**Sue Hyland**

Somewhere in the eighties we were invited to the Theatre Royal Windsor, to their, they were celebrating their fiftieth description of a play. Audio description was very new in the country; it had come from America. Um, I could give you a history of audio description but, you know, that would probably take a long time. Anyway, it had been invented in America, it was just coming in to this country, there were only one or two theatres in the country that were doing it, and also this one. We went along, I sat in the audience, my husband and I sat in the audience, I sat next to a blind gentleman, the curtain was down, er it was a production of Private Lives, and er the gentleman beside me said Isn't it a wonderful set, and I couldn't see a thing, the curtain was down. And he had a headset on, and he'd been listening to a pre-description of what the set was going to look like, and I was absolutely captivated by this, and er then we went backstage, we met some of the, the blind folks who'd been listening to the description, we met the people doing the description. It was a very cold and frosty night, I remember it very clearly, I remember driving back to Chichester. We stopped for petrol, and when my husband got in the car I said We've got to do this in Chichester! And he said, Yes, yes we have. So we came back, um, he inspired the theatre society, they said Yes, you know, we'll, we'll support you in this, we'll, you know, provide some money, and all that kind of thing. Um, Patrick Garland was then Director. He was very enthused by it, um, so I went back to the Theatre Royal Windsor with er, four or five other people, I think mainly teachers, people who are confident in speaking, and that kind of thing and we trained with the RNIB and the audio describers at Windsor, we went back for several weekends of training, and we brought audio description in at the year that Kenneth Branagh came, and the first play we described was Kenneth Branagh in Coriolanus.

**Karen Robinson**

RNIB, SORRY, IT'S ROYAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND?

**Sue Hyland**

Royal NIB, yeah. Sorry, yes. And er, and description has gone on at the theatre for over twenty-five years, er, and we have described every play in the main season, every play in the Minerva, ever since um that was built, and quite a lot of the winter season plays. So, and audio description now happens all over the country, it's on television, it's just become part of access for, for any visually impaired person.

**Karen Robinson**

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT PUTTING AN AUDIO DESCRIPTION TOGETHER? WHERE DO YOU START?

**Sue Hyland**

Where do you start! Hhm, where do you start. We go and see the play very early on. There's a team now of seven of us. We er, we see the play, early, we then, we have a script as soon as a DVD is made, which is usually made on press Night, we also have a DVD to work on at home. We, we find the places in the script where there are pauses and silences, and, because the golden rule of audio description is we never speak while the actor is speaking. Um, don't always adhere to that! But that’s the golden rule, and we prepare a description of the set, and a description of the main costumes, because visually impaired people, even though they haven't got good sight, only three per cent of blind people are truly blind blind, and colour is quite important. So if I say, you know, you're wearing red and blue, and you're the leading lady, then they've got some sense of that person, and what she’s saying. So we do describe the main costumes, not in great detail, but just enough to give the essential impression of what that costume is helping to gain the character of the person. And we give that to them beforehand, so like the chap I met in Windsor, they're sitting for about quarter of an hour or twenty minutes listening to us before the play starts, and then we're describing what is happening, if it's necessary to know, if it's essential [CLEARS THROAT] excuse me, if it’s essential for what's happening to the thread of the story-line. Somebody's creeping in on the scene, you and I can see that, but they might miss it. Never giving the plot away, although we know what's going to happen. Never give the plot away! Um, if we know there's going to be sudden noises um, explaining what those are, cos they might miss that somebody has dropped something and that's important, um, or if it's a funny action and everybody's laughing, the visually impaired person wants to be able to laugh with the audience, not after the audience. Um, so we prepare our own scripts, we write up exactly what we're going to say and when we say it. So we're not winging it, we’re, we're kind of reading our script, but we are trying to communicate it in the essence of the play, so if it's a funny experience then you want to portray that it's amusing, you know if it's really serious your tone of voice has to kind of go along in sympathy with the, with the actors, and we do it in a pair, so we try not to ever do a whole play because that's really exhausting, because you're really concentrating, and you're doing it live, so you're sitting with a microphone in front of you, um, in the main theatre we're in a box, watching live. In the Minerva we're on a screen, downstairs in a soundproof booth, in the dressing rooms, um, so we're describing off a screen, but we're in contact with the headsets. Um, so we're in pairs, we do an act each, and we take it in turns to be responsible for the set descriptions. We give cast names, er, and so we would prepare something together, so this year I will describe probably three of the plays, with somebody else. So we kind of swap it about, that's now my job, to kind of say who's doing what and when.

**Karen Robinson**

I'D HAD NO IDEA IT WAS LIVE. I IMAGINED THAT IT WAS RECORDED!

**Sue Hyland**

Oh no, no, no. It kept, it is, and it is our intention to record um what the set looks like, and costumes, with trying to get that up and running, so that can be put out online, er, so that visually impaired people can’t go to a described performance, they can go to another performance, and have read what it's going to look like. We describe each play twice. One matinee, one evening performance, so it's like captioning or signing, you know, it's there and available, and they will know um, when, you know, and to book up. A lot of visually impaired people are very faithful to the theatre, and we've been doing it for twenty-five years more, and there are people there, like us, who've been coming, visually impaired, and people will say You know, I thought I would never go to the theatre again, now I’m losing my sight, um, and I can now, because of you. It's very, it's very fulfilling, we're entirely voluntary, um, and it's just lovely, it's just a real privilege to do it, it's a real privilege to be involved so deeply with the theatre, and it's a real privilege to meet people who are visually impaired, who just love the, you know, when you talk to them, they talk about, Oh, we saw it! and we.... And they think they're seeing it, but they’re seeing it in such a different way to you. And their carers, or their partners, or whoever, will say Gosh, you know, now we don't have to sit and whisper in their ear all the time and annoy the people around us. So that's what we do! And er the audio described patrons wear a head-set um, slightly different to the hard-of-hearing head set, but that's, that's how they deal with it.