

Vision in Wales Roundup

Supplement: Spring 2013

Arts in Wales & Vision Impairment



David Toole, Karina Jones, Matt Fraser, Sophie Stone and Nick Phillips in Kaite O'Reilly's 'In Water I'm Weightless'

Photo credit: Farrow/National Theatre Wales

This edition has been sponsored by:

Introduction

Ten years ago Wales Council for the Blind ran a conference to discuss and showcase the work being done by and for sight impaired people in the arts in Wales. In preparation for that event, we conducted two surveys - one from arts providers and one from blind and partially sighted people – in order to get something of a map of what's going on here in Wales. We asked individuals questions like 'how often do you go to cinema, dance, musicals, etc.?'; 'do you require assistance at the venue?' and so on. Of arts providers we asked about disability equality strategies, training, reaching disabled people through marketing etc.

Underpinning the survey was research into the benefits of arts for personal development, social cohesion, and health and wellbeing. Were people with sight loss being excluded from the cultural industries that other people take for granted and benefit from in the aforementioned ways?

The findings included that, for many vision impaired people who do attend arts events there is a reliance on various forms of support that tend to reduce, rather than increase, their independence; and that a significant proportion of people face barriers to attendance and participation leading to exclusion.

We concluded that a collaborative approach to utilising existing networks and facilities is required in order to foster independence. Vision in Wales intends to revisit the strands of work that formed the basis for a series of conferences to ascertain what has been improved and what remains to be done. The arts would form one of these strands so the following articles are a taster of the territory we would like to explore. Also, the articles give, we hope, a sample of some experiences and

activities from the perspectives of audiences, practitioners and providers.

We would welcome anybody to respond with their thoughts and stories. We are particularly keen to hear from arts providers because there has been no response from the venues I put out a call to – I can't believe nothing has been happening! The question is has this collaboration taken place?

In Water I'm Weightless

The cover shows the cast from this acclaimed work by playwright, poet and author Kaite O'Reilly. The following interview conducted by Lizzie Ward is from Hearing Times - August 2012, reproduced here with kind permission.

Tell us a bit about your work and what inspired you to write *In Water I'm Weightless*.

I'm a playwright, dramaturg, and theatre maker who works both in the so-called 'mainstream' culture (I had a production earlier this month at Sheffield Theatres) and Disability arts and culture and Deaf arts. I've written extensively for radio as well as live performance, and tour internationally with The Llanarth Group, an independent performance company – I'm the resident dramaturg. We've just been invited to Tehran and Jordan in 2013, and are working on a co-production in Japan for 2013/14.

In Water I'm Weightless is my second production with National Theatre Wales. I wrote a new version of Aeschylus's *Persians* for their inaugural year, which won the 2010/11 Ted Hughes Award for new works in poetry. It was produced site-specifically on Ministry of Defence land, directed by Mike Pearson, and was coined by national newspapers as one of the cultural events of 2010.

I started working within disability arts and culture in 1987, as an actor with Graeae Theatre company, and as a writer and director I've been immensely fortunate to work with some incredible Deaf and disabled performers and collaborators ever since. *In Water I'm Weightless* brings together some of my long-term collaborators and old comrades – Mat Fraser, Mandy Colleran, David Tool, Sara Beer – and is inspired by the lives, experiences, imagination, and humour of Deaf and disabled people.

It is an Unlimited Commission, inspired by my ambition to put Deaf and disabled experience, what I call crip culture, and disability cool centre-stage on a national platform, performed by some of the best Deaf and disabled performers in the UK. I'm immensely fortunate that long-term collaborator John McGrath, the artistic director of National Theatre Wales, understood what I sought to achieve with this project, and was excited and committed to bringing it to fruition.

What is *In Water I'm Weightless* about?

In Water I'm Weightless is not a naturalistic drama with a linear chronology, telling the story of one individual. Rather, it is an ensemble piece - a montage of stories and experiences in signed and spoken languages, a fusion of text, dance, movement, sign performance, video and media projections. We have a stellar cast and a world class creative team: John McGrath, artistic director of National Theatre Wales, will direct, internationally respected Nigel Charnock will choreograph, and renowned New York-based media artist/designer Paul Clay will design.

In Water I'm Weightless is collaged from a large body of work I've been developing over several years – The 'd' Monologues ('d' denoting Deaf and disabled) – initially from a Creative Wales Major Award from Arts Council Wales, developed at the National Theatre Studio in London, and then further developed with the Unlimited Commissions I have been awarded.

What has it been like to create something for the Cultural Olympiad? Have there been any particular challenges?

This Unlimited commission has been a great experience. As lead artist I have been allowed to get on with the work and run the whole developmental process myself. I've felt trusted and respected. I'm delighted that with the Cultural Olympiad so many Deaf and disabled artists are being given this opportunity to make work as part of such a high profile event.

Moving forwards now into production with National Theatre Wales: It's fantastic to work with such an innovative company, which has political and cultural integrity, and is constantly making fresh, vital, ground-breaking work.

How do you hope the performance challenges perceptions of d/Deaf people and people with disabilities?

