

# GRAEae

T H E A T R E C O M P A N Y

## About Graeae

Graeae is a force for change in world-class theatre - breaking down barriers, challenging preconceptions and boldly placing Deaf and disabled artists centre stage.



Artistically led by Jenny Sealey, Graeae's signature characteristic is the compelling creative integration of sign language, captioning 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.

The original disabled-led theatre company, Graeae remains firmly rooted at the forefront of its field in the UK, with the valuable patronage of many high profile artists, directors and actors, including Sir Peter Blake, Jenny Agutter, Richard Wilson OBE, Sadie Frost and Dame Harriet Walter.

Not only does Graeae produce outstanding theatre, but the company delivers extensive training programmes and opportunities for aspiring and established actors, directors and writers. A recognised authority in accessible aesthetics, Graeae works closely with client organisations to inspire and lead best practice - creating, supporting and advising on the development of accessible environments for all theatre lovers, everywhere.

Based at Bradbury Studios in Hackney, East London, it is no surprise that Graeae's home sets the benchmark for inclusive practice. The award-winning building, the first of its kind in the UK, has creative access at the core of its design. From tactile flooring to sensitive heating systems, the Graeae offices and studio space are sophisticated and urban... a world away from the kind of institutional buildings often associated with access standards.

## Artistic vision

Graeae is a force for change, creating world-class theatre which explores new territory and theatrical genres, from contemporary classics to musicals to outdoor circus involving sway poles and giant puppets.

Graeae champions the inclusion of Deaf and disabled people in the arts through...

- Developing a new theatrical language in outdoor performance
- Investment in and nurturing Deaf and disabled artists
- Forging new collaborations and exchanges of skills with other companies



## Our history



Graeae was founded in 1980 by Nabil Shaban and Richard Tomlinson. Having met at college in Coventry, creating productions involving disabled people, their shared vision was to dispel images of defencelessness, together with prejudices and popular myths, around disabled people... through theatre, workshops and training.

By May 1980, a company of disabled performers was established to perform the first ever Graeae play *Sideshow*.

Writing in *Disability, Theatre and Education* in 1982, Richard Tomlinson said 'The story (of the Graeae) appealed to both of us. We were happy to concoct morals on the subject of disabled people supporting each other.'

Since 1980, Graeae has achieved an international reputation as a pioneer of accessibility in world-class theatre, with the original impetus of its founders still at its very core.

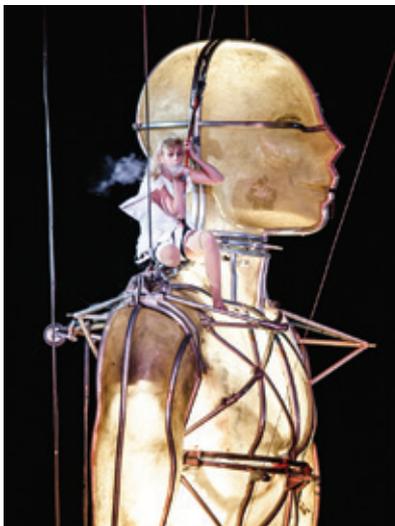
Nabil Shaban remains a patron of the company.

## The Graeae myth

The three wise Graeae sisters of Greek legend shared one eye and one tooth. Perseus stole them, vowing to return the eye and tooth if the sisters revealed how to kill Medusa. But he broke his oath, throwing away their life source. The Graeae ethos is grounded in working together and sharing resources.



## Productions



Graeae tours world-class, diverse, high impact theatre nationally and internationally.

'From the second that the Graeae Theatre Company bestrode the opening ceremony with an incendiary rendition of Ian Dury's *Spasticus Autisticus*, we learned that the Games would not shrink from disability but thrust it proudly and unabashedly in our faces.' **The Telegraph on Graeae's appearance at the London 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony Co-Directed by Jenny Sealey and Bradley Hemmings**

'Watching this version of *Blood Wedding* - and version it most definitely is - I was struck by the realisation that Graeae are pretty much the blueprint for what I wish Mainstream British Theatre was like.' **Andrew Haydon, Postcards from the Gods**

'Forceful, thrilling, stunning...consistently sensitive and thoughtful performances.'  
**The Daily Telegraph on *The Solid Life of Sugar Water***

## Access

Graeae is committed to inclusive working practice for the artists and staff with whom we work, and an accessible theatrical experience for our audiences.

