

Flintlock Theatre's - *Four Score Years and Ten* By Anna Glynn

In April last year, Hat Fair Winchester requested pitches responding to the city council's call for a creative project celebrating the Queen's 90th Birthday Party. As a company, we love projects that play with theatrical conventions, break down barriers and invite the audience into the performance space but this piece was different. It had to involve older people and have a discussion about their lives at its heart. This was new territory for us.

At school, I recall being taken into "old people's homes", where we were wheeled out in front of a group of older people who had our renditions of war songs somewhat forced upon them, I fear. We were rarely, if ever, prompted to engage with residents beyond our awkward performances. We knew that in making this piece of theatre, it had to be active and engaged. It had to not only be for and about older people, but put them at the heart of its making as well. We wanted people of all ages to hear the actual words of older people verbatim, not in a darkened theatre, but in a setting that put everyone at their ease, that enabled them to properly listen.



I had come across a series of photographic portraits by the American artist Tom Hussey some years before. In *Reflections*, Hussey's elderly subjects gaze into mirrors, and their younger selves look back at them, handsome, healthy and proud. It reminded me of how my grandparents had felt – still their young selves internally but disregarded by a society preoccupied by youth, that undervalued and dismissed them. So we devised a tea party, hosted by six actors in their 20s and 30s, speaking the words of six interviewees in their eighth and ninth decades with the aim of pushing audiences to listen differently to what they had to say.

We launched our project by meeting with groups of older people in Winchester. We shared tea and cake and posed questions, asking them to talk about their lives. From those first meetings, we identified a demographically diverse group of six interviewees whom we met individually in order to record them talking. Our participants were startlingly open. They trusted us with the most significant moments in their lives, their children, their partners, moments of triumph and of loss. When the war was being discussed (an enormous epoch for them all), one of our interviewees protested vociferously "Why do people always ask us about the war?". He had a point. Our group of six were highly experienced people who'd stood witness to the major events of the 20th and early 21st centuries. They had views on feminism, Brexit, European

unification, social cohesion. Anyone expecting them to focus solely on the past was disabused of that notion within moments of meeting them.



When *Four Score Years and Ten* was delivered in September 2016, we all realised something rather special had occurred. A tea party like no other was shared with audiences young and old and several of us agreed we had never enjoyed a project so much. I'm delighted that the show is touring the Hampshire area again this autumn and I would urge everyone to get to see this show, that challenges preconceptions about aging, and has so much to say about life as an older person in the U.K today.

Four Score Years and Ten - A Flintlock Theatre and Hat Fair Co-Production

A verbatim piece celebrating the lives of nonagenarians

Conceived and edited by Anna Glynn

Directed and designed by Robin Colyer

"Sensitively and cleverly conceived, beautifully performed... What a great company Flintlock are..."

Mary Dawson - Chair of the Board, Hat Fair