

Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter

Graeae's next production will be an adaptation of the autobiographical book **Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter** by prominent ANC member Albie Sachs. The story chronicles Albie Sachs' attempts to rehabilitate and rediscover himself after surviving an assassination attempt by agents of South Africa's Security Forces.

The book will be adapted by playwright April de Angelis. We had a brief chat with April about meeting Albie Sachs, working with the cast and her adaptation....

Could you tell us a bit about developing your adaptation?

One of the most interesting things was actually meeting Albie Sachs and talking to him. It really is a luxury to meet the writer whose book you're going to adapt. It was quite inspiring to meet him - we got an image of him as a real person, this real person that the story is about. He gave us a lot of freedom with the book. Rather than adapting the book word for word, he wanted us to be true to the spirit of the book, which is what adaptations are about really.

April spent two weeks with the cast and Graeae's Artistic Director in a workshop to develop the play...

And what about the workshop with the company - how has this taken a part in your work?

The workshop was a very significant part of developing the play. A lot of time was spent in discussion with the actors who expressed their own lives and experiences with disability in relation to Albie's. It was very constructive, and I found it useful to draw on their experiences for the play. We spent two weeks looking at the text discussing, improvising and working it into a theatrical text.

As a very literary piece, have you found it challenging to adapt as a play?

I find it a very interesting project - it is unlike, say fiction, in that it does not have a single storyline with a climax. It's very episodic with a lot of description, so its quite different to David Edgar's adaptation of *The Jail Diaries of Albie Sachs*. But the core of the story is Albie's struggle between his disability and politics, which is fascinating.

The real question throughout his experience is the nature of political struggle; which leads to questions about the place of armed struggle and so on... and this all comes about via his experiences as a disabled person. Because the story is intensely personal and expresses the struggle within an individual about politics via a personal experience (triggered by a political incident!), we find ourselves caught up in an extremely powerful story. This was also one of the important points that came from the workshop - how much a personal struggle should be restricted (or not) to a political statement. And I find this a pertinent point within any political movement - it can be applied also to the disability movement -the politics within one's personal struggles.

What do you find exciting about the premiere of this play?

I think the most unique and exciting element to the play will be the interesting ensemble work of actors with disabilities working imaginatively and dramatically in the widest sense possible to create a theatrical telling of Albie Sachs' story.

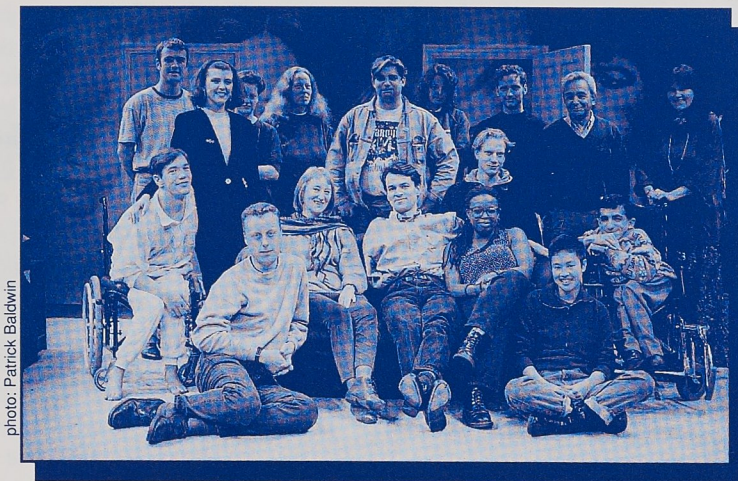


photo: Patrick Baldwin

Graeae Theatre Co. (aka the embarrassing company photo...)

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GRAEAE

gossip

welcome!

It's overdue but, believe it or not - it's *here!*

Welcome to the **first ever** issue of the Graeae Theatre Company's Newsletter! Graeae is unique in that we are the *only* full time professional theatre company run by and for disabled people in Europe. Our work, policy and initiatives are also unique. So we aim to provide you with information about Graeae's up & coming engagements and events. We start **HERE** with "Graeae Gossip" where we catch you up on all the latest news from the home base. In this issue, we look at Graeae Youth Theatre - our latest venture into expanding Disability Theatre. April de Angelis chats to us about writing for our forthcoming production, *Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter*, and Ewan Marshall (our Artistic Director) gives us an insight to what's in store for next season's programme.

