



The Association for  
Education & Ageing

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/about-us.html>

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# AEA DIGEST

**Issue no 51**  
**Winter 2018**

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**In this issue we are banging the drum for the benefits of theatre and film making in older learning.**

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

*Keith Percy*

In the last issue of the digest Autumn 2017, I wrote that “AEA must now go forward”. It has begun to do so.

Elsewhere in this digest you can read details of the issues of the *International Journal of Education and Ageing* that have begun to roll off the production line once more at a satisfactory rate. (see page 9). Issue 4(1) was published in early December; 4(2) will be distributed in early March and 4(3) in late May. The first two issues of volume 5 are already planned in outline. Indeed, it is expected that the articles in 5(2) will be based on papers, suitably re-written and refereed, from the *Identity, Voice, Creativity, Action!* Conference of last November, which AEA and Leeds Beckett University co-hosted on behalf of the European Learning and Older Adults Network. If you are not already a subscriber to the *International Journal*, then there has never been a better time to become one.

The AEA Executive Committee established a journal task group last October to identify new ways in which the editors of the *International Journal* might be supported. One of the outcomes of the Group’s recommendations is a detailed proposal for the establishment of an Editorial Advisory Board of international scholars to advise the editors, monitor the Journal, and work on its behalf.

There has always been a good relationship between AEA and the British Society of Gerontology (BSG). Later in this digest (see page 6) there are details of a new partnership, concerned

with learning in later life, between the BSG, the Ransackers’ Association and the AEA. For example, AEA will be collaborating with these partners to arrange one or two events under the umbrella of the BSG conference in Manchester in early July.

Before that - to note other activity - members of the Executive Committee will be representing and/or disseminating information about AEA at various conferences and events. Val Bissland will be at the Age -Friendly University Conference in Dublin, March 13th-14th; John Miles is exploring the possibility of an AEA Fringe meeting in the Pensioners’ Parliament June 6th-8th in Blackpool; and I will be speaking at a conference in Valletta, Malta on May 25<sup>th</sup> to celebrate the first 25 years of the Maltese University of the Third Age. I shall arrive with a case laden to capacity with AEA and *International Journal Literature!*



University of the Third Age Malta

<https://www.um.edu.mt/u3a>

We are currently planning our annual AGM, conference and Glendenning Memorial Lecture for late September 2018. We cannot announce the date yet because of booking procedures but we can say that the venue will be provided by our good friends in Manchester Metropolitan University. Between the AGM and the Glendenning Lecture there will be a 90 minute workshop, free to AEA members but open to others for an

entrance fee. We are thinking that the topic of the workshop will be *Memory in Later Life*.

If you are living south of Manchester you may have concluded from the above that during 2018 AEA is neglecting large areas of England in its planning of events (to say nothing of the rest of the United Kingdom). Year on year, we do try to move events around. Actually, we are debating whether to organise a whole day conference in London or Birmingham towards the end of the year. Possible themes which have been mentioned so far, but not explored yet, are dementia and the creative arts and learning in the fourth age. Clearly there are other possibilities. If any of you have suggestions about topics, locations or even speakers whom you would like to

hear, please let me know ([k.percy@hotmail.com](mailto:k.percy@hotmail.com))

I refer often to AEA's mission when thinking about what AEA can or should be doing. You can see the mission on the homepage of our website. With regard to learning in later life, it is to advance knowledge, to improve practice and to contribute to the development of policy. If you check through what AEA is planning to do this year you should be able to see how it relates to this mission.

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/about-us.html>

## CONFERENCE NEWS

*In the last issue of the digest we were previewing the 2017 Education and Learning of Older Adults (ELOA) Conference held at Leeds Beckett University in November. The theme of the event was **Identity, Voice, Creativity, Action** with the aim of exploring how older people are learning creatively in order to say who they are and to take action. The event was a resounding success, as **Jane Watts** tell us here.*

The conference was fun, creative, exhausting (for this organiser at least) and definitely showed that older people's learning is alive and well, taking place in a wide range of locations, and participating in lots of activities and engagement. Academic research on the topic of older people's learning also

appears to be flourishing to judge from the papers and workshops presented.



**Jane Watts speaking at the conference**

The organising group from AEA and Leeds Beckett University (LBU) put together an exciting, and very full, programme, which included participation from older students/learners in several presentations and a performance and workshop led by older learners, entitled *Talking 'bout my*

*generation*. Produced by Teresa Brayshaw of LBU with an older learners' group from the CINAGE programme, this performance gave us insights into the experience of ageing and learning and much to ponder at the end of the first day.



*Talking 'bout my generation in performance*

The participants were escorted from the conference venue to the performance space by members of the cast, wearing 'ageing masks' and using stereotypes of ageing in order to challenge them. Further entertainment was provided via a historical 'silver screen' walking tour of Leeds, focusing on both cinema history and insight into the development and regeneration of Leeds.

AEA partnered LBU in hosting the ELOA 2017 conference which was held in The Carriageworks performance space and at LBU in Leeds. The conference was well attended by ESREA/ELOA members and by older learners. Some of LBU's post-graduate and 3rd year undergraduate students took part in some sessions and acted as guides and technical support for parts of the event. An average of 50 people attended each day, excluding keynotes. There were 34 papers, 3 keynote sessions, 4 workshop sessions, and a few plenaries - one of which supported attendees in getting to know each other so that people could meet all the other delegates.

Creative workshops included a plea for better media representations of women ageing with a film screening run by Prof Jayne Raisborough of LBU and a very popular practical dance workshop run by Yorkshire Dance, called *A space for creative co-production with older adults*.

