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# Madonna professor recognized for work interpreting theater for deaf

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Dan McDougall (left), Madonna University professor and chair of the Sign Language Studies Department, was recently recognized by Oakland University with the Matilda Distinguished Community Service Award for his work in interpreting theater.

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Culture through the arts is an important part of understanding and enjoying the world in which we live, but for those who are [deaf](#) it can be difficult to fully experience certain aspects of the arts. This is especially true with theater, where the auditory and visual elements are equally essential.

Dan McDougall, Madonna University professor and chair of the [Sign Language](#) Studies Department, and his business partner Shelly Tocco have been working together since 1998 to bring down the largest barrier the deaf community faces with live theater. Through their [company](#), Terptheatre, they make interpreters an integral part of live plays by employing a technique called shadow interpreting. Shadow interpreting seeks to position the language of the play near the action on stage so that deaf patrons have a unified experience.

"Interpreters placed off to one side of the stage rarely satisfy anyone," said McDougall. "Both deaf and hearing audience members end up watching the interpreters and not the action on stage. Deaf people do this because they need to see the interpreters to follow the dialogue, and hearing patrons do it because they are simply mesmerized by our work."

McDougall and Tocco were recently recognized by Oakland [University](#) with the Matilda Distinguished Community Service Award for their work in interpreting theater. They have integrated interpreters into 31 theatrical productions for the university.

"When interpreters become part of the reality on stage, something magical happens. Deaf patrons can now understand the dialogue and appreciate the craftsmanship of the actors at the same time. For hearing patrons, shadow interpreters simply become part of the stage picture, and blend into the action. It seems like a radical concept to include interpreters on stage, but it ends up being the most normalizing of all of the options," McDougall said.

Karen Sheridan, professor at Oakland's department of music, theater and dance, said, "Our students and faculty have learned much by watching them and sharing the stage with them. Our deaf patrons and sign language classes have been treated to fine storytelling every time. The theater audience has been brought together by their work.

"This award is recognition of the collective efforts of our interpreters and the hundreds of Oakland University actors we have worked with over the past 13 years. Without their excellence, there would be nothing about us to recognize," McDougall said.

For more information on Terptheatre, visit [www.terptheater.com](#)

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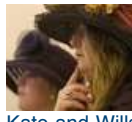
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