

Experiences in Audio Description for the Visual and Performing Arts:
A Virtual Workshop
Museum Arts Access Consortium
Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Meredith: Is there anything else? I know you did an edit about the part.

Ellysheva: I put the website in the chat.

Meredith: I'll do the mission. Then I'll jump in.

[Planning]

Meredith: You can take creative license. You know, "something I just found in my closet."

Ruth: I like that!

Meredith: Should we do that as well?

Ellysheva: Yes, best practices.

Ruth: What are we up to? How many?

Ellysheva: 80.

Ruth: Hot topic.

So many people don't understand how this works. I went to the MET to watch one of their people do a gallery tour for people who were blind. It was mind-boggling to me. Because I've never seen such a thing before and I couldn't imagine what it looked like.

Meredith: I looked at Peter's PowerPoint this morning. I'd love to see the performance he described. It's like an immersive experience. It's fantastic. Excited to hear from him.

Ellysheva: We're just waiting on presenters.

Meredith: We have a list of contact information for and from panelists in the google drive. I think Peter did.

Ellysheva: He said not sure.

Meredith: If anyone hears from the panelists, you can add them.

Ruth: One of the things I discovered is, when someone does PowerPoint, the chat disappears.

Or it gets stuck.

On the right of the screen. The PowerPoint covers it.

Ellysheva: Our first participant is here. Should I let him in?

Meredith: Let's give the presenters a few minutes. In case they have questions.

Ellysheva: Don't see them yet.

I sent the right link right?

Meredith: It took me a little to create the account and password. I think Zoom is being extra vigilante.

Meredith: You're in charge of muting everyone's mic?

Ellysheva: Yes I can be in charge of that.

Meredith: When you mute all it mutes everyone. So we'll need to unmute.

Ellysheva: Now there are a couple people in the waiting room that aren't presenters.

Ruth: You have your email open?

Ellysheva: I do. I've been looking at it.

Waiting is my least favorite part.

Meredith: I know.

Ellysheva: Should I send an email?

Meredith: Give them a nudge.

Whoever has their radio on will want to turn it off soon.

Ruth: I've got the TypeWell transcript on my phone. I don't know how to get it on to the screen.

Amy?

Ellysheva: Ruth, it'll be on a separate screen.

Ruth: It has to be on it.

Ellysheva: Nefertiti Matos is joining. Peter is here.

Nefertiti Matos: Hello can I be heard? Is my video activating?

Ellysheva: No.

Meredith: Hi Peter!

Peter Trojic: Hey Nefertiti!

Nefertiti Matos: How are you in Atlanta? Stay inside!

Peter Trojic mind if I share my screen? To make sure everything is proper?

Ruth Starr: Hi everyone. Sorry I'm late!

Peter Trojic: I have to leave the meeting and come back.

Ruth Starr: Have we seen Kyle?

Ellysheva: He should be coming. Haven't seen him here yet.

Ruth Starr: Nefertiti, is this Venic you're in now? That's rad!

Meredith: In your imagination it is.

Ruth: My computer isn't good enough quality to get a background.

Nefertiti Matos: I've been having so much fun getting ready for this presentation.

Ellysheva: There's Kyle!

Meredith: We're at 23 people, including us. It's about to be 1:00. Any panelists have questions before we start?

Ellysheva: We see your slides!

Kyle Wright: Hi this is Kyle.

Ellysheva: So you can stop sharing your screen. Any questions before we let everybody in?

Ruth Starr: I had images I might want to send out in the chat? Will I be able to do that?

Ellysheva: Sure. I was going to make you all co-hosts so you can do that.

Peter Trojic: Can we go over the order since everyone's screen is sorted differently?

Meredith: Nefertiti starts us off with the audio description 101 explanation. Then Ruth Starr. Then Peter. Then Kyle. If that's OK with everyone.

Ellysheva: Ruth Bernstein will give you a 5 minute warning.

Ruth: About 15 minutes for each?

Ellysheva: Yes.

Ready to admit everyone? Let's do it! I'm muting everybody.

Ellysheva: Welcome, everybody!

Meredith: Love seeing the room fill up.

Ellysheva: Meredith, should we get started?

Meredith: I think so! Welcome everyone to the MAC workshop on audio description for visual and performing arts.

We're happy for this great turnout. Looking forward to the Q&A portion at the end.

I'd love to have my colleagues from the MAC steering community introduce themselves. I'm Meredith Wong. Whoever would like to introduce themselves? Ruth Bernstein, would you like to introduce yourself? Can you unmute her?

Ruth: Hi, I represent the hearing loss community.

Meredith: Ellysheva?

