

**A.N.D**

A new direction for arts,  
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all eyes on us **The Interviews**

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**all eyes on us** tells the stories of David, Stephen, Lauren and Johnnie; four-performers preparing to appear in the Opening Ceremony of London 2012 Paralympic Games. The film shows four very different people whose lives have been characterized by a shared struggle to get along in a society where most people don't really understand them.

The Paralympics offered the best chance in a generation to help the British public learn about life with disability - but what changes has that brought, for the performers in the film and other disabled people?

In this programme you'll find interviews with Jenny Sealey, one of the artistic directors of the Paralympic Opening Ceremony; Joe Mason a young blogger who has been mentored by AND; Jacqui Adeniji-Williams from the film and there's also a joint interview with the Director Eelyn Lee and her sound-recordist/assistant-editor Shajna Begum. The interviews were conducted by Bianca Manu who was mentored by me, Charlie Tims. The photos that accompany them were taken by Frances Baker, Ros Barnett, Sam Lanchin, Tahmina Rahman and Benji Smith, who were all mentored by Tim and Barry.

**all eyes on us** and the Paralympics have started an important conversation about disability. Let's carry it on.



Photo credit: Benjahmen Smith

# Eelyn Lee & Shajna Begum

Eelyn Lee was the director of **all eyes on us**. Shajna Begum was one of a group of young filmmakers who collaborated with Eelyn on the film. She worked as an assistant editor and sound recorder.

## **How do you record sound if you're deaf Shajna?**

S. Everyone thinks I'm completely deaf when I tell them I'm deaf, but I'm not. I'm partially deaf so I still do hear stuff and I wear hearing aids as well.

## **So what's it like doing sound-recording?**

S. It's complicated because you're not just listening to the interviews - you have to listen to the background noise too. It's quite hard to concentrate on both but I've pretty much got used to it.

E. I remember when you first told me, in confidence, you were partially deaf, I had to ask you if you wanted anyone else to know, because it might be important for how we communicate - and you said 'no'. But over the course of time you've sort of come-out as it were!

S. I guess I didn't want anyone to treat me differently and I was worried that Eelyn wouldn't let me do things because of my hearing, but actually she gave me loads of opportunities. When I first told her it was actually because she asked me to interview someone and I wasn't sure if I would be able to hear and ask the questions. So I told her about my hearing, but she told me to give it a try anyway.

## **How did your access to the characters shape the film?**

E. London 2012 had loads of proposals from film-makers, but they took AND's because it was working with young people and a local film-maker. But the access was quite restricting - I was wondering how we could make a film out of just three rehearsals! After we started filming we decided we wanted to focus on their lives away from the rehearsals to paint a bigger picture - the aim became to tell their stories under the umbrella of this great big international event.

## **The swim scene is very memorable, how did that come about?**

E. When I went down to the first rehearsals in Dagenham I heard that Stephen had just taking his son swimming for the first time. As a film-maker you just immediately visualise the scene of them swimming. Film is a visual medium -



Photo credit: Benjahmen Smith



Photo credit: Frances Baker

you just know that that one shot of them swimming together is going to communicate so much about his journey. It just had to go in there!

**What have you learnt the most from being involved in the process?**

S. I found out a lot about other people's disabilities. I'd never really hung out with disabled people before. It was also useful learning about synching and things like that. I've realised that I've got to be serious about this if I want to go into film-making. I've got to take care that synching is done properly in the shoot. Making sure the sound-recording is fine, that the camera's perfect because if all that's right, you've a got nice film to make.

**How did you select the footage that eventually went into the film?**

S. I divided them into categories - like 'interviews', 'cutaways' and so on. If I saw one that was terrible I deleted it. If I wasn't sure I left it for Eelyn to decide.

E. We had four weeks in the edit in total. I also worked with Francis, our editor. It was relatively straightforward, because there was a natural order to the story; rehearsals, get to know each character, visit them in their private situations, working up to the big event, we see the big event and then we visit them at the end to get a bit of a resolution. But, like editing any film the issue is with getting rid of things you're fond of. In film-making the old adage is less-is-more. You have to be brutal in the final days!

**Is there going to be a follow up?**

E. I don't think so. But I think you could do a film on the legacy of the paralympics - it would be interesting to look 'one year on' in terms of attitudes towards disability, attitudes towards disabled people in the media and compare it to what we saw last september. But for our four main characters - they're getting on with their lives now.

**Did you get attached to the characters?**

S. Yeah. Mainly Stephen Because he had such a big story. Especially after we'd all done our interview with him we were all like - 'woww'.

E. We all got attached to each other. The young film-makers who were working on the shoot demonstrated a real professionalism. The stakes were a lot higher because this was a big commission. Everyone just upped their game and how we all communicated was really good. And when you work well together like that, you have a good time.



# Jacqui Adeniji-Williams

*Jacqui is the person asking the questions in the interviews in **all eyes on us**. She works in the Theatre Royal Stratford East and has been involved in AND projects for several years.*

## **What's the film about?**

It's about regular people who do extraordinary things, and the different journeys they take. It's easy to group people together, but everyone's an individual.

