

# Physical Disability Representation Matters:

An intersectional study of the confluence of playwrighting, casting practices, and progressive productions as they relate to diversity and inclusion in theatre.

Created for the students of the McLennan College Theatre Department

Kathleen Laundry, Professor of Costume Design

# Acknowledgements

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# Why do we need to know this?

American theatre, film, and television have a long and problematic history with systemic racism, misogyny, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and ableism:

15% of the world's population has a disability, but characters with disabilities are largely absent from theatre and the few roles that exist have been played by able-bodied and/or neurotypical actors. In the US 58.9 million people have some sort of disability, whether it's mental or physical. Among the 879 regular characters expected on broadcast programming during the 2019-2020 season, 3.1 percent — or 27 characters — have disabilities. People with disabilities are the largest minority in the world, and are the most underrepresented in entertainment.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we should know better and do better. We hope through education and deliberate action toward inclusivity in our productions as well as our classes, to increase the representation of these under-represented groups in both our student population and the plays we produce.

<https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2019/11/15/tv-season-record-high-disability-representation/27458/>

<https://howlround.com/disability-american-theater>

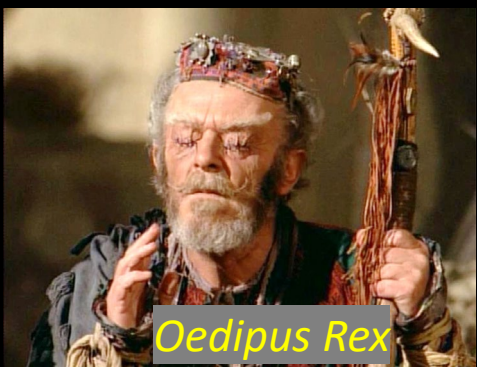
<https://www.respectability.org/2019/04/physical-disabilities-broadway/#:~:text=In%20its%2015%2Dyear%20run,who%20gets%20around%20by%20wheelchair.&text=Stroker%20%E2%80%93%20analyzed%20from%20the%20chest,with%20a%20wheelchair%20on%20Broadway.>

[https://dreamscapefoundation.org/why-accessibility/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw0rr4BRCtARIsAB0\\_48PkeqylBBvoaND6qqgNs-0I-Hht4KLO5nqv\\_q2kb9FygUQgHKsw4kcaAp6mEALw\\_wcB](https://dreamscapefoundation.org/why-accessibility/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw0rr4BRCtARIsAB0_48PkeqylBBvoaND6qqgNs-0I-Hht4KLO5nqv_q2kb9FygUQgHKsw4kcaAp6mEALw_wcB)

# Disability Tropes

- **Blind Prophets:** beginning in Greek mythology. Tiresius from *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, The Soothsayer in *Julius Caesar*, Neo in *The Matrix Revolutions*, *O Brother Where art thou?*, *Five Girls*, Muir the dwarf in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, Stevie in *The Pact*, Dealer in *Ghost Town*, one episode of *Angel* where 3 blind children are seers, Chiana from *Farscape*, Cordelia Goode from *American Horror Story*, The Seer on *Vikings*, Sara Lance on season 5 of *Legends of Tomorrow*.
- **Twisted Body/Twisted Mind:** Richard III is the codifier of this trope. Captain Hook from *Peter Pan*, Darth Vader in *Star Wars*, Elijah in *Unbreakable*, Howard from *Detective Pikachu*, Obasanjo from *District 9*, Doctor Strangelove, David Lo Pan in *Big Trouble in Little China*, Mason Verger in *Hannibal*, Tio on *Breaking Bad*, Dr. No, The Claw from *Dick Tracy*, Candyman, killer in *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer*, Fernald from *Lemony Snicket books and TV series*.





Oedipus Rex



Antigone



Julius Caesar



O Brother, Where art Thou?



The Matrix



Supernatural



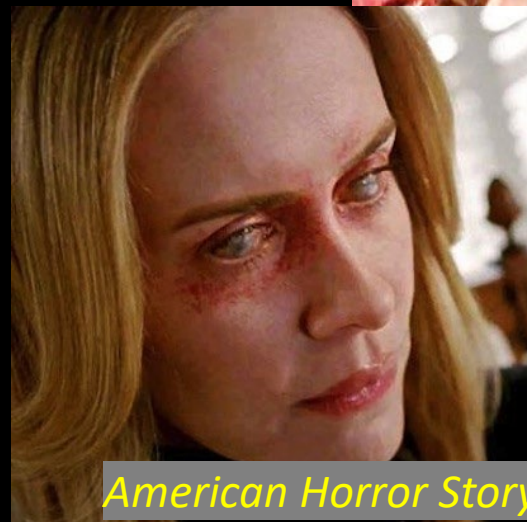
Ghost Town



Farscape



Legends of Tomorrow



American Horror Story



Vikings

# Blind Prophets

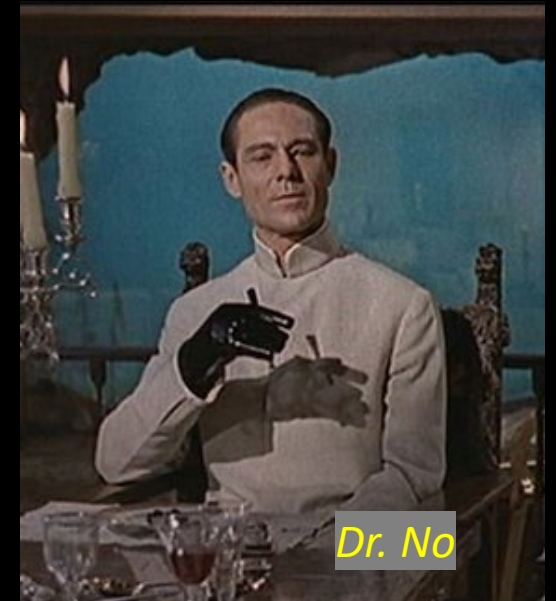
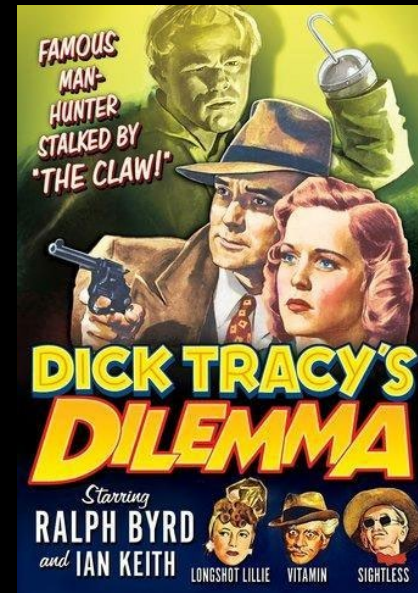




Richard III



Peter Pan

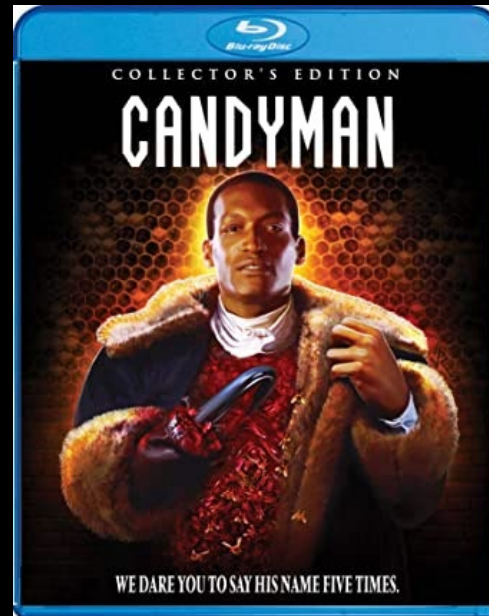


Dr. No

## Twisted Body/Twisted Mind



Return of the Jedi



I Know What You Did Last Summer



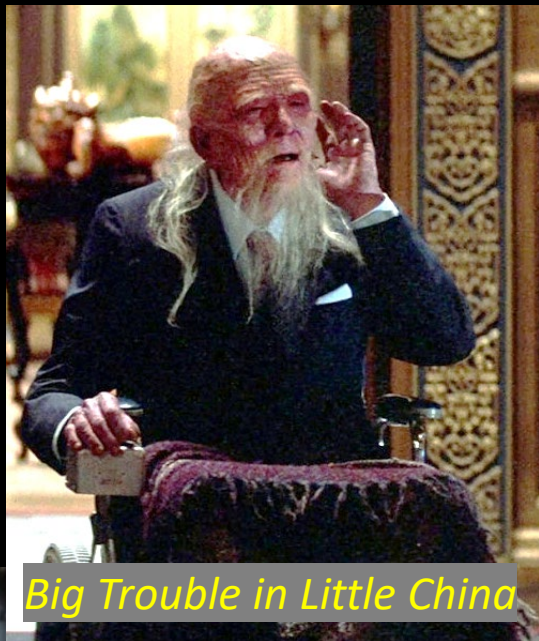
Lemony Snicket



# Twisted Body/Twisted Mind



*Doctor Strangelove*



*Big Trouble in Little China*



*District 9*



*Detective Pikachu*



*Hannibal*



*Unbreakable*



*Breaking Bad*

# What now?

Without bringing attention to the mistreatment of Physically Disabled characters, it makes it difficult for writers to change how they write these characters. By learning about stereotypes, we grow to appreciate quality storytelling. We always have to ask ourselves certain questions: Are these stereotypes damaging? How should show-runners and writers improve their storytelling when it comes to Physically Disabled characters? Can we like certain pieces of media while simultaneously recognizing their mistreatment of Physically Disabled characters?