I hope the work will challenge and subvert stereotypes and misinformed preconceptions – we're not 'tragic but brave' – we're not 'inspirational' individuals to be patronised and put on pedestals – we're not malingerers needing charity rather than our civil rights – we're talented, sexy, witty, ordinary individuals just like everyone else, with full lives and blossoming careers and all the paradoxical complexities of other human beings, regardless of age, gender, sexual preference, cultural inheritance, and embodiment – whether typical or atypical. I hope the work will challenge superficial notions of normalcy and limited definitions of what it is to be human. But that's my personal perspective. The work is not a political manifesto – it would be disrespectful to the actors to lump them under one political banner – it is about diversity and difference and validity and the opposite of hegemony.

Where do you hope to go next with your work?

Generally, I hope to continue to grow and develop, take risks, learn new skills, face new challenges and opportunities – that's where the joy lies. I'm also up for a new challenge.

Specifically and physically, once *In Water* appears at the South bank centre, I'm off to Berlin and Singapore for three months (I'm a Fellow of the International research centre 'Interweaving Performance Cultures', part of Freie University, where I'm reflecting on my work between Deaf and hearing cultures and 'mainstream' and disability culture).

Creatively, I'm completing my first novel and working on several commissions with theatre companies in the UK and beyond. Apart from the potential tour to Iran, Jordan, and Japan with the Llanarth Group in 2013/4, as a playwright I have a production in Copenhagen in Spring 2013 of *LeanerFasterStronger*, my cultural Olympiad project for Chol/Sheffield theatres.

Kaite's website is at www.kaiteoreilly.com

She also writes a blog about creative process, her various projects within disability arts and culture and the mainstream at www.kaiteoreilly.wordpress.com

Access to the arts – some personal views

Newport's Riverfront

Hilary Lester is visually impaired and for the last two years has also become a guide dog owner. She has lived in Newport for the last twenty eight years. She is interested in a wide range of arts: her late husband was a classical musician and, as a result of this, her taste in music has broadened from easy listening to opera. In the last couple of years she has also started a creative writing course with U3A, University of the third age, which has been a marvellous opportunity to study short stories, plays and books. We asked her to tell us something about her experiences of visiting local arts venues.

When we moved to Newport neither the Wales Millennium Centre nor Riverfront in Newport had been built so it was wonderful when these buildings were opened for business. As someone who is registered blind I am entitled to take a carer for free to both venues. The Millennium centre will ask that you complete a form and provide proof of your visual impairment with a Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) from the eye hospital. The Riverfront currently takes your word for it.

The Riverfront will provide, on request, the brochure in large print or on audio CD whereas the Millennium is by normal brochure or via the website. Both venues offer an assistance dog sitting service which my guide dog Yalena loves. The Millennium Centre, being a far larger venue, has more staff and so he is often taken for a couple of walks around the bay during a performance and certainly seems to know his way around the building.

I do some volunteer work for the Riverfront with brochure distribution and advising what makes a trip pleasurable for the visually impaired person. It is not easy to please all of the people all of the time so what is good for me could be difficult for

someone else. I have been asked to write about my experiences of visiting the Riverfront in particular. I usually take advantage of having the carer ticket free and so will have someone to go with. There is limited disabled parking so it is pot luck as to whether we get a space. If not then there are car parks within a short walking distance (although this could be a struggle for someone less mobile). The Millennium centre has limited disabled parking which can be booked with the ticket at a cost of £5 but again it is luck if there is space available.

If you come to Newport by bus or train, the entrance is across a busy dual carriageway with traffic lights. However there is a ramp into the building. The entrance is by automatic doors and difficult to detect as they are all glass. Once inside there is a wide open space and loads of light from overhead lights and from the building which is predominately glass. I think that the Riverfront are hoping to decorate the doors and some windows with coloured glass. To my mind this would not only improve the look of it but also cut down on the glare of light for me. There are also pillars, which are better to see as they are coloured. If there is a show on or picture then is also a volume of noise which can be distracting so I usually stand for a moment to get bearings etc. Having done this there is a small cafe to the left and the reception desk to the right. Tickets can be booked here or by phone. Either way the staff will help with the layout of the theatres and where is best to sit. Their programme is varied and covers a wide variety of taste from classical to heavy rock, comedians and plays often written/ performed by the local University students or local theatre companies. There are regular events also held such as first Wednesday which is a short lunch time concert or open mike night which is the second Friday of every month.

The studio also will show a film on a monthly basis which again caters for a wide range of tastes. Films expected so far are Great Expectations and Les Miserables. Where possible there is audio description and subtitles but this is down to the distributors and beyond the control of the Riverfront.

On occasions when I have gone to events on my own there are always staff available to guide me to my seat and make sure that I am ok in the interval. There is a disabled toilet on the ground floor just before the main toilets which now have silhouettes on the door to denote which is which. There is an upper floor with clearly marked steps or a lift. Here there is a licensed bar should you need it.

