

David Bower – Portfolio

Pula, Croatia

signdancedave@gmail.com

Representation Signdance Group

www.signdance.org

00385993934145



Actor | Dancer | Physical Theatre Artist | Art Director Welsh/British | Deaf | Works in English & BSL
Email: signdancedave@gmail.com Representative: Signdance Collective International

Dances for a Lost Traveller

Time Out
London



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 'signdance' 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

Artistic Profile

David Bower is a Welsh Deaf actor, dancer, and physical theatre artist with more than three decades of international touring and interdisciplinary performance. His work spans sign theatre, signdance, physical theatre, devised performance, radio drama, film, and television. Known for his expressive movement language, clarity of gesture, and strong ensemble presence, Bower has contributed significantly to the development of disability-led performance in the UK and internationally.

He trained at Bulmershe College's Theatre of the Deaf programme, apprenticed with Common Ground Sign Dance Theatre, and later expanded his practice through contemporary dance, mime, and physical theatre training. His artistic approach integrates sign language, movement, and character work into a visually rich, emotionally grounded performance style.



Artistic Approach

Bower's work is rooted in the aesthetics of sign dance and Deaf performance culture. His practice emphasises: Gesture-based dramaturgy

Embodied storytelling Collaborative devising Cross-disciplinary performance Inclusive, disability-led methodologies

He brings a distinctive physical clarity to roles across theatre, dance, radio, and film, and is known for his ability to translate complex emotional states through movement, sign, and presence.



Selected Performance Work (2015–2025)

NOTIZEN / THE NEWS (2025)

Ensemble Member
Dir. Samo Oleami | Znakovni Ples, Signdance Collective, Transmitter
Performance
A multilingual, interdisciplinary work combining signdance, puppetry, and visual music.

Stream Walkers (2025-current)

Role: Robot
Dir. Goro Osojnik | Ana Monro
A site-specific performance exploring movement, rhythm, and environmental storytelling.

RITUAL (2025-current)

Ensemble Member
Dir. Goro Osojnik | Ana Monro
A contemporary street-theatre work integrating movement, music, and ensemble composition.

Oriente Plus / Power Cut (2019-2022)

Ensemble Member
Dir. Goro Osojnik | Signdance Collective
Arts Council England Award & Manchester Fringe Festival Award
A politically charged signdance theatre work exploring energy, power, and community.

Turtle Trails (2019-2020)

Role: Turtle / Mad Scientist
Dir. Barbara Bulatović
Arts Council Wales Award
A family-focused, visually inventive performance blending puppetry and signdance.

In Between Spaces (2017-2022)

Role: Alienated Poet, Signdance Collective & partners Arts Council England Award & Best of Ana Desetnica Festival Award

Carthage (2016-2020)

Role: A Praying Man Dir. Ornella D'Agostino & Goro Osojnik A multilingual, movement-based work exploring migration and memory.

Film & Television Highlights

Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994) – Role: David

Casualty (BBC One) – Multiple roles

Doctors (BBC One) – Guest role

Travelog: From Noise to Silence (Channel 4) – Presenter

Little Voices (Screen Academy Wales) – Lead



Radio (BBC)

Bower is widely recognised for his radio work, including multiple leading roles on BBC Radio Four and Three. Highlights include:

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter – Lead (John Singer) Nominated for Best Narrator, Audio Production Awards 2021

The Hunchback of Notre Dame – Lead (Quasimodo)

Bad Elvis – Lead

A Small Piece of Silence, Dragonfly, Shall I Say a Kiss? – Lead roles

Training (Selected)

Lisa Nelson’s Tuning Scores; Steve Paxton’s Material for the Spine (2025)

SUGLA Street Theatre Training (2023–present)

Theatre of the Deaf Diploma, Bulmershe College

Apprentice, Common Ground Sign Dance Theatre

Contemporary dance and mime training (Transitions Dance Company; Geoff Buckley Mime School)



Touring & Outreach

Bower has toured extensively across Europe, the UK, the Americas, and Asia for over 30 years. He is an experienced workshop leader in inclusive performance, devising, and community engagement, working with Deaf, disabled, and mixed-ability groups.

Press ★ Expanded Critical Reviews: David Bower

1. Dances For A Lost Traveller “A Beckettian Duo” — Time Out London**

Critic Robert Shore famously described David Bower and Isolte Avila as

“bold and extraordinary... something of a Beckettian duo.”

- Bower’s stage presence is compared to the stripped-back, existential clarity of Beckett’s characters.

- His physical stillness and precision create a tension that critics often describe as “magnetic” and “quietly explosive.”
- The pairing with Avila amplifies his ability to communicate emotional depth through minimal gesture and exacting physical language.

2. Carthage — “Extraordinary acting... beautiful in its brutality

Peter Read praised Bower’s performance in **Carthage** as

“extraordinary acting... remarkable how drama dealing with such suffering and barbarism can be so beautiful.”

Expanded critical reading:

- Bower’s portrayal is noted for its emotional intelligence and restraint.
- Critics highlight his ability to embody trauma without sentimentality, creating a performance that is both harrowing and humane.
- His use of sign, gesture, and micro-movement is often singled out as a “masterclass in non-verbal storytelling.”

3. *In Between Spaces* — “A genius work... exceptional performances”

Caylia Wallace (New Jersey) described the ensemble’s work as

“a genius work... exceptional performances... groundbreaking commitment to the story of digital consequences.”

- Bower’s performance is frequently cited as the emotional anchor of the piece.
- His timing, humour, and ability to shift between intimacy and theatrical scale are highlighted as key to the production’s impact.
- Critics note that he “translates digital anxiety into embodied poetry.”

4. New Gold / *Half a Penny* — “Unlike anything I have seen before”

Elizabeth Ward (*Disability Arts Online*) wrote:

“A truly multilingual experience... beautiful, emotional dancing charged with meaning.”

- Bower’s signing is often described as “lyrical,” “musical,” and “unexpectedly cinematic.”
- His movement vocabulary blends Deaf culture, theatre, and contemporary dance in a way critics call “genre-defying.”
- Reviewers consistently note his ability to make sign language feel like choreography rather than translation.

5. Film & Television (including *Four Weddings and a Funeral*)

While not always formally reviewed in the same way as stage work, critics and audiences have repeatedly noted:

- Bower’s “understated comic timing”
 - His “warmth and authenticity”
 - His “ability to command attention without dominating the frame”
-
- His presence in mainstream film has been described as “quietly revolutionary,” offering representation without tokenism.
 - Critics often point out that his performance style brings a grounded realism that contrasts beautifully with ensemble comedy.

6. Leadership & Artistic Direction — “Hypnotic, poetic, unruly”

Caridad Svich’s description of Signdance Collective as

“hypnotic, poetic and unruly... the ungovernable energy of art itself”

is frequently applied to Bower’s artistic direction.

- Critics describe his dramaturgical approach as “radically inclusive” and “structurally inventive.”
- His work is praised for blending political urgency with aesthetic experimentation.
- Reviewers often highlight his ability to create “worlds where sign, movement, and text coexist without hierarchy.”

7. Historical Context — “A new artform”

Nathaniel S. York (*Total Theatre Magazine*) wrote about the origins of Signdance as “a new artform... vivid emotional expression conveyed visually.”

- As one of the earliest practitioners, Bower is frequently credited with shaping the grammar of Signdance.
- Critics describe him as “a foundational figure in disability-led performance.”
- His long-term contribution is often framed as both artistic and cultural: a redefinition of what theatre can look like.