

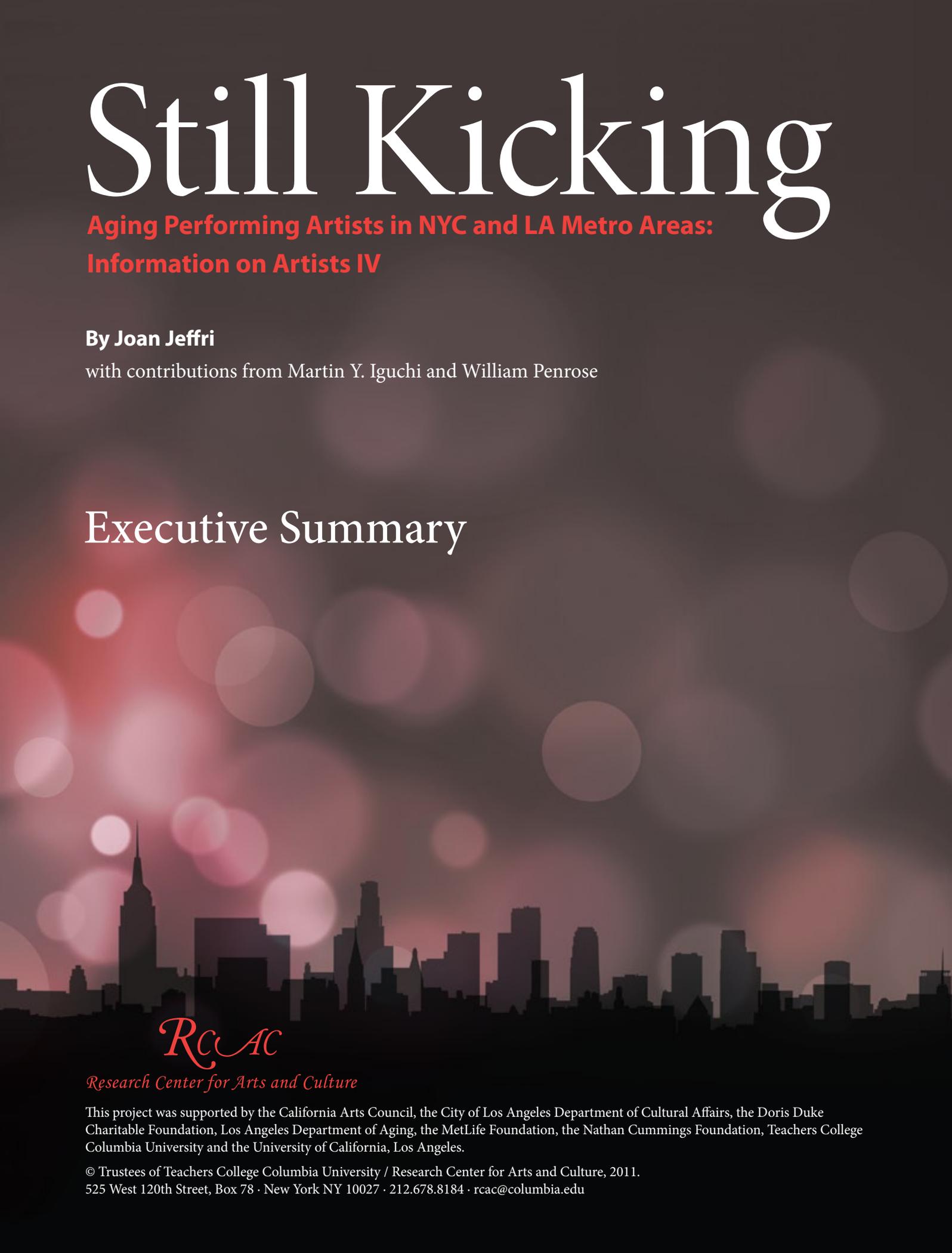
Still Kicking

**Aging Performing Artists in NYC and LA Metro Areas:
Information on Artists IV**

By Joan Jeffri

with contributions from Martin Y. Iguchi and William Penrose

Executive Summary



RCAC

Research Center for Arts and Culture

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*“I’m like an old whore.
I can do the work;
I just can’t do the stairs.”*

—93-year-old actor, NYC

*“It’s the jumping that’s hard.
I can still kick.”*

—68-year-old former Rockette dancer, NYC

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the many professionals in both the arts and aging communities, including managers, interviewers, caregivers, scholars, sympathizers and especially the ARTISTS.

Preface

Objective, nuanced research on the impact of arts and culture is difficult to come by. So we are particularly pleased to introduce this study, which has the potential to be transformative through its thoughtful, detailed approach to understanding the lives of aging artists.

The Research Center for Arts and Culture's work—in New York City, Los Angeles and elsewhere—provides significant insights into the creative individuals who define great cities. In addition, the findings in this report clarify many of the opportunities and challenges that come with major demographic shifts.

The Center's research methods and recommendations have already inspired collaboration across sectors in New York City. In 2009 the City and partners developed Space for Art, a program that gives artists studio space in senior centers in exchange for engaging cultural programs for senior residents and local communities.

In Los Angeles, where employment in the creative industries totals over 750,000, the role aging artists assume is little understood. The Center's research is an important step towards developing public policy and programs aimed at improving the lives of this vital segment of the population.

We look forward to the many productive ways this latest study will shape the dialogue around aging and the arts.

Olga Garay

Executive Director, City of Los Angeles, Department of Cultural Affairs

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Background and Introduction

No one has tackled the unique and urgent needs of artists as they grow old. Special attention to aging artists is important for material support and policy-making and is made more urgent in a time of scarce resources when the baby boomer generation is about to enter the ranks of the retired.

The last of the Baby-Boomers will reach age 65 in the year 2029.¹ Over the coming decades, the age distribution of our population will shift to one that is older than it is young for the first time ever. By 2020, there will be more Americans over the age of 65 than under 15.² Populations of individuals 65 and older are projected to be 54,804,000 in 2020 (16.1% of the total population), 72,092,000 in 2030 (19.3%), 81,238,000 in 2040 (20.0%), and 88,547,000 in 2050 (20.2%).³

“There are two options: to grow older, not to grow older.”

—86-year-old musician, NYC

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Profile of the United States*. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/pop-profile/natproj.html> (accessed June 16, 2010).

² MacArthur Foundation Research Network on an Aging Society, “Policies and Politics for an Aging America,” *Contexts* Vol. 9 No. 1 (2010): 23.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, *THE NEXT FOUR DECADES The Older Population in the United States: 2010 to 2050*, P25–1138 (Grayson K. Vincent and Victoria A. Velkoff, U.S., May 2010), 10.

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This study provides the first needs assessment of aging performing artists in the metro areas of Los Angeles and New York.

.....

This study focuses on professional actors, dancers, choreographers, musicians and singers in the metro areas of Los Angeles and New York.

