

# The Performing Arts Access Program Handbook – Part I



*Blind patrons among the audience enjoying audio described performance of Bethune at Factory Theatre*

## **A Practical Toolkit for Producers and Presenters of Audio Described Theatrical Performances**

By Picasso Pro & Creative Trust - 2012

[www.picassopro.org](http://www.picassopro.org) | [www.creativetrust.ca](http://www.creativetrust.ca)

# Handbook Part I - Audio Description (AD)

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## **Introduction**

In 2009 Picasso PRO and Creative Trust collaborated to implement an innovative communications access program for blind and Deaf performing arts patrons with the sponsorship of Sun Life Financial. The project took place within the context of our larger three-year partnership (2009-2012) supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Province-wide Program.

More specifically, the program launched communications access through Audio Description (AD) for Blind/Low-Vision Audiences and Theatrical Interpretation, using American Sign Language (ASL), for Deaf/Hard of Hearing audiences. The process was meant to encourage performing arts companies to integrate these services properly into their organizational cultures and programming. To date it has been the only such program in Ontario.

The overarching imperative has been to serve and nurture Toronto's Deaf and disability communities, which are large, diverse, active and growing as our aging population grows. Access is essential for these communities to participate fully in Toronto's cultural life. In turn, access enables theatres to develop new audiences and allows Toronto to rightfully retain its place on a world stage which increasingly reflects the values of diversity and inclusion.

This handbook shares our project with performing and media arts colleagues who may want to include communication access services within their own programs and require more information about the practical process. While funding remains an ongoing challenge for companies, we learned first hand what creative partnerships can yield through joint fundraising and personnel. Furthermore, Picasso PRO maintains a core of trained Audio Describers and solid working relationships with a network of ASL Interpreters to assist companies that want to take the next step.

In keeping with the project's two streams this handbook deals with: **Audio Description (AD)**. A second handbook covers **American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation**.

# **Handbook Part I - Audio Description**

## **What is Audio Description? History and Background**

Audio Description is a service that is provided by various organizations to theatres, museums, movie theatres, dance companies, zoos, aquariums and other arts and cultural events. It began in the 70's in Washington DC and in San Francisco. In Washington DC, Margaret Pfansteil and her husband Cody would go to theatre performances and he would whisper in her ear throughout the performance. After years of being hushed in theatres, they decided to start the first audio description service through the Washington Ear (a radio reading service located in Washington DC).

They led the first audio description training on the east coast and discovered ways that a describer can use portable audio equipment that is not obtrusive to other audience members. They began to train people around the United States to provide audio description in their communities. At the same time, Gregory Frazier, a professor at San Francisco State University was developing the underlying concepts for audio description and beginning to train people on the west coast. The main difference between the two concepts is that Gregory trained people to "script" live theatre and Margaret and Cody trained people to describe extemporaneously as they observed the live action.

By the mid-1980's audio description crossed the Atlantic to a small theatre called the Robin Hood, at Averham, Nottinghamshire where the first described performances in Europe are believed to have taken place. In 1987, WGBH of Boston created Descriptive Video Services (DVS®), a subsidiary that provides audio description for television viewers. DVS® has also engaged in providing audio description for first-run films in theatres nationwide.

In March of 1988, Jim Stovall, founder and president of the Narrative Television Network, independently began descriptions for movies on cable channels. In October 1990, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences awarded Emmys to Margaret Pfansteihl, PBS, Jim Stovall and the late Gregory Frazier.

Since 1994 the Los Angeles Radio Reading Service has provided a live description of the Tournament of Roses Parade. People who have been trained in the past by Margaret and Cody and Gregory have now been training people and there is a large network of describers, organizations and patrons. Currently Audio Description can be found in Washington DC, Ohio, Georgia, Arizona, Texas, Iowa, Indiana, Oregon, Washington (state) and California as well as in some places in Canada, England and Australia. It may not be in every city of the state or in every performance or cultural activity, but there is some access to audio description where there are trained describers.

## **The Service**

Audio Description makes theatre performances, museum exhibitions, parades and other cultural opportunities more available to persons who are blind or partially sighted. The listeners are issued a single earphone and tiny (3 by 4-inch) receivers through which they can hear a trained describer depict the sets, costumes and non-verbal onstage action via a portable transmitter.

Describers do not keep a running commentary but rather, talk about the essential, visual aspects of the production in order to help listeners share the total experience of the performance. Describers are not performers; they are reporters. They do not base their comments on their own biases or impressions. Instead, they pass on visual information and allow the listeners to develop their own opinions and conclusions.

Because successful description of an event demands special techniques, it is vitally important for trained audio describers to carry out the task of audio description in all events that are booked for this purpose.

When the art is well done it can have this response: "The description (of a movie) was so well done, I can't remember if I saw it before I lost my sight or after, it was described so vividly." -Jolie Mason of Los Angeles Radio Reading Service.

## **Audio Description is the Art of Talking Pictorially**

The audio describer is a verbal camera lens serving as eyes for people who can't see theatre, films, television, museum exhibits or other events. As the Washington Ear states: *Audio description is an art and a system developed by The Washington Ear\**.

