

# National Theatre of the Deaf

By: JiaJia Chen



# National Theatre of the Deaf

The National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) is a Connecticut-based theatre company founded in 1967, and is the oldest theatre company in the United States with a continuous history of domestic and international touring, as well as producing original works. NTD productions combine American Sign Language with spoken language to fulfill the theatre's mission statement of linking Deaf and hearing communities, providing more exposure to sign language, and educating the public about Deaf art. The NTD is affiliated with a drama school, also founded in 1967, and with the Little Theatre of the Deaf (LTD), established in 1968 to produce shows for a younger audience. The NTD has been fundamental in the creation of an international Deaf theatre community and has received several awards, including the Tony Award for Theatrical Excellence. The company has visited each of the 50 states during over 150 national tours, as well as over 30 countries.

# Role of the organization

NTD is a theater group composed of deaf and hearing actors who entertain audiences worldwide through signed and spoken languages. "The National Theatre of the Deaf was established in 1967 to dissuade the myth that deaf people cannot appreciate the arts and to 'educate and enlighten society about deaf culture (NTD, 2005)." Funded by the federal government, the National Theatre of the Deaf allowed local deaf actors to become professional performers. The NTD was established to provide an arena for deaf actors to become professionals and share their art with all audiences. Both deaf and voice actors create productions utilizing American Sign Language and the spoken word.

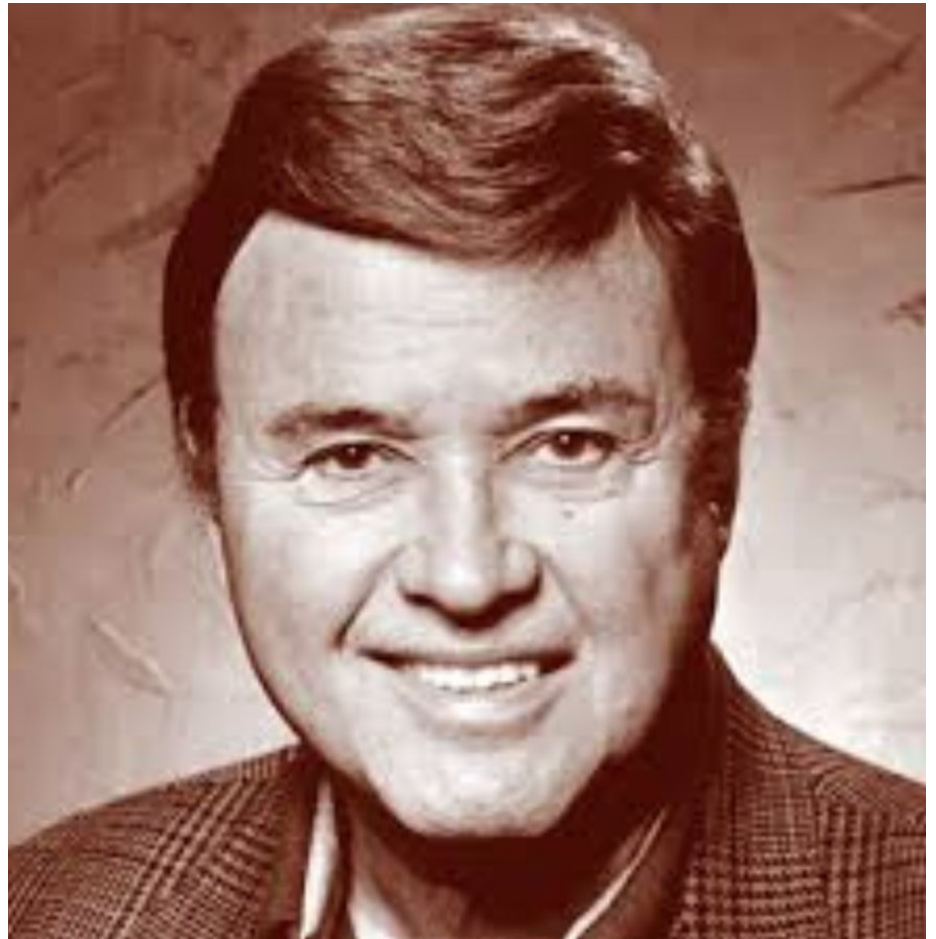
Source:

<https://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/topics/nationaltheaterofthedeaf.htm#:~:text=The%20National%20Theatre%20of%20the%20Deaf%20was%20established,allowed%20local%20deaf%20actors%20to%20become%20professional%20performers.>

# Person – Bernard Bragg

Bernard Bragg (September 27, 1928 – October 29, 2018) was a deaf actor, producer, director, playwright, artist, and author who is notable for being a co-founder of the National Theatre of the Deaf and for his contributions to Deaf performing culture. According to The New York Times, Bragg was "regarded by many as the leading professional deaf actor in the country."