## **What links them together?**

They're all at different stages of their life and have different stories. Johnnie wasn't born disabled. David was born deaf - he doesn't know any different. And Lauren - she's just a young girl, like me, just trying to get by. Stephen is 'having his moment' - which touched me more than anything else. But together, they're all very honest about their lives. They've got nothing to hide behind. They also have an inner-fight, like 'just because of x, y, z doesn't mean I'm not going to do a, b and c'. I know it sounds cheesy - but it's also about having the courage to not be judged. Everyone wants to be accepted whether you have a disability or you don't.

## **In the film there's a bit where it says you welcomed athletes into the stadium - what was that all about?**

I was part of the team welcoming ceremony - we did five shows a day for countries in the olympic village. And at the opening ceremony we stood at the entrance to the stadium welcoming the athletes in. After Team GB had passed we had to run back round the outside stadium and sneak back in, to our seats, to watch the rest of the show.

## **What do you think it is that the characters in the film are overcoming?**

With Johnnie, he's like a 'man's-man' but they're going to give him a pink umbrella! For David, acting was his world already so his challenge was about working with a spectrum of disabilities. For Lauren it was about the equipment she had to use. And for Stephen it was very much about accepting his disability along with all the things the other characters were dealing with!

## **How do you want the film to change people's perceptions?**

People shouldn't 'pity' disabled people. People are over-helpful or completely oblivious - if we can find somewhere in the middle, that would be great.

**Each disabled person is different, but the Paralympics was supposed to change our attitudes to all 'disabled people'. Do we need a 'code of**

**conduct?' Like - how do I know when to open a door for someone? I don't want to be patronising, but I don't want to be unhelpful.**

I think it's just about asking. I don't mind if people want to open doors for me. But some people don't like it. You just have to ask them - 'would you like me to open the door for you?'. You shouldn't expand from what one disabled person does and apply it to all disabled people.

**Do you think the Paralympics have changed attitudes disabled people?**

I think it was amazing. I'm not going to take that away for them

It was really good for younger kids with disabilities - it gives them a drive, something to look forward to, something to aim for. But older people with disabilities are a bit more cynical because they've lived it. As great as the Paralympics were - a month later, things had gone back to normal. Especially with bus drivers - I think they were put on high alert during the Olympics to make a good impression on visitors. If it changed one person's life, that's great. But if you think that out of millions of people, 100 people see the world differently. It's just 100 people, it's not that many.



Photo credit: Frances Baker

# Jenny Sealey

Jenny Sealey is the artistic director of Graeae - the UK's leading disabled-led theatre company - and was also a director of the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games last summer.

## **Did you like the film?**

The film is just stunning, because it represents a whole journey. I was very aware when I got all those professionals together that some of them didn't identify with being artists and some didn't identify with being disabled. But just putting them under one roof was the beginning of something quite extraordinary. I think the film has really captured that.

## **Was there a sense of community amongst the performers?**

I don't think I have ever felt so much at home as I did on the first day, when we had 44 performers in our bespoke room in Circus Space. We were a majority rather than a minority. There were a lot of deaf artists there. We had sign language interpreters there; everyone had to work out the best way to communicate with everyone else. I was in heaven. I was at home. It was an overpowering feeling.

By the end we identified as a family. During rehearsals we talked about disability all the time. Because we had to adapt to one another, it was there in the mix of everything all of the time. Some of the humour was fairly sick - legs getting lost, going awol and so on. But out in everyday life - being disabled is never the most important thing that defines what we're like. Being deaf is who I am - it's not the only thing that identifies me.

## **Does being more aware of communication make you a better manager and director?**

Because my whole world is visual I can be sitting at my desk in Graeae or in rehearsal watching people dancing and I can see quickly that there's a person in the middle and they're not very happy. At rehearsals I could tell through their physicalisation and their hesitancy that they can't get the information, and that they're unsettled. So I was able to zoom in and say look 'are you feeling unhappy? Do you want to go over there?'. That's a skill because I people watch.





Photo credit: Rosalyn Barnett



Photo credit: Frances Baker

### **How did you go from a blank-sheet of paper to an opening ceremony?**

I was directing *The Tempest* with a group of young people from the Orpheus Centre and I was asking this gorgeous young woman called Charlotte, who is autistic, "what do you think 'oh brave new world, that has such people in it' means?".

She said, "well, Miranda - she looks without judging..." and I went, "Thankyou Darling! That's it!".

I legged it over to Bradley and said, "I know what we're doing. I've got a hook and it's about how wonderful mankind is - it's Miranda! It's *The Tempest*!"

So when we met the organisers they laughed out loud said and said, "this is such a coincidence - Danny Boyle talked about *The Tempest*, Kim Gavin talked about *The Tempest* and now you're talking about *The Tempest*."

So Miranda was always there, Spasticus - Ian Dury - was always there (the organisers didn't know that - we knew that) from the start. And then we added the most famous disabled person living in the world. So we had Miranda, Spasticus and Stephen Hawking. When went into our blank room, we put those pictures up.