A word is worth a thousand pictures to set a mood when you can't see the picture:  
Describer Janet Dickson does Descriptive Video for "Suspicion" on PBS-TV:

*"At racing speed, Johnnie has driven Lina to the edge of the ocean. Uninhabited cliffs leading far down to the sea confront them as Johnnie steers the silver sports car onto the grassy edge of a steep precipice."*

Not plain old cliffs, but uninhabited cliffs. Confront instead of "ahead of". And precipice; scarier than a plain old cliff. At the end, when Lina trusts Johnnie again: "Turning her body to face him, she smiles. They kiss." She didn't simply "turn to face him". She turned her body. Sexier. Truer.

-excerpted from Picasso PRO Audio Description Training Booklet © 2010

## **Facts about Visual Disabilities**

By definition, people are "legally blind" if their best corrected visual activity is no better than 20/200. Only 10 percent of the individuals classified as legally blind have complete loss of sight; the other 90 percent have varying amounts of residual vision. In some instances, there may be field loss, resulting in tunnel vision, or a loss of either peripheral or central vision. Depth perception may also be affected.

Persons experiencing blindness or visual impairment should be provided with an opportunity to handle the object they are learning about and to be near the person demonstrating the activity.

### Low Vision and Blind – the Numbers (AD Coalition Archives)

- "In 1930, 4 percent of the U.S. population was 65 or older. Today (1988) it's 12 percent. By the year 2000, it will be 15 percent. And by 2020, one of every five Americans will qualify for a senior citizens' ticket on the space shuttle...."
- The group of people age 65 and older grew twice as fast as the population as a whole during the first half of this decade, the Bureau of the Census says...
- A man who makes it to 70 today actually can look forward to at least 11 more years
- "Approximately 80% of those over 75, or about 110% of the elderly population, are likely to experience some form of functional visual impairment." Stanley J. Brody, Director Rehabilitation, Research and Training, Center in Aging, University of Pennsylvania, School of Medicine in Aging and Vision News, Vol. 1 No. 1, of the National Center for Vision and Aging of the Lighthouse, The New York Association for the Blind.
- "Directly involved in the life of every low or no vision person are from one to a dozen or more friends, relatives, spouses, children, bosses, and fellow employees who benefit when the low or no vision person can cope better."  
-Margaret and Cody Pfanstienl, developers of Audio Description.

### In Ontario [as of June 2010, Statistics Canada]

- There were 44,000 registered Blind in Ontario based on CNIB registration
- 15.5% of Ontario's population or 1 in 7 were persons with disabilities



## **Context for the Sun Life Arts Access Audio Description Stream**

- The AD stream was developed with guidance from Vancouver's KickstART Arts & Culture's Vocal Eye Program, the first and only other program in Canada. [www.kickstart-arts.ca](http://www.kickstart-arts.ca)
- Both programs were launched under the guidance of pre-eminent AD Trainer and Advocate Deborah Lewis of Arts Access Alliance in California
- Canada is still behind most other English Language theatre centres where national Disability Discrimination legislation was passed in the 1990's and where services already exist. (Australia, UK and USA)
- Many theatres in Toronto are struggling to make their venues barrier-free; communications access allows them to offer some form of access immediately to blind, low-vision [LV], Deaf and hard of hearing [HOH] patrons
- The partnership between Picasso PRO and Creative Trust signified a unique opportunity to maximize the resources and networks of our combined constituencies and missions to make it work!
- The initiative was intended as a seeding project with the expectation that theatre companies served by the pilot will find ways to continue offering the service independently

## **Describer Training**

Audio Description Standards from the American Audio Description Coalition were referenced and formed the basis of the training provided by Deb Lewis, a co-founder of the coalition.

[www.audiodescriptioncoalition.org/aboutstandards.htm](http://www.audiodescriptioncoalition.org/aboutstandards.htm).

We have also drawn on the generous guidance of KickstART's Audio Description program in Vancouver [www.kickstart-arts.ca](http://www.kickstart-arts.ca) and references from VocalEyes UK: [www.vocaleyes.co.uk](http://www.vocaleyes.co.uk)

The Training Handbook was jointly created by Trainer Deborah Lewis and Picasso PRO/CT and is only available for professional use by the parties so named.

## Sample Call for Trainees

### Would You Like to Become a Professional Audio Describer for Live Theatre, Music and Dance?

#### What is Audio Description?

Audio Description (AD) has been around in the US since the early 1980's. It is not sign interpreting. It is not a play-by-play analysis of an event. It is an art of creating a visual picture through words. It enables a blind patron the opportunity to see the show with everyone else and gives them the ability to come to their own conclusions about what is happening on stage along with everyone else. The Describer's goal is to be unobtrusive and use vivid words to give the most direct description of **the action of the performance, transmitted through a wireless headset worn by the listener.** It is similar to a description of a person or place that you might read in a book in which you get a picture or image in your mind of how the object or scene looks. For live theatre and movies this description is fit in a quick time period between the lines of a play or film. **It can also be used to describe concerts, dance performances any other live events or in conjunction with 'touch tours' of an art or history museum, zoo or aquarium.**