Ellysheva: Yes! I'm Ellysheva the administrative secretary for MAC and I'm also putting a live transcript in the chat if you're interested in following along. If you have any questions for the panelists, feel free to message me at MAC Access or put it up for all to see!

Barbara: I'm Barbara, retired from NYPL for the Performing Arts and longtime member of the MAC steering committee.

Meredith: Thanks all for organizing. We have a few housekeeping things. We'll audio and video record this workshop. If you have a question for during the Q&A, feel free to submit anytime in the chat. We'll go through them, and see if we can address most if not all of them.

Also as Ellysheva mentioned, we have live transcription of this workshop. Which should be done by TypeWell. And that should pop up in a different window. Confirmed!

We'll also mute everyone's microphones so we can cut down on ambient noise and make sure everyone can hear us.

That's it for housekeeping. As far as who we are and keeping best practices, I forgot to ask everyone to briefly describe themselves. I'm Meredith Wong, Asian American, 5'1 " With cat eye glasses. Happy to be your moderator.

The first time panelists speak, they can do the same as well. And audio describe their slides, if they have them.

Before we jump into our panelists speaking, I want to read out our MAC mission statement.

MAC is the Museum Arts Access Consortium. We're made of professionals for the disability community. Through connection, and advocacy.

That's the framework where MAC comes from. We'll jump into welcoming our panelists. There's an exciting array of disciplines on this panel. Excited to hear from all of them.

I'll ask Nefertiti to get us started. Nefertiti if you'd like to describe yourself. And start us off with what audio description is.

Nefertiti Matos: Hi. I'm unmuted?

Thank you very much. Hi everybody. I'm Nefertiti Matos. I wear several hats. My biggest one is working as an access technology instructor at the Talking Book Library, a branch of the NYPL. I meet with disabled and non-disabled, able-bodied adults and children. Teaching technology skills on a mainstream device, or one made for people with disabilities.

Something as basic as typing skills, to something as advanced as building your own website. I create and facilitate workshops in

English and Spanish. And several other things.

I'm on thinktanks and working groups with Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, NYU Mobility Lab. I keep myself in the accessibility space in and around New York City. I'm lucky to be able to do that.

I'm a female, pronouns are she/her/hers. I have short brown hair, bob style, straight. Brown hair and skin. Latina. My background. This is complicated. This is part of an activity I'm practicing, but it's important I describe it for anyone blind or low vision. I'm a little stymied here. But it's a background of a city. I'm told, as I too am blind. It's an Italian looking city, whatever that means. Built in the side of a mountain. You can see the ocean and sky. Someone asked if I was in Venice. I wish!

Hopefully more from you all later. Should I stop now? Continue my presentation?

Meredith: Hi Nefertiti this is Meredith. Tell us what description is. Then continue with your presentation.

Nefertiti Matos: Thank you. Thank you Meredith for introducing yourself. If going forward you have a question, if there's time for that towards the end-- and presenters if you can state your name, that's helpful for me or anyone else blind or low vision.

What is audio description? The federal description is as follows. In theaters, museums, in television and film, it's commentary and narration guiding the listener through presentation with concise, objective descriptions of scenes, settings, costumes, body language, all slipped in between portions of dialogues and songs. The federal government describes it as this-- for the access board section 508 and standard sections, in February 22 2015. There haven't been changes since then.

I'll talk about that in a bit. Audio description, narration, added to the soundtrack to add visual description that can't be understood through the audio alone. For video content essential to comprehension. Audio description provides information on action, characters, scene changes, on screen text, and other visual content. Audio description

supplements the other track of the program.

Audio description is usually added during existing pauses in dialogue. It is also called "video description" and "descriptive narration."

A friend of mine in the Mayor's Office of Disability says, "think of it as the audio book version of your video." I love that and wanted to share with you. It's on point. As someone who's blind and who enjoys movies, live theater, museum exhibits, audio description allows me to see beyond what I can hear.

In a museum, recently at MOMA-- some work I'm involved with is a painting by Picasso called *Lobster and Cat*. I was to gauge what I thought it was. Some audio description was provided.

Based on the name, I thought it was a lobster and a cat. Maybe they're next to each other, I don't know what they're doing. Going by the name, that's not enough.

With the audio description, it was explained to me, it's a vivid lobster. Angry looking. The cat is also ready to snap at the lobster. They can tell because the cat's hair is on end. The lobster's claws are ready to clamp down on something. It was explained a lot more eloquently than I explained to you. But it allowed me to get a lot more context and experience.