# S. Robert Morgan: Actor who is blind

- Lost his sight in his twenties due to macular degeneration.
- Best known for Butchie in *The Wire* series on HBO. He was also in an episode of *Luke Cage*.
- Played The Preacher in *Polk County* for Arena Stage in Washington D.C.
- Founder/Artistic director of The Essential Theatre in DC, which has been operating continuously for 30+ years. From their website: <http://theessentialtheatre.org/>

“The Essential Theatre is a non-profit professional theatre dedicated, but not limited to producing theatre reflective of the African-American experience that explores and celebrates America's rich, diverse cultural landscape. Paramount to the company's mission is the implementation of programs for youth in Washington, DC's metropolitan area that promotes interdisciplinary education and positive levels of self-esteem.”

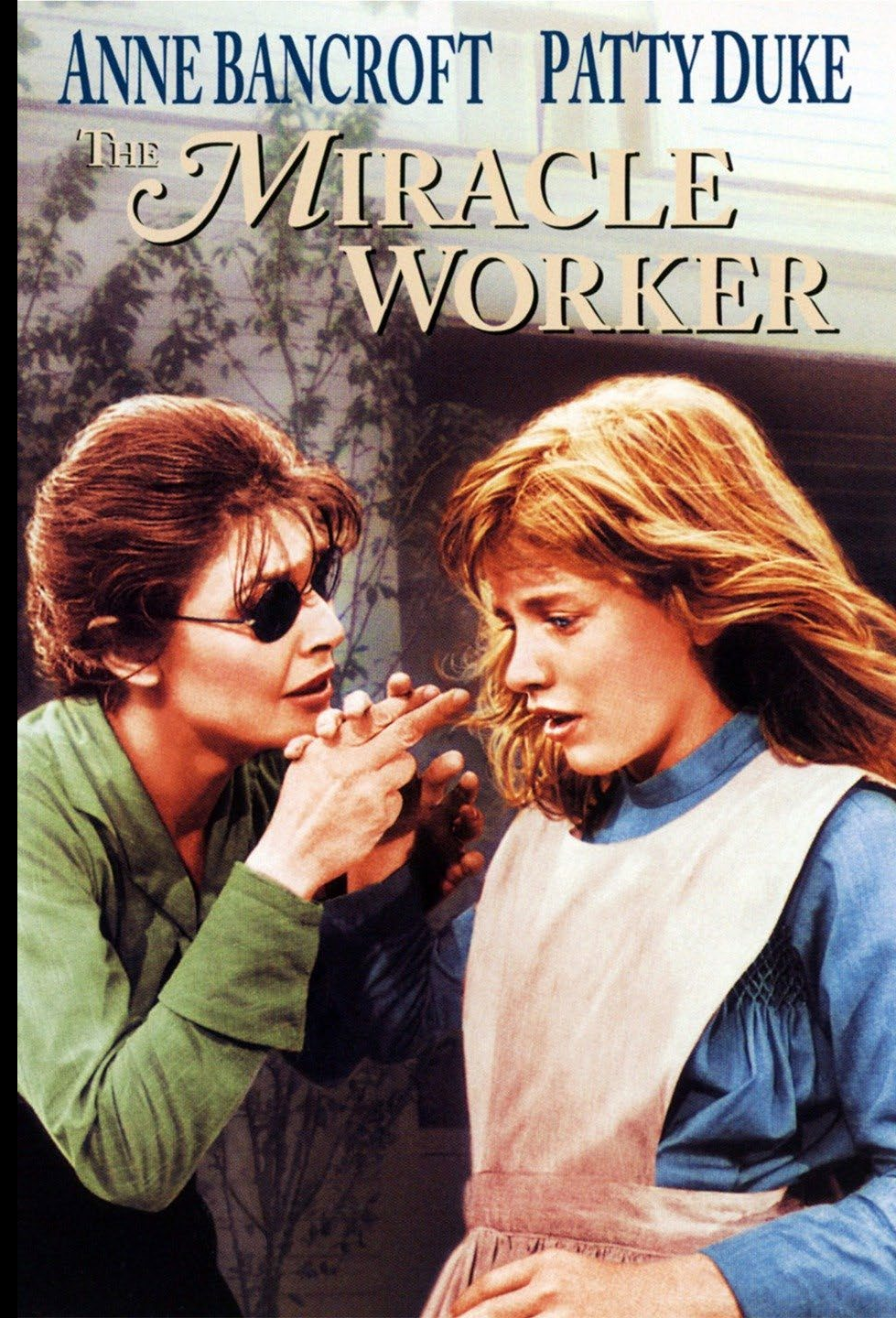


# *The Miracle Worker*, 1959

The play was adapted from Helen Keller's autobiography, *The Story of My Life*. Helen Keller was born in 1880 seeing/hearing but due to a childhood disease (either scarlet fever or meningitis) became blind/deaf. Annie Sullivan was legally blind and was hired to be Helen's teacher when Helen was 7 and had become almost feral. The play covers their relationship and Annie successfully teaching Helen how to finger spell words. Although she was delayed in her speech, she did learn to speak.

The roles of Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller were originated on Broadway starring Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke. Adapted to a film in 1962 where they repeated their performances. The film was remade in 1979 with Patty Duke playing Annie Sullivan and Melissa Gilbert as Helen Keller. It was remade again in 2000 with Alison Elliott as Annie Sullivan and Hallie Kate Eisenberg as Helen Keller. None of the actresses were blind or deaf.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen\\_Keller](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Keller)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne\\_Sullivan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Sullivan)





# *The Country of the Blind, 2007*

Coterie Theatre, Kansas

By Frank Higgins, adapted from the 1899 short story by HG Wells. Wells' original story was a caustic denunciation of the uneducated, unenlightened people of his era who, in his view, might as well be blind. The eyeless villagers and their leaders live in ignorance of the outside world, just as the isolationists of Wells' era refused to see the turmoil beyond their own communities.

Eduardo, a poor farmer blind in one eye, climbs the Andes Mountains seeking The Country of the Blind, hoping the old saying is true: "In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." He arrives to find the paths are indeed lined with gold and the people are without sight, but now he must learn to live with his own disability--being a seeing man in a world of blind persons. Will he be regarded as the one who is less than normal? Premiered at the Coterie Theatre and toured Kansas under the auspices of Accessible Arts.

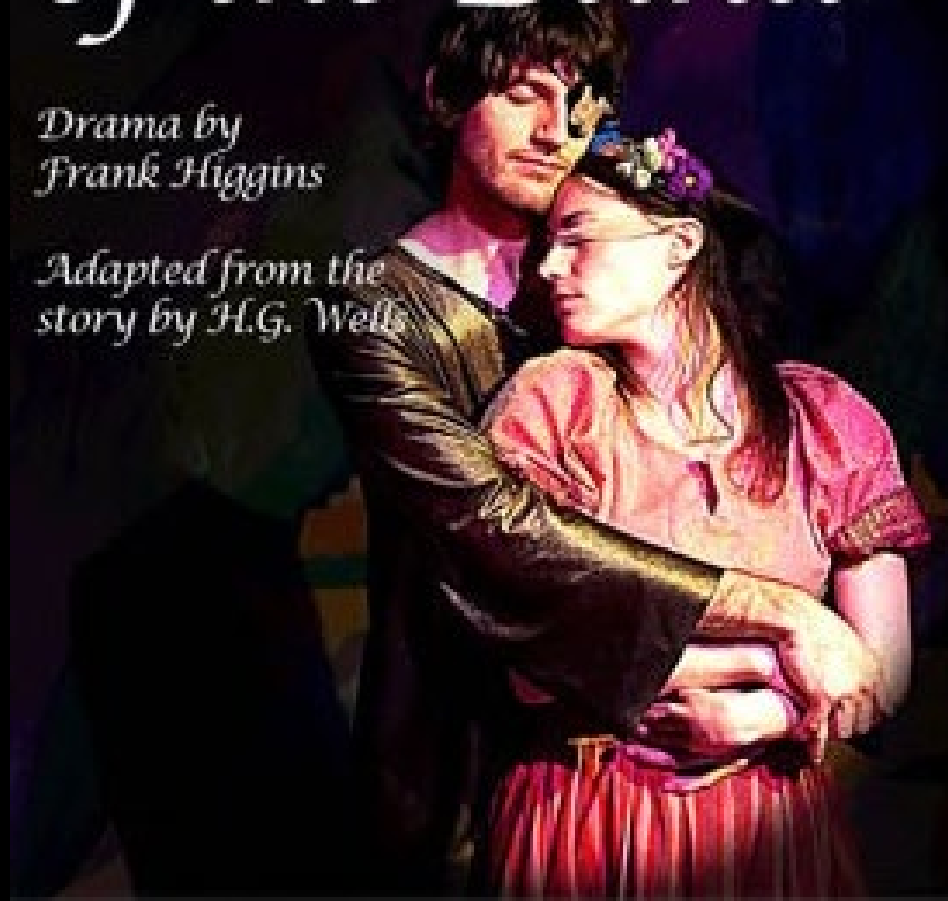
Was also adapted for TV in 1962 under the title "The Richest Man in Bogota". Lee Marvin played Eduardo.