#### Audition and Training Schedule

An Auditions Committee will select 6-8 individuals to take Toronto's inaugural training with **audio describer and trainer Deborah Lewis** based on auditions to be held sometime **between February 10<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010.** The **3 - day Training** will take place in **late March 2010.** Confirmed dates for Auditions and the Training will be announced by the end of January. Auditioners and Trainees will receive all pertinent materials and details prior to **their scheduled sessions.**

#### The Commitment

If selected for training you are expected to:

- Complete the 3 day training with 100% attendance
- Complete several hours of volunteer practicum with Picasso PRO
- Participate in the pilot phase of the program as a paid describer by describing 1-3 professional productions **by Creative Trust participating companies**

- Continue to meet with our AD Describers Circle for counsel, professional development and to help us evaluate and continue the program in Toronto
- Offer your AD services professionally in an ongoing capacity

### **The Sun Life Financial Arts Access Program**

Creating communications access to theatre, dance and other performance arts for Blind, Low Vision, Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing audiences



#### **Who Are We?**

**Picasso PRO** is a long-term project formed to facilitate genuine opportunity and inclusion for Deaf and disabled artists and audiences in the performing & media arts. **Creative Trust** provides financial and planning support to Toronto's theatre, music and dance companies so they can flourish and better serve their art, audiences and community for years to come. Access is a key point of our collaboration. The Sun Life Arts Access Program is linked to Creative Trust's larger two-year Audiences Project.

#### **Who Are You?**

An individual interested in and committed to learning a new professional skill and providing Audio Description services, under the auspices of Picasso PRO/Creative Trust's 2-year Arts Access Program, made possible through the generous support of Sun Life Financial. Audio description is a professional skill and paid service in many cultural centres worldwide but is new to Toronto's live performing arts.

#### **Audio describers come from all quarters! You may be:**

- A writer, translator, wordsmith, literate language lover
- An improviser, actor or other trained performer
- Someone who knows, lives with and/or works with Blind/low vision individuals
- A visual artist or individual with well-honed descriptive skills
- A radio narrator, voice-over specialist, volunteer/professional reader for audio recorded materials
- An avid theatre patron, arts advocate, cultural worker, disability activist
- An enquiring mind who wants to learn and acquire a new or second vocation

## **What We Need From You**

### **1. Basic Information**

- Name and Address with Postal Code
- Phone number/s: home, work and/or cell
- Email address:
- Your occupation:
- Your hobbies/interests/additional skills

### **2. Brief answers to the following questions:**

- Why are you interested in Audio Description?
- What types of events are you interested in describing?
- Do you have any description experience?
- Are you available to attend the Audio Description training on an afternoon, evening and weekend? Please indicate all that apply
- Additional comments

### **3. Please send as an attachment and include a bio not or resume**

**Submissions should be emailed to Rose Jacobson by January 25th 2010:**

Email: [jacobsonr@sympatico.ca](mailto:jacobsonr@sympatico.ca) Tel: 416-536-7522

Websites: [www.picassopro.org](http://www.picassopro.org)      [www.creativetrust.ca](http://www.creativetrust.ca)



## **The Process**

The Call for Trainees in February 2010 produced 40 responses within two weeks. Of these, 18 were auditioned by Rose Jacobson with the assistance of Caroline Holloway. Each candidate briefly prepared and then improvised a description of a recorded theatre scene being viewed on DVD. The description was recorded as an audio file for review. A specialized evaluation and selection process designed by our trainer Deb Lewis yielded 8 Audio Description trainees, trained by Deb over a three day intensive in March 2010. A follow-up schedule of practicum for the trainees took place between March and June.

An Expert Audience Advisory team was commissioned to guide the process on an ongoing basis - Wanda Fitzgerald and Durelle Harford McAllister.

The training process, tools and exercises are documented in our Audio Description Training Booklet co-created with Deb Lewis and is for use by Picasso PRO only in collaboration with Deborah Lewis or another approved trainer.

**Inaugural Audio Describers 2010:** Peter Cavell; Krista Dalby; Jane Field; Kat Germain; Kat Leonard; Elizabeth Saunders; Rebecca Singh; Aaron Talbot

## **AD Orientation for Performing Arts Companies**

When a theatre wishes to offer an audio described performance of a production, a designated staff person begins by contacting Picasso PRO. Below is an overview of the general process which theatres/performing arts companies undergo when planning an audio described production. At present Picasso PRO provides the equipment kit needed to implement the service; companies may also purchase their own for ongoing in-house use (document relates to Access Program protocols, 2009 – 2012).

### **Equipment**

- Portable wireless FM system (technology may change over time /upgrade)
- 1 Audio transmitter with 20 receivers and single earphones.
- Headset microphone for Audio Descriptor to use in a tech booth
- Or Stenographer's mask microphone for use when a tech booth is not available.

**Personnel:** Typically a team of four. Two trained Audio Describers see the event to be Audio Described in advance. In conjunction with a script of the event, one Audio Descriptor prepares and rehearses Pre-show Notes about the sets, lighting, characters, and costumes etc. This is then read to the Audio Description Audience, beginning 15 minutes before the show starts. The second Audio Descriptor prepares and rehearses to read during the show (between the actors' lines) notes on changes in scene, lighting, characters, costume, actions, etc.

The Sun Life Arts Access Program Audio Description Coordinator and an assistant will distribute equipment to the Audio Description Audience members in the foyer before they enter the theatre, and explain how to use it and test it is working correctly.

