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# AEA DIGEST

**Issue no 50**  
**Autumn 2017**

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**It wasn't all hard work – AEA members relax in the local pub after this year's successful conference**

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## **FROM THE CHAIR.....**

**Keith Percy**

In his Notes from the Chair in the last issue of the Digest (Spring 2017) Jonathan Hughes wrote about his retirement. He had recently retired from employment with the Open University and now wondered how he had “ever found time to go to (paid) work”. He had become a Citizen’s Advice volunteer, was learning about giving reading support to primary school children, was newly a Parish Councillor and with Anita had spent time in Brazil, where their son now lives. Jonathan announced his retirement from the Chair of AEA after four and a half years to focus on these and other interests. He will remain a member of AEA. We are very grateful to Jonathan for all he did as Chair of AEA. I was elected to succeed him at the AGM on September 25th and I hope that I can fulfil the role with the good humour and commitment which he always displayed.

In his last Notes from the Chair, Jonathan also gave early notice of a conference in Leeds from 9th -11th November 2017 to be co-hosted by Leeds Beckett University and AEA, on behalf of the European ELOA (Education and Learning of Older Adults) network. Entitled *Identity, Voice Creativity, Action: Older people learning creatively for creativity, finding a voice and taking action*, this conference is now almost upon us. It should be excitingly different as conferences go. More information can be found in this digest on page 6 and page 11 of the Arts and Culture section.

Full details are also available on the events page of our website

<http://www.associationforeducationandaging.org/aea-events.html> . The conference is open for bookings until November 8th.



**Keith Percy with Josie Tetley, who chaired the AGM prior to Keith’s election as AEA’s new Chair**

September 25th in London was a busy day for many AEA members. We held our annual AGM, a seminar on *Improving the learning experience for older people* and our 15th Annual Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture. The conference room was full throughout the day. The AGM was serious and engaged, emphasising AEA’s need to focus on its mission to encourage research, good practice and sound policy in relation to education and older adults, to have sound finances and to plan ahead a variety of activities in which members can participate.

An important event was the election of a new Honorary Treasurer, Carol Dickson Fisher (whom we profile on page 4 in this Digest). The seminar was both serious and fun. It had clear group-based tasks but it was a relief to be able to share (sometimes energetically) what came to mind about learning in later life at that particular time and in that particular group. Anne Jamieson, the organiser of the Seminar, writes about it on page 5 of this issue.

The Glendenning lecture - *I am still learning' -loneliness, isolation, older people and learning in the post-modern world* - was delivered by Professor Paul Kingston, of the University of Chester, where he heads the Centre for Ageing Studies. Lavishly illustrated in its first section by images of ageing from art, Paul's lecture was wide-ranging. It was thought-provoking on loneliness and social isolation of older people and the role of learning and education. Paul presented some of the early outcomes of an evaluation of the project Brightlife, which aims to tackle social isolation among older people living in West Cheshire and promotes many learning activities and experiences for a large number of older people. Brightlife is going to result in some important indicators for all of us.



Angela Glendenning with Professor Paul Kingston

My view is that AEA must now go forward. The Executive Committee are talking about new ideas, new events, new partnerships, new funding, new projects, new publications, a renewed website and better promotion and publicity. The key will be to increase membership and to involve existing and new members in thinking, planning and participation. The point is (is it not?) to make a difference to learning in later life.

*AEA was also delighted to welcome our new Treasurer **Carol Dickson-Fisher** to her first AGM.*

Carol completed the Certificate in Accountancy from the Open University about 10 years ago and did an IAB (International Association of Book-Keepers) computerised book-keeping course. She recently completed the AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians) advanced diploma in bookkeeping and has AATQB (AAT Qualified Bookkeeper) membership.

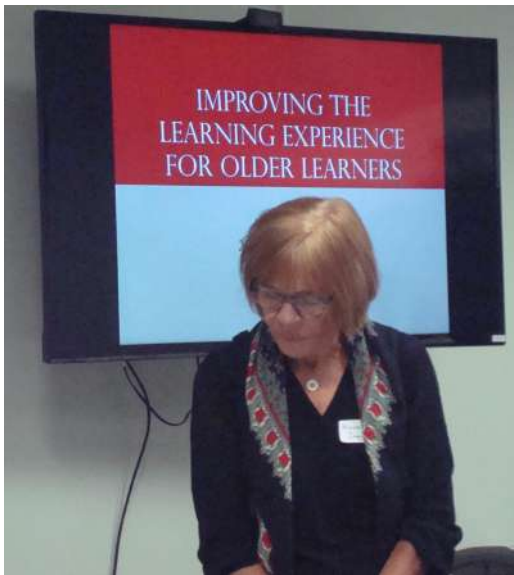
Carol took these qualifications to prepare for part-time employment and/or volunteering in future retirement. For the last two years she has been doing the book-keeping and preparing and submitting the accounts for a residents' association, which is a private limited company. The turnover of this company and her role in it compare well with AEA and the role of its Treasurer.

