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# Deaf prove deft in 'My Third Eye' [Review of the National Theater of the Deaf's play "My Third Eye" at the Pabst Theater, Milwaukee WI]

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# Deaf prove deft in 'My Third eye'

by Curtis L. Carter

Joyously expressive faces and excited communication among the people going into the Pabst Theater to see the National Theater of the Deaf perform in "My Third Eye" signaled the makings of a special evening.

The language of the theater crowd was predominantly the language of signs, as it would be on the stage.

The audience was not disappointed. The National Theater's "My Third Eye" tells a story that draws on the experiences of the actors. Episodes plumbing the experiences of their silent lives provide enlightening and dramatically engrossing materials. This material is presented in sign language accompanied by verbal narrative.

"My Third Eye" is five short pieces: "Biography," "Side Show," "Manifest," "Promenade," and "Curtain Raiser." The story is told first in a series of biographic narratives.

Each member of the cast, backed up by a screened picture of a childhood scene, reveals painful and joyous experiences with special relevance for him. We see a child suffer as he is forced to learn to speak "the way the others do."

Together the sketches offer sensitive-ly portrayed insights into the life of a

deaf person.

Stepping up the dramatic pace is "Side-show," a cleverly worked satire picturing as a curious exhibit the strange habits of the non-deaf.

From the deaf community's point of view, the telephone, the alarm clock, the tape recorder, all listening movements appear strange and very funny.

To show the range and variability of uses for sign language, the company offers "Manifest," a fast paced revue demonstrating their facility with sign language through poetry, inflection, and recitation games in signs. "Manifest" shows the richness and artistic potential for expression that is not often appreciated even by those who know and use sign language.

After intermission, the company turns to more artistically ambitious projects: "Promenade" and "Curtain Raiser." "Promenade" is modern dance psychodrama. Abstract in nature, the piece consists of the group milling around, going through, under, and on top of a large canvas drape. Each actor performs different movements, with occasional eruptions of verbal content expressing such emotions as anxiety, fear, rage, regression, through body language.

As the canvas rises and falls, people

move in relation to it, creating sculptural effects. At intervals a group cohesiveness develops and someone becomes a victim of their hostile actions. For the victim, the rising, tumbling walls of the canvas become a prison. Two figures are caught in the shake-up—but looseness of character formation in performance detracts from its dramatic intensity. It loses force, especially at the end, when didactic reflection on what would be missed if a person lost his sense of sound takes over.

"Curtain Raiser" begins as a well-constructed satire on a concert audience. It is clever, humorous, a "comedy of musical chairs" with a somewhat experimental structure. The movement is choreographed around placement and replacement of chairs, by the social hierarchy of the persons.

Performers appear as tuxedoed audience members staring expectantly all with cheshire cat-like grins at us. They invite participation through sign language from audience members, and respond with polite applause. We get the point. But then the piece begins to fall apart when too many new elements are introduced — a sign language version of "Three Blind Mice," song and dance routines complete with a chorus line. The piece ends with a rollicking and very entertaining chorus line song (in signs) and dance. It is all fascinating to watch, but I did not see them belonging to the same work. Again the ending did not follow through in the more imaginative vein established at the beginning.