In museums with family, I make sure the museum is aware I'm coming. I find any accommodations by calling ahead of time or emailing. I want to enjoy it with whoever I'm with. I've been known to host people out of town whether they can see or not.

I don't want to just be for the ride and hear the hmm's or disturb someone in the movie theater by having someone whisper to me. Audio description also provides me a level of autonomy.

I'm listening to something scripted, what someone else observed. But it's in my ear. I have a little ear bud in my ear for my talking points. My phone is in my lap. I have my screen reader to stay on point. It's common in museums. A device I plug into my ear for movies, audio performance. It allows me to listen to what I listen to.

Bring the volume up or down. Tune into what's around me with my ear without the plug. So I can keep track of my surroundings. I feel very independent when this happens. I also feel ensconced in the movie or performance without saying "what did you say?"

It's exciting, there's more and more being used. I hope with presentations like this one there's more of it. That there is a need out here, it's important, it can change lives. It has for me. It allows me to go out more, enjoy things more.

Ruth: You have 5 minutes Nefertiti.

Nefertiti Matos: Thank you! With that said, I'd like to share my screen here. To show you an example of audio description. Just a moment.

Can you see my screen?

Speaker: Yes.

Nefertiti Matos: Excellent. Hopefully you can hear my audio. Let me know if this can be heard.

Speaker: Nefertiti. The video is playing. But audio is not coming through.

Nefertiti Matos: Thank you.

Just a moment.

Speaker: If you want to move on, I think you included this link?

Nefertiti Matos: Yes. I wanted context. But this link is included in the resource list shared with you all. Sorry I can't play it for you now. I just want to go back to where I started, my background. I thought it'd be a fun activity for participants to describe my background. But I don't know how feasible that'll be, now that I'm doing this. Maybe we should close here.

Meredith: I'd love to walk through that exercise. I think we're

probably up, time wise. But something to think about, how would you describe this presentation or Nefertiti.

Nefertiti Matos: Thank you so much. I look forward to whoever is next.

Meredith: Thank you so much, Nefertiti. If you would stop sharing your screen?

It's so important to have someone actually using this tool. And who's in a role where she's teaching others about audio description. We felt her voice was a good way to get us all on board. And introduce the idea of audio description for those of you new to it.

We're moving on to Ruth Starr from the Cooper Hewitt Museum. Ruth, if you can unmute yourself.

Ruth Starr: Hi everyone! If you can all hear me, thumbs up!

Nice to see everyone. Rad to have you show up. I use she/her pronouns. I come from the Cooper Hewitt Museum. I'm a white woman, sitting on my couch. I'm young, short hair with choppy bangs. I'm doing home cutting! And behind me is my real living room. Someone asked me that today!

It is. It's a white wall, with a rocking chair and plants.

Today we are talking about audio description. Thanks James! Who loves my rocking chair. I'll throw links in the chat now. I wanted to start, as a museum person, what does audio description mean to me. And then at Cooper Hewitt, what does it mean to us now, in our journey of offering audio description. The high thousand foot overview is that audio description is a practice amidst a larger practice amidst visual description.

Audio description is often recorded. I included in the chat a couple great links. Shoutout to friends at the Jewish Museum. I saw a great pre-recorded audio of a link but they may have a better link. Let me know, I'll throw it in the chat! I also linked to MOMA's audio guide. Teaching artists Paula Stepman [sp?] a fantastic visual describer.

These are museums who do pre-recorded audio "tours," if you will. Typical of museums. You can experience a curator or educator talking about the work.

We've experimented with pre-recorded tours. Now we're focusing on exhibition videos.

For some museums with exhibitions of objects, we also have videos in our exhibitions. I'll speak about what that means in terms of providing audio description.

Another area this occurs is in live event. If someone wanted to be audio describing this event, there'd be some describing. Kyle and Peter will also speak about live and performance based description.

For us at Cooper Hewitt the way we provide description is in exhibition videos. It's policy that there's audio videos in gallery. We started doing it in 2018 with Senses, Designing Beyond Vision.

At Cooper Hewitt we are a design museum. Our museum covers decorative arts like tiles, textiles, to 3D printed robotics and drones. We run the gamut of content. It runs from historic teacups behind glass, to hands on interactive 3D printed cotton candy! Yes that's something we did have.

In terms of media we often have video in exhibitions. At one point we had 50 on view at any time. Often these are ancillary videos in the collection explaining about another object. If it's a building, it may be an architect speaking about the work. Sometimes it's the work itself. Animations, artist videos, 3D works that exist.

For us, the content ranges. I linked to a couple videos in the chat. One's from a recent exhibition called Willie Smith. The film is Expedition. The other from our triennial, A Grain of Sand. You can get a sense of what this means for how content is presented.

