

AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT ON OLDER PEOPLE FROM EIGHT COUNTRIES OF PARTICIPATING IN REMINISCENCE THEATRE

BY PAM SCHWEITZER AND LINDSAY ROYAN
FOR THE EUROPEAN REMINISCENCE NETWORK

THE BACKGROUND:

In October 1995, the European Reminiscence Network celebrated the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II with an international festival of older people's theatre, entitled "A TIME TO REMEMBER". Nine groups participated in the event, most of them creating a new piece of theatre for the occasion with the assistance of professional theatre directors. In all cases, the plays were built from the reminiscences and personal experiences of the participants of that period of their lives when the war was coming to an end and in each country people were counting the appalling human costs and picking up the pieces of their lives. The age of the players was between 55 and 95, with the majority in their 60s and 70s. None of the players were professional performers and the vast majority had come to the activity late in life and in many cases quite recently. For six days, the groups watched each other's plays, took part in workshops in mime, movement, music and improvisation and shared in a variety of social events. There was no common language (though there were interpreters available to all language groups) and the arts had to provide the main medium of communication.

THE GROUPS:

It is clear that the groups who came together to make the Reminiscence Theatre Festival, all had different starting points, different histories, different motivations and very different levels of experience. For example, some groups, such as the Berlin and Hildesheim groups had been working together for many years, whereas the Greek and Danish groups are quite new. Some groups had been established as theatre groups from the outset, such as the two German groups, the Taiwan group and the American group, but others, such as Age Exchange and the Danish group had started as reminiscence projects and then added theatre work to their activities later on. The French and Greek groups grew out of homes and day centres for older people where theatre was seen as a valuable additional activity within an existing programme. The Italian group are part of an older women's project who like to use theatre as part of their programme. Whereas most other groups are made up of older people, the Hildesheim group was developed specifically to enable theatre students and older people to work together theatrically on themes of mutual interest, and the Good Companions from Age Exchange sometimes create inter-generational productions with members of the Age Exchange Youth Theatre.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Despite these differences, it seemed to me to be important to see if there was any common ground between the groups in terms of what the individuals

within them are deriving from Reminiscence Theatre activity. For this reason I asked each group leader to conduct interviews with three or more group members following the same line of questioning. The questions were as follows:

Have you made new friends, and new kinds of friends, through working in the group?

How did you react to the experience of telling and listening to personal reminiscences?

Is it easier to share your reminiscences with group members or with your own family?

Has the dramatisation process enabled you to come to terms with past experience?

Has your sense of self-confidence increased through Reminiscence theatre work?

Has your view altered in any way as to what you feel you can attempt in terms of acquiring new skills and trying out new ideas?

How did your families and existing friends react to your reminiscence theatre activities and how have you coped with these reactions?

Has your sense of belonging to a community been increased?

Has your standing as older people in the community been increased?

These questions were designed to elicit feed-back on the six crucial elements involved in Reminiscence Theatre as devised and performed by older people:

- 1) It is a group activity demanding of the participants that they work closely together in an open manner with a considerable degree of trust.
- 2) It involves the sharing of experience around an agreed theme, to provide the raw material from which the group and the director will create the eventual product.
- 3) It involves putting each person's experience "on the floor", allowing it to become the general property of the group while it is worked upon in many different ways.
- 4) The individual stories and experiences must be welded together into a coherent whole through the creative process, usually with the help of a director, so that together they make a new artistic statement with its own internal logic.
- 5) The artistic creation is communicated and impacts on its audience in a variety of ways, changing, even if only a little, the way the individuals in that audience and the audience as a whole perceive the world.
- 6) The response of the different audiences to the work shown has an impact on the players in terms of their sense of themselves in their communities and their social roles.

DRAWING THE ANSWERS TOGETHER:

The results of the interviews are fascinating in that they reveal a great deal of common experience and there are far more similarities between the interviewees than there are differences. There are strong group identities and it is clear that each group emphasises slightly different priorities, but the

personal gains are remarkably similar across all groups. These gains are clearly very considerable and they are gratefully acknowledged by members from all groups. Reminiscence Theatre which might appear to a casual observer to be an enjoyable hobby for a few extrovert and specially artistically inclined older people emerges instead as a life-enhancing, life-changing social and creative outlet for a very wide range of older people with very varied social and educational backgrounds, personalities and life-styles.

The task of drawing together the responses from individuals within the groups has not been easy, because each group leader has tackled the task in a different way. For example, the French, Italian, Greek and Taiwanese leaders held group discussions so that the answers to each question appear as a block. The British, Danish, Berlin, Hildesheim and US groups arranged individual interviews. The French and Hildesheim interviewees were asked somewhat different questions; in the former case the answers are summarised and not attributed to individuals and in the latter case many of the questions related specifically to working with young people, but in both cases, there are many statements linking them with the individuals in other groups. Some interviews lasted nearly an hour (British, Berliners, and Hildesheimers) but these have been edited down and the main points extracted. In all cases there has been a considerable commitment of time by group leaders and interviewees and I am extremely grateful for their co-operation. Thanks are also due to those who took on the task of translating the texts, many of them on a voluntary basis.

I now wish to extract some of the key responses to each question, in the hope of showing some of the most widely shared experiences of working through Reminiscence Theatre.

N.B. a dotted line indicates that words have been omitted from the interview.

[] indicates that the information has been inserted in the text which was contained in the question.

QUESTION: Have you made new friends, and new kinds of friends, through working in the group?

The answer to the question about friendships was universally positive, though with varying degrees of intensity. Some preferred to maintain a degree of distance between them and other members of the theatre group and keep things at the level of a good working relationship with “*well known acquaintances*” (Ulla from Berlin), but I would say this was a minority response:

GRETE: I would say we are distant friends. We have always looked at ourselves, apart from one or two who then dropped out, as a group with a job to do, people who were always there for each other, particularly if things didn't go quite right. But something like "Shall we go here or there and you are my best friend" - that sort of thing - no. (Berlin)

ERNA: We don't build lasting bonds or relationships but a certain warmth is amongst all of the group when we meet. We do at times meet socially, exchange ideas and have fun times. I don't think it's that important to have a specifically close relationship. At each new production, new actors and actresses join, but it is important that we have a close bond each time we come together for a play. (Hildesheim)

In most cases the people interviewed put enormous value on their new-found friendships and felt they had found a particular warmth and affection in their group. Many people even felt they had acquired a new sort of family.

