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Event: BoP 'Make It Accessible" series

Date: 28/05/20

Time: 14:00 - 16:00

Remote Captioner: Louisa McDaid

[beginning of transcript]

Robert: We will give you a two minute warning when your speaking time is coming to an end and Callum will give you a visual warning. Any questions? We have got it on Facebook live.

Callum: I am muting everyone.

Robert Softley Gale: Hello people, sorry for the delay in coming to you. We had a few technical issues but are able to come to you so hang on right there. If your video is on please turn it off from now because as much as we love looking at your beautiful faces we don't want to see them right now! A few more are coming in. Then we will come straight back to you.

I think we can begin. I will turn on Andy Edwards, who is my cost host for this event. Hi Andy!

Andy Edwards: Hi, how are you doing? Looking forward to it.

Robert Softley Gale: Welcome everyone to the presentation. I will hand over and you will see as we along how this works - fairly straightforward. For anyone who came to the one a month ago this is a little different in that we are presenting ideas and what people have done before, it will be less conversation back and forth. Hopefully that will work



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differently.

My starting point in doing this is about working out how to support people to make accessible work. There is a lot we could be doing and these conversations and events are about moving forward. We are inviting Andy Edwards who is a theatre-maker in Scotland to come on board and help us make that happen. We are not the experts but have a bit more experience, we don't claim we know how this works!

I want to note at the start - some people have asked why we are not talking more about captioning and ...

>> I believe Natalie's screen isn't working so waiting to get that sorted.

Hold on whilst we get this fixed. In the chat window there is access information about how to access the BSL and the captions and other things. If you are not sure have a look there. You will see the link to the captions and information about the BSL. It's all there.

Can you post the BSL link there too? The caption link - getting mixed up! Any word from Natalie?

>> Nothing yet.

Robert Softley Gale: We will hold on a second and see what is wrong with her. Sorry about this, folks! What could we do? Trying to get everyone who is waiting, everything was working fine 20 minutes ago. We will do a bit of improvisation. We have Amy doing

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beautiful BSL.

Amy: Do you want to start and I will keep going until Natalie can take over?

Robert Softley Gale: If you are happy to do that.

Amy: If we get interrupted by children, it's not on me!

Robert Softley Gale: I was talking about captioning and people were asking about why we weren't doing more on that. We could not find a lot of examples of exciting work around that. We will look at that and think about the work that needs to be developed. Please keep your videos off so we can keep things as simple as possible so we can see the presenters and the BSL interpreters. We will get you to turn the videos back on at the end.

We encourage you to ask questions via the Chat Box, as people are speaking, put questions in there and we will collect them and put them to the presenters at the end. This is going out live on Facebook and there is a number of people in here too! Anything you say, we can't guarantee it won't go out to the world but don't let that hold you back! Any problems, Callum and I are here so send us a direct message so we can try to help. We will encourage the speakers to stick to the time limit. We encourage anyone when speaking, if you use any visual elements, to describe what you are saying. So talking about something this size [*demonstrates*] - talk instead about the "small thing".



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Handing over to Andy Arnold to speak about their experience. Handing over to Andy and Ramesh.

Over to you!

Andy Arnold: What Ramesh and I were speaking about is the journey we were on this last couple of years, and taking into next year. It started - I spoke briefly about this at the last meeting - for me never having worked outside the spoken word theatre, I was invited to direct Ramesh in *Off Kilter*, a piece of theatre that he would be able to put in a suitcase and travel around the world with. A story about a man losing his job and gradually his mind. He had the idea of working with a magician using tricks of illusion. That was a major challenge for me - an hour's theatre without any captioning or speaking or BSL. That was a learning process that was very fulfilling. We were in a rehearsal room with Catherine King and Natalie, working so we could communicate. Visually we started to communicate quickly and easily.

I cast him in a Christmas show, *Ali the Magic Elf*, last Christmas, a show for young children and it had two speaking parts in it. I wanted Ramesh to use his strong clowning skills and also the illusion skills that he developed in *Off Kilter*. That worked very effectively and we introduced some BSL for 3-6 year olds. It was mainly hearing children who were learning and they participated in the show by being taught very basic BSL. When Ali, the character, fell asleep, we got the kids to say "wake up". And when Santa Claus arrived. Very basic skills they picked it up quickly. It was the first time we worked on a piece that wasn't Ramesh's own piece.