That's the overview. For us, when we think of providing audio description for videos there are a couple things. The work flow. How to create description, how to record, how to design into exhibitions. I

included friends. Seena [sp?] and JJ. Great friends who are knowledgeable in the space. Great resources. If you follow the link to Grain of Sand you'll hear JJ. And in Expedition you'll hear the voice of a friend in the community, Darnell Lisby who worked on the project. Thanks to all who collectively made the material.

There's a pretty multi-step process. And certainly one that's collaborative with a lot of stakeholders. Thinking of how content is reflected through language is something all of us in museums think a lot about. Especially when objects and material may touch on difficult topics.

I was emailing with JJ, how are we talking about race, or reflecting physique in a fashion show of a bunch of models. How is that important to the meaning of the material.

There's a lot for institutions to reflect on in their style guide. Thinking of their role in providing material that is considerate in its approach and well reviewed.

For us, audio description scripts go through the same review that the rest of the content does. For a reaction exhibition on Muslim fashion, the text was read by a community of advisors representing that population.

The scripts were reviewed by that same body. This becomes one part of content that fits in with the larger landscape of what's going on in exhibition.

For us, there's also interesting opportunity with audio description. It's a creative practice. In a recent show we brought community voices to read the descriptions. We felt it was important to bring back to life.

It's exemplified in other examples. In contemporary pieces, there's concern of the artist's intent, what if the artist made a video and don't want it described? You can cc, artist's intent is not an excuse to not make it accessible! That's our job to make people know. If it's an artist's video and they don't want it altered, at Cooper Hewitt we say cool, let's get them involved. How would they want their work described? That's been a generative way to bring them into the practice. Not always possible.

If you're working with a collection of living artists, we recognize description is inherently a creative practice. Inviting it in. We're going to describe it. Artists care about how their work is reflected.

Ruth B: 5 minutes.

Ruth Starr: Rad moment where people care about accessibility.

I wanted to share examples from the Willi Smith installation that was only open for a day before COVID. I'll share it after. Unfortunately it hasn't seen a lot of visitorship. One thing important to us with the installation of audio description was audience awareness.

It's available to anyone. Anyone can turn it on, listen to descriptions. How does a visitor learn what audio description is. "When I lift this device, this is why I'm hearing that." For us as a design museum it's our mandate to educate people on that. On text on walls we say "audio description is available." These are folks using it.

There's a concern, "people are going to be confused by the audio description." For me, what a great moment to be intentional about the design of this tool. So anyone who sees the words can also listen to things being described. I think that's most of what I wanted to cover.

I'll think about how to get photos in the chat. Excited to be a part of the conversation and hear what everyone else has to say.

Meredith: Thank you so much Ruth. That was amazing. It came across when you spoke that you're passionate about this. Not just the surface of audio description but digging deep with the question of identity. Language as it reflects identity. The people doing audio describing, and the people involved in the work of art.

I love that idea of questioning the role of language. And how and why we choose the words we do to describe something.

That really impacts the understanding of that piece for someone who's low vision or blind. Thank you so much for that.

We were going to Peter but looks like he stepped away?

We have to unmute you.

Peter Trojic: Can you hear me now?

Meredith: Hi Peter. Thank you Ruth for that wonderful presentation. Just as a note, all if not all the links and references and resources our panelists speak about will be included in the resources list we'll post after the workshop is over. If you madly try to scribble the links, don't worry.

Peter, you have an interesting project to talk about.

Peter Trojic: Hi. My name is Peter. I am seated in my living room. Beige wall behind me. I'm mixed race. Half Asian and half white. Mid-30s. Little stubble. White shirt with Criss cross navy blue pattern. I have longish hair because I haven't been able to get a haircut.

I'll share my screen. I'll share the dance app. And can share after the presentation.

I assume you can see my screen. If you can't, interrupt me.

Heidi Latsky Dance Company is a city based company ... [reading from screen]

I am Peter Trojic the accessibility and technology director. Also involved with projects.

In 2018 we were at a residency at City College. We've developed a lot of our accessibility work in residencies at the City University of New York. In 2018 we were at Baruch, another college in New York City. We had a question, how can we make our work accessible for blind and low vision audience members? You need audio description if you're blind or low vision. The theater was equipped. However most of of the time our work is done in nontraditional spaces like Cooper Hewitt or National Portrait Gallery. There might not be

devices if we're in public like a park. We wanted to see how to make things accessible.

We created the Heidi Latsky Dance Company app. Based on that season, many audience members said they wanted to deepen their understanding of the dancers.