HILDA: Yes, well I've worked in places where the women have been very off-hand and nasty. Here they're so nice, everybody is, it's like a family really. When I first came, I was a bit shy and didn't know what to do, but now I'm used to everybody. I love coming. (London)

JOYCE: Oh yes, the friends from here now I really prize among my close friends. The friends I've made from here- it's like a family, really. I think we all feel that, it is really like a family. A bond of friendship. If anyone says, 'Who are your friends?', my first thought comes immediately to the people that I meet down here. (London)

LEE: We are like brothers and sisters in the group. And I am happy about that. (Taiwan)

LU: After retirement, one's social life circle became smaller. It is hard to find friends to talk with. In the theatre group we meet people from different places and learn from each other. (Taiwan)

GLEVA: I consider everyone in our group my friends, whereas before they were acquaintances. In sharing our experiences we discovered how much we have in common and the similarities in our upbringing, our family values, etc. (USA)

ANNA: Our Reminiscence Theatre group has become a lovely and life-giving team, in which we really enjoy being together on different occasions like birthdays and when we travel together. (Denmark)

For many people this was a relatively new experience coming after long periods of isolation, loneliness following the death of a spouse and general lack of social contacts.

PENNY: I lost my husband eighteen years ago, and for eighteen years I've wandered about doing absolutely nothing and relying on my son and daughter-in-law heavily. Emotionally. I feel that I became a little bit of a burden, and a worry to my son, who has got a very stressful job anyway. He was forever ringing up and saying, 'Are you all right, Nan' and I was saying 'No, I don't feel very well.' I was all right really, you know, but I just wanted attention, I wanted somebody to talk to, and I wasn't getting this from

anybody. So the Reminiscence Centre has been a wonderful thing to me. I've made friends and I just hope nobody tells me I've got to go!
(laughter)(London)

BARBARA: I just hoped that they would accept me for what I am. They didn't really know me, which I did find a bit difficult to begin with, because a lot of the group had been there an awfully long time. And I just didn't know whether they'd like the walk of life that I came from. I didn't find they minded at all, I didn't find any animosity towards me whatsoever. Nothing like that. A great community spirit. And that was very much apparent in Germany, when we were all so close together. I found that making these new friends was amazing and I really did like it very much. Especially as I'd recently lost my husband, so I did very much need some sort of friendships.....I don't want to get emotional... (London)

For some it has presented new challenges, especially where lack of close contact with others resulted from lack of emotional security or social confidence.

ANGELA: I'm still afraid, I don't trust people totally, but compared with before I've definitely got new people I'm friendly with. And some of them, who I thought were hostile, have rather shown themselves to be a real help. (Italy)

ERNA: I had a fear of touch - being touched. I still feel it at times, but have worked through a lot of it. I have been untrusting towards strangers mostly, before I trusted someone and got close, it took a long time. (Hildesheim)

It is clear from the interviews that leaving work has often been followed by a period of isolation and depression. Joining the Reminiscence Theatre group has been an important route out of a downward spiral. Astrid from the Danish group speaks about the extraordinary improvement in her health which seems to come from the special kind of "heart-warming" social contact the Reminiscence Theatre group provides:

ASTRID: Since I stopped working [because of illness], loneliness has been the biggest problem. Suddenly the whole day was there for me, but I didn't do anything at all. Being part of this project has really improved the quality of my life. When we are working together, the pain and nausea I feel so much of the time just disappears. And the tension too, which I used to feel so much in my shoulders. The other day, I managed to lift my arms above my head for the first time in ten years. (Denmark)

Some groups include people whose working lives have given them authority and power. At the point of retirement, such people can find themselves particularly isolated and depressed by the inevitable loss of status. Making new friends (often of a different social and educational background) in a reminiscence group, which is so removed from the structured and hierarchical work environment, demands a great deal of emotional adjustment. Some interviewees have talked openly of the personal challenges involved:

ANNA: I know that I am dominating and I have to restrain myself in the group. A lot of the leadership skills I developed in my working life just aren't useful in this new situation. That is sometimes frustrating. I suppose I have been spoiled in my life and if everything didn't go the way I wanted it to, then I became angry. Well I have to accept that that is just no use any more. I have to find a new balance and still be true to myself. (Denmark)

QUESTION: How did you react to the experience of telling and listening to personal reminiscences?

Most people had no doubt that much of the closeness they felt for others within the group came through sharing with others for the first time ever, or certainly for the first time in many years, their often highly personal reminiscences. Having the opportunity

- a) to talk about one's own past experiences, actions and feelings
- b) to do this in the supportive atmosphere of a group
- c) to establish common ground with others who have lived through the same events
- d) to reflect together on the storms weathered and the solutions achieved,

all these possibilities are not as readily available to older people as they should be and many respondents felt they had been rescued from a long and unwished for silence.

RUTH: These reminiscence sessions are very moving, funny and important because there is someone else, some others that are interested. The stories connect us to each other. I have no secrets anymore, so I can share everything with the group. My perspective is enhanced with comparisons of others' experiences. (USA)

ANNA: It was a lovely experience to meet people of the same age and to re-experience memories. As you listen to other people's stories, more and more comes back to you, even memories which had not been brought to light for many years. It was a true joy to hear about other people's memories and to tell about and live through again your own. (Denmark)

LINA: It gave me a lot of pleasure to remember my past experiences because I was able to see them in a new light, and I interpreted them in a new way. I was a bit nostalgic too because they were things that were over and done with. Listening has helped me to go on, because I understood that I wasn't the only one to have had negative experiences. (Italy)

ANNA: At the beginning I was unbelieving - as were the other women - because I didn't think I could speak about myself. Then I plucked up courage

and it was a wonderful experience. Before, I used to keep everything inside and think it through on my own, believing that I had great problems, then, by pulling out the memories, the negative ones too, I saw everything in a new dimension. (Italy)

ANGELA: I got free. Before, I was closed in. At 45, I thought I was finished, that I was stupid. Then, by reminiscing, I poured it all out and I said things that I'd never said to anyone. (Italy)

RINA: Listening to others was a help because I understood that we shared similar experiences, and I tried to help those who I felt were in difficulty and others helped me. Exchanging reminiscences has given me a new life. (Italy)

For many people there was an element of risk in relating personal reminiscences for the first time, but in most cases the effect was cathartic.