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Now we are going onto a third piece with the International Visual Theatre in Paris, mainly run by deaf technicians and box office staff for d/Deaf audiences. The artistic director is a d/Deaf actress in France, Emmanuelle Laborit. We are doing to devise a piece of theatre for them to work together and I will direct. That will be a visual piece. Emmanuelle uses French Sign Language, and Ramesh has an International Language. That will be a challenge! The two theatres in Paris and the Tron will spend a week devising that and next January we may have to apply social distancing rules. A journey I never anticipated and which was very rewarding and led to more use of BSL integrated in other productions at the Tron. Handing over to Ramesh.

Ramesh: I think Andy covered everything there. Well done! That was excellent and a positive experience. Me and Andy, we worked brilliantly together. He is a brilliant director. The reason being, he is so open minded and you need that, to listen to and discuss and bounce ideas off. The process was challenging, because we were doing a piece without any spoken or sign language. For over 20 years, I have been without using sign language in my work. The reason for that being, I didn't want a interpreter standing on stage. I didn't want captions. I wanted people to see the piece itself. To create something that was so visual that you could use d/Deaf and hearing actors and present to d/Deaf and hearing audiences - that you could immerse yourself in what was happening on stage.

With Andy, we had a rough script and explored the character and the visual elements that we could pull out to tell the story. A lot of my work has been physical and visual theatre and I am looking to continually challenge myself. With looking at mental health, I thought that was really interesting because in Off Kilter mental health really plays tricks



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on your health and we looked at building in magic with that. I am not a skilled magician but we started to embed this into the journey.

Andy, me and Kevin, before we wrote the script, we found a few magic tricks that seemed you could possibly transfer them and once we got the script out it was about linking what we had already played with. It's a lot about exploring and it was a new process for both of us. I learned new skills and Kevin was brilliant at supporting me to build the illusion.

[Two minute warning]

Ramesh: Kevin as a magician is not a theatre person. We had the story and journey and Andy was there as a director and it was the three of us working together that made it so powerful, building it that way. It was a beautiful process in the end because of that.

The Magic Elf was totally different! I was just an actor there and it was nice. You just get to be the actor and it was wonderful to work with Andy again. We built in elements of magic there. I was surprised at the addition of BSL in it. When Andy first said, "could we?" I said "yes, let's do that." If you keep it simple children adapt very quickly and pick up the language quickly. There was a great mix with music and illusion and magic and sign language.

Off Kilter and The Magic Elf were two totally different projects and one I was involved in the devising of it and it was a lot heavier. With the other I was just an actor. Two different processes but both worked well.



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>> Amy, can you go back a little bit? Your brain is being cut off!

A couple of questions coming in - one for you Andy: what made you want to work with Ramesh in the first place?

Andy: I was nervous about it because it was outside of my comfort zone. I had seen his work as a physical performer and thought he was very interesting as a performer. It was a conversation in the Tron Cafe where he was working on the idea of doing the piece and it was an informal discussion. I can't remember who asked who! You are always looking for new challenges and this was a really new and stimulating challenge.

Ramesh: I was nervous too! The idea of working with Andy Arnold. I was shocked when he agreed. I never thought he would! Before I had always thought it would be great but had always thought, how would that work? We had that conversation and also, it's really rare, a top theatre like the Tron to welcome in d/Deaf actors and performers and I wish more venues were most interested in directing d/Deaf performers. Would be great to see that.

Robert Softley Gale: Has working with Andy impacted on your practice?

Gone again! Amy, can we get you back! They all come at once.

That question to Ramesh - has it impacted your practice? What impact has it had on you?

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Ramesh: Firstly, working alongside him, and certainly with Off Kilter because that was the first we did together - was definitely an influence on me. With every project I always find something in the process that is new and always influences the next project. Working with Andy as a director, he has a visual way of working which made me step back and get another perspective on it. He is a hearing person from a hearing world and I am a d/Deaf man coming from a d/Deaf world. We had two very different perspectives that we could work with alongside each other and always be aware that we were trying to get to a hearing and d/Deaf audience. It was about trying not to focus on myself as a d/Deaf person and really open that out and use it in the project.