To focus on older artists means, of course, to take into account the artist’s entire career and the larger macrocosm that makes up the art world. For performing artists, the landscape is treacherous. Largely dependent on others to hire them, they risk obsolescence by technology, animation, and cyberspace. Existing in a culture of instant celebrity, their challenge for a lifetime career as working artists is serious. Additionally, different kinds of performing artists face different obstacles to their career development: singers may not come into their voices and thus their careers until their mid-30s; many dancers are transitioning out of active dance at the same age. While performing artists have the advantage of collective representation through unions, finding enough work to maintain full union status is often difficult. They, too, commit their daily lives to art forms requiring rehearsal as well as performance, self-promotion as well as self-criticism, and daily practice in which their minds and bodies are their instruments.

As the graying of America progresses and the baby boomers begin to enter their twilight years, the government and other agencies are deep in discussion over issues of physical and mental health care, social security, retirement and pension benefits, and attitudes and policies towards aging. Traditional solutions to the challenges listed above are not sufficient. A plethora of programs from 'lifelong education' to more user-friendly assisted-living facilities have been created as we grapple with social and public policies towards aging. This is one case where artists can show the way.

.....

Aging artists, who have learned how to adapt their whole lives, can be a model for society, especially as baby boomers retire and multiple careers become the norm.

.....

Professional Artists

This study, by the Research Center for Arts and Culture at Columbia University's Teachers College (RCAC) continues the work in its pioneering study, *Information on Artists III: Special Focus: New York City Aging Artists (IOA III Aging)*.⁴ Published as *ABOVE GROUND*. Its purpose, like *IOA III's*, was to understand how artists—who often reach artistic maturity and artistic satisfaction as they age—are supported and integrated within their communities, and how their network structures change over time and to understand how performing artists mature into old age—artistically, emotionally, financially and chronologically.

We again used the Respondent-driven sampling (RDS) method created by Dr. Douglas Heckathorn of Cornell University, and vetted aging performing artists as professionals in two ways:

1. Those who selected at least two of the definitions below:
 - a. "I consider myself a performing artist."

.....

⁴ Throughout this report, this study is referred to as our aging visual artists study or *IOA III Aging*.

- b. "I have earned more than 50% of my income in the last year as a performing artist or in performing arts-related activities."
- c. "I have been engaged (rehearsal, teaching/mentoring, performing, creative process) in my performing art more than 50% of the time during the last year."
- d. "I have performed as an artist at least 5 times in the last year."
- e. "I have performed as an artist for pay at least 5 times during the last year."
- f. "I have been trained/educated as a performing artist."
- g. "I have produced a documented body of work that is considered (self or externally) performing art (documented output = performances, compositions, collaborations, arrangements, recordings)."
- h. "I make a living as a performing artist."

2. Our use of RDS in which each artist, after his/her interview, was given four numbered coupons to recruit four other artists who were (a) 62+ (the age of eligibility for Social Security), (b) resident in the metro areas of Los Angeles or New York, (c) a professional actor, dancer, choreographer, musician or singer.

Of the 230 recorded interviews in NYC and 52 in LA, 219 (95%) in NYC defined themselves as professional performing artists: in NYC, 140 actors, 7 choreographers, 28 dancers, 17 musicians and 27 singers. In LA 51 (90%) defined themselves as professionals: 37 actors, 3 choreographers, 3 dancers, 4 musicians and 4 singers. **This analysis is based on results from the 219 professional performing artists in NYC and the 51 in Los Angeles.** Because of the small number of interviews in the LA metro area, these findings should be viewed with caution.

How Many Artists?

In 2005 according to the National Endowment for the Arts Census-based data through the American Community Survey (ACS), in the United States there were 1,999,474 artists including: 39,717 Actors; 169,647 Musicians; 25,651 Dancers and Choreographers.⁵

.....

⁵ National Endowment for the Arts, *Artists in the Workforce 1990–2005*, Research Report #48 (2008), 5.

In 2008–9, Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) reported a national membership of professional working actors as 20,181.⁶ In 2004, Screen Actors Guilds (SAG) represented nearly 120,000 actors.⁷

As with all studies that attempt to count “how many artists,” the numbers differ.

In this study, the RDS methodology allows us to estimate, using an approach called Capture-Recapture, **the number of aging professional performing artists in New York City, as 7,855 (this includes actors, as well as dancers, choreographers, singers, and musicians working under SAG contracts).** We arrived at this number through a formula using our RDS sample compared to the numbers for aging artists (62+ years of age) known to be members of the Screen Actors Guild. Unfortunately, we do not have enough participants in our LA sample to do the same.

Performers’ Unions

In the performing arts (unlike the visual arts) performers can become members of unions under the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Some performers’ unions, like the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), the Directors’ Guild and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, are not members of the AFL-CIO. These “craft unions” govern performers according to their skills, and the medium, venue and jurisdiction in which they perform. One of the reasons behind unionization is to protect workers from arbitrary management. Indeed, in the arts, in 1913 Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) was a pioneer in the development of unions and the protection of performers. Entry requirements into each union differ and while unions would like to promote the idea that unionization confers professional status, not all performers subscribe to this idea. In an industry where over 80% (in some unions) of the union population can be unemployed at any given time, the jurisdiction, power and effectiveness of the unions are questionable.

In addition, possibly because of this situation, not all performing arts unions have accurate data on their

⁶ Steven DiPaola, 2008–2009 *Theatrical Season Report* (New York: Actors’ Equity Association, 2009), 2.

⁷ Screen Actors Guild, “Surge in Number of Actors Paying Dues Online.” <http://www.sag.org/content/surge-in-number-of-actors-paying-dues-online> (accessed February 25, 2011.)

members, particularly those over the age of 62. Pension and health benefits are limited to a few based on their frequency of unionized work, so that a large percentage of union members may work at union jobs, but not enough jobs to qualify for full benefits.

Because the performers or entertainment unions have relatively small membership numbers (from a few thousand to a few hundred thousand nationally), some Member Assistance Program (MAP) services normally offered by a larger union are offered instead by independent nonprofit organizations for the performing arts.

Union membership in general is on the decline. In 2010, membership declined to 11.9% of the workforce, down from 12.3% the previous year.⁸ In 2009, approximately 10% of those 65 and older were union members. Among states, New York had the highest union membership rate (24.2%) and the union membership rate was higher for men (12.6%) than for women (11.1%).⁹

.....
Seventy-seven percent of our NYC and 90% of our LA aging performing artists are union members.
.....

Especially for actors, when these aging artists were starting out, there was little room for amateurs to make performing a lifetime career—the studio system in Hollywood, more tightly controlled unions, the regional theatre movement had not developed—whereas this may not be the case for younger performers today. Additionally, older groups often maintain their loyalties, so the high union participation rate is not so surprising.

One of the great confusions of people who look at performing artists is the number of unions to which they must belong in order to perform in various media and the jurisdictions they cover. Partly due to technology, these jurisdictions have changed, especially with the advent of cable television and digital/internet reproduction and dissemination, and jurisdictional lines have been blurred. One dancer/choreographer, for example, might have to join Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) to dance on Broadway, the Stage Directors and Cho-

⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Union Members* (Washington D.C., 2010) www.bls.gov (accessed February 4, 2011).