KATINA: When I narrate stories of that period of the past I am moved because I remember. I remember not the things I had chosen to forget but things I had neglected over the years. Now we bring those memories in front of our eyes again and we revive what we had in our hearts, the ruins.....and it is difficult. (Greece)

PENNY: When you first started asking things, I sometimes felt as though I was baring my soul a little bit, and then I thought 'Well that's stupid, because you won't tell anybody anything that you don't want them to know anyway'. I think it was the sharing of the stories that first brought me out of my shell. It was a long, long time since I'd spoken about the war, and it was sharing those stories, and bringing those memories alive, really, and the more I thought about it the more I began to remember. There's an awful lot of things that I'd forgotten, I'd really forgotten about, or I thought I'd forgotten about, but there they were, they were stored up there, weren't they? Ready to come out again. (London)

QUESTION: Is it easier to share your reminiscences with group members or with your own family?

Some people found it equally easy in both situations to discuss past experiences, though they did recognise a different dynamic.

ELVIRA: Certainly there is a difference because you approach these topics from a different angle with the family. You have all sorts of memories which mean much more to the family; it wouldn't make sense to discuss those in the same way in the larger group. As far as the actual topics are concerned these are discussed in both contexts - there are no taboos. (Berlin)

GIUSEPPINA: For me it's easier with the family than with the group. (Italy)

However, most people said they found it far easier to talk things over (past or present matters) with other members of the group than with their families and when questioned about the reasons for this, they answered that people in the group really listened and that with so much experience in common they felt better understood by group members.

ANNA: For me it's easier with other group members, because at home they never listen to me. (Italy)

LINA: The same goes for me. They love me, but..... (Italy)

RINA: In the theatre group I've related things I'd never said to anyone else in my life. (Italy)

PHOTINI: How could our children and grandchildren understand us since they have everything now? You cannot understand the meaning of the word starvation when you have a full stomach. Although our grandchildren sometimes listen to our stories it is as if they are listening to fairy tales. (Greece)

MICHALIS: It is more difficult to make our family understand us than the other group members because the latter have lived through the same situations that we have. Our own children find it difficult to believe us. (Greece)

ELEANOR: It is easier to share memories with group members than with the family because we're all more or less the same age. We remember the same things. Children and grandchildren are usually too far removed from my generation to be completely in tune. (USA)

GLORIA: It's often easier to share with group members since they are more eager to learn how your experience blends with theirs. (USA)

QUESTION: Has the dramatisation process enabled you to come to terms with past experience?

This last quotation points up the very particular kind of listening which happens when the shared stories are going to form the basis of joint work. The fact that these personal reminiscences will become the resource material of the group, the jumping off point for their theatre pieces, means that they have a significance for the whole group. What begins as one person's story, perhaps offered very tentatively in the first place, can become the kernel of a scene. The group will often look for connections between one person's story and another, so that the final scenes is a creative amalgam of different experiences. In this sense the story becomes the common property of the group and it is interesting that everyone involved in these groups appears to understand and accept the convention. Indeed group members appear to appreciate the creativity of the director and the group as they work hard to make something new which is dramatically effective from the raw material of their story without distorting the basic truth of it.

LORE: It is possible through positive theatre, to slightly change things and therefore it's easier to deal with them. If the issues had to be played more realistically as some of the old ones, audience, may expect, that would be difficult. I couldn't do it, but as long as one can distance or alienate oneself a little, it works. (Hildesheim)

RINA: I've always been shy. In reminiscence drama I reviewed my life like a film. (Italy)

RUTH: I did find it difficult at first because, when you are there on your own and told "now do it this way or now do it that way", then it is really difficult. I would certainly say that. I took an older friend with me to rehearsal one day. She said afterwards, "I thought I was in the loony bin." That's how it appeared to her. There you are, supposedly grown up and with older people, behaving in such a way! But when you then take part yourself and see how the others all cope, they are taking part too and they don't think that everyone's got a screw loose! Now I find it great. After all, we are all amateurs and to keep presenting oneself and to bring things back, that I find very impressive. I do have to say that. (Berlin)

What Ruth is acknowledging here is the need to let go of the story and be willing for it to be subjected to a demanding creative process from which it will emerge changed both in its artistic form and in the way the original teller now perceives the story. Of course a lot of reminiscences which are worked on in this way by the group during rehearsal periods do not make it into the final production, but the act of improvising around them is valuable in itself, involving the teller in reliving the story in a new context which alters its significance, and involving the rest of the group in a keener understanding of the person whose memory is at the centre of the scene. There are links here of course with Drama Therapy, but they should not be over-stated. Even though the effect of playing out a story may be cathartic for the individual, this is not the primary intention. The fact that the context is one of working together with others to manufacture a theatre production with all means available, definitely lends a greater sense of detachment to the improvisation activity. Of course scenes which do make it into the final production must convey real feelings about real happenings, but it is not only truth which is required but a container for that truth, so that the audience can engage with it without feeling over-exposed to an individual's personal pain or pleasure.

One important aspect of the dramatisation process involved in reminiscence theatre is that the group need plenty of detailed information from the story-teller to bring the scene to life. As a result of searching in their memories in order to help their colleagues understand the story better in the interests of effective improvisation, the people involved begin to put a greater value on their own memories and on those of other people. Listening skills develop and so does confidence. The person remembering does not need to feel self-conscious about speaking at some length and occupying the lime-light, since their recall will help the group to create a more authentic version of the story which is more satisfying for everyone. The questions and improvisations of fellow-players often lead to the teller of a particular story remembering all sorts of new information which had apparently been lost and forgotten. One

detail which might seem insignificant to the teller may prompt a completely new idea about how to translate a story into an effective dramatic scene. And there is nothing fresher to inform an improvisation than a newly remembered truthful detail.

*PENNY: I think it's a very good way of making a play, because they are true stories, and somehow you help us to bring these stories to life. You do for me, anyway, because I remember things that I'd forgotten. I'm keen to get it right, and I have to think 'Was that right, or am I just imagining that that's what happened?' so before I speak I have to make sure that it is right. A funny thing that happened to me the day I was talking about my stepmother; I felt her presence. Very much so. I don't believe in spiritualism and all this kind of thing, but I felt her presence that day, as though I was telling **her** story, as well as mine. With our plays, well they are our own memories, aren't they? I mean we might vary what we say a little bit, bring in something new that we didn't say before, so it stays alive, yes..... I'm learning a lot about theatre..... you think 'Ooh this is not going to work, is it?', but it always does, I don't know why, (laughs) but it does. (London)*

One recurring theme in the interviews is the impact on the performers themselves of recreating past experience and bringing it to life again. Many people find this an emotionally satisfying experience and feel grateful to the members of the group for their faithful representations of loved figures from their past.

HILDA: When Joyce played my Mum she was so like her that I got all emotional. It really felt like she was there. (London)

The older players also find pleasure in remembering themselves when young and in recapturing the energy of their youth often with delightfully ironic performances.