Carol has been employed as Senior Database Administrator in the National Archives in Kew for 17 years. She has two masters' degrees - in geophysics and in computer science, plus a Ph.D. in micropalaeontology.

*We also welcome to the Executive Committee newly elected members **Val Bissland, John Miles, Emma-Reetta Koivunen** (our former Hon Secretary) and former Chair **Joanna Walker**. **Robin Hadley** has now replaced Emma as Hon Sec. A full list of the makeup of the current EC can be found on page 20 and biographies and photographs of them will be posted shortly on the Contacts page of our website.*

*The first event of the conference proper was a seminar and workshop organised by **Anne Jamieson** on the theme of **Improving the learning experience for older learner**, which is one of the aims of AEA.*

This aim was the reason for the decision to hold this seminar, enabling participants to share experiences and views of what should be done to improve learning opportunities for older people.



Anne Jamieson

The session started with a short presentation by Hilary Farnworth, Vice Chair of the Ransackers Association. The Ransackers used to offer residential courses in Higher Education for those aged 55 and over, who had missed out on higher education. They were publicly funded and offered by colleges. Funding for this, as with so much other funding for adult learning, was withdrawn some years ago. Since then, Ransackers have been engaged in a research project to find out more about those who had attended the courses, their backgrounds, motivation and benefits. Data is still in

the process of being analysed, but preliminary findings highlight enormous benefits reported by participants, not least the growth in confidence among the learners.

The presentation was followed by group discussion of key questions, which included:

- What do older learners want?
- What is good about existing provision and practices?
- What are the gaps and how do we improve practices?

During the plenary session that followed it was clear that the groups had covered a wide range of issues. There was general agreement that, as post-50 learners are such a heterogeneous group, a better understanding is needed about the learning needs of different cohorts in addition to the influence of factors such as gender, ethnicity, and educational background. There was a call for gathering together existing research into the benefits of later life learning, to strengthen the case and to use this in lobbying for improved provision. Among other points made was the need to include a focus on gerontological education, i.e. learning about the ageing process and how to age well.



## OTHER CONFERENCE NEWS

*No sooner is one conference over than along comes another one! As diligent readers will know, AEA is co-hosting this year's ELOA conference with Leeds Beckett University's School of Film, Music and Performing Arts, where the event will be taking place. The theme is **Identity, Voice, Creativity, Action!** AEA's **Jane Watts** has been working closely with Leeds Beckett on the organisation of the conference.*

That theme embraces community-based learning and activism, arts-based learning for older people, and creative approaches to older people's learning. In addition to the more usual papers and posters we will be participating in performances and discussions from older learners and their tutors. We will be welcoming local older students at Leeds Beckett University - and from further afield. All in all, a very exciting 'conference with a difference'.



A Leeds Beckett student working the grams

Key-note speakers are:

Dr Victoria Watts, Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle, USA and Libby Costello, Royal Academy of Dance, UK - *Dance: Transfiguring lives through joy and rigour*

Dr Wendy Martin, Brunel University London - *Cultural Gerontology: Shifting the Paradigm?*

Anne Gallacher, Director of Luminate, Scotland- *Playing Many Parts: the impact of a festival on arts and older people*

Details of how to register were emailed to AEA members recently and can also be found on the Events page of our website, along with useful information on transport and accommodation. <http://www.associationforeducationandaging.org/aea-events.html>

And remember, if you can't spare the time for the whole conference, you can come for just one day, if you wish. Any questions about the conference can be sent to Dave Turner at LBU [d.p.turner@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:d.p.turner@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) or to Jane Watts [jane.watts@phonecoop.coop](mailto:jane.watts@phonecoop.coop)

*European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA)*  
<http://www.esrea.org/?l=en>

*ESREA Network on Education and Learning of Older Adults (ELOA)*  
*The 8th conference of the ESREA Network - ELOA.*

**9th – 11th November 2017 - Leeds, UK**

*In view of the emphasis on the arts in this exciting and innovative conference, you will find more information about its content and the work Leeds Beckett is doing with older learners on page 11 of the Arts and Culture section of this digest.*

*Prior to the AEA conference the Ransackers Association held their annual conference in September at Europe House in Smith Square, London on the very topical theme of **The future of Older European Citizens & later life learning**. Ransackers invited AEA members to join them and **Eileen Rubery** accepted the invitation on our behalf.*

The focus of this year's Seminar was older European citizens and later life learning. There were also sessions on the 'Ransackers' Project' research and on projects running from 2015-17 into "Serious Study in Later life".