Keynote speeches were given by:

Dr Wendy Martin;, *Cultural Gerontology: shifting the paradigm*. Wendy drew on the recent co-edited publication of a Routledge Handbook of the same name, which features a vast range of articles, including some by AEA members.

Anne Gallacher, the Director of the Luminate Festival in Scotland, one of Europe's largest creative ageing events, inspired the start of the conference with her presentation: *The impact of a festival on arts and older people*. As well as demonstrating the breadth of arts done by older people in Scotland, there were hints and tips for those who have to measure impact in the current funding regime.

Dr Victoria Watts of Cornish College of the Arts (Seattle, USA) and Libby Costello of the Royal Academy of Dance *Dance: transfiguring lives through joy and rigour*. This included participation by the audience in dance exercises as well as some academic rigour!

The conference made an effort to ensure that members of the ELOA network and other participants got to know each other, with a workshop on the first day facilitated by the chair of ELOA, Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha and by Jane Watts of AEA. We all returned home with a buzz and renewed enthusiasm, but also with the sense that there is much

more to be done - and so much more that could be done with additional resources. We had enjoyed a positive co-learning experience.

ELOA 2018 will be held in Faro, Portugal 11 - 13 October 2018. More details can be found at [www.esrea.org](http://www.esrea.org)

*A short history of the development of CINAGE can be found on page 16 in our Arts and Culture section.*

*Further information here from **Keith Percy** on AEA's plans for proposed co-operation with the **British Society of Gerontology and Ransackers** on future events.*



A significant number of members of AEA are also individual members of the BSG (British Society of Gerontology). The AEA has always looked for opportunities to co-operate with this much larger organisation.

In Autumn 2017, a group of members of AEA, who are also members of BSG, formulated a proposal to establish a BSG Special Interest Group. It was to be a partnership, comprising AEA, BSG and

the Ransackers' Association and to be concerned with learning, development and ageing. The group considered that BSG would agree that learning remains an under-valued and under-resourced aspect of ageing and that a special interest group would help to promote research in this area.

In late 2017 the BSG Executive Committee agreed to the proposal, allocated a sum to support a new special interest group and invited it to submit a proposal for a symposium within the framework of the BSG annual conference in Manchester, July 4th – 7th 2018. Members of the group's steering committee met in early January in London and made plans to submit proposals for a symposium at the conference and possibly also for an event on the conference "fringe".

The Special Interest Group aims to promote research and debate on:

- psychological processes of development (and decline) in adulthood and later life, and the factors associated with these;
- the impact of age on engagement in different forms of learning (informal as well as formal)
- the impact of different forms of learning on the ageing process and on the quality of, and wellbeing in, later life
- the role of older adults in educational policy making;

Co-ordinator of the group is Caroline Holland ([caroline.holland@open.ac.uk](mailto:caroline.holland@open.ac.uk))

## OTHER NEWS

*The David Hobman Annual Lecture commemorates the first Director of Age UK. Last year's lecture, hosted by Age UK and the Institute of Gerontology took place at King's College London in November. It was given by Professor Martin Rossor, who addressed the theme of **The Dementia Challenge – past, present and future**. Eileen Rubery was present at the lecture.*



Professor Rossor is Professor of Clinical Neurology at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, in London, where he runs a clinic that specialises in cognitive disorders and which acts as a tertiary referral service for young onset and rare dementias.

He started the lecture by pointing out that the symptom common to all these diseases is 'cognitive impairment', a symptom often seen as both progressive and irreversible. But this general term not only covers a wide range of deficits, but many of these deficits occur in other contexts as either temporary or readily remediable deficits caused by recognisable and/or identifiable factors. In some deficits, for example, memory is so short-term that the sufferer cannot

read to the end of a sentence without forgetting how it started, yet in others even now we are already able to treat the specific deficit. Furthermore, although we tend to see many of these impairments as irremediable and severe, in fact similar symptoms can incur as short term events, when they are in fact still remediable.

For example, Syphilis is caused by a micro-organism yet its neurological features can, if caught early enough, be treated so that cognitive impairment is prevented. Both drunkenness, caused by alcohol consumption and/or Mercury poisoning cause cognitive impairment, but both will remit as the level of the poison in the blood declines (at least in their early stages).

Furthermore, widely differing causes can give rise to very similar endpoints and even apparently direct neurological processes, such as depression or oxygen deficiency can result in similar cognitive deficits and yet be reversible when the mental environment changes.

As many of the above wide range of deficits, which can be caused not only by these pathologies but by a wide range of other more transient mechanisms, the majority of which are not as long-term or as irremediable as dementia, can be prevented or at least slowed down in their rate of progress, many of the currently less controllable symptoms may well be amenable to amelioration or delayed progression, so slowing the development of extreme symptoms.

Rosser also reminded us that, although initially there was a tendency to see these diseases as having global effects within the brain, in fact the deficits, even in ‘simple’ dementias can be very precisely and locally circumscribed. For example, lesions can be confined to the temporal or the frontal lobes and result in highly localised deficits, such as an inability to pick up an object from the floor while the ability to play a good racquet game of tennis is retained. And the relatively rarer sub-set of these diseases caused by highly localised, specific and recognised genetic defects can provide us with useful handles on mechanisms that can be helpful in enabling us to explore the underlying nature of different pathologies. It is also important to remember that, although dementia has been associated with ageing for a very long time, this has not always been the case, and these symptoms can also occur in certain situations in younger people too.

Another key development in the recognition of the key features of this group of diseases was the recognition of a number of genetically controlled pathologies. The enormous variation in this disease, combined with enormous specificity in some of the lesions it causes can be striking.

Finally, although we should be cautious about predicting a cure that is relevant to large numbers of those affected in the short term, in the longer term it is highly likely that we will learn how to control the progression of the disease, resulting in increases in longevity and better ways of managing and slowing down the rate of progression. Furthermore, since cognitive deficits affect widely different areas and so require different approaches

to treatment and management, the long term view is reasonably optimistic.