**In Advance:** The Audio Description Coordinator will visit the venue to discuss accessibility for an Audio Description Audience; and where the Audio Describers will be located, if there is not a tech booth.

The Two Audio Describers who will describe the event, will require comp tickets to see the show 1-2 times as far in advance as possible – the first few days of a run.

Allow at least 2 hours for set up of equipment, this includes testing that there is no audio interference on the FM frequency being used by the Audio Description equipment, from other equipment being used for the event – all of which will need to be turned on during the test.

Consider where the Audio Describers will be. The best location for Audio Describers is in a tech booth where they can speak without the possibility of disturbing other audience members. They will need good sightlines of the show and be able to hear the dialogue, either in a headset or speaker going in to the tech booth. They will speak into a headset microphone attached to a portable FM transmitter. If this is not possible they will need to be seated in the audience, or catwalk, with good sightlines, they will use a Stenographers Mask microphone, which is held over the mouth while speaking.

Allocate staff time to: ticket sales; visually impaired community outreach; to deal with technical testing above; and assist Audio Description Audience members in finding their seats during the event. Ensure Box Office and Ushers understand what is planned.

Like all audience members, Audio Description Audience members, especially ones who are asked to arrive 45 minutes before the show starts, want a good seat - close to the action, dialogue. They are only listening to the Audio Description in one ear; with the other they are listening to the show live like everyone else.

Choose and reserve up to two accessible seating areas - for those who do and do not bring guide dogs – which will require space to lie down. Some people will be fine with stairs, others will require the use of elevators, and some may require wheelchair accessible seating.

**Ticketing and Community Outreach:** Consider how you will reach the visually impaired community. This may include advertising that Audio Description is being offered in Season Programs, newspaper ads, online etc.

Ticketing will be most effective if the ticket sales agent can provide a CODE that Audio Description Audience members will use when booking their tickets, that indicates they require Audio Description.



People with disabilities including people with vision impairment are often economically disadvantaged, so higher ticket prices can be out of reach for this audience. Consider offering your lowest ticket rate for Audio Description Audience members, or two for one, or a free ticket for a companion or attendant accompanying an Audio Description Audience member. Consider providing programs in accessible formats, Braille, large print, or electronically.

**Audio Description on the day of the Event:** 3 hours before the show: Audio Description Coordinator and 1-2 of the Audio Describers will arrive to test for any equipment frequency interference from other equipment being used. FM equipment frequency can be changed within a certain range if necessary.

1 hour before the show starts: Assistant arrives and Audio Description Coordinator sets up equipment for distribution in the foyer.

45 minutes before show opens: Audio Description Audience members arrive. Pick up their tickets, are directed to where they can receive their Audio Description receivers and earphones, are shown how to use it.

30 – 15 minutes before show opens: Audio Description Audience is seated, allowing enough time to negotiate stairs, elevators, settle guide dogs etc.

15 minutes before the performance starts: Audio Description Pre-show notes begin

Please provide a safe place to lock away any unused equipment and the equipment carry case during the performance, as it may also contain credit cards or other collateral from Audio Description Audience members, which are held for the duration of the show as a surety of equipment return.

Please provide seating in the theatre for Audio Description Coordinator and Assistant, who will assist Audio Description Audience if there are any technical difficulties.

At the conclusion of the show, Coordinator + Assistant, and Audio Describers will go to the foyer to receive the equipment back from the Audio Description Audience members.



## AD Equipment Checklist

(Subject to change/upgrades over time; accompanies the equipment kit)

For Tech Personnel BEFORE and AFTER each use of the equipment, please check to make sure that you have:

Qty	Part #	Description
1	PPA T36	Transmitter
1	MIC 094	Headset microphone
20	PPA R35N	Receiver (labeled 1-20)
20	EAR 022	Earpiece (labeled 1-20)
1	-	Short patch-cable, used to attach Transmitter to an auxiliary sound source e.g. MP3 player
1	CCS 030 035	Carrying case
20	WND 009	Windscreen for headset microphone
1	SY100B	TalkTech Sylencer hand-held stenographer's mask
1 each		Ziplock bag containing your own mic windscreen and pieces of foam for stenographer's mask
1		Mini screwdriver
5		Mini flashlights in ziplock bag with 2 spare batteries
1		Battery tester (with batteries)
4		Extra mini screwdrivers in cases in ziplock bag
Varies		AA batteries

Before and after use, please check all items for obvious damage, and report any breakages to onsite coordinator

### NOTES:

- Transmitter or Receivers should not be used by persons wearing a Pacemaker – this should be mentioned to patrons when booking tickets, but please double-check when handing out Receivers pre-show
- When changing batteries of either the Transmitter or Receivers, check to make sure the switch above the battery compartment is set to the correct battery type – either Alkaline or NiMH.
- Each Describer has a labeled ziplock bag with their own windscreen foam/face-pieces for the Steno Mask, for hygienic purposes. Describers will be responsible for personal cleaning of individual pieces.

