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AEA DIGEST

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Don't miss AEA's International Conference "Learning in Later Life: Theory, Policy and Practice", which is taking place at the Milton Keynes campus of the Open University from April 5th to April 7th 2016....full details in this edition of the digest



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FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jonathan Hughes

Before writing these notes I always have a look to see what was on my mind when I wrote my last column. The most recent notes were in the Winter 2015 edition of the digest and since then winter has officially passed and we are on the brink of enjoying spring – although the daffodils in my garden seem to have been around for months already. Back in December I was talking about the need to identify new activities and partnerships to replace those we have completed, to provide a solid basis for AEA and to attract and retain members. I'm sure you will find the AEA's programme over the coming year of great interest and hope that you will spread the word to interested friends and colleagues.

On 5th to 7th April 2016 we are holding an international conference - *Later Life Learning: Theory, Policy and Practice*. There are some excellent key note speakers lined up including Chris Phillipson and Franz Kolland and a really interesting range of papers and presentations. The conference will take place at the Open University in Milton Keynes. I hope to see you there and am including the booking details

Online booking facility here:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/aea2016-learning-in-later-life-tickets-20124190997>

Registration details are available here: http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/ufiles/Fees%20and%20registration%20details%2025th%20March%202016_%281%29.pdf

Full details can be found on the events page of the AEA website.

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

The next event is at the OU in London (Hawley Crescent) Camden. This seminar is *Conversation into Action: Democracy, rights, participation, and learning in later life: Housing for all?*

This will be an interactive workshop to further develop a proposed course for intergenerational learning, which we hope might be a possible focus of activity for AEA in the future. It will take place on Wednesday, April 20th, 2016, 10.30am to 4.00pm at The Open University, 1-11 Hawley Crescent, London, NW1 8NP.

This workshop will provide an opportunity:

- to help test some of the ideas and materials
- to use on-the-spot-study-skills,
- to contribute to strategic discussion about housing policy social inequality, later life and 'intergenerational justice'

• to share experiences of home life, public involvement, policy development and campaigning.

There will be study materials will be available online in advance of the session. So please get in touch if you are interested. This event follows on from the May 15th Kilburn Debate 'Fitting together with age' the June 17th BSG/AEA event 'Lifelong learning and social gerontology: an essential partnership?' and the first *Conversation into Action* meeting on October 12th 2015. A second workshop is planned for 22 June 2016 prior to an intergenerational event to be held in Camden in autumn 2016.

There will be 40 places overall – five to BSG members new to the initiative – with space for 30 people at each event.

To register contact:
 CarolineHolland
caroline.holland@open.ac.uk,
 Jonathan Hughes
jonathan.hughes@open.ac.uk or J
 ohn Miles 07817 424356
johnmiles68@yahoo.co.uk .

In addition to these events there will be a free one day dissemination event on AEA's Grundtvig-funded *Wellbeing and Learning in Later Life* project. This is being organised by Professor Keith Percy and Dr. Anne Jamieson and will held at the Open University's London offices in Camden June 14th, 1100 – 1645.

There will also be a one day conference on *Memory and Learning in Later Life*, arising out of AEA's participation in a Grundtvig -funded project of the same title, organised by Professor Keith Percy and Dr. Val Bissland. This will probably be in northern England or Scotland. The date (which will probably be November 2016) is to be confirmed, as is the fee. I hope to see you at all or some of these events and I hope you will feel that these demonstrate AEA's conviction that it has an important part to play in making the case for the value of learning across the life course, and particularly in later life.

A quick reference diary of all events mentioned in this digest is available on page 14

*Returning to our forthcoming conference on **Learning in Later Life: Theory, Policy and Practice**, the full programme for the event is now in place – and a very exciting and wide ranging one it is proving to be. Details here from Keith Percy*

In addition to three keynote speaker sessions, the conference is able to run four sessions of papers, presentations and workshops offered by participants. Papers will be presented in parallel so that other participants can make a choice. AEA received abstracts of over twenty papers and all were subject to peer review by panels of AEA members. Eighteen were selected and will be presented at the conference.



The papers, presentations and workshops selected provide encouraging insights into the range and quality of current scholarship, research, debate and practice in the field of learning in later life. Presenters include teachers, researchers, older students, academics, consultants and those who might be termed 'activists'. There are several papers by postgraduate researchers. The range of papers is both satisfying and stimulating. There are papers on the notion of 'generational identity' and on the nature of spiritual learning. Papers on learning and particular social groups include one on quality of life and older Chinese adults, another on dementia care and immigrant communities and a third on use of technology by older people with sight and hearing problems. Presentations on practice in older peoples' learning include those on

drama, experimental science, film-making and cultural tours. Research presented and discussed includes memory in later life, older people using wearable technologies for activity and health monitoring and older people learning to cope with “scamming”. There is an extended workshop, focusing mainly on work and retirement, which will consider new approaches to helping people in mid and later life to understand and to flourish in different life phases, including ageing better projects, social enterprises and all age communities.

