

JO SALAS BIOGRAPHY

Jo Salas is the co-founder of Playback Theatre and the artistic director of Hudson River Playback Theatre in New York State. She has taught Playback Theatre in 27 countries and is a core faculty member of the Centre for Playback Theatre. She was a keynote speaker at academic symposiums on Playback Theatre held at the University of Kassel, Germany, and Arizona State University.

Jo Salas's publications about Playback Theatre include numerous articles and three books: "Improvising Real Life: Personal Story in Playback Theatre", now published in eleven languages; "Do My Story, Sing My Song: Music therapy and Playback Theatre with Troubled Children"; and "Personal Stories in Public Spaces: Essays on Playback Theatre by Its Founders" (co-authored with Jonathan Fox). She also co-edited the bilingual publication, "Half of My Heart/La Mitad de Mi Corazón: True stories told by immigrants."

Jo Salas spent a week in the Jenin refugee camp in Palestine with the Freedom Theatre, which developed a Playback Theatre project called the Freedom Bus. The project was initiated by Ben Rivers, who co-wrote a section within Salas' chapter of the Volume II, Acting Together anthology about working with Sri Lankans in San Francisco. The Freedom Bus traveled throughout the West Bank, stopping in villages to perform Playback shows and inviting people to tell their stories of the occupation. Salas trained the actors and witnessed three performances, listening to unforgettable stories of oppression and resistance. She also visited with Iman Aoun, whose work with Ashtar Theatre is featured in Chapter 4 of Volume I of the Acting Together anthology. Returning to the West Bank again a year later, Salas gave further training and traveled with the Freedom Bus team to a remote Bedouin village in the Jordan Valley.

Salas' No More Bullying project continues in local schools in upstate New York, as well as in other regions where Playback ensembles have been trained (most recently in Ukraine).

Additionally, three members of the AHRDO ensemble in Afghanistan traveled to New York and Washington DC to present a play based on stories told in Playback shows. The members also attended a workshop that Salas taught in New York City, and it was deeply moving for Salas to hear them tell their stories.

AHRDO used Playback extensively as part of their Legislative Theatre project about Women's Rights. Sadly, Z, the key female member of this team (and one of members who visited the U.S.), was violently attacked after receiving threats about her work. Hjalmar Joffre Eichhorn, who spearheaded the project in Afghanistan, has led Playback Theatre workshops in Bolivia, the Maldives, Kyrgyzstan, Northern Ireland and East Timor.

With the 2021 crisis in Afghanistan, AHRDO members and their families escaped to Pakistan and are now resettled in Canada.