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard\\_Bragg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Bragg)



Source: <https://deafseniors.us/celebration-life-of-bernard-bragg/>

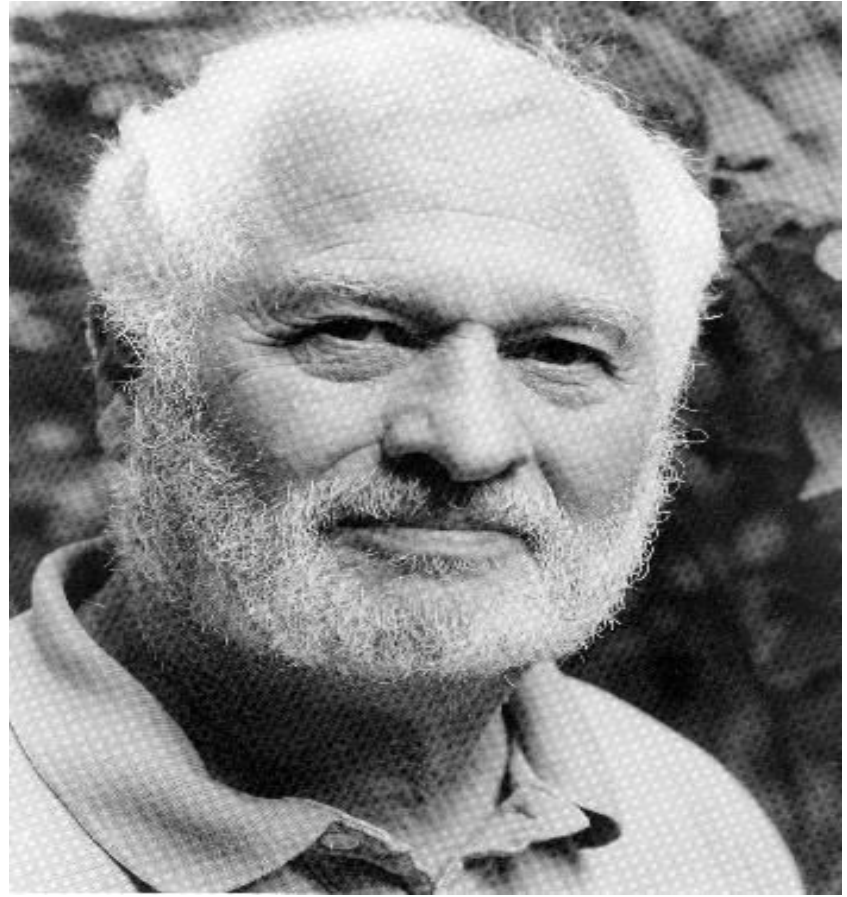
# Person – David Hays

## Founding Artistic Director

David Hays, a New York City native, a Harvard graduate with a major in the history of fine arts, a Yale graduate student who transferred to Boston University for an M.F.A in theatrical design, and a successful Broadway set designer. Hays brought so much success as the company's artistic director that in its very first year of existence, the company mounted its first national tour. The man who created the National Theatre stayed for three decades, keeping the company together after it was shaken by an embezzlement scandal in 1994. He moved from his original position as artistic director to run the company's administration and fundraising operations.

Source:

<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2002/6/3/set-designer-founds-famed-theatre-of/>



Source:

<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2002/6/3/set-designer-founds-famed-theatre-of/>

# Contribution to Deaf Theatre

NTD shows the value and talent of the deaf artist and the deaf individual. NTD became a catalyst for change, as theatergoers are often influential and public-spirited citizens. Deaf people also became more empowered. By affecting our audiences, NTD proved its ability to be a catalyst for social change. The National Theatre of the Deaf has been instrumental in opening up many other worlds for the deaf community. Captioned television, telecommunication devices, sign language interpreters, bi-lingual, bi-cultural education are some of the benefits that have occurred because of the work the National Theatre of the Deaf has done. Through its art, the National Theatre of the Deaf has created profound social change. Through its art form, doors began to open for the deaf population at large.

# Founding

In 1946, Robert Panara, a graduate of Gallaudet University and newly hired teacher at the New York School for the Deaf, produced a play with Bernard Bragg, a 17-year-old student in Panara's English class. Later in the 1940s, when Bragg was a student at Gallaudet, Panara left New York School for the Deaf to teach at Gallaudet. While both at Gallaudet, Panara, and Bragg conceived of the idea of a theater for the Deaf.