Productions I have seen recently have included Cerys Matthews, Joe Brown, Sinfonia Cymru and the pantomime all of which were most enjoyable in their own way. The new brochure has recently been published and I have already booked for Rhydian, Russell Kane and Pam Ayres. If you need any more information on the Riverfront, this can be found on the website or by contacting the box office on 01633 656679.

Audio description ...

Julie Thomas from Bridgevis (Bridgend and District Visual Impairment Society) describes the pleasures and pitfalls of attending audio described cinema and theatre performance with her family and with a group of Bridgevis members.

Sitting in a packed cinema, on my third headset and after 45 frustrating minutes of *The Hobbit* I still haven't heard a word of audio description. I think to myself, is it worth it? However, my three children are totally engrossed in the film and it wouldn't be fair to uproot them and just walk out. So I sit there and suffer half a film. After all, the reason I went to the cinema in the first place was so that we could go together!

On the plus side, the manager was waiting for me when I came out of the cinema, apologising for the technical glitch that had corrupted the audio file with free tickets to come and see any film again. He also explained that because not many people use

the audio facility, they feel it is under used and although they test these files it is not until the film runs and someone uses it that it would be apparent if there were a problem. However, I use the cinema regularly with my children and this is the first time there has been a problem of this sort.

It is also always important to make sure the films are properly advertised, so that if you need audio description you know it is available. Sometimes this does not happen but now I usually phone in advance to ask whether there is audio description. Without audio description, a film is only half a film and is not properly accessible. I am very pleased that the Odeon has made their screens accessible but it is really important that they make sure they let people know that audio description is available too.

I regularly organise trips to the theatre to see musicals, plays and Opera. Bridgevis have always enjoyed a great relationship with both the New Theatre and Wales Millennium Centre. Touch tours enable us to go behind the scenes and headsets are used for audio description.

I really feel it is very important that performances are clearly advertised as audio described when tickets are sold so that other people are aware of this fact. Other people have a choice of which performance they attend, visually impaired people do not. There is only one audio described performance, sometimes two, but choice is very restricted. However on more than one occasion, at the opera, Bridgevis members have encountered very poor attitudes by people sitting around us with regard to the audio description.

A group of people asked us if we'd come out from a home and if we were allowed out! They thought one of our members was whispering because of the headset and told him to be quiet! They also told us that we shouldn't use the headsets and if he was blind he would manage without, in fact we shouldn't come out at all! After a prompt response from myself, the staff at Wales

Millennium Centre asked them to leave as that was not the sort of behaviour they would accept!

At another opera performance, a woman in the seat behind us, not realising I was blind, kept complaining that she had paid more for her seat than the people in front of her, ie. us and it was disgraceful that other people got free seats. She had no idea how much money had been paid, she was making assumptions. She continued to question why people who couldn't see need to sit in expensive seats at the front! Needless to say, I enlightened her!

However, if audio description was better advertised and people were aware that the performance was audio described, there would be no confusion regarding the use of headsets. Perhaps then, there would be less rudeness from people attending those performances, and if they had an issue they could choose to attend a different performance.

I am glad to say, there have been no such attitudes in any other performances apart from the opera. Staff at Wales Millennium Centre and the New Theatre have always been very positive and keen to encourage attendance and it is certainly a worthwhile experience going.

On a humorous note, the touch tours are very enlightening and they range from very humorous to very serious. I will always remember going backstage for We Will Rock You! Not being able to see anything certainly has its perks! I was greeted by a very tall and muscular 22 year old man who came up to me and, after describing himself in detail (hence how I know these things), cheekily told me that to get an idea of his costume, I needed to touch him wherever I wanted too! What could I say! I also got to sit on the back of the motorbike, can't be bad.

I would encourage anyone to give these things a try, yes there are hiccups and sometimes things don't work, but only by having a go

and working with the organisations that put these performances on can they improve.

...and subtitles for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people

Martin Griffiths is deafblind and lives in Caerphilly. He is a keen cinema-goer, but here he describes the frustrations of trying to find a film he wants to see at a convenient time and in an accessible format. Martin blogs about his experiences as The Deafblind Taffia (<http://thedeaftaffia.wordpress.com/>) and this article is an abridged version of one of his recent posts, 'Why Deafblind Taffia keeps everything crossed at the cinema'.

Going to the cinema as a deafblind guy is one heck of an experience! It can be great but often it is a distressing one. As someone with profound deafness and partial sight the only way I can access cinema is to view a film with subtitles. I can hear and feel the very loud sounds in a modern cinema but due to sensorineural deafness I cannot make out what people are saying, so I need captions to help me make sense of the sounds I can hear.

The journey starts with a visit to the website www.yourlocalcinema.com to see what is available. Sometimes you may actually find a film you want to see at a time you can see it! In years of checking availability I have pretty well given up hope of finding a film on a day/time that I want to see it. Now I have to accept the powers that be will decide which time I can get to see the available film. It is likely to be early morning Sunday or teatime Monday. One local cinema does do a regular Tuesday evening screening but it seems no one has told the cinema chains that deaf and deafblind people are alive on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and they remain awake past 6.30pm too!

