



Theatre Ovest End  
presents 6 Plays on Age

## Description

# Company Co-Artistic Director Ann Lambert speaks about the theatre company and its goals

By Irwin Rapoport

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The experience of **old age and mortality** is an aspect of humanity that will be with us for eternity. While many have addressed it, the experience of each individual is unique. [Theatre Ovest End](#) is tackling this theme **until June 15** with ***Still Got Something to Say: 6 Plays on Age***, where six playwrights explore the theme, 'What is ageing?'

The plays are being presented with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Digital Now! grant. Here is the trailer of this digital event:

From the production's press release:

Theatre Ovest End commissioned six seasoned Canadian playwrights to write short plays exploring the theme of age, ageing and the challenges of navigating an ageist world. Notable playwrights **Jane Gilchrist, Debra Kirshenbaum, Ann Lambert, Kent Stetson, Judith Thompson** and **Rahul Varma** came together to generate new digital work.



Clare Coulter in *Queen Maeve*

Company **Co-Artistic Directors** are delighted with the way each playwright embraced the pivot from page to stage to film. They began the creative process by asking: What does 'old' mean? How does growing older often mean becoming the 'other'? How does ageism intersect with genderism, ableism, racialization, and socio-economic marginalization?"

Ranging in ages from 64 to 82 and including two Governor General's Award winners, the writers created short (10 to 20 minute) plays, monologues or scenes that reflect their authentic lived experiences. Theatre Ouest End has always been interested in intergenerational exchange. Here playwrights were invited to work with an emerging director. The ninety-minute final result offers a broad spectrum of experience and style – from comedic to tragic and the many spaces in between, often portraying alternatives to deep-seated stereotypes about ageing. Sensitively and intelligently directed and acted, topical, hot-button issues and stories include bridging the generation gap, differing political ideas, poignant decline, late-in-life romance, redundancy, and an 'Irish Queen' in a home for the aged.

If I am the root of my children and their children and their children, why don't they send me a card?

– Queen Maeve

"The ideas expressed in this work have been dear to our hearts for several years now; its urgency and timeliness have been given new weight in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. There is an entire society and its industries devoted to ensuring that we internalize ageism; we want to explore how this manifests itself in our lives, and our creative lives," said Mitchell. Lambert concurred, adding, "We want to challenge repressive notions of what ageing and old age implies, and create something that expresses more diverse, inclusive and socially enfranchising meanings."

Theatre Ouest End was founded in 2019 by Ann Lambert, Laura Mitchell, **Alice Abracen** and **Danielle Szydlowski**, who were later joined by **Anissah Vanhorn** and **Ayesha Hasan**. The company was created to bring together a community of both experienced and emerging theatre artists, to offer new work to people whose access to theatre is challenged by limited income, mobility, opportunity, or the perception that theatre is really

about and for someone else. It was also formed in the belief that everyone needs to tell a story – everyone wants to be seen and heard.

“We want to challenge repressive notions of what ageing and old age implies...”

– Ann Lambert, Co-Artistic Director, Theatre Ouest End

Company Co-Artistic Director Ann Lambert spoke with Westmount Magazine about her passion for the theatre and the role of Theatre Ouest End in enriching the cultural life of Montreal.

**WM:** *Since Theatre Ouest End was established, how many productions has it presented, and how has it grown?*

**Lambert:** In 2019, TOE hosted three live curated events where both established and emerging writers, actors, and musicians from Montreal performed a piece of their choice in front of an audience. Vulnerability is a source of inspirational theatre and, at TOE, we encourage everyone to share new work and take a risk with the support of their collaborators and community. TOE believes in equitable access to the arts, so we have installed a “Pay What You Want” system for attending the shows.

During the pandemic, TOE remained resilient with the continued support of our members. We offered our three events online, mainly through Facebook Live. So that’s a total of six, plus of course, the one we just launched, by far our most ambitious.



Ivan Smith and Ronica Sajjani in *Dhara's Revenge*

**WM:** *How would you describe the public reaction to the initiative?*

**Lambert:** Very positive and appreciative. I think a lot of people, especially in the West End of the city, recognize there is a real need for the kind of theatre we make.



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**WM:** *The COVID pandemic was not an easy time for theatre companies and live productions. What did Theatre Ouest End do to get through the experience and tap into local talent?*

**Lambert:** As mentioned above, we pivoted to an online performance format. In the fall of 2022, however, should we all stay open, TOE is producing an evening of work from the writers in our international Thursday afternoon writing workshop, the re-launching and public screening of *Still Got Something To Say: Six Plays on Age*, and the production of our founding member, Alice Abracen's beautiful play, ***The Covenant***.

?Inspired by a true story, *The Covenant* is set in June 1944 at Theresienstadt. Red Cross dignitaries are invited to marvel at this lively town, which appears to be a haven for Jewish people in the heart of Czechoslovakia. Little do they know that this paradise is a ghetto and concentration camp, elaborately staged to conceal Nazi crimes against humanity. Forced to participate in the terrible charade, the ambitious politician Peter and the dedicated Dr. Hilde find their idealism, their faith, and their love put to a terrible test. Timely and timeless, *The Covenant* (winner of the 2017 Canadian Jewish Playwriting Award) will have its world premiere in November 2022 at the Segal Centre's Studio Space.

