

Creative Age Festival

By Meaghan Baxter



Fri, Jun 8 – Sun, Jun 10

Timms Centre for the Arts, \$10

Full schedule available at cafestival.ca

'You don't stop playing because you get older; you get older because you stop playing.'

This is what legendary musician and television personality Tommy Banks told audiences at last year's Creative Age Festival, a phrase that festival artistic director and member of GeriActors and Friends David Barnet says couldn't be more true. He believes people need to maintain a sense of playfulness and enjoy themselves throughout their lives, which is precisely what the festival aims to offer.

Barnet says research in the United States shows that older adults and seniors who participate in the arts, whether its visual or performing, have an increased sense of well-being, create new social contacts, build a sense of empathy towards others and maintains a connection to the community as a whole.

"Seniors' involvement in the arts and level of comparative mastery, which means they're getting better at it, has a significant effect on health-care costs and doctors visits," adds Barnet.

The festival focuses on all levels of artistic experience and abilities for an inclusive environment that is not restricted by age. Intergenerational groups like GeriActors and Friends work with university, high school and even elementary students, which Barnet says opens the opportunity for a shared energy and connectedness between multiple generations through newfound commonalities.

This year, the festival combines improv, theatre, workshops, music and even a little magic. Mayor Stephen Mandel will kick off the festivities on Friday night, which Barnet says is significant because it shows the commitment of the city, and the mayor himself, in providing arts opportunities for older adults.

"If I have a personal campaign, it is to see that all seniors in Edmonton of whatever cultural experience, whatever educational experience, whatever economic background, have the opportunity to get involved in the arts if they want to," Barnet says.

The performances not only entertain, but also expose audiences to poignant perceptions of aging and all that accompanies it, as in the case of author Joyce Harries, who will be doing a reading, and stand-up comedienne Jennie Wilting.

A highlight of this year's lineup for Barnet is the creative movement workshops hosted by award-winning choreographer Marie Nychka. He admits the sessions may be a little daunting for some people to try, but encourages them to push past the initial apprehension and go for it.

"Seniors dance is the most extraordinary expressive manner, and I believe a seniors dance company would be very successful in Edmonton," Barnet notes of the workshop, which is wheelchair accessible. "It's an expression of meaningful movement in a way that's available to everybody, regardless of their flexibility or their physical strength."