

PICASSO PRO CREATIVE TRUST

SUNLIFE PERFORMING ARTS ACCESS PROGRAM JUMPSTARTS WITH EIGHT NEW DESCRIBERS

TORONTO, ON - Since the launch of the Sun Life Performing Arts Access Program in January 2010, Picasso PRO and Creative Trust have been partnering with each other towards a common goal: a performing arts season made more accessible to blind and Deaf audience members.

The two-year arts access program, part of the larger collaboration between Picasso PRO and Creative Trust, began by training 8 individuals in Audio Description [AD] – a practice which provides essential descriptions of sets, costumes and non-verbal stage action to blind/low vision audiences via a portable transmitter.

Eight Describers-in-the-making emerged from a 3 day workshop with acclaimed California-based specialist Deborah Lewis, March 26-28th. Our 'inductees' are Peter Cavell, Krista Dalby, Jane Field, Kat Germain, Kat Leonard, Elizabeth Saunders, Rebecca Singh and Aaron Talbot. In addition Durelle Harford McAllister and Wanda Fitzgerald have acted throughout as expert audience members, providing important feedback from the Blind/low-vision perspectives.

On April 25th fifteen dynamic American Sign Language Interpreters, members of the Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters [OASLI] joined facilitators Joanna Bennett, a senior ASL/English Interpreter specializing in performance work] and Rose Jacobson in a ground-breaking session on Theatrical Interpretation. It was an excellent opportunity for emerging and practicing Interpreters to become more involved in the setting of theatre production and performance, and has already yielded results and new and enthusiastic working relationships.

Our Describers were generously invited by Factory Theatre's artistic leadership to try out the process and technique during readings, rehearsals and the run of 'Featuring Loretta', enabling them to gain valuable experience in an actual theatre environment.

In the program's next phase, ASL Interpretation for Deaf/hard-of-hearing audiences will also be offered at select theatres. Overall the program will build new audiences, strengthen ties with the interpreter community and assist producing companies to properly integrate both services into their organizational cultures.

According to Jini Stolk, Executive Director of Creative Trust, 'Theatre can only be truly relevant if it's accessible to all. Toronto's creative performing arts companies are eager to open their doors as wide as possible and to welcome every interested audience member.'

With the recent purchase of our own AD equipment and continued preparation on both fronts we now stand poised to engage theatre, music and dance companies directly in the process. The Arts Access Program has been made possible through the generous support of Sun Life Financial in tandem with Ontario Trillium Foundation's ongoing support through the Province-wide Program.

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