We hope you enjoy it!

This newsletter is also available in Large Print, Braille, and on tape.

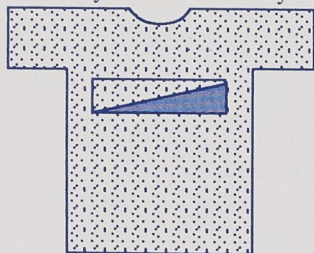
Address enquiries and correspondence to the address on the back.

keeping you up to date

Graeae now has an **extensive computer database** of information covering local groups of disabled people, people interested in our work, local schools etc. We are only able to update this information with support from our supporters and organisations. Why not join our mailing list, or check that your organisation is receiving information about our future work.

fashion essential

Graeae Theatre Company t-shirts are now available. They come in a trendy mottled



grey with a dark blue company logo on the front in M, L and XL. A must for this

summer and only £7.00 a piece! Give the office a call if you would like to order one.

company wheels

For those of you who have seen it, our current Mercedes Van which we use for National Touring is getting a bit old and ropery to say the least!



We are currently attempting to **fundraise** and replace it. This will be no mean task as current prices are around £30,000.00! Obviously, for a company like us it is essential to have a vehicle that can transport the company and actually get to those arts centres in the highlands that want Graeae to perform!! The most important issue is that the van is fully accessible and large enough to carry the company (about 8 people) and all our sets and equipment. You can help with any wacky ideas of how to come up with the cash, or if you know of any companies who may be willing to assist us in adapting the van, then do please get in touch.

audio-visual description service

We are currently researching the implementation of Audio Visual description for our productions.

As far as both ourselves, the RNIB and the London Audio Visual description Service are aware, we will be the first touring theatre company in Europe to attempt such a service.

We would like to hear feedback from anyone who has attended any described shows recently or is interested in helping us with our research. Please contact the office for further information.

We are grateful to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust for their financial support towards this service. **Watch out for details of our described performances in the autumn.**

fancy working with us?

Graeae, like many other arts organisations exists with both paid and voluntary staff. Have you got a few hours a week to spare? **Volunteers** are needed to help out in most areas of our work. We are able to pay expenses and provide basic training for volunteers.

From time to time we are also able to offer work experience placements. Please contact the office to discuss dates etc. Our priority is to offer this service to disabled people.

braille info service

In recent weeks, to the utterings of 'not another computer' and groans from the admin team 'how the hell does this work', we are pleased to announce that Graeae are able to provide all information in **braille**.

Following research we were able to find a translation programme which is suitable for our use and compatible with our computer system. Our thanks to Sensory Vision Aid for their support and training for the installation, and to The Peter Minet Trust for their financial support in establishing the system.

graeae goes international

Well, it seems that not a day goes by at the moment without another Air Mail letter arriving for us. Graeae have been invited to perform in countries such as:

*Sri Lanka * India * United States * Russia * Brazil * Kenya * Canada*



We are grateful to Disabled People's International and The Global Project for all their help and support over recent months in creating better links internationally. It is still the case that Graeae is only company of its kind within Europe and we are keen to develop close working relationships with other organisations of disabled people. If you are on your travels and come across anyone, then do let them know about us!! Amongst these many invitations, we are working on two projects for the Summer and Autumn in particular. Firstly, we have been invited by the American Theatre and Disability Association to participate in their National Conference in Boston during August. Secondly, we have been invited to perform at The Russian Association of Disabled People's Disability Arts Festival in Minsk, Belarus Russia.

Again, as with everything, we are trying to raise money from every source possible!



what is artsline?

Planning an evening out? Don't delay - Call Artsline today.

For anyone who doesn't know us Artsline is **London's one and only access information and advice service on the arts and entertainment for disabled people.** With all the information at our fingertips, we have full access details for theatres, cinemas, art centres, restaurants, nightclubs and music venues.

For all the latest info on the disability arts world, don't forget to read Disability Arts in London Magazine (DAIL). Co-produced by Artsline, DAIL is a monthly magazine packed with news, views and gossip. If you are a disabled person don't miss out, ring us now to obtain your free copy!