Having selected the best available film the next step is to determine which cinema chain and branch is showing it. Then, as advised, go to their website to double-check that the information

is still valid. In almost all cases the chosen film IS being broadcast with subtitles...hurrah!

I'm excited at the prospect of seeing an accessible film even though it is probably an animated film or family blockbuster as deaf people wouldn't choose an intelligent drama or complex thriller would they? In my case, I like films like The Kite Runner, Crash, Babel, Argo, etc. but hey ho let's make do with Madagascar 1, 2, 3 etc as selected for my viewing by the distributors... or is it the cinema that chooses? Hmm!

As I arrive my nerves start to kick in. I check the poster outside the entrance to confirm that the film is subtitled. I ask the person who takes the ticket to check. The cinema staff (after running around clucking or phoning their colleagues in confused panic) will confirm that 'yes the film is subtitled!'.

I sit through ads and trailers without subtitles. Just before the film starts an information clip tells the audience all about subtitles for deaf and hard of hearing people and audio description for blind people. This is a relatively new thing and is progress of a sort as surely people will now understand why the film they are watching has words on the bottom of the screen? No more groans from 'hearing' people when subtitles appear causing them to stare at the hearing aid wearers and signers who have spoiled their viewing!

As the film starts, the nerves kick in. Why? Because after all these checks and 30 minutes in the dark watching inaccessible trailers what often happens is that the film starts with no subtitles! I estimate that problems occur in around 40% of occasions I attend cinema. In four visits to Cineworld Cardiff, the problem occurred three times. Each time, I stomped out of the cinema, demanded to see management and in every case got a refund and a free pass to a future film with subtitles. Sounds good but like many other disabled people I want some sort of equality. I want to see the film with no fuss in an accessible way. I complained to South Wales Echo and they featured my story in 2011. The cinema gave

me a number of free passes, but I was unable to use them as no suitable films were available at a time I could go to see them before they expired.

Dispirited, I gave up until late 2012, when I saw on Facebook the angry comments of people across the UK experiencing the same problems. Deaf campaigning organisations were urged to do more. My recent experiences suggest there has been an improvement in the accessibility of cinema for those needing subtitles, although it is clear that problems still occur.

When subtitles are broadcast there are still some issues around their visibility. I myself have experienced problems with light coloured subtitles on a light background. The solution is to change the colour of subtitles to contrast with the background or at least to border white/light text with a black or very dark navy colour. Some cinemas appear to have reduced the size of text which may be an attempt to appease 'hearing' viewers. This makes it harder for the deaf with imperfect vision i.e. me!

Ideally the future would be that all films brought to each cinema will be shown at least twice with subtitles. Hopefully one day some of these films will be available on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays too. We are alive and available to line the cinema chain's pockets 24/7 you know!

Hopefully now you see why I go to the cinema with everything crossed!

The Performer

Vanessa Webb, a former director of Wales Council for the Blind, went along with Richard Bowers to talk to soprano Anne Wilkins, who is registered blind, about her career.

Vanessa – The thing that brought you to our attention was your success at the National Eisteddfod last year.

Anne – I'm still enjoying that I have to say.

V – I heard your performance on the radio and what amazed me was that the quality of your voice is still very young. I don't think it's changed as much as you'd expect voices to change over the years. It was a superb performance. Had you competed in the Eisteddfod before?

A – Several times. In Bridgend I came second, then after that I'd compete but nothing happened. But then I won the Lieder competition three times.

Richard – What did you sing?

A – On the first two occasions I think I sung some songs by Brahms then the third time was in Ebbw Vale (previously I'd won in Swansea and in Newport) and I sang a Welsh translation of Du Meinez Herzens Kronelein by Strauss. So I really was pleased to win three times. I thought that was it, because I'd sat through the Blue Riband so many times with people I know well who've sung and won and then I found myself on stage – I couldn't believe it!

V - Did you find the Eisteddfod people very helpful? Was it accessible for you?

A – Initially, when I entered, no, not particularly. Their website and their entry forms were a marathon. One day I spent about two

hours trying to fill in the form – there were just so many sections to it. I got a friend, who is an IT consultant, to transfer it into a very long Word document. In the meantime, while that was being done, I contacted the Eisteddfod office to bring it to their attention and I spoke to the main organiser who, when he knew my name, said 'you've been in it before!' I was having a moan about the fact that it wasn't accessible to blind and partially sighted competitors and their website should be more accessible than it is. So he filled in the form for me!

R – A 'reasonable adjustment', as they say.

A – Well it had to be because the deadline was a bit tight by this time because my accompanist and I had done so much work so I didn't want to not enter.

V – Wales Council for the Blind did do an access audit of the Eisteddfod some years back and we sent a report in to the National Eisteddfod Committee about the failures on the site. But that was more about the physical problems.

A- I've got to say that I've always had good experiences. That was the only time I'd had a problem. I went up to North Wales a few years ago to compete and I had one of the best holidays I've ever had. I got to chat to the Eisteddfod stewards and they used to say, if you want anything just put your hand up and somebody will come to you and that's exactly what happened. They couldn't have been more helpful. So it usually works, but maybe it's because they knew my face because I've competed, I don't know.