<http://www.eccofilmandvideo.com/home/the-richest-man-in-bogota>  
<https://www.dramaticpublishing.com/the-country-of-the-blind>

# *The Country of the Blind*

*Drama by  
Frank Higgins*

*Adapted from the  
story by H.G. Wells*



# *The Blind, 2008*

## Arcola Theatre, London

By Maurice Maeterlinck, a 19th Century symbolist writer. "In Maeterlinck's day, blind people would have been in institutions. For him, the blindness is symbolic of the human condition: the bulk of us led astray, deceived, puzzled and abandoned by powerful political establishments. He's not talking about blind people, really: he's talking about the disempowered. "



Directed by Jack McNamara, *The Blind* is about a group of blind people who have been taken out for a day trip by a priest and then abandoned. The cast is made up of 6 blind/visually impaired actors, one of which is also deaf. McNamara had wanted to do this play for twenty years. McNamara said, "I then set about doing research and meeting actors over the course of a year and a half. I met so many interesting and dynamic visually impaired performers that I soon realized that I would need a good reason not to use them in this play. They all had mixed feelings about the treatment of blindness in the piece but were open-minded enough to take it on. We decided from very early that we were not interested in creating an advocacy piece. Maeterlinck's message is dark and bleak, and we weren't going to shy away from that."

"In terms of working with visually impaired performers, it really was no more difficult than working with sighted actors. In the first day or so you establish everyone's individual needs (braille, large print or line feeding) and then you get on with the work. The real challenge with this production has been the text itself, not the actors. The press have placed quite a lot of emphasis on the use of visually impaired actors, but those of us doing it haven't found it a very big deal."

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/feb/05/theatre2>

<https://www.arcolatheatre.com/> <https://www.musicomh.com/theatre/q-a-jack-macnamara-feature>

<https://hypernation.wordpress.com/2008/03/03/maeterlincks-the-blind-acted-by-an-entirely-blind-cast/>



# No Peeking Theatre est. 2012

Founded by Amada Levie in 2012 in Jersey City to create a new format of theatre without one crucial element: sight. Their mission has been to bring communities together through works that create dialogue between marginalized groups and building a platform for diverse and high-quality theatre.

Audience members are blindfolded for the duration of the show and are introduced to sensory elements such as sound, taste, scent, atmosphere, and touch. These sensory elements are designed to invoke the "world of the play/story/piece". No Peeking is changing the way we experience and create live arts.

No Peeking is changing the dynamics of auditions. No headshots are necessary. Auditions are recorded and audio files are sent through email. Roles are given based on the capacity to best embody the characters needed for the production, not on appearance.

Our theatre is ADA accessible.

We accept all original submissions, regardless of genre, or form of written work.

Because we do not depend on spectacle, we are re-writing design positions. We add sensory elements to the productions in order to immerse the audience into the world of the play. We have created new positions in the design/tech world: Scentscaper, Soundscape, Touch Tech, Taste Tech, and Atmosphere Specialist. Because we have no need of scenery, lighting, or costumes, as well as paper-based products such as posters, programs, and scripts, we have vastly reduced our waste output and lowered the environmental footprint of our productions. <https://www.nopeekingtheatre.org/about>

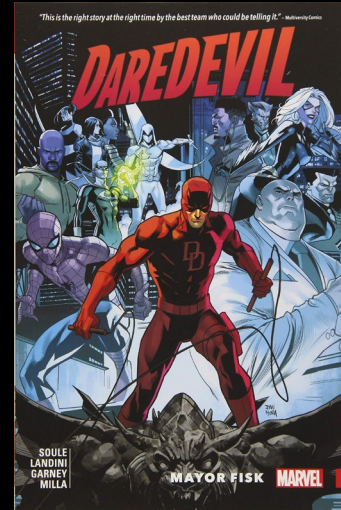
# Daredevil, 2015

*Daredevil* began as a comic book in 1964 created by Stan Lee, Bill Everett, and Jack Kirby for Marvel Comics. Matt Murdock was blinded as a child by a radioactive substance which gave him heightened senses. When he grows up, he becomes a lawyer and uses his super-powers to fight the local gangsters in Hell's Kitchen. It was adapted to a film in 2003. Murdock was played by Ben Affleck, who is not blind. In 2015 the Netflix TV series ran for 3 seasons, Murdock was played by Charlie Cox, who is also not blind.

David Perry, writing for Vice, "He's a blind lawyer moving through the streets and buildings of Hell's Kitchen. I found a lot to like in those moments about the series' portrayal of life with visual impairment. Murdock negotiates space using touch. His electronic devices—phone, alarm clock—talk to him. He frequently has conversations in which his sighted interlocutors catch themselves using visual cues (nods, shrugs, etc.) and then redirect. His closest companion and law partner Foggy Nelson (Elden Henson), acts as an interface for Matt and does so without awkwardness."

Kayla Brown writing for DO-IT (Disability, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) agrees with Perry, "I was happy with how well the television series was written. However, one group of people wasn't given the chance to watch and form an opinion. *Daredevil* did not provide audio descriptions, leaving people with visual disabilities unable to watch the show. This would be comical if it wasn't tragic; since the show features a blind character, Netflix should have put some thought into making it accessible...While it is great that Netflix responded to this particular case, we still have to look at this from the wider perspective. The fact is that people with visual impairments do not have the same access to media as most due to this lack of accessibility. It is great having a mainstream superhero with an apparent disability, but when people with disabilities can't access his story, it isn't super at all.

<https://www.washington.edu/doit/disability-media-daredevil-and-accessibility-issues#:~:text=The%20main%20character%2C%20Matt%20Murdock,world%20in%20a%20different%20way.>  
[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/jmaez3/how-well-does-daredevil-handle-disability-issues-320](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/jmaez3/how-well-does-daredevil-handle-disability-issues-320)



# *Molly Sweeney*, 2019

## Keen Company, NY

Written by Brian Friel in 1994.

Having lost her sight at infancy, Molly Sweeney knows the world through touch, sound, taste, and smell. When her hopeful husband and ambitious doctor propose an operation to restore her sight, Molly and those around her begin to understand that things may not all be as they appear. Friel based the play on the true story of a low-vision American man whose wife encouraged restorative vision surgery, which ultimately resulted in the deterioration of his overall physical and mental health.

Molly is played by Pamela Sabaugh, who first played the role in 2007 at Philadelphia's Amaryllis Theatre company. She was the first and so far only, legally blind actor to do so. Sabaugh's vision is somewhat different from her character's: She was a teenager when she developed juvenile macular degeneration and lost her central vision, so her brain already had a vocabulary of the sighted world. Molly, however, has no memory of seeing, and the transition to sight poses threats both neurological and existential.

The Keen Company's production features audio description and touch tours, braille programs, large-print programs, assisted hearing devices, and the venue is fully wheel-chair accessible.

<http://www.keencompany.org/molly>

<https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/10/15/molly-sweeney-through-new-eyes/>

<https://www.nyise.org/apps/news/article/1115303>





# Marlee Matlin: Actor who is deaf

- Lost her hearing at 18 months due to a genetically malformed cochlea.
- Best known for *Children of a Lesser God*, won a Tony for the stage play. She did the movie adaptation and became the first and only deaf actor to win an Oscar.
- She's made 20 films, and appeared in 40 TV shows. Nominated for an Emmy for *Picket Fences*.
- She's appeared on *Sesame Street* and in Billy Joel's video "We Didn't Start the Fire".
- Advocacy: Spokeswoman for National Captioning Institute and testified at a congressional hearing to get a law passed requiring all TVs to have closed captioning technology.

"Every one of us is different in some way, but for those of us who are more different, we have to put more effort into convincing the less different that we can do the same thing they can, just differently."

<https://www.marleematlin.net/>



# *Children of a Lesser God, 1979*

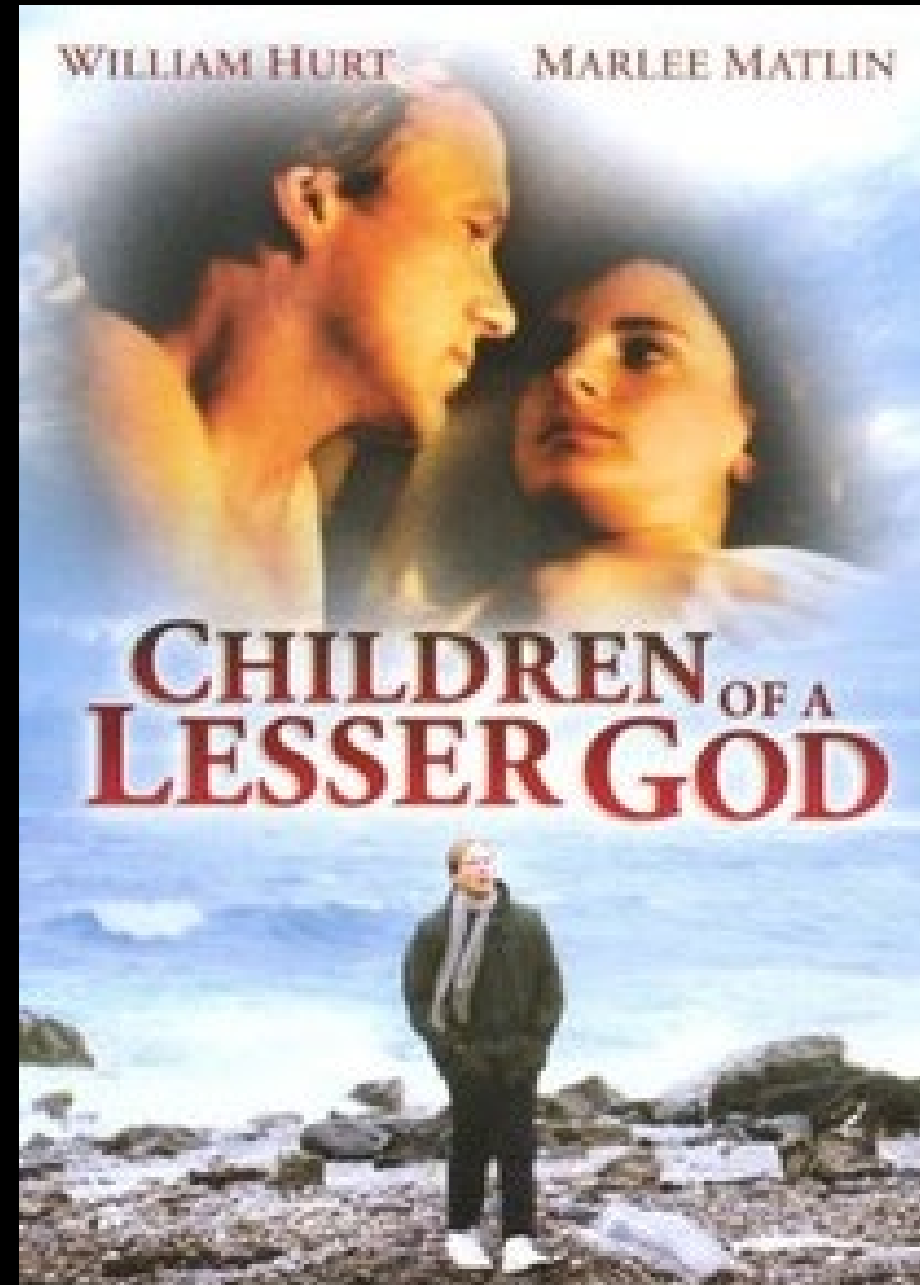
By Mark Medoff . Medoff wrote the play specifically for deaf actress Phyllis French based on her relationship with her husband, a hearing speech teacher.

