

Theatre Shows Accessibility

Arts Access Aotearoa's Arts For All Network supports Deaf and disabled artists, and individuals and organisations, who are working to become more accessible and inclusive in the arts. Anyone involved in or passionate about the arts and culture sector nationwide can connect with us to access information, advice and resources for free.

We can support network members in providing accessible performances during your show season.

We've put together introductory information about accessibility options we'd love you to consider for your season. By making your shows more accessible, you can increase your audience base, connect with a diverse range of people, and support our mission to ensure everyone has access to the arts.

Audio Description:

Audio description is a live narrated commentary for blind and vision impaired patrons that provides descriptions of what's happening on stage in between the dialogue or songs, such as body language, facial expression, movements across the stage and sight gags.

[Audio Described Aotearoa](#) is one option for booking qualified audio describers. There are also independent audio describers we can put you in touch with.

Arts Access Aotearoa have a steno mask and headsets available for hire.

[More information about audio description](#)

NZ Sign Language Interpretation:

Qualified Sign Language interpreters interpret what is being said on stage for Deaf people who use New Zealand Sign Language to communicate. You can use the conventional approach with the interpreter at the side of the stage, or integrate the interpreter into the action on stage. Integrating an interpreter into the action will require prior preparation and rehearsal time.

NZSL interpreters are in high demand and need to be booked in advance. It's always best to work in partnership with Deaf consultants to ensure your show is right for NZSL interpretation. You can contact [Platform Interpreting NZ](#), an agency specialising in NZSL interpreting for live events, to learn more. Other agencies include [iSign](#) and [Wordsworth](#). You can also have a look at the [interpreter directory](#).

[More information about NZSL interpretation](#)

Relaxed performance:

A relaxed performance is a comfortable and inclusive experience open to anyone who appreciates a judgement free atmosphere, preparation information, breakout space, and a relaxed attitude toward noise and movement. These shows may be especially welcomed by autistic, neurodivergent, sensory sensitive and disabled audience members.

In Aotearoa, **relaxed performances** focus on accessibility before and during the show and relaxing rigid theatre etiquette, without making changes to the lighting, sound, tech elements, or performance itself, and can include a range of different features and resources. **Sensory relaxed performances** may also include technical changes such as softening the lighting or sound or high sensory technical elements. You may consider either or both of these for your season.

We can share information about developing specific resources and setting up the relaxed performance structure that suits your show best. We can also provide advice about setting up breakout spaces, pre-show announcements, and other ways of welcoming your audience. These adaptable performances can fit any show- even a rock concert!

General Accessibility

Even without adding specific accessible programmes, we hope you will consider having some key general accessibility features.

Pre-show information will let audiences know what to expect, from arriving at the theatre all the way to the show starting. You can create simple text and image documents and/or videos which show what the venue is like, what is and isn't accessible, and how to navigate or ask for help. These resources will be useful to Deaf and disabled audience, first time theatregoers, non-English speaking patrons, and anyone wanting more detailed information. You can also include information directly on a website and at the theatre itself. We can support you in creating this information.

[Example of pre-show information](#)

Accessible marketing ensures that everyone can learn about, and consider attending, your show. We can support you to make sure your digital and print communications are accessible and help connect you with Deaf and disabled communities.

Welcoming Deaf and disabled artists with accessible auditions, rehearsals, and show seasons means you won't miss out on the opportunity to work with talented performers who have access requirements. From your audition notice to opening night, there are many ways to make your work accessible- and we can help.

Welcoming your audience to be themselves by embracing audience members using headphones, fidget toys, sunnies, or other comfort items, and having a

supportive attitude toward patrons using devices for accessibility or having specific access requests.

Additional Accessibility Options

The above are only some options you may consider- accessibility can take on many forms. We can also support you with your own accessibility ideas, practices and goals. You may also consider these options, which can be paired with the accessibility programmes above, or stand alone to have little to no additional cost involved. We can help you develop:

- **Descriptive notes** provide detailed descriptions of set, costumes and characters and can be useful preparation resources for audience members
- **Touch tours** invite patrons onstage before the show to explore the set, props, and costumes, and possibly meet the performers
- **Show specific information resources** like a show summary or details about technical and special effects help audiences know what the show includes and if it's right for them
- **Integrating accessibility** such as embedding audio description or NZSL into the show itself
- **Access tickets and companion tickets** which can help remove cost barriers experienced by Deaf and disabled patrons

Please get in touch with us at afa@artsaccess.org.nz to learn more about joining the Arts For All Network and how we can support your accessibility goals and mahi for your show this year.