

Newsletter Autumn 2025

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Editorial

Thank you to all who contributed to this autumn edition of the ADAS newsletter. I do hope you enjoy the articles, links and pictures.

The next Newsletter will be published in March, so please save up any anecdotes, photos, links and news for me then, especially with Panto season kicking off any day soon! Send to address below.

But meanwhile, I hope you all have a wonderful Festive Season – oh yes you will!

Until new administrator is appointed, please contact me directly to make suggestions, post an item, or send a photograph.

Thank you – Veronica Kinahan

E mail: veronica@kinahan.co.uk

Notes from the Chair - Amanda Foster

Here's a roundup of what's happening at ADAS and something about what I've done at the fringe.

First, some good news. We are updating our web site so it's more up-to-date and so we will be able to update it ourselves which we're not able to do at the moment.

Now we have 2 bits of sad news. Miriam, who was our administrator, has resigned because she has a new job. Miriam has been excellent and has worked so hard for our cause. She will be greatly missed and wish her well in the future. We are in the process of interviewing for a replacement.

Also, Veronica has had to resign from the Committee owing to personal reasons, but she will carry on editing the newsletters. Thanks, Veronica, for everything you have done since joining the Committee.

Many of you know Kirin who runs VICS - Visually Impaired Creative Scotland - which helps visually impaired people to become an actor, comedian, ETC or to work in backstage jobs.

Kirin invited me to come down to Edinburgh for the festival because a company called Extant who is VICS counterpart in England wanted to trial a different type of audio description called enhanced description. Before a show, there would be a touch tour and programme notes delivered by the company - but no actual audio description.

I listened to 3 shows with this type of access. The first one was called '**Big Little Sister**' about someone whose brother had cerebral palsy. The enhanced description worked very well with this because the lady who did the show did some description during it so we knew what was happening at all times.

The next one was called '**I think it could work**' which had three people performing circus acts. The touch tour worked very well as the people were explaining what they were going to do. The problem was that when it started; because it was so visual, all the blind people who were there forgot a lot of what had been said during the touch tour and also a lot was actually missed so we were totally lost. Kirin managed to get someone to explain what was happening to me but in my view, this did not work.

The third play was '**Small Town Boy**', set when Aids appeared in the 80s. This was the same as the circus play but this time, there was dancing all the way through. We thought there would have been audio as well as the dancing but there was not. At the time, I was sitting beside someone from Extant and the person didn't describe what happened, so it wasn't the best. I filled in the feedback form and said that this type of access is fine in a dialogue heavy play but not for anything visual.

I really enjoyed the experience and atmosphere and I'd just like to say thanks to Kirin for giving me the opportunity to do this because I wouldn't have been able to do this had I not had help from her support workers.

Please email me with any comments -

aburt123@sky.com.

Thank you – from Amanda

Two links about Arts Accessibility:

1. Sight Scotland are working to improve accessibility across the arts

Our chair Amanda appears in the link below, talking about audio description and touch tours at a rehearsal of *The Seagull* at the Royal Lyceum Theatre

<https://news.stv.tv/v/sight-scotland-calls-for-better-arts-accessibility-for-blind-audiences>

2. Collaboration of the senses': Royal Ballet teams up with blind artist for new show

Devon Healey, a blind artist, is collaborating with Sir Wayne McGregor, among other choreographers, and the composer Max Richter in creating a new Royal [Ballet](#) commission that will be premiered on 12 November, World Ballet Day. Please see the link below:

https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/oct/16/a-collaboration-of-the-senses-royal-ballet-teams-up-with-blind-artist-for-new-show?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

The London debut of JB Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls', was the scene of rivalry between the actors Ralph Richardson and Alec Guinness. The former hated the latter's squeaky shoes and, one night, Guinness couldn't find them. Richardson had put them in a bucket of water. "I squelched noisily through the last act," Guinness said, "and then missed two performances through near pneumonia."

NO WORDS AND PRETTY MINIMALIST PROPS TOO!