In the play, James is a hearing speech teacher at a school for the deaf, where Sarah was the brightest student in the class, but now that she's graduated, works there as a janitor. He is determined to get her to speak, she is determined to keep using ASL. Their failure to communicate drives the story as they begin a sexual relationship.

French originated the role of Sarah. The play premiered at the Mark Taper Forum in LA and was transferred to Broadway in 1980, and then the West End in 1981, where Deaf actress Elizabeth Quinn played Sarah. The play was adapted to film in 1986. Deaf actress Marlee Matlin made her film debut playing Sarah, for which she won an Oscar, the first and only deaf actor to win one. All of the deaf students in the film were played by deaf actors.

It was recently revived on Broadway with deaf Black actress Lauren Ridloff as Sarah.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/childrenofalessergodrattanasio\\_a0ad57.htm](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/childrenofalessergodrattanasio_a0ad57.htm)





# Deaf West Theatre, LA est. 1991

Founded in Los Angeles in 1991, Deaf West Theatre engages artists and audiences in unparalleled theater experiences inspired by Deaf culture and the expressive power of sign language, weaving ASL with spoken English to create a seamless ballet of movement and voice. In 2005, DWT was selected to receive the Highest Recognition Award by the Secretary of Health and Human Services for its “distinguished contributions to improve and enrich the culture lives of deaf and hard of hearing actors and theater patrons.” The company was nominated for three Tony Awards for *Spring Awakening* in 2016 and three for *Big River* in 2004.



<https://www.deafwest.org/>

Big River, 2004



Spring Awakening, 2016

# *Sweet Nothing in My Ear*, 1997

## The Fountain Theatre, LA

By Stephen Sachs. Performed in American Sign Language (with voice interpretation) and featuring a cast of deaf and hearing actors, the critically acclaimed play explores the controversial issue of cochlear implants for deaf and hearing-impaired people. In *Sweet Nothing in My Ear*, Laura, who is deaf, and Dan, who is hearing, are an attractive young couple happily married for nine years. Their son Adam was born hearing, but by age six has also become deaf. When Dan decides to pursue the possibility of a cochlear implant for his boy - a tiny computer chip inserted in the brain that would allow him to regain his hearing - a divisive wedge is driven between husband and wife that threatens to shatter their marriage.

Won California Governor's 1998 Media Access Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatre. The Media Access Awards are given by the California Governor's Committee for Employment of Disabled Persons, and were established in 1978 to "acknowledge productions, individuals and corporate activities in television, film, radio, theatre and print. The awards seek to recognize and encourage accurate portrayals that transcend stereotypical language and images of people with disabilities."

Adapted to a made for TV movie in 2008 starring Marlee Matlin and Jeff Daniels.

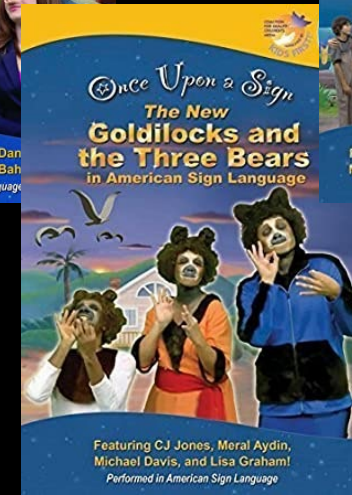
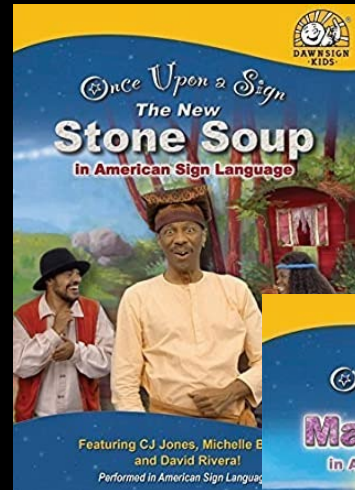
<https://www.broadwayworld.com/los-angeles/article/Sweet-Nothing-in-My-Ear-Play-to-be-Adapted-for-CBS-20071203>





# CJ Jones' *Once Upon a Sign*, 2015

CJ Jones was born hearing to deaf parents but lost his hearing when he contracted spinal meningitis at 7. He is best known for playing Baby's foster father in *Baby Driver*, 2017. He co-wrote and directed 6 classic fairy tales for *Once Upon a Sign*, a series of classic children's stories re-created with modern themes and performed entirely in American Sign Language. *Once Upon a Sign* is a multi-award-winning DVD series. All titles are endorsed by KIDS FIRST! and have received the Dove Family Foundation Seal of Approval. The Family Review Center has also chosen the series as the best of 2015 winner! <https://www.harriscomm.com/once-upon-a-sign-the-magic-mirror.html>





# Chris Burke: Actor with Down Syndrome

- First character on a network series with Down Syndrome as Corky in *Life Goes On*, 1989-1993, for which he was nominated for a Golden Globe in 1990.
- Appeared in 11 TV shows.
- Co-wrote his autobiography, *A Special Kind of Hero*, in 1991, with Jo Beth McDaniel.
- Released four albums and two DVDs as the band Chris Burke with Joe and John DeMasi.
- Voiced video game characters for *Philip Marlowe Private Eye*, 1996.
- Advocacy: Goodwill Ambassador for the National Down Syndrome Society since 1994.

“Back in those days, a parent looked at the disability and didn't see the ability. 'Life Goes On' showed that people with a disability can be included. Just give them a chance and let them learn. That's what the show was trying to teach.”



# *Life Goes On*, 1989-1993

The show centers around the Thatcher family living in Chicago. Drew, his wife Elizabeth, and their kids Paige, Rebecca, and Corky. *Life Goes On* was the first tv series to have a major character with Down Syndrome. Corky was played by Chris Burke. Patti LuPone played Elizabeth. It ran for 4 seasons. Nominated for 4 Emmy awards and won 2.

One of the first shows to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its social implications. In its later seasons the show depicted a relationship between Kellie Martin's character Becca Thacher and Chad Lowe's character Jesse McKenna. Becca and Jesse dated, and were often shown kissing. Jesse had HIV/AIDS and Becca did not. The show used this relationship and the character of Jesse to address issues of bigotry and unwarranted hysteria regarding the disease. Moreover, the show helped to inform its audience about the facts and myths surrounding HIV/AIDS (for example: the various ways one could or could not contract HIV/AIDS) and urged people to practice safe sex, avoid drug use involving needles, and to get tested.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096635/>



# Jamie Brewer: Actor with Down Syndrome

- Best known for Addie in *American Horror Story*, 2011-2018.
- Supports several non-profit organizations, including DSALA, BTAP, National Down Syndrome Congress, the American Association of People with Disabilities of the United States, Shane's Inspiration, and Easter Seals.

“Young girls and even young women [see me] and say 'hey, if she can do it so can I'. It's a true inspiration being a role model for any young women to [encourage them] in being who they are and showing who they are.”

