

British Theatre Guide

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Self-Raising

Mike Kenny and Jenny Sealey

Graeae in association with Soho Theatre and Theatr Iolo, developed with The Incubator at The Egg, Theatre Royal Bath

Soho Theatre

6–17 February 2024

Since 1997, Jenny Sealey MBE has been artistic director and CEO of Graeae, the company which champions work for and by the deaf, disabled and neurodivergent. She has scored many successes as a director (including co-directing the 2012 Paralympics Opening Ceremony) but here she takes to the stage herself to tell her own story.

The show was originally planned as an adaptation of Anne Fines's book *Flour Babies* (and bags of flour are involved in some audience participation) but that soon gave place to a personal memoir and a sharing of secrets.

Anisha Fields's setting is simple: a video screen above three mobile blue cupboards with a sink set into the centre one. For those who can't see them, Jenny describes them and herself and what she is wearing. Like all Graeae work, Lee Lyford's production sets out to serve everyone, so throughout there are audio description for those who need it, captions and BSL signing. This has been called a one-woman show, but it isn't: Jenny is paired with a signing interpreter (Jeni Draper on press night, who describes herself) while Jenny's son Jonah Sealey Braverman provides captions and video. Her fathers ran a firm of photographers, so photos also play a part in the telling.

Jenny was born with hearing but suddenly lost it aged seven after being knocked on the head. Doctors said they must wait until she was 19 and physically mature and then an operation might restore hearing, and meanwhile instructed not to let her use signing but to learn to cope in a hearing world.

It is a story of insensitive medics but a loving family with a glamorous mother, a devoted dad and three younger siblings. Jenny doesn't dwell on the difficulties but she provides a graphic picture of the difficulties the hard of hearing, let alone the totally deaf, encounter and gives sound advice on how to make communication with a deaf person easier.

Then comes the uncovering of secrets. It would be a spoiler to tell what they are, though an earlier apostrophe can give you a clue. I'll just say she finds out who she really is, though her mother insists no-one else should be told. It is a sensitive story but told with a light touch and full of laughter.

It is only an hour long and the family story peopled with personalities that could furnish a longer piece, but the presentation is so personal that the intimate sharing leaves you feeling satisfied. The various elements are fluidly integrated with Jenny Sealey's performance totally engaging, Jenny Draper's "term" becoming part of a double act and on-screen Jonah adding lively comment. It is touring to other dates and well worth catching.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)