We achieve this through collaboration and consultation with disabled artists and staff. For each project and working situation, we provide bespoke access solutions e.g. confirming wheelchair-accessible venues for productions and workshops, coordinating the provision of access support workers and British Sign Language interpreters, or arranging adaptive technology to facilitate the creative process.

Access is a basic right and requirement, a continually evolving methodology that enhances the theatrical and professional landscape. Accessibility enables theatre practitioners and audiences to create, engage with and enjoy our work.



## New writing



Developing and producing new work is at the heart of what Graeae does.

Our flagship writer development programme **Write to Play** nurtures and develops five new early career writers each year, in partnership with some of the most exciting new writing theatres in the UK. Running alongside **Write to Play**, Graeae's **Play Labs** offer artists a one-day opportunity to explore an idea in an early phase of development.

Our passion for producing all our new work in an accessible way means that access is pivotal to every commission and development process. From idea to page to stage, the route to integrated access challenges and drives our new work, while championing new voices and fresh ways of storytelling.

## Creative learning and training

Graeae has an enviable track record in creating work for and with young people and emerging artists. We believe in a universal entitlement to engage with the arts - as creators, participants and audiences. Each year we present a diverse, inclusive outreach and workshop programme led by our artists in collaboration with strategic partners.



Graeae is committed to a programme of widening participation within formal and informal education from primary schools through to higher education.

We are committed to continuing to develop, a growing pool of Deaf and disabled workshop leaders to deliver extensive outreach programmes, which are run alongside touring productions and as stand-alone projects, workshops and residencies. In 2015-16 we worked with over 5500 people through our youth programmes and professional training, while also reaching audiences of 2000 through our participatory projects, community and youth productions and training programmes.

Created in response to inaccessible mainstream drama training and a lack of diversity in the current theatre climate, Graeae's **Ensemble** programme paves the way for a new generation of theatre makers. Six young artists graduated from the first **Ensemble** training programme in March 2016, which culminated in a sharing at London's Soho Theatre.

# GRAEae

THEATRE COMPANY

Our training and consultancy programmes include:

- a range of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for disabled artists
- specialist workshops in inclusive teaching, rehearsal techniques, creative access and workshop facilitation for directors, casting directors, producers, youth theatre and workshop leaders
- 'Dare You', a programme of diverse leadership training for the corporate sector, delivered by Graeae's Artistic Director Jenny Sealey



## Support us

Graeae is a registered charity and our extensive programme of work is only made possible by the kind support of grant-giving organisations, sponsors and donations from the public. We receive core funding from Arts Council England (ACE). This funding pays for our central running costs, including some staff, and a contribution towards one of our touring productions annually.

In addition to our funding from ACE, we receive support from a number of charitable trusts, foundations and businesses. In recent years, this support has helped us to deliver professional development training for disabled performers and writers, and supported our outreach work with disabled and non-disabled young people in schools and youth groups across the UK.

In 2009 Graeae raised £2.6m to create a new home for the company, Bradbury Studios. The company worked with Artillery Architecture & Interior Design and Paragon Management UK Ltd to develop the site and received the highly coveted British Council for Offices award (Project up to 2000m<sup>2</sup>) 2010 for its innovative approach to accessible design.

We are currently seeking funding for a second year of the **Ensemble** programme, so that we can train up the next generation of Deaf and disabled theatre makers. If you can help, please contact [kevin@graeae.org](mailto:kevin@graeae.org)

## In a nutshell, what is Graeae?

A world-class theatre company that is artistically led by disabled people, pioneering an inclusive new dramatic language that is unparalleled and unprecedented.

**'Graeae rightly holds iconic status nationally and internationally for the innovation and quality of its work. It plays a vital part in the cultural life of this country.'**

**Ruth Mackenzie, Director of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad**

[www.graeae.org](http://www.graeae.org) [@graeae](https://twitter.com/graeae) [f/Graeae](https://www.facebook.com/Graeae)

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