

Accessible Relaxed Performance Reflections



This document shares what we tried, and what we learned, when working to produce an accessible relaxed performance. It is based on our experience with CRIPSiE's self-produced show "Careful" on November 18th and 19th, 2016. This document reflect our own notes, as well as the results of an audience survey and informal feedback. We hope this can be a living document, and we invite any feedback or resources that can help us to improve our relaxed performances in the future.

(photo 1: poster for our production of Careful)

Venue

The Westbury Theatre, at the ATB financial Arts Barns in Edmonton, was ideal for the following reasons:

- Flexible theatre set up, large enough for access
- Well suited to Bus, bike, walk, drive and DATS
- Easily accommodated audience of 115 per night (or more)
- Door buttons available, wide hallways and doors, accessible washrooms
- Organization committed to increasing access of buildings, projects, and productions
- (access info on the venue website found here https://stage.fringetheatre.ca/box_office_hours.php#w)
- (photo 2: lobby and box office of The Westbury Theatre)

Theatre Set Up/Seating

- We had 6-7 rows of riser seating at the back, with space in front of the risers for a row of wheelchair users.
- We made sure there were moveable chairs on the floor so that any audience member using a wheelchair could sit next to their friends or family.
- Based on feedback and attendance, we would add 2 rows of risers to increase the number of seats. The extra rows would help pull this seating closer to the stage space.



Theatre Set Up/Seating (continued)

- We had a floor-seating zone, with soft mats, at the front center of audience. Based on feedback from parents and non-parents, we would place the floor mats on one of the side isles, so there is less distraction to the audience behind the kids moving freely in this space.
- We had couches in the center, and tables and moveable chair/wheelchair seating on the sides. We might offer fewer tables, and more different kinds of chairs (e.g. with full backs to help with lumbar support).
- The seating areas were outlined with white tape on the floor. We made sure the isles were at least 48 inches wide, so there were wheelchair-friendly routes to all spaces.
- In addition, we live streamed the video into the lobby so that people could leave the space and return if they needed to. Upon feedback, we would consider hiring a babysitter so if children were overly restless, they could be dropped off in a play space and parents could return to the theatre.
- (photo 3: Audience at Careful, seated in risers and at tables on the floor)



ASL / Captioning/ Whisper Description

- We had American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters signing all spoken parts of the show, and available to support the interaction of Deaf and hard of hearing patrons. We reserved seats for ASL priority in the front right of the audience. In the future we will use ASL vlogs to help advertise our organization and shows to Deaf communities.
- We captioned all spoken parts of the show, and projected onto a screen at the back of the stage. In future, we would hang the projection screen lower to make it easier to read.
- Choreographers wrote visual descriptions for their pieces. Volunteers read these pieces in advance, and whisper described the performances for people with visual impairment. We prioritized a table on the left for patrons with visual impairments. A lamp was placed at the table to help with reading the visual description.
- We have targeted improvement of visual description skills as a priority for our organization in the coming year.
- (photo 4: ASL interpreter Nicole performs with Rebecca John. Both kneel on the floor, and there is text projected in the background)



Lighting and Sound

- We had house lights set to XXX and had many positive comments that it was enough for audience members to move, but not distracting.
- We did not use flashing lights that could trigger epilepsy.
- We did not moderate sound levels, but did receive one reply that lower sound levels would have increased access for at least one audience member.

Ticket Sales

- For admission, we charged \$5 to \$25 on a sliding scale, with no one turned away.
- Tickets were sold online through Eventbrite so that people to determine their ticket price, but it was difficult for people to buy multiple tickets. We need to find a better solution.
- Tickets were also sold at the door at the same price range.
- We realized that we need to create a better way to describe how sliding scale works. We need to train our volunteers in describing slide scale, and treating all payments equally.

Artistic Content, and Introduction

- We prioritized commissioning art from those often marginalized from mainstream artistic training and performance. Six of out of seven pieces were created by disabled and Mad artists; three of these from disabled or Mad artists of colour.
- Thanks to grants from the Edmonton Community Foundation, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and Orchesis Dance Society, we were able to pay all our artists at CADA rates.
- We introduced the show with the following territorial acknowledgement:
 - Hello. We want to begin by acknowledging that the land we gather on is Treaty 6 and Metis Territory. We acknowledge that the violence of colonialism is ongoing and that, as artists, we have the responsibility to consider how the stories we tell, and the ways we tell them, are complicit in colonialism.
- In the introduction we shared how a relaxed performance is supposed to work. We said:
 - We're excited that we are, for the first time, doing relaxed performance. What does this mean? Well, we realize that sitting in a chair, in the dark for an hour is not friendly to everyone's mind or body. So, we've given you a variety of seating options. We'll have the house lights up throughout the performance so you can move around and come and go as you need to. The show will be live streaming in the lobby, if you want to leave the theatre and still catch the performances. You're welcome to use your phone, but please turn the sound off. Whispered visual description will also be taking place during the performance, and if you are interested in this, please make your way to our volunteers seated at the front left side of the audience. Folks using ASL have priority seating at the front right side of the audience.

Communications

- We made sure that all website and social media communications were screen readable so blind and visually impaired people could access them.
- We made clear, in each of our advertising practices, that the show was pay-what-you-can, that the venue was wheelchair accessible, that there would be ASL, captioning and whisper description, and that it would be a relaxed all-ages performance that welcomes people moving, leaving, and vocalizing as need be.
- We could have done a better job of advertising the time doors would open, and the show would be over, making it easier for those taking the Disabled Adult Transportation System (DATS) to book transportation.
- In the future we would ask attendees to refrain from wearing scents if at all possible.
- In the future, if we were to have content that might be disturbing to some viewers or potentially inappropriate for children, we will have some content warnings on our communications in order to encourage informed consent.
- (photo 5: next page – logos of our sponsors)
- (photo 6: next page - audience after the show)
- (photo 6: next page - cast of twenty-two CRIPSiE performers taking a bow on stage)

Quotes from our Audience Members!

~ Saw [CRIPSiE's Careful] last night. One more performance only and I super recommend it! Cried, laughed, and felt so safe in an arts space for once!

~ Dear fellow Edmontonians. Cripsie offers a thought-provoking, exuberant and innovative performance experience. Do yourselves a favour! We will be there with bells on!

~ Thank you – for acknowledging that the land we stand on is not ours and that the stories we tell come from a bias of colonization. Thank you – for showing that ALL bodies can be beautiful, powerful and evocative in the images they create and the stories that they tell. Thank you – for truly understanding what accommodation looks like.

As a partner of someone with multiple health issues and 'hidden' disabilities and as a mother of children with mental health challenges, I cannot thank you enough for your relaxed performance space. Although, your performances were both powerful and beautiful it was your understanding of accommodation that brought tears to my eyes. For the first time in my life as parent and, a partner I had a space to bring everyone to that I did not have to worry about....

Clearly stating that people could come and go as they needed allowed [my partner] to feel comfortable. Having your show live-stream to the lobby allowed him not to miss any of it, had he needed to get up and move around, as is frequently the case. Providing both visual print and ASL allowed him not to miss any of the spoken portions of the program. My children are now old enough to be able to sit mostly still during a show. That was certainly not the case when they were younger. We ended up not attending events because there was never any true accommodation for children... The fact that the space you provided was clearly marked was just another degree of awesome. Thank you – for an amazing experience.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS:



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EDMONTON COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION



THE ARTS BASED RESEARCH
STUDIO



Thank you for taking the time to read this, and if you have any more feedback or ideas on how to make our performances even more accessible, please contact info@cripsie.ca

Sincerely,
CRIPSiE