[https://americanhorrorstory.fandom.com/wiki/Jamie\\_Brewer](https://americanhorrorstory.fandom.com/wiki/Jamie_Brewer)  
[https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4661932/?ref=nmbio\\_bio\\_nm](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4661932/?ref=nmbio_bio_nm)  
<https://www.jointherevolution.org/50-game-changers/jamie-brewer>





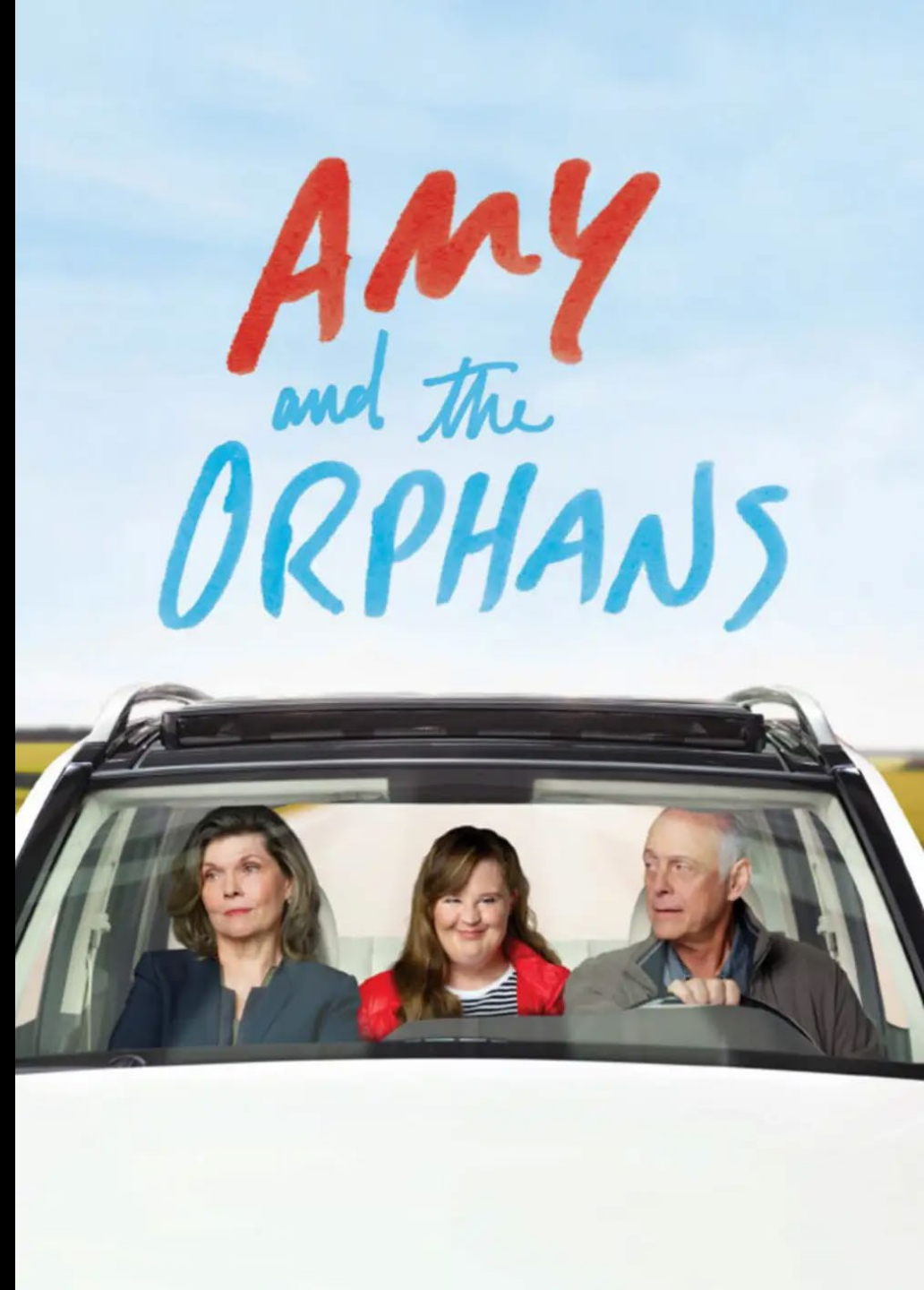
# *Amy and the Orphans*, 2018

## Roundabout Theatre Company, NY

- By Lindsey Ferrentino who was inspired to write the play by her aunt who has Down Syndrome. The contract specifies that Amy must be played by an actor with Down Syndrome. In this particular production, The understudy for Amy is a man with Down Syndrome, so when he has to step in, the character is called Andy.
- The play is about three adult siblings, Jacob, Maggie, and Amy, who has Down Syndrome. Amy had been institutionalized and her siblings take her and her caregiver on a road trip to Long Island to attend her father's funeral. Along the way, mistakes of the past are brought up and dealt with.
- Jamie Brewer won the 2018 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Featured Actress in a Play.

<https://www.roundabouttheatre.org/>

<https://thetheatretimes.com/i-cant-accept-amy-orphans/>



# Lauren Potter: Actor with Down Syndrome

- Best known for playing Becky on *Glee*, 2009-2015.
- Career includes 1 film and 6 TV Shows.
- 1 SAG nomination for *Glee*.
- Advocacy includes International Board of Best Buddies, Special Olympics, The Arc.
- Appointed by Obama to the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

"A long time ago when I was very little, I dreamed about being on stage. Some people told me I would never be able to do it, so I only paid attention to those who told me that I could."

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2373670/>

[https://glee.fandom.com/wiki/Lauren\\_Potter](https://glee.fandom.com/wiki/Lauren_Potter)

<https://www.specialolympics.org/about/ambassadors/lauren-potter>



# *Fall, 2018*

## Huntington Theatre Company, Boston

By Bernard Weinraub. This was the world premier of his new play.

Arthur Miller, the most celebrated American playwright of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was said to be the moral conscience of the nation, but he had a secret: a son born with Down syndrome whom he refused to acknowledge. The play explores the fascinating untold story of Miller and his third wife, photographer Inge Morath, and the divide between their public personas and private lives.

Miller's son Daniel is played by Nolan James Tierce, an actor with Down Syndrome.

<https://www.huntingtontheatre.org/fall/down-syndrome-then-and-now/>  
<https://www.huntingtontheatre.org/news/press/2017-2018/announcing-fall/>





# Peter Dinklage: Actor who has Dwarfism

He refused to play Elves or Leprechauns early in his career. His breakout role was in the indie film *The Station Agent* in 2003. He later played Richard III at the Public Theatre in New York.

Best known for playing Tyrion Lannister in *Game of Thrones*. Was nominated 8 times and won 4 Emmy awards for Best supporting actor for *Game of Thrones*. 83 credits in a 30+ year career. . In 2000, he said, “I seem to play a lot of wisecracking, cynical characters, but what I really want is to play the romantic lead and get the girl.” After GOT wrapped, he played Cyrano in a new musical version off-Broadway, and is now producing shows. Other shows you might know him from are: *Elf*, *Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, *Knights of Badassdom*, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, *Avengers Infinity War*, and *My Dinner with Herve*

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0227759/>

<https://www.biography.com/actor/peter-dinklage>

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/peter-dinklage-is-still-punk-rock>



# Other Actors who have Dwarfism



Kenny Baker *Star Wars*



Herve Villechaize *Fantasy Island*



Linda Hunt *Kindergarten Cop*



Zelda Rubinstein *Poltergeist*



Billy Barty *Rumpelstiltskin, Willow, Time Bandits*



David Rappaport *The Bride, Time Bandits*



Vern Troyer *Austin Powers, Harry Potter*



Warwick Davis *Willow, Star Wars, Harry Potter*



# Mabou Mines' *Dollhouse*

New York, 2003

The Mabou Mines theatre company is an artist-driven experimental theatre collective. Ibsen's feminist play becomes a parable of scale. The dollhouse is a man's world into which Nora doesn't fit. The men in the play, Torvald, Krogstad, and Rank, as well as Nora's children are played by actors with dwarfism, while Nora, Mrs. Linde, and Helen are played by women of average height.



# Richard III, 2004

*“Richard III* has always asked audiences to pay attention to Richard’s body, to expect to see a body that he calls ‘deformed’ and we might today call ‘disabled’. We imagine this body, following a long history of performance, with a hump, a limp, an immobilized arm. Shakespeare’s audience would have interpreted Richard’s disability as a sign of moral impairment. Richard’s deformity becomes the occasion for virtuosic acting, almost always by actors who do not identify as disabled. Work in disability studies has critiqued this practice of ‘cripdrag’ or ‘cripping up’, with deliberate reference to the cultural appropriation performed by an able-bodied actor who assumes, and then discards, a disability characterization (often to great acclaim).” IRL Richard III had adolescent scoliosis as diagnosed in 2013 when his skeleton was discovered under a car park in the UK.

This production at The Public Theatre in NY, starred Peter Dinklage as Richard III. David Rooney, writing for *Variety* said, “Dinklage rises to the occasion, not only in his facility with the language and effortlessly commanding stage presence, but in his keen understanding of Richard’s complexities and what he can bring to the character, both physically and psychologically. In his opening monologue, “Now is the winter of our discontent,” Richard’s bitter self-appraisal carries an added sting in Dinklage’s matter-of-fact delivery: “Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature, deformed, unfinished, sent before my time, into this breathing world scarce half made up.” The resolve to hate, given that love is not his domain, emerges from the speech with fresh fire. While eschewing self-pity, Dinklage’s Richard challenges the audience to pity him, then tosses that pity back in its face.”

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/richard-iii-and-the-staging-of-disability>

<https://variety.com/2004/legit/reviews/richard-iii-11-1200530339/>





# Tiny Tim *Christmas Carol*

- Chicago's Goodman Theater-- Paris Strickland, an 11-year-old girl whose spine was compressed by cancer during childhood has played Tim for 3 years in a row.
- North Texas Performing Arts Repertory Theater-- Jonathan Rizzo, a 12-year-old boy with muscular dystrophy, played Tim.
- London's Old Vic— Tiny Tim has been played by boys and girls with dwarfism, cardiomyopathy, cerebral palsy, and ataxia, as well as other issues affecting their limbs (twisted tibias, a missing arm) and eyesight for the last three seasons. 4 actors split the role each year.
- Broadway--Sebastian Ortiz and Jai Ram Srinivasan alternate in the role, both have cerebral palsy.