Robert Softley Gale: Thank you very much. We will move onto the next presentation. So we can get rid of you two.

Andy Edwards: So we are still going to switch things up because there have been technical difficulties getting Alyson into the call. Can Amy jump on?

Andy Edwards: I am Andy Edwards, a playwright and theatre-maker. And this is Amy Cheskin, a BSL interpreter with lots of stage experience.

>> Can we put Ramesh's video back on?

Andy Edwards: We are putting the questions in the Chat Box. We are going to be talking about a project called In Burrows. It began its life as a ten minute performance where I went on and vocalised a ten minute poetic description of an unseen photo. I



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was funded by Glasgow Connected Arts Network for 35 hours of rehearsal with a BSL interpreter.

Five things we learned - the first thing is to keep your hands open when you are working. The process of creating any performance, putting your ideas on stage, requires you to think about how accessible your ideas are. To me, thinking about "access" is merely an extension of this process. So be flexible, adaptable and work with your hands open. Making your work accessible will radically alter the nature of what you are making - because you're now making it for a different audience than when you started - so try not to hold onto what you've already done. I started out with a ten-minute performance, by the end of rehearsal with Amy we had found enough in the creative play to build a fifty-minute show.

Your Audience Know More About The Work Than You.

At a mid-point in the process, we invited the other artists to share work. We performed In Burrows to them, they performed to us. Petre's perspective had a direct impact on mine and Amy's work, as he identified moments within In Burrows that were exciting or joyous to him. For example, originally, we had intended that I learnt a monologue in BSL to welcome the audience. In rehearsal, I could barely remember it, and my struggles and failures to make readable signs were enjoyable for him. So, we changed the opening, to foreground my inability to sign, and it had a positive response - especially from BSL-using audiences. We wouldn't have seen this without Petre.

Number 3. If you can't do it right, try it wrong. Over eight weeks of rehearsal we made a



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lot of mistakes, because we tried a lot of different things. Take the same approach to “access means” within your work as you would when considering any other element of it. Then, if you’re unsure about something, it’s better to share it with someone to see what they think, rather than consign the idea to the scrapheap. The end to In Burrows is performed in tactile BSL - we play a language-guessing game where I close my eyes and try to interpret what Amy is saying to me. I wasn’t sure about it at all. I thought it looked interesting, but I thought it might be offensive or sensationalist, and Amy wasn’t sure how well it would read (sign-wise) to audiences. So, we consulted deaf-blind and BSL-using audiences and much to my surprise, they found it as interesting and engaging as we did. Don’t let your assumptions get in the way - try stuff out, share it, see what happens.

Number 4. Access is dramaturgical. Working with a dramaturg is often a good idea. These thoughts are born out of conversations with him. A key question I’ve learnt to ask myself is “What do I want people to access?” For example, if you install a ramp, you’re doing so to ensure someone’s access to a building, or premise, as well as to negotiate a flight of stairs. Consider the accessibility of your work at both the micro (i.e. moment to moment) and macro (i.e. whole shape) levels of dramaturgy. In Burrows kept the audience at a distance - it deliberately didn’t show its’ hand, creating an experience that at times was confusing or frustrating or repetitive. It played with a constantly changing dynamic of which language held power. It was different for different people at different times, and in the end: equal. The accessibility of the work was about this experience, at least as much as it was about comprehension and understanding. When approaching access, think about the qualitative experience of your work.

Number 5. You have to keep working at this. Two examples of this. The first is ‘Words,

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Who Needs Them?', a duet created by Petre Dobre and Adrianna Navarro, two of the supported artists. They had created a duet, performed in four languages - and it was great piece of work.

We challenged them to consider how an audience member with a visual impairment might experience their work. To them, initially, this felt difficult and incompatible with the work they had made, which dealt with a commonality between people that was beyond / before language. Audio description, in this context, felt threatening. Yet they stuck at it - and working together with Amy, they found a solution: a poetic, light-touch, audio description, that integrated with the work.