We opened with an excellent talk and discussion by Jean Lambert, Member of the European Parliament, focusing on what might be lost through the planned exit from the European Union. As I suspect is the case with many groups exploring this question whether initially from a 'Leave' or 'Stay' perspective, the general consensus was that 'losses' were likely to be much greater than initially recognised. Areas of particular concern included Care, 'Healthy Ageing' and Pensions.



**Jean Lambert MEP**

Ms Lambert, who is a Member of European Parliament, outlined the work she had contributed to in Europe. Each

EU Presidency is considering the issues they perceive as most pressing and trying to ensure adequate coverage of those issues that are only surfacing as the investigations progress. EU Research Funding is an issue of particular concern. Realistically the invaluable collaborative aspects of the present system are unlikely to continue in their present format without a major, coordinated effort. There is particular concern around research into issues around dementia. Less obvious areas of potential concern are projects at present managed via the WHO/EU co-ordination process. Many pensions' organisations have been involved in co-operative projects that have greatly increased their expertise. A WHO conference in Brussels in October, which will be concentrating on Anti-Discrimination Policy, equality of access to goods and services for the aged, the importance of maintaining collaborations on healthy ageing and collaborations on public health issues and youth unemployment could provide some further insights.

The EU parliamentarians committees do have limited research budgets they could use to fund areas of importance. One area of potential interest is the predicted shortages of professionals in key areas such as medicine that are likely to be exacerbated by the increased tendency for doctors to take early retirement. Discussions with the leaders of the medical and related professions to encourage the creation of 're-entry' pathways for those who, after 'recovering' from their original stress might be attracted back in more supportive roles is worthy of further thought.

The other major event of the day was a report on progress with the follow-up research on the Ransackers project, which was set up in 1992. Chris Ring outlined the origins of this unique project. *Ransackers* was a course set up specifically for older learners, aimed at encouraging those who had disengaged from the learning process early in life to re-engage and undertake serious research. Although the original participants are now many years out from the programme, the review had demonstrated that generally it had opened up a new world of activity that they had continued to pursue via independent research or further developmental activities long after completing the initial programme.



**Hilary Farnworth of Ransackers outlining the initial findings of that research at the AEA conference**

Opportunities for continued learning as one ages have however declined in recent years. While in the past many over 55 year olds continued to learn via University-supported Further Education programmes, following funding cuts over more recent years many universities have ceased to support Continuing Education, leaving a severely depleted field of opportunities. Since those that continued to provide courses now charge much higher fees, this has further

reduced access for the majority of this age group.

The situation in other countries was also discussed and in particular a recent Spanish initiative from Barcelona was reported on. The reasons for joining the courses reported by their participants included:

- Staying a useful member of the work-force;
- To enjoy learning new things;
- As ‘Social protection’ by keeping you alert and part of a community.

Popular subjects include Art History, Culture, Languages, Psychology, Politics and the learning of practical skills. Feedback on the courses has been generally positive and although people generally did not go on the courses specifically to make friends, this was often a by-product of the activity. Costs for the Spanish courses were around 80 Euros per month, in addition to a central subsidy.

Overall, this was a lively and informative day, covering many issues of importance and interest. I should perhaps close by drawing attention to one area that I feel is too often omitted: the management of ill health in the aged. I do not mean by this research on the diseases they are particularly prone to, but rather the provision to the ageing population of advice and assistance with the development of specific skills for *managing the interface with the professionals* that patients have to deal with. As the NHS becomes increasingly rule-ridden and stretched, patients do need advice on how to steer their way through this complex and not always very sympathetic maze. Given that by



death around 50% of us will have had at least one cancer, work on how to learn about and access the best treatment for any one individual is an urgent need. Once engulfed by the system, there is often not much time to learn how best to

manage it. We do need to encourage those entering this period to prepare in advance.

So, I leave you with that thought for the future!

## OTHER NEWS

*One way the torch of older learning is being kept alight is through the still growing network of **University of the Third Age** groups throughout the country. **Daphne Berkovi** has news of another U3A, which has started this year in Hampstead Garden suburb in London.*

Founded by pioneering philanthropist Henrietta Barnett, The Institute in Hampstead Garden Suburb opened in March 1909 providing “high quality and good value for money” adult education across North London for over 100 years.



