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Love and Generosity

National Theatre of the Deaf performs *The Giving Tree*.

During a time when greed and unchecked power run rampant over the Earth, a simple story on the theme of giving is well timed. The National Theatre of the Deaf will be at the Hult this Sunday to perform original adaptations of Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* and other stories. The troupe, composed of three deaf actors and one hearing actor, is on a mission: to entertain while sharing Deaf culture and artistry with the audience.

Although the show has been on tour this academic year to elementary through high schools with study guides accompanying it, it is not just for kids. Anyone interested in sign language or simply the beauty of storytelling would most likely enjoy this performance.

"You hear and see every word," says NTD Tour Director Betty Beekman. "Everything signed is also spoken."

The show begins with actors introducing signs to the audience, showing examples of how those signs might be incorporated into stories, and then the longer stories begin. After the show, the company stays and answers audience members' questions.

National Theatre of the Deaf was founded by David Hays in 1967. He saw *The Miracle Worker* and became fascinated with incorporating sign language and greater movement into traditional theatrical forms. The company grew from a professional training school in Connecticut to the forma-

tion of the Little Theatre of the Deaf, a company formed to bring works to younger audiences, to the 1994 National and Worldwide Deaf Theatre Conference formed to encourage the work of deaf playwrights. That first conference brought together playwrights from more than 40 theaters of the Deaf around the world.

Hays's company has toured works adapted from Chekhov, Voltaire, Homer, Moliere, and Ibsen. Although the current tour is based on Silverstein's themes of love and generosity, still, says Beekman, "some find it controversial." Some teachers have begun debates within their classrooms on *The Giving Tree's* themes, creating an even larger lesson from the performance.

So far, *The Giving Tree* tour has visited 18 states and has been seen by nearly 100,000 students, from school gymnasiums to larger performance venues, like the Hult.

"We get wonderful thank you letters and lots of times, they're quite touching," says Beekman. "Especially when they're from deaf kids who are mainstreamed [attending schools and classrooms for the hearing] and don't get to see deaf adults often. They are quite thrilled and proud to see these actors and meet them after the show."

Others, especially those "interested in diversity or sign language" also enjoy these performances, says Beekman. The show is at 2:30 pm on Sunday, May 4 at the Hult. **EW**

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