In 1963, Dr. Edna Levine, a professor of Deaf Studies at New York University, saw Bragg perform a one-man show in New York City. She asked him for a meeting and shared her own vision for a national theater for the deaf.[6] In 1965, they obtained a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to establish the NTD. Additional grant money was given by the Office of Education.[3] Mary E. Switzer of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and Boyce R. Williams and Malcolm Norwood of the Rehabilitation Services Administration were important advocates of funding the NTD.

Levine and Bragg worked with set designer David Hays to establish a mission statement, locate funding, select a location, and assemble a company. The founders also included Anne Bancroft, who played Annie Sullivan in the Broadway production of *The Miracle Worker*, and Arthur Penn and Gene Lasko, directors of *The Miracle Worker*.



Year(s)	Show Title	1977-1978	Who Knows One
1967-1968	<i>The Man With His Heart in the Highlands</i>	1978-1979	<i>Volpone</i>
1967-1968	<i>The Tale of Kasane</i>	1978-1979	<i>Quite Early One Morning</i>
1967-1968	<i>Tyger! Tyger! And other Burnings</i>	1979-1980	<i>Our Town</i>
1967-1968	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	1979-1980	<i>Four Thurber Tales (LTD)</i>
1967-1968	<i>On the Harmfulness of Tobacco</i>	1979-1980	<i>The Wooden Boy</i>
1968-1969	<i>The Critic</i>	1980-1981	<i>The Iliad: Play by Play</i>
1968-1969	<i>Camera 3 (LTD)</i>	1980-1981	<i>Silken Tent</i>
1968-1969	<i>The Love of Don Perlimoplin and Belissa in the Garden</i>	1981-1982	<i>The Ghost of Chastity Past</i>
1968-1969	<i>Blueprints</i>	1981-1982	<i>Gilgamesh</i>
1969-1970	<i>Under Milkwood</i>	1981-1982	<i>Issa's Treasure</i>
1969-1970	<i>Sganagelle</i>	1981-1982	<i>The Road to Cordoba</i>
1970-1971	<i>Woyzeck</i>	1982-1983	<i>Parzival, from the Horse's Mouth</i>
1970-1971	<i>Journeys</i>	1982-1983	<i>Big Blue Marble (LTD)</i>
1971-1972	<i>My Third Eye</i>	1983-1984	<i>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</i>
1972-1973	<i>Gilgamesh</i>	1984-1985	<i>All the Way Home</i>
1973-1974	<i>Optimism (or) The Misadventures of Candide</i>	1984-1985	<i>A Christmas Carol</i>
1973-1974	<i>A Child's Christmas in Wales</i>	1984-1985	<i>A Child's Christmas in Wales</i>
1974-1975	<i>The Dybbuk</i>	1985-1986	<i>In a Grove</i>
1974-1975	<i>Priscilla, Princess of Power</i>	1985-1986	<i>Race a Comet, Catch a Tale (LTD)</i>
1975-1976	<i>Parade</i>	1985-1986	<i>Farewell, My Lovely!</i>
1976-1977	<i>Four Saints in Three Acts</i>	1986-1987	<i>The Heart is a Lonely Hunter</i>
1976-1977	<i>On the Harmfulness of Tobacco</i>	1986-1987	<i>The Gift of the Magi</i>
1977-1978	<i>The Three Musketeers</i>	1987-1988	<i>The Dybbuk</i>
1977-1978	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>		

1989-1990	<i>The Odyssey</i>
1990-1991	<i>One More Spring</i>
1990-1991	<i>Collaborates with Pilobolus</i>
1991-1992	<i>Treasure Island</i>
1992-1993	<i>Ophelia</i>
1992-1993	<i>Sports (LTD)</i>
1993-1994	<i>Under Milkwood</i>
1993-1994	<i>The Wonderful "O" (LTD)</i>

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Theatre\\_of\\_the\\_Deaf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Theatre_of_the_Deaf)

# Productions



# Actors, instructors, and curriculum

## The founding company included:

- Violet Armstrong
- Bernard Bragg
- Charles Corey
- Gilbert Eastman
- Lou Fant
- Ed Fearon
- Joyce Flynn Lasko
- Phyllis Frelich
- Dorothy Miles
- Mary Beth Miller
- Audree Norton
- Howard Palmer
- Will Rhys
- June Russi
- Tim Scanlon
- Morton Steinberg
- Andrew Vasnick
- Joe Velez
- Ralph White

