

**Theatre New Zealand**  
**Te Pūtoi Whakaari o Aotearoa**



# Age on Stage

*The GeriActors!*  
*Looking for Seniors who Love Theatre!*  
*Presented by Paul Percy*



*"A lot of things are done to Seniors and for Seniors,  
but how many things are done with Seniors?"*

## **LIFELONG LEARNING and LEARNING IN LATER LIFE are specific challenges in getting older. Adult education is changing, and there are many more different strands these days.**

One principle demands an exchange of political- and social knowledge and an orientation to social issues in order to allow self-reliant, democratic and solidary actions. Regarding the old forms of education, we could speak of empowerment and competence. Older persons shouldn't just deal with their past and lose connection to everyday life. They should stay interested in themselves and the practical outputs of our modern society. Older persons may learn how to be part of it to find a role in which they find themselves contributing to an exciting new world.

### **The World of the senior is changing.**

Due to demographic change, many years of retirement could be used positively, which can open up the possibilities of a new ageing culture. Medical, technical, and social progress have provided the means that more and more of us can be older than 70 years nowadays. This is not only a New Zealand thing but also a global specific. In industrialized Western countries, faster development is observable, yet a trend towards longevity is now being recorded in developing countries.

Ageing is a lifelong process from birth to death. So, a continuous development of the personality is possible. Social Gerontology is an integrated science that contributes to the understanding of ageing. This science describes, explains and modifies physical, psychological, social, historical and cultural aspects of ageing and age. Being old is not just associated with limitations and deficits. There are positive reserves. So, we need to focus on the parts of our community that are evolving and pursuing specific objectives; these may affect the process, compensate for it, or do both. The post-professional life can be a meaningful phase of human life.

Arriving at the third age with these positive reserves is an excellent opportunity for subtle new challenges. This life phase can now be used wisely and seen as desirable so we can integrate into this changing society and not get left behind. Rigid reversals of ageing need to be broken. It should be possible for older people to decide whether to continue to work in their professions, continue their education, or just enjoy their free time, filling it with things they never conceived as impossible before.

Good ageing has its roots in earlier years of life and depends on the individual's financial, practical, spiritual, and emotional resources. Mobility, friends, and a good living place are personal prerequisites for activities outside the home, like volunteering at an institution or, participating in a theatre group or whatever an older person may choose as leisure time activities.

### **The Age Advantage.**

The idea of Senior Theatre is forging ahead in unexpected ways, and is heading in adventurous directions as an age advantage for older actors certainly exists. Acting of older persons is seen as becoming an important factor in societies of the 21st century. This means that more and more people are older than 60 and in good health. The baby boomer generation's first wave began turning 65 in 2011 and will continue until 2029. As this generation got mostly everything they strove for during their active life, it is safe to say that they will make the best of their post-professional life and bolster our society with the culture that concerns this large group of persons older than 60 and 65.

## Working with seniors can be a challenge and can be rewarding.

Older persons enjoying everyday life and not being troubled so much by daily inconveniences are to be found everywhere, where there is something for them to do, learn, experience, be amongst other people, travel, play cards, or just enjoy their grandchildren. Senior Theatre takes advantage of this attitude. A performer with such an age group must be aware that finding plays that will suit the actors will be appreciated by the audience and will be just right. Self-made plays by seniors might show low quality, or the existing literature may not be useable. So, finding just the right literature and roles for a particular group will be rewarding but not easy. Seniors are not always easy to deal with as they are used to doing things their own way. A specific difficulty will be finding the right person for a particular play character. There is often great jealousy among the older actors. But if the director or directness is able to master all these difficulties, success will be theirs.

The success of a Senior Theatre Group is closely connected with the performers. Senior performers and senior actors range from professional to amateur in both rural and urban settings. Other talents are appreciated too - patience, humour, strength, and time - lots of time, humour, patience again, and sometimes strictness! There will be physical and cognitive challenges in some cases but the right trained facilitator will negotiate these and bring any group together to have fun and laughter.

Older persons nowadays may live 20 to 30 years after retirement. This period of life might be a third of the whole lifetime. It is not just time; it is free time; it is time one has to fill without a profession you might have loved, and with friends and family increasingly living far away. So, creating a new personality with new ideas and perspectives might be essential. Being involved in the creative arts means that older persons might start to take a new interest in life, learn again to play, to have fun and to tap into that creative side of themselves, make new friends and keep body and brain active and alive. Their memories and life experiences become valuable, can be shared safely with others and used to create powerful pieces of drama. Confidence is built and arts sessions become necessary and anticipated events.

## What are you waiting for?

The third age is an opportunity that can be used wisely, and starting a Senior theatre group could have far-reaching benefits for your theatre company and community.