We already know many cases take 5 to 10 years to progress and that the symptoms can be exacerbated by other factors such as medication for other causes and social conditions such as isolation. Other similarly remedial factors are bound to come to light if we remain vigilant. For example, we are beginning to realise that in the aged simple things like drowsiness or confusion can lead to serious deterioration of cognitive symptoms, so that an individual deficit may be greatly improved by some quite simple changes in patient management.



Professor Rosser concluded that it is therefore important to remain optimistic about the possible interventions that can be used to improve the quality of life of individual patients as research progresses and that, since this research journey is still at a relatively early stage, the possibility of progress on a wide range of fronts in the future is real.

*Professor Rosser's full lecture is available as an audio recording on the Age UK website. :*  
<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/conferences/david-hobman-annual-lecture/>



*Are you a subscriber to AEA's International Journal of Education and Ageing? The next few issues are now in the pipeline and there is some really interesting and informative material about to be published. Further details here from editor **Keith Percy**.*

The next issue of the International Journal of Education and Ageing (volume 4, no.2) will be published in the near future. Together with an Editorial and extensive International Notes, it will contain six articles - all based on papers delivered at AEA's 2016 International Conference held at the Open University. The articles are:

Franz Kolland

*Identity work and lifelong learning in ageing societies*

Jennifer Granville and Teresa Brayshaw  
*Senior Moments: Reflections on a European Cinema and Active Ageing Project and collaborative advances*

Chisoka Simões, and colleagues

*Non-formal education for older people using experimental science activities*

Iram Naz

*How informal adult learning impacts other areas of older students' lives*

Joanna Walker

*Perspectives on spiritual learning and development in later life*

Jane Watts

*Lifelong learning for changing times: mid-life and retirement transitions*

The articles to be published in IJEA volume 4, no 3 in May are almost in their final form. They are all from German or Austrian authors and are based on papers given at the Congress of the Austrian Society of Geriatrics and Gerontology in 2017. They are:

Ines Himmelsbach

*Ageing and transitions: education in old age in the light of narratives*

Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha & Sai-Lila Rees

*The impact of workplace conditions and educational activities on older worker's health*

Vera Gallistl, Viktoria Parisot & Anna Wanka

*Learning to be old – the doing of age in older adult education*

Julia Steinfort-Diedenhofen

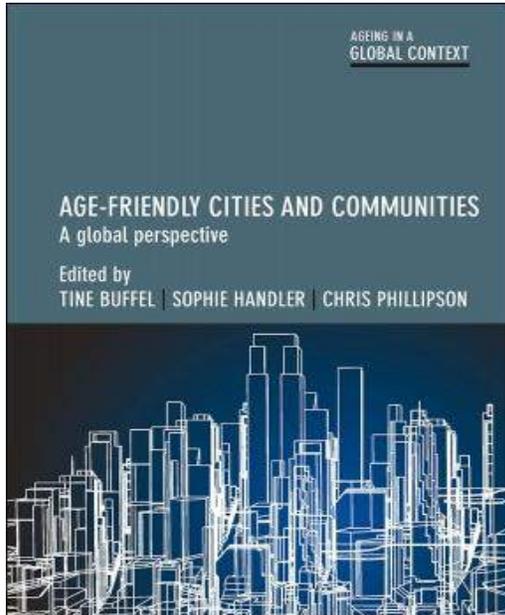
*Choice of place of residence in older age as a key learning challenge - a didactic analysis*

Members of AEA who do not already subscribe to IJEA, but would like to do so, can find details on the Journal page of AEA's website.

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/international-journal-of-education-and-ageing.html>

If, as a member of AEA, you would like to receive a complimentary pdf. of one of the articles in vol.4 no. 2, in order to judge whether you should become a subscriber to IJEA, write to the editor-in-chief ([k.percy@hotmail.com](mailto:k.percy@hotmail.com)) and you will receive the pdf upon publication of the issue.

AEA member **Chris Phillipson** is co-editor with **Tine Buffel** and **Sophie Handler** of a new book *Age-friendly cities and communities - A global perspective*.



As the drive towards creating age-friendly cities grows, this publication provides a comprehensive survey of theories and policies aimed at improving the quality of life of older people living in urban areas. It has been described by Alana Officer, who is responsible for the World Health Organization's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities as "an invaluable resource for anybody interested in the global age-friendly movement and a clear and insightful agenda for future action."

Leading international researchers critically assess the problems and the potential of designing age-friendly environments. The book also considers the different ways in which cities are responding to population ageing, the different strategies for developing age-friendly communities, and the extent to which older people themselves can be

involved in the co-production of age-friendly policies and practices. Also included is a manifesto for the age-friendly movement, focused around tackling social inequality and promoting community empowerment.

*Age-friendly cities and communities* is published by Policy Press (Bristol University Press) and can be ordered online here <http://policypress.co.uk/age-friendly-cities-and-communities>. If you prefer to order by post, please contact me at [carolofdawes@btinternet.com](mailto:carolofdawes@btinternet.com) and I will email you an order form which you can print out.

In her browsing around the internet, **Carol Allen** has come across various pieces to do with older learning and related subjects. Here's a selection of **Older Learning news**.

When I first joined AEA we had a government that appeared to be committed to the benefits of lifelong learning. The landscape has of course now dramatically changed. In my wanderings around the internet I found an interesting piece from David Blunkett and Alan Tuckett under the dramatic title *Cast off the wet blanket smothering adult learning*, in which they point out that, as a result of government policies over the last 15 years the stark impact on adult learning is that 2 million fewer adults – among them the poorest and least skilled – now have access to publicly supported further education than in 2003. The writers don't limit themselves to just older learners but highlight the now proven benefits of continued learning for all adults and suggest that "the time has come both to look back at what worked well, before the wet blanket of narrow utilitarianism smothered so many

innovative initiatives, and as a way to identify a vision for today.” The full article can be read here.