I suppose the dream show to be asked to audio describe would be one where the dialogue proceeds at the same steady pace every performance, with clear distinction between the voices of the various characters, at a volume level which is consistent, and with just the right number and duration of gaps in the dialogue for us to insert exactly what needs to be said, and when.

Lydia Kerr and I were excited to be asked to describe a groundbreaking show from Belgium called *Works & Days* having its UK premiere as part of the 2025 Edinburgh International Festival but, to be honest, I don't think we had fully grasped that this would be a play with no words at all! When the EIF brochure was eventually released several months after we'd signed the contract, we read the characterisation of the play as "a wordless piece, a visual spectacle, a living painting". You might think that this would give us free rein to talk non-stop, with no worries about crashing the dialogue, but of course that would not have been appropriate or desirable for all sorts of reasons.

Lydia and I discussed how we would approach this and agreed that it was going to be more of a

challenge even than the content which the brochure warned contained a lot of loud noise, nudity, sexual themes and fake blood. We couldn't wait!

Without the EIF's extremely helpful Warm Up, a bite-sized audio introduction to the performance, we would possibly have found it quite puzzling, at least to begin with, and it has to be said that conversations could be overheard at the end of the opening night between some audience members who hadn't had the faintest idea what was going on. Having a video recording, and the printed script (albeit in a rather quirky translation) was hugely helpful for us and, although we only had three opportunities to see the show live, we came to admire, enjoy and even understand it.

Audio describers always have to be adaptable and the fact that there was no interval in this show meant that Lydia and I had to share the rather cosy space of the AD box at the Lyceum, and practise a seamless, soundless changeover about halfway through. A potential problem for describers at the Lyceum is having their view from the AD box obstructed by audience members seated in the back row of the upper circle, but our wonderful boss, EIF Access Manager Callum Madge, was able to arrange things so that this ceased to be a problem.

It is always an honour to be asked to describe an EIF production and working for/with Callum is a real pleasure. He has a huge number of responsibilities (his job description must be at least twenty pages long) and is clearly committed to the development of access. He gives us audio describers a great deal of encouragement and support, and I believe we can be of assistance to him in the general area of marketing and promotion of audio description, particularly in the identification of blind and partially sighted people for whom the Edinburgh International Festival would be a new experience.

Bridget Stevens

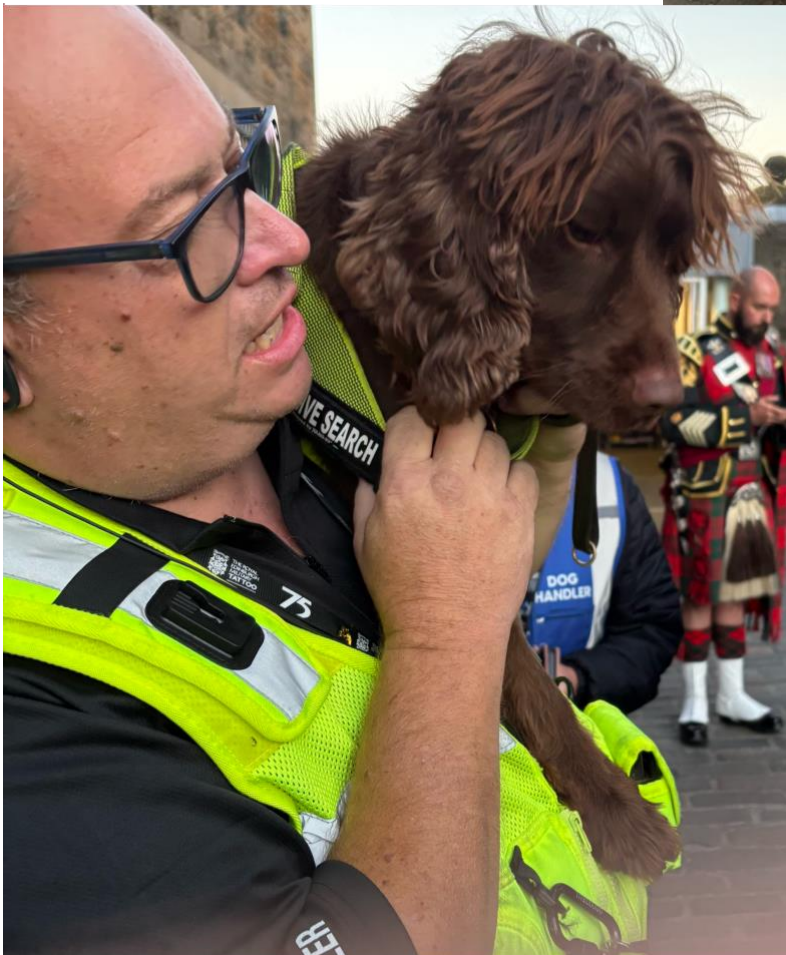
A prize to anyone who can identify this! (picture below)