Samuel and Henrietta Barnett portrait by Hubert von Herkomer in Toynbee Hall

Sadly in 2016 the Trustees of the Institute, had to put the organisation into liquidation. This left a void for local residents who had enjoyed a wide variety of courses literally on their doorstep. Then in early 2017 a meeting was held in the local Free Church with over 350 attendees to hear about the proposal to establish a new University of the Third Age.

A steering committee was established and under its stewardship of chair Jack Berkovi, the process began of establishing a new HGS U3A. Fast forward to September 2017 and there are now nearly 500 signed up members and nearly 60 interest groups. HGS U3A like all U3As is dedicated to lifelong learning, coming together and learning together. We are now one of over a thousand U3As in the UK. There are a whole variety of interest groups ranging from art, literature, walks, music and languages.

We are fortunate to have group leaders and committee members with expertise and experience from their previous working lives, and indeed specialist interests to manage and lead the organisation and their groups. Another aspect of this new U3A is the monthly Topical Talks, where we strive to invite speakers to talk to our members on a

variety of different and interesting topics.

There is a continual demand to establish new groups, as our new groups organiser has found from searching through member applications. Of particular interest there is a demand for language learning, music, bridge, walking groups, history and computing. A group has also been formed for members on their own (MOTO), which continues to grow. This is a self-autonomous group, who arrange their own activities under the aegis of our U3A.

From a personal perspective I have established a Book Group, reading 20th century classics. Group members choose from a trusted list of over 150 titles, selecting books that symbolise the changing world of the 20th Century. This allows plenty of variety; different genres and themes to discuss. Some members explained that they had never belonged to a Book Group before, so this was a wonderful opportunity for members to enjoy something new. This exemplifies the wonderful world of U3A, which allows members to explore new interests in retirement; meeting new people and being part of a large U3A community.

On a wider scale there are also opportunities for members to become involved with Shared Learning Projects, where U3A members contribute to research for external organisations. An example of this is *Citizens: 800 Years in the Making*. This is a three year project being run by Royal Holloway, University of London, which was launched earlier this year. U3A members will be playing an important role, highlighting local stories and looking at

the relevant history of a particular borough.

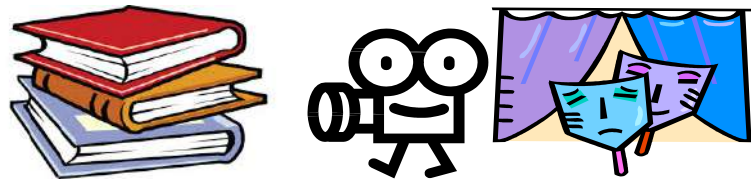
The scope and the scale is endless and anyone who wants to establish a new group is warmly welcomed. U3A is playing a vital role in “bridging the gap” after the demise of Further Education colleges and ensuring that older learners can broaden their horizons in a friendly and relaxed environment. Testament to this popularity is that there are now over a thousand U3As across the UK and the growth continues.

*Further information on this new U3A group can be found here*  
<https://hgsu3a.uk/>

*And while you're on the internet, why not check out AEA's presence on social media.*

Follow us on Twitter – our “handle” - which is Twitterspeak for username – is @AssocEduAgeing

AEA's Facebook page has been getting a lot of readers lately. As well as news of AEA events, we post many items which I have found online and are of interest to older people. Recent ones include a piece on the effect of participation in the arts on health and wellbeing; a paper on a national strategy for older learning; an item on dementia friendly film screenings and news from the Baring Foundation on arts and older people. In addition, if you like our page and like and share our postings, that all helps to give AEA and the subject of older learning a higher profile on social media. So do support us at <https://www.facebook.com/EducationandAgeing/>



## ***AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION***

*As someone working as a drama tutor with older learners, digest editor **Carol Allen** has been looking with great interest at the forthcoming *Identity, Voice, Creativity, Action!* conference which AEA is hosting with Leeds Beckett University, School of Film, Music and Performing Arts. An event which raises the question: **How important is Creativity to us all?***

With the downgrading of so called “soft” arts studies in schools in favour of “harder” subjects such as maths and science, plus the yearly cuts in the real value of subsidies to arts institutions, we are now living in a society which is increasingly downgrading the arts as a mere frippery compared to the “serious” and grown up stuff such as engineering and finance. The only acceptable argument in favour the arts appears to be the fact that as an industry they make a significant financial contribution to the economy. Money does indeed buy food and shelter, which nourish the body. But the arts feed the spirit, the soul.