'We are storytellers and love the theatre because it is live. And the immediacy of it is thrilling. Nothing can replace the experience of being in a room waiting for the lights to dim and wondering what will happen on stage.'

– Ann Lambert, Co-Artistic Director, Theatre Ouest End

**WM:** *What attracted you to the theatre, and why is it important that Montreal has a rich and lively theatre scene?*

**Lambert:** Oh, that is a pretty short question to a loooooong answer. We are storytellers and love the theatre because it is live. And the immediacy of it is thrilling. Nothing can replace the experience of being in a room waiting for the lights to dim and wondering what will happen on stage. What journey will we be taken on or take our audience on? What will we discover about our world, the world of the characters, and what it's like to be a human navigating it? It's transformative and transcendent.

Over many centuries, people have periodically declared the theatre to be dead. Most recently, during COVID, someone explained that the theatre we had been making now for four decades is "done." We disagree. Theatre will never die because it offers what no other art form can. We at TOE want to make theatre that is timely, compelling, entertaining and meaningful. No small feat.

**WM:** *What are some of your favourite plays, and from which playwrights do you derive inspiration?*

**Lambert:** Too many to name here, but include: Shakespeare, Tony Kushner, Athole Fugard, Caryl Churchill, Judith Thompson, Lucy Kirkwood, Tomson Highway, Stephen Sondheim, Chekhov, and Williams. They always break my heart and make me laugh and make me want to wrap my arms around, well, humanity. There are dozens more!



Laura Mitchell in *Okay Boomer*

**WM:** Montreal has a lot of excellent and talented actors, playwrights, directors, and theatre crafts expertise, be it set designers, makeup artists, and others essential to bringing word to life on the stage. What can groups like yours do to create a vibrant theatre scene and give these individuals an opportunity to display their talents?

**Lambert:** With our most recent project, we hired: 11 actors, three directors, six playwrights, two camera operators and one film director, a sound editor, video editor, two stage managers, one make up artist, and one publicist – we hope we're not forgetting anyone! Our raison d'être is to give voice to stories and storytellers who need to be seen and heard. Hopefully, we will get the support and funding we need to continue doing this.

**WM:** What can be done to develop talent among young people and help them develop a love for theatre?

**Lambert:** Get them started early! Support theatre programs in elementary and high schools that are chronically and critically underfunded, if the programs exist at all. Theatre changes lives. Theatre SAVES lives. From four decades of experience working with young people, we know this in our bones.

Viewers will be able to see the performance s through the company's [Facebook](#) page **until June 15**. Tickets can be reserved via [Eventbrite](#) on a Pay What You Want basis.

To learn more about Theatre Ouest End's ongoing events and workshops visit [theatreouestend.ca](http://theatreouestend.ca)

*Images: courtesy of Theatre Ouest End*

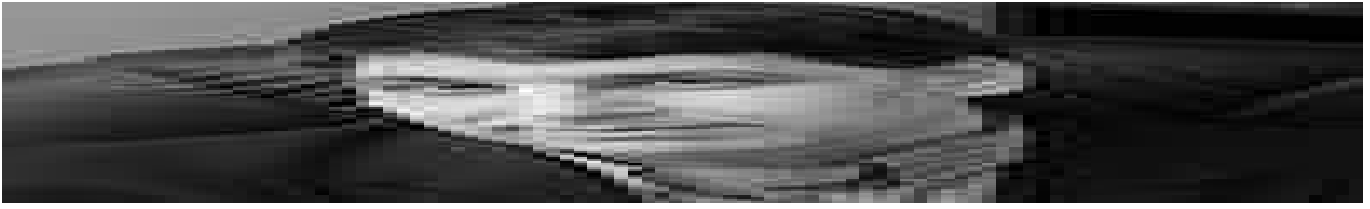
*Feature image: Marcel Jeannin and Victoria Barkoff in Mellow Elders*

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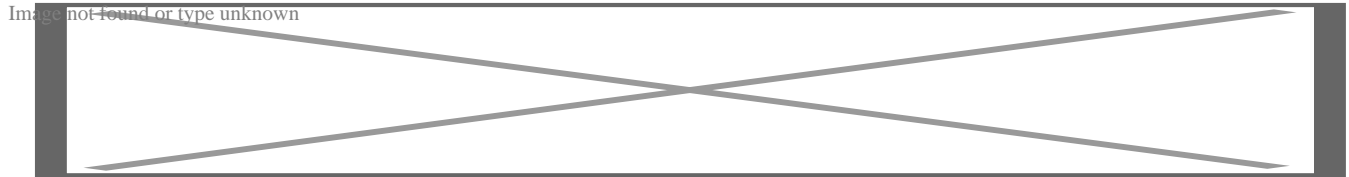
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*Irwin Rapoport is a freelance journalist.*

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