
Open Door Theater

— Making theater accessible on
both sides of the curtain —

About Open Door Theater



Since 1980, Open Door has been committed to making theater accessible to anyone and everyone. For many, the experience of being involved in an Open Door production is life-changing as they develop confidence, feel support, and find their voice on the stage. Our mission has evolved over the years to include creating an inclusive experience for our audiences as well, creating performances geared to making each show accessible to as wide a community as possible and revolutionizing universal design in theatre to center and include more voices, bodies and experiences.

OUR MISSION

We envision and embrace a diverse community which enables access to theater for all on both sides of the curtain through mentorship and communal problem solving. We strive to create a family environment in which cast and crew can reach their goals and we share our experiences and expertise with other organizations so that we can all become more inclusive and accessible. We welcome the unique insights, perspectives and feedback of all our participants to fulfill our mission and believe that the more diverse our community, the more learning opportunities created.



WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL?

- No Actor or Crew participation fee
- Ages 9 to 99: adults and children participate together
- Whole families cast together in productions
- A theater village collaborating to ensure the success of all
- Education provided to our cast and crew about diversity and universal design
- Focus to ensure cast members put in the best role to accentuate their abilities
- Mentorship progression, so that mentees become mentors
- By listening to our cast and community members who represent every aspect of the human spectrum, we learn more about how to create a positive experience for all
- Centering stakeholders "Nothing about us without us"

Quick Facts



Founded	1980
Cast Members	40*
Cast Identifying as disabled	75%*
Crew Members	Approx. 100 (20% identifying as disabled)
Auditioners identifying as non-white	30%*
Budget	Income approx. \$43,000* Expenses approx. \$31,000= \$12,000*
Cast Accommodations	Buddy system, ASL interpreters, Zoom, ALDs
Audience Accommodations	Open and Closed Captioning ASL-Interpreted Shows Audio Described Shows Sensory-Friendly Shows
Website	opendoortheater.org
Documentary	http://bit.ly/odtdocumentary

*Based on
2022 Show
The Lightning
Thief

What Does INCLUSION Mean?

Inclusion doesn't mean simply inviting people with differences into our space.

Inclusion means making our space and our performance as welcoming and accessible as possible to all performers and patrons, so that everyone can participate, onstage and off, in the communal experience of a live performance.

By **listening** to our cast and community members, who represent every aspect of the human spectrum, we learn more every year about how to create a positive experience for all.

It is critical to have organizational culture around access pre-production, rather than trying to retrofit access later.

- ASL Mentorship starts at auditions
- Captioning begins when rights are requested
- Sensory friendly considerations are built into design elements and blocking
- Audio Description starts after casting is complete with cast self description survey

Cast/Crew Training and Interaction Guidelines

All cast and crew receive training on interaction with members of the Disability communities
Including:

- Deaf/HH, Blind, Mobility, Autistic (Initially outsourced to Autism Alliance of Metrowest but that was disenfranchising to cast on the spectrum “nothing about us without us”)
- Currently run our own training with User Expert on the Spectrum
- Distribute written Interaction Guidelines to all crew/volunteers
- Safety/Emergency prepared guidelines to crew/cast
- Provide Basic ASL Lesson for all cast/crew annually including Deaf Culture questions with user expert.
- Production Team training CPR/First Aid Certification (2021)
- Developing ASL Video Glossary for Wing-to-Wing Backstage Communication, Front of House Communication
- Board/Volunteer/Staff buy-in through demonstration of organizational culture/mindset, leading by example, utilizing in-person interaction & social media (facebook etc) centering on best practices

American Sign Language Interpreted Shows



- First Interpreted show: The Wiz (2006)
- First Deaf/ASL actors on Stage 2015 Shrek Winner of Eastern Massachusetts Association of Community Theaters (EMACT) Most Accessible Theater Company 2015. Nominated for our ASL dragon Ensemble. Held pre-audition workshop with ASL interpretation to prepare students.
- First Adult Lead Deaf ASL performances 2018 Cinderella (Prince and Step Sister). Winner of EMACT Directors Choice Award for Actor Collaboration for Deaf prince and voice actor.
- Hiring Director of ASL (DASL "dazzle") expert to work with ASL interpreters and Deaf actor and crew since 2017.
- When we could not find an ASL class for our casts to take, we hired a Deaf instructor and now run own ASL classes 1-2 x year since 2016
- 2019-present working on an Innovation Grant from the MCC to develop video ASL glossaries for front of the house ASL Terminology and backstage terms for actors and crew wing to wing to distribute publicly to theaters/museums.
- ASL Budget 2022 = Rehearsal \$2300, Performance/DASL \$3500, grant funded.



