SEEING THE ARTS BEYOND VISION LOSS
by Josie Kantner Smith

What don’t you see at a play, dance performance or opera?

• The rich, visual details of scenery, costumes and props.
• Actors facial expressions and gestures.
• Their appearance and disappearance from the stage.

These details, taken for granted by a sighted person, are lost to blind and partially sighted people when they experience the performing arts. The audio-description service of the Sight-Loss Support Group has been expanding access to the arts for blind and partially sighted people since 1999.

What is Audio Description?

Audio description is the verbal description of key visual elements of live theater, television, film, museum and art exhibits, and historic and cultural sites. For the performing arts, professionally trained audio describers interject brief explanations of set design, scene changes, costumes, lighting effects, movements, and body language and facial expressions. A describer deftly slips in a few well-chosen words during natural pauses in the dialogue or singing,
creating a vivid mental image that makes scenes come alive. Audio-description patrons listen through a small earpiece connected to a receiver that picks up the transmission of the audio describers from the back of the theater.

**Performing Arts Audio Description**

Description of live theater productions include drama, comedy, musicals, opera, circus/acrobatics, and ballet and contemporary dance. In addition to painting a verbal picture of the key visual elements of the performance, audio describers offer well researched, pre-performance notes on the background of each production.

**Visual Arts, Historic Sites and Gardens Audio Description**

The audio-description program offers occasional tours of museums, galleries, arts festivals, historic sites, and gardens and arboretums. Live description helps patrons “see” paintings, sculpture, tactile works of art, historic sites, and lushly planted gardens and landscapes.

**Where is Audio Description Offered?**

A wide variety of performances are described each year each year. Productions are selected from Penn State’s Center for the Performing Arts, FUSE Productions, the State College Community Theater, Nittany Theatre at the Barn, and the State High Thespians. Audio-described tours of the visual arts, historic sites and local gardens are offered occasionally throughout the year.

**How Does Audio Description Work?**

If you are new to the Sight-Loss Support Group’s audio description program, please register with the Sight-Loss Support Group by calling (814) 238-0132. This gives us an opportunity to explain the details of the program and put you on our mailing list.
Tickets are also required for most performances and may be obtained through the specific production company or performance venue. A listing of current audio-described performances and tours is always available at the Sight-Loss Support Group web site, www.slsq.org.

Please note that beginning in September 2016 reservations for audio description will be required two weeks in advance for each performance. The next issue of The Outlook will explain the details of the new reservation system.

Enjoy the show – the whole show!

**SUMMER 2016 GARDEN TOUR**

**ARBORETUM TOUR: Tuesday, June 14, 2016, 10:00 am, H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens at the PSU Arboretum.**

Our garden tours are always favorites! This June we will again be joining the exuberant Master Gardeners that assist with the weekly garden group for residents of Centre Crest to explore the late spring/early summer blooms of June. We will also tour some of the new installations at the arboretum, particularly at the newly opened Childhood Gates Children’s Garden. Enjoy a June morning on flat, easy-to-maneuver walkways with lots of benches to rest and inhale the fragrances! The tour is free and open to all, but please notify the SLSG office by email at office@slsq.org, or by phoning 814-238-0132, if you plan on attending.

**ARTS FESTIVALS, July 13–17, 2016**

Festival Eyes Guides are available for FREE guided touch tours at various times at the 2016 Central PA Arts Fest, downtown State College and Penn State campus by appointment, as well as the 24rd People's Choice Festival in Boalsburg. Call 814-238-0132 to schedule the services of a guide, or see our Festival Eyes page for more information on this program.
SUMMER 2016 AUDIO DESCRIBED EVENTS
by Eileen Rivoir

With outstanding shows representing three of our excellent local theater companies, this summer is the perfect time to give the audio description service a try and “see the arts beyond vision loss”. Please arrive 30 minutes before curtain time to check out the audio description equipment, and to listen to in-depth, pre-show notes that begin 15 minutes before the performance. The pre-show notes are researched and written by the audio describers and greatly enhance your evening (or afternoon) at the theater. If you have any questions about audio description or the events listed below, please call the Sight-Loss Support Group of Central PA at 814-238-0132. Please refer to each event's synopsis below for specific ticket and/or reservation information.

MY FAIR LADY: Saturday, June 18, 2016, 2:00 pm, Penn State Downtown Theater.