- Transmitter headset can cause slight pressure on the temples over time; a soft tissue can be tucked between temples and point of contact to make more comfortable if necessary.
- Receiver cords for the headsets/ear pieces must be gently coiled for storage to avoid damage that will affect transmission
- Receivers will work with any ordinary set of headphones, if a listener is unable to use our earpieces. Sound will only come out of one of the speakers. Non-earbud headphones should not be used, as they may leak a lot of sound and be distracting to other audience members. Finally, even if a client is using their own headphones, the Describer should still be the one to plug/unplug them from the Receiver.
- The headset microphone only picks up sound sources within a very small radius. It should not pick up any of the nearby sounds in the booth or audience.
- Despite its small radius, the headset microphone is very sensitive. The Describer can speak very softly and still be heard clearly through the earpieces. This means that in theatres without a booth, the Describer might be able to sit in the house without needing to use the steno mask.
- To mute the Transmitter, press the On/Off button once. The button will flash red if the unit is muted. Don't actually turn the Transmitter off if any of the Receivers are in use – this will cause irritating static for the listeners.
- In cases where the steno mask must be used to muffle sound, plan how you will handle your written notes while using the mask, since it is hand-held.

### **General Procedures:**

#### **Changing batteries (Receiver or Transmitter)**

- Turn device off
- Open the battery compartment, on the rear of the device.
- Remove batteries, using the fabric strip to loosen them.
- After replacing old batteries with new, check to make sure the Battery Type Switch (located inside the compartment, just above the batteries) is set correctly – either Alkaline or NiMH.

## **Connecting Transmitter to auxiliary sound source**

For testing purposes, the Transmitter can be attached to an mp3 or CD player, using the small patch cable (found in the carrying case).

- Turn the volume on the auxiliary sound source all the way down
- Plug the patch cable into the headphone jack of the aux source, and into the Aux jack on the top of the Transmitter.
- Turn up volume of aux source as necessary.

## **Testing/Setting Channels**

The Transmitter and all Receivers are set to channel 13 as a default. This should only be changed if there is interference in the theatre where we are working, and should be changed back to 13 afterwards.

### *Testing the channel*

- In the theatre space, have staff turn on all devices which operate using radio frequencies.
- Turn on Transmitter and one Receiver. Connect headset and earpiece.
- Test for interference. If working in pairs, have one Describer sit in the seat they'll be in for the show and speak continuously into the Transmitter. The other partner should use a Receiver, and walk around the house to check for areas of interference or dead zones. Alternately, an mp3 or CD player can be used with the Transmitter in place of a Describer.

### *Setting a new channel*

- Turn the channel dial on the Transmitter one click forwards to select a new channel.
- Next, to adjust the channel on the Receiver, open the battery compartment, insert the small screwdriver into the channel control, and slowly turn it **in the same direction** you turned the channel dial on the Transmitter. Speak into the microphone while turning, and listen through the earpiece. When you hear your voice clearly through the earpiece, the channel has been set.
- If you hear your voice through the earpiece but the sound is not crystal clear, try fine-tuning it with the screwdriver. If this doesn't work, go back to the first step and select a new channel on the Transmitter.
- Once the Receiver channel has been successfully set, tune the remaining Receivers in the same way.
- Spot check at each described performance.

## **Show/rehearsal procedures:**

### **On the day of tech rehearsal:**

1. Cross-check equipment against inventory – is anything missing or damaged?
2. Figure out where the Descriptor(s) will be sitting during the performance.
3. Have theatre staff turn on all devices which operate using radio frequencies.
4. Test for interference. If working in pairs, have one Descriptor sit in the seat they'll be in for the show and speak continuously into the Transmitter. The other partner should use a Receiver, and walk around the house to check for areas of interference or dead zones. Alternately, an mp3 or CD player can be used with the Transmitter, in place of a Descriptor.
5. If excessive interference is encountered, set equipment to a new channel and test again. Once a clear channel is found, make a note of it.
6. If small dead zones persist even after setting equipment to a new channel, arrangements may need to be made to ensure your patrons don't sit in those areas.
7. When packing up, check inventory and make sure Transmitter and all Receivers are turned off.

### **On the day of the performance, before the show:**

1. Test for interference once again, starting at whatever channel was chosen on the tech day. Remember that interference patterns can vary from day to day, so there's a chance the channel that was clearest last time last time might not work as well this time.
2. Once patrons begin to arrive, hand out Receivers. Check if they have a pacemaker; if they do, it is unsafe for them to use a Receiver. Plug in earpieces for the patrons, and demonstrate how to put on the earpiece and adjust the volume.

### **After the show:**

1. Collect items from patrons.
2. Make sure each Receiver is turned off, and remove batteries. Check Receivers and earpieces for damage. Gently re-coil the earpiece cables for storage, and check all items against the inventory to make sure nothing is missing.

**Cleaning: (refer to handbooks in case)**

Transmitter and headset

Receivers and ear pieces

Steno Mask: foams, face pieces and mask itself

## Sample Contract between Theatre and AD Service Provider

### Sun Life Financial Performing Arts Access Program herein referred to as PAAP

#### \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre + Address

Re: Audio Description between PAAP and \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre Company

Picasso PRO/Creative Trust and \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre Company agree to collaborate on PAAP: a pilot program providing live audio description and ASL interpretation, dates \_\_\_\_\_

This contract refers to the provision of live Audio Description on \_\_\_\_\_ for a trial live description and for {one or more} publicly described performance of the production of Production Name +date \_\_\_\_\_.

