



NEWS RELEASE  
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## A ZOOMFUL OF SENIOR ACTORS

In locations large and small, the pandemic is forcing Senior Theatres to keep actors and audiences socially distant for health and safety. The benefits of Senior Theatre are so great, it is imperative to find a way to adapt. Leading the campaign is the Senior Theatre Resource Center which guides companies with training, sample shows, skill building, and encouragement. The result is a flurry of Senior Theatre classes and performances, all online.

### **What Was at Risk**

Talk to any older actor and they'll say what they love most about Senior Theatre is the *esprit de corps* (or group feeling) of working together to put on a performance. It's what holds theatre companies together. In addition, Senior Theatre brings many benefits – from pure fun and happiness to decreased anxiety and loneliness. Intellectual benefits have also been documented, from improvements in memory, to problem solving. Social distancing brought on by the pandemic stopped it all. Performances were postponed; then cancelled.

The crisis is real. One-third of all the Senior Theatre groups is on a complete hiatus, while the remaining two-thirds are barely doing anything. Losing the benefits of Senior Theatre may compound the damaging effects of the pandemic.

### **More than a Solution, a Huge Success**

ArtAge Senior Theatre Resource Center is jumping into action as the leader of the effort to move Senior Theatre online. They began with the first virtual Senior Performance in which actors were brought together on Zoom with their performance streamed live on FaceBook. The group overcame a few technical glitches in the process of transferring drama to a software application designed for a business meeting. In the end, this

performance of a hilarious short play, *Tech Support*, entertained an audience of over 700! That's many more people than would be expected in a brick and mortar theatre.

A second discovery was that doing Senior Theatre online produces the same benefits as when done in person. Theatre touches every part of us as humans, stimulating our physical, mental, psychological, cultural, and emotional selves. Just as in real life, the social outcome of performing is the strongest.

Since that first production, ArtAge has produced a full slate of resources and learning opportunities for Senior Theatres--from webinars to tip sheets. (*a list of resources is attached*) The efforts have paid off. Older adults, stereotyped as not tech-savvy and resistant to change, jumped in, inspired and motivated, finding ways to keep acting in this new reality. One reason the transition has been so smooth is that most Senior Theatre shows are done as readers theatre, with less emphasis on movement and scenery—a perfect fit for online experiences.

### **An Easy Recipe**

Interestingly, early adopters came from all levels of senior theatre—from groups with frail actors to those with very active ones. With family calls and other social gatherings happening online, everyone gained the technical skills they needed quickly. The difference for theatre is that actors need to be taught how to look into the camera while acting. Actors also need guidance with backdrops, lighting, and sound. Unlike in a real theatre, where those are taken care of by a crew, each actor has to become skilled at “setting the stage.”

Costs are minimal. In addition to the usual costs of scripts and royalties, the costs for a virtual “Theatre” (such as an online conference/webinar subscription) are modest.

The only thing missing? Applause! In normal times, it's better than a trip to the doctor! No one has figured that element out, yet. But it'll be sure to happen.

**ArtAge Senior Theatre Resource Center** promotes Senior Theatre by making it easy for older actors to find and perform pieces that meet their needs. Our collection of Senior Theatre plays, books and materials, is the gold standard in the field, a treasure trove of bright, lively shows featuring older people in their best and most humane light.

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[www.seniortheatre.com](http://www.seniortheatre.com)

## Resources for Adapting Senior Theatre Online

Whether in real life or online, start with classes. Learn the fundamentals of teaching, adapt them to the online platform, and then move from practice to production.

If you're new to teaching Senior Theatre or need a refresher, you'll find the best practices with this handy TipSheet.

- [Teaching Senior Theatre Classes](#)

Early in the pandemic, Bonnie L. Vorenberg presented a webinar demonstrating how to conduct an online Senior Theatre class. You can watch a recording.

- [Teaching Senior Theatre Classes Online](#)

In this TipSheet, we share some tips and tricks — things we learned producing our first online performance — with you.

- [Senior Theatre Online Made Easy TipSheet](#)

Here's an informative article by Bonnie L. Vorenberg, published in *The Journal on Active Aging*. November/December 2020, Vol. 19 no. 7

- [Senior Theatre Adapts to the Pandemic: COVID-19 Teaches Older Actors New Tricks](#)

Characteristics of plays that work well online include:

- Small casts
- Focus on character and plot
- Few technical elements
- Plays with limited movement
- Plays where action can be done vocally, such as with [Radio Theatre](#).

The marvelous news is that most of our plays already meet these criteria!

- [plays that work well online](#)