RINA: When I acted out my reminiscences, I really believed in them. On stage the woman playing my aunt was really like my aunt and I felt I had gone back to being a little girl again. At that moment I found a new spirit inside myself, the same as when I was young, which I thought was dead and gone. Now I don't feel shy about having those feelings, the opposite - I look for them because they give me pleasure. (Italy)

This sense of greater energy in old age through remembering more youthful times is something which is well known to those who run reminiscence groups with frail elderly people. It is often really surprising how the mere remembering of past vitality is capable of reproducing it in the here and now, so that the young person still inside can shine through. One of the great pleasures of working on reminiscences through theatre is that one can meet and get to know the younger versions of the group members without any sense of indignity. It is interesting to note that in those groups who are used to working with younger people, and they themselves do not play their younger selves

there is scepticism, even anxiety about the effectiveness of older people playing themselves when young:

LORE: It was the mix of young and old which attracted me to this group. If it had been only a theatre group of old people I would not have joined. I don't like it when old people may have to play someone young. I prefer the exchange as it happens in real life. (Hildesheim)

Not all the replaying is pleasurable and interviewees were frank about the painful reliving they had found themselves involved with, though often people found useful new insights through these re-enactments. The process for the most part appears to have been beneficial, even therapeutic, and there were few accounts of people withdrawing from groups. It has been interesting to note that where someone does leave a group, it is usually for reasons of ill-health or to pacify or look after a partner, rather than because they cannot cope with the experience or have got everything they need from the activity and are bored with it. Most wish to go on pushing back their own barriers and tackling new challenges.

Of course there may have been individuals who could not cope with the particular subject chosen and Cleo Mavroudi from Greece told us of 'an immediate scattering of the group' when faced with the pain of reviewing the period of the Civil War which followed the German occupation. She relates how she had to lighten up the subject and theme to allow for this and to be sure of retaining a working group. In other groups too the older people speak of reliving pain through their theatre work and how they have coped with this experience both in the theatre group and in the privacy of their own homes.

LORE: Our last piece, "Without Turning Around" was for me a bit heavy. I had come to terms with those events by writing about them but now every performance starts it all up again. And I keep dreaming about it, that is difficult. With this last piece, because I am rather emotional, I get immediate tangible memories. I could paint pictures of it all. Ugly pictures. (Hildesheim)

ANASTASIA: I believe that humour helped us to go through the difficult parts of our play and it also helped the other people to watch the performance. (Greece)

LEE: When I collected those objects connected with memories, such as pictures, books, clothes, and toys, I thought about my husband, daughter, and grand-children. All the passing days came back again. But the day when I was a young girl became less bitter to me when I reconsidered them in reminiscence sessions. (Taiwan)

ELLIE: Sometimes it is painful. It was hard to act out my feelings about being afraid I wouldn't recognize my husband at the train station when he came home after the war. (USA)

JOAN: It drags out so many memories that you have suppressed. I remembered the distress I felt coming back from evacuation at the end of the war. I went away at the age of nine as an evacuee and came back at fourteen, before the end of the war. My mother and I had changed to such an extent that it was very very hurtful and difficult, we had both altered so much. My parents were very busy with war work and my mother suddenly had to become a mum again, for a child that had grown up. She said, "You are big enough to see to yourself now." And I wasn't, you see, that was the hurtful bit, I was not adult. I played my mother in the scene. I made her quite harsh. I began to understand the psychological reason why she couldn't accept me, why she felt awkward with me. I could understand what had happened. Thinking back on it now I think she was probably rather jealous of my happiness in Kent where I was evacuated, which is also very understandable. It was like a rejection of her. (London)

From the above quotations it is quite clear that a lot of feeling, re-thinking and reflection happens for the older people both during their working sessions and afterwards. Any of us who work in reminiscence are familiar with the comment on seeing interviewees a second time: 'I couldn't stop thinking about it after our talk. I was awake half the night thinking back over it after so long.' The claims which are made that reminiscence is a useful means of reviewing one's life, or parts of it, are particularly justified where dramatic improvisation is involved. The bringing back to life of the past in the rehearsal room and in live performances is a tremendously powerful catalyst.

PENNY: I felt at the beginning, when I was telling the story about the boy who was killed, and his mother who had lost those four sons, I felt very sad about that When I was playing that particular part, I could see Ronnie's face vividly. And when we were performing, even in that confined space, I didn't see the audience's faces. His face was there as I was talking about him, and Joyce and Kitty portrayed his mother and his sister so well that I did get a lump in my throat then. I know my voice was shaky..... But I found that I could talk about it without crying or weeping you know. I felt O.K. but it was 50 years ago, so it's a long , long time. (London)

QUESTION: Has your sense of self-confidence increased through Reminiscence theatre work?

Most interviewees have found the reminiscence theatre process extremely enlivening. The preparations for a production generate a lot of energy and adrenalin and also a lot of pressure. There is a strong desire to do well, not to let others down by forgetting, to polish up presentational skills. Learning new communication skills for theatre has a big pay-off in daily life for the older people involved in terms of both physical and mental self-confidence. Christian Robert reports from the French group who performed in London, Les Femmes de la Residence Viricel, that individuals had felt proud of themselves and of each other, more assured and more open. They have had the confidence to start organising their own activities in the residential home where they live.

WU: After my wife passed away, I often hid in my house and cry.... I got confidence after participating in this group. I began to think that I am charming. Being an actor satisfies my desire of expressing myself. I liked to be praised, and liked to share the pleasure of acting with others, too. It is like amusing yourself and others at the same time. Theatre is interesting to me. I felt myself energetic and useful in it, even in such an old age. (Taiwan)

LEE: The training in acting has increased my confidence. (Taiwan)

ELLIN: Aside from classroom teaching, I've had little experience on the stage since college. Through 'Footsteps', I've grown more confident, been able to project my voice better. I've even sung! (USA)

SOPHIA: When I was going from the dressing rooms all the way along the aisle to the stage everybody was touching me saying: "Go on, Sophia, go on!" and I was thinking I was doing something very important and when I reached the stairs to the stage, I started mounting it with such pride!! (Greece)

One delightful, and perhaps not altogether surprising result of these interviews across so many countries is that many of the older people involved had always really wanted to 'go on the stage', but most had abandoned the idea as a wild childhood fantasy. Having this surprise opportunity so late in life, when most had not trodden the boards since their school days (which mostly ended at about 13 or 14 years old) has been extremely thrilling. Most people never thought they'd have the opportunity to perform again in old age and have really relished the long-deferred dream becoming a reality.

