

September 2017

\$5.00

DeafLife

THE DEAF COMMUNITY MAGAZINE™



**Interpreting
with joy:
Terri Reisinger**

DeafLife CHART

Our cover story

Terri Reisinger, a professional interpreter in Rochester, New York, is noted for her vividly colorful interpreting of live concerts. We present a photo-essay, with Jess Kamens's and Andy Buscemi's vivid photographs, as a way of celebrating the skill of interpreters who make musical events accessible to the Deaf community. **22**



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IN OUR NEXT ISSUE...

Angus English is a Gallaudet University alumnus who uses the surprising medium of ball-point pen to produce moody, richly textured, and colorful works, some celebratory, some surreal.



Terri Reisinger: interpreting with joy

Rochester, New York, has the nation's highest per-capita Deaf population. This means that wherever one goes in Rochester, they're liable to encounter Deaf people—signers on public buses, small conversational clusters signing away in shopping malls, museums, and cafés.

One advantage to living in Rochester is the relative accessibility of interpreted concerts. Rochester has an energetic musical culture, with live concerts as part of the annual cycle of festivals.



The Lilac Festival, one of the major events in Rochester's calendar, is held each May, to celebrate the array of lilacs in Highland Park, which displays numerous varieties, including locally-developed cultivars. But since the lilacs don't bloom on a strictly predictable schedule, the festival, which runs for 10 days, emphasizes cultural events in addition to the traditional attractions of food (funnel cakes being a standard offering, with kettle corn and a variety of other delectables featured year to year), artisans' creations, merchandise, and souvenirs. People come in from other states, even Canada, to take in the festival, and the organizers want them to have a great experience and a good reason to return. There is almost always rain, which results in some disruption to the planned events and activities so flexibility is paramount.

Free concerts are a major attraction, with singers, instrumentalists, and bands both local and nationally known. Folk music, bluegrass, jazz, pop, rock, tribute bands, legendary bands such as Phish there's always something to choose from.

And as Deaf people know, a good interpreter can make the music come alive for us take us inside so that we can enjoy it just as much as hearing concertgoers do.

Terri Reisinger has combined two passions for music and interpreting to bring the lyrics of live music to Deaf people. She's gaining a reputation, too.

Please tell me about your background. Are you from a Deaf family? Any Deaf relatives or friends?

I grew up in Rochester and Old Forge, New York. My cousin is deaf, however she does not sign. My aunt, who's hearing, has worked at the Rochester School for the Deaf since the early 1980s, teaching Earth Science.

How did you become an interpreter? How'd you get involved?

I grew up in Rochester and spent all of my summers and weekends up in the Adirondacks. It was up in Old Forge where I first remember meeting deaf people as a young kid. Campers and staff from Camp Mark 7 would come to watch some of our performances.

As a young child growing up in the Adirondack Mountains every summer, I was involved in a creative arts and drama program where we would learn a play and perform it using both sign

and voice. I fell in love with Sign Language from that moment on. I was involved with this program from when I was about six years old until I was 13. My teacher from that program, Pat Rickard, was a former dance teacher at Gallaudet University. She taught us theatre skills, dance, and sign language. Later in life, in my early 20's, I ran into Pat while I was waiting tables and I ended up helping her teach the kids ASL that summer and many more

to follow I then really wanted to study and learn ASL more in depth and I ended up taking a sign-language class at the Rome School for the Deaf and soon after that I went to NTID for the ASLIE program.

I graduated with my AAS degree in interpreting from NTID/RIT in 2005 and I received my Bachelor's degree in Earth Science/Geology from Plattsburgh State University in 2008. I thought I wanted to become an

There is nothing quite like the energy at a live music event and for everyone to be feeling that vibe together is amazing.

Earth Science teacher at a school for the deaf and I finished all of my coursework in the NTID Master's program for Secondary Education of Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing; however, before I was able to finish my student teaching I became pregnant with my son and that changed my life path in the most magical ways.

I am a single mother of a beautiful three-year-old boy named Toren Oak Reisinger. He has filled my life with magic, joy, true love and the proof that all of

our wildest dreams can and do come true!

I worked at RIT as a staff Interpreter from 2009-2013, moved to Oregon and had my son, and worked as an educational interpreter in Medford, Oregon. Toren and I moved back when he was three months old to be with family and since that time I have been working for Sorenson VRS. RIT and Sorenson both rocked! Some of the best interpreters in the world work at RIT and Sorenson and out in the community here in Rochester, New York,



and it has been such a blessing to work alongside these skilled interpreters and glean from them.