⁹ Ibid.

reographers Society (SDC) to choreograph there, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) to dance with the Atlanta Ballet, the American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA) to dance as a Rockette, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) to dance in a film, and either SAG or the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) to dance on television. Since performers have such peripatetic careers, it's possible that this dancer/choreographer would have to perform under ALL of these unions in a single year and would have to pay dues to each of these unions based on her income from each. However, if she does not have the requisite number of weeks under ONE union, it is possible that she will not be able to receive health benefits or contribute to her union pension.

At this writing, SAG and AFTRA are hoping to move towards merger status, the third time they have tried to do this. If successful, it is possible that other performers' unions will follow suit, thereby allowing performers to use their *combined* earnings and power across unions which could curtail administrative costs and provide more equitable and much-needed pensions and benefits.

Partnerships

The University of California, Los Angeles joined the Research Center as a research partner with a team headed by Dr. Martin Y. Iguchi, Chair of the Department of Community Health Sciences, School of Public Health. The study included a partnership of funders as well: in addition to UCLA and Teachers College, these included the California Arts Council, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the Los Angeles Department of Aging, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, and the MetLife Foundation. The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation made the publication and dissemination of this report possible.

*“You just go on as long as
you can.”*

—85-year old actor, LA

Town meetings were held for performing artists in communities in both New York and Los Angeles in locations including the Actors Fund, Career Transition for Danc-

ers, the American Federation of Musicians, The Jazz Museum in Harlem, the New York City borough arts councils and other agencies. We continue to communicate with individual performing arts unions governing our study artists (and providing comparative data), the Department of Professional Employees of the AFL-CIO, the Actors Fund, the National Center for Creative Aging, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Departments of Aging and of Cultural Affairs in both metro areas.

These partnerships provided a rich tapestry for us to interview performers who worked for the WPA, danced in Minsky's Follies and the Borscht Belt, who played at the Cotton Club, Carnegie Hall and with Gene Krupa, actors who studied with Uta Hagen, appeared on Saturday Night Live and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. These are also the people who make sure to eat lunch in the employees' cafeteria at Lincoln Center (to make sure they get “seen”) or the diner near Manhattan Plaza for a sense of community. They performed with the Negro Ensemble Company, off and on Broadway. They have done bus and truck tours, performed for meals, lived on food stamps. Many speak multiple languages and have worked all over the world. And, to pay the bills, they have been everything from auctioneers to priests. (And, full disclosure, the author used to be one of them.)

Findings

Of the 230 recorded interviews in NYC and of 52 in LA, 219 (95%) in NYC and 51 (90%) in LA defined themselves as professional performing artists.

Demographics

Interviewees ranged in age from 62 to 94 in New York City and from 62 to 97 in Los Angeles. The mean age for our aging NYC professional artists is 73 (median 72); in LA the mean is 75 (median 74).

In our aging visual artists' study, being an artist is a Master Identity, transcending race and other kinds of barriers like gender and education. One of our performers echoed this:

“One of the great things about art is that it crosses over ethnicity, gender and sexuality.”

—80-year-old actor, NYC

Demographics of New York City Respondents

	Age (Mean/Median)	Race*	Gender (F/M)
Actor	74/74	White 93% Black 5%	56%/44%
Musician	71/70	White 78% Hispanic 11% Black 6% Other 5%	17%/83%
Singer	73/74	White 83% Black 13% Hispanic 4%	64%/36%
Dancer	72/70	White 72% Black 14% Asian 7% Hispanic 7%	77%/23%
Choreographer	67/66	White 86% Black 14%	29%/71%

*Numbers at 1% and under were not included.

We should remember, however, that this very wide sample represents the face of the performing arts in the 1960s when there were few minorities (and few apologies) in the industry.

Profile of an Aging Performing Artist

73 years old NYC
75 years old LA

Would choose to do
it all over again

Belongs to a
performers'
union

Takes more risks
in the artistic
process than
when younger

Lives alone

Has health
insurance

Current health
places no
limitations on
performing work

Still training in
his/her art

Lives in a rent
controlled
apartment



Edwin Forrest as King Lear

Communicates
daily or weekly
with other
artists

Has a degree
beyond high
school

Has had
experience as an
apprentice

Has a
deeper
creative
experience

Not planning on
leaving metro
area

Satisfied with
lifetime
performing
career

Earns money
through his/her art

Has a will

Demographics of Los Angeles Respondents

	Age (Mean/Median)	Race*	Gender (F/M)
Actor	75/74	White 95% Hispanic 2.5% Asian 2.5%	59%/41%
Musician	75/75	White 100%	50%/50%
Singer	73/72	White 60% Black 40%	40%/60%
Dancer	69/69	White 100%	67%/33%
Choreographer	84/90	White 100%	100%/0%

*Numbers at 1% and under were not included.

Hypotheses, Assumptions, Evidence

1. ISOLATION

HYPOTHESIS

Aging performing artists, indeed performing artists in different genres, have fewer opportunities to work in groups, ensembles and venues where they might have frequent communication and therefore, become increasingly isolated.

Isolation is cited as perhaps the greatest disease of the aging. Rowe and Kahn in their legendary work spoke of the fact that humans are not meant to live solitary lives. Karl Pillemer and his colleagues' particular focus on the "second half of life" cite social integration as promoting well-being for the older person and his or her family and isolation as a barrier to that.¹⁰ A 2005 report by United Neighborhood Houses of New York reports that 32% of New Yorkers aged 65 and older are living alone, compared to 28% of people nationwide.¹¹ Sixty-one percent of our aging NYC performers live alone; 51% of our aging NYC visual artists lived alone. Older people who

¹⁰ Karl Pillemer et al., eds., *Social Integration in the Second Half of Life* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 5.

¹¹ United Neighborhood Houses of New York, *Aging in the Shadows: Social Isolation Among Seniors in New York City* (New York: United Neighborhood Houses, Spring 2005), 9.

live alone have a greater chance of living in poverty than those who live with a spouse.¹²

“Art is a way out of isolation.”

—Jane Alexander¹³

As people live longer and longer lives, and as friends, family and colleagues become ill and die, their social networks diminish. A nurse practitioner at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City told us,

You know what the greatest disease in this hospital is? It's not cancer, not heart disease. It's isolation. People who have no social networks end up using the hospital as their network.¹⁴

Unlike visual artists, who generally work alone but 77% of whom, our research found, communicate every day or every week with other artists, many performing artists depend on other artists to make their art and, while opportunities to do one-person shows or perform solo exist, much of the work is a collective experience. In fact, 66% of our NYC responding performers serve as their own managers, only 23% of our LA artists act as their own managers; 83% of NYC artists and 90% of LA artists use computers (74% NYC / 73% LA of these for their artwork) and over half of NYC artists and 42% of LA artists find it somewhat or very difficult to obtain or maintain representation in order to get employment. Seventy-four percent of NYC artists and 41% of LA artists have been involved in the business side of their work for their entire or almost their entire careers.

“As you get older, you become invisible.”

—68-year-old actor, NYC

One of the ways performers continue their social networks is through continued training or “taking class.” Thirty-six percent of our aging NYC professional per-

¹² Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics, *Older Americans 2010: Key Indicators of Well-Being* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010), 8.

¹³ Andrea Sherman, *The Arts and Older Americans*, Foreword (Washington D.C.: National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, 1995), 2.