Upper Left:
Seussical (2017)
Upper Right:
Cinderella (2018)
Lower Left:
Shrek (2015)
Lower Right and
Center:
*The Lightning
Thief* (2022)



Sensory Friendly/Relaxed Performances

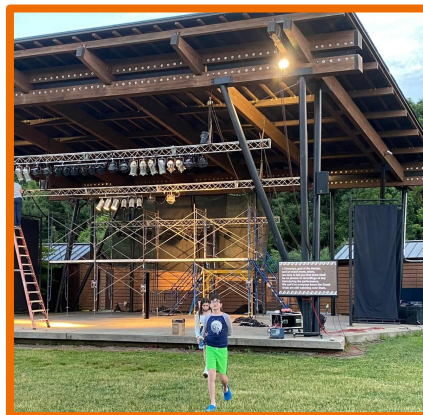
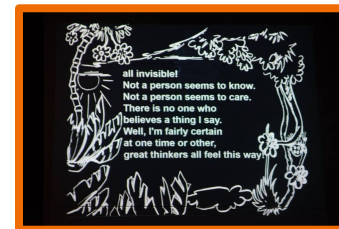
- **Judgment-free environment** - audience understands who else will be there
- **Pre-show introduction of actors** - in costume, but out of character - reinforces that actors are just pretending
- **House lights** - remain partially lit during the whole performance
- **Assistive communication** - devices and headphones are allowed
- **On-site Specialists** - assisting our ushers and house staff
- **Expectation and acceptance** - audience members may vocalize and move around
- **Staffed "chill-out" space** - to allow people to leave the performance if needed, including a live video feed of the show
- **Designated "Family Bathroom"** - to facilitate gender-neutral access for those who require assistance
- **Training sessions** - during our rehearsal period to educate our cast and crew to potential audience needs.
- **User Experts** - Consulted on all design aspects of production



Open/Closed Captioning

Captions are displayed on the proscenium arch on both sides of the stage, on screens, and on smartphones. Captions have illustrated borders to support set design and overall feel of the show

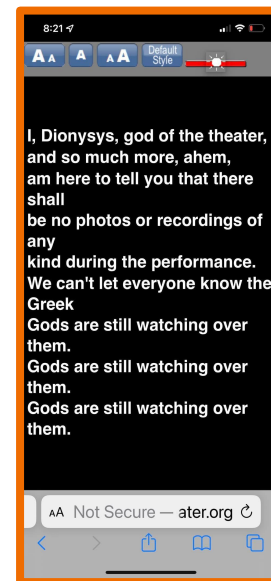
Captioning and projectors made possible by grant from the Acton-Boxborough United Way Youth in Philanthropy. Software created by Bradley Botkin from WGBH. Total Capital Investment: \$1300 (no ongoing costs)



Top Sides: Seussical 2017, Cat in the Hat and ASL Interpreter, proscenium projection

Bottom Left: The Lightning Thief 2022, Flat Screen TV for outdoor performance

Bottom Right: The Lightning Thief 2022, smartphone view



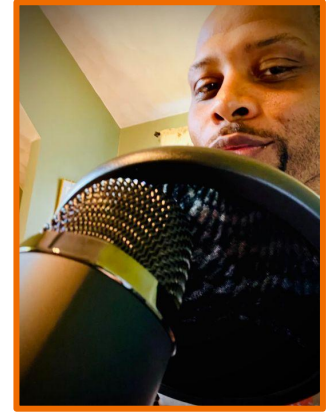
Audio Description



Open Door Theater and AD

- Added to Open Door Theater shows in 2014 at the suggestion of a visually impaired actor participating in the show
- Grown to 25 headsets distributed in 2018
- Key to hire a stakeholder in creation and evaluation of AD
- Costs: \$1000 for Describer + \$150 for User Expert
- Equipment: Open Door borrows from Perkins School, can be done with regular ALDs and/or Zoom
- 2022 Open Door Theater added Open AD for pre-show, posted in advance on website and social media
- 2022 Geotag locations for stage and restrooms for wayfinding
- 2023 Budget will include transportation for blind patrons to attend
- Tactile tours pre-show of costumes, sets, special effects

