



In response to a continuing lack of diversity across the theatre industry, Graeae is crowdfunding to give young D/deaf and disabled people training, work-experience and their first steps into a career in the arts.

Ensemble is an extensive training programme which skills up young D/deaf and disabled artists between the ages of 17 and 26 in theatre making skills, equipping them for a career within the industry or further drama school training. Teaching on the programme is delivered by world-class practitioners, and is run in partnership with leading drama schools¹, ensuring that change is filtered throughout the industry.

As was recently reported in *The Stage*², a zero intake of disabled students had been reported across leading drama schools in 2016. Furthermore, research shows that 22% of disabled students are denied education, training or employment opportunities compared to 15% of non-disabled students³. These statistics illustrate the current issue of barriers faced by many D/deaf and disabled young people - exactly what the Ensemble programme aims to conquer.

A highly successful first year of the Ensemble programme was run from October 2015 to May 2016, with six young artists graduating and performing a showcase at London's Soho Theatre. These artists have gone on to receive further training, as well as being cast in professional productions.

The Crowdfunding campaign will allow this programme to be run for a second year. Donations of any size from £5 upwards are welcome and hugely appreciated; rewards for those over £30 include beautifully packaged postcard sets, signed A3 prints from illustrators involved in the Graeae/Central Illustration Agency February 2016 exhibition *Reframing the Myth*, tickets to future Graeae productions and becoming an Ensemble ambassador. High profile Graeae patrons including **Dame Harriet Walter** and **Jenny Agutter OBE** have endorsed the campaign, which runs until Friday 9 December. www.crowdfunder.co.uk/graeae-ensemble

¹ Partners on year 1 of the Ensemble programme were London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA), Royal Central School of Speech & Drama (RCSSD), Goldsmiths University and Rose Bruford College.

² David Hutchison, *The Stage*, 18 Oct 2016: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/zero-number-of-disabled-or-east-asian-graduates-from-top-drama-schools-in-2016/>

³ Youth Cohort Study & Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, 2010

Quotes

'Our Ensemble redefines how theatre is made and will drive Graeae's mission forward – that we (D/deaf and disabled artists) have a right to be centre stage.'

Jenny Sealey, Artistic Director & CEO, Graeae Theatre Company

'The Ensemble model of learning nurtures the development of new talent whilst also changing the theatre ecology. We need to work together to increase the speed of change needed right now.'

Jodi Alissa Bickerton, Creative Learning Director, Graeae Theatre Company

'I have grown more than I could have imagined. I have worked with some of the industry's best and have managed to break down personal barriers. This was the best way for me to start my career as an actor. Graeae has helped me so much.'

Josh King, Year 1 Ensemble artist

'The strongest quality of the *Ensemble* programme is that it provides a unique learning experience in equal measure for the young people involved, as well as for the individuals and organisations who contribute to the planning and delivery - the programme definitely lives up to its name.'

Rhiannon Fisher, Access & Widening Participation Officer, London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art

'I love the idea of *Ensemble* working with drama schools so that the drama teachers themselves learn more about the needs of D/deaf and disabled performers. Drama students will get to understand that we're all in it together, we're all trying to do the same thing... *Ensemble* is doing a great job in equipping people with skills that they will need in the profession.'

Dame Harriet Walter, Graeae Patron

'I have been a patron of Graeae for many years, they are a brilliant organisation creating exciting, entertaining and provoking theatre for everyone to be able to enjoy and benefit from. The *Ensemble* programme to develop more talented young people is much needed.'

Jenny Agutter OBE, Graeae Patron

'Graeae's Ensemble programme is a vital tool in the training of D/deaf and disabled drama students. As we all strive towards full inclusion in all UK drama schools and theatrical training facilities, Ensemble will offer many of the required skills to young artists who cannot access these mainstream schools due, in a large part, to the lack of access in these old institutions and curriculums. Our hope is that Ensemble encourages more D/deaf and disabled people to engage in professional theatre and highlights how much more inclusive other drama training needs to be, if disabled professionals are going to be trusted and respected with equality in the work place.'

Mat Fraser, Graeae Patron

Editor's notes

Graeae is a force of change in world-class theatre - breaking down barriers, challenging preconceptions and boldly placing D/deaf and disabled artists centre stage. Artistically led by Jenny Sealey, Graeae's signature characteristic is the compelling creative integration of captioning, sign language and audio description, which engages brilliantly with both disabled and non-disabled audiences. Championing accessibility and providing a platform for new generations of artists, Graeae leads the way in pioneering, trail-blazing theatre. Graeae won the Promotion of Diversity Award at the TMA Theatre Awards UK 2012. www.graeae.org

The **Ensemble** programme employs six artists between the ages of 17 and 26 for a period of six months to train with highly qualified freelance and drama school practitioners working intensively in the areas of Vocal Preparation, Physical Theatre, Devising, Classical Text, New Writing, Theatre for Social Change and Workshop Facilitation. Alongside these modules, Ensemble artists also share learning with students from the partner drama schools and are paired with a mentor from the industry who guides, supports and advises on artists' professional development throughout the programme. Throughout the first term, the Ensemble artists develop practical performance skills and a theoretical framework, as well as learning how to use drama as a means for social change and personal exploration. This practical learning feeds into a six-week rehearsal of a play in the second term, which is given a public sharing.

Reframing the Myth was an exhibition held by Graeae and the Central Illustration Agency in February 2016, which interpreted the outstanding artistic achievements of artists that had worked with Graeae over the last 35 years. The Central Illustration Agency partnered 34 of its illustrators alongside 5 additional visual artists chosen by Graeae with 39 of Graeae's creative practitioners and artists to explore their mutual creativity and produce artwork inspired by the experiences of the company's actors, dancers, writers and directors. Merchandise from this exhibition (postcard sets and signed posters) is being offered as rewards for the Crowdfunding campaign.

For any enquiries or interview requests, please contact:

Graeae Press Office

Richard Matthews

Tel: 020 7613 6906

Email: press@graeae.org

Website: www.graeae.org