

Scheinfeld Declaration on Theatre by and for Seniors

Seniors are acting up!

The need to perform and act does not diminish with old age.

There are many ways for seniors to participate in our society's cultural life: participating in theatre productions is one of them

Theatre work with seniors is an artistic endeavour

Theatre work with seniors can transform personal memories and experiences into art and thereby make them accessible to a wider audience. However, this process does not necessarily need to culminate in a public performance – in cultural endeavours such as this, the journey is often itself the destination.

Nonetheless, the work should be understood as having an essentially artistic character, since only as an artistic activity, only through an intense focus on the process of artistic creation, can theatre work fully realise its educational and social dimensions.

The theatre is regarded as a quintessentially social artform and it can, when it is treated as art, have a significant social and pedagogical impact.

Theatre work with seniors is diverse and colourful

As joyously diverse as human beings are, so too are the different forms that theatre work with seniors can take, among them: theatre of memory, sketch performances, inter-generational theatre, vernacular theatre, narrative theatre, theatre with patients suffering from dementia, dance theatre...

Theatre work with seniors is inherently meaningful

“If we want to prevent old age from becoming a mocking parody of our former way of being, there can be only one solution: to persist in pursuing goals that give meaning to our lives.”
(Simone de Beauvoir)

Theatre work offers the opportunity to do just that. It can tap into the energies of old age and give expression to seniors' specific attitudes towards life. The artistic activity of performing and play-acting leads to a sense of high-spiritedness that can contribute to a greater degree of serenity when looking back on one's life.

The engagement with existential questions – concerning life, death and the process of remembrance – gives rise to highly individual images and emotions. The theatre provides a space to express these emotions, to make them outwardly visible and recognisable to others.

ASSOCIATION OF GERMAN AMATEUR THEATRES E.V.

The fundamental aim is to give a distinct shape to the treasure trove of experiences that seniors have, to pull these experiences out into the open and thereby prevent them from growing cold and stiff, always hidden from view.

Theatre work with seniors is a powerful public platform

When pursued with great amounts of enthusiasm and self-confidence, theatre work can provide cutting responses to questions about our culture's obsession with youth or its anxieties regarding old age, thereby generating new images (and self-images) of the ageing process within our society. Furthermore, the knowing detachment that comes with old age allows for a clear-headed examination of the here and now.

Theatre work with seniors is a safeguard against loneliness

Performing and rehearsing as part of an ensemble creates a sense of solidarity and a pleasurable satisfaction that is not merely private but shared with others.

Theatre work is also an inherently social undertaking, such as when a personal memory is incorporated into a role-playing exercise, engaged with by the whole group and processed through the combined efforts of everyone involved.

Theatre work with seniors creates a space for personal interactions

Theatre work with seniors aims to create a space for shared experiences and creative flights of fancy, a space where seniors can reassure themselves of their own mental and emotional capacities. It engages in imaginative aesthetic exaggeration, leads to absurd situations, brings together unconventional people, and, above all, tells stories – stories which may not speak to younger and older people in exactly the same way, but which nonetheless can bring together members of different generations in a shared new perspective on life.

The National Working Group (Bundesarbeitskreis) on Senior Theatre at the BDAT adopted this public position paper on theatre by and with seniors – the Scheinfeld Declaration – in 2007 in Scheinfeld/Bavaria.

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