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Prime Stage Theatre Celebrates World Sight Day on October 8 and Recognizes the Individuals that Help the Blind to “See”

(Pittsburgh, PA – September 29, 2020) As we celebrate World Sight Day on October 8 we want to recognize those who help the blind to see — Audio Describers.

Audio describers break down common barriers to theatre accessibility. They inform individuals who are blind or have low vision about visual content essential for comprehension. These details make all the difference for blind and low vision individuals who want to experience live performance. When this isn't provided, they are unable to understand and enjoy the performance to its fullest potential.

“Audio-described performances allow individuals who are visually impaired to immerse themselves in more than just the actor's voices or the sounds of the props. It takes them to a world of creativity where the characters have purpose, the settings have meaning, and the audience has equality,” says William E. Hanuschock, III, M.Ed., CTVI, Assistive Technology Specialist – Outreach, Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children.

Prime Stage Theatre's audio description performances began with their production of **1984** in March of 2017. Co-founders Wayne Brinda, Producing Artistic Director, and Connie Brinda, Finance Director, were introduced to Nathan Ruggles, Audio Descriptor, by Brian Rutherford who is an advocate for the arts and visually impaired.

Not only did Ruggles join the Prime Stage team to do audio description but he also suggested adding Touch Tour workshops before performances for patrons to hear the actors' voices, feel some of the costumes and props and walk around the set for a better description of the overall production.

“Nathan is passionate about his work as an audio describer and is always looking for ways to make the theatre experience better” says Connie Brinda. “We’re delighted to have Nathan lead our audio description program, be a part of Prime Stage Theatre and be an advocate for the community.”

Every production presented by Prime Stage Theatre includes an audio described performance. While the productions for the remaining season will be live streamed there will also be live audio description for each one accompanying the live stream.

Audio description not only benefits people who are blind or have low vision but also those with cognitive limitations who have difficulty interpreting visually what is happening.

“Among the many recent initiatives in providing access to the full range of human experience, one of the most important is audio description for live and recorded performances,” says Don Ciccone, Carnegie Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. “Many of my friends and acquaintances who are blind or have low vision have expressed their delight with this service, as it has opened up a previously obscure experience to allow full enjoyment and participation. Before audio description the many movements, gestures, and details of scenery were experienced as silence or confusing background noise, with the result that conversations often came across as disconnected chatter without context. Information about who is on stage, who is speaking, time period and set location, lighting, and costumes restores context, and the intent of the author and actors becomes clear. Beyond the benefit to the blind and visually impaired community, the opportunity for individuals of all abilities to participate together in social and cultural events enriches our society as a whole. We are grateful to Prime Stage Theatre and the many other cultural and entertainment venues for providing this essential service.”

As with all performances Prime Stage is striving to make their productions accessible to all and make it a priority for everyone to feel included. In addition to American Sign Language, subtitles and audio described performances Prime Stage Theatre is the only theater company in the Pittsburgh area to attain Certified Sensory Inclusive status through KultureCity. KultureCity is a leading nonprofit recognized nationwide for using their resources to affect change for those with sensory needs.