What society seems to neglect is the enormous and frequently unrealised potential and need for creative expression, which rests inside every human being. While I’m not suggesting that mathematics or indeed scientific and medical research for example are not creatively fulfilling – creativity isn’t the

province purely of the arts - this need is still frustrated and neglected for many people during much of their working life.

For example, I have spent most of my life working with apparently hard headed news journalists. I note with interest how many of my now retired colleagues are giving expression to their creativity through writing, acting and directing in plays, making music, painting pictures. One of them, a lifetime crime reporter, has created a company producing radio drama – though to be fair, he had that as a side-line, while still reporting from the Old Bailey. I also have a friend, who is a rocket scientist – I kid you not! –and she loves the creativity of the weekly jazz dance class we both attend.



**My “baby ducks” leaping into the water of a song and dance number!**

I notice it too with my own drama class of older learners, many of whom have

spent their working lives in professions such as engineering, administration or property management and have never acted in their lives before. They are now taking to the mysteries of improvisation, play making, even song and dance, like so many baby ducks leaping joyfully into the water!

And if that is regarded as a mere frill by the rulers of our world, there is also the economic argument that this “food for the soul” has such a positive effect on older people’s physical health and mental and emotional wellbeing, that it could save the NHS loadsa money – see that article I refer to on page 10.

So turning to the topics – and indeed entertainments - that are being covered in this conference, it would appear that Leeds Beckett is making a big contribution to helping students old and young to express that creativity.

Jane Watts has already listed on page 6 the keynote speakers who will be highlighting the factual and theoretical value of creative expression. But creativity is action, action illustrated by the work now taking place.



The university’s School of Film, Music and Performing Arts runs a part time course for people of 65 years and

over under the title of CinAge with the expressed purpose of giving them “the opportunity to make films that tell their story.” The group will be showcasing their work in two sessions at the conference.

On the first afternoon there will be a theatre piece created by the students with their director Teresa Brayshaw. *Talking ‘bout my generation’* is a new theatre work which speaks to the audience about what it means to be 60+ in the UK - right here and right now.



On Day 2 there is a screening of a film made by the CinAge group and a discussion. It would also appear from this photograph that there is an intergenerational aspect to this project, with younger people supporting the older actors with their technical skills.

At a time when the generations are becoming increasingly separated from each other, intergenerational activity is an important element. Having made a film myself with older learners and being about to embark on another one, I have experienced how much both generations enjoy and learn from working with each other.

And if participants at the conference want to take part in a bit of creative activity themselves, there are practical

workshops on offer on the Friday morning on improvisation, dance and what promises to be a lively session exploring the question, *Can we have better media representations of women ageing?* Oh and I should mention that end the afternoon on Day 1 there is a Silver Screen historical guided walk around Leeds. Sounds like fun.

There are also two sessions where various parallel papers will be presented on a wide variety of topics, including ones from Jo Walker and Sue Stuart, who write about their subjects below.

It promises to be a most informative, entertaining and indeed creative conference. And I hope to bring you further news of Leeds Beckett's creative activities with older learners in a future edition of the digest.

*I mentioned earlier how creativity and learning feeds the soul. Jo Walker will be delivering a paper at the conference which deals with that aspect head on, under the title **The role of informal learning in later life spiritual development***



My paper discusses ongoing doctoral research on spiritual development in later life, studied through the lens of

informal adult learning. I am interested in how older people view their spiritual lives – how they see spiritual change and pursue spiritual development, and what these bring to the experience of being older. In accounting for changes in spirituality that take place in later life, I am proposing that these can be characterised in terms of informal learning: both incidental learning from life and more purposive self-directed learning. I am concerned that informal learning about spirituality can be made more explicit and available.

I propose an initial account of later life spiritual learning that acknowledges the legacy of previous models of adult development (such as Erikson), but seeks to re-imagine spiritual development for today's older adults. The conference themes of 'identity' and 'voice' will be addressed by exploring how a research design prioritising older adults' own thoughts and concepts can add to our understanding of mature spiritual identities that are forged in later life.

The development of a spiritual identity over a life-time, and its particular expression in later life is an important challenge in the context of increasing longevity - as a way that meaning and purpose can be re-created and sustained. A rapidly changing culture concerning spirituality and religion adds to challenges that cohorts of mature adults are now facing as they age. If meaningful development were more accessible to older spiritual learners, the role of spirituality could be recognised as an underestimated source of human flourishing in later life; one in which adult learning and development can play a significant part.