<https://www.tes.com/news/further-education/breaking-views/cast-wet-blanket-smothering-adult-learning>

I also found an interesting blog by Paul Stanistreet, former editor from 200 to 2014 of *Adults Learning*, a magazine for people working in adult education. In his blog, which he calls *The Learning Age*, he recently wrote about the importance of creativity – a subject on which I waxed lyrical in the Autumn edition of this digest. In this particular piece Paul is focussing on the vital importance of culture and creativity in education generally, where it is being squeezed in favour of “skills”. He is not talking about older learning as such but it still might be worth your while to browse through this and some of the other pieces on his blog. <https://thelearningage.wordpress.com/2018/01/31/creativity-matters-and-not-just-to-the-privileged/>

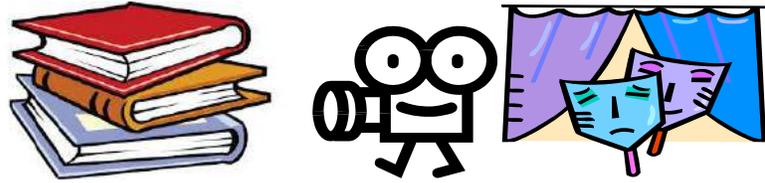


I see Paul also carried a feature in 2016 about our dear friend the late Professor Brian Groombridge

<https://thelearningage.wordpress.com/2016/06/10/a-life-in-education-an-interview-with-brian-groombridge/>

Recently I came across the website for Flourishing Lives, which describes itself as a “London-wide coalition of organisations taking a creative, relational approach to supporting richer, more independent lives for older people.” It points its visitors to some useful sounding events and activities, so if you live in the London area, it might be worth keeping an eye on it. <http://flourishinglives.org/>

Finally, I suspect the *Radio Times*, to which I subscribe to save myself having to bother to buy one every week, must have somehow found out my age, as my weekly copy always comes stuffed with leaflets and flyers for walk in showers for the aged, beds which move up and down and even stairlifts! Something useful this week though was a flyer from Age UK inviting readers to send off for their guide to keeping your brain together or *Staying Sharp in Later Life*, as they term it. The booklet gives a simple guide to the physical structure and function of the brain; thinking skills, how and why they change with age; things you can do to keep them sharp and some interesting information on “cognitive reserve” and why that varies from person to person. You can however get everything that is in the guide from the Age UK website as well. Information I have passed on to my own class of older learners. <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/mind-body/staying-sharp/your-brain/>



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

*Drama school is not just for young people. RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) in London runs a two-year part time course for over 60s, which is now in its sixth year. Carol Allen has been talking to Vivian Munn, director of the Elders Company.*



**Vivian Munn**

I became aware of the course because two of my students have taken part. One has just joined, the other finished her two years in December and I was in the audience for the company's final performance, a black comedy by Frances Poet called *Down the Hatch*. I am very proud of my students' achievement because, as word has spread, the course has become increasingly popular and with most students staying on for a second year, new places are limited. For the current year there were some 60

applicants for only 7 new places. Vivian has been director of the Elders Company since it started in 2013.

"From the beginning we wanted it to be not just a place where people came for games and drama exercises but a serious attempt at trying to extend people's knowledge, ability and give them some skills", says Vivian.

Entry is by audition although perhaps audition is a bit of misnomer. "It's not a test. It's a series of open workshops, where we'll have perhaps twenty people at each, from which I have to select maybe seven people so there is a vetting system. When they first apply students have to make a statement on their application about why they want to join. Sometimes it's to do with where they are in their life and how they want to forward their aspirations. Often I'll look at them favourably even if they haven't had any experience of acting. That's always has a great connection for me, because of how the experience can move and change people. What I want from the workshops is to see how the applicants interact with each other. Sometimes I might give them prewritten scenes to do, sometimes we might improvise in the whole group or in smaller groups. I have support tutors at the auditions with me, who act as my

second pair of eyes. It can tell you a lot, watching people.”

With many activities for older people there tends to be a gender imbalance – women overall are keener joiners than men. This is particularly true of any drama group and indeed is true of the acting profession itself, where there are more female artists than male and more male roles than female – currently a subject of fierce debate. Vivian’s choice of students however is based on many factors apart from gender.

“If that applied to the elders, I might only have had two or three men. Not that I was desperate to have an equal balance but over time I’ve been able to find both men and women with a certain ability and desire to be involved and this year of my 16 students, 8 are women and 8 are men. I’ve always tried to get a good cross section of ages and different types, as you would with any drama course, because of the various roles you’re going to be casting. For example, I’ve had an 87 year old playing the mother of a 62 year old, which is the right age difference. We have a retired black cab driver, who’s now with us for a second year. I’ve had quite a few teachers. People who’ve worked in law, there was somebody who’d worked for British Airways. I’ve always wanted to keep it open so people won’t be excluded. It has to be across the board really. I want them to be an ensemble that is going to get on and I don’t just mean be friends but will be able to work together without too much antagonism, so we can enjoy ourselves. It’s not just about serious drama but there has to be a certain quality and atmosphere of creativity.”