The Conference programme has three distinguished keynote speakers:
 Professor Franz Kolland of the University of Vienna, on *Education and identity construction in super-ageing societies*;
 Professor Chris Phillipson on *Developing new policy agendas for later*

life learning: critical perspectives from a changing life course and

Dr Jane Watts on *Lifelong learning for changing times: mid-life and retirement transitions*.

Presenters will have the opportunity to place their papers and presentations in a post-conference publication which AEA will publish on-line. Some papers are expected to be offered for review for publication in AEA’s *International Journal of Education and Ageing*.

Learning in Later Life: Theory, Policy and Practice is taking place at the Milton Keynes campus of the Open University from April 5th to April 7th 2016,.

Enquiries to k.percy@hotmail.com

Further information on the Conference may be found at

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

OTHER NEWS AND EVENTS

The Life Course Development Association will also be holding their annual conference this summer. Details [here](#).

The Life Course Development Association (LCDA)’s Annual Conference is on **14th May 2016**
 10.30 - 15.30 (followed by AGM),
 Venue: Birkbeck, University of London
 Speaker: Dr. Carol Holland, Aston University:

Use it or lose it! What should we “use” or develop to prevent cognitive decline with increasing age?



Dr. Carol Holland is the Director of Aston Research Centre for Healthy

Ageing, a multi-disciplinary centre aimed at addressing the challenges of reducing the gap between healthy life expectancy and actual life expectancy by working together across the disciplines on different challenges. She will present some of the evidence on the effects of physical, intellectual and social activity on cognitive function and examine some aspects of cognitive function that have an influence on quality of life, maintaining rewarding social relationships, and resilience in older age. Can our current knowledge of prevention change ageing for this generation?

There will be an afternoon interactive session with memory activities.

LCDA Members £5 including lunch, or free for morning session excluding lunch. Please register in advance.

Non-members: £10, including lunch, or £5 for morning session excluding lunch.

In order to book, please send cheque, payable to LCDA, to The Treasurer, Martin Goffe, 48 Conifer Gardens, London SW16 2TY.

If you wish to renew your membership for 2016, please include the £15 membership fee.

If you wish to do a bank transfer, the sort code is 090151 and the account number is 92829408.

Details of venue and programme will be sent on registration.

Any queries, please contact martinrgoffe@gmail.com

*Emma Koivunen of Manchester Metropolitan University recently attended a seminar for the Ageing and Long-Term Conditions research group at MMU on **The future of gerontological education and the learning of older adults***

The speaker was Dr Paul Nash, who is a chartered psychologist currently working as the Postgraduate Programmes Director in the Centre for Innovative Ageing at Swansea University. And as such, he is interested in gerontological education, as well as older learners.

Dr Nash's presentation covered the ways in which gerontology is taught in the UK and further afield as well as who is studying it and the importance of the subject when ironically resources for these programmes are being cut back at a time when it is believed that gerontological/ geriatrics knowledge is urgently needed.



He also looked at issues around where people are receiving their education/learning, including the fact that in UK higher education institutions only 1% of full time students are over

the age of 60%. Looking at the wider picture, Dr Nash pointed out that with an ageing population, understanding the needs of older adults has never been more important, in terms of not just meeting their physical and psychological care needs but also understanding the desires of this, the largest consumer group in today's society.

As far as actual learning is concerned in all its aspects from formal academic to peer learning, the acquisition of practical skills, intergenerational activity, assessing the spread of older adult learners and addressing the barriers they face will all further facilitate a growing field and empower engagement and involvement of older adults.

A .PDF of Dr Nash's PowerPoint presentation is available on request from Emma at E.Koivunen@mmu.ac.uk or Carol at infoaea.allen1@gmail.com

One of the very valuable resources for older learners over the years has been the Ransackers Association.



*The RA is now mounting a year long research project into “**Serious study**” in **later life**, for which they need the assistance of older learners themselves. More information here from **Hilary Farnworth***

First some background. Ransackers Association is keen both on what we call “educational adventures “for older people and on older people as a resource for society. Under the original auspices of Better Government for Older People (BGOP), and led by Vi Hughes, the founder of the Ransacker concept, 10 week residential courses for people aged over 55, supported by tutors, took place at UK colleges of higher education over 10 years. This became the Ransacker Project and in 2006 Ransackers Association (RA) was formed. We describe the courses as ‘educational adventures in serious study’, because the learning was (a) highly motivated, (b) carried out over a period of time (not as a one-off) and (c) supported (though not led) by professional educators. Changes in the funding climate however have meant the cessation of the courses for the time being at least.

