

Still Stomping

By Sian Stevenson

Moving Memory Dance Theatre Company has built a reputation for creating bespoke projects that offer older people high-quality, creative, movement-led opportunities focusing on animating the stories of the everyday via movement, music, spoken word and digital forms.

Our work is targeted primarily at the older generation but from the outset we have worked with younger people as performers, performance assistants, stage managers, digital artists, and filmmakers.



Our first full-length show *Moving on Moving* (2013) involved an intergenerational company of 22 performers who helped make and perform the piece, carrying older people's stories and their days of ballroom dance into a public space. The project confirmed the potential for such creative activities to result in rich moments of magic and shared experience.

We continued to build on this via a range of performance & participatory projects including the *Feminists of Thanet* with Turner Contemporary, Margate; *MOVE*, a flash mob in the streets of and *Beside the Sea* with Age UK Thanet's intergenerational group (<https://vimeo.com/247854436>). All these projects served to celebrate participants of all ages as co-authors and artists.

Most recently, in partnership with Gulbenkian, Canterbury and Kent County Council, and thanks to funding from the Baring Foundation and Arts Council England's Celebrating Age scheme, we've developed *Still Stomping* - a 2-year programme of intergenerational work.



We kicked off with *Start Stomping* which brought together our core performance ensemble, our new Intergen31 company (aged 14-23) and a group of women 50+ who had been attending our workshops (nicknamed the 'Juniors') - to create a company of 25 people, young and old. Together they explored issues of gender imbalance, male-dominated politics and movements such as #metoo, resulting in a vibrant piece of work that, alongside a 16ft inflatable man, stomped its way into bOing! International Family festival. 30mph winds threatened the possibility that 16 powerful women aged 14-86 would

sail, Mary-Poppins-like, into the skies toward the looming spires of Canterbury Cathedral – but thankfully, justice prevailed and the world was sorted by an 86 year old heroine with a penchant for red tricycles and goggles (<https://vimeo.com/305242490>).

The performance outcome of our work is really important, but we value the process highly. Quite often, we see individuals shift from passive observer, to curious participant, to active maker, to performer of their own stories. This process can lead to a renewed sense of self and identity, as well as a sense of being part of a community. Whatever we work on, we work with a common intention, to create something as an ensemble. Our process involves playing, being creative together and sharing our stories through moving - so we develop a different way of communicating, a new physical vocabulary.

These factors give each group a clear a sense of purpose and a distinctive identity that encourages connections, relationships and friendships. Having a shared purpose and experience is a motivator and leveller – we work with a sense of equality, which sweeps away, or overcomes, preconceptions of age and ageing.



When the process comes to fruition, and something is framed and shared, it results in a sense of validation for the group, and (hopefully) moments of magic to which audiences of any age can relate. Age is irrelevant really. It's about being human and looking for the best in us.

It is this process that University of Kent researcher, Ian Farr, explored within the *Start Stomping* process. Ian focussed on the impact of the work on changing participants' ideas of ageing and concluded:

“... the intergeneration dance theatre project was a successful intervention to counter negative age stereotypes and negative self-stereotypes which may serve protective functions in terms of health and health behaviors.”

<https://www.movingmemorydance.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Intergen31-Report-FINAL.pdf>

We are taking all this learning and pouring it into the next stage of Still Stomping – *Love Grows*, a project that explores the love between generations, gathering stories from primary school children and sharing these with older people in a variety of settings culminating in a celebratory event at bOing! Family festival 2019.