

## 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 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 and Richard Wilson.

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...

- intensive actor and writer training initiatives
- providing access support for all creative and learning situations
- empowering young disabled artists to pursue a career in the arts through workshops led by inspiring role models
- providing training models for the creative sector, from inclusive practice for drama schools to accessible e markets for theatre venues



## 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*.

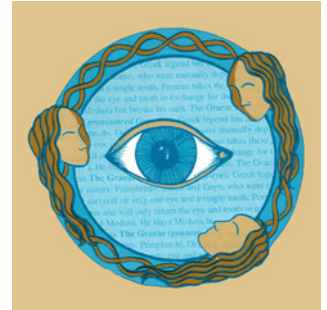
Writing in *Disability, Theatre and Education* in 1982, Richard Tomlinson said 'The story (of the Graeae) appealed to both of us. We were happy to concoct morals on the subject of disabled people supporting each other.'

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.

“Jenny Sealey’s production goes to immense, creative and sometimes thrilling lengths to make itself legible to people with impaired vision and hearing.” *The Scotsman on Blasted*

Recent acclaimed productions include

- ***Reasons to be Cheerful*** by Paul Sirett  
“A Graeae Theatre Company triumph” Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*
- ***Signs of a Star-Shaped Diva*** by Nona Sheppard  
“A remarkable piece of theatre” *British Theatre Guide*
- and the current award-winning outdoor production of Ted Hughes’ ***The Iron Man***, adapted by Paul Sirett  
“This kind of captivating, unique show is what the festival is all about” *Latest 7 Magazine*

## 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 passion for performing stories in an accessible way means that access is pivotal to every commission process. From idea to page to stage, the route to integrated access challenges and drives our new work.

By enabling, developing and producing the work of established and emerging writers, we champion a tradition of integrated access and equal representation.

Our commission and development process explores the possibilities for integrated accessible communication within every play, including on-stage sign language interpreters, use of film or recorded sound, captioning, power point projections and audio description. Our unique approach nurtures and promotes new ways of performing and telling stories - this is what is known as the '**Graeae Aesthetic**'.

## 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 have, and are 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. Over the past year, we have delivered over 170 workshops to more than 1,400 participants across the UK.

Our recent large education programme, Urban Access, was delivered in collaboration with the theatre company Kazzum, as part of A New Direction's Olympic-themed programme. 'The Biggest Learning Opportunity on Earth?' is an innovative London-wide partnership programme, exploring the value of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games as a learning opportunity for young Londoners.

Our training and consultancy programmes include:

- a range of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for disabled artists, including Circus Arts at Circus Space
- specialist workshops in inclusive teaching, rehearsal techniques, creative access and workshop facilitation for directors, casting directors, producers, youth theatre and workshop leaders



## Funding

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 the Arts Council and we recently received confirmation of funding for a further three years (2012-15). This funding pays for our central running costs, including some staff and a contribution towards our core programme of work.

In addition to our core funding from ACE funding, we receive support from a number of charitable trusts, foundations and businesses including the City Bridge Trust, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and Trust for London for our training and education programmes.

Graeae was allocated ACE funding of £2.6m to build our new home Bradbury Studios. To consolidate funding for the project Graeae launched an ambitious appeal in 2008 which raised over £350,000 from trusts and foundations including the Bradbury Foundation, Clothworkers' Foundation, John Ellerman Foundation, Equity Trust Fund, The Wolfson Foundation and Awards for All.

Graeae worked with Artillery Architecture & Interior Design and Paragon Management to develop the site that became Bradbury Studios and received the highly coveted British Council of Offices award (Project up to 2000m<sup>2</sup>) 2010.

## 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 has been at the forefront of theatre and disability arts for the last 30 years.”**

**Boris Johnson, Mayor of London**

[www.graeae.org](http://www.graeae.org)

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