"... 15+ living sculptures ... "

We erupt into movement, then return to stillness.

Audience members loved the show but wanted to get to know the dancers. We created an immersive experience. For blind and also hard of hearing community at the same time.

In the fall of 2018 we were supported from public funds. Through New York City department of cultural affairs.

Versions 2.0 and 3.0. We were at a residency at City College. The video to the left shows off how the app works. The app is screen readable. It has a screen reader for a program, audio description, Ticker Tape which sounds like a voice over. And the Final Walkthrough which we added.

We also have post-show feedback. To stay more connected with our audience and community

Audio description. What does audio description of dance and DISPLAYED mean? How to do it if there's no dialogue, like with movies, television shows?

[Reading bullet 2]

If you think about it, when I look at my screen, I see everything going on. Looking around my room, my eyes process a large amount of information. Human ears can't do that. How to do audio description so it doesn't overwhelm the blind audience member? How do you make it interesting? Traditionally audio description is a secondary track that accompanies the dialogue in a movie or film.

But in dance, where there is no dialogue, how do you make it interesting? How do you offer a way into moments with improv working with a pre-recorded track?

Through the show, all the dancers have moments of improv. Especially in the first 18 minutes. When they exit, it's a complete improv session. We had no way of offering a way into this part of the show for blind audience members.

We worked with an audio describer David Linton. We decided to be innovative.

[Reading "Our Answers"]

"As the audience walks through, they can hear the dancer speak."

You have 15+ members standing in the space. Not typically a theater space. It can be a gallery space. These spaces don't have access to a typical audio description system that you'd see in a museum or theater.

As the audience walks in, they can hear the audio description by the dancers. As they exit, the dancers are in a moment of improv. They return to being sculptures. There wasn't an effective way to offer a way in, until we had the ability to create a sort of museum tour of the dancers.

They speak. I have a small clip if I can get it playing. Let me know if you can hear it.

[Audio:

... being on display is not typical. I'm usually head down, not looking at what others are looking at ...]

That's Carmen, one of the dancers recording how she felt during the piece. This offered sighted audience members a way to understand and also blind audience members, who couldn't see the dancer before, they had something to consume.

All content is captioned for both deaf and hard-of-hearing communities or those without access to headphones.

Ruth B: You have 5 minutes.

Peter Trojic: "Because the app was created ...

Through every step of this process ... "

At first we were going to deploy the final walkthrough through facial recognition. Then we realized if you were blind you couldn't walk to the dancer and have the phone register. Or if you had a cane, you couldn't hold the phone as well. We went through many ways to deploy the technology. With the app we changed from rehearsal to rehearsal.

"Currently ... " [On screen]

We showed a work at Dixon Place and played the audio description at Dixon Place that didn't have access to devices for typical audio description.

Additionally it offers a program. The theater itself was in a greenmode-- the word is escaping me. They didn't have paper programs.

Performances and installations can be accessible in untraditional spaces. If we have the program at the UN or Central Park the performance can still be accessible. Most users have cellphones. For those who don't, we have iPads available. It makes a way in for sighted viewers and you can go back, see the show with the audio description track.

In the future we plan to display as an ongoing run. We want to augment in a creative way.

A feature we have is swatches of the outfits. Before and after the show, a blind user or any audience member can feel the costumes, understand the fabric.

We like to enhance the elements of interactive shows using the app.

And engage the audience more.

If you'd like to know more of the app you can go to the Google App or App store. If you need to contact me, my email is peter@heidilatskydance.org.

To Ruth's point, the app allows audio description to be available to everyone. That's not typical. When I first encountered it, I turned it on for a weird movie I was watching. I just assumed it was a part of the film. I didn't understand what audio description was until someone explained.

Even though I'm disabled, I don't know everything about disability. I always say, try to work with the communities. When asked for resources I use, use resources in my community. I worked with people in the NYPL before, and one of Nefertiti's friends was immense help. Help that sighted users don't have. Consult the user base during the project. I saw projects like this fail before, because the creators consult a blind person once or twice if they're lucky.

It's basically box checked off their list, they move on and say it's accessible. You'll never have an accessible product unless you're able to consult a blind or deaf person or your target audience through your process. I think I'm done.

Sorry that was really fast.

Meredith: It seems fast. It's a lot of information. It's an exciting project. I'm excited it's ongoing. Thank you so much for sharing that with us. It brings up an interesting idea. Where you actually balance digital and non-digital access tools. And you're wanting to be as inclusive as you can with these tools you're using. For the disability communities as well as the able-bodied communities.

Peter Trojic: As a point, what was interesting was grappling with the point of making audio description creative without taking away from the intent of audio description. That was a big debate in the studio. And with audio describers.