V – Well, let's hope it's because the culture's changing and they are getting more aware.

Can I take you back to the beginning, because I'm interested in how your career developed? Do you remember when you were first noticed for your singing – in your childhood?

A – No, no-one ever did. In school I was at the back of the queue for everything. I was the slowest – I didn't have anything going for me at all. Other people in my school thought I was stupid. There were very low expectations for me.

V – Which school was this?

A - The blind school in Bridgend. I wasn't happy there, I have to say, but in school Christmas concerts and shows I always wanted to be on stage – always wanted to take part - but I was never even considered.

V – So when did you begin to feel that you could sing and that you actually took a step forward?

A – I had sung as a child at home and in the local chapel in Glyn Neath. Because I was an only child I thought being pushed to sing at home was just my parents being a bit indulgent, so I'd never pushed myself. And then I'd left the Royal National College for the Blind and started work, so I was over 21, and I met some family friends who were singers. I was with them on one occasion and happened to join in something they were singing, because I knew the words, and that was it! They said 'you ought to have some lessons' and I laughed. But by that time I'd sung in the college choir as an alto (I'm now a soprano). That was it as far as my singing was concerned. There was nothing exceptional at all. One of these family friends who showed an interest in my singing was teaching locally so I went to her for about a year and then applied to the Welsh College for Music as a part-time student. After a succession of teachers and going through the graded exams, I went to Zoe Cresswell who got me through Grade 8 singing. I wanted to do a Diploma, but Zoe, having my best interests at heart, felt that the visual aspect of performance was too difficult. She retired from the college and I didn't know what direction to go in. My father suggested I went with the teacher I'm now with, Jeanette Massocchi. I went to see her and she suggested I go for a

diploma and now I've got three performance diplomas, so it shows it can be done.

V - So you went on to enter competitions, but you teach also don't you?

A – Singing and piano. And braille music.

V – When you were in the school for the blind they would have accommodated you with the visual aspect.

A – They did, but then I wasn't particularly interested. But then I went to the College in Shrewsbury which had a much more active musical life and I did do some braille music there. But they didn't make it interesting. The teacher didn't really understand that some people could find braille music difficult because he didn't find it difficult himself and I think he felt that other people shouldn't either. He didn't really appreciate the difficulties that I found and I came home and went to see Kathryn Phipps, the music teacher in Bridgend School. She agreed to help me through Grade 5 theory because I realised that if I wanted to go further with my singing this was something that was essential. She really opened so many doors - she made me understand how to relate braille music to actual sound. I went on to fulfill my ambition of getting three Grade 8s in Music Theory, Piano and Singing with the help of my friend from the Royal Academy.

V – So when you went to the Welsh College of Music and Drama you had access to braille there, did you? How did that work?

A – Well, I only went for one hour a week so if I needed braille I provided my own.

For the last two years I've been mentoring a young musician who's a very good pianist but her braille music level, and that of other students there, is not as high as their practical level of music, and it should be. I'm not saying they should use braille and

nothing else with all the other technologies that are available – yes, use it all, there's a place for everything – but if they need braille music their level of musicianship and braille music knowledge should be at the same level as their practical ability.

V – I've never really understood braille music and how it works because you have to feel the braille but you're using your hands on the piano.

A – You learn it so many bars at a time. It can be quite a slow process but you learn all the details of the music as anybody else would. I don't just use braille music, I use anything - tape; iPad; whatever technology is available. But I always think Braille music gives you that option: you don't have to rely on somebody to teach you the tune – you've always got the opportunity to pick up a book and learn it yourself. I emphasise this to my braille music pupil because her braille music is very good but as a player she is a beginner.

R – Does Braille music cover everything you can do in regular music notation? I always think notation is quite dense anyway so I'm struggling to think how it would look in Braille form.

A – Forget how music looks; it's a completely different system. What people don't know is that the inventor of Braille also invented braille music. So if people don't use it that way of learning dies. Somebody who reads your newsletter may correct me but, as far as I'm aware, I'm the only braille music teacher in Wales outside of the Welsh College of Music.

V – So tell me, with Braille music does it change at all. Do they find improvements or adjustments?

A – Sometimes they try and change little details but as far as I'm aware there aren't that many changes you can make to it.

V – Going back to your singing in the Eisteddfod, you don't speak Welsh, do you?

A – Yes, well I'm not fluent, but I did as a small child and in my last couple of years at work they brought a Welsh tutor in at South Wales Police so I was able to go to Welsh classes and revised the language and was successful in two Welsh exams as well.

V – With the other languages you sing in, did you learn any of these, or do you just learn the songs?

A – I had a go at Italian and I might go back to that, but when I've sung in French and German I've just learnt the songs. But having said that my teacher is very thorough and she will make sure I understand what the song is about.

R – I'm interested in the Welsh translation of Strauss you sang. Presumably you knew the song from the German, so how did you find the Welsh translation?

A – You know, I wish they wouldn't do it, because it's never exact, it never sounds the same.

V – Does the same thing apply to English translations?

