

AEA DIGEST

Issue no 26
Spring 2009



Sir Terry Pratchett, one of the winners in this year's Oldie Awards (see page 6)
Photo: © Getty Images

IN YOUR SPRING DIGEST

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Plus theatre, music and film reviews

FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jo Walker

Dear friends,

I hope that many of you have been enjoying AEA's greater capacity for being engaged with the issues of later life learning and for communicating with you about them. A major step forward has been the launching of our new, independent website at www.associationforeducationandagein.org. We have not appended a 'uk', so as to better reflect our international membership and aspirations. I hope you like the site's contents and its looks, but before anything further, I do want to say a huge thank you to our corporate member, the Centre for Policy on Ageing (CPA), its director Gillian Crosby and IT manager, Nat Lievesley.

CPA has hosted and managed an AEA page on their site for over a year now, thus enabling us to have the benefit of being on the web, while we planned and built our own site. We are grateful for the time and effort they put in, including redesigning the page to implement our new house style. Carol Allen has risen to the challenge of managing the new site and has already had contact with members wishing to post items of news and views. Previous issues of the Digest and several of the Frank Glendenning memorial lectures are available as downloads. Do visit and send us your comments and suggestions.

Our other major piece of communication this year is of course our international conference to be held with the Department of Continuing Education at Lancaster University. Professor Keith Percy, a founding member of AEA and editor of its journal for many years, will deliver the Frank Glendenning lecture, and will

take wisdom, experience and learning in later life as his theme. As you may recall, the memorial lecture is always a free public event, so even if you cannot make the conference, do consider the lecture and the AGM (*the programme is on page 3 after this article, and is also on the website*).

We have been delighted that the Conference call for papers resulted in a wide range of interesting proposals, which are currently being programmed into the schedule. Additionally we have guest plenary speakers Professor Ron Manheimer, from the University of North Carolina and the Centre for Creative Retirement, and Dr Elizabeth Mestheneos from 50+ Hellas in Athens, who is the current president of AGE, the European 'umbrella' for NGOs concerned with older people's issues.

We hope the main conference will attract researchers, policy makers, adult teachers and learners. As a pre-conference event, a free day programme has been arranged by Lancaster's 'University of Later Life' staff, and is proving very popular. For details of this and the conference programme, and to download the booking form, visit our aforesaid website

www.associationforeducationandagein.org or book online at www.lancs.ac.uk/depts/conted/aea2009.htm

From late in 2008 and into 2009, we have been taking regional opportunities to consult with older learners, both through special meetings or by joining in with existing events. Jim Soulsby and David Crossan have been leading this work, using their experience of working with older

people's groups over many years, and analysing survey data they have gathered on the way. We will present some findings from this initiative later in the year. We also look forward to completing a range of developments in the Association (such as the website) for a report to the Esmee Fairbairn

Association in return for their support over the last two years. This has enabled us to grow and be more effective in our chosen field. We hope you agree and will continue to support and interact with us.

Reaffirming Teaching and Learning in Later Life

Weds 1st - Fri 3rd April 2009, at Lancaster University, UK

**ORGANISED JOINTLY BY THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION AND AGEING AND THE
DEPARTMENT OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, LANCASTER UNIVERSITY**

Pre-conference Day Event: University of Later Life

Weds 1st April, 10am - 4pm

Free entry.

A one-day programme for older people consisting of discussions and lectures from University staff that are designed to inform, interest and inspire.

For details and to book, contact: j.petersen@lancaster.ac.uk

Or ring 01524 592621 (international 011 44 1524 592621)

Full programme on:

http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/pages/aea_events.html

Frank Glendenning Annual Memorial Lecture

Thursday 2nd April, 4.15 - 5.30pm

The Owl of Minerva: Wisdom, Experience and Learning in Later Life

Professor Keith Percy, Director of the School of Lifelong Learning and Widening Participation, Lancaster University

This session is open to the public and entry is free. Venue: Conference Centre, main campus.