*Creativity embraces the body as well as the spirit and the mind. A lot is talked about these days about the role of exercise in later life. Dance is one way of doing this creatively. Other popular activities are yoga and tai chi, which have a mental and spiritual aspect as well as a physical one. Sue Stuart will be presenting a session on **Tai Chi** at the conference. She writes here about the work she has been doing with her group, in which Tai Chi has been used in a memory improvement context.*

My tai chi group and I are very much aware of the benefits we experience from practising tai chi: improvements in posture, balance and strength; better sleep patterns; stress relief and management. Items in the press at the end of April following a systematic review on the benefits of exercise for older adults (Northey et al., 2017) highlighted how tai chi can help to prevent falls in older adults and can promote cognitive function regardless of the level of cognitive decline. So when we heard that the Alzheimer's Society were running a series of information sessions for people who had recently been diagnosed in the room adjacent to ours in the community centre where we have our tai chi class, we were keen to share our knowledge and our practice.

During a short presentation and demonstration for the people with memory problems and their friends and relations we floated the idea of *Memory Partners*. Over the seven weeks of the summer holiday, when we would not normally be having classes, we offered to teach pairs of people (a person with a memory problem and their significant other) a little tai chi. Leaders of the information session and the community

links officer felt that this would be a worthwhile and supportive follow-up to the information course, so members of my tai chi class and I as their instructor embarked upon framing a pilot project and gained ethical approval to study our scheme from Bucks New University.

Everyone, participants of the project and members of my tai chi group acting as mentors, was asked to keep a diary of the experience. They consented to submit their records as part of the evaluation process to be led by the instructor in the company of her helpers at the end of the project. We knew that there would be gaps in attendance as people had already booked their summer holidays, so I offered support in the form of diagrams and instructions on an A4 sheet and by giving references to suitable YouTube clips. There was also the possibility for people to purchase a DVD consisting of structured lessons, which followed a similar route to the content that we intended to cover.



Sue's Tai Chi class in action

The number of people we could accommodate and the duration of the project were also limited by the size of our room and its availability. The limitations on the project thus make it impossible to make precise claims about the outcome or the effects of the project. However there is enough evidence to confirm that everyone enjoyed the experience and would like it to continue.

Currently, with the support of members of my tai chi group, I am investigating ways to develop both the project and the research.

*Just a reminder, full details of the forthcoming Identity, Voice, Creativity, Action! Conference along with booking links can be found here on our website:*

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/aea-events.html>

*Turning now to theatre, we look at what's on currently that is worth seeing in West End Theatre. Carlie Newman gives her recommendations.*

**Young Frankenstein** is a real romp of a show! Funny, bawdy, with great choreography, an excellent cast and even a good set. It's a musical version of Mel Brooks' 1974 film of the same name. Brooks, now 91 has written the book for this version and you can hear his voice as the gags come pouring forth.

The film itself was a glorious spoof on the horror movie and this show captures all its fun. Hadley Fraser plays Dr Frankenstein (he likes to be referred to as 'Fronkenstein' as he is ashamed of his grandfather, Victor) who inherits his grandfather's castle in Transylvania. Although he intends to sell the place quickly he is lured into staying by his voluptuous assistant, Inga (Summer Strallen) and the idea of bringing a dead person to life. Dr Frankenstein also finds another assistant waiting for him – the dorsally-challenged Igor (Ross Noble) – although when he says he can fix Igor's back, the bent-over helper says, "What hump?" There is also his grandfather's housekeeper and lover, Frau Blucher (Lesley Joseph).

Hadley Fraser has a lovely voice and puts in a charismatic performance. He is

more than ably assisted by the comedian Ross Noble, who manages to remain doubled over as he sings and dances. Their duet song *Together Again* is excellent. As with the rest of the show, it is magnificently directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman. The chorus can all sing and dance well. Summer Strallen shows that she is a worthy member of the Strallen family with her almost acrobatic dancing and lovely voice. Lesley Joseph, who can't sing, puts across her key song, *He was my boyfriend* in a hilarious manner. In the small part of Dr Frankenstein's fiancée, Dianne Pilkington manages to sing beautifully and convey her character perfectly.



Hadley Fraser & Ross Noble

Not just a spoof on horror movies, the show parodies other musical forms, so that Joseph's song is performed in the manner of a song from *Cabaret* – she uses a chair and spreads her legs. There is a lovely bit where the Monster (Shuler Hensley) dances to *Puttin' on the Ritz*. It is not very politically correct, but the show is loads of fun and will send you

out of the theatre feeling better, with joy in your heart.