RA has though carried out research with some of the 700 people who took part in these courses, exploring the effect of this later life study on their lives. In 2015 we did some unfunded research which, although based on a small sample (20), indicated some trends:

- 1 Women in particular had been prevented by family, class or social factors from attending HE courses in their youth
2. When it came to IT experiences: most people had clearly benefited and learned new skills but some had very specific learning needs, which had not

been fully supported -we take note! Also smart phones were not really around then – and this is a whole new area of digital life.

3. Many people reported changes to their lives after completing their course in terms of new friends, new confidence for volunteer roles and being more active in their community.



Ransackers workshop at Ruskin 2014

But what did they study? Now we have the first answer: from 187 Ruskin College projects done by Ransackers: 2004 to 2013: 32% were on historical subjects, including biography and family histories. Social issues as a broad heading was the next most popular at 26%, followed by issues around ageing 8% and health 7% .

From March 2016 we have a small grant from the Averil Osborn Fund to do 12 months further research, which will not just produce findings but will also upskill a team of older people to do the actual research and manage the project. A team of older researchers, all over 55, will investigate the value of serious study in later life for both benefit to the individual and the wider aspects of older people as citizens and a contributory resource for society. This team of older people will be supported by academics, who are experts in the study of ageing, and they will be coached and supported

by three workshops plus email and phone throughout the twelve month duration of the project. The research will explore the meanings, social value and impact of serious study in later life by drawing upon the experiences and expertise of older learners. The first workshop is in London in April; two further workshops and an end of project event are still to be arranged. Possible venues for these later events are Oxford and Milton Keynes.

Our team of older researchers is now in place but we would also like to hear from people in that same age group (55+), who are interested in being interviewed about their own study (which can be any HE course, Ransackers courses, City Lit courses)

For further information please contact Hilary Farnworth,

hfarnworth@gmail.com

tel: 0208 341 0023

www.ransackersassociation.org.uk

Information on the April workshop can be found in our quick reference events diary on page 14

*Another important player on the older learning scene for many years was NIACE – the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. NIACE, along with another body, The Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion, has now been merged into a new organisation **The Learning and Work Institute**,. **Jane Watts** explains the implications of the merger.*

The Learning and Work Institute was launched in January 2016. The merger was approved after lively discussion by the members of NIACE at the AGM on 4th November 2015. Members were

reassured at the AGM that the priorities of the organisation would still include the importance and promotion of an inclusive approach to adult education, including the importance of older people's learning. The organisation aims to "be a powerful voice for adult learners, the low paid, the unemployed and those most disadvantaged in society".

The new body states that it is an "independent research, development and campaigning organisation" with the aim of "promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion". It plans to build on both organisations' previous work and is based across offices in Leicester, Cardiff and London. David Hughes, former chief executive of NIACE has been appointed as Chief Executive Officer

The institute states on its website that : "There has never been a more important time for learning, employment and inclusion issues to be tackled together. With 5m adults in the UK lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills alongside widening skills gaps, we believe learning investment needs to increase for people across their careers and support people into active retirement. The devolution of employment and skills will provide great opportunities for better support to get people into work and to progress at work, but more needs to be done to understand how to do that and to find out what works best. Better services at local level will lead to more inclusive economic growth."

As many Digest readers will be aware, NIACE ran Adult Learners' Week in England over the last 24 years. Learning and Work will be running a new Festival

of Learning for 2016. I understand that there will still be an event called Adult Learners' Week in Wales.



L & W says that: "The Festival of Learning (previously Adult Learners' Week) is the biggest national celebration of lifelong learning in England, and has inspired similar celebrations in more than 55 countries across the world. The festival (1 May – 30 June) plans to bring together hundreds of organisations across the country to hold events that aim to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to discover how learning can change their lives." Go to the Learning and Work website to sign up for the new event.

www.learningandwork.org.uk

A link here to a page on that website giving L & W's David Hughes' response to the measures outlined by the government in the recent budget.

<http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-thinking/news/learning-and-work-institute-respond-chancellors-2016-budget>

The emphasis appears to be on learning in order to increase employable skills with no mention of support for the wider benefits of lifelong learning. No surprise there though. This is the government whose education minister Nicky Morgan told teenagers to steer away from the arts and humanities and opt for science or maths subjects to increase their employability, while schools minister Nick Gibb rated arts subjects on a par with Esperanto and den building. Don't

expect Men in Sheds to get much support from this government then! Ed. – rant over!

*However in other news the House of Commons was the setting for the launch of **Dementia**, the latest in the **Making the Case for Social sciences-series**.*



The latest in this series of publications from the Academy of Social Sciences is on the subject of *Dementia*. It was launched by the academy in the House of Commons on 15th March 2016.