Conference Programme

Wednesday 1st April

- 10am - 4pm **Pre-conference Day Event: University of Later Life** (see above)
- 5 - 5.30pm AGM of Association for Education and Ageing
- 5.30 - 6.30pm Registration for residential delegates
- 7.30pm Dinner for residential delegates

Thursday 2nd April

- 9.15am Registration for day delegates
- 9.45am Welcome and introductions
Jo Walker, Chair of AEA and Professor Keith Percy, Lancaster University
- 10am **First keynote address:** New paradigms for old: trends and developments in later life learning in North America
Professor Ron Manheimer, University of North Carolina
- 11.15am Break and refreshments
- 11.35am **Papers and Workshops** (session 1)
- 12.45pm Lunch, networking, exhibition
- 2pm **Papers and Workshops** (session 2)
- 3.10pm Break and refreshments
- 3.30 - 4pm **Panel and Plenary Discussion:** summing up day one
- 4.15 - 5.30pm **Frank Glendenning Annual Memorial Lecture** (see details above)
- 5.30 - 6.30pm Reception
- 7.30pm Conference dinner, with speaker

Fri 3rd April

- 9.15am Registration for day delegates
- 9.30am Welcome and review
Jim Soulsby, AEA
- 9.40am **Second keynote address:** Making later life learning relevant in Europe: policy, practice and strategy
Dr Elizabeth Mestheneos, President of AGE - the European Older People's Platform
- 10.50am Break and refreshments
- 11.10am **Papers and Workshops** (session 3)
- 12.20pm Lunch, networking, exhibition
- 1.40pm **Older People's Voices:** Conference Reflections and Testimonies, including from Lancaster University's Senior Learners' Programme and Lancaster & District U3A
- 2.45pm **Third keynote address:** Older adults and informal learning
John Gibson, UK Government Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
- 3.30 - 4.10pm **Summing up and close**

Official Notice of the Association for Education and Ageing AGM

**The Annual General Meeting of the Association for Education and Ageing will be held on Wednesday 1st April at 5.00 pm at:
Department of Continuing Education,
Lancaster University
Ash House,
Lancaster LA1 4YT**

If you are unable to attend and would like to present apologies please contact the Secretary on aeasecretary@googlemail.com or ring Carol on 020 7385 4641

NEWS ITEMS



Stephen Newman in the student bar at Ruskin College. His course work, he insists, is in that knapsack on his back!

*A couple of years ago we carried an item in the digest on Ransackers, the scheme pioneered by Ruskin College Oxford, which opened up new possibilities for older people who had missed out on higher education. Ransackers is supported by Government backed Better Government for Older People programme, now to be abolished, as Jim Soulsby feared, when writing on the Elbourne report in our last edition. **Brian Groombridge** pulls the two strands together.*

With regard to the Elbourne review and its implications for older people's engagement, Jim said that it could be timely for Government to strengthen local authorities' capacity to interpret Opportunity Age (and other relevant policies) together with older people's forums etc . But to achieve this, Elbourne recommended disbanding Better Government for Older People and setting up a new structure. I share Jim's doubts whether this new set-up would be sustainable. Moreover, the Government may also have put one of BGOP's most important achievements at risk: Ransackers. AEA should be on the alert.

RANSACKERS was devised by Vi Hughes, former Senior Lecturer at Ruskin College. She was learning Gaelic at the time. Hence: ransaachadh - it doesn't only mean plunder - it can mean explore, discover, scrutinise. BGOP set up Ransackers in 2004, supported for four years by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. Ransackers enables older people with no previous experience of higher education to research a theme of their own choosing for a ten week term at an adult residential college. So far there have been nearly 300 Ransackers, studying a very wide variety of topics at Ruskin, Fircroft, Hillcroft, Northern College, and the University of Brighton. Related opportunities should be available this summer at Strathclyde University, and later on at Queen Margaret University and Coleg Harlech. Ex-Ransackers have formed their own Association; most Ransackers (60%) have enthusiastically stayed on in education, and some have taken degrees.

College funding was provided by the Learning and Skills Council but the LSC has itself only another year to run. It is hoped similar programmes can be developed by the devolved governments and other universities are trying to get involved.

As I write, BGOP is working towards becoming Change AGENTS, a Co-operative Friendly Society. It's hoped that Ransackers will be a 'Product' of Change AGENTS, but at present there's no money. The national Development Officer, June Kathchild's, contract expires at the end of this month. She's worked out a very clear statement about the funding arrangements now needed. I believe AEA should support

Ransackers, help ensure its survival and expansion, and maybe contribute to discussions with DIUS.



With Ransackers in mind, plus the masses of older people, who've lost part-time study opportunities through adult education cuts, John Denham needs to act soon with something like Jennie Lee's verve and determination. She's much in mind as the Open University celebrates its 40th anniversary. The OU's also had funding problems, and there'll be no extravagant partying, but it's benefited so many older people that AEA should raise a glass or two.