The second example is 'In Burrows' itself. After initially promoting the work we faced some backlash and questions about why we hadn't cast a d/Deaf performer in Amy's roles. We had been conscious of this from our first meeting (one of Amy's first questions was, "can you cast a d/Deaf performer instead of me?") and so felt able to offer the reasons behind this choice in response. Nevertheless, it gave us both pause to consider why we were making this work, and where it might sit in relation to other work being made, and about the politics of language ownership. With "access", I think it's important to approach these questions openly, non-defensively, and always be thinking about your current work as being part of a series - or process. Expect to not have all the answers, expect to have things to work on.

What do we have questions about?



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Representation within In Burrows. We're currently in the process of submitting applications to go back into rehearsal, and work with a d/Deaf performer, either to be cast in my role, Amy's role or to reconfigure the work based on their presence. We'll probably try all three, this will probably give us lots more questions.

How do we create more spaces to learn? Rehearsal and experimentation are fundamental parts of artistic practice and our approaches to access and accessibility benefited from being worked with in this manner. Yet, in a landscape where the provision of access tools or representation of disabled artists is not commonplace, is it justifiable to use resources in this way? Does anything need to shift before this?

Everyone involved with In Burrows did a lot of unpaid work to make the project happen. My ability to lead it owed to good fortune (I was able to find in-kind rehearsal space) and my own circumstances (no dependents, free evenings, stable employment). This isn't abnormal - this is how a lot of these projects seem to get off the ground, particularly for emerging artists. How sustainable is this approach? Where will the money come from to fund research into access?

What are we trying to integrate access into? Will this always position those who access work through these means as outsiders? What alternatives are there and how do we make them?

Cultural appropriation of Sign Language? It's beautiful and very poetic in look, but should it ever be created or imbedded without input and permission for the community



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it comes from?

It was about the feelings and sensations we wanted the audience to feel. We had questions about why we hadn't cast a d/Deaf performer. That was one of Amy's first questions. We felt able to offer reasons about why we had made the choices but it gave us pause to consider why we were doing this. With access and these questions it's important to approach your work, quite non defensively and think about the work as a learning process. Expect not to have all the answers. What do we have questions about? First is representation specifically within In Burrows. We are looking at casting a d/Deaf performer in one of the roles and we will probably trial three. Questions beyond the work are about creating more spaces to learn - rehearsal and experimentation are fundamental to this and the approach to access benefitted to being worked on in this manner. Is this a justifiable use of resource? What needs to shift and what are our priorities in the artistic community?

I will leave it there and we can take Qs&As.

>> I have come out of the whole thing!

Amy: It's one of the things that is really important to me! As opposed to the many other things not covered. Anyone knows I hate the phrase "accessible". To me, it makes it feel like a grudge purchase that you decided just to slot something on the end and you don't really care about.

Just in case you are honing around for another phrase, I don't have the perfect one but

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it's important to create work that is important to a diverse audience and not 'accessible'. I would like to be invited into the room as opposed to, "God, do we have to work with her again?"

Robert Softley Gale: First question, where did the idea for the show come from?

Andy Edwards: From nowhere in particular, it was a poetic phrase that came out of rehearsal. It was reverse engineered in a bit. And there was a book by Jonathan Burrows on choreography for a dance piece.

>> What made you as a hearing theatre-maker want to get involved?

Andy Edwards: A combination of feeling that was a very alive conversation I was seeing on stages in Scotland, I was seeing work with BSL interpreters in it. I wanted to understand more about what that means. I saw Amy in a Birds of Paradise show, Purposeless Movements, at the Tramway years ago and I found that really interesting as an audience member. My background is similar to Amy. Amy is a linguist as well. I find that an interesting thing, sitting with these two cultures and languages on stage together.

Robert Softley Gale: At the starting point, who was the intended audience? Where you thinking about who would be coming to the show?

Andy Edwards: We were in conversation all the time trying to imagine who would be in the room and what their experience of the show would be. It might be people who were

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d/Deaf or hearing but more broadly, that the show would be interesting to people who like being confused by work at times!

Amy: I think definitely for me one of the great successes of the show is that however you came to it and were receiving it, it was different and confusing for everyone! One of the things we played with that wasn't in the original spec, but I saw he was using the term 'accessible' and we just had BSL. We looked at putting audio description in.