HILDA: When I was young I used to sing, but that was before I ever got married, that was years ago. I've never done it since. To have an ambition fulfilled at my age, at 66, I think it's marvellous. It is, really. I still can't believe it, actually. I love it. It brings me to life. I love acting. (London)

GRETE: I actually discovered a justification for my wish which I have had since I was a girl and young woman, to go into acting in some way. [I discovered that theatre] was right for me and with that, the inhibitions disappeared. (Berlin)

SOPHIA: These experiences are very important to us considering our age. And to me personally it is even more important as I had always had the talent to be an actress but my family did not let me become one. (Greece)

PENNY: When I was very young, six or seven, I was always singing and dancing. I was in an orphanage and one day we had the Lord Mayor of Liverpool coming and I was chosen to sing and dance, and I even remember the song: 'Everything Stops for Tea'. I don't know why I was chosen, but from then on it was the applause of the audience that got to me, I loved it. I thought, 'This is it, this is what I want to do.' I always hoped to be discovered by somebody. (laughter) I just love the theatre. When I first started work every penny I earned was spent at the cinema or to go and see some show or another. I just.. I... it wasn't only the acting I liked, I liked the atmosphere of the audience, I liked working on behind the scenes, I didn't even mind selling

tickets at the front of the house. I liked everything about the theatre. And I like theatre people. (London)

BARBARA: I do actually love being on the stage and acting. [But I hadn't done any for about 35 years and thought I never would again. I'm 72 now.] I thought, well what an opportunity to be able to join a theatre group at my age! I mean there are not many places that you can do that. I just thought it was absolutely wonderful and it was completely different to anything I'd done before, but so much more communal than in an ordinary dramatic company. I often found that everybody was out for themselves in an amateur dramatic theatre, wanting to get the part, wanted to do it the best, whereas in this it was not like that at all, because it was very much a group thing. You felt for the other people, knowing that it was their personal story. (London)

For other group members, especially where their first entry to the project was not through theatre, entering the acting world at such a late stage has represented a great hurdle to jump over, an alarming leap into the dark. But even where it has been very taxing, the activity has been maintained and confidence has grown quite considerably.

ANNE: I'd never done anything like that before. It was all new to me. I thought, 'No I won't be able to do all that', but it sort of comes to you in the end, doesn't it. I'm just breaking myself in gradually. I'm a bit shaky at the moment but all the rest of the group are encouraging me. (London)

JOAN: In the other places I'm very much my own person. In the [charity] shop where I volunteer, they look up to me, and in the hospital shop they're grateful. But when I'm here [with the theatre group] it's the unsure bit, and I'm feeling my way..... I might appear extrovert, but I found it a terribly big responsibility to act in front of people who were actually going to pay to watch me and I felt very very insecure about it all, in fact I lost weight.... I think the main worry is that you are being watched, and you feel as though you're going to do something silly, like forgetting words, or tripping up, something that would let the whole thing down.... But I must say after it was done, and you're on 'the high', I was glad I didn't miss it. I'm doing things that I never even thought I was capable of doing, and as you say, that's extremely exciting, you've got to bring something out of yourself to do that. Because it's alien to whatever you've done, been brought up in. (London)

There is clearly a liberating effect for many of the older people in taking on other roles. There is an element of release, of self-forgetting which allows some older performers to escape from those aspects of themselves which they feel shy or embarrassed about. They find they can have a bigger repertoire of roles in life as well as on stage

JOYCE: To sing on my own in front of an audience was absolutely the last thing after seventy years of my life I would ever have said I could do! [When I did that in our last show I was playing my grandmother.] I was being her at that moment. But if you asked me, Joyce, to stand there and be Joyce and sing a song I would be awful. Being someone else, you can then get yourself

inside another character. I can go dress up in one of our productions now and look absolutely horrendous with an old turban, I don't care how it's tied on, an old split overall and everything- I mean I wouldn't like to be seen normally, in a party group dressed like that, but when I'm somebody else I don't care what I look like. I completely come out of my own frame then, you see. I lose the fear. (London)

LU: I am grateful for the chance of learning to express myself. And to fulfill my star dream as well. It is not easy for an old man. I could only be myself before, but right now I can play somebody else. That is also interesting to me. (Taiwan)

Looking through the interviews it is interesting to notice that some of the oldest performers, even where they are taking part in theatre for the first time, have lost all fear and anxiety. For example, William from the Danish group is 86 years old and in daily life does have a tendency to forgetfulness, but on stage he is very relaxed ... even laid back!

WILLIAM: I wasn't nervous at all about being on the stage. It didn't bother me one bit, but I noticed that others were very nervous, even people like Elinor who is used to giving public lectures. I didn't blush or anything. I hadn't that many lines, and the few I had I could remember. It sometimes happens that there is a little mistake, if not by me then by one of the others, but it is not something I lie awake at night worrying about. (Denmark)

QUESTION: Has your view altered in any way as to what you feel you can attempt in terms of acquiring new skills and trying out new ideas?

This question prompted a wide range of answers, some very specific relating to new projects, new activities, new fields of learning, and others more general demonstrating an increased sense of competence and a wider framework or context for their future lives. Everyone interviewed seemed to feel that their confidence to try new things had developed and their sense of their own potential for growth and self-development was ever more apparent.

ANASTASIA: Since my husband died I have wished and tried to stay occupied with various activities as a reaction to inertia and grief. This project and this trip (to the festival in London) were the motives for my wish to become even stronger. And not only that, but I realised that it was a wish for creation. Now I know I can still create beautiful things and this fills me with confidence, pleasure and strength and as long as I can I shall try for more. (Greece)

RINA: I've understood that everything doesn't end inside the home, and that there's another world and other people who live like I do, and have got the same problems perhaps. Being together and comparing our experiences can only do good and also help find new ways of getting over problems. (Italy)

ANNA: I've changed the way I see other people, because before I was too subdued, now I'm not so slow to take part and say what I've got to say. (Italy)

ULLA: On one tour and I don't remember which one, I did some silk screen painting - very creative. So, things I would previously not have dared to try I now have a go at. Whether anything comes of it or not is another question but at least I have a go now. In that way I certainly have gained in self-confidence. (Berlin)

ELVIRA: I have always liked painting but always in secret. Rather like when, in your teens, you start to write poetry which you then hide. That's how I used to do it. About half a year after I joined the theatre group, I read about the painting circle which I then joined. We have even had an exhibition and the pictures were of quite a high standard and we got good write-ups. I didn't want to work for an exhibition initially - I preferred just to paint but through doing that, I found the courage to do more. (Berlin)

BARBARA: I feel I haven't learned anything for about 50 years.....! Thinking I knew everything! Now I'm really happy to try learn anything, because I do realise that there is an awful lot more to life than the life I had before. I'm learning to use a computer and I'd love to do more training in reminiscence work. Maybe even be a trainer. I've always liked the idea of teaching, you see. I mean I don't mind being in charge at all. (London)

JOAN: I have far more confidence. Even about putting pen to paper, which you never do, do you, unless you write a letter, but if you've got a tale, a story, and then you find that it's accepted and put in a play or in a book, or in a newsletter that's for somebody to read, that gives you a lot of confidence. (London)

QUESTION: How did your families and existing friends react to your reminiscence theatre activities and how have you coped with these reactions?