A – Not as much, but it can. If you're used to hearing something in Italian or German and you hear it in English it doesn't sound right.

R – Especially from Italian because their ending of all the words in vowels gives it an openness. So you can hold the note over a vowel and still know what the word means whereas in German and English you've got to finish it with a consonant usually, so you're waiting for that meaning to come.

A – Yes, and I've listened to English National Opera who do translations in English and it never sounds right.

V – Apart from your teaching you obviously practise a lot.

A – Yes, because I'm working towards a piano diploma and I've started to learn the cello. I practise cello when I can fit it in; practise piano an hour or so a day and singing the same. And I'm also the secretary of an orchestra so I have a very full day. They're called the St Woolos Players. They're attached to the Cathedral in Newport – they don't just play at the cathedral but they took the name. They play Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert. They did some Finzi at their last concert so they play a wide range of music and they're fabulous!

V – So what have you got coming up in terms of competition or performance?

A – In terms of competitions I've got what I wanted with the National Eisteddfod so I wouldn't want to compete again. I'm not saying that Llangollen isn't an option at some point, but I haven't looked into it enough yet.

V – Well, that's the Eisteddfod's loss, I think. Thank you very much, Anne, for talking to us and good luck with your career.

You can find out more about Anne Wilkins on her website, <http://annewilkins.com/blog/>.

The Cultural Olympiad in Wales

Maggie Hampton, Strategic Director, Disability Arts Cymru reflects on the involvement of visually impaired people in last year's Cultural Olympiad.

2012 was of course the year of the Olympics and Paralympics in the UK, but it was not all about sport. The Cultural Olympiad produced a lively and exciting programme of arts to celebrate the Olympics, and in Wales there was a good deal of involvement by visually impaired people.

Disability Arts Cymru ran *Whose Flame Is it Anyway?* a wide range of arts projects for young people and part of *Power of the Flame*, funded by Legacy Trust UK.

One of our partner organisations was UCAN Productions, working with blind and visually impaired young people across Wales. One of the UCAN members is Lloyd Coleman, a young man still in his teens who is an incredibly talented musician. We commissioned Lloyd to compose *Breaking the Wall*, a 40 minute orchestral piece inspired by the original marathon runners and linking this to the breaking the barriers we face now in everyday life. Lloyd's composition was recorded by BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and an excerpt was played at St David's Hall in Cardiff last March at the Music Nation concert.

Using Lloyd's *Breaking the Wall* composition, UCAN devised a musical theatre production involving young blind and visually impaired actors. This stunning production played at Wales Millennium Centre and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, and at the Catrin Finch Centre in Wrexham. Lloyd also played clarinet in the Paralympic Orchestra which performed at the closing ceremony of the Paralympics in London and was televised worldwide. This young man is truly an

inspiration for young visually impaired people, and we are looking forward to the ongoing development of his musical career. Another of our projects was the *Go Get Started* visual art competition which attracted over 300 pieces of art work from disabled young people in Wales. One of the winners was Angharad Butler-Rees, a visually impaired student at Ysgol Plasmawr, Cardiff; her beautiful watercolour painting of *A Fish* showed huge talent. Angharad's painting was exhibited in the *Go Get Started* exhibition at the Norwegian Church Arts Centre in July. The *Fish* image was also one of twelve which were reproduced on quality postcards, available free of charge at arts centres across Wales. The image was also reproduced on ceramic mugs, for sale from Disability Arts Cymru.

Ignite the Flame was our creative writing project, and we worked with Valleys Kids, based at Penygraig in the Rhondda. One of our writers was Amy Thomas, a visually impaired girl whose poetry has been published in our *Whose Flame is it Anyway* anthology. Here is an excerpt from her poem *Cool's Opposite*:

Flickering vibrance
Engulfing all that it sees
It sizzles and burns
Smouldering sizzler
Ever changing shape-shifter
Delightful, bright, snuggly

Amy also joined with others in the writers group to perform her work to appreciative audiences at the Soar Centre, Penygraig and at the Norwegian Church Arts Centre in Cardiff Bay.

Audiences were not forgotten! Disability Arts Cymru's adaptation of Aristophanes *Birds* played at the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff in May, and one of the three performances was audio-described for blind and visually impaired people.

Another theatre production, *In Water I'm Weightless* was an Unlimited commission for the Cultural Olympiad and London 2012 Festival. *In Water* was written by award-winning playwright Kaite O'Reilly, who is herself visually impaired. In 2010 Kaite was presented with the Ted Hughes Award for Poetry, for her magnificent play *Persians*, also produced and performed by National Theatre Wales.

In Water I'm Weightless was a fabulous, vibrant production which went right to the heart of disabled people's culture. The Guardian newspaper said "...the show uses O'Reilly's poetic texts to challenge preconceptions around disability, celebrate difference, and question exactly what it is we mean by normal". Playing at the Wales Millennium Centre and then at the South Bank in London as part of the Cultural Olympiad celebrations during the Paralympics, every show was audio described and there were touch tours for blind and visually impaired people. All of the actors were disabled people, one of whom, Karina Turner, was visually impaired.

