

Mayor of London

news release

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New £240,000 drive to increase visitor access at London's theatres

The first comprehensive guide to assisted performances in London theatres for people with sensory disabilities has just been published. It is part of a £240,000 visitor development and access initiative being backed by the Mayor of London, which will target deaf and disabled people, as well as families with children.

The new brochure - Access London Theatre - aims to open up London's theatres to people with sensory disabilities. It lists all audio described, captioned and sign language interpreted performances taking place during summer 2006 across the whole spectrum of London theatre, from the Taming of the Shrew at the Open Air Theatre, to Mary Poppins at the Prince Edward. Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, said: 'London is changing and as a part of this change access to arts and culture for deaf and disabled people must be addressed. The Access London Theatre brochure is a key part of our £240,000 project with the Society of London Theatre to make London theatre more accessible for audiences with sensory

Mayor of London's Press Release on Visitor Development and Access Initiative (Get into London Theatre), issued 5 June 2006. For more details, contact Lucinda Harvey at The Society of London Theatre on 020 7557 6727 or e-mail lucinda@soltma.co.uk

disabilities and other under-represented groups. 'The guide lists assisted performances across the whole spectrum of London theatre from musicals to Shakespeare to contemporary drama. It marks the start of our efforts to make London's theatre more accessible and I hope it will encourage many more audiences with sensory disabilities to sample the best of London's theatreland. '

Richard Pulford of the Society of London Theatre said, 'We hope that this project will enable more people to enjoy London theatre and support theatres across London in their efforts to reach new audiences.' Steve Mannix from Shape said 'We have been delighted to work on this ground breaking access programme for disabled and deaf people. Seeing the very first marketing campaign highlighting assisted performances in the West End is a real credit to the efforts of the Society of London Theatre, the Mayor of London, LDA, and partners. Not only that, but the staff training programme has really started to break down barriers. Here's to full houses!'

The brochure is part of a three-year project being funded through the Mayor's London Development Agency to improve the accessibility and communicate the diversity of London theatre to three groups of under-represented groups - audiences with sensory disabilities, families and young people. The project is being implemented by the Society of London Theatre with the support of the Mayor of London, Visit London, and the Arts Council England.

For the first time - as a part of this initiative - a steering committee consisting of the key theatre industry organisations has been formed, to take a collective and collaborative London-wide approach to access issues. The steering group includes the Independent Theatre Council, Theatrical Management Association, Audiences London, Shape and Arts Council London. As well as the publication of the first comprehensive access guide, the initiative has already achieved several milestones in its first year. 250 theatre staff have undergone Disability Equality training and it has supported the first ever industry access seminar run by Shape and

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Audiences London. It has produced the London A-Z of Family theatre which lists all the theatres in London that offer a family programme and developed an under 5s programme for Kids Week in the West End.
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Notes to editors:

1. The Access London Theatre guide to assisted performances is available in a wide range of accessible formats Braille, CD tape, large print and PDF. To request one of these you can either call 020 7557 6751 or email access@soltma.co.uk. 2. Assisted performances are constantly being updated and the next brochure listing performances taking place from September until December will be available at the beginning of August. Please check www.theatre-access.co.uk for the latest listings.

3. Audio description means a blind or partially sighted person can experience theatre; it is a live verbal commentary providing information on the visual elements of the production as it unfolds.

The description is delivered around the dialogue of a performance and patrons listen to it through a discreet headset

4. Captioning is similar to subtitling and gives deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people access to dramas, comedies and musicals. At a captioned performance the words are displayed on a screen (or screens), placed near the stage or in the set, so they can be seen at the same time as they are spoken or sung. Captioning is also helpful for theatre-goers whose first language is not English.

5. Sign Language Interpreted performances are a regular feature of London theatre in drama, musicals and children's theatre, offering a wide variety of choices to theatre-goers who are British Sign Language (BSL) users. An interpreter will stand in a clearly visible position and interpret the spoken aspects of the show.