The university is compiling an oral history archive, and I've been interviewed - I was on the Planning Committee which set it up - along with major figures such as Prof Asa Briggs. I reminisced to Hilary Young, an expert oral historian, not only about that but also remembering other links with older people, e.g. recently chairing an OU-Help the Aged advisory group on research into age discrimination, led by Senior Research Fellow, Bill Bytheway, where older people were interviewed about their experience of age discrimination, care homes, the Internet, and much more.

*There is always a plethora of awards ceremonies in the early part of the year with the film, theatre and television worlds celebrating their own with Oscars, BAFTAS, Oliviers and so on. In the midst of all this backslapping comes the **Oldie of the Year Awards**, an annual event organised*

by the "Oldie" magazine to recognise the achievements of some of our older citizens in various fields.



Andrew Sachs and John Sergeant, two of this year's winners, with awards host Sir Terry Wogan

Photo: © Getty Images

There's a certain "tongue in cheek" aspect to these awards, whose categories change from year to year in response to events. The headline grabber this year was John Sergeant, named as "hooper of the year" for *Come Dancing*, the show in which he was snubbed by the judges but got the public's approval for his less than delicate dance moves. Actor Andrew Sachs was named 'granddad of the year' for his "dignified response to the BBC furore surrounding phone calls about his granddaughter". A more serious note was struck with the naming of Sir Terry Pratchett as 'Campaigner of the Year' for using his recent diagnosis of Alzheimer's as a way of raising awareness of and improving research into the condition. Veteran Lib Dem MP Vince Cable won the 'I Told You So' Award for his correct prediction, based on years of political experience, of the current economic downturn, "which fell on deaf ears for far too long" and writer Diana Athill, now in her early nineties, got the oddly named 'Bed Next to the Door' award. You probably need to have read her award winning memoir *Somewhere Towards the End* with its forthright reflections on old age to get

the reference. And an optimistic and sporty note was struck by the award to Octogenarian Peter Hildreth, star of the 1952 Olympics, named as '2012 Olympic Hopeful of the Year' for his continued training on the escalators of his local shopping mall. Bit more varied than the Oscars, ennit?

Welcome to New Members. *Since the last Digest came out, we've had the pleasure of welcoming more new members into the association, including Delys Sargeant and Dr Jock Fletcher from the state of Victoria, Australia and from here in the UK Helen Pursey, Robert Goodliffe, Chris McAllister, George Baddeley and Angela Taylor. We hope to have the pleasure of meeting some of you personally at the conference. Delys and Jock though have already told me that unfortunately they're not going to*

be able to join us this year. It is after all a long way from Victoria to Lancaster, UK!

On the subject of membership, may I please take this opportunity to jog the memories of those members, who have not yet got around to renewing their subscriptions for 2009.

Current subscription rates are:

Retired/unwaged	£13.00
Waged	£26.00
Corporate	£75.00

Please make cheques out to The Association for Education and Ageing and send to:

Carol Allen,
AEA Secretary,
132 Dawes Road,
LONDON SW6 7EF

FEATURE

*Executive Committee member **Dave Crossan** was invited on behalf of AEA to contribute to a recent seminar for Fast Track Graduate new entrants to the Civil Service. His brief was to provide an explanation of "**How the Third Sector can influence the policy and decision making process**" - essentially how a "Non Government Organisation" can lobby Parliament and Government Departments to get their voice heard. The strategy he gave the group is useful advice for anyone trying to get their point across to the powers that be.*

After briefly explaining the importance of the work of the AEA and the demographic changes that are already

significantly effecting the social make up of Britain, and the possible consequences of this in terms of employment, health and the quality of life, I suggested the delegates might like to take notes as I explained the eight main rules of lobbying, which I summed them up as being :-

- 1) Reading and research
- 2) Choosing your allies,
- 3) Show those you want to convince the benefits they will receive,
- 4) Show how this fits in with policies already in place and how it complements other work both within their Department and across Government,
- 5) Be persistent and do not be discouraged if you don't immediately

succeed. Be prepared to compromise, seeing this as the first step towards your goal,

6) Be brief. People are busy so keep to one page and use bullet points where possible,

7) Be prepared for the difficult question.

At this point I split the room down the middle and gave the two groups separate tasks, both of which required them to show their lobbying skills. One group had to think of themselves as seven year olds, who want a new bicycle and explain how they would get their parents to buy them one. The other group were to be some 30 years older and faced with the prospect of redundancy, as their boss wants to employ younger, fresher and cheaper workers. They were given ten minutes to devise a lobbying strategy to get a bike or save their jobs.