Lenny Rush



Jonathan Rizzo



Paris Strickland



Sebastian Ortiz, Jai Ram Srinivasan

# Freddy Freeman from *Shazam*

In the comics Freddy Freeman is a disabled newsie, who after being saved by Shazam is given powers that turn him into Captain Marvel Jr. When Freddy first appeared it was 1941 and the US was about to enter the war after Pearl Harbor. Kristen Lopez writing for Forbes said, “For wartime audiences of the era, Freddy Freeman represented the numerous young boys sent off to fight, many of whom never came back the same. So the fact that Freddy becomes a hero was a testament to the strength of American masculinity. Considering the time period it's unsurprising that being Captain Marvel, Jr. also makes Freddy able-bodied. People with disabilities were often institutionalized or otherwise removed from the public eye. Disability was considered a weakness, a defect. Certainly we'd change that narrative in 2019?”

In the film adaptation *Shazam*, 2019 Freddy is played by Jack Dylan Grazer, an able-bodied actor. Luciano Vecchio, a disabled comic book artist and illustrator, said when talking about why Freddy's disability is erased in the film, “Because disability is seen as weakness, that we're not as strong as abled-bodied people. I've said before how when Freddie dropped his cane in Shazam and was revealed as abled-bodied my heart sank. Freddy Freeman is a character created in 1941, considering context and history of comics superheroes he is a pioneer in disability representation. Which we can appreciate while ALSO question and discuss and keep updating. What is the point of diverse representation if the narrative is to erase that diversity and frame that as something positive?”

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kristenlopez/2019/04/08/shazams-freddy-freeman-disabled-superheroes/#1109a8b53434>

<https://www.deviantart.com/lucianovecchio/art/Shazam-Jr-Commission-795626752>





# Laura in *Glass Menagerie*, 1944

By Tennessee Williams. A semi-autobiographical play based on his experiences with his family. Laura is based on his sister Rose, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia as a young woman. Their mother had Rose lobotomized in 1943, after which she was institutionalized. In the play Laura suffered from pleurisy which gave her a limp, which in turn caused her to be painfully shy and turn inward to her collection of glass animals.

In 1987, through the office of Disabled Student Services, California State University at Northridge produced *The Glass Menagerie*. Director Katherine Pavini had epilepsy and walked with a cane. She cast 3 disabled actors in the show. Jill Grigsby had cerebral palsy and played Amanda the mother, Diane Woody had arthritis and played Laura, Rik Johnson was blind and played Jim, the gentleman caller. Donald Morris played Tom and was the only cast member who was not disabled. The producer Jim Hammitt also had cerebral palsy and used an interpreter to make his curtain speeches to the audience. All performances were also signed for the deaf and hard of hearing.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-04-02-vw-1830-story.html>



Film Adaptation, 1950  
Jane Wyman as Laura

# Professor X and the *X-Men*

Charles Xavier aka Professor X, runs Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. X-men have an x gene that gives them special abilities but they are called mutants and fight for justice in a world where anti-mutant bigotry is fierce and widespread. Chris Claremont said "The X-men are feared and despised collectively by humanity for no other reason than that they are mutants. So what we have here, intended or not, is a book that is about racism, bigotry, and prejudice."

- Comic books, 1963, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby
- 13 Animated TV shows, 1992-97 *X-Men* is the best.
- 12 Films, starting in 2000, starring Patrick Stewart and James McAvoy as Professor X.





# Niles Caulder of *Doom Patrol*, 2018

Niles Caulder is the leader of the superhero team The Doom Patrol, created in 1963 for DC by Bruno Premiani and Arnold Drake. Niles is a paraplegic with genius level intellect. Caulder founded and organized the team called Doom Patrol to protect the innocent and fight crime, and to teach humanity to accept others who live as ostracized "freaks," who have been radically transformed from terrible accidents. It is Caulder's genius that allowed the team members to survive (e.g., designing Robotman's body, devising Negative Man's medicated bandages), and helped them come to terms with their new reality.

- Comics: 1963
- Animation: *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*, *Young Justice*, *Teen Titans Go!*
- Live Action TV: *Titans* played by Bruno Bichir, *Doom Patrol* played by Timothy Dalton.

[https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Niles\\_Caulder\\_\(Doom\\_Patrol\\_TV\\_Series\)](https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Niles_Caulder_(Doom_Patrol_TV_Series))

[https://titans.fandom.com/wiki/Niles\\_Caulder](https://titans.fandom.com/wiki/Niles_Caulder)

<https://screenrant.com/doom-patrol-season-2-villain-niles-caulder-chief-reason/>



# Robotman on *Doom Patrol*, 2018

Cliff Steele, 1963. Cliff was a race car driver until an accident in the Indianapolis 500 destroyed his body. Niles Caulder placed his brain in a robotic body and then recruited him for Doom Patrol.

- Comics: 1963
- Animation: *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*, *Young Justice*, *Teen Titans Go!*
- Live Action TV: *Titans* played by Brendan Fraser, *Doom Patrol* played by Brendan Fraser.



[https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Clifford\\_Steele\\_\(New\\_Earth\)](https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Clifford_Steele_(New_Earth))

[https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Clifford\\_Steele\\_\(Doom\\_Patrol\\_TV\\_Series\)](https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Clifford_Steele_(Doom_Patrol_TV_Series))



# *And They Dance Real Slow in Jackson, 1979*

Written in 1979 by Jim Leonard Jr., about Elizabeth Ann Willow, a girl who had polio as a child and has had to wear leg braces and use a wheelchair ever since. As far as I can tell, no disabled actress has ever been cast as Elizabeth. Maysoon Zayid, an actress with Cerebral Palsy auditioned for the show in 1996 as a student at Arizona State University and was not cast in favor of an able-bodied actress:

‘Finally, my senior year, ASU decided to do a show called *They Dance Real Slow in Jackson*. It’s a play about a girl with C.P. I was a girl with C.P. So I start shouting from the rooftops, “I’m finally going to get a part! I have cerebral palsy! I didn’t get the part. Sherry Brown got the part. I went racing to the head of the theater department crying hysterically, like someone shot my cat, to ask her why, and she said it was because they didn’t think I could do the stunts. I said, “Excuse me, if I can’t do the stunts, neither can the character.” This was a part that I was literally born to play and they gave it to a non-palsy actress. College was imitating life. Hollywood has a sordid history of casting able-bodied actors to play disabled onscreen.”

<https://vialogue.wordpress.com/2014/01/06/7012/>

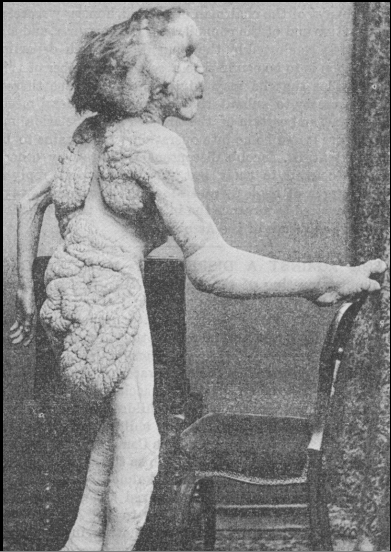
[http://www.dailynebraskan.com/opinion/pannirselvam-hollywood-should-provide-more-opportunities-for-disabled-to-act/article\\_1de77ae0-07bd-11e8-b066-fb664101aee3.html](http://www.dailynebraskan.com/opinion/pannirselvam-hollywood-should-provide-more-opportunities-for-disabled-to-act/article_1de77ae0-07bd-11e8-b066-fb664101aee3.html)



Laurel Johnston 2009 Production by Lone Star College

# *The Elephant Man*, 1979

Joseph Merrick was an English man who had severe deformities. He was exhibited in a freak show as The Elephant Man then went to live at The London Hospital for the rest of his life. In 1986 it was conjectured that he had Proteus syndrome, but DNA tests on his bones and hair in 2003 were inconclusive. The play was written by Bernard Pomerance with the note that Merrick was to be played with no prosthetic makeup. Philip Anglim originated the role, was replaced by David Bowie, then Mark Hamill. Adapted to a film in 1980, played by John Hurt with full body prosthetic makeup. Billy Crudup played Merrick in the 2002 revival, Bradley Cooper in the 2014 revival. Charlie Heaton was cast in 2018 to do a remake on BBC. The UK disability charity Scope's head of communications Phil Talbot said: "It's disappointing that a disabled actor has not been cast in the remake of *The Elephant Man*, as it's one of the most recognizable films to portray a disabled character."



Joseph Merrick, 1889



John Hurt



Mark Hamill

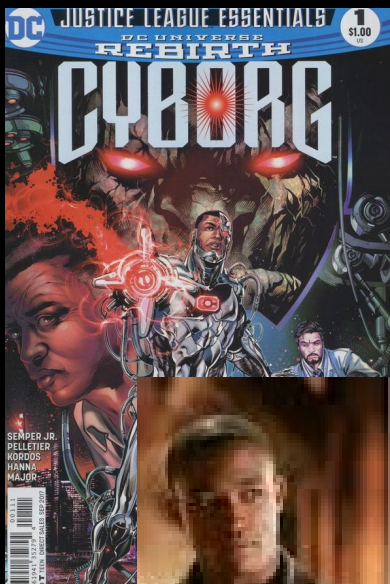


David Bowie



Bradley Cooper





# Cyborg from *Teen Titans*



An explosion in the laboratory of Dr. Stone left his wife dead and his son Victor severely damaged and in need of cybernetic enhancement to save his life, which was done without his consent, and which he initially despises his father for undertaking.

- Comics, 1980
- Animation: *Teen Titans*, 2003-2006; *Teen Titans Go!*, 2013-2020; *Teen Titans Go! To the Movies*, 2018; all voiced by Khary Payton.
- Live Action TV: *Smallville*, 2001 played by Lee Thompson Young; *Doom Patrol*, 2018 played by Joivan Wade on the DCU.
- Film: *Batman v Superman*, 2016 and *Justice League*, 2017 played by Ray Fisher.



