

INTERPRETING FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., (RID) Standard Practice Paper (SPP) provides a framework of basic, respectable standards for RID members' professional work and conduct with consumers. This paper also provides specific information about the practice setting. This document is intended to raise awareness, educate, guide and encourage sound basic methods of professional practice. The SPP should be considered by members in arriving at an appropriate course of action with respect to their practice and professional conduct. It is hoped that the standards will promote commitment to the pursuit of excellence in the practice of interpreting and be used for public distribution and advocacy.

About Interpreting for the Performing Arts

Interpreting for the performing arts spans the full spectrum of genres from Shakespeare to new works, including but not limited to children's theatre, musical theatre, literary readings, concerts, traditional and non-traditional narratives. This type of interpreting happens on traditional stages for local companies, for touring shows, in alternative spaces, museums and galleries, and in educational settings, to name a few.

Because each venue and genre has its own demands and each community has its distinct relationship with the performing arts arenas, there is no single template that can address the needs of each setting and audience. The suggestions put forth in this SPP are intended to help the interpreted performance event be as successful as possible for all parties involved, but particularly for the audience it is intended to serve.

Interpreting in these settings is a service to the Deaf, hard of hearing and signing community and as such, needs to be held accountable to the same evaluation standards as other interpreted interactions. (*Refer to the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct*)

One measure that helps ensure success is choosing qualified, certified and experienced interpreters. Another critical component is developing a system to gather feedback from Deaf and signing audience members. We recommend that interpreters work with organizations to help gather feedback and address the logistical aspects of performance interpreting. Organizations can act as intermediaries and provide point people, liaisons, advocates, and contract negotiators. They can handle the hiring of interpreters, get the scripts and materials, and determine the most favorable placement of interpreters. They ensure that the lighting is set, check that the audience seating is optimal, and act as the overall troubleshooters to make certain the interpreted event is successful. This in turn allows the interpreting team to focus on their work as interpreters. When there is no organization functioning as a liaison, the interpreting team will handle the logistics.

There are many interpreter constellations employed in different settings and regions, such as proscenium interpreting, shadowing, zoning, etc., but for the purposes of this SPP, the focus will be on proscenium type interpreting working in teams of two (2) or more interpreters.

Competencies

Interpreters working in this arena must have knowledge of the content, be facile with the source and target language, be comfortable working within the venue, have a sense of presence, and work well with the team. They must draw from a wide repertoire of language choices in order to make their interpretations as complex and rich as the primary source, which enables them to deliver a product that mirrors the performance in both content and aesthetics.

Performance interpreting is not a vehicle for interpreters to become performers but rather a vehicle for the target audience members to enjoy the performance event. The interpreting team needs to carefully employ features of ASL that make character depiction distinct, so that the story will be clear. This is often a delicate dance, weaving the needs of the interpretation with the performative aspects evoked in performance interpreting. These nuances can be navigated with the help of a Deaf advisor. The ultimate goal is to arrive at a successful interpretation of the performance. Such an interpretation delivers a product that reflects both the meaning and aesthetics of the performance.

Interpreting Team

Depending on the needs of the show and the audience, the constellation of the interpreting team may change. Deaf-blind and low vision audiences are expanding. Tactile and low vision interpreters for the performance may work in parallel with the other interpreting team. The interpreting team can include Deaf advisors, Deaf interpreters, and low vision and tactile interpreters. To ensure full collaboration, it is important to position the team so that members can see each other.

It is critical to work with a Deaf advisor to monitor and shape the work of the team and to monitor the clarity and success of the interpretation.

The team members work together to build a cohesive interpretation, go through the process of analyzing scripts, assigning characters, and building team agreements to achieve a dynamic equivalence of the performance.

Resources and Materials for Preparation

Rehearsal time is needed, preferably two (2) weeks or a minimum of three (3) rehearsals, depending on the performance. The more opportunity to view the performance and rehearse, the better the interpreter's product will be. Organizations can arrange for interpreters to have access to theatre/venue space and to the resources and materials listed below:

- Script, lyrics, set list
- Dramaturge (as needed)
- Advisors - Deaf advisor
- Rehearsal space
- Access to viewing the performance
- Assistive listening device, set list, music stand with a light (for concerts)

Logistics

The following logistics are key to ensure that the interpretation is accessible to the audience. Interpreters work with point people at the venue to arrange the following:

- Positioning of the interpreters
- Lighting for the interpreters
- Assistive listening device, set list, music stand with a light (for concerts)
- Accessible seating within sight line of the interpreters
- Point of contact, such as house manager, stage manager, box office, accessibility coordinator

Laws

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), more arenas are providing interpreting services in their public venues. Title III prohibits discrimination with regard to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges or access at the place of accommodation. Places of public accommodation are required to provide "effective communication" with the use of auxiliary aids or services to persons with disabilities. This may include "qualified interpreters," captioning, amplification, or other systems.

Conclusion

Performing arts are collaborative by nature and so is the act of interpreting a performance. Nothing can succeed without the collaboration between all parties, the interpreter with their teams, the venue, and the audience. The ultimate goal is to arrive at a successful interpretation of the performance, delivering a product that reflects both the meaning and aesthetics of the performance.

Resources

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