¹⁴ Joan Jeffri, Presentations of findings *IOA III* to St. Vincent's Hospital, March 11, 2009.

former respondents and 51% of our LA performer respondents continue this practice; 66% in both cities do so every week.

“Without my community of artists I would be entirely alone.”

—71-year-old actor, LA

FINDINGS: ISOLATION

While ensemble work may become more difficult to obtain as people age, nevertheless, over two-thirds of our aging professional performing artists communicate every day or every week with other artists: 77% of the NYC aging performing artists communicate daily or weekly with actors, 53% with dancers/choreographers, and 67% with musicians/singers and 65% with other artists. In LA, 96% communicate daily or weekly with actors, 46% with dancers/choreographers, 54% with musicians/singers and 70% with other artists. Sixty-one percent of our aging NYC performers live alone; 51% of our aging NYC visual artists lived alone.

2. WORK AND RETIREMENT

HYPOTHESIS

While 88% of our professional visual artists said they will never retire from art, their art process is both self-motivated and self-controlled. For performing artists, there are a whole host of considerations in regard to “work” including the reality that the physical demands of their art forms combine with the physical realities of aging. Situations will likely be different depending on the art form.

In 2008, 69% of our artists in both cities worked between 10 and 20 hours a week in their last paid job; another 17% in NYC between 20 and 30 hours per week (LA—14%) and 17% over 30 hours per week (LA—16%). Over half in both cities consider themselves “not retired.” Of

these, in NYC, 65% are actors, 8% musicians, 11% singers, 13% dancers and 3% choreographers.

While all societies have demarcations of their people by age, there are different views of what Westerners call “retirement.” In some cultures, retirement is inconceivable, at any time in the life course. For the elders among the Hopi of the American Southwest, the end of active work and participation in the community is death, not retirement. In traditional Chinese families in China adults from age 55 on are regarded as *lao-nian*—a stage of old age that commands respect, pleasure and reflection.¹⁵

The retirement age for artists is likely to be much higher than for the general population. As life expectancy is expanding, retirement age will most likely lengthen for the general population. As stated in our study of visual artists, the National Council on Aging (NCOA), describes retirement as a “process” rather than an “event.”¹⁶ In its 2002 study of people 65+ older, 58% were completely retired, but 23% described themselves as both “retired and working” and another 19% as not retired.¹⁷ Nicole Maestas used Health and Retirement survey data to show that “nearly one-half of retirees follow a non-traditional retirement path that involves partial retirement or unretirement, and that 24% of retirees later unretire.”¹⁸ Unretirement jobs share characteristics of “bridge jobs” so, in fact, people may have several retirements during their lifetimes, especially with the recent economic downturn.

Even with the elimination of a mandatory retirement age and the lowering of the age limit for Social Security benefits from 65 to 62, many artists continue to work on their art even as they age, some with no regular formal employment. Some, in fact, may have no retirement age at all. Studies on retirement timing and patterns give “increasing attention to work after retirement, partial retirement and bridge jobs between the end of a career

¹⁵ Mark Luborsky and Ian M. LeBlanc, “Cross-cultural perspectives on the concept of retirement: An analytic redefinition,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 18 (2003): 257.

¹⁶ National Council on Aging, “American Perceptions of Aging in the 21st Century.” http://www.ncoa.org/Downloads/study_ing.pdf (accessed April 19, 2007).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nicole Maestas, “Back to Work: Expectations and Realizations of Work After Retirement,” *RAND Labor and Population Working Paper* (Los Angeles: RAND, August 2005), 1.

job and the full exit out of the labor force.”¹⁹ Additionally the concepts of a) “self-defined retirement” when workers may actually be retired from one job but working at their art and b) work later in life that involves movement into new forms of work, whether art-related or not, are areas our aging performing artists have identified.

A 2006 Merrill-Lynch survey of 1,835 individuals between 60–70 years old as well as approximately 3,500 adults and spouses of varying ages up to 70 in six metropolitan areas, indicates that 71% of adults surveyed hope to work beyond the traditional retirement age, and 45% of these say they do not plan to stop working ever.²⁰ Some are even asking to abandon the word *retirement*.²¹

Of the over half of our aging performing artists who do not consider themselves retired in relation to their performing work, over 80% say they would miss the self-expression and three-quarters in NYC and 82% in LA say they would miss the excitement of the performing arts; 65% in NYC and 70% in LA would miss the camaraderie and social networks; 39% in NYC and 46% in LA the self-esteem and social status and only a quarter in NYC and 46% in LA would miss the income (the biggest reason older workers gave for continuing to work). A Pew study also reports that, according to the US Census, since 1980, adults 55 and over have increased their participation in the labor force to 40% for the first six months of 2009—the highest rate since 1961.²²

“Singers don’t have retirement plans; I have to sing until I die.”

—77-year-old singer, LA

¹⁹ Glen H. Elder Jr. and Eliza K. Pavalko, “Work Careers in Men’s Later Years: Transitions, Trajectories, and Historical Change,” *Journal of Gerontology* 48: 4 (July 1993): S180.

²⁰ Harris Interactive Agewave, *The 2006 Merrill Lynch New Retirement Study: a Perspective From Individuals and Employers* (New York: Merrill Lynch, 2005), 4.

²¹ Nancy Morrow-Howell and Marc Freedman, “Introduction: Bringing Civic Engagement into Sharper Focus,” *Generations* XXX: 4 (2007), 8.

²² Paul Taylor, *America’s Changing Workforce: Recession Turns a Graying Office Grayer*, A Social & Demographic Trends Report (Philadelphia: Pew Research Center, September 3, 2009), 4.

In relation to their performing work, 28% of our NYC performers and 33% of LA performers are semi-retired; over half say they are not retired.

Forty-four percent of NYC professionals and 41% of LA professionals are retired from some kind of work other than performing with an average age of 63 in NYC and 61 in LA and 65% in NYC and 58% in LA receive retirement benefits from that occupation. These “day jobs” include the usual broad spectrum of work: as a translator at the United Nations, as a wardrobe dresser, college/school teaching, clerical and office work, consulting, court stenographer, dubbing foreign films into English, real estate, engineering, social work, postal worker, sales manager, market researcher, nurse, hospital staff, public relations, administration, accounting, travel writing, development, advertising, motion picture projection.

Although some respondents answered a question about when they thought they would stop working at their performing art with responses based around physical limitations (when the voice gives out or they are no longer able to stand), others said they would retire when they stopped breathing, when they were dead. The median age in both cities at which professional performing artists estimate they will stop being active in their art is 90.

FINDINGS: WORK AND RETIREMENT

In relation to their performing work, 28% of our NYC performers and 33% of LA performers are semi-retired, consonant with the changing population; over half (54% NYC/56% LA) say they are not retired. This is a major difference from our data on aging professional visual artists, 13% of whom are semi-retired and a substantial 80% are not retired. Forty-four percent of NYC professionals and 41% of LA professionals are retired from some kind of work other than performing with an average age of 63 in NYC and 61 in LA and 65% in NYC and 58% in LA receive retirement benefits from that occupation.

3. IDENTITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

HYPOTHESIS

Aging artists have different views of identity and professionalism, particularly at the older end of the age scale. Common criteria used by economists (time spent making art, money earned from art, certification/education/training in art) as well as by sociologists, particularly regarding the movement of artists through hierarchies of power or control throughout their lifespan²³ provide some ways to look at artists.

We learned from aging visual artists that having a “body of work” helps to define them as professionals and from jazz musicians that the number of gigs in a year does the same. Dancers have told us that even when they stop dancing (often by their mid-thirties), many continue to call themselves dancers. How do these markers of identity and professionalism manifest in performing artists who are aging?

Again, performers had a strong identity with their profession as reflected in their attitudes towards work and retirement above and their realistic attitudes towards employment.

“The theatre is no place to make a living. But it’s a wonderful place to live a life.”

—80-year-old actor, NYC

Over half of our NYC and LA artists feel validated or very validated as artists; 83% of NYC artists and almost all of the LA artists say their self-esteem is good to excellent and 87% in NYC and 92% in LA that their self-esteem *as artists* is good to excellent.

While income is not the only way to define occupation, it has been borne out in over two decades of studies of professional artists of all ages at the Research Center for Arts and Culture, that performing artists most frequent-

²³ Stephen R. Barley, “Careers Identities, and Institutions: The Legacy of the Chicago School of Sociology,” *Handbook of Career Training*, Michael B. Arthur et al., eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

ly select an “income” definition (“I earn my living as/I earn some income as an artist”) to define themselves as professional artists, while visual artists select attributes like “inner drive to make art.” In this study the NYC performers again selected the income definition as their primary one, while the LA artists selected “inner drive.”

In terms of hours worked, in their last professional job, 88% of our NYC performers worked under 20 hours per week and 84% of our LA performers worked under 20 hours per week.

“The art is where we live.”

—83-year-old actress, NYC

Educationally, performers are well above the level of the general population with 60% in NYC and 52% in LA having been educated at the Bachelor’s Degree level or higher.

Interestingly, in this study, especially among the actors, there were many gradations of artistic self-definition: people who wanted to be called entertainers, people who said to be called an artist you had to have the word “great” in front of it, people who made strong distinctions between performers and celebrities. Some of this may be generational, just as our older visual artists didn’t think in terms of “careers,” but in the performing arts, added to the mix in a more visible way, is the area of competition.

“How do you deal with competition as an aging artist? How do you deal with the fact that you are no longer what they want? You are in competition with your children, not only with your peers.”

—70-year-old actor, NYC

And competition, in this milieu, is closely linked to ageism and stereotypes.

FINDINGS: IDENTITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

Thirty-nine percent of NYC and 35% of LA performing artists earned their major income in the last 12 months as performing artists, or performing arts teachers (9% NYC/15% LA), arts managers (2% NYC/3% LA) or in other art-related occupations (7% NYC, 18% LA). Thirty-eight percent in NYC and 53% in LA have a secondary occupation. These figures may also reinforce the economic difficulties of performing work in the LA metro area. Eighty-eight percent of our NYC performers worked under 20 hours per week and 84% of our LA performers worked under 20 hours per week at their last paid job. Seventeen percent in NYC identified themselves as professionals with a criterion of making a living/intending to make a living as an artist while 17% of the LA artists defined their professionalism by “inner drive to make art.”

4. DISCRIMINATION AND AGEISM

HYPOTHESIS

The majority of programs that fund individual artists concentrate on emerging and mid-career artists. Emergency funds and funds for retooling (Career Transition for Dancers, The Actors Fund, Music Cares) exist, but almost no funds are available for the purpose of supporting the work of aging performing artists. In addition, performing artists generally depend on the venues in which they perform and the companies that hire them. Are performing artists being discriminated against both because, in a media culture devoted to youth, they are aging?

A little under half of our NYC aging artists responded that they have not been discriminated against. Of the remaining half, our NYC older artists report discrimination because of age (66%); 25% feel discriminated against due to their artistic medium (compared to a quarter of our aging visual artists), a quarter because of ethnicity, gender and race, and 39% because of physical appearance. Of these, 86% say they were denied a performing job based on discrimination. This, of course, affects their income. Twenty-three percent say their lives have been made some or a lot harder due to discrimination. In LA 81% of performing artists say they have not been discriminated against, although it was common throughout our study for performers to say they had not experienced discrimination and then to speak fluently on their experiences with ageism elsewhere in the interview.

“Discrimination against age is the younger generation’s loss.”

—78-year-old actress, LA

One fit, attractive, brown-haired 75-year-old actress whom we interviewed, was called to audition for the role of a 75-year-old. She had to go out and buy a white wig and borrow a cane to emulate what the casting director thought 75 looked like.

As we age, it is also likely that we will manifest certain disabilities. Age and disability seem to make the odds of work in the performing arts industry doubly difficult. A Screen Actors Guild study reported that only one-third of their SAG members with disabilities reported working in a theatrical or television production in 2003 and performers with disabilities worked an average of 4.1 days per year (3.5 days for those over 40).²⁴

²⁴ Olivia Raynor and Katharine Hayward, *The Employment of Performers with Disabilities in the Entertainment Industry* (Los Angeles: Screen Actors Guild/Producers Industry Advancement and Cooperative Fund, May 2005), 7.

“Ageism is so subtle: People who don’t think they are experiencing it are experiencing it. People who think they don’t have it do have it. In the arts, there’s so much focus on supporting young people, it’s assumed that, if you’re old, you don’t have anything to offer.”

—72-year-old actor, NYC

FINDINGS: DISCRIMINATION AND AGEISM

A little under half of our NYC aging artists responded that they have not been discriminated against. Of the remaining half, our NYC older artists report discrimination because of age (45%); 66% feel discriminated against due to their artistic medium (compared to a quarter of our aging visual artists), a quarter because of ethnicity, gender and race, and 39% because of physical appearance. Of these, 86% say they were denied a performing job based on discrimination. This, of course, affects their income. Twenty-three percent say their lives have been made some or a lot harder due to discrimination. In LA, 81% say they have not been discriminated against although people spoke eloquently elsewhere in the interviews about their experiences with ageism.

5. LEGACY

HYPOTHESIS

Leaving behind a legacy for a performing artist is a complicated concept. While still photographs, digital media, film, records can reproduce and capture a performance, none of these is the original experience. We speculated that performing artists pass their legacies on through their bodies, through teaching, collaborating, mentoring and through personal interaction and that the “documentation” of their work is likely spotty or non-existent.

The contemporary illustration would be Merce Cunningham, whose Legacy Plan is “a comprehensive roadmap for the future of the Cunningham Dance Foundation,” as envisioned by founder Merce Cunningham “to transition his Company and preserve his oeuvre.” The Plan will ultimately position the Merce Cunningham Trust—established by Cunningham in 2000 as the successor organization to the Cunningham Dance Foundation—to hold and administer all rights to his choreography.²⁵ Plans include a final Legacy Tour, digital recording and dissemination of his work and transition of all work to the Cunningham Trust. For performing artists without a foundation, a company or a cumulative body of work, especially those who consider their work ephemeral, this may be a difficult if not impossible task.

