

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DATE: April 2004

America Needs More Visual Theatre!
Any Dramatists Out There Ready to Create a Difference?

As evidenced during the highly-successful Deaf Way II International Arts Festival summer 2002 in Washington, D.C., over 25 deaf theatre companies from around the world performed exciting forms of visual theatre showing hints of Cirque du Soleil, Bill Irwin, Pilobolus, Marcel Marceau, Penn and Teller, and Martha Graham. Although verbal theatre has its place in America, there is not enough visual theatre happening in this country. And, there certainly are not any places in America at the present moment where deaf or hard-of-hearing playwrights can receive a fully accessible two-week-long workshop in visual play development...except at the Visual Playwrights Retreat, which is happening July 5-16, 2004.

The U.S. Department of Education has graciously provided funding for a partnership between Gallaudet University Theatre Arts Department in Washington, D.C., and Lanham, Maryland-based arts organization *Quest: Arts for Everyone* to conduct over two consecutive summers a rare opportunity for aspiring and experienced deaf and hard-of-hearing writers to develop play scripts. Playwriting applicants will have the benefit of receiving guidance and support from visual theatre experts sensitive to the communication and educational needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing writers.

The retreat will tailor itself according to the needs of each playwright. To help further develop their scripts from a visual base or with visual support, applicants will have access to a pool of professional actors adept at creative movement, improvisation, and American Sign Language. If needed, a variety of other tools and resources will be made available to assist in play building such as: video cameras; digital cameras; computers; art supplies; props; masks; and costumes. One of the primary goals of the retreat is to introduce alternative means of building or enhancing play scripts other than the traditional way of being alone in a room hammering out a script in English.

Tim McCarty, president of *Quest: Arts for Everyone*, believes that theatre of the deaf is moving in an entirely new direction and Quest is at the forefront of supporting that movement. This is evident by Quest's commitment to produce works that comes from a visual base, integrating deaf and hearing theatre artists and production staff. Another goal of the retreat, in line with Quest and Gallaudet Theatre Arts Department's mission, is to foster the growth of provocative and exciting visual theatre accessible to deaf and hearing audiences. Both organizations strive to break down the misconception that one has to be deaf to appreciate plays by deaf theatre artists.

Retreat director Willy Conley, a Gallaudet Theatre Arts professor, playwright, Quest Affiliate Artist, is firmly committed to nurturing deaf playwrights. He understands from firsthand experience the ignorance that many hearing arts organizations, universities, and theatres have about deaf artists trying to receive a grant or an education. Most deaf applicants experience rejection for a number of reasons, and mostly it boils down to an organization's inability to understand the communication and cultural needs of deaf applicants.

For those interested in the Visual Playwrights Retreat, an application form and more information are available online at: www.quest4arts.org/retreat.htm. For specific information, concerns, or media requests, contact Retreat Coordinator, Miriam Ganz.