

The Finger Dance:
A Deaf Girl's Journey Through Music

a play for an ensemble cast
of deaf and hearing youth

by

Mark Steven Jensen and Flint Keller

with an ASL poem

by

Cara A. Barnett

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Mark Steven Jensen, Flint Keller

Recognized by the National Theatre for the Deaf as an "Outstanding Play
for Young People"

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First Production

THE FINGER DANCE was commissioned by SteppingStone Theatre for Youth Development. SteppingStone Theatre performed the play March 9-25, 2001 at the F.K. Weyerhaeuser Auditorium in St. Paul, MN. The play had the following cast (in alphabetical order:

Nick --	Justin D. Barlow
Sarah --	Shayna Collins
Tessa --	Andrea L. Davis
Lindsey --	Hannah Edwards
Jeff --	Jeremiah Ellison
Jennifer --	Caitlin Gatzke
Anita --	Alissa Paris Gilbert
Mary Beth --	Meghan Laughlin
Cole --	Pavel McGlave
Kelly --	Terria Middlebrook
Rod --	Corey Nystrom
Shelby --	Jenna Poehlmann
Lizzie --	Jerrica Poehlmann
Hannah --	Minda Clair Sherman
Ty --	Miles Tagtmeyer
Maggie --	Allison VanSiclen

Understudies: Laura Lentz understudy for Rod (aka Rox), Andrea L. Davis understudy for Shelby, Terria Middlebrook understudy for Tessa.

The play was directed by Flint Keller. The ASL Director was Nicole "Nic" Zapko. The Composer/Musical Director was Gary Rue. The Artistic Director of SteppingStone Theatre is Richard Hitchler.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Flexibility is possible with the casting. Unless noted, all the parts are for actors aged 10-18. Here is the suggested makeup of the company:

SHELBY--A deaf girl. Before she lost her hearing in an accident, she was musically gifted.

LINDSEY--A hearing girl. SHELBY's best friend. She can sign quite well.

MARYBETH--A deaf girl. She is a young poet.

COLE--A hearing boy. He eventually learns how to sign.

TY--A hearing boy. COLE's best friend.

JEFF--A hearing boy. Another friend of COLE's. He is an excellent drummer.

ROD--A hearing boy. A bully.

NICK--A deaf boy who is in puppy love with girls.

TESSA--A hearing impaired girl. Best friend with LIZZIE.

LIZZIE--A deaf girl who is set in her ways. She is interested in NICK.

SARAH--A hearing girl who NICK likes a lot. She is best friends with ANITA.

ANITA--A hearing girl who is uncomfortable around deaf people. She is SARAH's best friend.

MAGGIE--A hearing girl between 8-10 years old. She is LINDSEY's younger sister.

JENNIFER--A hearing girl who is between 8-10 years old. She is a close friend of MAGGIE. She will double as either the younger version of SHELBY or LINDSEY.

HANNAH--A hearing girl who is 8-10 years of age. She is another friend of MAGGIE. She will double as either the younger version of SHELBY or LINDSEY.

KELLI -- A deaf girl 12-16 years old. She is a friend of LIZZIE and TESSA's.

EMILY -- A hearing girl 12-17 years old.

Director's Note

As you read *The Finger Dance*, you may wonder at the logistics of integrating hearing and Deaf students, and how to weave in interpreters so they are not add-ons but integral members of the cast. Originally I had thought we would add a few interpreters to the cast; actors who would be integrated into the production, standing near who they were signing so both the Deaf and hearing audience would not need to look away from the action for interpretation.

What we ultimately did was juggle the actors so that Deaf actors, when not playing their character roles, moved into the role of ASL interpreter for the hearing actors. Likewise, when hearing actors fulfilled their job as characters, they became voice interpreters for the Deaf actors.

For transitions between character and interpreter, and to delineate between the two responsibilities, the actors were given black interpreter shirts. Taking these interpreter shirts on or off was never hidden from the audience, becoming a convention from the opening scene. It takes extra preparation in terms of blocking, but it worked quite well.

This also helped equalize stage time, as many of the interpreters were cast from the actors playing smaller roles.

The Finger Dance was a special experience for all of us. Deaf and hearing came together in a manner beyond what we imagined when we conceived of the show. As co-writer of *The Finger Dance* I hope you will consider producing this play; if you have any questions, please feel free to contact either Mark or myself via e-mail!

-- Flint Keller
Co-writer and Director

SETTING: Morning. The exterior of a high school.