For musicians, recording is definitely a way to preserve their legacy. For grassroots musicians in our 2000 jazz study (mean age 43/median 42) 56% had recorded their own music and 30% had had their music recorded by a professional recording company. For union (AFM) jazz musicians, (mean age 53/median 50) 60% had recorded their own music; 75% had been recorded by a professional company; and for non-jazz musicians (mean age 50; median 47) 40% had recorded their own music and 73% had work recorded by a professional company.²⁶

Also, performing artists are known to pass on their knowledge through teaching. Indeed 56% of our NYC and 48% of our LA aging performing artists intend to pass on their legacy through teaching; 51% NYC / 38%

²⁵ Merce Cunningham Dance Company, “The Legacy Plan.” <http://www.merce.org/p/> (accessed December 25, 2010).

²⁶ Joan Jeffri, *Changing the Beat: A Study of the Worklife of Jazz Musicians*, Research Division Report No. 43. (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2003), 98.

LA through mentoring and 59% NYC / 43% LA through working with young people.

“We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.”

—George Bernard Shaw

A quarter of our NYC aging performing artists and 23% of our LA artists have analog recordings; 28% of NYC and 34% of LA performers have digital recordings or representations of their work. A quarter of our NYC artists and 21% of our LA artists have videos and 10% of NYC artists and 13% of LA artists have a website.

Half our NYC and 38% of LA professional aging performing artists have made no preparation for their art after their death (this does not include leaving a will—see below). For visual artists in *IOA III Aging*, this was 21%.²⁷ The nature of the performing arts dictates a very different situation for passing on one’s legacy. Visual artists, for the most part, have physical works of their own creation (excepting conceptual and performance artists), and some performers like musicians and singers may have recordings. Actors and dancers can document through media and indeed, 25% of our NYC artists (and none of our LA performers) have videos.

What is striking about aging performing artists in this regard is how much their legacy involves interaction with others. As previously noted, 59% percent of the NYC and 43% of the LA aging performers say they will pass on their legacy by working with young people; 56% NYC/48% LA by teaching; 51% NYC/38% LA by mentoring; 52% NYC/ 57% LA by writing. In our “town meetings” for the project, performers exhibited ambivalent and sometimes contradictory feelings about legacy. One well-known Broadway actress claimed that the live theatre experience was ephemeral, that “you had to be there” and when the curtain came down, the experience was gone. A dancer turned actor who was religious about documentation of her work, faced the daunting prospect of storage and of “who would take this.” The choreographers/dancers Eiko and Komo are

²⁷ All references to *IOA III* can be found in Jeffri, *Above Ground: Special Focus NYC Aging Visual Artists*.

creating one legacy model based on the museum model of a retrospective. Visual and performing arts curators are assisting them in examining almost 40 years of their collaborative history that includes performances, installations, revivals, a visual art exhibition, a catalog, essays, video works, workshops and discussions, all ultimately “housed” on a website.²⁸

The advice of some older performers resonates with future generations. One dancer who had been through serious early health issues, advised the young to hear “testimonies of the unexpected” from their older peers.

FINDINGS: LEGACY

A whopping 92% of both NYC and LA aging performers have a will. This is much higher than our 23% of aging visual artists and than the 42–55% of the general population; 77% of NYC artists and 65% of LA artists have a health proxy; 67% NYC and 66% LA artists have a power of attorney and 41% NYC/43% LA have an estate plan. It is curious that performing artists, many of whom have less “tangible” material to pass on, are so much more organized in terms of these later life concerns than aging visual artists, who largely have objects to pass along. Yet, in terms of actual documentation, their systems indeed seem spotty and incomplete.

6. CAREER SATISFACTION

HYPOTHESIS

Research speculates that workers who have frequently moved in and out of jobs, employment, or the work force may be less invested in their careers and less attached to the work force²⁹. Conversely, artists, even if they move in and out of the work force and hold multiple jobs, are very invested in their careers. In the 1990s, 41% of the actors we surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with their careers; 89% said—if they had it to do over again—they would choose the same career.³⁰

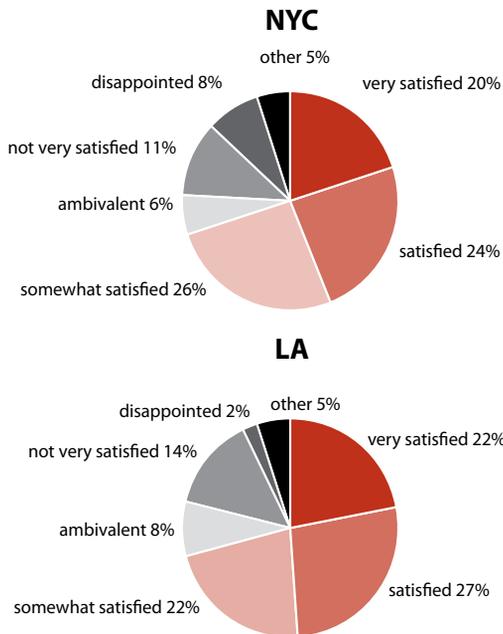
²⁸ See www.eikoandkoma.org

²⁹ Shin-Kap Han and Phyllis Moen, “Clocking Out: Temporal Patterning of Retirement,” *American Journal of Sociology* 105: 1 (July 1999): 191–236.

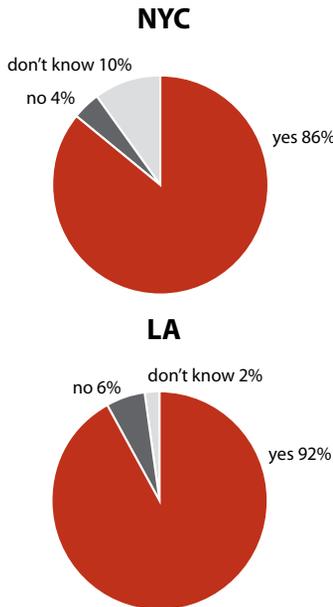
³⁰ Joan Jeffri et al., *Artists Training and Career Project: Actors*, (New York: Columbia University / Research Center for Arts and Culture, 1992), 25.

A surprisingly similar percentage—44%—of our aging professional NYC performer respondents and 49% of our LA performer respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied and another 26% NYC / 22% LA said they were somewhat satisfied (total 70–71%) with their lifetime performing careers; 86% in NYC and 92% in LA said they would choose to be an actor/dancer/choreographer/musician or singer if they had it to do over again. Eight percent of the NYC artists and 2% of the LA artists said they were disappointed with their performing careers.

Satisfaction with Lifetime Performing Career



“Would Choose to Be a Performing Artist If Had to Do it Over Again”



Eighty-three percent of NYC performing artists say they work in the arts primarily because of the creative expression it affords them; another 22% says it's due to “fire in the belly” and 20% say “personal satisfaction.” Only 30% of LA performers cite creative expression as the major motive; 33% cite “fire in the belly.”

“I put one foot in front of the other and get the next job.”

—74-year-old dancer, NYC

Using the Diener Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) that we used for aging visual artists, individuals who score between **25 and 29 (High Score)** like their lives, and feel things are going well. Of course their lives are not perfect, but they feel that things are mostly good. Furthermore, just because the person is satisfied does not mean he or she is complacent. In fact, growth and challenge might be part of the reason the respondent is satisfied. For most people in this high-scoring range, the major domains of life—work or school family, friends, leisure, personal development—are going well and while the person is satisfied, he is not necessarily complacent.

