

Recorded Audio Description as an integral part of the live dance performance of Miramos

Holsanova, Jana¹, Suvalo Grimberg, Veera² & Weidelt, Tina³

1 Researcher, Lund University, Cognitive Science Dept., Sweden

2 Artistic director, Dance Company Spinn¹, Gothenburg, Sweden

3 Audio describer, Audiosyn, Sweden

There is growing interest in making dance performances accessible for individuals with visual impairment and blindness (BVI) (Bläsing & Zimmermann (2021), to strengthen cultural participation of a non-sighted audience in aesthetic experience of dance and to elicit positive emotional reactions (Karkou et al 2017). One way is to provide live audio description (AD) that enhances mental imagery (Holsanova 2021, Johansson 2016) and gives BVI audiences means to engage with the work of art and immerse in the mood and feelings that the artwork evokes (Perego 2019). Apart from locomotion (movement dynamics, spatial direction, body shape and attitude) (Geiger 2005), dance is also a part of a narrative (Fryer 2009). There is therefore a call for an enriched AD (Neves 2016) that includes description of facial expressions, glances, gestures, body postures, emotions and uses a visually intense poetic language (Margolies 2015). All these aspects create a better context not only for understanding and imagination but also for empathy, engagement and aesthetic emotions in the experience of choreographic performances (Fertier 2017).

In our project *Miramos*² (2020-2021), we developed a novel method for an inclusive and accessible live performance of dance via recorded AD. The aim was to offer AD at every performance and improve accessibility for a larger group of BVI audiences. The first AD script was written on the basis of a filmed performance. The audio describer was invited to rehearsals, and the team – the audio describer, art director, choreographer and performers – started an intense, open and permissive dialogue. The challenge was to create a balance between the story and the form of artistic expression: i.e., to preserve choreographic details which constitute the dance performance and to offer narrative summaries so that the recipients can create inner images, interpret the story, and create their own aesthetic experience of the performance. By reading and processing the script together, the team was able to identify vague places and decide how to improve them. The synchronization of music and AD was then created in QLab software via 123 cues.

Feedback from the BVI reference group was important in the process. The collaborative efforts resulted in a final version of the script with visually intense language, rich vocabulary, vivid descriptions of movements, facial expressions, emotions, gazes and narrative elements. Apart from that, the teamwork also led to changes in choreography, changes in wording and formulations (as suggested by the reference group), and to addition of choreographic details (as reliable cues for AD). The artistic experience has been further enhanced and the dancers have become clearer in their expressions after taking part in the process of recorded AD.

¹ Dance Company *Spinn*, founded by the artistic leader Veera Suvalo Grimberg in 2010, is a professional dance company, supported by the City of Gothenburg, Västra Götaland Region and the Swedish Arts Council. *Spinn* is passionate about new ways of creating and presenting the art of dance by including performers and audiences with disabilities and by challenging stereotypes about what dance is and can be.

² *Miramos* performance (35 minutes long) is a magical and playful journey beyond time, among colors, shapes and fantasy. The audience meets four imaginative creatures who are on a temporary visit on our blue-green planet. Curious and wondering, they explore the world. Premiere of the recorded AD in connection with a live performance of *Miramos* was at the World Culture Museum in Gothenburg in September 2021.