Meredith: I'd love to do another workshop on that. The craft of audio

description is just that. You can delve so much deeper into it. But that's a tangent and for another workshop.

I'd love to invite Kyle to introduce himself, welcome to the panel Kyle.

Kyle Wright: Hello there, I'm Kyle Wright with the Schubert Organization. It's a group in New York with 17 Broadway and 6 off-Broadway services. Also ticketing services like Telecharge. Can you all hear me?

I won't share slides. Just our process of what we're doing on Broadway.

I'm a white, middle-aged person. I'm 36, whatever that means to you. I have greying hair. I'm sitting in my dining room. I painted it studio green, it's a dark green but also an aquamarine blue depending on the light. And there's modern geometric block print art behind me.

Broadway is having a moment right now as is everyone. We don't have a business now. Everything I'm talking about today was launched prior to COVID-19 and will continue post COVID-19. But good news is that it's in Schubert Theaters and in other theaters. There's the Broadways League and on the league level, 2 years ago we launched a program for on demand closed captioning and audio description for every seat for every Broadway theater. These are programs, platforms, required for all theaters 4 weeks of opening, across the board.

If you bought a ticket, and 4 weeks after opening the services aren't available, contact the owner because that's not OK, they should be there.

4 years ago, the first thing we did when we launched into this initiative, inspired by 2 things. One, the advent of technologies making it cost effective to provide the services. Streaming apps requiring low bandwidth to work reliably. Second, vocal recognition to trigger speech to text.

For Broadway theaters, it's not live but pre-recorded audio description prepared by professionals. Scripts are done and the recording is with

high quality recording. They are triggered based on vocal recognition.

It made us think, maybe now is a time to make a scalable solution. Most don't realize there are 10,000 performances on Broadway in a year. That's a lot of people to facilitate real time live audio description. We knew we needed solutions to provide equity and parity.

We had the technology, we knew we needed to do it for a long time. Now let's bring in the community we hope to serve. Day 2, we brought in organizations, patrons, people from the deaf blind community to formulate a plan for putting together the platform, to test it, make it reliable, put together marketing materials, and improve and maintain it.

That became the advisory committee that met every quarter, now twice a year. To stay on top of our committee. We call it Audience Services at Shubert and something similar elsewhere. It includes several products with the exact same content.

What we knew from testing is, the one thing we can rely on is that nothing works for everyone! Variety and ongoing commitment and testing options is the way to serve as many as you can.

We began with GalaPro an app that provides captioning, and amplification, and subtitles, and language translation. We tested just this one piece of technology, seeing how it works with other technology like I-Caption. And Descriptive. [sp?]

We went to Avenue Q with executives. Bought out the balcony and tested to see how it worked. We tested, does it work? What is the level of disruption? Is there glare? Sound bleed? Other issues with hearing aids? We determined it was a success, made improvements, went to our advisory board.

Now we were ready for a different test. Let's go to a Broadway show. We bought out the center mezzanine for Fiddler on the Roof. And invited people to test. I went with gift cards. We had people sit for the live performance to see if it worked with more people using it at

once. And what it felt like for level of inclusion. It was a screen and headphone out, and did they not feel excluded or disruptive or that they didn't belong. Two wonderful things happened. I got two feedback from people sitting around the group. "It looks like people are using that for Captioning." More often than not, "I can't understand what's happening on stage, can I use it?"

We learned a lot. One of the major things we learned is that the synchronization of the audio description or captions was a key part of the entire platform. Mostly because no one wants to laugh too soon or late or understanding the jaw dropping choreography on stage. Everyone wants to experience it together.

When we do our best work we change hearts and minds with people without the same background. We made it as near real time as we could while making it scalable. So people coming in on vacation could just come in and experience it. And those who came in with their grandkids could still experience it with all the enabling platforms we could provide.

We went back to the drawing board, focused on synchronization. And did tests with low vision and blind populations. We had a funny realization. We sat our advisory board for the audio description in the first 3 or 4 rows of Phantom, thinking it'd enable people to hear better. But the music is so loud, it drowned out the audio description track.

Ruth B: 5 minutes.

Kyle Wright: We learned on how to place people, how to label seats, and these types of informational aspects. This was the fall of 2018. Then we launched audience platforms. We continue to improve it. With a suite of technologies. GalaPro is one. There's also i..caption. And also Descriptive for audio description. Then there are headsets.

With audio description and captioning, no matter the device, it's the exact same content and triggering technology. We want to make sure people are comfortable using their phone and so on.

