


Dementia friendly projects at Festival and King's theatres

The Festival City Theatres Trust, which runs the Festival and King's Theatres and The Studio in Edinburgh, marks the culmination of three years funding from The Life Changes Trust for its dementia friendly communities project, Forget Me Not, with the publication of three books: 


Beyond Memory: Storytelling & Singing: by Ailie Finlay and Marie-Louise Cochrane

Vivid Rebellion: The Art of Edward McLaughlan, MBE

An Audience With... Janice Parker Projects

In 2015 staff at the Festival and King's theatres noticed avid friends of the theatre for many years had stopped attending events and shows. When they were contacted it was discovered that one of them had been diagnosed with dementia and no longer felt confident to see shows. It was at this point that staff asked the question, 'What can we as an organisation do to enable people living with dementia to continue seeing shows and remain an active and valued part of the theatre community?'

That same year the Festival City Theatres Trust applied for a three-year grant from the Life Changes Trust to enable the theatres to become dementia friendly. The trust was successful and was awarded £321,000 over three years to set about doing exactly that with the Forget Me Not project.

 A large part of the project has included programming of dementia friendly events and performances, including the first dementia friendly performance of a major touring musical in Scotland, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and the UK's first dementia friendly opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, produced by Scottish Opera.

In tandem with this programme of events FCTT have been working with artists, dancers, theatre makers and storytellers, some of whom are living with dementia .

Forget Me Not has encompassed work within and outwith the theatres, tea dances, art exhibitions, dance workshops, drop in cafes for carers, storytelling in care homes and theatre and dance shows on stage. The books – ‘An Audience With...’, ‘Vivid Rebellion’ and ‘Beyond Memory: Storytelling and Singing’ – tell some of the stories the project has encountered.

‘An Audience With...’ celebrates the work of six women, from three generations, who are all dancers. Together they explore what it meant to dance in the days of variety theatre, what it’s like to dance together now and what this means in the future. The publication of the book is accompanied by the release of a film documenting the women’s two-year residency at the Festival Theatre.

‘Vivid Rebellion’ celebrates the artwork of Edward McLaughlan MBE who has explored his dementia diagnosis and the world around him through his vivid pictures. He is a veteran dementia campaigner and advocate for people like himself, living well with dementia. Edward’s work has been shown in two exhibitions in The Studio.

‘Beyond Memory: Storytelling and Singing’ grew out of sensory story telling sessions delivered to Edinburgh schools ahead of our relaxed performances at the theatres. This book was developed with Bellville Lodge, Glencairn and the dementia wards at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. Without the enthusiasm of the staff and the involvement of the people they support, this book would not have been possible. This is a practical resource for professionals and home caregivers alike to share the joy of story-telling and singing.



The Life Changes Trust was established by The Big Lottery Fund in April 2013 with a ten-year endowment of £50 million to support transformational improvements in the quality of life, well-being, empowerment and inclusion of people affected by dementia and young people with experience of being in care.

The Festival City Theatres Trust will be continuing its work in making its theatres dementia-friendly spaces where audiences of all ages feel welcome and included.

The books will be officially launched at the Festival Theatre at the end of this month and will be followed by a screening, starting at 2.30pm, of 'An Audience With...' a film by Martin Clark and Janice Parker (75 mins)

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Dementia Friendly Communities include, empower and support people affected by dementia and their carers in every aspect of life, from accessing services to using public transport. They can be geographical communities or communities of interest.

They also help empower those whose lives are affected by dementia so that they can remain integrated in society, live as independently as possible and participate actively in decisions that affect their day-to-day lives.