Part of the show was signing a poetic narrative and he would suddenly say funny things like "her hands moved liked spiders". I thought this would be interesting from the view of the audio description, and to clue in the d/Deaf audience, because when he said something totally ridiculous - I would sign to the d/Deaf audience that he was saying my hands were moving like spiders. So everyone was holding power at different times. It was very playful and enjoyable. Whether you loved or hated it, as long as it wasn't boring I am good with that.

Robert Softley Gale: Is there anything you learned at the end of the process that you wish you'd known at the start?

Amy: For me, what was really interesting was, me and Andy - and it mirrors Ramesh and the other Andy's experience - it started with an insane conversation for two hours over a coffee. We were just chatting and I told him to speak to other interpreters. Mirroring them, it was the idea that Andy would put everything in the pot so I wish I'd known it would be so much fun going in!

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Andy Edwards: The thing I would add, going in, to be a bit less scared. Maybe that is good advice all the time. We talk about audio description. That was something Amy brought into the room and the producer said the same. I was initially resistant because I was scared of getting it wrong or putting something unsuitable out there. Get over the fear and put something out there because something is better than nothing. Not viewing it in black and white terms. I appreciate the middle ground there, you can work with in that and have fun.

Amy: If you don't ever do things wrong you don't get the feedback how to do things right. If the choice is between don't do it all or do it perfect, you are missing so much. If you come to it creatively and say, let's try this, does it work? If everyone says no, great. You approach it like any other creative process. If something doesn't work for this, it can be tried elsewhere. It's about keeping your hands open to an open view of what you can do and taking feedback. We had that through the process and it was great.

Robert Softley Gale: We are going to take a ten minute break for the interpreters and the captioner. We will come back at three. You don't have to leave the meeting. Go and have a quick loo break and be back for three.

[break]

>> Can I encourage people to ask any questions in the chat? So anything you want to ask the presenters would be great.

>> I can hear you, Alyson. And we can hear you now too.



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I have texted you too so covering all bases.

>> No-one can see me but that is fine.

Okay, hi everyone! So I am Alyson Woodhouse and for those who don't know, I am a blind, freelance theatre-maker and I am interested in talking about making theatre that is accessible for all audiences. I wanted to share with you my experience of working with a particular project, Sherlock Holmes and the The Adventure of the Red-headed League. My own relationship with accessible theatre for context ...

[audio cutting out]

>> We can see you but you are muted at the moment.

Can a host unmute her please?

Alyson Woodhouse: That should be it! Can you see me? I will start again! I am Alyson Woodhouse and am here to talk about my experiences of The Adventure of the Red-headed League and Sherlock Holmes. My experience of accessible theatre - I hadn't previously had much in the way of access to theatre with embedded access until I worked with Michelle as a creative learning trainee on Blood Wedding at Dundee Rep in 2015. That was my first experience with embedded access. I had heard of BSL and audio description nights but this was the first time I had contact with accessible theatre. This was my introduction to it, really.

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It opened up a whole world about the types of things you could do, particularly around audio description. I had never heard of audio description being embedded in the narrative of the text. Michelle and I talked about doing work together and we thought it would be a good thing to find our way of doing it. We decided to think about the classics because we discovered a gap in the market for disabled theatre - for the Classics being performed by disabled people. There are things specifically written for disabled people but not enough about the Classics.

We decided to do that and we chose Sherlock because it's a lot of fun, it's in the public domain and is out of copyright and easy to adapt. Because it's written in the first person narrative, we thought that Dr Watson would be a brilliant audio describer. We thought that would be a good way of introducing audio description. We had funding from Creative Scotland for a week at Dundee Rep and we were showing the piece to people and one of the most encouraging pieces of feedback was that the audio description felt like part of the story itself. A very encouraging piece of news because this was totally new to us. We took that on board in taking the project forward.