Audio Description provides people who are blind or visually impaired with information that conveys the settings, costumes, body language and sight gags during a theatrical performance. Trained describers provide live, concise, objective descriptions inserted between pauses in the dialogue to aid the audience in their understanding of the essential visual elements. Audience members listen to the description through small receivers with headphones or a single earpiece. Audio description is intended to complement the performance not interfere with it.

Picasso PRO/Creative Trust will provide:

A fee of \$\_\_\_\_\_ x a team of two Describers which will be paid for by PAAP. It is understood that the theatre will commit to seeking its own funding to continue AD services beyond the duration of the pilot program.

- Pre-show program notes which detail the sets, costumes and physical descriptions of the performers and which may be uploaded to the theatre's, Picasso PRO's and Creative Trust's websites.
- Picasso PRO, Creative Trust, Sun Life Financial's logos, and text or an insert suitable for programs and websites.
- Equipment for the audio description - which will consist of: Portable wireless FM system. Headset or Stenographers mask microphone. 1 Audio transmitter with 20 receivers and single earphones. It is understood that the theatre will commit to seeking its own funding to rent the PAAP equipment for described shows beyond the duration of the pilot program.
- Testing of the equipment in the theatre prior to each audio described performance.
- Two personnel to distribute and provide equipment orientation for each performance.
- Orientation for frontline staff, in the theatre, on appropriately accommodating visually impaired audience in a theatre setting.



- Live description by two trained describers beginning 15 minutes before the show starts for [production name] at \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre:

Date \_\_\_\_\_ trial description

Date/s \_\_\_\_\_ public description/s

\_\_\_\_\_ Theatre will provide:

- A location tour with Picasso PRO/Creative Trust personnel to plan the location of the audio describers, equipment distribution and orientation point, and audience.
- Tickets for two audio describers, to preview the production 2-3 times each. Tickets or seating for a team of four for each described performance.
- Additional complimentary tickets as needed and mutually agreed upon to host sponsors and other required auditors for the performances
- Copies of the script for each describer at least one week prior to previewing the production.
- A location for equipment distribution and orientation point (typically in the lobby).
- A location with good visibility of the playing area and sound for the describers (preferably a technical booth if one is available).
- Picasso PRO/Creative Trust access to the theatre to set up equipment a minimum of 1 hour before the show starts.
- Box office, ushers and volunteers with information about audio description as well as the dates of the audio described performances so they can help to inform patrons about this service through the run of the play.
- Ticketing for the audio description audience and providing a way for booking of audio description by audience members (a special Code number or acronym can be helpful). Consider cheaper tickets or two for one tickets to make theatre accessible to people with disabilities who may be economically disadvantaged.
- Show descriptions and theatre logos for use on Picasso PRO and Creative Trust's websites.
- Directions to theatre suitable for a blind person traveling by public transit to locate the theatre, using specific directions – e.g. three blocks south of Queen West to Adelaide Street, 1 block east on Adelaide, etc.
- If possible, programs in accessible formats, Braille, large print, or electronically – PDF's are not very accessible, word docs or web text is preferred.
- Marketing and outreach of the audio description service, where appropriate, in ads, programs, websites. This will include at minimum the Picasso PRO, Creative Trust and Sun Life Financial logos - as well as the following text in inserts for each audio described performance: *'This audio described performance is part of the Sun Life Performing Arts Access Program (PAAP), a series of audio described theatre performances at Toronto theatres provided by Picasso PRO/Creative Trust, made*

*possible with support from Sun Life Financial. Description brings the sets, lighting, costumes, and action alive for visually impaired audience members through a wireless transmitter to a single earpiece. Audio description begins 15 minutes prior to curtain. '*

- Staff or volunteers to usher visually impaired audience to their seats.
- Have frontline staff attend orientation Picasso PRO may offer on appropriately accommodating visually impaired audience in a theatre setting.
- A secure place to lock any unused equipment, and the equipment carry case during the performance.

This letter of agreement dated \_\_\_\_\_ is by and between \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre Company and Picasso PRO/Creative Trust for provision of audio description service through the Sun Life Financial PAAP

Signed for Picasso PRO/Creative Trust by Rose Jacobson, Picasso PRO Project Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (position)  
for \_\_\_\_\_ Company \_\_\_\_\_

----end----

## **Sample Contract between Service Provider and Audio Describers**

### **Sun Life Financial Performing Arts Access Program herein referred to as PAAP**

#### **Re: PAAP Audio Description Pilot Series 2010 - 2011**

between Picasso PRO/Creative Trust and  
Audio Describer: Name address phone etc

(Audio Describer) agrees to work for Picasso PRO/Creative Trust as an Audio Describer during the PAAP series 2010- 2011, a dual program of live audio description and ASL Interpretation.

#### **This contract refers to the provision of Audio Description services.**

Audio Description provides people who are blind or visually impaired with information that conveys the settings, costumes, body language and sight gags during a theatrical performance. Trained describers provide live, concise, objective descriptions inserted between pauses in the dialog to aid the audience in their understanding of the essential visual elements. Audience members listen to the description through small receivers with headphones or a single earpiece. Audio description is intended to complement the performance not interfere with it.

