

Silence speaks through Little Theatre

Traveling troupe Little Theatre of the Deaf returned to Oregon for a performance of sign language poetry at the Hult Center

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Pulse Reporter

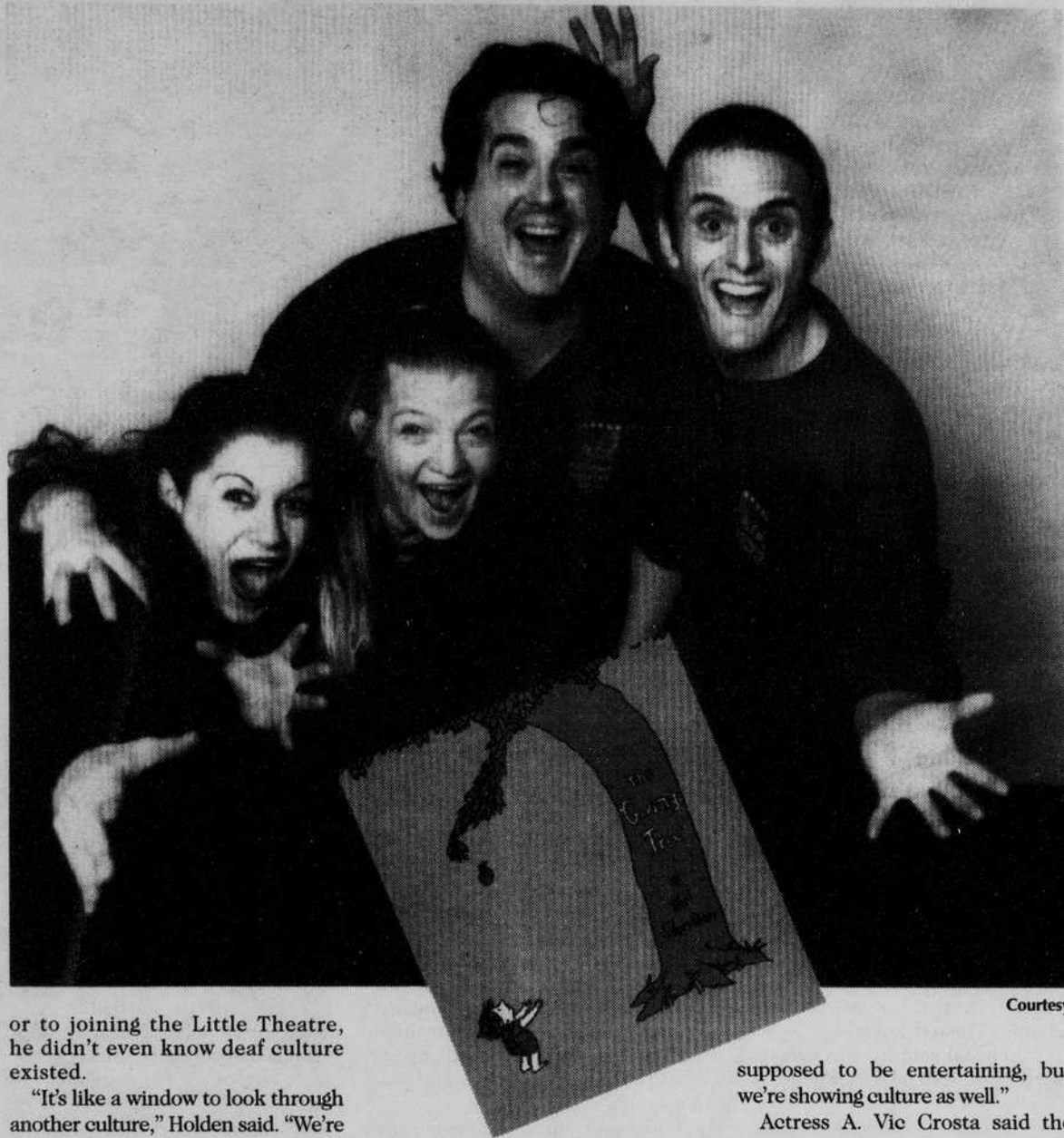
Language speaks louder than words, as illustrated by the Little Theatre of the Deaf on Sunday at the Hult Center. The Little Theatre is part of the larger National Theatre of the Deaf, a Tony-award winning troupe now in its 35th year of existence.

University graduate student Mi Jeong Kim, coordinator for the National Theatre of the Deaf, said she brought the group to Eugene partly because of her personal interest in deaf culture.

"They've been on tour in every state in the United States, but it has been a long time since they were last in Oregon," Kim said. "Deaf people have had little opportunity to see the Deaf Theatre group."

Sunday's show combined sign language with spoken word. It began with actors teaching the audience shapes and names, which was followed by four short stories, including a rendition of Shel Silverstein's "The Giving Tree." Actors served as both props and people during the story, and afterward took requests from the audience, changing into things such as parts of a roller coaster and robots. Following the performance, the actors led an interactive workshop with audience members.

Jim Holden, one of the four actors in the group, and the only one with hearing ability, said pri-



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or to joining the Little Theatre, he didn't even know deaf culture existed.

"It's like a window to look through another culture," Holden said. "We're

supposed to be entertaining, but we're showing culture as well."

Actress A. Vic Crosta said the

world of the deaf is virtually unknown to hearing children, and the show gives them access to that world.

"The most common question kids ask is if you talk," said Crosta. "Everything is new to them about us."

University sign language instructor Johanna Larson-Muhr said the group takes into account the deaf view of things, and there is an aspect of deaf culture that hearing people can't hear or see.

"Unless you know the language, you can't understand the take on the world," Larson-Muhr said. "It's difficult to put into words what the deaf world would be like."

Larson-Muhr said the fact that the actors are using sign language makes the overall effect more poetic and theatrical.

"This can be considered poetry," she said. "In American Sign Language poetry, the rhyme is using the same hand shape and how they utilize space — little movements, location and palm motion. You cannot have sign language without facial expression and body movement."

Today, the group will travel to Western Oregon University, where they will perform a lecture and demo workshop, followed by a visit to the Oregon School for the Deaf later in the day for a creative drama workshop.

"Celebrating Deaf Culture," a rally and informational fair, will take place from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday at the EMU Amphitheater.

Contact the Pulse reporter at aaronshakra@dailyemerald.com.



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