Since then we had another session of R&D where we worked with Tim Barrow who is now the official writer for the project, doing the N.T.S Starter. We worked with a d/Deaf performer to integrate BSL in a similar way. We introduced a d/Deaf character, a female one, because there are very few in Sherlock Holmes. We wanted to make her story part of it but still make it about access. We have shown it at an Emporium this year with Federation of Scottish Theatre to gain dramaturgical feedback. And to show it to different theatre companies to inform them of our work. The goal is to put this on in a



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mainstream theatre and take the learning through doing it, particularly around audio description and BSL.

It's really been a fascinating thing, I would encourage anyone to try and make things accessible. It can be hard, I found audio description easier to implement than BSL, partly because I am blind anyway. We have to ensure that when doing a production need making things, you have to differentiate between your own tastes and what you think others would like and what is problematic. It's really worth it. Thank you.

Andy Edwards: That was great. Thank you. Going straight to the questions. The first question is from [*missed name*] about choosing a story that doesn't have a grisly death.

Alyson: The The Adventure of the Red-headed League is the story we picked, about a bank robbery and not death and murder! We chose it because it's a comedy and we thought that people would be more likely to come and see it. We want to open things to as wide an audience as possible and we thought people would be more likely to see a comedy than a tragedy.

>> You are talking about populist theatre as being a place where there is a lot of ground for accessible theatre.

Alyson: The Adventure of the Red-headed League is a really intriguing story and not well known. It has the selling point of Sherlock Holmes but something more intriguing and it allows us to bring in audiences and give them accessible work but telling the story in a slightly different way. We are working with that and using it to go forward.

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Andy Edwards: Another question - what other Challenges and classics would you like to work on?

>> I would love to adapt Dickens but that would take forever because they are huge. I love the vocabulary but something like David Copperfield and Great Expectations because they are in the first person narrative. It's interesting to adapt the Classics in terms of things like the exploration of gender issues and disability, to work out what translates into modern 21st century society and what is different.

We did a lot of research about the portrayal of disability in Victorian literature. We are trying to work out when writing about a d/Deaf or blind character, to think about them within the historical context. That is the main challenge, thinking about ways to present these ideas. We want to give people more disabled role models in theatre and why not use classic characters, making it happen naturally as part of the story itself?

Robert Softley Gale: Andy has crashed. Another question that came in, can you say more about how you integrated the BSL via the guest character?

Alyson: Are you still there?

>> Robert has also crashed.

Alyson: We tried it a few different ways and still trying to find a right way. We thought about making Holmes or Watson the d/Deaf character. We decided to make the client



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Mr Wilson the d/Deaf character. He is a pawn broker. He has a huge story and tells it within the piece. It was signed and integrated BSL. We used him as that.

We were still experimenting with different ideas. We received feedback from National Theatre of Scotland and thought, what about making his daughter the d/Deaf character? She signed for him. We had a story about her as well though and it was at odds with him being a d/Deaf character. In a way her story is perhaps, from a disability point of view, easier but from an accessible point of view she is a bit more tricky.

We are trying to find a balance, an elusive balance between making this character authentic as a d/Deaf person and making them accessible. We don't want to go too much one way or the other. Mr Wilson may have worked well as an accessible tool but not as a character because the original character tapped into dodgy disability stereotypes. Grace doesn't do that so much. She doesn't have the voice that Wilson has. We are still working on this and it's one of the more exciting parts of the project.

Andy Edwards: I am back and I believe that Robert's Wi-Fi has gone down. Thank you. That sounded really fascinating. I want to ask, there is another question that has come in. I wanted to ask myself, whether your experience of using audio description, watching the performance - did that inform your approach to using audio description as to style here?

Alyson: If anything my experience prior to accessible theatre, has ... I used to go to the theatre and listen to audio description night. You would sit with your headset and listen through the head set. I found that very distracting. And not particularly a positive



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experience with non integrated access. That is the biggest driving force behind what I decided to do with this because I wanted the audio description to be part of the script. Blood Wedding was the first experience I had of that - the characters would say their names and put in the audio description there. That was more like what I wanted to do but still not quite. It was still an extra piece of work. With Holmes and Watson the fun is that they describe the clients and both notice different things. We had fun at the Dundee Rep week around who you believe and could you put both together to create a picture. It's a method I want to keep doing with whatever I do.

Andy Edwards: We have some messages in the chat. I came out of the meeting and joined again so I can't see what was there previously.