There were some interesting responses to this question, showing how determined some of the group members have had to be to maintain their activity in the face of hostility. Although the majority seem to have support and encouragement from their husbands, children and grandchildren, there are partners who feel threatened, envious or even rejected when the older people pursue with such enthusiasm their new-found activities.

ANNA: My husband doesn't want me to but my children agree. They say that in this way I'm living a better life. Certainly they don't have the patience to sit and listen to me. Some of my women friends say that they would like to do the same, but they don't. I try to encourage them. My doctor too says that this experience of drama is helping me a lot. (Italy)

ANGELA: My family let me get on with it and they give me lifts when I need one as well, but first I have to do all my household chores. If something goes wrong or everything isn't tidy, they make it weigh on me. One family member is green with envy and I have had serious problems with her. (Italy)

RINA: At first the children were astonished, perhaps they felt a bit embarrassed, then they were happy about it. They can see that I'm happier and have made new friends. (Italy)

JOYCE: My daughter likes seeing my picture in the newspapers, but my son is always rather embarrassed. I think he still views Mum as Mum and I don't think he likes to see me on stage being someone else. Strange, really, but he's pleased I do it, he's got no objection, and I think secretly these little photos go about in his briefcase and I'm sure they come out at work, because he once said a lady at work had said, 'Was that someone to do with you?' (because of the surname, you see) and of course the pictures went in the next day, very quietly. (London)

RUTH: My partner just has to live with it. He just has to accept it. Sometimes he even comes with me. But it's very difficult - it just isn't his 'thing.' He couldn't do it himself and he can't understand that I do it either..... My sister says quite openly that I just want to show off - that I need the publicity. She was quite nasty about it. She just wouldn't accept it. Last year she became very ill and that gave her lots of time to think about everything and now we're together again. Since then she has seen our production and even brought a few ladies with her and was delighted. After that she saw it all in a different light and said, 'Man, I think what you are doing is great.' (Berlin)

SOPHIE: I got some ironic comments from my children [when I told them I was going to England with our theatre group], teasing me for being too old for such a thing and so forth but I proved to them that I could manage! Only my granddaughters asked me with real interest: "Granny how did you manage to understand the other people's plays?" and I told them that I did not need to know the language to understand what was familiar to me too. (Greece)

PHOTINI: I had great reactions and difficulties from my own husband and children. My husband said "What on earth are you going to do there since you do not speak the language?" My children refused to look after my husband while I would be away. They said it was my duty, not theirs. So trying to please everybody (including myself of course!) I decided to take my husband with me..... Some of my friends do not know about it. Some other 'friends' were ironic about the trip: "Why don't you stay at home old woman? Where are you going, leaving you husband?" was one of the milder things they said. As for the neighbours, I never told them and never shall because I know they do not like the KAPI at all. All they do is spreading rumours about it. (Greece)

The reception of the productions of these reminiscence theatre groups is not always favourable either. Some have reported that family, friends and acquaintances have found it embarrassing when older people 'make a spectacle of themselves.' And there have been considerable tensions between the players and some audience members in countries where the past is difficult to discuss and where many believe that the pain of the past is best forgotten, and who fear the consequences of 'raking it over.' Cleo Mavroudi, the Greek group leader, comments:

CLEO: On this rather difficult situation of coming to terms with one's own past and of the reminiscence activities, on the whole they did not receive much help from friends and relatives. On the contrary the women received negative comments, especially from their friends who were obviously jealous. Some members of their families were discouraging and even ironical about the project. Most of their grandchildren were supportive though. The only man in the group received neither positive no negative comments from his relatives. They all got comments full of jealousy and spite ("Why did you have to show that our people had fleas? Couldn't you have shown something nicer?") and only a few comments of true sympathy and support from other members of the KAPI who, we must notice here, had never wished to take part in this project. (Greece)

ULLA: Our peer group..... say, 'Well, yes, OK, that's behind us now, stop going on about it. We don't want to be forever reminded of those days.' (Berlin)

For the most part though, families and friends have taken great pride in the older people's achievements.

HILDA: My family think I'm a star! My brother 'phoned the other day and he was telling me I should get an audition on the television! I said I'm sixty-six. I'm too old for all that. (London)

PHOTINI: From our hotel in London I phoned my fellow mother-in-law to ask about our grandchildren and she told me: "Photini I would never believe that you are there! I think of what you are doing and I am a bit happy too near you!" In our age we were given the chance to enjoy something we would never have imagined before. (Greece)

Perhaps the most dramatic transformation in the attitudes of friends and family was experienced by Sheu of the Taiwanese group:

SHEU: Long ago I was known by a lot of people as a Taiwanese Opera singer. Since my leg was broken, I hid in a dark cave for a long time. I considered myself a failure. Everyday I just drank a lot to forget sorrow. Then Ya-Ling (our director) came. She came to see me every week and persuaded me to perform on stage again. I was reluctant in the beginning. But after two

plays of performing, my neighbours began to say hello to me. The relatives and friends came visiting me, because they saw me in the newspapers and on television. My children who have all grown up and left home pay respect to me again and I am happy about that. (Taiwan)

Christian Robert reports on the astonishment amongst the families of the Femmes de la Viricel in Lyon, France, that they could make theatre, especially in a foreign country at an international festival when some of them were over 90 years old. He says the children and grandchildren marvelled on seeing the films and newspaper articles about these wives, mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers they didn't know they had. One lady told how she had lived 49 years with her husband but this was the first time he had heard her sing. Another tells how her grandchildren discovered the war through her work and how her children learned for the first time how she had met their father at this time....things one did not normally speak about. All the French families appear to have been very proud of what their older relatives had done and their performers themselves felt a great sense of validation.