I'll show this about what we put together. I'll share computer sound. For Zoom to play video, click "Share" and the checkbox. To make

sound come through. Let's see if this works.

[Video:

(Captioned)

Kyle Wright: Great. Now let me stop sharing. Did that actually work for everyone? Can I get a thumbs up?

Great.

I have like 30 seconds left. One thing I didn't cover is that it's free. In the process of using GalaPro or any of these technologies you disable the sound so it doesn't cause disruptions. We have 18 tours using GalaPro and providing these services as they tour the country. This is getting traction which we're excited about. Also while the work is done, while they change a little, it's cost saving to provide this at national touring levels.

With that I'm done. GalaPro is the website which I'll put in the chat.

Meredith: Perfectly timed!

That concludes our panel presentations. I am blown away by all of them. We have a couple minutes before the Q&A. If you want to stretch, take a deep breath to get your blood going, feel free to do so. If you have questions please put them in the chatroom. Or if you prefer to ask live, you can raise your hand and we'll unmute you as need be.

We'll give you a couple minutes to shake it all out then we'll unmute as we need to.

[Break]

Meredith: We'll come back to the table in about a minute.

Some questions were put in the chat window. If you'd prefer to ask them live, put up a hand. We'll unmute your mic.

OK! We have everyone back at the proverbial table. I'll pass the baton to my colleague Ellysheva. She'll coordinate the Q&A. Thanks very much, Ellysheva.

Ellysheva: I'm a young woman, white, red hair, shoulder length, coral sweater, floral blue shirt.

I got a couple questions in the chat. The first one I saw was for Peter. I'll unmute everyone. Sorry.

Something is going weird.

Peter Trojic: You have to unmute yourself.

Ellysheva: We talked about dancers were involved in the script right?

Peter Trojic: Heidi gives us a task as one of the dancers. Sometimes we create movement. Or in collaboration with Heidi. We already have intimate knowledge of the movement when we start writing the audio description. We started a version of the piece in 2015. We wrote this in beginning of 2018. Most hadn't interacted with audio description before. One of the dancers misunderstood the task and came back with a poem which was really fascinating. Everyone's really involved in writing the script. It's how it feels in our body. We give it to an audio describer.

As a dancer and accessibility director we refine the script. It evolves. The cast changes, the piece changes slightly. We can record it more easily now as we've worked out more bugs.

Ellysheva: Great. Another question I got from the chat. Which I think any of our presenters can answer.

Out of curiosity, any insights on how audio description can be used by the deaf-blind?

Peter Trojic: We are in the process of updating our audio description. But we want the next version to be captioned on the app. So a deaf-blind person can understand what audio description is. Audio description in itself is an art unfortunately lost to the deaf community

as it's not available to them.

Kyle Wright: From an insider's perspective, at Shubert it's a little complicated. We do track usage to see how many patrons use our apps. Before all this, depending on seasonality, on average we had 1-200 people a week using the GalaPro app. Split among people using audio description and captioning. Majority use captioning. 10-15 a month use audio description. That's partly to do with our ability to accurately promote audio description to the community that needs it. We're always trying to figure out how to do it. Part of it is just consistency and talking about it every chance we get to build awareness.

I'm talking from venue owner and distribution standpoint. I encourage the board to not look at the numbers. Not how many use it but that it's available. You have to be careful in my experience, with executives, with giving too many numbers with accessibility. "We're paying however million dollars for only 200 people a week." That's not the point. The point is to provide it for a human right to enjoy storytelling in a shared environment because it's right and frankly legally required. It's a double edged sword looking at analytics.

Peter Trojic: What's interesting with live performances, people don't know there's audio description available. I don't know if we had users at Cooper Hewitt but at National Portrait Gallery there were the devices ready. They even moved it outside where it wasn't typically available. Not one person used them but I talked to the director at the museum. It's not about usage. But about if a patron does come, by having it available to one, word spreads. The more and more we audio describe, in the future hopefully there'll be audience members say, "oh I can go to this show." It won't be an issue of, is it accessible.

Just a reminder, anyone asking a question, please say your name. Anyone else from the panelists who wants to answer that question?

OK. We have a question from Londs Reuter.

Londs: Can you hear me? I'm a dance artist and access worker at the Whitney. Nice to see so many friends here today. I was hoping

to hear how you make choices around ethics of what ethics are maintained. This is something I struggle with working in a museum. I talked with educators about maintaining the perspective of the curator, maintaining the perspective of the show. Or revealing [audio out]-- and thinking about the average visitor. Someone without pre-knowledge of the show.

I'm curious how you make choices around what perspectives get maintained. That's open to anyone on the panel.

