



Actors 50 and over pursuing their passions

By Jan Engoren

With the emphatic moniker, Pigs Do Fly, Ellen Wacher, founder and producer of Pigs Do Fly Productions, wanted people to know, women (and men) of a certain age are still relevant.

“When pigs fly,” might be an ironic comment meant to convey the unlikeliness of something happening, but Pigs Do Fly stands for people over 50 living interesting, active lives, according to Wacher, a 60-something who founded the theatre company in 2014.

With a mission to produce plays that highlight the actor over 50 as a viable, fully involved, full of life character, Wacher says she wants to engage the 100 million-plus Americans who are over the age of 50 and are under-recognized by the marketers of other popular culture.

“We don’t do plays about dementia or death,” says Wacher from her home in Miami. “I’m interested in vibrant, active people living their lives and pursuing their passions.”

All of the company’s plays focus on this demographic

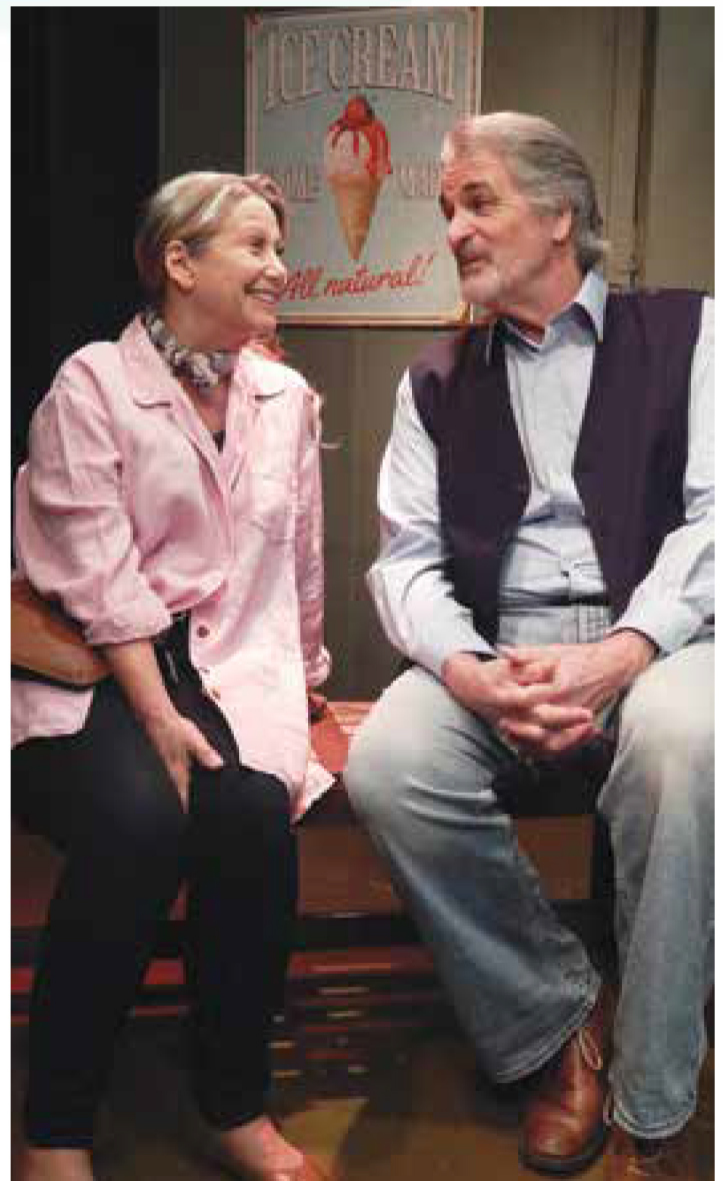
and feature actors over 50. The company is a professional theatre company and all employees are paid.

Seven years ago, Wacher presented her first production, “Fifty Plus – A Celebration Of Life . . . As We Know It,” a collection of short plays featuring actors 50+, and focused on active folks of the same age group.

On March 6, 2020, Wacher’s latest production, “Helen on Wheels,” an original play by Oregon-based playwright Cricket Daniel premiered at the Empire Stage in Ft. Lauderdale, but was indefinitely postponed as theatres shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I’d give my eye teeth to be back live,” says Wacher who is gauging things on a daily basis as to when the theatre might resume.

She’s also concerned about whether her audience – also people of a certain age – will return. Noting that many theatres and other arts venues have moved their programming online, Wacher defers, saying, “By definition,



Beverly Blanchette & Dave Corey in *Helen on Wheels*.

theatre is meant to be shared live and in person.”

A native of Miami, Wacher worked for the state of Florida as a teacher and lobbyist and retired with 30 years under her belt.

“I always wanted to be an actress,” Wacher remembers, “but didn’t have the courage to starve. Eating and dressing nicely were always at the top of my list.”

So, once she retired, she decided to pursue her passion and appeared in local productions of Neil Simon’s “Rumors,” “The Sisters Rosensweig,” “Joseph Andrews” and “The False Witness.”

“Now I can do what I always wanted to do and not worry about the money,” she said.

However, it was a shock to learn that she had aged out of the commercial acting market.

“I didn’t fit the stereotype of what they wanted for older women,” she remembers. “I got really mad and decided to start my own theatre company. I didn’t have a clue what I was doing, but I was committed to the idea.”

“I was headstrong and determined,” Wacher says. “I lucked out, found the right people and in spite of not knowing what I was doing, managed to get it done.”

“We picked plays, held auditions and the audiences came,” she says. “I got positive feedback from my audience.”

Currently, Wacher is vice president of the SAG-AFTRA Miami local, and as chair of the women’s committee, works on the need to better recognize actors (and audiences) over 50 in theater, television and film.

During the quarantine and pandemic, Wacher, despite eating what she says is a bit too much ice cream, attended SAG Zoom meetings, watched reruns of Seinfeld (her



Leigh Bennett, Barbara Sloan, Barbara Bradshaw, & Diana D'Ambrosio in *The Lost Virginity Tour*.

favorite), Friends and Everyone Loves Raymond, and founded the Miami Radio Players, a group of professional actors based in Miami who perform live radio shows.

Once she gets the all-clear to resume productions, Wacher is ready to go with re-launches of two of her most popular productions – Daniel’s “Helen on Wheels” and an original comedy by playwright Jerry Mayer titled, “2 Across,” about the New York Times crossword puzzle and a chance encounter aboard a San Francisco BART train.

She also has her eye on mounting “The Savannah Sipping Society,” a comedy by Nicholas Hope, Jessie Jones and Jamie Wooten.

As one audience member proclaimed to Wacher, after a previous show, “Thank God someone’s doing something for people like us.”

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Barbara Sloan & David R. Gordon in *2 Across*.