The course runs from January to December in three terms of eleven weeks. For the first two terms students spend two and a half hours on a Tuesday morning, working on scenes from plays – contemporary and Shakespeare – and studying voice, movement, singing and techniques such as Meisner and Alexander. In the third term the commitment factor is increased to all day on Tuesday, as they rehearse the play they will be performing for three shows at the end of the term. And for the last two weeks of that period they will be working full time in the theatre from 10.15 in the morning to often 7.30 at night with technical and dress rehearsals, as the set, designed by a RADA Technical Theatre graduate, appears around them with RADA Technical Theatre and Stage Management students doing the sound and lighting. Just like professional actors.



*Our Father* by Deborah Bruce

It’s a schedule which requires a considerable degree of commitment and students are required to sign a contract that they will attend all sessions, apart from pre-booked holidays and what Vivian describes as “the natural disasters of life – family or own illness. Otherwise it’s very difficult for other people involved in a scene to work, if

their partner isn't there, so we had to lay down the law.”

And during the ten week summer break, students will still be working, learning their lines for the play, even before going into rehearsal.

“It's not the way I would want to work but it's out of necessity. Sometimes we've been caught short when we get into rehearsal and right at the end, actors are still floundering just to remember their lines. I want them to feel happy and confident in expressing themselves, when they hit the stage. It's to do with their education and having a good experience. I'd love to have the luxury of letting them assimilate those lines in rehearsal so that it goes through your body but time is against us. It's against my natural instinct but if we didn't do it this way we might otherwise come a cropper.”

The play the students will be performing is specially written for them by a professional playwright, who will come into class at some point and observe the students working. He or she then has to go away and write a play by the end of the summer term. This year's writer is Christopher William Hill.

“Christopher's already met this group. It depends on the writer really. They may come in to see the odd class and get a feeling for the group. I might set up improvisations so they can watch or I know for a fact that a previous writer, Deborah Bruce, just eavesdropped on some conversations. The object of the writing is to stretch the student. If the student is say a teacher, that doesn't mean they will be playing a teacher but the writer might well draw on certain

qualities of that actor, so it's a stretch still but not too much. Some of these people have never acted so you can't push them too far. I will have had conversations with the writer, perhaps said “I've had this idea” or “This is interesting, where we could push the elder to” and according to their own writing commitments elsewhere, the writer will be starting to think about a plot and characters.”



*The Word* by Nell Leyshon

“The stories are age appropriate but it's more to do with an idea about humanity rather than pigeon holing them as older people. We consciously steer clear of specifically old age subjects. For example, we did a play by Nell Leyshon called *The Word*. On the face of it you might have thought it was about dementia, but it wasn't. It was about a virus, which affects everybody and makes them unable to articulate themselves and speak. So it was actually about our relationship with the words we use and how they affect our identity.”

“The play developed from an idea I had, when I said, “Maybe we could work with less words?” Now that might seem like the actors wouldn't have to learn so much. But actually it was harder to learn because there were lots of .....and repetitions.”

“It’s hard to write a play for sixteen people and in the space of 80 minutes give everyone an equal showing. Inevitably there will be a sort of lead role but the main protagonist in last year’s play *Down the Hatch* for example was a man who’d lost his speech through a stroke, and so the character had very little to say. He had lines but when he said them, they were unintelligible. So it wasn’t necessarily the biggest role on the page. That is part of the whole challenge of trying to make it an equal thing as an ensemble. And it’s always to do with trying to stretch people from what I know about them.”



*Down the Hatch* by Frances Poet

In his career as an actor Vivian has worked with RSC and the English Shakespeare Company, in the West End and various touring companies, including most interestingly performing to young people in schools with Theatre Centre, founded by Brian Way, the “father” of theatre in education.

“When I was there we worked on a lot of contentious material such as the cruise missiles coming to Greenham Common. This was long before people were discussing these things in schools. We had parents and newspapers at certain schools trying to ban us because of the content of pieces. I hadn’t worked with older people before the way I do with the

elders but as an actor I’ve worked with lots of older actors. It’s interesting how people’s attitude to age is now changing. You can be quite elderly in years and still be young. Elders have a lifetime of experience. There’s a lot to draw on but it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s all going to be able to come out in a theatrical context. But that’s my job. I guess I was asked to do it because they thought I had the sort of personality that would be able to encourage and inspire people and to produce a safe environment where I would be able to encourage them to deliver things, even if they lack experience.”

Finally, what does Vivian feel that his students gain from their experience with the Elders Company. And what does he get out of it?

“I think the satisfaction I get without giving too much away about personal details of people is when quite often family members come up to me to talk about their sister, their brother, their aunt, mother, whoever it is, and tell me what the elders experience has meant to their relative. And it’s usually positive, quite often emotive and huge. I had one student, when she was leaving I asked her if she had had a good time” and she said “Yes it has completely changed my life”. And I said something glib like “Oh that’s nice” and she said “No, you don’t understand. This has completely revolutionised everything for me.”

“As far as the performance is concerned, that is as good as I can get it. There is no such thing as perfection but I’ve always been happy with it. But the biggest satisfaction is when I hear those comments about how it’s changed people, transformed people. That moves me hugely. It’s not just about

theatre or acting, it's to do with expanding people's lives. Maybe they've been very solitary or maybe they've gone through difficulties, which I'm not party to. But it's just wonderful to hear that and to know they've managed to get onstage and do it."