Ellysheva: Thanks Londs!

Ruth: I can start. This is Ruth Starr from Cooper Hewitt. I love when there's another Ruth.

Thanks Londs for this question. It's super critical. For us at the museum it's a question around stakeholders. There's a lot around the power and privilege of the different stakeholders in content creation. How much are we privileging the artist perspective we always default to. How much are we privileging the usability or quality of text for this particular purpose. For me that's where we approach it from a discussion point.

We operate on multiple planes. My first priority was that we make a policy. And I think others like Kyle spoke around policy too. In terms of maturing a practice. Step one, you start. Step two, establish a policy. That's how people can trust this will be available. Once there's a policy that every exhibition video will be described-- when we rolled it out, that exhibition will.

That one won't. So people coming in can just watch some videos? And it's up to them to figure it out? That makes no sense. It's arriving at the point, "this is something we're going to commit to." First it requires honest conversations. We're constantly privileging certain perspectives over others that are assumed in an exhibition context.

There's a lot in description that opens up insecurity and uncomfortableness with how are we describing sensitive topics?

For me it's us arriving collectively at what feels right. Recognizing that the curators oftentimes are advocating for the concerns of the artist. "The artist ... " For their perspective, they advocate that. From my perspective, I meet that and talk from the visitor perspective. Cool, but it's our job to educate artists about people and visitors. It's thinking about the goals of the material, and being clear. Coming at a place of education.

That argument about perspective is rooted in assumption and a lack of full, deep understanding on what it is we're doing, why, for who.

Taking the time to walk through and say this is what we're doing. For me it's helpful. Not always. It takes one occurrence of doing it right to set a precedent. In the way that it takes one occurrence of doing it wrong to set a precedent. With decision making it's a larger landscape of power.

For visitor advocates, how much are they listened to? I go back to what I always say, as much as visitor advocates can saddle up with points. I want to hear the curator but not rest on, "just because we did that before, doesn't mean we should do that now."

Kyle Wright: I love hearing you speak Ruth, you always say it so eloquently. I'll start with policy. My role is not in accessibility, I build out new businesses. This happens to be one of the businesses we built. That's an important perspective. In the process of building a policy, I often don't get to hear the human side. Which is great.

The truth is, not to make it gross, money plays a big part of it. In my world, when we talk about the captioning script, issues of IP come up. It turns into a nasty legal issue. "That's not how I intended it." That's all important. But the privilege of perspective is important.

I'd love to get the producers of the shows to be in discussions like this. To put a face on a community. That's where you take the step from policy into creation and community. If the creators think about ALL participants and members when they think of what they're building. That's how we take the next step in my industry. We're talking about commercial scale. It's a Herculean lift.

Peter Trojic: What you guys said about creating policies is important. My position was created within the company. We are an integrated company with disabled and non-disabled dancers. My role originally was just to ensure physical access for people with disabilities in the company. Then extend to the audience. It grew from there.

The technology aspect started because one day we were talking in the studio, how do we do this? We found an app developer. We tested it in the Baruch residency. And came to the City college residency. We applied for funding. I worked with an app designer because I'm familiar with the work and UX design. It's important to be willing to create new policies and positions. As the number of disabled population grows with the aging population and just in general, it's important to service.

We stay away from words we use internally. We didn't want to give it away. We want the audience to infer what they infer from the piece.

The dancer's ability to reclaim their self identity. As dancers or disabled people, we sometimes rig off what we look. This was our opportunity to really claim our identity. It was important for the dancers to have a voice. In the audio description in the beginning you hear the dancers speak. That's not something you typically hear. It drives the point home without riding it out.

Ellysheva: Thank you so much for answers. We are close to being at time for this workshop. I'll pass it back to Meredith to close it out.

Meredith: Thank you Ellysheva. First, huge round of applause to all our panelists. They were wonderful. It's so stimulating to have so many different voices in the room from all these disciplines. The implementation of audio description is different, depending on what discipline you are talking about.

Thank you so much. Thank you to all of you, our participants and audience in attending the workshop, asking questions, being open to having these conversations. This is what MAC is all about. Having conversations, pushing the envelope, seeing what resources are out there.

In closing, we're excited about this conversation. There are issues that can be workshops. We'll put it on our wishlist for upcoming years.

Thanks so much. If you're interested in any of the resources, we'll put together a resources page that we'll post or email out to everyone. If you think of questions later on feel free to get in touch with MAC. Thank you. Enjoy the rest of your afternoon.

[Thank you's]

[End of panel]

**** This transcript provides a meaning-for-meaning summary to facilitate communication access and may not be a fully verbatim record of the proceedings. ****