The result was astonishing. The room was buzzing, and one participant said afterwards that he had noticed that a colleague, who had not joined in all day, got his pen out and started writing. There was great enthusiasm to report back on their lobbying strategies. It seemed that all the participants had thoroughly enjoyed the exercise and appreciated that lobbying was not an arcane art but something we all engage in throughout life. And yes there was a difficult question about the role of professional lobby groups. AEA have been invited to attend another Fast Track event and hopefully this will lead to our greater involvement and influence on policy for older people in the future.

If you are involved with lobbying about something, here's a useful website which enables you to contact your representatives electronically.

<http://www.WriteToThem.com>

You type in your postcode and it will come up with contact details for your local councillors, MP, MEP or MSPs, or Northern Ireland, Welsh and London AMs

It is after all up to us to keep those who represent us on their toes!

More Web stuff!

Do make a point of visiting our new website and telling your friends and colleagues about it.

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.or>

The website is a very important means of communication for AEA, not only with our members but with the rest of the world. On the subject of which I would like to start a section on our News and Views area

http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/pages/news_views.html
with the object of drawing visitors' attention to items in the press relating to older learning. But for that I need your help. If you see a suitable item in the press, if you could copy and e-mail me the URL – for those of you who don't speak fluent computer lingo, that's the bit in the box at the top of the page beginning <http://> – . I can then access the piece and get a link onto our site. It would also be helpful if you could give me the title of the publication, the date, headline and a brief idea of what the story is. That latter also applies, if you've read the piece in a newspaper. With that information, I can usually manage to track it down on line. So any suggestions in this field please to aeasecretary@googlemail.com

For those of you who are not on line, you are missing out on some of the benefits of being an AEA member. Even if you don't have a home

computer, you can now access e-mail and internet from most public libraries and some other places for no charge. You can set up a free e-mail account with various servers such as Hotmail, Yahoo and Google and then check your messages from any computer anywhere, let's say once a week, to see if you've any messages from AEA, or indeed, once you're in the swing of it and have given out your e-mail address, from your family and friends anywhere in the world! There are some members, who don't like dealing with attachments or indeed getting

their copy of the digest in attachment form (translation – attachments are like enclosures in a letter, which show up as a symbol in an e-mail and have to be opened separately). Not a problem. I have a separate distribution list for those members and if you request it, I can continue to send you your copy of the digest in hard copy form. Plus of course, while you're checking your e-mails, you can go to our website and browse the latest and the back digests online. So go on – give it a whirl. It's useful and it's fun!

Trips for
Older
Females and
Fellows



Carlie and Steve Newman have another TOFFS trip coming up very soon, this time to “**The Emerald Isle**”, specifically to Galway and the West Coast of Ireland via Dublin

- Departure date 24 May 2009
- .6 days/5 nights. (1 night Dublin, 4 nights Galway)
- Dinner, bed and breakfast and all excursions included Staying in 3 star hotels
- Price £609 per person for a twin room sharing. single supplement £99
- Deposits of £150 by 7th April latest please.

Leaving from London Heathrow using Aer Lingus scheduled flights. Highlights include a brief tour of Dublin, and in Galway: the Connemara National Park, St.Bridget's Garden, a cruise on the Killary Fjord and the final evening will be spent at a fantastic show of Irish dancing and entertainment

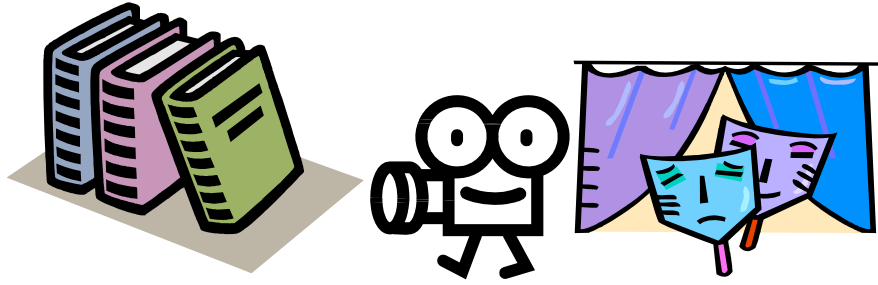
Full details, brochure and booking form from:

Carlie and Steve Newman,
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Belsize Grove,
London NW3 4XE.

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AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

*For several years now I've has been thinking about starting a theatre group for older people based around living history, though I haven't as yet found the time. Seems like I've now been pipped at the post by one Alvin Tan in Singapore. He's the founder and artistic director of **The Necessary Stage**, who have just put on their first show, as reported by **Channel News Asia**.*

Long before terms like 'active ageing' and 'wellness of seniors' were thrown around in Parliament, Alvin Tan had in mind a structured programme to facilitate long-term learning for seniors.