The topic was discussed by Rt Hon Norman Lamb (MP for North Norfolk), AEA patron Baroness Sally Greengross OBE (Vice Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Dementia and Ageing and Older people), Professor Murna Downs (School of Dementia Studies, University of Bradford), Dr Jo Moriarty (King's College London), and others.

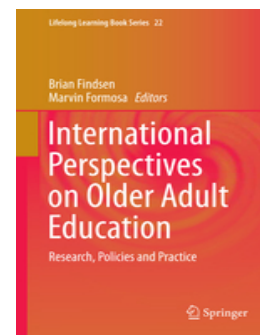
This publication is the eleventh in the series. Each of them provides an overview of the key current social science research on the topic. Previous ones have included Ageing, Mental Well Being, Sustainability, Environment and Climate Change and Crime plus overviews of social science research in Scotland and Wales. The publications can be downloaded here:

<https://www.acss.org.uk/publication-category/making-the-case/>

*News of AEA members' participation in an important new publication **International Perspectives on Older Adult Education** from fellow member **Marvin Formosa** in Malta.*

Marvin sends his apologies that he is unable to attend our conference this year as he will be travelling to Russia, India and Turkey in April. Marvin is currently dealing with his increased responsibilities as Head of his Department at the University of Malta plus acting as Chairman of the National Commission for Active Ageing and Director of the United Nations Institute on Ageing.

However he and fellow AEA member Brian Findsen in New Zealand have found time to co-edit an important new publication in the older learning field - **International Perspectives on Older Adult Education**.



The book, I'm told, breaks new ground in international understandings of what constitutes later life learning across diverse cultures in manifold countries or regions across the world. Containing 42 separate country/regional analyses of later life learning, the overall significance resides in insiders' conceptualisations and critique of this emerging sub-field of lifelong learning and adult education.

And while I'm singing the praises of AEA members, I should point out that the chapter on Austria has been written by Professor Franz Kolland, who is of course one of the keynote speakers at our forthcoming conference and that on the UK by Dr Alex Withnall.

Full details of this comprehensive volume, which is available at £58.99 as an e-book or £74.50 in hard cover can be found on the publisher's website here <http://www.springer.com/gb/book/9783319249377>

Open University and India. *More news on the international front in that another traveller to India this year was Steve Hill, the recently appointed Director of External Engagement at The Open University.*

With the Indian government targeting for another 40 million university places by 2020, there is a great need for higher education development. The Open University (OU) is currently working to support this goal and make distance learning a large part of this. Along with Vice-Chancellor Peter Horrocks, Steve Hill the Director of External Engagement at The OU, visited India in February to exchange a Memorandum of Understanding with Amity University, which will allow The OU to share its expertise and leadership in research, technology and innovation in distance education with a leading Indian institution.

Steve Hill, comments: "This important agreement is a further demonstration of The OU's on-going mission to develop distance learning capabilities both at home and abroad. We have always

sought to bring the benefits of education to partners, economies and individuals by widening access to high-quality university education. The OU is continually seeking to respond to opportunities around the world, looking to share our leading expertise in distance learning with other countries.



"With more than 40 years of experience in combining technology and education, The OU is ideally placed to play a central role in sustaining development in innovative economies such as India's. Our vision at The OU is to continue helping build capacity in online and distance education to address global skills shortages, which will ultimately benefit societies and economies all around the world."

The visit is representative of the wider trend of internationalisation in British higher education, which now no longer just consists of foreign students coming to the UK for a limited period of time, but now sees British institutions establishing a presence abroad. According to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills in 2013,

the value of UK education exports is in the region of £14.1 billion and it suggested a further £9.6 million came into the UK from Foreign Direct Investment in education-related projects[2].

Given that the country has a large English-speaking population and holds

long standing links with Britain, India can benefit from the sharing of British higher education knowledge and expertise. Distance learning already counts 3.5 million[3] students in India and the sharing of knowledge and expertise with The OU will help India enhance this growing segment.

Taken from a press statement issued on behalf of the OU

OBITUARY

*The AEA learned with great sadness of the death in Oxford of **Robert Elmore**, aged 91, on January 8, 2016. **Keith Percy and Alex Withnall** pay tribute to their friend and colleague.*

Bob was one of the co-founders and first members of AEG (the Association for Educational Gerontology as AEA was first called) in 1985. At the invitation of Frank Glendenning he attended the series of seminars in the early 1980s at Keele University on emerging issues in later life learning, from which AEG emerged. Everyone enjoyed his friendliness, erudition and quietly authoritative manner. He helped plan early AEG annual conferences and was the AEG honorary secretary for a time. He contributed an outstanding paper *Sociological and Social Policy Dimensions of Educational Gerontology* to the first edition of AEG's Journal of Educational Gerontology. He subsequently provided two well-informed and critical review articles in later editions and a further elegantly argued paper *Education for Older People: the moral dimension* in the

successor journal Education and Ageing in 1999.