I became NIC Certified in 2012.

How long have you been doing performance interpreting? How'd you get into that specialty?

Professionally, since 2013. I interpreted for my favorite band Phish twice that year. Since then I have worked with incredible talent and some of my musical heroes, like Bruce Hornsby and the Noisemakers, The Wailers, Keller Williams, Rusted Root, and more!

However, I have been impromptu Performance Interpreting for years! Haha! When I was a college student at Green Mountain college in Vermont, in 1997 (studying art and earth science) I would always sign and sing the songs from the plays I was involved with from my summer program days with Pat. It was back in those days that I would tell my friends that it was my dream to sign alongside of Phish. This was before I even knew or had the thought of becoming an interpreter.

Growing up, I listened to The Grateful Dead. I loved their mu-

There is a lot of studying involved, listening to and learning the music and lyrics and trying to figure out what the meaning of the lyrics are.

sic so much. When I found out they had their very own interpreter, I thought that was the best thing ever! They even had their very own Deafzone at their shows for the Deafheads (fans of the Grateful Dead are called Deadheads), where they would hold balloons to feel the vibrations of the music. This was fascinating to me and something

that I always dreamed of doing!

When I was attending NTID for the interpreting program, during the summer months I worked at Camp Mark 7. After our days work we would go out to the local tavern and we would interpret the music that was playing for our fellow Deaf co-workers.

What's the best aspect of your work? The worst?

The best aspect of my work is when the Deaf and hard-of-hearing fans are rocking out right alongside the hearing fans. There is nothing quite like the energy at a live music event and for everyone to be feeling that vibe together is amazing. Being able to provide equal access for the most magical, intimate moments that the concert experience offers is truly an honor. Nothing lights me up more than this work, and to be a conduit for the music to come through to visual life is an incredible feeling.

The worst aspect is when it is hard to hear. Sometimes the in-the-ear monitor to get the vocals fed into your ear is not providing an adequate feed. Or it is so loud standing on the stage that you can't even hear the band singing and even if you know the song by heart if you can't hear you have to look over and when you see their lips moving then you're like, okay, now it's time to interpret! Haha That brings up the importance of studying. There is a lot of studying involved, listening to and learning the music and lyrics and trying to figure out what the meaning

of the lyrics are. Sometimes you get the set list well in advance, which is wonderful because then you can really fine tune the songs that will be played. However sometimes you get a set list just minutes before or not at all. Many of my most favorite bands are jam bands and are very improvisational. They go with the flow They don't create set lists and they will feed off of their fellow band-mates and the crowd. So that can pose a challenge, and that is where the importance of studying the music comes in. And that, for me, is the best kind of studying there is!!!

Any favorite stories you'd like to share?

Yes! One of my favorite ASL teachers told us to "never give up." I can see him telling us that now, like it was yesterday. Follow your dreams and if you fail the first 100 times, don't give up because dreams do come true.

One amazing story that comes to mind is interpreting for The Mowgli's, an awesome alternative pop-rock band from Los Angeles, at the Rochester Lilac Festival. There were so many fans in the crowd and some of the Deaf fans wanted us to be ON

stage with the band instead of on the lower platform we were on, which was down and to the left of the stage. This was communicated to the Mowgli's manager and in between songs they were made aware, and then we were right up on stage with them and the Deaf fans were so stoked! They could see and feel it all, and the Mowgli's were singing their song "San Francisco" ("Do you feel the love?"), and I'm pretty sure everyone was feeling the love, and that's what it is all about!

Any comments you'd like to make on the RID's current state of chaos?

Just that I have faith that our national organization will continue to grow and make positive improvements.

As you know, Rochester has highest per-capita Deaf/HoH population of any U.S. city. This means that it's a common sight to see clusters of signers everywhere (where, in other cities, it might be considered odd), and there are some good public accommodations and amenities, such as live interpreters at events.

Rochester is such a special place. I think it is amazing that you will see interpreters at events all over town. It's such a good feeling to know that everyone is welcome and access is there.

Interpreters at live music events and festivals are becoming more and more prevalent, which is just the coolest thing ever, because concerts are such a special experience and the fact that all people, deaf and hearing, are sharing in the groove together is truly awesome! There are so many great performance interpreters out there right now and I am honored and humbled to be working in this arena with them.