"I've always wanted to start this Theatre for Seniors," Tan said. "Some five years back, there were no agencies that could provide funding for it, but when the government started to look into ageing and disability, the Council for Third Age was set up and I quickly submitted my proposal."

The Theatre for Seniors programme, which was launched in April last year, is a three-year curriculum that aims to equip participants above the age of 50 with essential skills and knowledge about theatre and drama. From acting classes to production and history of theatre workshops, students gain

opportunities to understand the intricacies of theatre works, learn new skills and interact with their peers.

Due to overwhelming response at the start, The Necessary Stage had to conduct interviews to gauge the participants' level of interest and commitment. The formalised programme is carried out over four terms each year, with lesson plans and learning outcomes. Participants generally need to commit less than two hours of their time each week to stay in the course.

At the end of each year the course culminates in a public performance. The group's first presentation *ENCORE: An Evening of Ageless Theatre*, staged in March this year, consisted of five short plays and devised works, with three in English and two in Mandarin.

One of the workshops required the participants to reach into their memories and tell stories of the time when they were 24. "We're very interested in their lives and their own stories", explains Jean Ng, an arts educator and theatre actress, who is one of the three facilitators of the programme. "It's a very rich source for creative work... We had a whole term where we devoted time for students to tell their stories in class and from there, we structured short

theatre pieces," she said. One of the pieces constructed from these sessions is a multilingual play called "@24" which explores significant moments in one's youth. The short play has a relatively large cast of 22 people, made up of a motley crew of ex-lawyers, former nurses, retired teachers and executives.

A number of participants in the group, whose oldest member is 72 years old, said they had absolutely no theatre background when they decided to join the programme. Professional bodybuilder Angie Kong, who looks much younger than "early 50s", said: "I chanced upon it in the papers. It's curiosity and a large part of vanity that led me to join the programme – this is a chance to be on stage!"

Some, like 55-year-old Lawrence Lee, views the course as a way of keeping young and remaining 'ageless'. "Being young to me is doing new things, being renewed and refreshed. This is totally new to me, so when I read about it in the newspaper, I got excited and decided to try it out," the former teacher said.

Others members of the group dabbled in the arts when they were younger, but gave it up to be a homemaker or to focus on their careers. With their children all grown up and their families well taken care of, they have now returned to explore and to see if they have the talent for theatre.

Like Ng, Tan sees a great potential in the experiences of the seniors. "I've always believed in capitalising on our life materials. It adds to the artistic and cultural capital that we have and it is also rich in intergenerational opportunities."



The Necessary Stage company of Singapore in action

*I may not be able to offer you an older person's theatre group at the moment, but the National Theatre has now extended its education activities under the title **Discover** with some projects specifically for older learners. This month they're inviting you to try your playwriting skills.*

Building on the previous NT Education work, Discover aims to extend the National's work beyond the stage into community as well as education settings, providing journeys of discovery about its repertoire, staff and artists for people of all ages. '**Discover for Life**' is devoted to lifelong learning, working with groups of older people on projects responding to the repertoire. In an earlier pilot project, Lee Hall's play *The Pitmen Painters* provided the basis for a group of twelve members of The Greater London Forum for Older People to discover the skills of the people creating sets in the National's scenic studio and to create their own scenic art for display in the Cottesloe Theatre foyer.

Discover Playwriting is associated with *Mrs Affleck*, a new play by Samuel Adamson, which is currently in the

repertoire and is based on Henrik Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*



Applications are invited from aspiring playwrights who are over 55 for an idea for a new play they'd like to write based on a favourite classic. The 'classic' could be a play, as in the case of *Little Eyolf*, or it could be a classic novel, or even a film.

Initially you should describe your idea in a maximum of 200 words. In collaboration with the NT Literary Department, 12 applicant writers will be selected to work with Samuel Adamson along with Discover and the Literary Department at the NT Studio on developing the first scene of their play on Friday 24 April. When completed, the twelve scene-ones, will receive a report from the NT panel of script-readers. Successful applicants will also be offered a complimentary ticket to see the matinee performance of *Mrs Affleck* in the Cottesloe Theatre on Tuesday 21 April.

Ideas should be sent by post to the Discover Programme, National Theatre on the downloadable form on www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/discover/playwriting by **Wednesday 1 April 2009**.

