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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Ventnor Exchange Puppetry Commission

Deadline: Monday 15th February 2020

OVERVIEW

Commission Title:	Old Age Puppets (Puppetry Commission)
Reports to:	Co-Directors
Commission Type:	Freelance
Commission Fee:	£1,000 (per puppet) with an additional budget for materials tbc

Ventnor Exchange is looking to commission three new puppets for a devised production in development called *Old Age Puppets (working title)*.

Old Age Puppets (O.A.P's) is a comedy drama that aims to showcase emerging puppeteers, performers and writers in a format that will evolve over time, allowing different creatives to participate in this ongoing project.

WHAT IS VENTNOR EXCHANGE?

Ventnor Exchange is an innovative grassroots arts organisation based on the southern tip of the Isle of Wight. A social enterprise dedicated to bringing cultural experiences and opportunities to remote regions like the Island and developing the creative ecosystem in the area. Our work includes the management of a micro arts centre in an old Post Office building, which now hosts a year round programme of theatre and comedy. It was recently described by Darren Henley, CEO of Arts Council England as, "a brilliant cultural hub firmly embedded in its community".

We also produce two annual events; Ventnor Fringe, the Island's largest performing arts festival, and the newer Isle of Wight Children's Festival. In June 2020, in response to the pandemic, we launched Brave Island, a unique online platform for 14-25 year olds providing opportunities, funding and training, which has already engaged with more than 100 individuals.

As a social enterprise and non NPO, we receive no regular funding from our local authority or other public bodies and so our work is predominantly made possible through trading activity

which includes running a popular local bar and community space, as well as a record shop and other trading activities.

In 2019 we were grateful to receive Arts Council England backing to begin piloting a small commissioning strand to our work, and prior to the Pandemic the concept for Old Age Puppets was developed as one of our initial projects.

The Show

What happens to puppets when they retire? In **Old Age Puppets** we visit one seaside town to find out, as we discover the secrets to living well and growing old disgracefully!

Each resident has a story to tell, sharing their advice for living a long and happy life, including some rather unorthodox suggestions.

Based on interviews with real centenarians the show offers a hilarious insight into their advice on how to live the good life. A comedy aimed at adults of all ages, at its heart is a message of the importance of intergenerational conversations, of caring for our elderly communities and the advice we might want to give to future generations ourselves when the time comes.

The Concept

We are looking to commission three different puppets, each depicting a different elderly character (listed below) who will each tell a story inspired by their own lives. Each of these segments are self-contained, except for the ending, leaving open the possibility of additional characters and stories being commissioned in the future, and a show that can evolve over time.

We are open to applications to create all three of the characters, or for applications to build a single puppet of whichever character most appeals to you.

We are open to puppets of any form, material or aesthetic providing they are inspired by the character's brief. The three different puppets do not necessarily need to visually relate to each other. It is intended for the production to showcase different puppet craft and skills.

What are we looking for?

- You will have a passion for contemporary puppetry and can create high quality work.
- You will be excited by the ambition of this project to showcase new puppetry as well as the creative concept of the piece.
- You will have had professional experience in building puppets for theatre productions.
- Able to construct puppets that can be used by professional actors for multiple performances over time and which can withstand reasonable wear and tear.
- Able to work from home or remotely, providing updates to the creative team at regular intervals.
- You will be comfortable working collaboratively with the Creative Team and independently on your commission.

Timeline

- Deadline for Applications: 22nd December 2020
- Interview Dates (via Zoom) 29th & 30th December 2020
- Successful Applicants Notified: 4th January 2021
- Puppets Delivered: 14th February 2021

The Creative Team will be available for regular feedback and support between 4th January - 14th February 2021. We are happy to be flexible in scheduling these digital sessions around your other commitments.

Subject to COVID Guidelines at the time, we hope to hold rehearsals in March 2021 on the Isle of Wight. There may be an opportunity to attend some of these sessions with the creative team. An additional fee/travel costs to be agreed would be provided.

Location

- The setting is contemporary, the present day.
- Characters to choose from are...

Character 1 *"This is some advice for the ladies, never marry an older man, marry a younger one!"*

This character was a successful singer who's led an eventful life of luxury. She is full of anecdotes, name drops constantly, and enjoys the finer things in life. Her many previous partners, some of whom may have met suspicious ends, have informed her outlook on life that the secret to eternal youth is living well and not caring what others think. Think larger than life, vulgar, big costume jewellery, hair. Inspirations: Dolly Parton

Character 2 *"I put my health down to whisky and cigarettes"*

This character is the local landlord who refuses to retire. He is a charismatic storyteller and a brilliant impressionist but clearly isn't looking after himself, in fact he might even be falling apart. We'll learn from him the importance of treating your body like it's going to last you 100 years. Think crumpled, faded suit, wrinkled sallow skin, thinning hair. Inspirations: an older Bernard Black.

Character 3 *"Don't let anybody else control you"*

This character is a superstitious person, easily influenced by others opinions and prone to conspiracies. She puts her old age down to higher powers at work and regular naked moon baths. Her many bizarre rituals and compulsions collected over the years have now consumed her - she is not as free as she would have you believe. Think lots of jewelry, new age style, clashing clothes. Inspirations: Professor Trelawney.

How To Apply

To apply, please submit via email to **hello@ventnorexchange** with the **subject line: Ventnor Exchange Puppetry Commission**.

- Your CV and a cover letter (maximum two A4 sides) demonstrating how you meet the criteria and an initial concept or idea for one or more of the characters.
- We welcome video submissions for those who prefer to use this method. (Recording with a phone is acceptable, but please do rehearse and pitch it like a CV and remember to include information about your initial concept or idea for one or more of the characters)

Upload in a common format such as MOV or MP4, uploading to YouTube or Vimeo (make sure you set it in a private mode if you prefer for it to not be made public)

- Whatever format you chose, do not forget to attach or send links to examples of your previous work.

For further information or an informal discussion about this commission in advance of an application please contact -

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