# Nessarose in *Wicked*, 2003

*Wicked the Musical* is based on a series of books written by Gregory Maguire from the Wicked Witch's point of view, which were inspired by the original book series by Frank L. Baum. Elphelba and Nessarose are half-sisters. Elphelba's father was a traveling salesman who gave her mother a green potion to drink when she became pregnant. Nessarose's father was the Governor of Munchkinland. Nessarose uses a wheelchair due to a birth defect which caused their mother to die in childbirth. They go to college together. While there, Elphelba uses her magic to help Nessarose walk again, which backfires, because although the spell works (she enchants her shoes) now that she can walk, the man she loves sees that he no longer needs to take care of her, so he professes his love to Elphelba causing Nessarose to try to use magic to put a love spell on him, but it instead shrinks his heart so that Elpheba can only save him by turning him into a Tin-Man.

In its 15 year run, *Wicked* has not yet cast an actress with physical disabilities to play Nessarose.

<https://www.nationaldisabilitytheatre.org/mission-1>



# *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, 1996

## Noel Coward Theatre, UK

By Martin McDonagh. *Harry Potter* star Dan Radcliffe starred as Cripple Billy in the West End Revival of the play, which also transferred to Broadway. The story revolves around the town cripple, Billy Clavan, who is an orphan being raised by his two aunties in 1930's Ireland. Daniel Radcliffe researched physical disabilities and although the script doesn't specify what Billy has beyond suffering partial paralysis, the actor decided that his character has a form of cerebral palsy called hemiplegia. "You're on dodgy ground a little bit when you're an able-bodied actor playing a character who lives with a disability. So I want to make it as authentic as I possibly can."



Adding salt to the wound for the disability community is that in the context of the play, an American film crew comes to the Island of Inishmaan looking for the next Hollywood star. Billy dreams of going to America and being an actor, to escape his dull life on the island. Although the whole village seems to find Billy's ambitions ridiculous, the producers actually take an interest in him and take him to the USA. Once they are back in Hollywood though, they ditch Cripple Billy quickly in favour of a nondisabled actor who is 'cripping up'. Billy laments: "They didn't want me. A blond lad from Fort Lauderdale they hired instead of me. He wasn't crippled at all, but the Yank said, "Ah, better to get a normal fella who can act crippled than a crippled fella who can't fecking act at all." Except he said it ruder. (Pause) I thought I'd done alright for meself with me acting. Hours I practised in me hotel there. And all for nothing." I wonder how Radcliffe feels, saying this line? How director Michael Grandage feels about his decision not to hire a single disabled actor for the play when roles for disabled people are so hard to come by."

Nina Muehleman of Disability Arts Online said, "Radcliffe himself seems to be the only one in the production who did some research on disability. Nonetheless, this play deals with some interesting thoughts on disabled identity and shows a refreshing lack of sentimentality. But it would be interesting to see what a company like Graeae would do to material like this, or generally, how a production company who is aware of stereotypical tropes and stereotypes around disability would stage 'The Cripple of Inishmaan'. Sadly, as it is, it is just one more representation of disability by nondisabled people, made for a nondisabled audience." This is emphasized by the fact that the Noel Coward theatre is one of London's least accessible theatres, and that during its almost 3 month-long run, only one single performance of 'The Cripple of Inishmaan' is accessible to visually impaired or Deaf people. It is impossible to enter the building with a wheelchair without help from the staff."



# Cost of Living, 2016

By Martyna Majok. Premiered in Willaimstown MA, moved to Off-Broadway in 2017. The play examines two pairs of relationships between disabled and able persons: one between a graduate student with cerebral palsy and his female caregiver and the other between a quadriplegic woman and her ex-husband. *Cost of Living* tells the story of four very different people in four very different circumstances, each trying to get by. Eddie, an unemployed truck driver, reunites with his ex-wife Ani after she suffers a devastating accident. John, a brilliant and witty doctoral student, hires overworked Jess, a caregiver. As their lives intersect, Majok's play delves into the chasm between abundance and need and explores the space where bodies — abled and disabled — meet each other. The company consists of Jolly Abraham as Jess, Gregg Mozgala as John, Katy Sullivan as Ani, and Victor Williams as Eddie. Jo Bonney directs. Won the Pulitzer prize for drama in 2018. Gregg Mozgala and Katy Sullivan who originated those roles have the same disabilities IRL. [https://www.theatermania.com/off-broadway/news/photos-cost-of-living-martyna-majok\\_81164.html](https://www.theatermania.com/off-broadway/news/photos-cost-of-living-martyna-majok_81164.html)



# Crutchie from *Newsies*, 2018

## Axelrod PAC, NJ

Newsies was a film in 1992 about the real life 1899 strike of news boys against Joseph Pulitzer and other publishers who tried to take more than their fair share of the newsies earnings. It premiered in 2011 at the Papermill Playhouse and then moved to Broadway in 2012. Addison Antoff, writing for The Theatrical Board, “The rare yet somehow still token disabled character is here. The most well-known of these? Crutchie. Yes, that’s his name. That’s it. That is all he gets. He is **literally** defined by his disability. If that is the reasoning behind defining this character by his mobility aid, then why not accurately reflect the demographic of poor teenage boys? That large a group of impoverished children in that era would be *full* of disabled characters. There should be more people of color and more disabled people. No, instead an able-bodied actor is cast. That actor was Andrew Kennan-Bolger.

Patrick Tombs played Crutchie 6 years later at Axelrod Performing Arts Center in 2018 and again at Westchester Broadway Theatre in Elmsford NY in 2019. Tombs is an actor, singer and musician who was born with arthrogryposis, a disorder that causes atrophied muscles and stiff limbs. He walks with leg braces. He says that casting actors with disabilities rather than those without in roles that portray those disabilities is a key step to inclusion.

<https://www.broadwaytheatre.com/index.php?src=blog&year=2019&month=5>

<https://www.thetheatricalboard.com/editorials/addisondisabilityrep>

<https://www.app.com/story/entertainment/theater/2018/06/06/actor-disability-tackles-crutchie-newsies-nj-free-movies/674609002/>

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/new-jersey/article/Disabled-Actor-To-Play-The-Role-Of-Crutchie-In-Disneys-NEWSIES-20180522>





# *Teenage Dick*, 2019 Ma-Yi Theatre Company, NY

The My-Yi Theatre Company is dedicated to the development of new plays that engage with their Filipino audience, as well as producing works by Pan-Asian Americans. *Teenage Dick* was commissioned by [The Apothetae](#), a company dedicated to plays that explore and illuminate the disabled experience. Mike Lew's play, based on *Richard III*, has moved the action to Roseland High School where Dick is bullied for his Cerebral Palsy and a tendency to monologue. His friend Buck is a wheelchair user, and the most popular girl in school Anne, finds out she has Muscular Dystrophy. In his pursuit of vengeance and the office of senior class president, Dick must ask himself if it's better to be feared than loved.



# Robert David Hall: Actor who is a double amputee

- A car crash resulted in both his legs being amputated in 1978.
- Best known as Dr. Robbins on *CSI*.
- 40 year career with 64 credits including TV series: *Life Goes On*, *LA Law*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, and *The Practice*.
- Voice acting: *GI Joe*, *The Real Ghostbusters*, *Batman the Animated Series*, *The Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries*, *Batman Beyond*, *Avatar the Last Airbender*, and *Ben 10*.
- Advocates for hiring actors with disabilities; testified before Congress, served as Chair of Performers with Disabilities Committee. Advocates for Mental Health.

“If you support diversity and think shows should give a portrayal of what America truly looks like, then performers with disabilities must be included in that equation...People have been very good at being politically correct. They say the right things. But there has been an assumption that disabled actors could slow down production, can't do this or that, or that people won't want to see them on screen.”

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0004371/>

<https://celebritymentalhealthspeakers.com/personnel/robert-david-hall-2/>

<http://entertainmenttoday.net/tv/19746/2019/03/look-closer-campaign-has-csis-robert-david-hall-champion-actors-with-disabilities/>





# R. J. Mitte: Actor with Cerebral Palsy

- Born not breathing in an emergency C-section which resulted in permanent brain damage. Diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at three years old. Used leg braces and crutches through most of his childhood.
- Best known for playing Walter Jr. on *Breaking Bad* from 2008-2013, nominated three times for a SAG award, won once.
- Started his career on *Hannah Montana*, in 2007.
- 21 TV credits including *Switched at Birth* as Campbell Bingman, and 8 film credits.
- Advocacy: Celebrity Ambassador for United Cerebral Palsy. Appeared on the cover of *Neurology Now*.

“I would love to switch on my TV and see a disabled person talking about something they are genuinely interested in or acting out a part that doesn't just focus on their impairment.”

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2666409/>

<https://www.brainandlife.org/articles/after-the-role-of-a-lifetime-breaking-bads-rj-mitte/>

<https://www.keplerspeakers.com/speakers/rj-mitte>



# Ali Stroker: Actor who uses a wheelchair

- A car crash paralyzed her from the waist down when she was just two years old.
- First wheelchair user to graduate from NYU Tisch Drama Dept.
- Appeared as Olive in a Regional theatre production of *Putnam County Spelling Bee*.
- Mezzo-soprano, appeared on twelve episodes of *The Glee Project* and one episode of *Glee*.
- First wheelchair user to appear on Broadway in 2015 as Anna in *Spring Awakening*.
- First wheelchair user to be nominated for and win a Tony award for Ado Annie in *Oklahoma*, 2018.
- Identifies as Bisexual.
- Advocacy: Co-Chair of Women Who Care which supports United Cerebral Palsy, a founding member of Be More Heroic, an anti-bullying campaign, founding director of ATTENTION THEATRE.