The **Edinburgh Royal Military Tattoo** brings joy and pride to so many – not least to the team of Audio Describers! This year, guests from the **Armed Forces of Ukraine** added poignancy, as their country continues to defend military invasion and attack, taking place even as they were performing on the Esplanade. The female dancers had very bright outfits as in the picture below: red calf length slouch boots, with layered skirts, white floral embroidered shirt, with black velvet waistcoat and apron heavily embroidered with colourful floral patterns. Their traditional flower crown (Vinok) is bright red and green, packed with interwoven flowers, with long matching ribbons flowing from it, looking like a maypole.



The **Polish Border Guard** (right) wear an edelweiss badge on their calf-length khaki green capes, held round their shoulders by white braid. This badge signalled that they originated from the Tatra mountains of Poland - and they were very proud of being Highlanders. They didn't speak much English, but I taught one of them the word 'fluffy', because their hats had two white (fluffy!) eagle feathers tucked in their round brimmed hats. Every time I met the guardsman again, I was greeted with a big smile and 'Fluffee'.



And talking of fluffy, we met a gorgeous Tattoo sniffer dog, unfazed by bagpipes and bayonets.

A 'Blues Brothers look-alike' member of the US Airforce Honor Guard Drill Team, (right) explains that they all wear dark glasses because the overhead spotlights might hamper their split second 'fixed bayonet' throwing.

He is in full Airforce blue dress uniform, with white gloves and silver braid over and down his left shoulder



Gary, a young veteran (left) who had been blinded in conflict, enjoys holding the bagpipes. Casually dressed in zipped purple fleece, he is talking to a smiling female member of the Tattoo pipe band, in full highland dress, complete with four medals and huge sporrán. Gary showed me his 'magic glasses' which correctly identified Edinburgh Castle!

OPERA AND ACROBATS

Describing opera can sometimes be a bit challenging, having to factor in the surtitles, describe lavish costumes and sets.

Describing acrobatic performances can also be a bit of a challenge - getting the terms correct, trying to describe the actions of 8 people all doing something different.

So put these together and what do you get? ***Orpheus and Eurydice*** at this year's Edinburgh Festival.

Time was very limited, with a Dress Rehearsal on the Tuesday, first night on Wednesday, our rehearsal on Friday then AD performance on Saturday. No problem though - we were given a recording to work from in advance. Having spent a fair amount of time working with this, and downloading information from a circus movement website, we toddled along to the Dress Rehearsal to discover that most of the movement was different from the recording - oh joy!

Not having described in the Playhouse before, we didn't really know what to expect, but the staff were extremely helpful. The AD box unfortunately is basically a cleaner's cupboard (we could have taken our washing in!). The monitor is good quality, except for when there are certain lighting effects – and then the stage is bleached totally and you really can't see what's going on.

The opening was spectacular- Euridice is suspended very high up on a circus rope and slowly twirls and summersaults her way down to Hades. Unfortunately for us, the director decided to fill this with atmospheric smoke, so carefully prepared introduction became a bit of a guessing game.

