

**NOVEMBER 24**  
**Silent awe**

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*filling in for Troy Dodds*

Have you ever sat in a room, in complete silence, and felt totally uncomfortable? The silence becomes so unbearable it feels as though your eardrums will burst? I have. I call it 'Deafening Silence', and it is certainly something I can do without.

Have you ever seen a performance in a theatre, in complete silence, where you were totally captivated, moved, shocked, stunned and spellbound? The silence becomes so natural that you wonder if the thousands of words you speak every day are necessary at all? I have. I call it 'Silent Awe', and unfortunately, it might be something we all will have to live without. That is if the support and funding of one of Sydney's lesser known theatre companies does not continue.

The Australian Theatre of the Deaf (ATOD)'s production of *The Wild Boys*, currently playing at the Parade Playhouse, NIDA, is one of the most amazing pieces of theatre I have seen in a long time. From the breathtaking opening sequence to the stunning use of a simplistic set to the emotions and stories portrayed by 4 actors with no dialogue – this show is utterly awe inspiring.

Established as a theatre company in 1979, with assistance from the Australia Council and The Elizabethan Theatre Trust, ATOD have been a professional entity for nearly 30 years. Their mission statement is to make a unique contribution to Australian culture by creating daring theatre for both deaf and hearing audiences alike. In doing so, promoting understanding and awareness of cultural differences and increasing the audience for deaf cultural expression.

Not many people know how this company benefits both the deaf and hearing communities every day. Their theatrical reach does not stop at producing magnificent mainstage productions like *The Wild Boys*. Throughout the school year, they tour an education program nation wide, promoting deaf awareness. I have witnessed a group of 200 students from a rough Western Sydney school sit in total silence for 60 minutes watching one of ATOD's performances. Needless to say, the teachers were awestruck having never seen their students quiet for more than 5 minutes at a time. They perform for deaf community events, host workshops in visual communication, and they also organise interpreted theatre throughout Sydney, allowing deaf audiences access to major musicals and plays that we hearing audiences take for granted.

Recently, the Australia Council altered the ways in which companies qualified for funding and ATOD has drawn a short straw in the money sweeps. With one third of their funding cut, it will be difficult for this little theatre company to survive without the support of the community it serves.

If you have seen an Australian Theatre of the Deaf show before, you know how wonderfully creative and inspiring they can be. If you have not, I encourage you to make a beeline for the Parade Playhouse and see this 75 minute wonder. If you are new to visual theatre, I would take some time to read up on the background of the play, so you can make connections with visual references.

It is time we rallied behind this amazing company, to ensure they have at least another 30 years of bridging cultural gaps, performing their visual vernacular and opening their world to those who are in the dark.

<http://www.aussietheatre.com/mysay.htm>