# Graeae Theatre Company. Information for prospective Graeae Board members.

# Graeae: A force for change in world-class theatre.

# Vision.

To create world-class accessible theatre, breaking down barriers and challenging preconceptions by placing Deaf, Disabled and neurodivergent artists centre stage

# Mission.

Graeae’s mission is to ignite artistic curiosity, pioneer a radical dramatic language, champion accessibility and provide a platform and opportunities for new generations of Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists, locally, nationally and internationally, through the creation of trail-blazing theatre.

# Values.

Graeae is a disabled-led human rights company, founded on the need to tackle social injustice, discrimination and exclusion. It is fuelled by the pursuit of inclusion, access and artistic excellence and champions Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people in the creative industry.

# Our History.

Graeae was founded in 1980 by Nabil Shaban and Richard Tomlinson. 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*.

Since then, 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.

# Background.

Artistically led by Jenny Sealey O.B.E, Graeae’s signature characteristic is the compelling creative integration of sign language and audio description, which engages 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 C.B.E, Dame Emma Thompson D.B.E and Jack Thorne F.R.S.L.

Not only does Graeae produce outstanding theatre, but the company delivers extensive training programmes and opportunities for aspiring and established actors, directors and writers. Additionally, Graeae inspires and leads 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 U.K, has creative access at the core of its design.

We are often asked how Graeae is pronounced, we appreciate it may not be obvious, so we are happy to share the correct pronunciation which is, grey, eye.

# Graeae and 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.

For each project and working situation, we provide bespoke access solutions for example, arranging access at venues for productions and workshops, coordinating access support, or arranging adaptive technology to facilitate the creative process.

Graeae is committed to pioneering and evolving the aesthetics of access, continually exploring new ways to weave in layers of accessibility and communication, such as B.S.L interpretation and audio description. The aesthetics of access is now a recognised signature characteristic across Graeae productions.

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.

# Looking to the future.

Graeae’s 2023 to 20026 national strategy opens up the cultural landscape for disabled artists, participants and audiences countrywide.

We have a battalion of allied arts venues and training partners working with us to dismantle the barriers faced by independent artists by building connections with theatres, arts organisations and training providers, establishing the next generation of arts leaders.

The strategy will deepen our engagement with our community by delivering a lush, intersectional, disabled-led tapestry of art and culture and bold, radical, creatively stimulating theatre.

The collaboration with trusted partners nationally, and in particular, the North West in Knowsley, and Liverpool, and East in Colchester and wider Essex, is focussed on delivering a cohesive pathway to culture for disabled people as artists, participants and audiences.

Our accessible London Head Quarters remains a vital resource for our artists, but we are aware of imminent rental increases.

Disabled artists, throughout their journey, will have the opportunity to ignite, connect and hone their craft - in London (particularly in Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest) and in the North West of England.

Working with partners such as Shakespeare North Playhouse, Liverpool Everyman, Action Transport Theatre and 20 Storeys High, we will start to build opportunities at every stage of an artists’ development.

The strategy comprises six strategic aims. These are:

1. **Create world-class theatre**: produce and tour high quality, high impact theatre that is unmistakably Graeae’s, providing a platform for the skill and excellence of disabled artists.

2. **Find new audiences**: ensure the work has a lasting impact across England, unleashing creativity in regions and communities, working with groups that have little access to art and culture and on a variety of platforms.

3. **Champion accessibility**: partnerships with national and international organisations creating, supporting and advising on accessible environments and practice.

4. **Nurture talent**: work with national partners to open up the arts for disabled artists at all experience levels. Create new environments for theatre-makers to thrive and build independence.

5. Promote **excellent governance** and leadership across the company, the theatre sector and other businesses. Open up routes to leadership roles.

6. **Explore new creative horizons**: by scrutinising our practice and exploring new processes and by representing a greater diversity of voices on stage.

# What you might like to know as a prospective Chair of the Board.

Graeae is established as a Registered Charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee. This means we are set up as a non-profit organisation that is intended to deliver what we regard as an important vision and mission.

In appointing a new Chair, we are looking for a Deaf or Disabled person who is prepared to make the commitment to the Company, is willing to learn as well as teach, and has some understanding of the challenges and opportunities Graeae faces.

We acknowledge that there are different routes through to leadership roles for Deaf and Disabled people and that Board Membership may not have been accessible or on offer to some applicants in the past.

As Chair, you will have experience of governance or leadership in some form. We are flexible to how this is defined. No qualifications are required.