We also missed being able to judge audience reaction, which was very important in this show. There were many occasions when the audience would audibly gasp – in fact one member of the audience quite literally jumped out of their seat! So we needed to describe succinctly a lot of complicated acrobatic moves as performers were thrown across the stage and caught by someone else, or a tower of 3 rotated and then slowly collapsed on to the stage.

The upside of this type of performance was that there was virtually no scenery, and minimalist costumes, so that saved a bit of time in the introduction. It also did not have an interval, so we had to pick a point roughly half-way through which was suitable for shimmying in and out of the chair.

It was an absolutely stunning show with beautiful music as well, performed by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra plus the chorus from Scottish Opera. Somehow the acrobatics did not really impinge on the opera as much as we thought they might - both worked really well together.

And once we had come to terms with all the leaping about, it was a joy to describe and a relief when we 'got it right'.

Trina Gillies & Veronica K

Here is the YouTube trailer of the show, with some music – and a lot of leaping and throwing.
<https://youtu.be/U4PVSuiZWx8?si=vinnJPCWWK0sXcb8>

Pictures of the opera are on the page below.



Two girls face one other, upside down, each balanced on one arm while another stands on their necks and holds up their legs.



A red dressed acrobat is suspended lying back, a silk rope hooked under her outstretched arms. Another acrobat holds her feet



A red-dressed acrobat is flung high in the air, about to be caught by four people below

The words 'The Triumph of Love' is smeared in blood-red paint on the white backdrop

All photos © Jess Shurte/EIF

Talking of opera.....During one performance of the opera *Don Giovanni*, the protagonist descended into Hell through a trapdoor. Sadly for him, the lift jammed, and so the reprobate was still half-visible as the music ended, leaving the Don to declare: "Good news! Hell is full!"

WHAT AUDIO DESCRIPTION MEANS TO ME

ANNE DIGNAN

Audio description to me is an accessible tool to the most wonderful performances in any of the arts settings. Without audio description I would be imagining all sorts of things that would not be relevant to the plot or the action on the stage whether it be opera or a play.

I was first aware that there was a marked change in my eyesight when I was sitting watching the opera, Aida. Good seats in the grand circle were my annual treat during the summer holidays when I was teaching. I noticed I could no longer read the surtitles although I felt my seat was relatively quite close to them. It was only after this that I went back to my optician to say there was a massive and worrying change in how my eyes were working.

After my diagnosis as being severely sight impaired due to dry macular degeneration I thought my world was closing in on me. I thought I could never go to the theatre or attend an opera performance ever again because I relied so much on the surtitles. However, when a friend introduced me to audio description, I could not believe that I was getting some of my independence back. It was such a joyful moment and I have never looked back - pardon the pun!

Audio description is an extension of my eyes and ears. The audio describer paints a visual image of what is happening on stage. Because I am also hearing impaired, without the use of headsets and having a description of the sets plus the characters and their costumes, I would not be able to have a reasonable grasp of the story as it unfolds. I love to imagine what each of the characters are, how they would react, what they are thinking and what their end game is in the storyline.

Even when I could actually read a book cover to cover, I always painted my own picture of the characters. I am a visual thinker and so now, as the story unfolds, I can see the action in pictures, frame by frame. This is where audio description really comes into its own, because listening to the dialogue through my headset and having the audio describer describing what is happening on the set, really gives me the licence to 'have a ball' as I let my imagination develop my own personal take on the storyline. It is very helpful that the costumes are described as well, because even if I cannot see the characters clearly on the stage, I may be able to pick out, for example, a character who is wearing a tall hat or a character who is dressed in vibrant purple feather boas.

Audio described performances are often coupled with touch tours whereby you can enjoy the privilege of going up on to the stage. To look out at the auditorium and then turn round to find the audio describers alongside stage management and sometimes members of the cast, makes me feel so privileged as I definitely do feel I am being treated as a VIP - and I mean VIP in the sense of very important person as well as visually impaired person.

To my mind it takes a special kind of person who is devoted to improving the lives of people who have limited vision, if indeed any vision at all. Many people do not appreciate the hard work which goes into preparing a descriptive piece for any individual show and I always admire the attention to detail that the describers put into their scripts.