Bob was born in April 1924 in South London. He was called up for military service during the Second World War but as a devout pacifist he was allowed non-combatant status and posted to 225 Parachute Field Ambulance as a surgeon's assistant. In the early hours of D-Day, June 6, 1944, he parachuted into France and set up an aid centre at a

chateau, which soon filled with casualties until field hospitals were established. He continued to serve in Belgium, Holland and Singapore, before being discharged in 1947.

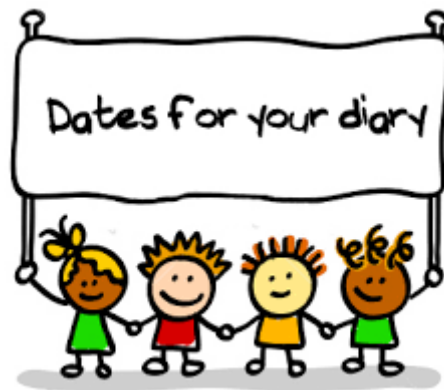
He was one of the first undergraduates at Keele University College, which opened in 1950. He graduated in English Literature, took a job at the City of London College and developed a special interest in constitutional and administrative law applied to health and social care.

In 1965, Bob was appointed Staff Tutor, Public and Social Administration in the Department for External Studies at Rewley House (later Kellogg College) Oxford University. AEA colleagues still recall the experience of climbing several steep staircases to Bob's eyrie at the top of Rewley House – an amazing room piled high with books and papers in the middle of which Bob sat behind a very

large desk. He was always delighted to entertain AEA colleagues and was a generous and kindly host.

In 1968 Bob set up the Elmore Committee which ran a boarding house for ex-offenders and still exists today. He became increasingly involved with voluntary social care agencies, serving as chairman and member of the Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf, the Oxford Council for Voluntary Services, the Oxford Community Health Council, the Carers' Centre, Oxford and the Oxfordshire Probation and After-Care Committee and others.

Retiring in 1991, Bob - who never married - spent his retirement working for 20 years with the Guideposts Trust, a Witney-based charity for those with dementia, learning difficulties or mental health problems. He served as chairman until 2011.



Forthcoming events diary – see next page

EVENTS DIARY 2016

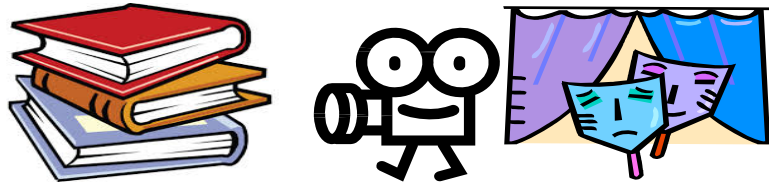
- 5th-7th April** **AEA's International Conference: Learning in Later Life – Theory, Policy and Practice.**
 Venue: Open University, Milton Keynes
 Further information and registration:
<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/aea-events.html>
- 14th April** **Workshop – Serious Study in Later Life.** Ransackers research project
 Time: 10 am – 4 pm.
 Venue: Open University, Hawley Crescent, Camden Town NW1 8NP
 There are a few places still available for those interested in participating.
 Booking essential. Contact: Hilary Farnworth hfarnworth@gmail.com
- 20th April** **Conversations into Action** - Democracy, rights, participation, and learning in later life. Housing for all? An interactive workshop to further develop a proposed course for intergenerational learning
 Time: 10.30 am – 4 pm
 Venue: Open University, Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, NW1 8NP
 Booking essential: Contacts:
 Caroline Holland caroline.holland@open.ac.uk ,
 Jonathan Hughes jonathan.hughes@open.ac.uk
 John Miles johnmiles68@yahoo.co.uk tel: 07817 424356
- 14th June** **A one day dissemination event on AEA's Grundtvig-funded Well-being and Learning in Later Life project**, organised by Professor Keith Percy and Dr. Anne Jamieson. Contributions also from London-based organisations Claremont Project and Open Age
 Time: 11 am to 4.45 pm
 Venue: Open University, Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, NW1 8NP
 No fee. Priority booking for AEA members now open.
 Contact k.percy@hotmail.com
- 22nd June** Second workshop for **Conversation into Action**. Details tbc

Further events – dates tbc

- September** **AEA's Annual General Meeting** will to be held at Manchester Metropolitan University. The annual **Frank Glendenning Memorial lecture**, which is open to all, will follow. Lunch will be available. No charge.
- November** A one day conference on **Memory and Learning in Later Life**, arising out of AEA's participation in a Grundtvig -funded project of the same title, organised by Professor Keith Percy and Dr. Val Bissland, will be held at a venue probably in northern England or Scotland. fee tbc

Details of these events as they become available will be posted on the events page of our website

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



AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

*My attention was drawn recently to an interesting piece in the New York Times blog pages on **Using the Arts to Promote Healthy Aging** by **Jane E. Brody**. And though the piece is about what is happening with older people in America, the conclusions apply internationally.*

Ms Brody begins her article by talking about a documentary she had seen called *Alive Inside*, which demonstrated how much music can do to help vulnerable older people, especially those with dementia. She cites the case of a 90-year-old African-American woman living in a nursing home who could remember nothing about her life growing up in the South. But when she was given an iPod that played the music she had enjoyed in her youth, she was able to describe in detail the music and dances she had enjoyed with her friend in those days.

