



Accessibility TipSheet Captioning/CART in the Performing Arts

From the Access Office

When considering captioning in the performing arts, there are two things to keep in mind:

- 1) Captioning is not the same as opera surtitles (or supertitles). Surtitles are highly synopsis-ed, carefully edited translations of what is being sung. Captioning is a word-for-word transcription of what the performers are saying or singing as well as sound cues like “phone rings”, “knock at door”, or “classical music”.
- 2) Captioning for live theater targets an audience that we, as performing arts providers, have let slip through the cracks: people whose hearing loss is too severe to benefit from the use of assistive listening devices and who don’t use or know sign language.

The following should help you research how to offer captioning at your venue.

The Kennedy Center uses an LED sign system to provide captioning. The sign is four feet long and scrolls two or three lines with 2-to-3 inch lettering in red, yellow, or green on a black background. The sign is positioned house left on stage with some flexibility depending set, stage, and pit configuration. The captioning sign in the smaller theaters is visible from most seats but some locations are better. In the larger theaters there is a designated captioned seating section where the captioning is easily visible.

The Center hires a professional court reporter/captioner or CART (Computer Assisted Real-time Translation) provider who either pre-enters the script and all sound references into their computer in advance and scrolls the text up in time with the performance or writes the show live (real-time) by listening and typing exactly what he or she hears. Pre-entering works if you have a script and the performers never vary the text. Real-time works when you don’t have a script, the script is new and evolving, the performers improvise, or there is audience participation. A combination of the two can also be used for shows that are mostly scripted but incorporate some improvisation or audience participation.

Resources

Your best resources for good information about captioning/CART in live theater are the following organizations/theaters that have been offering captioning regularly:

- **Victory Gardens Theater** in Chicago, Illinois. Contact Robert Alpaugh at ralpaugh@victorygardens.org
- **Theater Development Fund’s Theatre Access Project** in New York, New York. Contact Lisa Carling at lisac@tdf.org.
- **PaperMill Playhouse** in Milburn, New Jersey. Contact Michael Mooney at mmooney@papermill.org
- **Milwaukee Repertory Theater Company** in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Contact Annie Jurcsyk at anniej@milwaukeeep.com
- **Kentucky Center for the Arts** has been doing captioning using non-professionals (volunteers) for years. They can talk to you about the equipment and the process of using volunteers. Contact Martha Newman at mnewman@kentuckycenter.org
- **Caption Coalition, Inc.** is a small non-profit specializing in theatrical captioning that basically started the trend in New Jersey several years ago. Contact David Chu at dchu@c2.net.

Technology

The following are most of the existing captioning systems currently being used in theaters. *Please note: Inclusion on this TipSheet is not an endorsement of any organization or product.*

- [Cinema Subtitling System](#) was developed by Digital Theatrical Systems (DTS) for use in movie theaters. The text is stored on a hard drive, which synchronizes the captions with a time code on the film, and then shown through a second projector. This system has experienced some success in the UK. Video description can also be provided by this system.
- [Electronic Signs \(formerly VCI\)](#) developed software compatible with an LED sign so that anyone can operate the captioning. They sell both the LED sign and the software as a package. The sign is also compatible with standard CART software so that it can be used for real-time captioning.
- [Figaro Systems, Inc.](#) has a back-of-the-seat system originally designed to provide surtitles for opera. They are currently working on a handheld option. Their system will interface with standard CART software so that it can be used for real-time captioning.
- [Personal Captioning](#) has several types of systems. The most advanced system is a small, portable wireless FM unit. They are currently developing two other systems, including a PDA and a unit that clips to glasses.
- [Sound Associates, Inc.](#) developed I-Caption, a hand-held device that can be used to provide captioning and audio description.
- [Walt Disney World Resorts](#) developed a handheld wireless receiver that displays text narration in an environment where the audience is moving around. Additional information: 407-824-4321 (voice); 407-827-5141 (TTY);
- [WGBH's RearWindow System](#) was developed for use in movie theaters. More information about this system is available at [http://www.wgbh.org/rearwindow](#). Many in the deaf and hard of hearing community would prefer open captioning at movies.
- [Wireless RERC](#) is still under development. It is a wearable system that depends on wireless transmission and a micro display plugged into a PDA and attached to glasses or a headband.

Additional CART and Captioning Resources

- The Described and Captioning Media Program's [Captioning Key](#) is a great resource for information on different types of captioning
- WGBH's [Captioning FAQ](#) is a great resource for information on different styles of captioning.
- Visit the [National Court Reporters Association](#) (NCRA) online for good information about CART and captioning.
- Check out this [article](#) about a gentleman who rigged up a captioning system using computer equipment he had around the house.

About TipSheets

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