

TOJ MORA:

Yesterday, at Deaf Austin Theatre, they just gave the first major performance in Austin, Texas. That performance was called "Next to Normal". It's a collaboration project where they worked with another group called Ground Floor Theatre.

[Cut to B-roll]

FEMALE ACTOR (Sandra Mae Frank):

I'm a part of the DAT, Deaf Austin Theatre, as one of the Board of Directors. We wanted to team up with the Ground Floor Theatre here in Austin, Texas. Austin has a rather large deaf community so where are the theatres that include hearing and deaf actors? I'm not talking about ASL interpreting shows. I'm talking about actual actors. We just thought, "Why not go for it, without workshops, without experimenting or test piloting. We just jumped in and now that we did our opening, we did great with our show. We got a great response from the audience and they were grieving, laughing and crying. We need more of that, we need more stories that are authentic and real. We're just getting started and we have many more to produce including you!

FEMALE ACTOR 2:

This experience has been the most intense. It's deep, wonderfully done and beautiful to behold. This is a great comeback gig for me because I haven't done this for awhile. To come back to Austin and to get rolling with this project and even the story itself has been amazing! I've made deep connections and I've seen people sobbing, grieving and connecting with the storyline, myself included! I highly recommend everyone to come and see this play. Working with DAT and Ground Floor Theatre has been incredible! We connected so well and this shows how hearing and deaf people can work together as one entity making meaningful impact on both worlds. That's just a beautiful thing. I really, really enjoyed this experience so I hope that you all will come and see us!

MALE ACTOR:

In this play, there's heavy emphasis on the topic of mental health. I learned a lot about mental health. I learned that grief has no time limit. I learned this the hard way when I used to push people to go see the doctor when I should have been supportive instead of pushing people to move on. With this experience, I would apply that approach to my real life scenarios where I'll be supportive of my friends instead of pushing them to see their doctor. That's made a lot of impact on me.

TOJ MORA:

The show has 2 directors: Brian Cheslik and Lisa Schepps. Brian is from the DAT while Lisa is a part of the Ground Floor Theatre. I did ask Brian to share a brief statement on film about his experience. Lisa sent me her statement through a text message that I will show you.

BRIAN CHESLIK:

We truly appreciate this opportunity. Deaf Austin Theatre (DAT) is a new company here in Austin. It's about 2 years old, this is our first major production and it's an enormous undertaking. We've done a few tv shows and a few online, Facebook Live shows among other platforms. This is the first time that we've done a full show and I'm so glad that we got to collaborate with such an amazing theatre company like Ground Floor Theatre. So, our partnership, the process of selecting our actors has been and giving our all to Austin has been one beautiful story. Austin, Texas has never seen a show like this one before. So, this will set the tone for future DAT productions and there will be more coming!

MALE VIEWER:

I just watched the show and wow, what a champ show! All the acting and the language blended well into a really amazing show! It's a must-watch!

FEMALE VIEWER:

It was very, very heartfelt. The family and really everything about that show is definitely something you would not expect, you know? The production has hearing and deaf actors included in the show and just wow!

MALE VIEWER 2:

After coming here to see the production, I thought this was an amazing show! The show was above and beyond any performance that I've ever seen. Really, that show was very raw and authentic. There was plenty of clarity and it's a really emotional experience too. So, it's worth it for you to come out here to see this performance. You simply must!

TOJ MORA:

The show has already been sold out for this weekend. However, in the next weekend and the weekend after that, they still have tickets available for purchase. What really stands out for me is seeing how these deaf and hearing actors worked with each other. Typically, there would be hearing actors in the lead role with deaf actors stepping in as supporting roles to shadow, mirror or whatever you call it, with the hearing actors. That's a nice thing to have such accommodations, but this show was different. I'm seeing more and more deaf actors out in the front. Now, it's becoming more common to the hearing actors behind the deaf actors while signing and assuming more of supporting roles. I think this is amazing and it gives me goosebumps seeing these moments. It's a very good show and I would definitely recommend that you watch the show when you can!

<https://www.groundfloortheatre.org/normal>