

UCSD sponsoring a Theatre of the Disabled production "A New Silence" to help solve economic problems the group is facing

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An innovative new theater ensemble gave its first public performance last September at the University of California, San Diego and the enthusiastic response of the audience marked a special success for the actors.

The ensemble was the Theatre of the Disabled, and the actors were eight developmentally disabled adults whose previous acting experience was minimal.

"We were extremely impressed by the theatrical purity and power of the first production of the Theatre of the Disabled, and we are deeply impressed by the high level of commitment, concern and theatrical imagination of the artistic staff," said Michael Addison, chairman of the UC San Diego Department of Drama.

Addison was so impressed by the group that he and Penelope Andros, artistic director of the ensemble, have put their heads together and come up with a plan that could solve some of the economic problems that the publicly funded group is facing.

The university is sponsoring a Theatre of the Disabled production, "A New Silence," at 8:30 p.m. May 16-18 in the UCSD Theatre. Admission will be \$2. A new play by the group will be presented at UC San Diego in June, and the group has been invited to use rehearsal space this summer at the university.

Addison said he is also working with the university's Department of Community Medicine to investigate sources of funding for future cooperative programs between the theater group and the university. He said private and public grants will be sought.

"We're doing all we can to help make campus and community groups aware of the work of the Theatre of the Disabled," Addison said. "We wish to be of service to them because their work merits it and because we feel this will strengthen our program by providing opportunities for faculty and students to participate in this creative work."

The theater group is a project of Community Arts and the group is funded by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act through the Regional Employment and Training Consortium. Funding is limited and temporary.

The CETA funds pay the salaries of the small staff and some administrative costs are covered. The actors must find their own transportation, and members of the staff often must transport the actors to and from rehearsals in Balboa Park.

The actors all are mentally retarded. They were chosen after extensive auditions at San Diego County Association for the Retarded work centers. More than 250 persons auditioned, and Andros said more would have auditioned if transportation and space for auditions had been available.

Andros, set designer Paul White and music director Jonathan Sacks work with the young actors to develop the ensemble's program. The group is encouraged to improvise, and the result is a moving portrayal of the special world~of the disabled, mime, music, improvisation and rehearsed dialogue.

"Three people in the group I would consider creative geniuses," said Andros. "One girl has perfect pitch. She improvises songs, making up lyrics and melody as she goes along. When you expect someone to be mentally retarded, they're mentally retarded. When you expect them to be brilliant, they're brilliant.

"This isn't a therapy group. It is therapeutic work, because it inspires self-awareness, self-confidence and self-worth, all leading to greater independence. But we are all professional theater people," she said. "We are advocating and we are entertaining.

Many aspects of our shows have nothing to do with the disabled. We've all been in situations where we've been misunderstood, or made fun of," she concluded.

She said the affiliation between UC San Diego and the Theatre of the Disabled "has marvelous potential." About 95,000 developmentally disabled adults live in San Diego County, she said, and programs to serve them are extremely limited.

Addison added that long-range goals for the Theatre of the Disabled project have not yet been established, but future interaction will be detailed as soon as funding can be located.

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