AT RISE: Students enter from all parts of the theatre.

TY

I can dissect the frog myself, Cole!

COLE

Just trying to help you, man, that's all. The quiz is tomorrow and you've been out three days! With stomach flu!

TY

Is it really that gross?

COLE

I found like three flies in mine.

TY

Three?

[Grabs his mouth.]

COLE

C'mon Ty, I'll go over the study guide with you.

[Enter MARYBETH by herself.]

TY

Cole, that weird Deaf girl's coming over here! Can we sit over there?

[MARYBETH sits down and takes out a notebook.]

COLE

Yeah.

[HANNAH runs on-stage, carrying two backpacks. She is chased by MAGGIE and JENNIFER.]

MAGGIE

Give it back, Hannah!

HANNAH

I just wanna see it!

MAGGIE

Don't wreck it!

[HANNAH pulls out a book from
MAGGIE's bag.]

JENNIFER

Wow! A picture book of the Blue Jean Boys!

[ROB enters, listening to a diskman. He leans
against a wall.]

[Enter LIZZIE and TESSA, signing ASL.
TESSA wears hearing aids.]

TESSA

[Performance Note: All ASL dialogue is in
parenthesizes.]

(Aren't you embarrassed? I would be so embarrassed.)

LIZZIE

(She didn't have to read the note in front of the whole class.)

TESSA

(At least you didn't write out his name.)

LIZZIE

(I know! If he found out, I would've died!)

MAGGIE

I had to go with Dad to the book store because Lindsey was over at Shelby's house.
Again. You gotta try the new vanilla freeze, they're great.

JENNIFER

They give me a headache.

HANNAH

[Squeals.]

The Blue Jean Boys are just the bomb!

[Enter ANITA and SARAH.]

ANITA

I'm pretty sure next Saturday I'm not working at Taco Bell.

SARAH

If you're free, you and me are at the mall.

ANITA

I'm all over that.

[Enter LINDSEY and SHELBY. SHELBY signs while LINDSEY both signs and speaks.]

LINDSEY

We hardly saw each other all summer. I want to do something together with you this year.

SHELBY

(So do I. But what?)

LINDSEY

How about we join the swim team?

SHELBY

(I don't want to be in the swim team.)

LINDSEY

Then what do you want to do?

SHELBY

(I don't know. Something different. Something magical.)

LINDSEY

Magical! What?

SHELBY

(I don't know! I just feel lost.)

[Enter NICK.]

TESSA

(There he is! What a hunk.)

LIZZIE

(He's all that and a bag of chips. He's coming over here!)

TESSA

(He is!)

[NICK walks up to SARAH and ANITA.]

(Where is he going?)
LIZZIE

(I don't know.)
TESSA

Hi... Hello.
NICK
[Speaks, but it is hard for him.]

Hey... Nick? Nick! What's up?
SARAH

Nice. Nice... morning.
NICK

Sure. Okay. See you around.
SARAH

What was that all about?
ANITA
[Whispering.]

I don't know.
SARAH

Do you think he? Y'know, likes you?
ANITA

Him? But he's... No, let's not go there!
SARAH

[They laugh.]

[Enter JEFF, carrying a poster and thumb tacks.
He has drumsticks in his pocket. He walks up
to COLE and TY.]

Hey guys, give me a hand.
JEFF

What's up?
COLE

JEFF
It's a music contest. Mister Curtis got it in the mail this morning.

COLE

[Reading the poster.]

The winners go to, where? Washington, DC? To perform at the Youth Across America Festival. Wow, that's cool.

SHELBY

(What are they putting up?)

LINDSEY

I don't know.

[The three boys walk away from the poster, COLE in the lead, walking backwards. They head towards ROD.]

COLE

You could do your drum solo.

JEFF

It's not for soloists. It's for small groups.

COLE

Oh. Hey! That's even better! The three of us, man, we could do a drum trio! Y'know, this could be so--

[COLE backs into ROD.]

Hey, sorry man. Jeff, this could be so hot. The three of us, y'know, each with a drum kit, jamming away in style--

ROD

You made my CD skip.

COLE

Huh?

ROD

Can't you hear? You made my CD skip.

JEFF

Leave him be, Rod! He just bumped you.

TY

Yeah man. Back off.

COLE

I said I'm sorry, man, I didn't see you. Hey--

[ROD grabs COLE.]

ROD

You wanna black eye or a sore gut? You pick.

COLE

I don't want to fight with you, Rod. So, just go crawl back into your hole!