>> A question from Jo - after starting this journey have you thought of other classics you would love to tackle?

Alyson: As I said before, I would love to do some Shakespeare because that is where I started. One of the tragedies because I prefer them. Macbeth for instance - I have seen a lot of productions of that that I haven't liked because of the depiction of the central characters. So a production of Macbeth to see what we could make from that.

>> What was the hardest part of integrating audio description into the play?

Alyson: Trying to censor it down. The Victorians were very verbose and there is a lot with Watson wittering on so it's about pruning it. When I am making audio description what I am interested in... I am not particularly interested in what people are wearing. It



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doesn't register. I am more interested in body language and facial expressions. Others want to know what people are wearing and body language doesn't register in the same way. So I have to juggle between what I like and think about the bigger picture, what everyone else wants.

>> We have two minutes left.

>> You mentioned the integration of BSL and audio description - do they ever interact in the work?

Alyson: You have to think about everything at once in making accessible theatre. The characters providing the BSL and audio description are different so it's probably easier, they may end up compartmentalising a bit. This is where we think about fine tuning the audio description or the BSL. Because it's different characters, if it were the same character that would not really happen.

Andy Edwards: Thank you. That is putting us at time. Now, we are going to take 10 minutes just to give the captioner a chance to have a rest. So if everyone wants to have a tea and have a stretch, come back for 15:32 for the last presentation from Bryony.

[break]

Andy Edwards: We will crack on with the last presentation.

Bryony, are you ready to join me?



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Bryony: Can everyone see and hear me? I am Bryony from Arika. Today I'm wearing a white shirt with slightly longer than shoulder length hair and I have brown-framed glasses. I use she/her pronouns.

We have a short time so I thought I would do something slightly different, from the perspective of an event producer. We put on festivals around politics and ideas. I thought I would run through what we have done over the years to make it possible for people to feel safe and comfortable at our events. I am sure lots of you will have done this in the past and I would love to be in conversation with you about making events as open as possible.

We were inspired and provoked by artists we invited to take part in our Episode 7 event. I will put the link in the Chat Box. They were coming to do a presentation and said that there were some things we needed to put in place. That was the start of the practical raising of consciousness about putting things in place to make things more accessible. We have been trying bits and bobs over the last 4 years, experimenting and giving things a shot.

Today I will focus on things we have done at the Episodes, the festival type events. We have just completed Episode 10 in November last year and did I Wanna To Be With You Everywhere at Performance Space in New York last year, organised by folks from a disability community. We learned a lot from that. Link to that in Chat Box too.

Some of the things we have done - financial access is really important for us. It may



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come under audience development but for us it's about access. Our events are 'pay-what-you-can' and we set up a desk at the Tramway as a welcoming place for people to make donations. The events are non-ticketed and there is no stigma about not paying. There is no transaction. We are in solidarity and collaborate with a number of local groups in Glasgow who might not be able to attend due to travel costs. We put on bus money for those folks so they can be there without it costing them too much.

We have the Arika desk, a place set away from the box office. Venues are different and the reception at the Tramway is by the door. We wanted a desk further into the body of the theatre space where you can ask for requests and find out where the captioning will be and the BSL interpreter. That has worked really well. We include an access request statement on the publicity and marketing so people can contact us about needs not already in place.

The most recent statement *{summarised}* - " we are operating from the point of view of access intimacy, a common capacity shared between us all. Please let us know what we can do to make attending the episode easier for you." Hopefully that is an open statement that people can use to get in touch.

Quiet space - I love these! We collaborated with Harry Josephine Giles before Episode 9 to design what a great quiet space would look like and Harry came up with a general design based on the work they have been doing over the years. We have a quiet space at every event with a range of comfortable seatings and low light levels, ear plugs and drawing materials. It is a space designed around the needs of autistic people but everyone is welcome. They have proved really successful and are important at a festival,



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for being in a social space without the pressure of interacting. You need a space to be able to do that and as producers there are lots of negotiations you have to go through but we are really insistent with the venues. It's not an add on but part of the event.