In the last few months Artsline has been busier than ever. A week of ads on LBC radio resulted in a flood of calls. Building on the success of this our ads can now be seen daily in the Evening Standard and also riding around London on the side of 11 accessible taxis. No prizes for spotting one!

As usual we have continued our campaign to highlight access issues and discrimination. There has been lots going on. Regular readers of DAIL magazine will know about our ongoing battle with the Royal Opera House. For others, the story so far...Until August last year, the Royal Opera House offered concessions of £16.50 to all disabled people. Then one day a bright spark at the ROH hit on a clever way to increase the box office takings. They decided to raise the ticket price for semi-ambulant disabled people to £49. Several people rang us to draw our attention to the situation. The campaign began. Now, after a demo outside the ROH and several meetings with the staff, the battle continues...

Tony Butler, a disabled man, recently rang Artsline to tell us about the treatment that he and his wife received at an event organised by Capital Radio. The event took place at a club in Ealing. The staff had a bad attitude towards disabled people. Assistance, although booked in advance was given grudgingly. We have since contacted Capital Radio and have given them a list of accessible music venues which we hope they will use when organising future events.

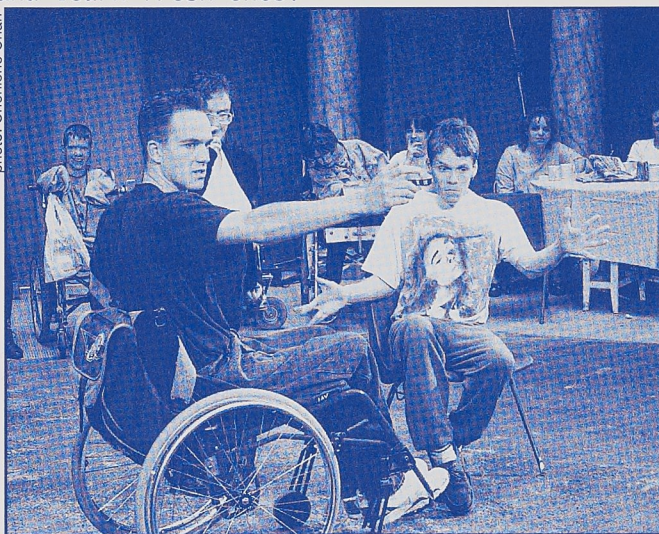
Anybody out there with any horror stories regarding visits to arts venues or anything else you think we should know about, don't see the in silence, call us on 071-388 2227.

new Power Generation

Announcing the arrival of The Graeae Youth Theatre & Training Workshops...

The Graeae staff frequently receive calls asking for experienced disabled performers. It's sometimes quite a problem for us to recommend people when training and opportunities for actors are so limited. But all that is changing. As the result of a successful pilot project back in the Spring, last September saw the launch of the new **Graeae Youth Theatre.** Budding young actors will now have the chance to develop their own improvised shows, improve their acting skills and learn fresh ones.

photo: Cherrilene Chan



**Graeae Youth Theatre
September '92**

The Youth Theatre is open to physically disabled and sight and hearing impaired young people from 14-24 years and meets weekly at Interchange Studios. The sessions include voice and movement work as well as improvisation and other theatre skills and we aim to work towards a major production. If the presentation produced at the end of the pilot four day course is an indication of the talent and imaginative resources of young disabled performers then we are in for some exciting and stimulating theatre.

**"where do we get any training?"
is often the cry from talented performers,
writers, directors and technicians...**

TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Drama schools are not exactly queuing up to admit disabled people on their courses so we at Graeae have a special commitment to offer high quality training opportunities.

From a questionnaire circulated to our past and present members we have compiled a database of existing experience and training needs. We kick off our training programme with a series of workshops in voice and movement, audition technique and improvisation and continue with playwriting, singing, physical theatre and workshop leading.

As far as possible, experienced disabled tutors lead the sessions. Graeae actors have worked in a collaborative project with the Royal Shakespeare Company and a residential course working on Shakespeare text will take place next year. We also plan to set up an agency to advise on casting for theatre, film and TV. Watch this space for further details in the autumn.