People who score in the **20–24 range (Average Score)** include the average life satisfactions in economically developed nations. This person is within normal range in that he has areas of his life that need improvement, however he would likely want to move to a higher level by making some changes in his life.³¹

In our study, 95% of our professional artist respondents in both cities answered all five questions in Diener’s Satisfaction with Life Scale. The questions are:

1. In most ways my life is close to ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

³¹ The above descriptions are from Diener, Ed. “Understanding Scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale.” (2006). <http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/> (accessed December 25, 2010).

Diener Satisfaction Scores for NYC and LA

Aging Professional Artists (IOA IV), Aging Visual Artists (IOA III), and Comparative Groups

	IOA IV NY	IOA IV LA	IOA III NY	Comp. Data ¹ ³²	Comp. Data ² ³³
Mean	23.60	26	24.12	26.43	17.81
Median	25	26	25	n/a	n/a
Mode	27	30	n/a	n/a	n/a

FINDINGS: CAREER SATISFACTION

Similar to aging NYC visual artists, NYC aging performers are satisfied with their work, their identity of being an artists, and have average-high self-esteem when compared with the general population. Forty-two percent in NYC and 52% in LA feel validated or very validated as artists (lower than our 63% of NYC visual artists) and 86% in NYC and 92% in LA would choose to be a performer if they had to do it all over again. They score average-high in comparison with the general population.

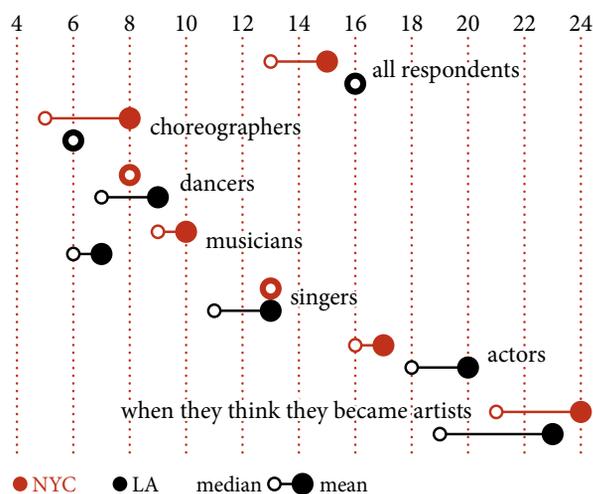
7. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

HYPOTHESIS

Aging artists are more highly educated than the general public. In 1950, 17% of the older general population had graduated from high school and only 3% had a Bachelor's degree. By 2003, 72% were high school graduates and 17% had a Bachelor's degree.³⁴ According to both RCAC and other independent studies of artists over the last two decades, over 40% of artists have Bachelor's Degrees and another third have graduate degrees.

The average age our NYC respondents began training for their art was 15 (median 13). This was much younger for NYC dancers (mean and median 8), choreographers (mean 8 / median 5), musicians (mean 10 / median 9) and singers (mean and median 13) and older for actors (mean 17 / median 16). Ninety-one percent of our NYC respondents and 76% of our LA respondents received art-related training in the NYC Metro area. The average age at which they thought they became artists was 24 (median 21); for LA the mean was 23 (median 19).

Age When Respondents Began Training



³² Errol Hamarat et al., "Perceived Stress and Coping Resource Availability as Predictors of Life Satisfaction in Young, Middle-Aged, and Older Adults," *Experimental Aging Research* 27(2) (2001): 181–196.

³³ Brian Scott Ehrlich and Derek M. Isaacowitz, "Does Subjective Well-Being Increase with Age?," *Perspectives in Psychology Spring*: 20–26 (2002): 23. Description of Sample: Older (94 participants age 60–93) participants were recruited from several senior centers and assisted living communities for elderly in the Philadelphia area. Older participants from assisted living communities or who experienced cognitive impairments were not recruited.

Our findings were similar for LA artists. The mean and median age LA performers began training for their art was 16. This was younger for LA dancers (mean 9 / me-

³⁴ Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, *Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Well-Being* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, August 2004), 6.

dian 7), choreographers (mean and median 6), musicians (mean 7 / median 6), and singers (mean 11 / median 13) than for actors (mean 20 / median 18).

Forty-nine percent of our NYC respondents' and 24% of our LA respondents' initial arts experience took place at home and almost three-quarters at school (57% for LA respondents). Up to high school, for 63% of NYC artists and 48% of LA artists, their exposure to the arts was through after-school or weekend classes, and for 63% of NYC performers and 66% of our LA performers from visits to theatres, concert halls, dance concerts, performing arts venues, etc. Sixty-three percent of NYC artists and 44% of LA artists have experience as teaching artists, while 30% of NYC artists and 40% of LA artists teach now and New Yorkers spend a little over a third of their work time teaching while Angelinos spent one fifth of their work time teaching.

In 2005 in the general population, 30% of the over 65-ers were high school graduates; 27% had a Bachelor's Degree or higher.³⁵ In all studies of artists, there is a high degree of education. This study is no exception.

In New York City, 60% received a formal degree beyond high school: 32% had a Bachelor's Degree, 25% received a Master's Degree and 3% received a Doctorate or Professional Degree; in LA, 52% received a formal degree beyond high school: 42% had a Bachelor's Degree, 8% received a Master's Degree and 2% received a Doctorate.

In our 1997 study of artists in LA, SF, NYC and Minneapolis/St. Paul, *Information on Artists II (IOA II)* 45% of Actors' Equity Association members had a college degree and another 29% had a graduate degree.³⁶ Twelve percent in NYC and 18% in LA received financial assistance for their education under the G.I. Bill.

Unfortunately, high levels of education do not correlate positively with income, and in 1990 Filer found that longer schooling had a negative effect on income for performing artists.³⁷ This finding has been confirmed by other studies since that time and policy makers have frequently debated whether to decrease the "supply" of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Joan Jeffri. *Information on Artists II*. (New York: Columbia University / Research Center for Arts and Culture, 1998), 3.

³⁷ Randall Filer, "The starving artists: Myth or reality?—Earnings of an artists in the United States," *Journal of Economics* 14 (1) (1998): 15–38.

artists by restricting admission to the schools that train them.³⁸

FINDINGS: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

As with all past studies of artists, this one confirms the higher education level of professional artists. In New York, 32% of our artists received a Bachelor's Degree, 25% a Master's Degree and 3% a Doctorate or Professional Degree—a total of 60% with a Bachelor's Degree or higher. In LA, 42% had a Bachelor's Degree, 8% received a Master's Degree and 2% received a Doctorate, a total of 52% with a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

8. HEALTH INSURANCE

HYPOTHESIS

Unlike all previous RCAC studies over the last two decades, except grassroots jazz musicians, over 85% of surveyed artists had health or medical coverage including 93% of our aging visual artists. We expected aging performing artists (even with Medicare) to resemble RDS jazz musicians, of whom half the number of unionized musicians had health coverage.

