



Bernard Bragg

1928-2018



Early Life

- Bragg grew up in Brooklyn, and was fully immersed in the Deaf culture through his Deaf parents, aunt and uncle.
- Bragg was also involved in the acting culture through his dad's job as an amateur actor.



Education

- Bernard studied theater at Gallaudet University (at the time called Gallaudet College).
 - While studying, Bragg had lead roles in performances, and gained experience directing
 - Bragg was also interested in literature and won the *Teegarden Award for Creative Poetry* during his final year



Life after College

- After he finished his Education, Bragg became an instructor at the California School for the Deaf (CSD), and taught there for 15 years.
 - While he was there, he was also involved in extracurricular activities such as supervising and directing student productions
 - Bernard also continued to pursue his own opportunities in theater by directed convention shows for the National Association for the Deaf and performing at the Los Angeles Club for the Deaf



An Interesting Opportunity

- While working at CSD, Bragg had an opportunity to see famous mime Marcel Marceau while he was on tour.
 - At this performance, Bernard was lucky enough to arrange a meeting with Marcel. This connection opened the door for an audition by Bernhard that resulted in him receiving an offer by Marcel to study under him in Paris.
 - Bernard accepted Marcel's offer, and traveled to France once the school year was complete.



Returning to America

- Marcel inspired Bragg to perform more, because, as he said, *“If he can do a two-hour show without saying a word, why can’t I?”*.
 - When Bragg returned to the States, he successfully performed as a mime in the San Francisco area, with both set routines and improvisations. He toured throughout the country, visiting clubs, theaters, schools and universities. Bernard also got his own Bay Area TV show, titled *The Quiet Man*, and eventually expanded his tour to Europe.



A Growing Career

- Somehow, Bernard managed to continue teaching as his career grew. He obtained a master's degree in special education with a drama minor at San Francisco State University.
 - Bernard did leave his teaching career when he had the opportunity to become a founding member of the National Theater of the Deaf (NTD).
 - Bernard spend a decade with NTD and promoted *sign-mime* as a theatrical art form, which was a fusion between the art of miming and American Sign Language



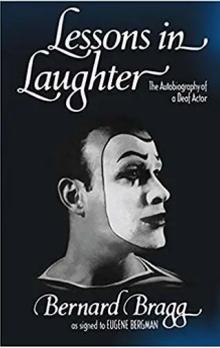
After NTD

- After leaving NTD, Bernard spoke and performed in 25 countries and 36 cities. Not long after, Bragg worked with a scriptwriter on a TV movie titled *“And Your Name is Jonah.”*
 - Bernard also received an acting role in this show, and was the first to present a realistic portrayal of Deaf culture



Accomplishments

- Bernard received multiple awards throughout his career, including:
 - International First-Class Merit and Lifetime Achievement Award from the World Federation of the Deaf
 - A Tony Award for Theatrical Excellence with the actors of the NTD
 - Gallaudet University acknowledged him with an honorary doctorate
- Bernard also influenced the Deaf overseas as an artist-in-residence with the Moscow Theater of Mimicry and Gesture and educating actors at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic arts in Sweden.
- Bernard had a biography written about him, Signs of Silence by Helen Powers, and he penned an autobiography as well, Lessons in Laughter.



End of an Era

- Towards the end of his life, Bernard performed a one-man show, *Theater In the Sky*. He also arranged for \$55,000 of his shows proceeds to be donated to the National Association of the Deaf and the World Federation of the Deaf
- Bernard died in 2018 when he was 90 years old, and he left a lasting impression on many, including famous Deaf actress Marlee Matlin. She was one of his past pupils, and said *“Every actor who is Deaf and who steps on a stage today or in front of a camera owes a debt of gratitude for the path he forged over 50 years ago,.”*



Resources

Information for this biography comes from...

Bernard Bragg Website, content by David S. Evans: <http://www.bernardbragg.com>

Gallaudet University Website: <http://www.Gallaudet.edu>

Great Deaf Americans (2nd Ed.) by Matthew Scott Moore and Robert F. Panara, MSM Productions, Ltd. (1996)

The New York Times obituaries: *Bernard Bragg, Who Showed the Way for Deaf Actors, Dies at 90* by Neil Genzlinger

The Washington Post obituaries: *Bernard Bragg, pioneering Deaf actor who brought sign language to the stage, dies at 90* by Emily Nanger