### **Has doing the opening ceremony opened doors for Graeae?**

I was really hoping that the phone would be ringing (not that I'd hear it). But it hasn't. And I feel particularly upset, not for me, but for my colleagues like Nicola and Miranda. She is the most beautiful actress. Whose employing her? Nobody. It's wrong. What about Lauren? Why isn't she doing something else. Why!? She doesn't want to be doing *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* every single Christmas. She really doesn't. She's better than that.

I'm probably the only artistic director that wants to close their theatre down: in 2013, why do we have to have a company like Graeae? We should be on at The National, we should be at The RSC. 1 in 8 people are disabled - theatre should reflect demographics of society. I have so many brilliant actors that get rusty because they don't get used. I need people to see beyond them playing disabled characters. That's the battle that I'm fighting and I have been fighting the last 25 years. I don't really want to be fighting anymore, but it's still there to be fought. And I'm not ready to hang up just yet.

### **Can a film change perceptions?**

I think the exposure of this film is really important. The newspapers can say 'yes! we've transformed our perception of disability' and then weeks after the games has finished - \*silence\*. And I'm like 'we're still here!'. We're still fighting against government cuts in benefits and the rest of it - don't push us

away now. I also fundamentally believe that art has a huge ability to affect change. All art is informative, it's educative, it's about emotional literacy, it explodes your mind and opens it up to thought processes, opinions and feelings. You have to believe as an artist that what you do, can change people's lives. The question 'what has changed?' needs to be asked 3 or 4 times over the next year - to carry on the conversation. The change takes a long time to filter through. And if we're still out there campaigning as Graeae, maybe it'll get to the 29th August 2013 and it'll seem like something has.

# Joe Mason

*Joe Mason has been blogging about the Olympics, with a bit of help from A New Direction, for three years. In Summer 2011 he began writing about Amy Marren, a 12 year-old swimmer who was born without her right hand. She later qualified, and competed in the Paralympic Games.*

**Did anything surprise you about Amy when you first met her?**

I was shocked at how mature she was at the age of 12 and how physically strong she looked. I don't think I've ever met such a dedicated 12 year old.

**Would you have interviewed and photographed Amy differently if she had been an able-bodied athlete?**

Interesting. I don't think I would have. Despite never having met a person up close who doesn't have a hand I still felt normal around her and the interview went exactly how it would have done if she wasn't disabled. I think the main point of discussion and fascination was her age and ability - not her disability.

**What's the difference between a Paralympic and an Olympic athlete?**

They're all athletes and compete at their respective sports. It's different sports not lesser sports if that makes sense.

**Has the Paralympics changed the way that people at school & other people you know think about disability?**

Honestly not a lot because I believe most people of my generation these days respect disabled people already. I think we became more aware of the sports and the sheer amazement of some stories such as the one-legged cyclists

**You recently interviewed your Gran about the 1948 Olympics. If your grandson interviewed you in 60 years, what do you think you'd tell him about London 2012?**

Wow. I guess my memory would have deteriorated some what and I'd refer him to my blog! I would tell him as well that I felt like an important youngster at the time the world focussed in on London.

**Did the Olympics change the way you think about London? How?**

I think it brought London together more with the rest of the country. All cheering for athletes from GB and some events were out of London too. I felt proud to be a Londoner I guess too...

**You go to watch Arsenal alot. How did the atmosphere at the Olympics/Paralympics differ from the atmosphere at Highbury on a**

### **match day?**

It is a lot more heated at the Arsenal! But it felt a bit more like a festival at London 2012 than just a sporting occasion.

### **Do you think we'll see the Olympic and Paralympic Games as nice dream we all had once - or will we see it as turning point, and the beginning of a better city?**

I hope we see it as a turning point for something good but I imagine it will feel like a happy memory and a feeling of nostalgia around my area.



Photo Credit: Benjahmen Smith





Photo Credit: Rosalyn Barnett



Photo credit: Sam Lanchin

## **Disability in the UK**

There are over 11 million people with a limiting long term illness, impairment or disability in Great Britain

19% of working age disabled people do not hold any formal qualification, compared to 6.5% of working age non-disabled people.

The prevalence of disability rises with age. Around 6% of children are disabled, compared to 15% of working-age adults and 45% of adults over State Pension age in Great Britain.

22% of children in families with at least one disabled member are in poverty, a significantly higher proportion than the 16% of children in families with no disabled member

In 2012, 46% of working-age disabled people were in employment compared to 76% of working-age non-disabled people. The gap has reduced by 10% over the last 14 years.

In 2008, 19% of disabled people experienced unfair treatment at work compared to 13% of non-disabled people

Between 2004/05 and 2011/12, the percentage of buses with low-floor wheelchair access increased from 52% to 88%

Disabled people remain significantly less likely to participate in cultural, leisure and sporting activities than non-disabled people.

Source:  
Office for Disability Issues  
Department for Work and Pensions

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