## Early instructors in the school included:

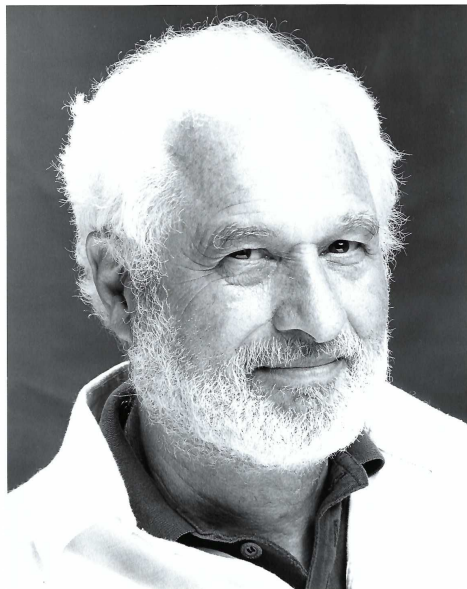
- Bernard Bragg
- Eric Malzkuhn
- Bob Panara
- Sahome Tachibana
- Gina Blau
- William Rhys
- George C. White III

## The school's curriculum included:

- Acting
- Mime
- Bodily movement
- Stagecraft
- Lighting
- Costuming
- History of theater
- Creative dance
- Japanese dance
- Hindu movement
- Tumbling
- Fencing

# Recipients of two awards: NTD Lifetime Achievement Award

– David Hays, Founding Artistic Director, NTD Appreciation Award



– Betty Beekman for 35 Years of Service, and that the NTD Pioneers: Founding Members during the First Year 1967-1968 were recognized for their contributions in forming the organization.



Source:  
<https://ntd.org/david-hays-betty-beekman-and-ntd-founders-receive-awards/#:~:text=The%20National%20Theatre%20of%20the%20Deaf%20%28NTD%29%20is,recognized%20for%20their%20contributions%20in%20forming%20the%20organization.>

# Why is this organization or individual significant in the Deaf Theatre community?

The National Theatre of the Deaf has had a strong influence in the U.S. theatrical community; a large proportion of the country's deaf theatre artists have trained there, and a number of NTD alumni started their own deaf-theatre companies across the country and abroad. NTD has also educated generations of hearing audiences about American Sign Language (ASL) and deaf culture, and it has provided intercultural experiences for both deaf and hearing audiences.

The National Theatre of the Deaf has greatly advanced the visual/performing arts aspect of deaf society. It has also informed and shared with hearing audiences, providing a creative way to unite two diverse cultures. NTD's cultural and educational influences benefit all of society, as well as provide great entertainment and fun for all who attend. The beauty, flexibility, and power of communication are demonstrated by the unique productions of the National Theatre of the Deaf.

# Images



# References

- “Bernard Bragg.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 24 Aug. 2020, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard\\_Bragg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Bragg).
- “Celebration Life of Bernard Bragg.” Deaf Seniors of America, 9 Mar. 2019, [deafseniors.us/celebration-life-of-bernard-bragg/](https://deafseniors.us/celebration-life-of-bernard-bragg/).
- “David Hays & Betty Beekman Receive Awards, NTD Founding Members Recognized.” National Theatre of the Deaf, 25 Oct. 2019, [ntd.org/david-hays-betty-beekman-and-ntd-founders-receive-awards/#:~:text=The%20National%20Theatre%20of%20the%20Deaf%20%28NTD%29%20is,recognized%20for%20their%20contributions%20in%20forming%20the%20organization.](https://ntd.org/david-hays-betty-beekman-and-ntd-founders-receive-awards/#:~:text=The%20National%20Theatre%20of%20the%20Deaf%20%28NTD%29%20is,recognized%20for%20their%20contributions%20in%20forming%20the%20organization.)
- Healey, Katie. National Theater of the Deaf (NTD), 12 Mar. 2005, [www.lifeprint.com/asl101/topics/nationaltheaterofthedeaf.htm#:~:text=The%20National%20Theatre%20of%20the%20Deaf%20was%20established,allowed%20local%20deaf%20actors%20to%20become%20professional%20performers.](https://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/topics/nationaltheaterofthedeaf.htm#:~:text=The%20National%20Theatre%20of%20the%20Deaf%20was%20established,allowed%20local%20deaf%20actors%20to%20become%20professional%20performers.)
- Maytal, Anat. “Set Designer Founds Famed Theatre of the Deaf: News: The Harvard Crimson.” News | The Harvard Crimson, 3 June 2002, [www.thecrimson.com/article/2002/6/3/set-designer-founds-famed-theatre-of/](https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2002/6/3/set-designer-founds-famed-theatre-of/).
- “National Theatre of the Deaf.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 9 Apr. 2021, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Theatre\\_of\\_the\\_Deaf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Theatre_of_the_Deaf).