

Our deafblind actors are the inspiration!

Theatre-group 'Beautiful View' creates the nicest views¹

About Toneel Mooi Uitzicht (Beautiful View)

This article is about our theater group 'Toneel Mooi Uitzicht'². It's a Dutch name meaning: Theatre Beautiful View. Toneel Mooi Uitzicht is a part of Kalorama³ – The Centre for the Deafblind in Beek-Ubbergen, the Netherlands.

My name is Casper Schimmel, professional director and 'theatre-producer'. I'm a graduate from the School of Arts in Arnhem, Netherlands. Shortly after beginning my work at Kalorama in 2010, I formed Toneel Mooi Uitzicht. This group comprises 23 deafblind actors who live at the Kalorama Centre. Each actor brings with them their own unique talents and qualities. Being a large group, the actors usually work separately in three smaller groups.

Different types of Theatre Projects

Our group provides various performances, which we call supportive theatre, to celebrate special occasions, such as Christmas shows, street fairs, neighbourhood day, etc.

Once a year, the group performs a large theatre



production, completely written and prepared by the group themselves. Our most recent production 'Contact' (May 2013) played to an audience for four nights. Previous productions included: 'Romeo and Juliette' (2011) and 'Kalorama is on a Mountain' (2012). While the title of the next performance has not been decided, for sure it will be a performance "for all the senses"

Working with deafblind actors is a special challenge as they have different levels of abilities and disabilities. A great deal of communication assistance is required from staff assistants and interpreters to help with the interactions during the rehearsals and performances.

Since we began the

theatre, a great deal of understanding and growth has developed among the performers through the focus on communication interactions during the preparation, rehearsals and performances.

Making theatre - it's all improvisation!

The method we use to make theater is improvisation! When we start, there is no script. We write the texts then create our own scenes and props. We then think about how to combine them together in the program which includes many different scenes to fit with the theme.

When we chose our recent theme Contact, we decided it would be a Theatre on Location Project. The

¹ Part of the theatre group participated in a Focus Group during the 8th Dbl European Conference, Lille France, August 26, 2013

² www.everyoneweb.com/moouitzicht

³ www.kalorama.nl

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performances would be done on location throughout the premises of Kalorama and different scenic locations throughout the village of Beek-Ubbergen.

The performance started with a scene first in the Kalorama theatre, with the audience present. Following this first scene, the audience was split up in three groups and followed an attendant from location to location where they were entertained by a different actor-group performance. The final scene of the show occurred in the parking lot area where the travelling audience came together with all the actors for one final performance based on the same theme. In this way the actors successfully worked separately and together!

The actors are the inspiration

As the director, the most

important thing for me is the role the actors play throughout the entire process. Their individual ideas and skills to create the performance are indeed an inspiration!

I give you three examples of my inspiration:

First example features one man who has lived for over 30 of his 50 years at the Kalorama Centre. As well as being cognitively impaired, his visual and hearing abilities are declining, limiting his independence. When acting he demonstrates a good understanding of such emotions as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. He has difficulty acting such nuanced emotions as jealousy and disappointment. It seems difficult for him to understand the difference between reality and theatre. At the same time he is very

funny and has good dancing moves. Because I have known him for some time, I chose for him a scene I knew he could understand well. I let him play a slapstick scene using anger and sadness, knowing that being nice in the scene was not real to him. Last year he played in a scene where he cheerfully danced, slept and snored and then woke up to scare the dog. He liked to perform this scene very much. He asked me after each rehearsal whether he played the scene well. He gives the right information for me to choose the perfect things for his scenes. I was successful to make 'tailor-made' scenes for both his performances.

Second example is a woman with acquired deafblindness. She has become more dependent and passive since the recent onset of her disability robbed



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her of her former rich and fulfilling life. It was difficult to motivate her initially with theater. She thought playing theater is a bit crazy and not real. Slapstick was not her piece of cake. It was difficult to challenge her to play theater until I realized that if I gave her a familiar not 'crazy' role that she understood, it might inspire her. So when I grabbed the baby doll in the rehearsal room and indicated that the child had to be comforted by her, the 'mother in her' instantly connected with this role! She played her scene extremely well, experiencing all the emotions in caring for her child. She enjoyed the

applause and good reviews after the performance!

The last example I give is about a woman who is very intelligent and had worked in a hospital some years ago as a manager. She has acquired deafblindness and is unable to walk. While her severe sensory disabilities restrict her acting possibilities, it has not limited other important aspects. She has many good ideas and can write beautiful

theatre scripts. Unfortunately her speech is difficult to understand so the theatre group benefits largely from her writing abilities. But she continues to act in the performances, using body language interpreted to the audience by an attendant.

Most of the actors know very well what parts they would like to play in each performance. If the actor does not know initially what to play, I improvise for them