The Music and Memory project that provided the iPods has since spread to many nursing homes and facilities for the aged around the country. Though not to most, as Ms Brody wryly points out, due to the fact that the medical insurance companies, which are happy to cover the cost of the expensive drugs, which can turn old people into compliant virtual zombies, don't have any policy in place to cover this much cheaper musical alternative

However with the help of grants from organisations such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Institute on Aging, programmes have been set up throughout the country for arts activities such as music, dance, painting, quilting, singing, poetry writing and storytelling, which, as Ms Brody puts it, are adding meaning, joy and a vibrant sense of well-being to the lives of older people.



I particularly like the example she gives of an 82-year-old former schoolteacher, who wrote and directed a screenplay that was then performed by her fellow residents in the retirement home where she lives. She then went on to join forces with her 79 year old friend to write their life stories in rap and perform their rap memoirs to a group of at-risk teenagers they were mentoring.

The activities mentioned above and many others are part of a programme called EngAGE, whose goal is to create a nationwide network of programmes for

older people that keep them healthy, happy and active through lifelong learning in every conceivable art form and enable them to live independently for as long as possible.

The late Dr. Gene D. Cohen, a gerontologist at George Washington University, who will be a familiar name to many of you, was a staunch advocate for the mental and physical benefits of creativity for the elderly. He directed the Creativity and Aging Study, a controlled study sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, that showed after only a year that the health of elders in the cultural groups stabilized or improved in contrast to a decline among those in the control groups. Scientific research has an explanation for this – because creativity challenges the mind, this results in the formation of new dendrites, the brain’s communication channels

Janine Tursini, director of Arts for the Aging in Rockville, Maryland., cites a National Endowment for the Arts study, which showed that when older people become involved in culturally enriching programs, they experience a decline in depression, are less likely to fall and pay fewer visits to the doctor.

Ms Brody concludes her piece with the observation that social engagement, which nearly all these programs provide, has been repeatedly found in major population studies to prolong life and enhance healthy aging. Clinically, the programs have been linked to lowered blood pressure, reduced levels of stress hormones, and increased levels of the “happiness hormones” that are responsible for example for a runner’s high.

There are many other examples of the positive outcomes of these programmes in Ms Brody’s article. To read it in full got to http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/07/using-the-arts-to-promote-healthy-aging/?_r=3

I can bear out Ms Brody’s conclusions on the beneficial effects of creative work from my experiences with my drama class of older learners and will be delivering a short presentation on that subject on the Wednesday afternoon of the AEA conference.

*One of the many extra mural projects that I and the class got involved in was the making of a video for the **Victoria and Albert museum** about the masque culture of 18th Century Venice.*

We filmed the video nearly two years ago but the new gallery, where the video will be part of the exhibits for the next twenty five years was only opened recently, when we were invited along to view the finished article.



Jo Cooklin and Audrey Joseph viewing the video

The real value of the experience though was in what we all learned about film making and the “green screen”

technique, where the elaborate sets you see in the final film are put in via the computer editing – we acted literally against a plain green background. Also what we learned from the curators, who were on hand throughout to make sure all the period details were correct - the costumes, the customs, even the way you held a fan.

The Victoria and Albert Museum has always been though a rich source of information for theatre research. As a student I spent many happy hours in their Theatre Collection researching for my paper on the history of productions of *King Lear* – a project which also involved coming up with a concept for my own production, including drawings of costumes and sets – not a great success that, as I'm pretty bad at drawing!

While I was there viewing the film and the new gallery, which is very impressive, I noticed an exhibition the museum has running through the summer. *Curtain Up: Celebrating 40 Years of Theatre in London and New York* is about just that, taking you behind the scenes of international hit shows such as *The Phantom of the Opera*, *A Chorus Line*, *Wolf Hall* and *War Horse* – many of which, I must patriotically point out, were created here in London.



Chorus Line – photo by Jonathan Hordle.

Through costumes, set models, scripts, photographs plus film the exhibition aims to show you all the elements that go into creating these shows. So I must return to the V & A soon to look at this one in more detail.

