

# PREFACE

Although the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) has achieved national and international recognition, relatively little historical information is readily available about it. The purpose of this book is to remedy that lack by presenting a comprehensive look at the development of NTD from 1959 to 1993, from the time certain individuals and groups joined forces to create a fully professional acting company of deaf artists in 1967 to its current hard-earned fame.

In telling the story of NTD, I have made use of previous studies, only two of which have been published. Helen Powers's book, *Signs of Silence* (1972), is a biography of Bernard Bragg, an NTD founding member. The book includes significant historical information on the early years of NTD. Bernard Bragg wrote his autobiography, *Lessons in Laughter*, which was translated by Eugene Bergman, in 1989. The book provides an interesting anecdotal perspective of NTD.

Four other studies of NTD have been written but not published. George McClendon's "The Unique Contribution of the National Theatre of the Deaf to the American Stage" (Master's thesis, Catholic University, 1972) draws considerably on infor-

mation supplied by the late Sam Edwards, a former NTD member. McClendon's study, now twenty-one years old, was written too early to assess the importance of NTD. The late Dorothy Miles, a talented deaf actress, wrote her thesis, "A History of Theatre Activities in the Deaf Community of the U.S." (Master's thesis, Connecticut College) in 1974. Miles's work contains valuable information about the deaf American stage and is particularly important because she had been an NTD company member for four years, knew the deaf community well, and wrote from a deaf perspective. The third thesis, "The Theatre of the Deaf in America: The Silent Stage" (Master's thesis, Southern Illinois, 1979), was written by John Heidger. Heidger's primary method of research involved interviewing people, and most of the people he talked to were hearing. Nancy Bowen Tadie's dissertation, "A History of Drama at Gallaudet College: 1864 to 1969" (New York University, 1978), also proved to be an important source of information.

While all six of these studies contain important information, none presents a comprehensive picture of NTD. Hence, the challenge for me to pursue my personal mission in life.

When I visited NTD for the first time in 1978, I started to collect information, take pictures, and keep in touch with NTD. When Jack Gannon's inspiring book, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America* (1981) first came out, I seriously decided to pursue my goal to write about NTD. I finished the first manuscript in 1989, but had to spend three more years revising it. In the meantime, I continued to collect pictures and other historical materials to update the book. The results of my work are now contained within the covers of this book. Frankly, I am glad I waited fifteen years to complete this mission.