not be accessible to a deaf audience through ASL or captions. Or, access may be provided, but in ways that create an unequal experience for the deaf audience. Typically, in mainstream*ed* theatre, a deaf actor will sign the lines, while another actor will speak the lines. However, when that deaf actor leaves the stage, there is no one left to continue signing, meaning a deaf audience using ASL will only catch a fraction of the story *when and only when*, that single character is present. While access may be provided in the form of captioning devices or off-stage interpreting, the resulting split visual attention creates inequalities for deaf patrons.[6] Though the deaf actor's presence onstage does create a blended language environment, this is not a fully integrated production.

Integrated theatre as we define it exists in the middle of this spectrum. The exact range of the production depends on several factors. Is it more deaf-led or hearing-led? How many deaf artists are involved? How much decision-making authority do the deaf creatives have? What are the goals of the production? What is the purpose of the integration onstage? What is the culture of the producing theatre company—is it open-minded and inclusive of artists and audiences? Who is the target audience? How is access for the audience handled? What will be necessary for the production to be considered successful?



[6] This issue is discussed further in Chap. 5—"Dual Staging Models".

In general, common characteristics of an integrated production within this range are:

- The production involves deaf and hearing artists working together toward a common goal.
- The production is inclusive, as well as accessible. All perspectives are included and respected in the decision-making process. Deaf team members are not just given language access to the decision-making but are decision makers themselves.
- The production foregrounds ASL and English bilingualism in the following settings: meetings, rehearsals, shops, fittings, onstage, and backstage. This includes providing an ASL translation of the script and making use of a director of artistic sign language (DASL).
- The production involves a cultural exchange between deaf and hearing worlds that occurs in meetings, rehearsals, shops, fittings, onstage, backstage, and even outside of the theatre setting.
- ASL, spoken English, and open captions are purposefully incorporated into the telling of the story in ways that provide equal access to the production for deaf and hearing audiences.
- There is a purposeful, story-driven explanation of how characters using different languages are able to interact and communicate in the world of the play.
- All deaf characters are played by deaf actors.

A production that includes any one of these characteristics starts a decision-making process about how to best tell the story, how to achieve inclusion for all team members, how to provide access for all audience members, and how to blend two very different cultures. The integration process is woven into the creative play-making process throughout the entire life of the production from initial conception to strike. *This is integrated theatre.* Productions closer to the center of the scale have more equal participation and representation of deaf artists working alongside hearing artists. Though artists may be separated by languages or cultural differences, their equal participation alongside each other is what creates a unified production team.

The very center of the spectrum is perhaps only aspirational. Many deaf theatre makers we interviewed believe they've not yet seen a truly integrated production. Others wonder if it is indeed possible at all.

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Evenly balanced integrated theatre

A production at the very center of the scale achieves a delicate balance between deaf culture and hearing culture. The word *balanced* is critical at the center point. It means the production doesn't skew toward either group of people. This balance creates the equality of true integration. This is a production where no artist needs to reorient who they are because they are equally welcome, accepted, and respected. Deaf and hearing participation is evident and equitable at every level. The responsibility for respectful and inclusive communication is shared by all, not seen as the responsibility of the deaf team members. Deaf and hearing artists share directorial responsibilities equally. Responsibilities are also shared on the stage management team. The cast, the backstage crews, the designers, the technicians are all integrated. There is no division within the production—no one has to work to join someone else's world. It's a cohesive and equitable experience during the pre-audition time, auditions, meetings, and rehearsals. Then, both deaf and hearing audiences are welcomed into this unified experience during performances.

Currently, it's not very realistic for many productions to occur at the very center of the spectrum. There aren't enough formally (or even informally) trained deaf directors, designers, and stage managers across the country to achieve a 50/50 balance on more than one or two production teams at a time. Despite this, hearing theatre companies should make every effort to include as many deaf creatives and crew on the team as possible.

In summary, we define integrated theatre as:

> A deaf and hearing creative team producing a play bilingually in ASL and spoken English that resonates with and is equally accessible to both hearing and deaf audiences.

Most integrated productions are planned from the beginning; however, a production can unexpectedly enter the territory of integrated theatre. Perhaps a deaf actor shows up in the audition room of a hearing theatre company and nails their audition. At that point, it becomes the responsibility of the producing company to accommodate their new team member

(whether they be actor, designer, stage manager, etc.). Whether the integration is planned or not, our book will explain how to best go about including all artistic team members.

Defining Success in Integrated Theatre

The way to measure the success of a theatrical production varies depending on who you ask. A producer likely has a different definition of success than a director, whose metrics may be different from that of a designer or actor. Audiences exit the theatre with their own view on the success of the show, most times without ever knowing whether the artists involved considered it a success. We asked each of the people we interviewed for this book how they would define success for integrated theatre and we got many distinct answers.

Taking these various perspectives into account, we developed a broad definition of success with which to evaluate integrated productions:

> A production in which all artists feel included, supported, and able to achieve their best work, which then translates to a powerful impact on all audience members.

This definition could be applied to theatre in general, but the words *included* and *supported* are particularly important when a team is working across language and cultural barriers. In this kind of work, it's easy for people to feel excluded or unsupported—and in many cases it's entirely accidental. An integrated production is most likely to achieve success via inclusion and mutual support, when team members, especially those with decision-making power such as producers and directors, are people with *open minds* and *open hearts*. We emphasize this phrase throughout the book because many of the artists we interviewed used those signs when asked what makes for a successful integrated production. The way decision makers approach the process makes a difference for everyone involved. Below are a set of non-negotiable principles which will help start your production on a path to success.