JEFF

You'll havta take on us, too. Right Ty?

TY

Us!? Ah... yeah, right. Us.

[Everybody stops to watch this fight. ROD notices the eyes on him. He hastily exits.]

SARAH

Way to go Cole! Woo! Woo!

(SARAH and ANITA join COLE, JEFF, and TY.)

ANITA

What did you do to him?

COLE

I just bumped into him and he got all hot.

JEFF

That was so great, telling Rod to crawl back in his hole!

SARAH

You said that?

JEFF

Right to his face.

ANITA

That creep deserves it.

[NICK joins LIZZIE and TESSA. The hearing kids are now on one part of the stage, while the Deaf kids are on another.]

LIZZIE

[Gets NICK's attention.]

NICK
[Sadly.]

(Hi.)

LIZZIE
(That's a nice shirt you have on. Is it new?)

NICK
(No.)

[He watches the hearing kids.]

MAGGIE
Let's take my book inside. I don't want any bugs getting on it.

HANNAH
Bugs? Yuck!

[The three girls walk by LINDSEY and
SHELBY.]

MAGGIE
[To LINDSEY.]
Hey geekface.

LINDSEY
Shut up.

MAGGIE
Watcha looking at?

LINDSEY
Just get outta here, it's none of your bees whacks.

MAGGIE
I so love my dear sister.

LINDSEY
Get outta here!

[The three girls run off.]
Shrimp head.

SHELBY
(This is a big music contest.)

LINDSEY

Yeah. A trip to Washington, that's going to be pretty cool for some kids. Come on, let's sign up for the swim team before class.

SHELBY

(It says its open to everybody.)

LINDSEY

Not everybody.

SHELBY

(Yes! Look!)

LINDSEY

Okay, show me where it says that.

SHELBY

(Right there.)

ANITA

Check out the odd couple.

TY

Those two are real freaks.

[LINDSEY hears them.]

ANITA

That Lindsey makes me gag whenever she talks about Shelby. "Friends since second grade, despite everything." Why is Shelby so interested in that contest? Does she think she's going to perform music or something?

JEFF

What would she play? The air?

[JEFF starts mocking Sign Language in broad gestures, like a music conductor. ANITA and TY join him. SARAH half-heartedly does as well.]

TESSA

(What are those kids doing?)

LIZZIE

(Being jerks.)

[NICK walks towards them.]

TESSA

[She grabs him.]

(Don't.)

COLE

Guys, guys. Cool it! They're watching.

[Both groups look uncomfortably at each other. Silence. The bell rings. Everyone, except SHELBY and LINDSEY, start to shuffle into the building.]

SHELBY

(Why were they doing that?)

LINDSEY

Forget it.

SHELBY

(Tell me!)

LINDSEY

They saw you looking at that music contest and they were making fun of you. Just forget about them. Come over to my house after school today, okay?

[LINDSEY follows the hearing kids.]

SHELBY

(Okay.)

[SHELBY watches LINDSEY leave.]

[LINDSEY's living room. There is a piano. SHELBY sets down her book bag and walks up to the piano. She touches it.]

[Enter LINDSEY, carrying a Monopoly board and some chips.]

LINDSEY

What do you want to drink with your chips?

SHELBY

(Do you still play?)

LINDSEY

Maggie plays a little. What do you want to drink? You're not watching me are you? Shelby? Shelby!

[Gets SHELBY's attention.]

What do you want to drink? I've got the Monopoly out. Let's play.

SHELBY

(Why did you stop?)

LINDSEY

You were the one who was good at it. I was just following you.

SHELBY

(Those duets we would play when we were younger. Remember?)

[Enter two younger girls (the actors playing JENNIFER and HANNAH), both dressed like LINDSEY and SHELBY. They sit on the piano bench and begin to play a duet. A classical piece, perhaps by Beethoven.]

LINDSEY

Yeah. Those were fun. All that practice. After school, twice a week--

LINDSEY and SHELBY

[Both signed and spoken.]

Tuesdays and Thursdays.

[The girl playing YOUNG SHELBY stops YOUNG LINDSEY. She plays a part that YOUNG LINDSEY had been playing inaccurately.]

LINDSEY

You could be a real pain sometimes.

SHELBY

[Hams it up.]

(I was a perfectionist!)

LINDSEY

You were amazing. So who do you want to be? The top hat or the shoe?

SHELBY

[Watching YOUNG SHELBY.]

(My parents were even talking about sending me to music school.)