Music is so colorful. It tells a story. It can make us cry, make us smile, make us feel silly and alive. I am so passionate about making all of the feelings music hits you with accessible. Just because someone can't hear doesn't mean they can't enjoy music. Music brings people together and that is so important, especially now more than ever!

I have been seeing the band Phish since I was fourteen years old. (They are quite legendary and have an extremely dedicated fan-base for being so under-the-radar and not mainstream at



all!) From that moment on I was hooked. This band has influenced my life in so many ways and continues to do so to this day. After twenty-five years of seeing them, I still get goosebumps. I have followed this band across the coun-

terpret for them for my first-ever assignment as a performance interpreter at a rock concert,(the career of my dreams), it was the wildest, most amazing moment of my life, other than the birth of my son, of course!!!



Rochester Lilac Festival/Andy Buscemi Photography

try and back a few times seeing show after show Their concerts are always different night after night, the set list ever changing.

I have so many friends that I have met because of this band and still continue to meet through our mutual love for this music, both Deaf and hearing. Phish's music is ingrained in every fiber of my being, so when I was able to in-

The Facebook page Reisinger Performance Interpreting came to fruition with the help of my amazing mama friend Jess Kamens. She came to watch Get the Led Out, a top-notch Led Zepelin cover band, and from that very moment on she became a huge supporter of my work and she wanted to photograph me in action. Then she helped to set up

a Facebook business page. This all came about during the success at the Rochester Lilac Festival. It was the first year that the festival had hired interpreters for all of the headlining bands during the ten days of free music the

teammate Kim Billyard back year after year to show the music and bring the energy that the talent on the stage deliver!

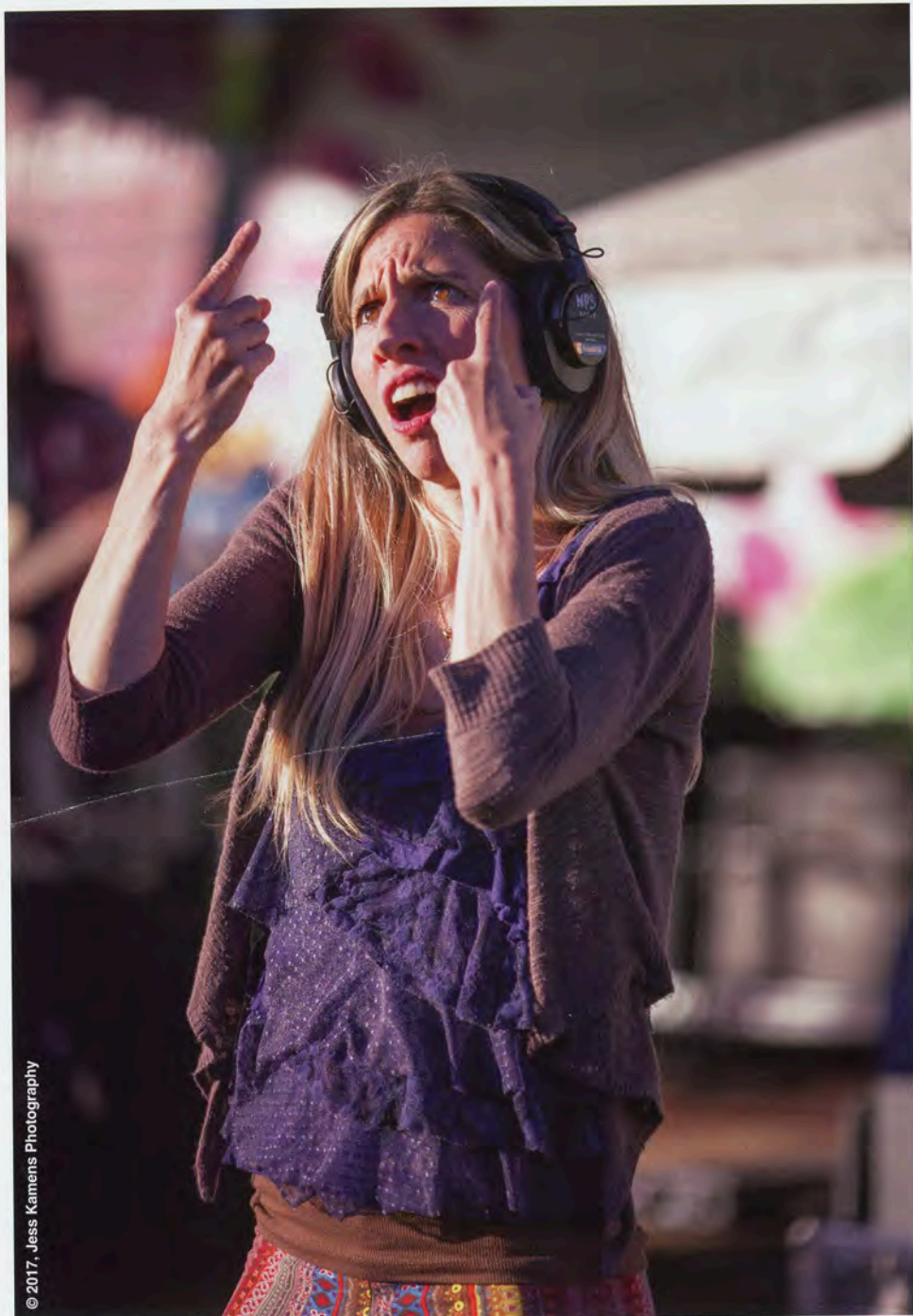
It is my goal to not only interpret the lyrics but to show the music. From the highs and