Over the years it has been a great honour to get to know many of the audio describers personally. They are so friendly and approachable when they meet and greet you at front of house of the theatre and it's always nice to be able to put the 'headset' voice to a face. So please take this as a heartfelt thank you to each and every one of the audio describer team. 'Thank you' does not seem to be adequate to express how I feel about being able to access this wonderful service.

Anne Dignan

Describing Sex and Eroticism

The Audio Description Association UK regularly sends round an email regarding skill-set sessions on various topics – a chance to brush up on different skills, meeting people all over the world who ‘tune in’.

September’s Skill Set immediately caught my eye: ‘**Describing Sex and Eroticism for Stage and Screen**’, especially as the session was being led by my namesake (but with a K), Veronika Hyks, who has decades of screen and stage AD experience. The on-screen participants (all women) zoomed in from America, Italy, Argentina as well as UK.

Veronika talked about how to describe sex or similar activity on stage and screen – anything from a tentative kiss to full on sexual activity and everything in between – without being too graphic, or too po-faced or timid, conveying the mood without being indelicate or laughably clunky.

We talked about Jilly Cooper (flowery language), told to avoid euphemisms, steering a path between ‘nether regions’ and ‘nuts’; how the sound of OUR voices was crucial – and how little could be said to set the scene. ‘After the trousers come off’, say nothing if the sheets are rustling’ !!

We learned about the role of ‘intimacy co-ordinator’ and what this means for film and TV sets – and audio description. We were told about the training for this role – and the fact that it’s very well paid (Don’t all rush!)

We discussed explicit erotica; not for the faint hearted, but apparently there is a market for it being audio described! This led us on to a clip from the famous (infamous?) ‘50 Shades of Grey’ film, starring Dakota Johnson and Jamie Dornan. Having watched it without AD, we then watched the same clip with the audio description, which was done ‘deadpan’ and immediately dismissed as laughable.

My honest opinion? I have read out a Tesco shopping list with more excitement (mind you, this might be my age, ha ha!)

This led on to a much more interesting discussion about adverbs. Could we, as audio describers, use a word to enhance what is happening without putting our ‘spin’ on it? And which word would fit? eg He gazed at her tenderly/ longingly/ lustfully/ dismissively/angrily and so on. How do we keep being observational and not interpretable?

All in all, it was a very interesting session, making us all think a great deal about the words and tone of voice used to describe sensuality on stage and screen.

Veronica Kinahan

GK Chesterton, the author and philosopher is best known today for his Father Brown mysteries. Chesterton was a man of substance, physically as well as creatively, because he weighed in at more than 20 stones.

During the First World War, a patriotic matron harangued him for not joining up. “Why are you not out at the front?” she asked, to which he replied: “Madam, if you go round to the side, you will find that I am.”

Reminder from the ADA(S) Administrator

Email: - admin@adascotland.com

ADA(S) Facebook Page and Twitter account :

Facebook: - <https://www.facebook.com/ScotlandAda2>

Twitter: - <https://twitter.com/ScotlandAda>

Theatre Contacts

	Name of theatre	Telephone number
Aberdeen	His Majesty's Theatre	01224 641122
Ayr	The Gaiety Theatre	01292 270920
Cumbernauld	Cumbernauld Theatre	01236 737235
Dundee	Dundee Rep	01382 223530
Edinburgh	Festival and Kings	0131 529 6000
	Royal Lyceum	0131 248 4848
	Playhouse	0131 557 2692
	Traverse	0131 228 3223
Glasgow	King's	0141 332 3321
	Theatre Royal	0141 332 3321
	Tron	0141 552 4267
	Citizens	0141 429 0022
Inverness	Eden Court	01463 234234
Perth	Perth Theatre	01738 621031
Pitlochry	Pitlochry Festival Theatre	01796 484626
St. Andrew	Byre Theatre	01334 475000
Stirling	Macrobert Arts Centre	01786 466666

For updated information check our website www.adascotland.com

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