



**SIGNDANCE GROUP/ Znakovni Ples**

**David Bower and Maria De Graal ( Isolte Avila ) –**

**COMBINED ARTISTIC & CREATIVE PORTFOLIO**

**Artists:**

Maria De Graal (Isolte Avila) – Artistic Director, Choreographer, Performer

David Bower – Actor, Dancer, Physical Theatre Artist, Art Director

Location: Pula, Croatia

Website: [www.signdance.org](http://www.signdance.org)

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## **Joint Artistic Statement**

Signdance Group is a disability-led performance company founded on the long-term artistic partnership between Maria De Graal (Isolte Avila) and David Bower. Together, they developed signdance: a multilingual, interdisciplinary performance language that integrates sign languages, choreography, theatre, visual music, and embodied dramaturgy.

Their work is rooted in inclusive practice, cross-border collaboration, and sustainable touring. For more than three decades, they have created performances that challenge conventional hierarchies between text, movement, and sign, offering audiences a visually rich, emotionally resonant, and politically engaged experience.

### **Their shared vision centres on:**

Disability-led innovation

Multilingual and cross-cultural expression

Sustainable, low-impact touring

Collaborative devising

Community-engaged practice

Signdance Group continues to expand its methodology through new European collaborations, site-specific works, and interdisciplinary partnerships.



## **Biographies**

### **Maria De Graal (Isolte Avila)**

Cuban–Puerto Rican artist based in Pula, Croatia

Founder of Signdance Theatre (1987)

Maria De Graal is the originator of signdance theatre and a leading figure in disability-led performance. Her work integrates sign languages, choreography, theatre, puppetry, and visual music into a distinctive artistic language. She has toured internationally for over 30 years, collaborating with partners across Europe, India, the Americas, and the Caribbean.

Training: Cuban Ballet; Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; Tanz Wochen Vienna; MA, California Institute Of The Arts

Languages: ISL, BSL, English, Spanish, Italian, French



## David Bower

Welsh/British Deaf actor, dancer, physical theatre artist, and art director

David Bower is a celebrated Deaf performer known for expressive movement, clarity of gesture, and strong ensemble presence. His work spans sign dance, physical theatre, devised performance, radio drama, film, and television.

Training: Theatre of the Deaf (Bulmershe College); Common Ground Sign Dance Theatre; contemporary dance and mime; Tuning Scores; Material for the Spine

Film/TV: Four Weddings and a Funeral; BBC's Casualty and Doctors

Radio: Lead roles on BBC Radio Four & Three; Audio Production Awards nominee.



## Artistic Approach

Together, De Graal and Bower have shaped sign dance into a multilingual, interdisciplinary performance form that blends:

Gesture-based dramaturgy

Sign languages as choreographic structure

Embodied storytelling

Visual music and rhythm

Puppetry and animation

Inclusive, disability-led methodologies

Sustainable, low-impact touring

Their work is known for emotional clarity, symbolic depth, and the ability to communicate across languages and cultures.

**Dances for a Lost Traveller** 



**Signs of brilliance** David Bower July 2 – 8 2009

★★★★★  
**Warehouse Theatre** Off-West End

This is one of the strangest and boldest shows I've seen. David Bower and Isolte Avila of the deaf and disabled artist-led company Signdance Collective are something of a Beckettian duo: as he pulls her tented form about the stage on a rope in 'Travelling' it's hard not to think of Rik Mayall and a particularly ecstatic Ruby Wax.

You don't just get Bower and Avila's surreal humour and freeform 'sigdance' moves, either. The pair perform in front of film projections to the accompaniment of Luke Barlow and two members of probably the most inspirational jazz group in Britain, Led Bib. There's also a little audience participation to establish that we're all friends – I had to raise my arm while the rest of the spectators told me I was beautiful (and I'm sure they meant it most sincerely).

'Listen', an evocation of Bower's struggle with tinnitus, is extraordinary. At first he raps incomprehensibly into a microphone as digital glitches and deconstructed sounds engulf him in a vortex of white noise. A garage band then fires up and he starts to fling himself around expressionistically, the spirit of Iggy Pop at his shoulder. Like the first piece, it's probably closer to performance art than a purist's idea of 'dance'.

The final item on the night I saw the show (the programme varies) was the most conventional. 'Here', a jazz ballet about a couple undergoing relationship difficulties, has Bower and Avila, a pillow apiece, throwing dirty looks and even dirtier shapes at one another. The score is a scorcher, though – Led Bib's Mark Holub at his best, which is saying something.

*Robert Shore*

## Selected Works

NOTIZEN / THE NEWS (2025–present)

Cross-border collaboration integrating sigdance, puppetry, animation, and visual music.

Stream Walkers (2024–current; touring 2026/27)

Site-specific performance developed with Ana Monro Theatre.

RITUAL (2025–current)

Contemporary street-theatre work exploring movement, rhythm, and ensemble composition.

Oriente Power Cut / Oriente Plus (2019–2023)

Award-winning interdisciplinary work recognised for innovative signdance integration.

In Between Spaces (2017–2022)

International collaboration exploring digital anxiety and multilingual performance.

Carthage / Cartagena (2016–2020)

Movement-based work on migration, identity, and memory.

Broken City Wall Street (2016–2017)

Site-specific collaboration with PopUp Theatrics.

Turtle Trails (2019–2020)

Family-focused performance blending puppetry and signdance.



## Critical Reception

“Bold & extraordinary ... a Beckettian duo.” — Time Out London

“Beautiful, emotional dancing charged with meaning.” — Disability Arts Online

“Expresses herself through dance ... inventive use of movement.” — News Shopper

“Extraordinary acting ... beautiful in its brutality.” — Peter Read

“Hypnotic, poetic, unruly ... the ungovernable energy of art itself.” — Caridad Svich

Audience responses to recent work describe it as moving, intellectually provocative, and resonant across generations and cultures.

## **Touring & Outreach**

For over 30 years, De Graal and Bower have toured extensively across Europe, the UK, the Americas, Asia, and the Caribbean. Their outreach includes inclusive performance workshops, community engagement, training for Deaf and disabled artists, and cross-cultural exchange.

## **Contact**

Signdance Group

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