

Vintage Adventurers and the Newly Minted

Part I - Crafting an Intergenerational Theatrical Experience Using an Experimental Musical Tour

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Roots & Branches

In *Roots & Branches: Creating Intergenerational Theater* Arthur Strimling proves that when young and old performers infuse personal experience in story elements it makes potent theatre. As the master to professionals and amateurs, Strimling's practical techniques and philosophy serve as a blueprint that guides both the primary (staged) and secondary conversation that occurs amongst the audience. In fact, it is often the *social objects* that emerge from this subtext that catapult and ricochet as creative form on to the stage.

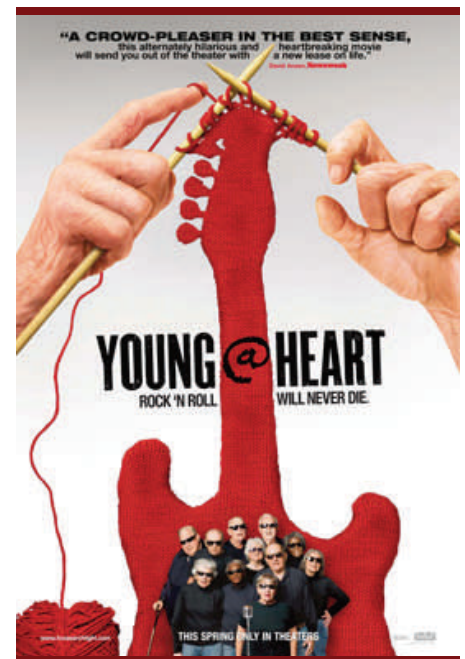
It seems that "reminiscence is a major developmental task," Barbara Myerhoff, author of the book, *Number Our Days* and a colleague told Strimling. An essential element in the later stages of the life process that gives credence to the old saw, "if you like stories, you should talk to old people. They have a lot of stories and no one is listening."

On with the Show

Inspired by not only stories, but astounding musical talent, Chartwell REIT Senior Stars Tour charts a course that plays out in an intergenerational experience that intertwines and delights multiple generations. The elder stage performers rollick even before the curtain is drawn with skate-boarders and many of the audience's (and even performer's) grand children emerge as an integral part of the show. A "chorus of play with me please" echos from the rafters as quickly as balloons descend and are volleyed about in the audience. In a moment, relationships are transformed -- seniors sharing a link as bubbles and balloons dance above their heads -- bond in non-judgmental openness with wee ones. It's almost as if this social link is in the DNA: grandparent-grandchild; sage and student; unconditional love.

Though certainly successful from the onset, the Chartwell Sr. Stars Talent Contest (now in its second year) was ripe to bring a broader base into the fold. The positive message and powerful role-modeling enthrall audiences across the age spectrum; a tour makes it that much stronger and relevant.

Performing before residents, local community members, practitioners in education, theatre, therapy, social work and allied areas is also a huge benefit. These staged interactions and awe-inspiring performances have young and old gathering in a unique way to radiate a new found appreciation for the ageless nature of the creative spirit. Its a moving experience. One that is carried beyond the Senior Living environment to schools, community centers, the marketplace and many other settings.



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Part I - **Crafting an Intergenerational Theatrical Experience Using an Experimental Musical Tour**



Loping Around ---

Starting as a "casual run," as producer and Chartwell Sr. VP for Marketing and PR, Phil McKenzie designated the National Tour in 2008, the ensemble company was formed with a core group of 2007 Sr. Star finalist vocalists. Over numerous months the concept was developed through a "co-ed" creative process that the program continues to use. During a series of rehearsals, the company experimented with several choreographed improvisational forms based on the best selling Easy Tai Chi programs of Dr. Keith Jeffrey. The musical score forms the backbone of an intricate--though well-paced--set of stage movements to unfold in a dramatic and lively story arc. The show became a fully-mounted, streamlined production that toured primarily in GTA locations during the first year. Their polished, Canadian-centric, performance balanced lighthearted juxtapositions of the Summer of Love/Age of Aquarius musical fair with a medley of contest-winning compositions to explorations of inter-generational dynamic movement. These choreographed pieces ranged from dueling mobility assistance devices to the delicate capturing of intact soap bubbles.

Mutual Appreciation Society

Throughout the hour, elders inspire the young with their courage and stamina as they pass on the mystery of the human spirit; the youth inspire the elders with their idealism, hope and their savvy, tough ways; both the young and "young at heart" inspire audiences with the magic they create.

Probably the stage's most notable moment arises when the local flavor is revealed in full measure. To not be a spoiler, suffice it to say, there is a moment when the production laces the performer's and the audience's personal narrative together through life events, scenes and milestones that play as a springboard for a new look on aging and values. By the encore the audience is inspired to leap over any generation gap and come together, paralleling the transformation that happens in the Chartwell Senior Homes. Its a heart-swelling rendition that rewards participants, audiences and the communities fortunate enough to have the tour stop by for a song and dance.

Part II - Therapeutic Counseling in Inter-generational Choreography: *it ain't easy -- but it's worth it!*

Explore exercises; warm-ups; storytelling techniques; practical advice; insight into physical, cultural, and other differences between elders and youngsters and how to bridge them to craft inspiring performances.