Rochester Lilac Festival/Andy Buscemi Photography

event offers. The Rochester Lilac Festival is the largest free festival of its kind in North America. It is an amazing event full of amazing musicians, artists, and of course lilacs! It was well received and as the festival went on more and more Deaf concertgoers were in attendance. I am thrilled to say that the Lilac Festival wants to have myself and my awesome

the lows, to the funky and fast beats, and to the sultry and slow sounds, I strive to show all of these musical variations in space as well as on the body and face.



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**“She has something special”
notes from photographer Jess
Kamens**

Terri’s three favorite things in life are music, signing to music, and her child. She weaves these within and out of each other in her every day life.

To find someone who has an interest in all of those things as well, is probably quite rare, but it happened! I walked into an orientation for our new and amazing, alternative, outdoor-dream-of-a-daycare to see a woman bubbling with energy sitting on the bench. Then I saw her hat. Phish. A band that I have been traveling [to] and seeing for over 22 years (and it turns out *we* were seeing). Then I saw her sign! Then I noticed our children playing together. From that quick moment on, we were fast friends.

This band, which brings people together from all over the world to dance and travel together in a community way, brought me to yet another friend! Then she told me she had signed for them. Our friendship began immediately. I myself studied ASL for 3 years post-college and have had such a love for this language for many years. I traveled the world

and was able to use ASL in Thailand as well as Australia. It was quite remarkable not being able to speak Thai, but being able to communicate with a Thai person using ASL. And while my skills in ASL have diminished after so many years living out of the country, my love for it has not and my connection to the Deaf culture was quickly re-ignited upon meeting Terri.

Our three-year-old children play together. We teach them signs. We take them to endless amounts of shows, locally and afar, where they dance and play together. We have finally, after hundreds of Phish shows collectively under our belts, saw the boys perform together. Our friendship which surrounds mostly music and children has grown to include signing as well.

When I found out that Terri was interpreting for all 10 evenings of the Rochester Lilac Festival, I knew right away that I had to capture her doing so. I am a professional photographer and shooting music is one of my favorite things to do. Shooting Terri signing music was even more special. It was at this time that I learned what exactly she can do. I was shocked. She was signing



© 2017, Jess Kamens Photography

the music, not just with specific signs, but with her whole body as she danced a drum solo or played the air guitar or saxophone. It was sensational. After 10 full days of music with my daughter, watching Terri and watching deaf and hearing people alike from around Rochester fixated on her performance, I knew she had something special. I spoke to many people at these shows. A deaf woman commented to me that she's never seen music come to life until now I watched deaf people stand in front of her and imitate her signs and dance with her. I watched people come up to her after the show, amazed at

what she had given them. People watched her sometimes instead of the musical performers. She was reaching people in a way no one had here before.

Terri has a special gift and I am so grateful I am able to not only capture her images, but experience every one of her shows! She is a special person with a positive outlook in life like I have never seen. Her energy levels know no boundaries and I know that she will continue to do what she loves, signing music for everyone to enjoy. ■

DeafLife These photographs, by Jess Kamens and Andy Buscemi, were taken at the 2017 Lilac Festival (May 12-21). Thanks to Ms. Kamens and Kari Petsche, and also to Terri Reisinger

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