Please mark the envelope "Discover: Playwriting"

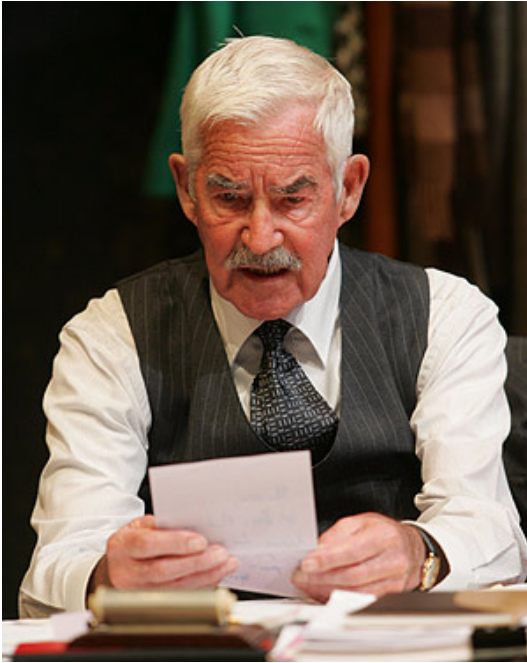
This information is also on the News and Views page of our website with a link to the application form.

*The philosophy that an active brain and an active life keeps you healthy and maybe, if you're lucky, wealthy and wise, seems to be born out in the world of arts and media. **Carol Allen** highlights some **Celebrity Veterans** who are still making their contribution in a big way.*

If you'll pardon a bit of name dropping, I was at the theatre recently and who did I and my companions bump into but Sir Peter Hall, enjoying a night out like any other theatregoer. At 88 he is still active in theatre, though starting to take things a bit easier. As Lady Hall confided, "He's only doing one production at a time these days." Not so film director and actor Clint Eastwood. 79 this May, he's directed eight films this century, two of which he's starred in, he's currently directing a film about Nelson Mandela's first term as President of South Africa with Morgan Freeman in the lead and his current release *Gran Torino*, in which he also stars (see "On Screen" page 12) is breaking box office records. Sir David Attenborough, 83 in May, is still travelling the world and sharing the wonders of its flora and fauna with us through the medium of television, while Sir Michael Caine at just turned 83 is currently averaging around two new films a year. He has a new one out shortly (*Is There Anybody There?* also reviewed in this edition) and has recently completed work on a thriller called *Harry Brown*. And the year is still young! While Dames such as Judi

Dench, Helen Mirren and Eileen Atkins are always in demand for stage and screen roles.

Here though is a face from the past that you may not have seen for many years and who is now making a UK theatre comeback.



Do you remember a handsome young fellow called Michael Craig? Now 80 years old, he started his career as an ASM in “rep”, working his way up to his first lead in a play at Oxford directed by the young Peter Hall. Shortly after that he was spotted by a J. Arthur Rank talent scout, who signed him up and made him a well known movie face. He’s made some thirty films, including *The Angry Silence* in 1960, in which he not only co-starred but he and his brother Richard Gregson shared an Oscar nomination for the screenplay with director Bryan Forbes, while on stage he played opposite Barbra Streisand in the original London production of *Funny Girl*. In the seventies he married Australian actress Sue Walker and settled “down

under”, working steadily in Australian movies and tv series. He starred in a tv series, “*G.P.*” in the nineties, for which he was recently voted “Australia’s most trusted man” and in recent years has played rather a lot of judges. And it’s as another judge that he returns to London in his first UK stage appearance, he tells me, since he was in a touring production of “*An Inspector Calls*” in 1988.

In *Trying* he plays Judge Francis Biddle, who was US Attorney General under President Roosevelt and Chief American Judge at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials. The play by Canadian writer Joanna McClelland Glass is based on her real life experiences of working as Biddle’s secretary in the sixties, when he was nearing the end of his life. And although Biddle does in the play refer to his illustrious past, its focus is more on the developing and eventually mutually supportive relationship between this often cantankerous and inward looking old man, contemplating his approaching end, and his young secretary. It’s beautifully played by Craig and Meghan Popiel as Sarah, the fictionalised version of the playwright. He in particular is very affecting as we see him changing from being a vigorous if somewhat absent minded and disorganised man into a figure of increasing infirmity. And his final message to Sarah, which she plays after his death recorded on the new fangled machine she’s persuaded him to use, is very moving.

Michael first played the role in Sydney a couple of years ago and has now brought the play to London with the support of his niece, producer Sarah Gregson and Neil McPherson, director of the Finborough Theatre. Belying the

physical frailty of the character he is currently playing, Michael off stage is a vital and energetic man, thriving on the challenge of giving seven performances a week. He is enjoying being back in London and now, with so many of his family living here, he hints that he is considering settling here again. And will he still continue acting? “Being realistic there aren’t that many roles for 80 year old actors”, he says wryly, “but if the opportunity’s there, yes, of course I will”.