Carolyn Lucas



up and coming

nothing more than the odd fabulous production or two??
Ewan Marshall our Artistic Director brings us up to date....

1992 was a very exciting and successful year for Graeae with a launch of two new productions: Maria Oshodi's **HOUND** and Firdaus Kanga's **A KIND OF IMMIGRANT**, both of which went on extensive national tours attracting considerable attention and critical acclaim. If we haven't succeeded in putting Graeae back on the map (we hope we have) then we've certainly crawled all over it. Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Bristol, Birmingham, London...the list seems endless and we mustn't forget our time in Northern Ireland; Derry, Dungannon, Belfast...I think it would be difficult to forget the wild hospitality of the Irish! Other exciting initiatives have come to fruition like the establishment of the **Graeae Youth Theatre** who are currently working on a show, or the series of training workshops and original collaborations such as the week we spent working with the **Royal Shakespeare Company**. We are all looking forward to continuing and expanding our work in 1993,

particularly our planned autumn tour of *Soft Vengeance*, which will be touring internationally as well as nationally and we will be working hard to raise the necessary finance to get us to those places. It is important that international links between disabled artists are established and developed and we will continue to work hard to forge links in this area.

Theatre in Education

As everyone involved with theatre or the education system knows these are increasingly difficult times to maintain a commitment to theatre work in schools. Looking at the situation nationally this is a time where we are seeing the demise of TIE companies and a constant struggle for the survivors. As part of our overall programme Graeae would like to maintain its commitment to TIE work, offering disabled young people a chance to see performances and participate in creating their own drama work. Theatre work with young disabled people is just as important now as it has ever been. Last year we commissioned a report to assess what the current situation was for drama provision in special needs schools and whether it was still possible to take our theatre work to these schools. Following on from the report, we have embarked on an action/research project with **special needs schools** in the London area where, working closely with them, we are re-assessing and devising

theatre provision and hoping to launch a major schools project which will be touring nationally in '94. On recent visits to schools I have found them keener than ever to have Graeae come and work with them but they are struggling with insufficient funding. If our work in schools is to continue and indeed, if TIE as a genre is to continue, some radical re-thinking has to be done over who pays for the work.

Festivals

We have been invited to take part in the **Scottish International Children's Festival in Edinburgh**. This will be the first time the company has visited Scotland for quite some time - apparently it's in Tent City, so all Graeae personnel will be issued with wellies & spades!

London International Festival of Theatre

Ten disabled performers have been invited to work alongside students at the **Peking Opera School** and Beijing Jing Ju Opera Troupe as part of the London International Festival of Theatre. Introducing disabled artists to the 'total theatre' style of the Peking Opera is fantastic in the best sense of the word and is an excellent example of experimentation that attacks the preconceptions and the invisible barriers that can limit theatrical exploration by disabled artists. The performance arising from the residency will be shown to a specially invited audience at the **South Bank Centre** in June.



insider's REPORT

Penny Goater - Arts Council Theatre Administration Trainee (Bursary for a Disabled Person)

I heard about the training bursary via DAIL and I felt I just had to apply! I'd been working as an administration volunteer at the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre in Taunton for a couple of years and this, together with my interest in Disability Arts, made the bursary irresistible!

My training takes place over eighteen months and the time is divided between Graeae and the Royal National Theatre - one year at Graeae and six months at the National. I appreciate the tremendous range of experience this gives me and although only a third of the way through I have already learnt a great deal.

Areas I am covering include financial management, press and marketing, background to arts funding and personnel work. At Graeae I am involved in specific projects such as helping with booking the 'Soft Vengeance' tour, fundraising and administration of the Youth Theatre which I enjoy very much.

Various day courses are included in my training and there are four one-week residential courses that I have to attend, along with the other Arts Council Trainees. The standard of training is very high, and these courses are an opportunity to compare notes and arrange visits to other organisations.

I am delighted to be working at Graeae - it is challenging, enlightening and very hard work! The bursary is a marvellous opportunity for me and I hope I'll do it justice. Meanwhile, thank you to everyone at Graeae for making me feel so welcome and part of the team.



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