Picasso PRO/Creative Trust will provide:

- All contracting with the theatres regarding: Audio Described performances, training of theatre staff; provision of preview tickets and scripts of plays for Audio Describers, Tickets x 2-3 performances each to prepare the Audio Describers; location of equipment for distribution in lobby, location of Audio Describers during performance; Programs in accessible formats, Braille, large print, or electronically
- Equipment for the audio description - which will consist of: Portable wireless FM system. Headset or Stenographers mask microphone. 1 Audio transmitter with 20 receivers and single earphones.
- Testing of the equipment in the theatre prior to each audio described performance.
- A fee of \$400 each x 2 Audio Describers per production paid by PAAP for the 2010-2011 seasons during our pilot program.

Audio Describer will:

- Audio Describe the following shows as either 1st or 2nd Audio Describer:
- In a situation of unforeseen circumstances or emergency, if unable to Audio Describe a show as scheduled, contact the PAAP Coordinator, and the other Audio Describer/s as soon as possible to let them know. Fees will be adjusted according to fairness, taking in to account preparation completed, e.g. pre-show or show notes already prepared.
- Attend 1 one-hour training session regarding appropriately accommodating people with vision impairment in a theatre setting.

- Work co-operatively with theatre staff - front of house manager, production manager etc
- Review and rely on or adapt existing pre-show notes such as those from trainer Deborah Lewis for well known plays.
- Where possible (e.g. at the end of the first week of a show run), provide a WORD document with his/her pre-show notes suitable for uploading to Picasso PRO, Creative Trust and/or the theatre's website for visually impaired audience members to review with screen reading technology.
- Be at the theatre 1 hour before each Audio Described performance.
- When pre-arranged with partnering Describer, begin live description pre-show notes 15 minutes before the performance starts
- When NOT live Audio Describing the pre-show notes will be available in the lobby to assist with equipment distribution and orientation prior to the performance.
- Assist with collecting, and storing equipment at the end of performances.
- Take in to consideration feedback regarding his/her audio description received from audience members, other Audio Describers, and Picasso PRO staff.
- Provide an invoice to Picasso PRO/Creative Trust for each Audio Described production.

This letter of agreement dated \_\_\_\_\_ is by and between  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and Picasso PRO/Creative Trust.

Signed for Picasso PRO/Creative Trust \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

----end----

**Sample letter of invitation to targeted audience circle**

**P!CASSO  
PRO**

CREAT*i*VE TRUST

October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Dear friends and theatre-goers,

Do you love live theatre but are tired of relying on the whispered interpretations of a sighted companion? Would you like to enjoy a professionally produced show fully, along with everyone else? Then Picasso Pro/CT in collaboration with Factory Theatre have got something special for you!

Please join us on **November 30th at 8 p.m.** in the Mainspace at **Factory Theatre** for the first ever show in Toronto theatres featuring live audio description! The play, ***Bethune Imagined***, was written and is directed by Factory Theatre's **Artistic Director Ken Gass**. We have arranged special 2-for-1 ticket prices for the occasion.

Many of you know Picasso PRO, a long-term project bridging disability and the performing arts. **Picasso Pro** with our partner **Creative Trust** are offering audio description to begin creating accessible theatre for blind and low vision patrons. We would love you to be a part of it. Our generous sponsor for the pilot project is **Sun Life Financial**.

The evening's description begins sharply at 15 minutes prior to curtain, with an introduction to the overall production and design concept, sets, lighting, performers and other program notes. Picasso Pro has trained brand-new describers to provide key action and other visual information between the actor's lines, through a wireless transmitter to a single ear piece worn by the patron. Please **be sure to arrive at the theatre by 7:15** to pick up your headsets in the lobby, test them out and settle in for the pre-show description.

You'll then hear running description of essential action during the play. Directly following the show, we invite you a reception in the adjoining lounge where you will join us, the describers and Factory Theatre staff to raise a glass and discuss your experience. We are still learning and will appreciate your feedback, participation and support!

**About the Play *Bethune Imagined***

**Norman Bethune** was a medical pioneer and political revolutionary who became a Canadian icon and international hero revered by billions. He was also a man who loved women – a passionate insatiable man, whose destiny drove him to conquer everything and everyone around him. Did he sacrifice love for the greater cause? This is a story of Bethune and three remarkable women in his life. It features **Fiona Byrne, Sasha Cole, Irene Poole** and **Ron White**.

**Audio Described Performance Date:**

**November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010** arrival time: **7:15 pm**; showtime **8:00 pm**

**Tickets Prices:**

Ticket price for our blind and low-vision patrons and their companions: a special 2-for-1 price using the special code **AUDIO**. **Regular price \$28; seniors and students \$23**

Tickets for the audio description service are limited to a maximum of 20 audio receivers available and must be purchased in advance. The **tickets are non-refundable and will be sold on a first-come basis**.

**Tickets may be purchased:**

In person: **Factory Theatre Box Office, at 125 Bathurst Street**

1:00 -8:00 pm Tuesday – Saturday

12:00 – 4:00 pm Sunday (cash, debit, or credit card: VISA , MasterCard, AMEX).