FUSE productions brings us Lerner and Loewe's My Fair Lady. The story concerns Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl who takes speech lessons from Professor Henry Higgins, a phonetician, so that she may pass as a lady. With such tunes as "Wouldn't It Be Loverly?", "The Rain in Spain", "With a Little Bit of Luck", "I Could Have Danced All Night", "On the Street Where You Live", "Get Me to The Church on Time", and "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face" it's no wonder everyone, not just Henry Higgins, falls in love with Eliza Doolittle. Please arrive by 1:30 pm to obtain equipment and listen to pre-show notes. FUSE is generously allowing a limited number of tickets at a discounted price to those with sight-loss and their driver. Patrons may use the student price online at http://fuseproductions.org, or mention it when phoning 814-380-8672.
THE HEIDI CHRONICLES: Friday, July 29, 2016 pm, 8:00 pm, Penn State Downtown Theater.

The State College Community Theater presents Wendy Wasserstein's Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning play, The Heidi Chronicles. Comprised of a series of interrelated scenes, a feminist art historian and her friends mature from the 1960's to the 1980's, as they search for political, professional and personal fulfillment. Heidi watches her friends move from the idealism and political radicalism of their college years, through militant feminism, and eventually back to the materialism they had originally sought to reject. Heidi's own path involves an affair with a womanizing lawyer who eventually marries for money and position, a troubling relationship with a charming young pediatrician who turns out to be gay, and increasingly disturbing contact with the other women from her childhood and college years. Eventually she comes to accept the fact that liberation can be achieved only if one is true to oneself. Please arrive by 7:30 pm for equipment and pre-show notes. Tickets are available online at https://scctonline.org/heidi/ or by phoning 814-234-SCCT.

CALENDAR GIRLS: Tuesday, August 2, 7:30 pm, Boal Barn.

The Nittany Theatre at the Barn brings us Calendar Girls. Based on the true story of eleven WWI members who posed nude for a calendar to raise money for the Leukemia Research Fund, Tim Firth's show became the fastest selling play in British theatre history. When Annie's husband John dies of leukemia, she and best friend Chris resolve to raise money for a new settee in the local hospital waiting room. The news of their charitable venture spreads like wildfire, and hordes of press soon descend on their small village. The calendar is a success, but Chris and Annie's friendship is put to the test under the strain of their new-found fame. The Nittany Theatre is generously allowing audio-description at the final dress rehearsal of Calendar Girls for those with sight-loss and a
driver at no cost. With adult themes and some partial nudity, this show is not appropriate for children. No ticket is necessary, but please contact the SLSG by emailing at office@slsg.org or by phoning 814-238-0132 for reservations, and to verify the 7:30 pm curtain time.

**COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED) (REVISED):** Tuesday, August 29, 7:30 pm, Boal Barn.

The Nittany Theatre at the Barn presents Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged) (Revised), an original play by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield. Directed by Emmy Frank, this show promises all of William Shakespeare's works in 97 zany minutes! The Nittany Theatre is generously allowing audio-description at the final dress rehearsal for those with sight-loss and a driver at no cost. No ticket is necessary, but please contact the SLSG for reservations and to verify the 7:30 pm curtain time by emailing at office@slsg.org, or by phoning 814-238-0132.

**NEED A MAGNIFIER?**

Two Screen Magnifier Systems (X50) have been donated to the Sight-Loss-Support Group. These are available to be loaned at no cost to a visually-impaired individual. One is an Optelec System about the size of a microwave oven, the other is a Video Eye Sidekick System mounted on a small table. If you are interested in using one of these systems in your home, please contact the office (814-238-0132 or office@slsg.org).
HOPE FOR MEDICARE COVERING
THE COST OF LOW VISION DEVICES

by Josie Kantner Smith

For decades the vision loss community has been advocating for Medicare coverage of assistive technologies, particularly low vision devices. Currently, Medicare will not pay for any device that contains a lens, thus low vision optical devices and electronic magnifiers are excluded from coverage, just as eyeglasses or contact lenses are. It’s past time for this policy to change. Just as a person needs a cane or a walker after a physical injury, so a person with low vision needs a low vision device to continue functioning independently.

Now for the first time, federal legislation may begin to change this antediluvian national policy. In 2015, H.R.729–Medicare Demonstration of Coverage for Low Vision Devices Act of 2015 was introduced in the House of Representatives. The bill seeks to establish a demonstration project to gauge the fiscal impact of a permanent change to Medicare coverage – reimbursement for low vision devices. This nationwide, five-year project, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, will evaluate the economic impact of allowing reimbursement for certain low vision devices. Once the legislation is enacted and the demonstration project is successfully completed, Congress will have significantly richer data upon which to consider permanently changing the Medicare program to allow for coverage of low vision devices, especially the most-costly devices. Stay tuned and keep your fingers crossed.
Remember to check our website (www.slsg.org) for announcements, updates and further information.

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