However, if you are interested in joining the Board and don’t think you have the experience necessary to be Chair, we would still like to hear from you as there are other Board Member roles available.

# Composition of the Board.

Graeae’s trustees are recruited for their specialist skills or knowledge and because they are representative of those with a stake or interest in the charity’s work. Board members may also be recruited for their status, influence, contacts or public standing but this is not a primary concern.

# What you can expect of us.

If you ask any Graeae Board members present or past they will all tell you that being a Board member is a stimulating, challenging and rewarding role. It offers the chance to work with a dedicated, committed, resourceful and professional group of people including staff team, Board and advisers, in an innovative and challenging environment. In becoming a Board member we will invite you to use your skills, experience and attitude to:

* Make a real difference to the future of theatre practice.
* Help develop meaningful opportunities for disabled performers and creative practitioners.
* Support the production of theatre which challenges perceptions and pushes boundaries.
* Actively engage with the strategic decisions and planning necessary to ensure Graeae thrives.
* Deepen understanding of the lives of people from a range of social backgrounds and cultures.

As a new Board member you will receive a thorough induction to the Company, ongoing training as appropriate and the support of your other Board members and the Graeae staff team.

# What we will expect of you.

Board members are asked to commit to the following:

* Attendance at all Board meetings, normally 4 per year.
* Attendance at a minimum of 3 Graeae performances or events per year.
* Attendance at sub-committee meetings or working groups as appropriate, up to 4 times per year.
* Providing contacts who can help provide support, advice or funding.
* Attending stakeholder meetings or networking on behalf of Graeae.
* Being alert to opportunities that would further the Graeae vision and mission.
* Becoming familiar with Graeae’s business and financial models, finances, budget, and financial/resource needs.
* Understanding our policies and procedures.
* Helping communicate and promote Graeae’s mission and programmes to stakeholders, artists, and audiences.
* Supporting Graeae in a manner commensurate with your abilities and expertise.
* Act in the best interests of Graeae at all times.
* Declare any conflicts of interest as soon as reasonably practicable where these may arise, and withdraw from decision-making as appropriate.

Board members are also responsible for the selection, appointment and development of new Board members and as such are required to:

* Monitor the skills, knowledge and experience of the Board’s membership.
* Ensure the Board has the competences and abilities to achieve its aims.
* Identify your own development and/or support needs and with the Company make arrangements for these to be met.
* Participate in training as required.
* Maintain an up-to-date knowledge of the sector.

# Board member recruitment policy and process.

Vacancies occur from time to time on the Graeae Board when Board members reach the end of their term or service or have to leave because of other commitments. When a vacancy is identified we:

1. Prepare an outline of the sorts of skills and experience we are looking for from a prospective Board member.
2. Undertake an open and accessible process to fill the vacancy including:
* Making the vacancy known to as wide an audience as possible. This may also involve current Trustees or staff making the vacancy known to their contacts and seeking to get expressions of interest from suitable people.
* Appointing a recruitment panel for each Board member vacancy being advertised. The panel will assess an applicant’s skills in relation to the role description, as well as their ability to meet minimum requirements of a Graeae Board member as outline in Appendices one and two.
* The interview panel will make recommendations to the Board after which successful applicants will be invited to attend two Board meetings as an observer. Appointments are then confirmed and made formal at the Annual General Meeting.

Graeae aims to ensure that no prospective Board member receives less favourable treatment on any of the grounds listed in its Equality and Diversity policy. Our recruitment procedures are reviewed regularly to ensure that individuals are treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities and sufficiently diverse sectors of our communities are reached.

# How to apply.

We will need a C.V and a covering letter, letting us know why you are interested in joining the Board and what skills and experience you could offer Graeae.

You can apply in writing. Please use between 500 and 1000 words.

You can apply with an audio recording or a video. Please make this recording or video between 3 and 6 minutes long.

If you would like access support in completing your application, you can request this through our Access Manager, Vicky Berry at vicky@graeae.org V.I.C.K.Y, at, G.R.A.E.A.E dot O.R.G.

You can send your application to our Executive Director, Kevin Walsh, at kevin@graeae.org K.E.V.I.N, at, G.R.A.E.A.E, dot, O.R.G.

Or you can send your application by post to, Board Recruitment, Graeae Theatre Company, Bradbury Studios, 1.3.8 Kingsland Road, London, E.2.8.D.Y.

The deadline for applications is 18 October, 2024.

We hope to meet shortlisted applicants in the week commencing 11 November, 2024.