*Elders Company courses are free to the students and are generously supported by The Austin and Hope Pilkington Trust and several anonymous donors. Other one off workshops for elders are also available for a small charge <https://www.rada.ac.uk/education-and-outreach/elders-company> where you can also find information on how to apply for next year's Elders Company.*

*There are some similar schemes elsewhere in the UK, most of which are subject to some fees.*

*Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow offer a 4 term course for over 60s. [https://www.rcs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Drama\\_for\\_over\\_60s\\_-\\_Weekly\\_Class.pdf](https://www.rcs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Drama_for_over_60s_-_Weekly_Class.pdf)*

*The Groundlings theatre in Portsea near Portsmouth have their own Company of Elders, who do a two hour class a week and act in many of the company's productions.*

*<https://groundlings.co.uk/theatre-services/drama-school/>*

*Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester offers elders workshops and also has an Elders Company*

*<https://www.royalexchange.co.uk/elders-company>*

*Also on their site is an interesting paper detailing the history of the scheme*

*<https://www.royalexchange.co.uk/616-the-royal-exchange-elders-company-from-pilot-to-intergen-work/file>*

*The Crucible Theatre Sheffield don't have an elders scheme as such but they*

*do have the intergenerational Sheffield People's theatre company for anybody aged 12+*

*<https://www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/get-involved/sheffield-peoples-theatres>*

*The Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh offers an over 60s 10 week practical performance acting course two hours a week starting in April.*

*<https://lyceum.org.uk/take-part/community/acting-courses>*

*Staying with elders and drama, further information here on how the **CINAGE and CINAGE Live 2018** projects were developed. **David Turner**, Project Coordinator for the School of Film, Music and Performing Arts at Leeds Beckett University tells the story of how a diverse group of senior participants explored active ageing by embarking on a journey of learning, creativity and inter-generational collaboration.*



**Generations working together**

In 2013 the Northern Film School at Leeds Beckett University was part of a Grundtvig Lifelong Learning project **CINAGE: Cinema for Active Ageing**. The school partnered with Portugal, Italy and Slovenia, with the research initially addressing the six competencies identified by the EU as essential to active ageing, and then applying them to a course in practical filmmaking with a group of senior volunteers, leading to the

production of three short films, developed, written and produced in each of the partner countries.

The emphasis was upon developing film narratives that reflected the experiences and knowledge of the senior participants. The project culminated in a symposium, hosted by the Northern Film School at Leeds Beckett University, which saw an international mix of stakeholders, researching or active in the issues of our ageing population, giving papers and exchanging views and expertise at a series of seminars and workshops.

The highpoint of the symposium though, was the Film Festival with a competition inviting entries of films either featuring or made by over 65 year olds, and with a finale that showcased the twelve CINAGE short films from all four countries. This proved to be a profoundly moving experience, seeing narratives based on the subject of age and ageing from such very different international and personal perspectives.

In 2016 and 2017, the Northern Film School continued to develop CINAGE, specifically exploring how experiential and embodied learning could be instrumental in the design of new models for developing creative learning projects for older adults, situated at the heart of higher education and the University sector. We stretched and developed our methodologies, incorporating a more structured exploration of inter-generational collaboration.

This intergenerational collaboration was our most successful outcome. None of the films could have been made without our undergraduate students' involvement. During the production

period they formed a tight knit, supportive team, who ended up both teaching our older participants, and learning from them.



Many told me it had been the best experience they had had since being in Film School – and our participants told us that working with 18 year olds who brought their dedication, knowledge and patience to the project had been an important part of the experience for them.

Based on the success of CINAGE, in 2017 we offered a *CINAGE LIVE!* course –working with seniors to create a live, devised performance about their view of the world (with the starting point that a large part of the older generation voted for Brexit). Another innovation was the *Mining the Memories* project, developing the CINAGE model to offer the participants, who were all ex-miners aged over 65, to reflect on the long term impact of the 84/85 miners' strike in South Yorkshire, through working with us to make short films. This project eventually produced eight films, which have gone on to have success in film festivals nationally and internationally.

*And talking of intergenerational film making, during the Christmas break Carol Allen did some filming with her older learners, helped by skilled young*

*cinematographer Tom Branwell. The project was entitled **Vintage Selection**.*

We haven't made a film since 2012, and apart from two students I now have a totally new group, so for most of them it would be a new experience.



**Shooting a scene from *Stop Thief* a drama about a light fingered waitress in a café**

Like our previous opus *Miss Threadgold* all those years ago, we were filming material we had already performed live – in this case it was the show *Vintage Selection*, which we created last summer for the New Horizon Centre's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. As with *Miss Threadgold* I was encouraged by the enthusiastic reception the show was given by the audience and wanted to give the students a permanent record of their achievement and also to teach them about the difference in technique of acting for the camera as opposed to a live audience.

I had two new students join the group in the Autumn term, so I had to create new roles for them, when adapting the material for the screen. Neither of them had much experience of acting before but they were both quick learners. *Vintage Selection* was a programme of short plays and a couple of musical numbers, so it presented a different challenge from the half hour drama we

had filmed previously. I was delighted at the way the group took to the discipline of filming and the experience of acting the various sections out of chronological order for practical reasons of scheduling, having to change costume and switch on a sixpence from one role to another. We filmed some of the material at the centre over two days, where time was limited, but the group responded magnificently to the discipline that required. We then did a third day's shooting at my house, where some of the students worked from 10.30 in the morning until 9.00 pm in the evening without complaint.

The material is currently being edited by our young friend Tom. I am thinking we might do two versions. A complete record of the show and then split it into a series of individual short films.



**Peter Cairns with ensemble doing it His Way!**

And I should mention that one of the students, who performs the song *My Way* partly as a spoken monologue and partly a sung piece incorporating the rest of the company, has so taken to singing that he is now having lessons, has done a few solo singing "gigs" for some social groups in North London and has applied

for an audition with *Britain's Got Talent!* A learning experience or what?

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

Wow! And Wow again for the musical marvel that is ***Hamilton***. This is not just a hip-hop show. With music throughout, there are many good songs with lovely melodies using various musical styles. The songs reference Sondheim, Shakespeare and even Gilbert and Sullivan. And it has a cast who interpret the music perfectly.