While many may scoff at the Sun newspaper, nobody will ridicule the play *Ink*, which shows how the Sun newspaper was purchased and then completely revived by Rupert Murdoch in the 1960s. Appointing Larry Lamb as his founding editor for his new paper was Murdoch's first stroke of genius. Murdoch (Bertie Carvel) creates a new style of newspaper. Larry Lamb (Richard Coyle) recruits journalists from anywhere he can, giving good salaries and promising a successful career. With Murdoch's encouragement Lamb transforms the Sun into a popular paper full of silly stories and lots of pictures.



Confrontation between Rupert Murdoch (Bertie Carvel) and Larry Lamb (Richard Coyle)

Well-written by James Graham, the play moves on to examine the circulation war between papers, with the Mirror, the most popular until the Sun came along. We get a really good idea of the bitter rivalry between the two papers and the journalists involved. There is much to amuse here and thankfully the play doesn't moralise. It just presents the setting up of the paper and leaves us to consider what is going on. It is only when we get to the introduction of Page 3 and its scantily clothed girls that we

begin to see exactly what Rupert Murdoch had initiated.

Very well acted by the whole cast, Bertie Carvel as Murdoch shows us the energy of the man while Larry Lamb is caught beautifully by Richard Coyle.

A set built of files and layers to give it height with journalists rushing around gives the audience a feeling of Fleet Street in the late 60s and early 1970s. The play speeds along under the direction of Rupert Goold.

*(Young Frankenstein is at the Garrick Theatre, London booking until 10 February 2017) Box office: 0330-333 4811*

*Ink is on at the Duke of York's theatre until 6th January 2018, Box Office: 0844 871 7623).*

*More entertainment news with Carol Allen looking at What's On Screen*

In the late seventies Oscar winning Hollywood actress Gloria Grahame had fallen from favour. By now in her mid 50s but still optimistic, she was scraping a living wherever she could, frequently in regional theatre in the UK. There she met struggling young actor Peter Turner. They fell in love, then split up. But in 1981 Peter received a phone call from Gloria. She had been taken ill in Lancaster. Could she come and stay with him and his family in Liverpool, while she recovered? *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool* is based on Peter's memoir of their love affair.

Annette Bening, who is tipped to win her own Oscar for this role, is perfect casting as Gloria. In the early days of her romance with Peter, she is mischievous, impish and still youthfully sexy, yet she does not flinch from the harsh close ups showing every line and sag of suffering as her illness develops. Jamie Bell as



Peter matches her beautifully and is totally convincing as her young lover. The two of them have created a wonderful sense of ease and relaxation in their on screen relationship, making its resolution all the more poignant.

They first meet in a scruffy “actors’ digs” boarding house in Primrose Hill, when Gloria recruits Peter to help her rehearse a disco dancing routine. It’s a deliciously original seduction and both Bening and the former Billy Elliot are no mean dancers.



Annette Bening and Jamie Bell

The leading actors are well supported by Kenneth Cranham and Julie Walters as Peter’s parents, who take in their guest without question. There’s a funny yet touching scene, where Cranham remembers he and his wife going to the pictures to see Gloria’s films, never dreaming that one day they would be welcoming her into their home.

Paul McGuigan directs with sensitivity, imagination, keeping a perfect balance between humour, romance and tragedy. There is one particularly effective directorial flourish, where he plays the same scene between the lovers twice, once from Peter’s point of view, then again from Gloria’s, giving us a whole different perspective on what is going on.

There aren’t many sci-fi movies which star an 86 year old actress. Although in the case of *Marjorie Prime*, as with the best of sci-fi, the premise is a device used to explore the human condition. In this story it is memories - how true are they and to what extent are they what make us human?

Set in an unspecified future, Marjorie (Lois Smith) is in the early stages of dementia. Her son in law Joe (Tim Robbins) buys her a “prime”, which is a responsive artificial intelligence hologram in this case of her dead husband Walter (Jon Hamm) when he was about 30. “Walter” is primed by Joe with real Walter’s life story, so he can inter-react with Marjorie and help her recover her memories.

After Marjorie’s death Smith re-appears as a Marjorie “Prime”, now interacting with her daughter Tess (Geena Davies). This time Joe is trying to help his wife reconcile her relationship with her mother, which was damaged by the suicide of Walter and Marjorie’s first child, Damian. But memories are of course unreliable. We rewrite them as we live.



Jon Hamm and Lois Smith

The film is sometimes a little tricky to follow – stay alert for the flashbacks which add texture - but it is beautifully acted by the whole cast. Smith gives a remarkable performance – her smile is dazzling, her confusion moving. So does Hamm as Walter Prime, a super intelligence processing new information

like an actor developing his role. “I will remember that next time”. And what a poignant but disturbing experience it might be to be able to talk once more apparently face to face to those who have passed on?