Curtain Up is at the V & A until 31st August. More detail here

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibition/s/display-curtain-up/about-the-exhibition/>

I also mentioned the museum's theatre research collections. More detail on the Theatre and Performance collections can be found here

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/t/theatre-and-performance/>

*Continuing with the subject of musical theatre, for this issue **Carlie Newman** has chosen to review a new musical and a play with music about a great jazz singer.*

The real life singer Ma Rainey (known as the mother of the blues) is the focus of ***Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*** (Lyttelton Theatre at National Theatre until 18 May 2016). Box office 020 7452 3000) but the real drama takes place with her band.

The musicians rehearse in a basement changing room while the two white bosses sit upstairs above the stage where Ma Rainey (Sharon D. Clarke) will record. They have put a 'No Admittance' sign at the bottom of the stairs leading up to their recording booth. The band members are all present but the singer is late for the recording session. When she finally arrives, Ma Rainey, who is bi-sexual, is accompanied by her girlfriend Dussie

Mae (Tamara Lawrence making her professional theatre debut). Ma Rainey is obviously the Diva but ultimately the real power lies with the white men who are in charge. The four band members have their own stories but it is newcomer Levee (O-T Fagbenle) who threatens the existing peaceful co-existence. He is smart, cocksure and ambitious to promote his own music. Levee has written a new arrangement of the song for which Ma Rainey is famous, the *Black Bottom Blues*, and insists that the band uses that in the recording. The other members argue that Levee is just doing what the white man wants and Ma Rainey also wants the original version as that is the one she is known for. When the boss announces his support for Levee, the other musicians, Toledo (Lucian Msumati), Cutler (Clint Dyer) and Slow Drag (Giles Terrara), turn against Levee.



Sharon D. Clarke as Ma Rainey

August Wilson has set his play in Chicago. Beautifully written, with some comedy used to underline the political

points, it gives an idea not only of the life of musicians, but emphasises the power struggle that in 1927, when this recording session takes place, is beginning for black people in the cities as they struggle to move upwards. The set design emphasises the differences between the white bosses upstairs above the central area and the musicians downstairs to the basement.

Sharon D. Clarke has a great singing voice and acts well so that her voice adds drama to her outbursts. Her girlfriend Dussie Mae is not so committed to her relationship with the singer and Tamara Lawrence uses lots of sex appeal in her scenes with Levee, when they get together in a swift sexual encounter. Both actors are fine and play well together as do all the cast, who give the play a real ensemble feel.

Just right for a really interesting theatre outing. Book now!

Rating: ****

When I saw *Mrs Henderson Presents* (Noel Coward Theatre until 18 June 2016, then touring UK. Box office 0844 482 5140) at Bath Theatre Royal, I thought it was a pleasant little British musical, which I hoped would go on to London and now it has. It is based on the 2005 film of the same name, but with a number of different elements, including of course the fact that it is a musical – now quite a major one. This story of a rich widow, who invests the money left by her husband into buying an old run down theatre, which then becomes the famous Windmill Theatre in Soho, is a little gem.

It takes place between 1937 and 1940, with a kind of narrator in the person of a comedian (Jamie Foreman), who comes on between scenes to crack a usually somewhat 'off' joke or two. The musical

has a slightly old fashioned air which actually suits the piece, though there is one not very successful part, where Foreman performs as Hitler in a kind of parody like *Springtime for Hitler* in Mel Brooks' *The Producers*.

Mrs Laura Henderson (Tracie Bennett) employs the Dutch Jewish Vivian Van Damm (Ian Bartholomew) to manage her theatre. When times are hard she has a 'light bulb' moment – literally here as a light goes on – and decides to present her girls in the nude. Although she has a hard time convincing the Lord Chamberlain, she manages to by assuring him that the girls won't move.



Written and directed by Terry Johnson, the show is consistently amusing with the leads Bennett and Bartholomew being particularly strong – although, in spite of her grey wig, Bennett's face looks a bit too young to be known as the 'old lady.' Singing is good all round too, once Bartholomew gets into his stride. The rest of the cast perform well with a very sweet-voiced portrayal by Emma Williams of the tea girl, Maureen, who becomes the top nude at the Windmill revue and her admirer Eddie (Matthew Malthouse) who is keener on her than she on him until he goes away to fight in the war and she realises what she might be losing him. The two work well together and Emma sings *I'm an*

ordinary girl in a telling yet well-voiced manner.

Many amusing lines abound: for example, one of the girls remarks, as she is taken to a safe shelter when bombs fall: "I don't want to sleep with rats," to which the reply by another is

"Don't worry I've slept with plenty."

Well directed too with the girls being given individual characteristics and the change between complete comedy and the more dramatic events of the second half well depicted. The Windmill Theatre kept open all through the war and the, "We Never Closed" motto is emphasised.

Some good songs and lively dancing with some pretty costumes including ostrich feathers which are twirled around Emma's nude body make this one to see now or to watch out for when it goes on tour and is on at a theatre near you.

