



## THE *Heart* OF THE TRIANGLE

Sharing the vision and supporting the mission of the Triangle area non-profit community.

# Arts Access: Making Art Participation More Accessible to Individuals with Disabilities

by Judy Liu, MPH

*"Art is not what you see but what you make others see." Edward Degas*

**C**an you imagine not being able to hear the glorious sounds of a musical performance or orchestral concert? Or, not being able to see a comedy performance in a musical theatre? The mission of Arts Access is to enable North Carolinians with disabilities to have full access to arts programs and facilities, and to encourage their full participation fully in the rich cultural and artistic life throughout the state.

Arts Access is a nonprofit organization based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since 1982, the organization has remained steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that the arts can be enjoyed by everyone. Arts Access concentrates its efforts on providing audio description, consulting and training services, and the organization's website serves as an interactive online resource to connect individuals, artists, educators and organizations throughout the state. Example: For individuals with visual impairment, Arts Access partners with volunteers to offer audio described performances in which a "describer" verbally describes the actions in a performance.

Since the 1990s, Arts Access has increased its partnerships with regional and statewide theatres and performance companies to provide audio description for performances of many productions including live theatre, opera, and ballet. During the past 10 years they have seen increased requests from NC town councils and museums to provide audio description for visual events such as public art and special travelling exhibits. On average, Arts Access provides audio description for 80 to 90 live productions and/or exhibits each year. Please call venues and ask for the accommodations you or your loved ones need.

Another service that Arts Access provides is training for arts organizations and venues who wish to more effectively provide accessible opportunities for their shows and exhibits. On average, Arts Access provides 8 to 10 workshops per year to train organizations and their staff on best practices in accessibility compliance as it relates to the arts. They perform consultations of up to 300 per year, through resource fairs, group presentations, and one-on-one meetings. They served almost 1,200 individuals in the 2016-17 Fiscal Year.

Arts Access strives to encourage and promote the work of artists with or without disabilities throughout North Carolina. As a part of this goal, Arts Access encourages artists to participate in their new Artist Link Project—a directory of NC artists, teaching artists, and advocates. Inclusion in this database will

enable artists to exhibit and promote their work in order to more fully participate in the cultural and artistic life of our state.

They launched a pilot program intended to impact arts educators in Wake County Public schools so they can better include kids with disabilities. It is called the Wake Arts Inclusion Project (WAIP). About 35 artists and arts educators have registered with their Artist Link Project directory. They also have scheduled three WAIP workshops with more to be announced in the coming months.

If you would like to learn more about the Artist Link Project, please contact their Program Coordinator, Jennifer Marshburn at [jennifer@artsaccessinc.org](mailto:jennifer@artsaccessinc.org). If you would like to learn more about WAIP, please contact [info@artsaccessinc.org](mailto:info@artsaccessinc.org).

Arts Access also offers support for arts organizations and venues throughout North Carolina in accessibility compliance and staff training related to the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### Training and consultation topics:

- Disability awareness and sensitivity
- Usher and/or docent training for interacting with people with disabilities
- Evaluation of facility to meet ADA requirements
- Support for writing organizational ADA plan
- Audio describer training
- Support in creating accessible communication and marketing tools
- Including people with disabilities in arts education programs

### Upcoming audio described performances:

- Guys & Dolls at Cary Arts Center, October 8, 3:00pm
- Darkside at Burning Coal Theatre, October 15, 2:00pm
- The Little Mermaid at Durham Performing Arts Center, October 21, 8:00pm
- Grace for President at NC Museum of History, October 22, 5:00pm
- Lizzie Borden of Fall River at Cary Arts Center, October 22, 8:00pm
- Sense & Sensibility at Playmakers Repertory, October 24, 7:30pm
- A Soldier's Play at Justice Theatre Project, October 29, 3:00pm

You can donate via PayPal online at [www.artaccessinc.org](http://www.artaccessinc.org) or contributions can be mailed to: Arts Access, Inc., PO Box 10574, Raleigh, NC 27605

For information, please contact [info@artsaccessinc.org](mailto:info@artsaccessinc.org) or call 919-833-9919.