Lyn-Manuel Miranda, author of the book, lyrics and music has composed a wonderful musical. It tells the story of one of the founding fathers of America, Alexander Hamilton, as told by Aaron Burr who acts as Narrator for much of the show. Most of us in the UK know little about Alexander Hamilton (Jamael Westman). Perhaps we identify him with the head on the \$10 US bill or as one of the founding fathers of the United States of America. We see young Hamilton arriving in New York aged 19 and learn a lot about him in the opening minutes. Aaron Burr, Alexander's mentor tells us that Alexander Hamilton was born in the Caribbean to an unmarried Scottish father and half-French, half-British mother. He was soon orphaned. He used his intelligence and charm to rise to become a leader in the 18th Century political scene, before he was killed in a dual at the age of 47 by Aaron Burr. Unusually, we are told the end of the story at the beginning.

It's how Lin-Manuel has staged it that is outstanding. Together with director Thomas Kail they present a set that works for the content, a cast who

delivers and music which enhances the lyrics.

Politics and the role of immigrants in the foundation of present day America are brought to the fore. Hamilton is an immigrant who comes to America with nothing but becomes very powerful. The line "Immigrants – they get the job done" is applauded by the London audience while the importance of the immigrant contribution to the creation of modern America is emphasised. Although the musical deals with the revolutionary politics of 18th century America, there are enough points of commonality to ensure it hits home today.

But it is the casting that gives this musical its edge. Jamael Westman develops, before our eyes, from a hesitant 19-year-old listening carefully to Burr's instructions to talk less and smile more into a self-assured leader.



**Jamael Westman as Alexander Hamilton with the West End cast. Photo: Matthew Murphy**

This young actor in his first major role shows complete control of the stage. His good-looks make women fall for him – his wife Eliza (played by Rachelle Ann Go who has a lovely pure voice), sister-in-law Angelica (given a suitably feisty interpretation by Rachel John) and his mistress Maria (Christine Allado). Westman too has a most pleasant singing voice. A truly charismatic performance from a new star. Equally important is his rival and ultimate killer, Aaron Burr.

Giles Terera, always believable, moves from mentor to fellow politician, then political rival. The entire, mostly non-white, cast perform well. Jason Pennycooke as the Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson and Michael Jibson as King George III are most amusing.

The show moves at a fast pace with the cast – led by Westman and Terera – constantly moving in what is an exciting and innovative show.

There have been many productions of *Julius Caesar* in the past and some good ones more recently, but Nicholas Hytner's interpretation must surely rank with the highest. Both his choice of setting – a promenade audience with half moving around the acting area and the rest sitting on seats overlooking the action – and the beauty of the new Bridge Theatre in London are superb.



David Morrissey as Mark Antony and Ben Whishaw as Brutus. Photo: Manuel Harlan

So too is Hytner's choice of actors. Ben Whishaw plays Brutus as a quiet thinker, a politician more interested in books than action, while David Morrissey's Mark Antony is a bit of a showman, confident in his ability to get the mob on his side. Making his mark, too, is David Calder as Julius Caesar. He talks as though he doesn't want or care about

acclaim but seems all too happy to accept honours when they are offered. Who does he remind you of as he shows off to the crowd? Could it be another dig at President Trump? And then we have a female Cassius. Michelle Fairley starts off in rather a low key but soon gains in stature and is a worthy member of the main trio of conspirators.

Surprisingly, another group of actors turns out to be the parading audience on the ground (what the Globe Theatre would call 'groundlings'), who form the mob and, with more than a little stage management, are moved around the floor to respond and indeed take part in the main action. We can see how they are manipulated first by Ben Whishaw's intellectual Brutus and then by Mark Antony's oratory, brilliantly put across by David Morrissey.

The sets are brought on quickly by the stage hands. We even have ash falling from above and settling over the furniture in a war scene. In this production modern dress fits in well with the interpretation and the loud rock group, which plays at the start of the play, encourages the promenaders to bounce around the floor.

*Hamilton* is at the Victoria Palace, London booking until 30 June 2018 Box office: 0844 482 5138

*Julius Caesar* is at the Bridge Theatre, London until 15 April with an NT Live Broadcast on 22 March. Box office: 0333 320 0051

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

The critical and more crucially financial success of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* demonstrated that there is gold in them there "old 'uns" or to put it more

politely, older audiences are worth courting. *Finding Your Feet* appears to be another effort to chase the “grey pound”. Featuring a sterling cast from the more mature end of the acting spectrum, the story kicks off when Sandra (Imelda Staunton) discovers that her just retired, wealthy and recently knighted husband (John Sessions) has been conducting an affair for years with her best friend Pamela (Josie Lawrence). With her dreams of comfortable, marital golden years shattered, Sandra takes refuge with her elder sister Bif (Celia Imrie), a cheerful, unmarried ageing hippy who lives in a council flat.

As the sisters haven’t seen each other for years and Sandra is a bit of a snob, the going is at first rough. But when Bif persuades her sibling to join her at the local dance class, Sandra is drawn into a promising looking romance with Charlie (Timothy Spall), a furniture restorer, who lives on a humble canal barge.



**Imelda Staunton and Timothy Spall**

Also in the class is Joanna Lumley, who despite having her normally blond hair dyed grey is still age defyingly gorgeous and snaffles one of the best gags in the film.

From the trailers you might be led to believe this is a bit of a musical extravaganza along the lines of *Stepping*

*Out* but the dance class is only one element in a story which mixes comedy with tragedy and an inevitably bumpy late life romance. It gets off to a slightly uneasy start, where it looks like we might be in for an elongated sitcom with Staunton making like to the manor born, but once we get into Bif’s world and particularly the relationship between the sisters, the film settles into a likeable if not always totally believable attempt to convince us that there is life and indeed love in later life.