Or

By calling the Factory Theatre Box Office at **416-504-9971** with the code **AUDIO** and placing your order. A valid credit card is required for telephone purchase.

**Directions to the theatre**

Factory Theatre is conveniently located in downtown Toronto, 125 Bathurst Street, corner of Bathurst and Adelaide; one block north of King Street and steps from the Adelaide streetcar stop on Bathurst. The Mainspace is accessed through the Adelaide Street doors, and then up two flights of stairs.

**Via TTC:**

511 Bathurst Streetcar southbound from Bathurst Station

501 Queen Streetcar westbound from Queen or Osgoode Station

504 King Streetcar, westbound from King or Saint Andrew Station

**Driving:** go to MapQuest for directions

**Public Parking** is available directly across from Factory Theatre on the south corner of Bathurst and Adelaide. Parking is \$10.00 at this lot. There are also meter boxes for limited parking spots on Adelaide and Bathurst Sts.

**Still have questions?**

Once you've purchased your tickets you may contact me by email with any additional concerns, or the Factory Theatre Box Office directly by phone, prior to the day of the performance. This is the first of several productions we plan to make available to blind and low-vision patrons at a number of theatres in Toronto over the next year. We hope it's the start of a beautiful relationship! Looking forward to seeing you there.

Yours truly,

Rose Jacobson

Project Manager, Picasso PRO

[jacobsonr@sympatico.ca](mailto:jacobsonr@sympatico.ca)



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## **FAQ's and Basics: Audio Described Performance**

The words 'people' or 'persons with disabilities' put a focus on the person instead of their disability. Proper language: 'disability' or 'disabled' not "handicap' or 'handicapped'

**Re: Audio Description Patrons:** Someone may be Blind or low-vision (LV). Not all Blind/LV people read Braille; some can read large print, others no printed media at all (Braille or text), Many Blind/LV patrons have software which reads emails and electronic devices aloud to them...at home computers or on portable devices. Some folks use special Braille note-takers and keyboards. Some use magnifiers, glasses, canes or service animals, others walk unassisted.

**Protocols:** Always ask a patron what his or her ACCESS REQUIREMENTS are not what their disability is...they will then explain to you what they need if anything. e.g. *"I need to sit on an aisle or in the front row because I have a service animal with me"* OR *"I would appreciate your assistance in guiding me to my seat."*

You may offer to help someone by offering your arm, - but not by grabbing theirs; respectfully allow the patron to take the lead and indicate which side to walk on. While escorting someone you can describe the pathway verbally enroute – e.g. *"we're coming to three steps up into the theatre"; "you are being seated in the front row of the house".*

**Re: Hospitality:** Don't be nervous if you don't know exactly what to say or do; we're all human! You can just ask a patron how to be of help! e.g. *"what is more convenient...would you rather I got you a drink or escorted you to the bar?"*

When informing or giving directions to a Blind/LV patron e.g. location of bathrooms, pathway into the lobby, etc., remember to describe verbally and clearly – not by pointing or showing.

Note: *for the audio described performance our describer will give some information to patrons through the headsets directly:* e.g. *"I ask that you remain seated until the*



rest of the house is cleared and then make your way back to the lobby to return your listening devices.”

**At the Box Office:**

**Patron:** *Hi I’m here to pick up my tickets for the show under the name...*

**Staff:** *Welcome! Here are your ticket/s... Please proceed to \_\_\_\_\_ to pick up your listening device/s. There’s a table \_\_\_\_\_ and people waiting to assist you! Please proceed directly to the table to ensure you are equipped when the doors to the house opens...The pre-show Audio Described Notes will start approximately 15-20 minutes before the show itself.*

**Washrooms:** *The door to the women’s washroom is directly \_\_\_\_\_. The men’s washroom is \_\_\_\_\_ .... etc. describe verbally.*

**Other FAQ’s**

**Do we sit anywhere?**

No we’ve reserved \_\_\_\_\_ for patrons using listening devices and their companions. Ushers will be pleased to show you to your seats.

**Are there house programs?**

Ushers will hand out print versions on the way into the theatre. There are no Brailled house programs because the Audio Describer will give you all the information through your headsets, prior to the start of the show {and at intermission if there is one).

You *will* receive a Braille Insert about the Audio Description program where you pick up your listening device. There are also some large-print program highlights at the table.

**How long is the show:**

Number of hours (including a 15 minute intermission where applicable). At Intermission you should be back in your seat 10 minutes before the second act starts to catch all the described Program notes for ACT 2.

**Returning the listening devices:**

Your Audio Describer will explain the details to you. Ushers will show you to the table back in the lobby to return your listening devices

**Note to ushers and box office staff at intermissions:**

If you see Patrons hanging out in the BOX OFFICE/LOBBY area please urge them to return to their seats ASAP for the Audio Described notes for ACT 2.

**Questions from other patrons about what's happening:**

**What's going on tonight?**

Staff: We're very pleased to say that tonight is a special performance that includes audio description for patrons who are Blind and low vision. There's an insert in your house program that explains it! Patrons using the service will hear live description of physical elements of the show through headsets they wear... while you continue to enjoy the show without interference. For more information about the program see the contact info on the program insert.