There have been some delightful anecdotes about the reactions of grandchildren from other countries too to their dramatic super-grannies.

ANNE: My great-granddaughter, Chloe, said "Ooh Nanny, you'll be famous, you will!" She listens in to everything, she's only five-and-a-half, but she listens in! When I had to get my photographs done for the passport, there was a lady sitting in the photo booth, (she had to get a new bus pass because she'd had her handbag taken) and she wasn't sure of putting the money in, so the lady said to me, "Oh you go in and do it first and I'll watch." Chloe says to her, "My Nan don't want photos for a bus pass, she wants to go to Germany, she's going in a show!" What could you do? (laughter) Talk about showing you up! (London)

PENNY: The youngest grandson is very, very interested. He asks me all kinds of questions. He was actually in the Centre one day, when somebody rang up and asked me to be interviewed for Woman's Hour on the BBC. And he couldn't wait to get home, to tell his mum that he was there when the 'phone call came, you know. So yes, they think it's good. They came to see the show. The eldest boy is putting together all the videos and tapes about our work to make one long tape for me. So yes, he's interested. (London)

Question: Has your sense of belonging to a community been increased?

A sense of belonging to the community has in many cases been taken to mean belonging to the group first and the wider community second. The group in many cases is a new community of friends and the pleasure of finding such a group so late in life cannot be over-estimated.

Becoming a theatre group demands that the members become a team more than any other artistic medium. They need to help each other and feel able to rely on each other for tolerance and support. They need to share the difficulty of getting lines and moves learned and help those most who need it most.

They need to be able and willing to rescue each other in performances when lines go missing or minds go blank. There is a need for a lot of mutual sympathy and a lot of good humour if people are not to feel bowed down by their own failures, but rather encouraged to persevere. I have been tremendously impressed by the sense of loyalty within most of the groups and feel this is vital in what is essentially a difficult enterprise. For older people who are not used to remembering lines to start doing so at a time in their lives when it undoubtedly gets harder displays a lot of courage and determination. Of course it is part of the skill of the director to try to give individual members a work load that they can succeed with while still stretching them a little more in each production.

JOAN: You go through so much together. I mean we're going through a scene and one can't learn a line or somebody else can't learn a line, and you know what they're going through and you feel part of them and you feel sorry for them. You are part of a team, you try to help them, jolly them along as they jolly me along, and so you are sharing something that is quite difficult, so you have a certain amount of feeling for each other doing that. (London)

RUTH: In Footsteps one realizes how integral one's performance is to helping others in the show. (USA)

PHOTINI: I have met you (Cleo) and all the members of our group so I long to come back here every week. I expect to share again and again more moving moments and I am looking forward to our next performance. (Greece)

KATINA: I wish to make this new centre here [where the group meet in Athens] like our second home. (Greece)

ELLIN: The people in the group are friends. We share a common history in many respects. And now we have shared new adventures.... It is challenging to be a part of this group. I'm most impressed that such a miscellany of individual women could have become a cohesive group. (USA)

GLORIA: Our trip to England in October 1995 was the beginning of a community for me. (USA)

ERNA: I must admit, it [the theatre group] has first place in my life. (Hildesheim)

Others have interpreted the word 'community' more widely. Many mentioned the pleasure of meeting people through performances and talking to them afterwards. The theatre piece is a social as well as an aesthetic vehicle. Giving performances has given them the possibility of widening their social contacts and feeling more integrated in their local, or even in some cases their regional communities. As performers, they have recognition and validity where (to quote from the Italian group) 'before there was only the family and only loneliness.' Many people speak with pleasure about being acknowledged in a new way, as a result of their theatre work. All of us need some recognition from outside to reinforce our sense of identity and value, but theatre

audiences afford this most immediately and in the most graphic form. Group members find it exciting and startling when they are clapped for the first time.

JOYCE: That first trip we did to Bermondsey, I think that was our first outside performance and the audience were so appreciative I couldn't get over it, how they thought we were good, you know, and that was an eye-opener to me. (London)

ELEANOR: More people know of me now. Often people stop me in the street... to say, 'Didn't I see you in a play?' (USA)

LEE: I was only Mrs. Lin before, a common housewife, but right now there is always somebody who knows me wherever I go: when I walk on the street, go shopping, even when I go out on a picnic with my family. (Taiwan)

ELVIRA: We always talk to and with the audience [after the show]. There, we are forever finding all sorts of connections during that hour or half hour while we're talking and all sorts of things come out then. That's the one side. On the other side we always have discussions afterwards about the individual discussions we have had. And suddenly you get all sorts of ideas.... It [our community] has become much bigger and wider. (Berlin)

Question: Has your standing as older people in the community been increased?

On the whole, the answers to this question were affirmative. Most groups felt that they were presenting a very positive image of older people and that there was plenty of evidence to suggest that they were being listened to more as a result. Underlying all the responses is a feeling that the participants appreciate having a platform from which to speak and that they take a responsible attitude to the use they make of that privilege.

ULLA: I feel that I belong, not as a spectator, but rather as someone who has something to say, something to contribute. (Berlin)

LINA: I've got the courage to express myself and in that way to be able to say what I think on the basis of my experience. Other people listen to me more. (Italy)

ULLA: We say to the older people to whom we play, 'You can do this as well you know. Go on, get on with it.' Through that all sorts of groups have started up but whether they are successful I really couldn't say. Whether there is an improvement over-all for the older generation? I suspect that they would be more likely to write down their memories or give lectures rather than join a theatre group. You do need to push yourself a bit for that. You have to stand out in front which, I think, not everyone can do. And not everyone can laugh at themselves or, if you like, make themselves look ridiculous when it doesn't quite go the way you want it to and the others laugh. (Berlin)

LU: In this ageing society old people occupy a high percentage of the population. By standing out to perform, we demonstrated a new model for old people - a symbol of life and energy. Theatre activity should be broadcast and I am willing to be the starter. (Taiwan)

LORE: It is also important that people see being old doesn't mean sitting around and twiddling your thumbs, or in front of the TV or on a park bench waiting for the end. I will never forget when in Hannover a few young people came up to us and said: "You have given us something good to think about". And that is what we want to do; if we shake up one person in one of our pieces that's worth something. (Hildesheim)

Many people mentioned the pleasure they find in communicating with young people in their audiences and having good exchanges with youngsters. Some felt they had a great responsibility to teach younger people 'old stories of the past, even those of misery and suffering' in the hope of averting unnecessary suffering in the future.