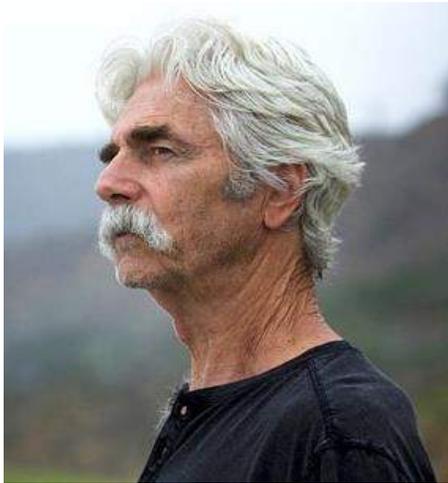
Staunton and Spall make a convincing pair of late life lovers, dragging their pasts behind them and Imrie is both funny and touching as Bif, hiding the tragedies of her life behind a fiercely independent and easy going exterior.

For some reason *The Hero* failed to secure a UK theatrical release, so it’s well worth taking this first opportunity to see it now it’s on DVD.

It stars actor Sam Elliott, who has been a film actor for decades. Now aged 72, with his thick white hair and moustache, weathered face and deep bass Southern drawl he is still handsome and yes, sexy, as he demonstrated as Blythe Danner’s later life lover in *I’ll See You in My Dreams* just a couple of years ago. But his role in *The Hero* is the first time he has played an actual leading role. And he rises to the occasion brilliantly.

Elliott plays Lee Hayden, a veteran star of Westerns, whose glory days are well behind him. The title of the film refers to the only role Lee is proud of, in a career which is now reduced to voicing commercials for barbeque sauce in a voice which puts Colonel Sanders to shame. He only appears to have one friend, Jeremy (Nick Offerman), who was his co-star in a TV Western series years ago and who keeps Lee well

supplied with dope. Then Lee discovers he has terminal cancer and the contemplation of his own death motivates him to put his life in order and make somewhat ineffectual efforts to reconcile with his daughter Lucy (Krysten Ritter) via his ex-wife Val, with whom he still has a cordial relationship and is played by Elliot's real life wife Katherine Ross in two small but effective scenes. He also finds himself drawn into a May and December love affair with a stand up comedienne Charlotte (Laura Prepon), who quotes the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay at him and is not much older than his daughter.



**Sam Elliott as Lee.**  
Photo Beth Dubber/Everett

The story is well told and neatly plotted – perhaps over neatly for some, who may accuse it of relying on too many cliché situations. But Elliott, well supported by his fellow actors, brings such presence, sincerity and at times a dry and laconic sense of humour to the role that you cannot help but be caught up with him and his world.

One gets the feeling that director Brett Haley, who wrote the film specifically for Elliott, was determined that the world would finally get to see what this

actor could do. And his veteran protégé doesn't disappoint. He is totally charismatic, demonstrating that this opportunity to carry a movie – he is rarely off camera – is well overdue.



**Sally Hawkins, with Doug Jones in *The Shape of Water*.** Photo: Allstar/Fox Searchlight

Three high profile films which may capture your interest now. *The Shape of Water* is a Beauty and the Beast type fantasy about a love affair between a mute woman Elisa (Sally Hawkins), who works as a cleaner in a secret government laboratory and the creature she rescues from the cruel experiments of a government agent. The setting is the cold war period of the sixties and the agent, Dr. Robert Hoffstetler (Michael Stuhlbarg) believes the creature can help America get ahead in the space race with Russia. Reminiscent of the creature from the Black Lagoon, brilliant mime artist Doug Jones, a stalwart of several of director Guillermo del Toro's films plays one of the most unusual romantic male leads in film history. The films of the period are also evoked in the movies Elisa watches with her neighbor, retired artist Giles (lovely performance from Richard Jenkins), in the movie theatre under her apartment and in a charming fantasy sequence involving Elisa and the creature in a pastiche "Fred and Ginger" song and dance number.

*Phantom Thread* is set in the haute couture world of the fifties and stars Daniel Day Lewis as fashion designer Reynolds Woodcock on a par with Harvey Amies and Norman Hartnell, who has a complicated love affair with the girl he turns into his star model and muse. Day Lewis, in what he claims will be his final role, is charismatic and Lesley Manville is terrific as his assistant. I wasn't that keen though on Vicky Krieps as Alma. The film is however really beautiful to look at, as it gives us a fascinating peek into the backstage world of the fashion house. And the period frocks are lovely!



**Daniel Day-Lewis and Vicky Krieps in *Phantom Thread*.**

**Photo: Allstar/Focus Features**

Whether or not you have childhood memories of the Second World War, *Darkest Hour*, is worth seeing for a real star performance from Gary Oldman, convincingly made up to impersonate Winston Churchill. The film tells the story of his struggle at the beginning of

the war to persuade his cabinet that we had to take on Hitler.



**Gary Oldman as Winston.**

**Photo: Jack English**

There has been some controversy over a sequence in which Winston seeks out the views of the ordinary man and woman on the London Underground – the film's makers argue it may not have happened but it's the sort of thing Winston would have done – and anyway it's a good scene! And while today in the light of history we regard Chamberlain's attempts at the appeasement of Hitler with disapproval, the scenes in the cabinet of Churchill fighting against the appeasement lobby, embodied in Lord Halifax (an excellent Stephen Dillane) are particularly fascinating. Even though we know what actually happened, one is still thinking throughout, "supposing Winston's got it wrong and he should have gone for peace talks?" If he had, what a different world we would now live in.

There's also a delicious joke about the real meaning of his famous V sign and Oldman delivers those well known Churchill speeches perfectly. This is history brought to thought provoking, dramatic life.

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