Chris Tally Evans is another visually impaired artist who received an Unlimited Commission for the Cultural Olympiad with his digital storytelling project, *Turning Point*. Inspired by the impact upon his life when he became visually impaired as a young man, Chris gathered over 100 stories in digital format from people all over the UK, focusing on a significant turning point in their lives. Everyone has a story to tell and many of us can probably think of 'that moment' that made us see things differently, maybe changing our lives for ever. The film was beautifully presented, the stories quirky and unexpected, bringing home just how diverse and interesting peoples' lives are. One of the Storytellers was Sir Roger Moore, of James Bond fame! There was dialogue throughout the screenings, making them fully accessible to visually impaired people, and one story was simply told without any visuals at all.

So 2012 has been a very exciting year in many ways and the examples here show just how varied has been the involvement of visually impaired people in Wales during the Cultural Olympiad. I will finish with some words from Lloyd Coleman, our visually impaired musician: "I have learnt a huge amount during the course of writing *Breaking the Wall*. It has been hugely rewarding and I hope the other artists involved feel the same way about their projects. Judging from the work I've seen, it seems highly likely this is the case, and I am thrilled that we've all been able to play our part in ensuring that 2012 is a year to remember not only for sport, but for the arts too."

Disability Arts Cymru is funded by the Arts Council of Wales as the strategic organisation for disability and the arts in Wales.

Disability Arts Cymru,
Sbectrwm, Bwlch Road,
Fairwater, Cardiff CF5 3EF 029 2055 1040
post@dacymru.com
www.dacymru.com

Musicians in Focus

Musicians in Focus is a research and consultancy organisation for visually impaired musicians of all ages and abilities. It was founded by Jacqueline Clifton in 1996 after her sight was damaged by an unknown virus.

Many who have been through the experience of a sudden change to their circumstances will understand the long, bewildering process of finding out what help is available and how they will survive. Jackie wondered how many other professional musicians might have to find a way to survive in a similar situation and suggested to the Musicians Union that she set up a central advice point for others. With help from the Musicians Benevolent Fund and the Royal Society of Musicians she was able to purchase a

specially adapted computer, braille embosser and other equipment. Jackie had always had an interest in music technology and was amongst the first musicians in London to explore the possibilities it presented, not only in sequencing and recording but in education. She felt that this technology would be an important part of the future of music; little did she realise how significant it would prove to be!

During the process of trying to access the music technology she already knew Jackie realised that there must be other visually impaired musicians who would want to pursue the same path. Thus the first area of research for Musicians in Focus began. She quickly made contact with a small number of other visually impaired musicians around the world working in similar fields. A Research Fellowship at the Royal College of Music (where Jackie had studied both as a Junior and Senior student) soon followed. This led to the foundation of the Scheme for Young Visually Impaired Musicians at the RCM Junior Department. This scheme enables young visually impaired musicians to study at the Junior Department with the addition of specialist teaching in braille music and access to music technology reaching the required standard for university and conservatoire entrance by the age of 18. (For further information visit the website www.rcm.ac.uk/jd/aboutrcmjd/specialprogrammes/visuallyimpairedmusiciansscheme/).

Over the last ten years invitations to join projects funded by the European EQUAL programme, enabled Musicians in Focus to expand its series of UK wide workshops. These workshops were also a means of communicating the results of research into the accessibility of music software to teachers, parents and support workers as well as students. Many people at this time had no knowledge of what the possibilities were and just assumed that it was impossible for a visually impaired person to access music technology. The team at Musicians in Focus was determined to open minds to new ideas in the way music is taught, developing new teaching methods and materials.

The *Get Your Hands on an Orchestra* project was a fantastic opportunity for a group of visually impaired musicians to work with members of the London Symphony Orchestra and learn how their instruments work; to literally get their hands on an orchestra. Most young people can learn about different instruments by watching how their friends put instruments together, how they tune instruments, how the sound is produced. Visually impaired people need to touch the instrument, to have someone explain how it works. Having found out about the instruments and listening to ensemble performances by members of one of the greatest orchestras in the world, inspired participants to compose songs, chamber pieces, music for radio plays and short films. The collaborative creation of *The Princess' Tale* as a sequel to Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* culminated in a performance at the LSO St. Luke's Jerwood Hall in June 2007.

In October 2007 Musicians in Focus presented a three day conference hosted by the Royal College of Music in London. Titled *Inclusion Through Music* this conference drew together music industry representatives, educationalists and music professionals from all over the UK and Europe to discuss all aspects of access to music education and the profession. It was encouraging to find that years of talks with the music industry had resulted in a genuine desire to promote access to software and hardware. It was sad to find that there were still great difficulties to getting published books and scores in accessible formats. Despite the general feeling of optimism and appreciation for the opportunity to network amongst those who attended the conference Musicians in Focus realised that there was still a huge amount of work to be done.

From the beginning Musicians in Focus has been running workshops at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff for a small group of young musicians. In recent years support for young people on the Junior Music courses based on the scheme at RCM have proven to be a great success. Other

courses and seminars for teachers and support workers from teaching braille music to access to music technology are promoting a wider knowledge and understanding of teaching visually impaired people. Evening classes for all ages provide an opportunity to get together with other people with a range of visual abilities. The recent Summer School found a group of musicians aged 9 - 74 learning and playing together.