Non-negotiable Principles

In our work of creating integrated plays, seeing integrated plays, and interviewing a wide range of artists who have created or participated in integrated plays, three non-negotiable principles have become apparent. These principles should already be ingrained in an integrated theatre process, so they especially apply to mainstream*ed* theatre on the right end of the spectrum.

1. If the play calls for a character to be deaf, it must be played by a deaf actor. No hearing person should portray a deaf person onstage, period. This goes for television and film as well as theatre. Casting a hearing person to play a deaf character steals the role from deaf artists, who have fewer casting opportunities to begin with. Beyond that, a hearing person without the lived experience of being deaf, cultural competency in the community, fluency of language, and a deep understanding of visual communication, is not able to authentically portray that character. Similar to how one should not cast a white actor to play a non-white character, one should not hire a hearing actor to play a deaf character.

2. When a deaf actor is cast, the leaders of that production must immediately plan to make production inclusive not only for that actor but also for deaf audiences. Creating inclusion means ongoing ASL interpreters need to be hired, as well as a director of artistic sign language (DASL) and, ideally, a deaf consultant. Bringing these experts in early maximizes their impact on the production's inclusiveness. Chapter 2—"Sign Language Linguistics, Poetics, and Musicality" elaborates in more detail on the work of DASLs and deaf consultants. To briefly summarize here, a DASL supports artistic choices involving deaf culture and ASL onstage. A deaf consultant fosters awareness among the production team about deaf culture, ASL, accessibility, and inclusion. When a deaf actor gets a role, word will spread and deaf patrons will attend the show to support their community member. They will expect and deserve to have high-quality access to the play in its entirety. Not providing that equitable experience is audist. Access to the performance should be available in ASL and/or *open* (not closed) captions for the entirety

of each performance and, ideally, the entirety of the run.[7] If the latter is not possible, publicity should clearly identify which performances will be interpreted and/or include captions. Implementing these strategies will help ensure full accessibility for artists and audiences.

3. From the start, high-quality communication must be an imperative. In all aspects of an integrated production, there should be 'equality of communication' between all deaf and hearing people on the creative team—no matter their role. Each individual should be able to express themselves authentically in the language of their choice and be equally received by everyone else in the room. This non-negotiable principle means that all communication is accessible (i.e., received by everyone in the room) as well as inclusive (i.e., available for everyone in the room to join at any time). Especially in theatre to the right of the spectrum, communication may not be made a true priority, leading to an inequitable experience for the deaf artists. Communication as a top priority includes hiring professional, trained interpreters with experience in theatre from the very beginning. It also means that all members of the team are actively engaged in crossing language and cultural barriers on a personal level. Everyone should invest time and energy toward community-building. This involves a willingness to learn and use ASL in meetings, rehearsals, and, perhaps more importantly, breaks or social times. Prioritizing communication is necessary for the entire life of the production. We cannot overstate the importance of equal, inclusive, and accessible communication at every step of the creative process.

Production Case Studies

We have selected four integrated productions that we will use as case studies in the book. This section introduces the case study productions with a short synopsis of each play and provides a rationale for why these specific productions were selected. Examples from these productions will highlight where certain aspects succeeded or did not succeed. A misstep in one

[7] Open versus closed captions will be discussed in Chap. 3—"Guidelines for Designers".

area does not mean the entire production was a failure. Instead, the mistake provides a lesson to apply to future productions. No production process is perfect and rarely is any performance perfect. Mistakes are made, things deviate from the plan, setbacks occur, and new paths forward are charted. Live theatre is an ever-changing process and product.

Spring Awakening

In 2015, an integrated revival of the musical *Spring Awakening* by Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater appeared on Broadway and ran for 135 performances. It was produced by Deaf West Theatre in Los Angeles, California under the direction of Michael Arden. The production originally opened at the Inner-City Arts Rosenthal Theater in Los Angeles (2014), later transferring to the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills (2015), then making its way to the Brooks Atkinson Theatre (2015–2016). *Spring Awakening* was wildly successful in terms of critical recognition and popularity, and is perhaps the most well-known integrated production to date. The musical was led by a hearing director and was envisioned as integrated from the start. A professional production, it went through multiple iterations over several years as it traveled from Los Angeles to New York City. Neither writer worked on the production; however, interviews were conducted with multiple people connected to it. Both writers viewed an archival recording at the Theatre on Film and Tape Archive at the New York Public Library, New York City.

Spring Awakening is a modern rock musical based on an earlier play of the same title by German writer Frank Wedekind. Set in 1891 in Germany, the story focuses on a group of adolescent schoolchildren who are journeying through puberty with unsettled confusion, longing, and rebellion. Melchior Gabor is a brilliant star student, Wendla Bergmann is young and naive, and Moritz Stiefel is just anxious to learn what's happening to him. We follow the stories of these three and those of other teenagers. Their lives and struggles with self-discovery intersect as the young characters encounter physical and sexual abuse, rape, abortion, and even suicide. All the while, their parents and authority figures refuse to help them understand what it means to grow up.