GIUSEPPINA: Yes, and more young people than older people come to see me. Perhaps they understand that they can learn something and ask for advice as well. (Italy)

RINA: It's the same for me too. I've taught some children to keep a diary to note down all their memories and what happens. I'm happy about this, and they're not my grandchildren. (Italy)

SHEU: A lot of young people came asking me to teach them Taiwanese Opera. I am old. If I didn't transfer my art now, there will be less person willing to learn. That's why I taught Opera free of charge at home occasionally. It is kind of paying back the society, I guess. In the latest election, I sang Opera for the political party I supported. The audience remembered me, they came from far away to show support. I believed they would trust the candidate I supported just as they trust me. (Taiwan)

JOYCE: The impression I've got from younger overseas people in the audience is that they've been really impressed. People can't alter their expressions in their eyes and on their face, and it shows. They really are thrilled with it, they think we're great. Often I just quickly look at them when they're watching and ...they're intent, and the smiles on the corner of their mouths means that they're enjoying it. In that last show, 'Cheers' there was that scene where everybody said afterwards, 'Oh it was lovely, I was crying and then I was laughing', and so many people said that, that it must have had an impact. I do thoroughly enjoy doing it. (London)

PENNY: One young German boy said to me, 'I've got a picture in my mind now, of what you are talking about.' And he could actually see what I was talking about, not just think about it but he could see it. One said that as soon as we'd started off with the singing that it was wonderful, and then the stories came afterwards and this one person said to me, 'I'm so grateful'- I'm sure she said grateful, I might be wrong- 'that you have given me this story. It's a story that I didn't know about.' (London)

Where the performing group is made up of young and old there is of course even more scope for building community links and breaking down unnecessary barriers. The Hildesheim group, Jung und Alt, concentrates on making theatre from the experiences of older and younger people, and in this case the younger people are theatre students primarily but their particular concern is the relationship between theatre arts and the community. The youngsters change as they come and go from courses, but for some this work seems to have made a lasting impact on them. Frederike Fetting, one of the leaders of this group, interviewed young people who had worked with the group and their responses are most positive:

STEFANE: What I find amazing is that the distance between me and the old has diminished, like the old people in the street who are not part of my life's framework. Now they do not seem so alien.... Lore and Erna are my new friends, though on a different basis from my friends of the same age. That is because we got to know each other. I have now a different relationship towards and with other old people. I have more interest in them. (Hildesheim)

ANGELIKA: One ignores the old a lot and to have exchanges with them I find quite enriching... especially in this group; how the old see human related subjects from quite a different perspective from mine which is of course based on my own past experience. (Hildesheim)

The Good Companions group from Age Exchange in London also undertake joint productions with young people. The 'Cheers' show presented at the international festival included young people from 8 to 21 years old. Nathan who is 21 and has played in our Youth Theatre on and off for many years, but on the whole their productions, though inspired by the stories of the older people were played out by the youngsters. Here, he reflects on the experience of actually doing a joint show for the first time:

NATHAN: I think when you act with them you get a much more realistic play. They can say to you if what you are doing is right. There was more scope to improvise, I suppose, when you were just given the stories to develop as you wanted, but a lot of the time it wasn't as realistic. Actually working with them, they'd be able to guide you in the right direction, they've been there and had those experiences. (London)

I asked Nathan how he had felt about playing a scene in which he married Joyce who is 75 years old.

NATHAN: I was worried about it at first, thinking I've got to get a girl my age in, to make that all right. I just thought this is going to look absolutely ridiculous. But in the end it was fine, better. To the audience it looked like she was reliving her memories, and I was how old I would have been in her memory. That just made it work better, it was an advantage, because it added something to it, made it quite funny. (London)

Reflecting on the whole experience of ensemble work across the generations on this project, Nathan was extremely positive and in the following comment I think he speaks also for the other youngsters involved in the project.

NATHAN: It was brilliant, because I just made a lot of friends with an age group that I wouldn't normally have the chance to work with, and it was interesting to hear about their memories and put them into the play. It was good going off to Germany with them. I think it was Lilian who said it was just like a big family, and everyone just got on so well. (London)

CONCLUSION:

It is quite startling in looking through the interviews what a radical impact this work has had on the lives of the older people concerned and, in an indirect way, on their families too. Many people have said their lives have changed, that they have been given a fresh start, in fact have found a new lease of life. I believe that it is crucial that the older people have shared experience with people of their own generation (in this case both within their own countries and in an international context) and they have reassessed their own experience in the light of the shared new ideas and reflections. The other crucially empowering factor has been that they have worked together on their experiences and shaped them into communicable pieces of theatre. They have then seen for themselves the impact of their work on a wide and varied audience and they have found affirmation of themselves and of their own creativity in their audiences' positive responses. Through developing their own creative skills they have realised that they have still great potential for growing and learning. Their increasing self confidence has enabled them to learn new skills, build new relationships, feel valued in their communities, in short, to feel more alive.

I should like to finish with two final statements from those involved in the interviews. First, a story from Katina from the Greek group in which she marvels at what is happening to her with so much truth about her feelings:

KATINA: When I was getting my passport issued I could not believe what I was doing. I was saying to myself: "Katina, what are you doing? Are you really going to England?" But again I did not want to stop. Since you (Chloe) had told us to order a passport, I did so! When I left I did not even tell my children because I myself could not believe it. I had never been abroad

before! On the plane, when we were flying over the clouds I wanted to burst into tears. I turned round and saw nobody in tears so I sat quietly in my place like a numb cat. When I got off the plane I wanted to kiss the ground, I assure you I did, I was so impressed! I had never been abroad before and now I was even going to perform abroad! (Greece)

And finally Silvia Bevilacqua's summary of her discussion with the Italian group:

SILVIA: The interviewees themselves - laughing and very loudly - were unanimous in asking me to underline that they have been silent for 50/60 years and that now they have started to talk and express themselves, they can't stop! (Italy)

APPENDIX 1:

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED:

GREECE by CLEO MAVROUDI 5 (4F 1M)
DENMARK by BRITA LOVENDAHL 3 (2F 1M)
USA by SARAH WORTHINGTON 7 (7F)
TAIWAN by YA-LING PEN 4 (2F 2M)
ITALY by SILVIA BEVILACQUA 5 (5F)
HILDESHEIM by FREDERIKE FETTING 4 (4F)
BERLIN by SYLVIA WINGENS 4 (4F)
FRANCE by CHRISTIAN ROBERT a group interview (8F)
LONDON by PAM SCHWEITZER 7 (6F 1M)

Total of INTERVIEWEES 47

Further information from Pam Schweitzer: email pam@pamschweitzer.com