“A lot of my life, people focused on what I cannot do. But I have lived my entire life looking at the things I can do.”

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4706602/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/09/theater/ali-stroker-oklahoma-tony-awards.html>

<https://www.health.com/mind-body/ali-stroker>

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/people/Ali-Stroker/>





# Steve Way: actor with Muscular Dystrophy

- Best known for playing Steve on *Ramy* Hulu TV series, 2019-20.
- Co-creator and star of the web series *Uplifting Dystrophy*
- Stand-Up comedian and substitute teacher in Rutherford, New Jersey.
- Advocacy includes MDA, Medicare for All

“As of 2018, American streaming services had only 11 disabled characters that were played by disabled actors. While this number has gone up, it’s still shamefully low. However, I can’t put into words how special I feel to be one of those performers. Knowing that I’m telling stories of the disabled community that have never been seen on television before is probably the most rewarding feeling I’ll ever have. But... we have a lot of progress to make.”

<https://medium.com/@thesteveaway/ramy-me-fe547e5ca38d>

<https://www.thesteveaway.com/new-page-1> <https://fyc.hulu.com/ramy/2020/06/25>

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/comedian-steve-way-talks-acting-accessibility-and-2020-contenders\\_n\\_5d3082efe4b020cd993feab8](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/comedian-steve-way-talks-acting-accessibility-and-2020-contenders_n_5d3082efe4b020cd993feab8)



# Graeae Theatre, est. 1980 U.K.

Nabil Shaban and Richard Tomlinson founded Graeae in 1980. Having met at college in Coventry, creating productions involving disabled people, their shared vision was to dispel images of defenselessness, 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*.

“Graeae presents a unique approach which boldly places deaf and disabled artists center stage in a diversity of new and existing plays and pioneers a radical dramatic language by exploring the “aesthetics of access”, creatively embedding a range of tools such as audio description and sign language from the very beginning of the artistic process.”



<https://graeae.org/>

*Reasons to Be Cheerful, 2017*



# *Peeling*, 2002

## Graeae Theatre, UK

Kaite O'Reilly's play is about three disabled actresses who are cast in a company of *The Trojan Women* just to tick the diversity box. Alfa is deaf and signs, Beaty is blind, Coral is in a wheelchair. They gossip backstage while waiting to go on. As they talk, they peel away layers of pretense as well as costumes. The play is a pro-feminist look at motherhood, adoption, and abortion, it is strongly anti-war, and it explores the way women's bodies and disabled bodies are represented in the media, the former as sex objects and the latter as freaks. It incorporates signing, super-titles, and description within the drama itself. Ruth Bailey, writing for *Disability Now*, said, "a challenging, accessible theatre performance rooted in disabled peoples' experience".

<https://kaiteoreilly.com/work/2017/2/15/peeling>

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2002/apr/06/theatre.artsfeatures>

[https://cdn.atria.nl/ezines/web/GenderForum/2005/No12/genderforum/interview\\_OReilly.html](https://cdn.atria.nl/ezines/web/GenderForum/2005/No12/genderforum/interview_OReilly.html)

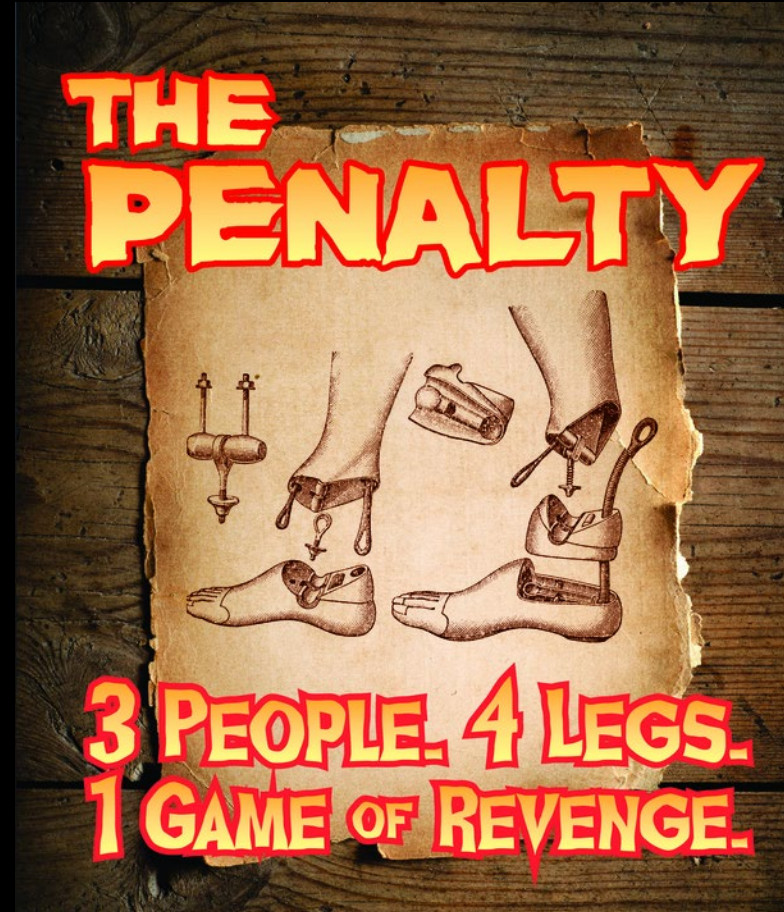


Rehearsal photo: Caroline Parker as Alfa, Sophie Partridge as Coral and Lisa Hammond as Beaty,

# The Apothetae, est. 2012 NY

The Apothetae is a company dedicated to the production of works that explore and illuminate the, "Disabled Experience." To do this we focus on newly commissioned plays by both established and up and coming playwrights, and material that already exist in the theatrical canon featuring characters with disabilities or dealing with disabled themes: *Oedipus*, *Richard III*, *The Elephant Man*, etc. By making visible the human impact of disabled people throughout history, we believe empathy can be practiced, perceptions changed, and new communities forged through the collaborative and transformative power of the artistic process.

<http://www.theapothetae.org/>



# National Disability Theatre, est. 2018

“National Disability Theatre employs professional theatre artists who create fully accessible, world-class theatre and storytelling; changes social policy and the nation’s narrative about disability culture; and provides a guiding model in accessibility for the arts and cultural sector.

NDT as one voice within the larger umbrella of the disability community, acknowledges that the experience of disability occurs alongside other identities, and that disabled people who are black, brown, trans, queer, gender non-conforming, or non-binary have been historically marginalized within the mainstream disability rights movement. NDT aims to change that, and strives to create a brave, creative, theatrical space as free from oppression as possible.

NDT believes in the power of representation in theatre. Disabled presence throughout an artistic team (actors, writers, directors, designers, dramaturgs) ensures that disabled people are not “othered” — it’s impossible to “other” someone when they are in the room.”



*Emily Driver's Great Race Through Time and Space*

<https://www.nationaldisabilitytheatre.org/about-us>

<https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/03/02/disability-takes-the-wheel-in-emily-driver/>

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/National-Disability-Theatre-Kicks-Off-2019--2020-Season-20181203>



# Disability Theatre Companies

## New York

- Identity Theatre Company  
[https://www.facebook.com/IdentityTheaterCompany/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/IdentityTheaterCompany/?ref=page_internal)
- The Apothetae <http://www.theapothetae.org/>
- Theatre Breaking Through Barriers <https://tbtb.org/>

## East Coast

- National Theatre of the Deaf <https://ntd.org/>
- Barrier-Free Theatre Company of Maryland  
<https://www.barrierfreemd.com/>

## Midwest

- The Uppity Theatre Company <https://www.uppityco.com/>

## West Coast

- Deaf West Theatre <https://www.deafwest.org/>
- Detour Company Theatre <https://detourcompanytheatre.org/>
- Phamaly Theatre Company <https://phamaly.org/>

# Candoco Dance Company, est. 1991

[Candoco](#) is a world-leading professional dance company. Bridging the mainstream and the experimental, its bold approach and powerful collaborations create distinctive performances and far-reaching learning experiences. Candoco celebrates different ways of seeing, of being, and of making art, putting the company at the forefront of conversation around dance and disability.

Candoco is located in the Aspire National Training Centre in Stanmore, North London, UK.



<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jan/08/victim-art-dance-disability-interviews-candoco-dv8-fallen-angels>

# Disabled Dance Companies

## California

- Axis Dance Company  
<https://www.axisdance.org/>
- Infinite Flow Dance  
<https://www.infiniteflowdance.org/home>
- Jess Curtis/Gravity  
<https://www.jesscurtisgravity.org/>
- Kinetic Light <https://kineticlight.org/>

## New York

- Born Dancing <https://www.borndancing.org/>
- Cathy Weis Projects <http://www.cathyweis.org/>
- D2D/T Abdul Latif <https://www.ald2dt.com/>
- Dance for PD <https://danceforparkinsons.org/>
- Def Dance Jam Community  
<http://www.defdancejam.org/ddjw/abt/>
- Heidi Latsky Dance <https://heidilatskydance.org/>
- Infinity Dance Theatre <http://www.infinitydance.com/>
- New York Deaf Theatre  
<https://www.newyorkdeaftheatre.org/>
- Sidiki Conde Tokounou <https://www.sidikiconde.com/>
- Tamar Rogoff Performance Projects  
<https://tamarrogoff.weebly.com/>
- ZCO/Dance Project <https://www.zcodanceproject.com/>

<https://www.dance.nyc/equity/disability/worksartists>