Rating: ****

Reviews of what's new in the cinema from Carol Allen.

Eye in the Sky is an intelligent, relevant and thought provoking film wrapped effectively inside an edge of the seat action movie. It deals with the moral dilemma raised by the technology of long distance drone warfare.



In London Colonel Katherine Powell (Helen Mirren) is in charge of a drone

operation to capture a group of terrorists in Nairobi, Kenya, who are about to embark on a suicide mission. As the remote pilot (Aaron Paul) is about to fire the missile from Nevada, he sees a nine year old girl come into the kill zone. The question of whether they fire the shot or not i.e choose save the child or the community becomes a political one, which gets passed up the British and American chain of command as the moment of truth approaches.

Good performances all round include the late Alan Rickman as the General brought in when the situation escalates and Barkhad Abdi as the Somali agent on the ground who risks his life to try to save the child. The film shows a contemporary awareness of diversity in its casting, which also features Babou Ceesay as Mirren's sergeant who is put on the moral spot by his commanding officer, while Mirren's role was originally written for a man and then gender changed by director Gavin Hood to give it more complexity.

The bickering of the buck passing politicians and their fear of how they will explain the story on Radio 4 becomes almost farcically comic at times yet with an underlying awareness of the moral issues involved.

Hail Caesar is a jolly comedy from the Coen Brothers set in 1951 Hollywood, which seizes the chance to spoof the films of the era. The occasionally ramshackle plot concerns a group of communist screenwriters, who kidnap and hold hostage one the studio's biggest stars (George Clooney) and persuade him to their way of thinking that the profits should be shared among the workers. The entertainment value comes from the performances of the actors, including Ralph Fiennes as an arty

director of a sophisticated drama; Channing Tatum as a star with a secret, who features in a Gene Kelly style dance number; Scarlett Johansson, who also has something to hide, doing an Esther Williams type water ballet and most of all Clooney, star of studio's current biblical epic. in which he is reminiscent of both Richard Burton in *The Robe* and John Wayne in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.



At the centre is James Brolin as the studio head trying to keep all his actors under control, while being needled by Tilda Swinton in a "Hedda Hopper" double role as twin gossip columnists in deadly rivalry.

The Daughter started out as a stage production in Sydney by director Simon Stone, who had adapted Ibsen's play "The Wild Duck" to a contemporary Australian setting. It is still Ibsen's story but very effectively retold here on film with a first class cast.

Christian (Paul Schneider) returns from America to the logging community of his upbringing for his father Henry's (Geoffrey Rush) remarriage to his much younger housekeeper. He meets up with his old mate Oliver (Ewen Leslie), who is happily married to Charlotte (Miranda Otto), with whom he has a 14 year old daughter Hedvig (Odessa Young). They live with Oliver's father Walter (Sam Neill), who is close to his grand

daughter – together they have created a small animal sanctuary, where Hedwig is looking after a wounded wild duck, which Henry shot on a hunting expedition but failed to kill. The family live in much humbler circumstances than Henry does in his grand house, due, we later discover, to the fact that Walter years earlier took the rap for a dodgy business deal he was in with Henry, who thereafter flourished. The difference in their fortunes is now exacerbated by the fact that Henry is closing the logging mill where Oliver works and Oliver will be out of a job.

Christian is resentful of his father's marriage plans and obsessed with the past. He is a man who cannot leave well alone. And when he starts digging around, he uncovers a secret which threatens the happiness of his friend's family.

The most sympathetic character is Walter, who in Neil's performance is a man of great humanity – the only one who understands the power of forgiveness. Otto is also excellent as a woman whose stable marriage is threatened by Christian's dogged and blind insistence on revealing the truth of the past, while newcomer Young is touching as her daughter.



Odessa Young as Hedwig

If you know Ibsen's play, it is interesting to note the parallels but if you don't, the film is still gripping in its own right. A good story is always worth the retelling.

I'll See You in My Dreams is pleasant and very likeable film, which came out in February and is now available on DVD. It's the story of a late life romance between widow Carol (Blythe Danner) and ageing bachelor Bill (Sam Elliott).



Carol enjoys a contented and enviably affluent lifestyle (her late husband left her well provided for) in her lovely house with swimming pool and with her friends in the nearby retirement village – some lively comedy here from Rhea Perlman. But when Carol's beloved dog dies, there is a gap in her life. Enter first the young pool man (Martin Starr), with whom she visits a karaoke bar, neatly sketching in her adventurous past as a singer. And then she meets Bill, who captures her interest with the sexy twinkle in his eye and champagne lunches on his yacht – he's determined to enjoy the money he's saved before he dies. Blythe Danner gives her character a sensitivity and sense of fun, which make her the sort of woman you enjoy spending time with. A gentle romantic comedy with some moving moments, this beautifully played story embraces the small joys and sorrows of life in a big way.

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