*Loving Vincent* is a groundbreaking combination of live action, animation and artistry, in that the scenes were shot with live actors, then each frame of the film (around 65,000 of them) was hand-painted over in oils in faithful replication of the style of the artist Vincent Van Gogh. The result is visually enthralling as we see Vincent’s paintings and particularly the people in them come to life as the artist himself saw them.

All the characters in the story are people whom Van Gogh painted and the film makers have woven them into a fictional story. The time is 1891, shortly after the Vincent’s suicide. Armand (Douglas Booth) is given a letter by his father, Postman Joseph Roulin (Chris O’Dowd), a friend of the late artist, to hand-deliver to Vincent’s brother in Paris. There is no trace of the brother but in the course of his search, as the people whom Armand meets tell him their memories of Vincent, he becomes intrigued by the mystery of the artist’s death. Why did he commit suicide and indeed was it suicide, or was he murdered?

The plot to be honest isn’t that strong. Armand’s quest is more a device on which to hang the visuals, which are so spell binding they hold, indeed grip our attention. It is fascinating the way you can recognise the actors, who play the roles, while at the same time they have become the people in the portraits brought to life. The best likenesses in terms of being a match with their portrait are Armand himself and Gachet (Jerome Flynn), Vincent’s doctor in his final days, though they are all convincing.



Gachet (Jerome Flynn) as seen by Van Gogh

They include his paint supplier, Pere Tanguy (John Sessions), Gachet’s housekeeper, Louise Chevalier (Helen McCrory), the Doctor’s daughter, Marguerite (Saoirse Ronan), and the Boatman (Aidan Turner) by the river where Vincent often spent his days. The characters are set in the places where they lived, again painted as seen through Van Gogh’s eyes – the fields, the river and the town, including the famous café at night.

For the flashbacks of these characters’ reminiscences of Vincent, the film uses a black and white photo realism technique, which contrast interestingly with the paintings brought to life and in which Vincent is played by Polish actor Robert Gulaczyk.

This is a beautiful and truly original piece of work and a major achievement, both technically and artistically.

Noah Baumbach’s *The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)* is fiction, though I suspect it may be inspired by his own experience of life and family relationships. His film certainly has the ring of total emotional honesty and truth. It is also in many places very funny.

Danny (Adam Sandler) and Matthew (Ben Stiller) are half brothers, the sons of Harold (Dustin Hoffman) a much married ageing professor and sculptor of minor reputation. Matthew is a successful hot shot accountant/business manager in Los Angeles. Danny, who like his father still lives in New York, once showed talent as a musician but relinquished his ambitions to become a “house husband” to his successful but now ex-wife and raise their daughter Eliza (Grace Van Patten), who now makes eye-popping, semi pornographic “artistic” videos and is about to start a film course at the college where Harold once taught. There is also a half sister Jean (Elizabeth Marvel).

The relationships in this family are complicated with a lot of unresolved “stuff”, particularly between the brothers and with their father. Things come to a head when Harold is injured in a fall, as a result of which his memory becomes erratic. He is taken to hospital and may not survive, which is when his sons realise that time could be running out to resolve their issues. That may all sound a bit downbeat but the material is handled entertainingly with the sort of New York Jewish wit of those early Woody Allen movies, which were also set in the world of middle class Manhattan intellectuals.

Hoffman is terrific as Harold, an irritable, grey bearded patriarch, who is jealous of his contemporaries in the art world who have achieved more fame than he has. His children’s efforts to organise a retrospective of his work have to be handled with great care in order not to injure his sensitive ego. Both Sandler and Stiller put their comic talents to good use but also demonstrate an emotional depth and understanding in

their characters. The scene where they revert to the fisticuffs of squabbling children is a comic jewel with strong emotional undertones.

The female characters are somewhat sidelined but Thompson, who was so good with Hoffman in the sweet love story *Last Chance Harvey*, makes the most of her role as Harold’s current partner, as does Marvel, rising above the squabbles of her half brothers, while there is a strong cameo from Candice Bergen as one of Harold’s ex-wives.



**Dustin Hoffman and Emma Thompson**

This film is an example of the way distribution patterns are changing. Shown at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year and also screened at the London Film Festival, it is a Netflix production and after a very limited theatrical release, is now available on the Netflix channel – if you are a subscriber. It’s good that Netflix is putting money into making big screen style movies, but it would be nice if they were available more widely and for longer on the big screen. But I suppose eventually, as television screens get bigger and we all become less willing to leave our personal entertainment media to go out into the wide world, this will become increasingly the norm and “going to the pictures” could become a thing of the past.

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