2022 Open Door Theater received an Innovation Grant from Massachusetts Cultural Council to spearhead a program to train Culturally Responsive (BIPOC) Audio Describers, and partnered with Chris Robinson (A11y/StageSource), Brenna Nicely (American Repertory Theatre), and Brian Gould (NCAM/WGBH)



COVID Outreach



Had to think outside the box to maintain community connection 2020-2022

FREE Offerings

Weekly Sunday evening Zoom call

Halloween car parade drive-through

Drive-in car parking lot concerts using FM transmission

Previous ODT show zoom watch parties

FREE Workshops

Improv

Auditioning

Mask Making

Playwriting and the Female Voice

Acting: Relationships, Conflicts, & Opportunities

Choreography

Directing

Combined total participants served - 500 including 20% Disabled

“Ask Me” Fair 2022



“We learn by listening/paying attention. Everyone has an interesting story.”

- **Event:** Living Library in partnership with local library and after school youth group
- **Speakers:** Intersectional, engaging humans, including dancers, magician, artists, actors, and activists with diverse backgrounds/identities/culture serve as *“Human Books”*
- **Participants:** Children ages 5-12 and their caregivers
- **Purpose:** to provide a safe space for intentional and respectful conversations to promote empathy, acceptance and tolerance and dispel stereotypes, fear and othering so that people of differing backgrounds and experiences could learn from and appreciate each other
- **Format:** Small group (6-10 people) rotation with each presenter where presenters tell life experiences and children ask questions. Available jar of prompt questions, provided by facilitator and presenters
- **Accommodations:** ASL interpretation, braille, and audio describer for presenters and participants. Modeled best-practices for participants, including pronouns on name tags
- **Event Costs:** Interpreter, describer and presenter stipends \$200 per

Awards



Open Door Theater has been recognized for its Mission as well as for its Award-Winning Productions

2019 Most Accessible Cultural Institution, Massachusetts Cultural Council

2020 Lifetime Achievement Award for Accessible Theatre, Sam Gould, Eastern Massachusetts Association of Community Theatres (EMACT)

2018 DASH Special Consultants Choice Award for Excellence in Cooperative Performance Deaf Actor Adam Preston and Voice John Young and Best Stage Management, EMACT - Cinderella

2017 Community Partnership Award for Inclusive Theater, Sam Gould, Federation for Children with Special Needs

2016 Best Non-Profit Organization, Middlesex West Chamber of Commerce

2016 Semi-Finalist Innovation Awards Small Business Administration NE

2015 DASH Nominations - Best Stage Management, Best Costumes, Best Make-Up, Best Specialty Ensemble (Dragon), EMACT - Shrek

2014 DASH Special Consultants Choice Award for Accessibility and nomination Best Specialty Ensemble (Milworkers), EMACT - Working



Committed to Consistent Improvement in Accessibility

LEARN: Inaugural member of the Massachusetts Cultural Council's UP Initiative to increase the accessibility of Organizations in Massachusetts and beyond

TEACH: Consulting with other organizations to promote, teach and model theater Access

MODEL: The work which we are doing in Massachusetts to increase access is a model to other companies in Massachusetts and across the country

SERVE: Serve on DEI/Access committees in Town, EMACT, Landmark Orchestra

LEAD: LEAD training/networking



Above: Sword Fight -
Cinderella 2018



Bottom Center: The Casey
Family 2018

Below: The Gentlemen 2018



Above: Hoverville Ensemble
- Annie 2012 (Boston Globe
Photo)

Center: Pirates - Peter Pan
2016 (Chris Russo Photo)

Below: Cast photo - Into the
Woods 2020





THE LIGHTNING THIEF



OPENDOORTHEATER.ORG

NARA PARK AMPHITHEATER

JUNE

2022