Trying continues at the Finborough Theatre, Finborough Road, London SW10 until 11th April
<http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk/>
 Box office: 0844 847 1652

Carlie Newman has some recommendations from the West End stage. Two plays both set in America in the 50s but with very different production styles.



Ken Stott and Hayley Atwell in “A View from the Bridge”

Photo: © Alastair Muir

Director Lindsay Posner’s production of *A View from the Bridge* (Duke of York’s) is one of the best shows around

at the moment. Ken Stott, whom I wouldn’t have rated as one of my favourite actors before this, gives an excellent interpretation of Eddie who will not admit his feelings towards his niece, Catherine (Hayley Atwell). First staged in 1955 it depicts the lives of longshoremen of Italian descent in the dock area in Brooklyn beneath the famous bridge. Eddie takes in the illegal immigrant cousins of his wife, Beatrice (most movingly played by Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio). Marco (Gerard Monaco) is working to support his wife and three children back home, where he hopes to return, while Rodolpho (Harry Lloyd) wants to remain in the USA. Soon, however, he and Catherine fall in love and Eddie becomes jealous and tries to prove Rodolpho is homosexual. There is always the danger of the two brothers being discovered and deported. Stott is only small in stature but gives a towering performance in this well-written play by Arthur Miller. Good, too, to see Allan Corduner in a meaty role as the lawyer who tells the story of Eddie’s downfall. There is a simple but effective set.

The other play, which is also set amongst the longshoremen of New York is *On the Waterfront* (Haymarket). Here we have a typically (in the best use of the word) Steven Berkoff production in that it is not realistic but stylised and choreographed to bring out the very core of the play, which is based on Elia Kazan’s 1954 film. As with *A View from the Bridge*, the play references the McCarthy witch-hunts and many considered the film to be Kazan’s justification for his role as a ‘friendly’ witness. The ensemble double as dockworkers and gangsters and in both roles act as a kind of chorus,

commenting on the action. Music, including drumming, highlights the action. Simon Merrells brings off the Marlon Brando role of Terry Malloy with great panache and is good looking in a positive way rather than a carbon copy of the film version. Even his line, "I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody..." comes across freshly. He shows Terry's conflict between doing what he knows is right and helping Edie (played with conviction by Bryony Afferson) find out who killed her brother, and betraying his boss, Johnny Friendly, a member of his own family. Berkoff, as Johnny, uses his whole body to show the menace of the character, while his energetic direction of the play is so powerful as to be almost over-powering.

A View from the Bridge continues at the Duke of York's until 16th May, followed by a short tour.

Brighton 19th -23rd May

Richmond 26th -30th May

Glasgow 2nd - 6th June

On the Waterfront is at the Haymarket until 25th April



For this edition of AEA Digest, Alex Withnall has abandoned her usual book

*review spot to recall the **Leonard Cohen Fall 2008 Tour**, which she caught at the LG Arena, NEC Birmingham last November. And as she freely admits, she's a bit of a Cohen groupie!*

My (one-sided) love affair with the Canadian poet/singer/songwriter Leonard Cohen has been in progress for over forty years now although I had not seen him on stage since 1986. Having failed dismally to get tickets for his earlier visit to Britain last summer – they sold out in minutes – I was thrilled to be in the huge audience of mostly over-50s at the NEC on what proved to be a bitterly cold November night. The air of excited expectation in the audience was enormous as the six-piece band assembled quietly – and then suddenly, there he was, almost a sort of gangster figure in a trilby running athletically on to the stage and breaking straight into *Dance Me to the End of Love* in that fantastic gravelly voice that seems to have dropped another octave since those heady sixties days of *Suzanne* and *Marianne*, the songs we all surely remember.

Can this man really be 74 years old? In a night of sheer emotion, he was on stage for almost three hours, mesmerising the audience, pausing to tell us why he abandoned the contemplative life ('cheerfulness kept breaking through') and to introduce the members of his band and his backing singers – his long time collaborator the fabulous Sharon Robinson and the hugely talented Webb sisters. The audience were mostly quiet and attentive except for the occasional shout of 'We love you Leonard', which the great man modestly acknowledged from the stage. Even the constant flashing of cameras failed to detract

from the spell-binding excitement of the night. And so for over an hour, we were treated to all those old familiar songs from the well-known *Bird on the Wire*, the witty *Everybody Knows* and the very personal *Chelsea Hotel No.2* to the gently evocative *Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye*. We were hooked.