Seating options - we recognised early on that lots of people find seats in theatres not the best. At both Episode ten and I Wanna Be With You Everywhere, we have flexible seating options, some bean bags and office chairs and a couch in the seating area. So people can go into the space feeling already catered for and not having to ask.

We have a Safer Spaces statement and we want to be able to create a space where people can communicate thoughtfully and respect differences and feel safe. There could be ticks for sharing pronouns and not making assumptions about others and respecting physical and emotional boundaries. Part of that thing in place for that is active listeners. They are people who are observers in the space who can intervene into the conversation if something is seen to be triggering for people. If people were particularly triggered they could leave the space with the listener and engage in support and discussion with them.

Access rider requests - we are not the first to do this but have been inspired by names I will put in the chat afterwards. It's a framework for artists and participants to share in advance how we can best support them - communication preferences, what makes events run smoothly, when they like to be paid and marketing preferences.

We do some BSL stuff and live captioning and audio description but I thought I would focus on things today outside of those situations. Thank you for listening and interested



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to hear your questions and having a conversation. Thank you to the BSL interpreter and for the captioning. I had it on all the time apart from my own presentation. That is me!

Andy Edwards: That was fascinating to hear a broader approach to access and especially financial access. Would you be willing to share your access statement here in writing? Is there an easier way we can send that out?

Bryony: In terms of the access statement, the access request statement, I can put that in the chat. It's on our website, that is why the links are in. Go to the events page, they are in the visitor information section and highlighted on the front page.

Andy Edwards: Can you share an example of how an active listener took part in an event?

Bryony: A lot of the events we put on are improvised and conversations happening in the moment between people who haven't met before, there is a lot that happens in the moment we are not in control of.

This year at Episode 10 we had a speaker due from London who had to cancel because they weren't feeling well. Someone in attendance at the Episode offered to take on that spot. We quickly put this together. We hadn't necessarily met this person before. Their presentation was amazing but it did change the pace of the conversation and the language they used was different to the language used previously. The active listener was identified at the beginning as having that role and they could step in and acknowledge the change of pace and if anyone wants to speak about the language



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being used, they can do it and have a conversation. It's an insurance policy and we found it really helpful. There were a few instances where people chatted through their thoughts and feelings with the active listeners.

Andy Edwards: Are they paid members of staff or volunteers?

Bryony: It was the first time we have done it. Those in theatre may be more aware in the rehearsal process, having a support mechanism there. We pay everyone, at Arika. No volunteering going on there. One of the listeners is a member of Arika, from an activist background and has done a lot of work with care and speaking to groups and doing mediation.

The other person had some training in counselling. They were both interested in the content. We were lucky to find two people with that intersection of capacity.

Andy Edwards: To check if my understanding is correct - is the active listener about supporting the experience of the audience rather than mediating between the experience?

Bryony: There is often an active facilitator on stage. Sometimes the facilitator role can't do everything and we recognise that the on stage facilitator could do with someone listening from the audience perspective so they can make an intervention and watch what is happening in the room. It supports the facilitator and hopefully enables the audience to feel they are supported and in a safer space.

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Andy Edwards: That is really fascinating to acknowledge that duty of care throughout a piece as part of the organisation hosting. That is all the time for questions. Thank you for a really interesting presentation.

Robert Softley Gale: We are at the end. Hopefully that couple of hours was useful and interesting to hear about. We are interested in how we take this forward, what is useful and what you want to see/know more about. Feel free to get in touch. Callum has put a link into the Chat Box to send your evaluation back. We can email that round too. Email wise we have all your email addresses from this. We will email out some of the links. If you want to keep your email address private let us know and we won't put that into anything other than BCC. Get in touch and let us know how we can keep in touch.

A massive thank you to Louisa, the captioner and Natalie the BSL interpreter and especially Amy and Catherine who stepped in when everything went wrong. we can't thank them enough. Great to know we are all in this together and can all help each other. If you want to turn your camera on to wave goodbye, feel free. Thank you to everyone who spoke and all of you who listened and to everyone who took part. Keep in touch and let us know how we can help!

Andy Edwards: Thank you so much everyone for coming and those who presented.

Robert Softley Gale: Let us know how we can support you to make accessible work. Thank you again. Take care. Goodbye.

[end of transcript]