Musicians in Focus continues with its original aims to support musicians facing sight loss with advice on how to carry on working. Advocacy and research plays a large part along with the never ending task of disseminating information about teaching and learning. The organisation is based in the centre of Cardiff and is available to advise anyone, of any age and musical ability, with a sight problem to participate in music making or study.

Jacqueline Clifton, the founder Director was appointed MBE in the Queen's birthday honours in June 2007.

For more information, contact Jackie at:

Musicians in Focus,

6 Hafod Street

Cardiff CF11 6RA

Tel: 029 2023 1113

Email jackie@musiciansinfocus.org

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this supplement. We hope that you enjoyed the articles. What do you think? Do you have any experiences, good or bad, to share? What changes would you like to see to improve access to the arts for disabled people? Please send your views to richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk or telephone him on 029 2047 3954.

Opportunities for visually impaired people at RWCMD

The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama (RWCMD)'s Pre College Department in Cathays Park in Cardiff offers opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to participate in the specialist music or drama training on offer. In collaboration with Jackie Clifton from Musicians in Focus, the department has developed an e-learning unit with Braille translation facilities enabling them to provide bespoke training and support for visually impaired musicians of all ages.

For talented children and young people, they offer tuition in performing, composing, listening, history and technology, which are the core skills needed to participate fully in Junior Conservatoire courses. If you would like to find out more, please contact junior.conservatoire@rwcmd.ac.uk.

For visually impaired adults, RWCMD run an evening class called *Exploring Music* at every Tuesday evening during term time from 6pm to 8 pm. If you would like to find out more, please contact outreach@rwcmd.ac.uk.

For those who would like to develop their instrument or vocal skills to a high level, they offer one-to-one *Music Lessons* to students of all ages and abilities, delivered at the College. For further details, visit the 'Community Programme: Music Lessons' page on the RWCMD website, <http://www.rwcmd.ac.uk>.

The popular weekly Community Choir brings together over one hundred people on Saturdays during term time, and the mixed voice and treble voice Community Choirs are a fixture of the Community Programme schedule. Working towards an end-of-term performance for family and friends, the choir is a great way to indulge your passion for singing, and the only entry

requirement is enthusiasm. For further details, visit the Community Choir page on the website.

Jigsô is an exciting new initiative aimed at musicians of any age playing any instrument at any standard. The group creates and plays their own music rather than using a printed score, making it a very accessible activity for musicians with a visual impairment. *Jigsô* is currently running some free tasters sessions for anyone interested. For further details, visit the *Jigsô* page on the website.

The main telephone number for the College is 029 2034 2854.

Advertise in ViW Roundup.

ViW Roundup is sent to more than 500 people, in a variety of formats. We are a not-for-profit organisation that hopes to recoup its costs so that we can serve blind and partially sighted people in Wales, and seek advertisers for our newsletter so that we can continue to produce this valued journal. Our rates are as follows (per edition):

Full A4 page: £125 (black and white) £200 (colour)

1/2 A4 page: £75 (black and white)

1/3 A4 page: £45 (black and white)

Enclosures: single sheet A4 500 copies, supplied in a ready-to-go format: £100. Enclosures (such as booklets): please ask for quote. To advertise in many editions, please contact us for discounts.

If you are interested, please contact Dewi Osborne via **dewi@wcb-ccd.org.uk** or telephone 02920 473954 to find out more.

Roundup is published quarterly by Vision in Wales. It is also available in audio CD format. Further copies can be requested from Richard Bowers, Vision in Wales (formerly Wales Council for the Blind), 2nd Floor, Hallinans House, 22 Newport Road, Cardiff CF24 0TD. Telephone 029 2047 3954.

Please send articles and news items to the above address and mark the envelope "Roundup". You may also send to richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of ViW, and as much of the material is submitted by third parties, we cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of the information therein. We reserve the right to edit for publication.

The theme for the next edition of Roundup will be **transport**.

If you wish to make a contribution on this topic, or on any aspect of visual impairment, please contact richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk or telephone Richard on 029 2047 3954.

Eisteddfod success in Pembrokeshire

In February 2013 the Pembrokeshire 50+ Forum held an Eisteddfod at St David's. To promote a positive image of visual impairment and older people 13 visually impaired people entered various classes. All the classes were judged without the judge being aware of entries by visually impaired people. The results were fantastic. Mrs Eva Rich won the Knitting class, Mrs Penny Baines came second with her scarf and Mr Edmund Thomas came 1st and 2nd in the wood craft section. We also had a 3rd in the knitted doll class and entries in the poetry, short story and bara brith classes. All placed entries had a certificate and a little velvet bag which is a traditional prize similar to the one which would have been presented as prizes in an Eisteddfod in times gone by. It was a great day and we are looking forward to next year.



Like Vision in Wales on Facebook



Follow us on Twitter @VisioninWales