The second half opened with the catchy *Tower of Song* recorded in 1988 for the album *I'm Your Man*. As our hero reached those pertinent lines 'I was born like this, I had no choice; I was born with the gift of a golden voice', a murmur of agreement rippled through the audience culminating in a huge burst of applause that later turned to laughter during those endless de-do-dum-dums when Leonard instructed Sharon 'don't laugh' causing her to do just that. Then we had a stunningly beautiful rendition of *Boogie Street* from Sharon herself followed by the now famous *Hallelujah*, destined to become the Christmas No. 1, and an unusual spoken version of *A Thousand Kisses Deep*. Suddenly we were into *Take this Waltz* and the end of the set.

We weren't letting go that easily though. There must have been at least three encores and a standing ovation for *So Long Marianne*, *First We Take Manhattan*, *Famous Blue Raincoat* and what seemed like the highly relevant *Democracy* ('is coming to the USA').

But as audience enthusiasm rose to a peak, we were lulled unexpectedly to the end of the evening with a hypnotic but powerful version of *If It Be Your Will*. It was over.

As we all tramped cheerfully away into the frosty night, there was a definite sense of camaraderie among the thousands of people who had trekked to the NEC from all over the country. Perhaps there was an unspoken recognition that we'd been in the presence of a musical genius and that he'd been singing especially for us – never mind that he'd be doing it all over again in another city tomorrow.

My one regret? We didn't hear 'my' song *Alexandra Leaving*. I hope they play it at my funeral.



Clint Eastwood in "Gran Torino" (see next page for review)

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On Screen - Carol Allen

I see my lead film in the last digest was also a Clint Eastwood movie (*Changeling*) but they just keep on coming. I wouldn't normally review a film which opened weeks ago but *Gran Torino* is doing such good business, it's still in cinemas and if you haven't caught it yet, I wouldn't want you to miss it. Because it's not often that a film about a grumpy old man, starring and directed by a man in his seventies, packs 'em in at the multiplexes. But there's a very good reason – it's not about age, it's about quality. Eastwood plays embittered and racist Korean war veteran and former car worker Walt Kowalski, recently widowed, who resents the world that has changed around him but who's drawn back into it, when the South East Asian teenager next door, pressured by local gangs, tries to steal his beloved Gran Torino car. It's a tale of intergenerational and racial reconciliation, which veers towards the sentimental but avoids it through the truthful performances of Eastwood and his team of new young actors.

An intergenerational relationship is also at the centre of *Is Anybody There?*, where a friendship develops between ten year old Edward (Bill Milner), who lives with his parents in the retirement home they run and retired magician Clarence (Michael Caine), one of its residents. It helps the boy get over his morbid fascination with death and the older man come to terms with the mistakes of his past. Caine is very good but the script doesn't give him the opportunity to move us in the way he is can do. The film does have some effective dark humour and some touching moments but the somewhat cliché way the other residents are written verges on the

offensive. With the exception of Rosemary Harris as a former dance teacher, they are all barking mad and senile, though the actors playing them do their best to make them convincing.

In *The Damned United* Michael Sheen gives another virtuoso performance of a real life character. This time it's cocky and clever football manager Brian Clough, his obsessional rivalry in the 60s/70s with Don Revie (Com Meaney), from whom he took over Leeds United, and his friendship with his right hand man Peter Taylor, which he betrayed to further his obsession. Clough's downfall is the classic story of a man brought down by hubris and speaking as someone who has no interest in football whatsoever, I was totally gripped by it.

Cheri, based on Colette's novel of the same name is from the writer/director team of Christopher Hampton and Stephen Frears of *Dangerous Liaisons* fame. It also stars Michelle Pfeiffer from that film. Set in Paris at the turn of the 20th century, Pfeiffer plays ageing but still beautiful courtesan Léa de Lonval. At the request of fellow lady of pleasure Mme Peloux (Kathy Bates), she takes Peloux's son Cheri as her lover to teach him about life and love. But the two become so attached to each other that when Peloux arranges a marriage for him, the parting is painful for both of them. The petulant, immature yet touchingly vulnerable Cheri is played by up and coming Rupert Friend, who is equally good and very different as Prince Albert in *Young Victoria* - also worth catching by the way. The Belle Époque settings and costumes are totally gorgeous and such is Pfeiffer's beauty (the only signs of age on her face are a few discreet lines around the eye) that this May and December love affair is both convincing and touching.