Contrary to our hypothesis, 96% of our aging NYC and 94% of our LA performing artist respondents have health insurance. Eighty-four percent of these feel this coverage is adequate. This compares favorably with all our other studies of artists in all genres, except grassroots jazz musicians, who had approximately half the coverage of union musicians. Eighty-four percent of our responding NYC aging artists and 87% of our LA artists have Medicare: 50% have Medicare A; 40% in NYC and 54% in LA have Medicare B; 4% in NYC and 2% in LA have Medicare C; 18% in NYC and 9% in LA have Medicare D. Only 4% in NYC and 6% in LA have Medicaid. Fifty-five percent of those NYC performers and 34% of the LA performers who have Medicare also have a Supplemental Social Security Policy.

³⁸ Just such a study was conducted by the Gulbenkian Foundation in the 1970s in the UK and the recommendation to restrict places at acting schools was quickly buried.

In 2005, 13.7% of the 65+ population received coverage through Medicare and 13% through Medicaid; 67.7% were covered by private insurance.³⁹

Before they got Medicare, these artists were covered by: their arts unions, plans from their spouses, and plans such as those offered by Aetna, Affiniti, Anthem, Magnacare, Oxford, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, United Healthcare, GHI, self-paying HMOs, PPOs, HIP, a plan provided by an employer, private insurance (from self or spouse), the Veterans Administration, through teaching, the government, a non-arts job and quite a few said they had NO insurance.

Only 16% of NYC respondents have coverage from an arts union; another 11% from a non-arts union; 17% have an HMO. Twenty-four percent have long-term care insurance. The results are strikingly different in LA, where 47% have coverage from an arts union; only 2% from a non-arts union; 23% have an HMO. Twenty-eight percent have long term care insurance.

More than 80% of NYC performers and 92% of LA performers reported that they paid under \$5,000 out-of-pocket for healthcare costs in 2008. Similarly, for our aging NYC visual artists, out-of-pocket health expenditures in 2005 averaged \$5,000 or less. Using the mid-point numbers within each range to calculate a mean average, a New York City performer’s out-of-pocket costs for healthcare was \$4,650 in 2008; in Los Angeles it was \$3,723.

In terms of performing artists’ actual health, 86% of the NYC artists and 88% of the LA performers say they are in good to excellent health compared to 74% of the general 65+ population(2004–2006).⁴⁰ In 2005, the Alliance for Aging Research and The American Federation for Aging Research issued a public agenda report that put forth some of the new ways scientists are thinking about aging: “The goal is extending the health-span, not just the lifespan. What we are talking about is keeping older people productive longer.”⁴¹

³⁹ Ke Bin Wu, Income, *Poverty and Health Insurance in the United States in 2005* (Washington, D.C.: AARP Public Policy Institute, 2006), 44. Available here: http://assets.aarp.org/rg-center/econ/fs133_income.pdf.

⁴⁰ Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics, *Older Americans 2008: Key Indicators of Well-Being* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), 120.

⁴¹ Alison Kadlec and Lucyann Barry, *The Science of Aging Gracefully: Scientists and the Public Talk About Aging Research* (New York: Public Agenda, 2005), 4.

“My job is a verb—constantly learning.”

—87-year-old actor, NYC

Among the top factors mentioned by biomedical researchers are a sense of meaning and purpose, to help reduce stress, improve lifestyle and make medications less necessary: **in this, artists are a model for society.**⁴²

FINDINGS: HEALTH INSURANCE

As in all our former studies, except for grassroots jazz musicians from 2000, a high percentage of artists—especially aging artists—have health coverage. For aging NYC visual artists this was 93%; for aging NYC performers 96% have health coverage and 94% of LA performers do. In NYC, only 16% of these have health insurance coverage through an arts union, while 47% of LA performers have coverage through an arts union.

9. INCOME AND EARNINGS

HYPOTHESIS

Aging artists have a higher percentage of asset and pension income than the general aging population.

NYC: Gross Household Income for All Professionals and by Gender

NYC	All Professionals	Male	Female
Mean	\$50,608	\$49,054	\$49,776
Median	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$50,000

LA: Gross Household Income for All Professionals and by Gender

LA	All Professionals	Male	Female
Mean	\$53,521	\$59,053	\$48,052
Median	\$30,000	\$50,000	\$30,000

⁴² Ibid., 13–14.

NYC: Mean/Median Individual Income from Work as a Performing Artist

NYC	All Prof'ls	Male	Female	Actor	Musician	Singer	Dancer	Choreo.
Mean	\$9,885	\$9,438	\$9,531	\$6,820	\$8,517	\$20,677	\$14,350	\$8,833
Median	\$1,750	\$1,750	\$1,750	\$1,750	\$5,000	\$1,000	\$250	\$5,000

LA: Mean/Median Individual Income from Work as a Performing Artist

LA	All Prof'ls	Male	Female	Actor	Musician	Singer	Dancer	Choreo.
Mean	\$9,361	\$10,105	\$8,556	\$7,953	\$31,417	\$4,300	\$15,875	\$1,000
Median	\$1,750	\$5,000	\$1,750	\$3,375	\$5,000	\$1,750	\$15,875	\$1,000

NYC: Mean/Median Household Income for Aging Professional NYC Artists According to Discipline

NYC	Actor	Musician	Singer	Dancer	Choreo.
Mean	\$48,133	\$70,633	\$54,239	\$54,750	\$24,000
Median	\$30,000	\$67,500	\$50,000	\$40,000	\$30,000

LA: Mean/Median Household Income for Aging Professional NYC Artists According to Discipline

LA	Actor	Musician	Singer	Dancer	Choreo.
Mean	\$44,855	\$156,250	\$35,900	\$39,833	\$23,000
Median	\$30,000	\$175,000	\$30,000	\$16,000	\$23,000

For NYC males, a mean of 19% came from Social Security (median 10%); for females, a mean of 14% of total household income came from Social Security (median, 5%). For males 36% and for females 38% of gross individual income came from Social Security (very close to our aging visual artists percentage of 39%). For NYC males in 2008, a mean of \$32 of individual work as a performing artist was from grants or awards; for females just above \$1. The average annual residual and royalty payments in 2008 for an aging NYC performer was \$1,129. For males it was an average of \$1,969, for females \$489.

For LA aging professional artists, 42% of aggregate income came from Social Security (median 50%). For Los Angeles males, 46% of gross individual income came from Social Security for males, 45% for females. The amount from grants or awards was trivial for both males and females in LA, significantly less than a dol-

lar on average. However, the average annual royalty and residual payments for an aging performer in LA in 2008 was \$1,678; an average of \$534 for men and \$2,372 for females.

Among our respondents: 85% of our NYC respondents took Social Security, 76% received income from a retirement plan, 49% received income from other investments, 46% received payments from union pensions and 40% from stocks and bonds. Females earned an average of \$886.11 “off the books;” males, \$1,802.38.

In LA, 92% of our respondents took Social Security, 35% received income from a retirement plan, 38% received income from other investments, 52% received payment from union pensions and 44% from stocks and bonds. Females earned an average of \$626.32 “off the books” while males earned \$54.55.

Historically, it is common for artists to turn to teaching to supplement their income, and sometimes to provide benefits like health insurance. Thirty percent of our NYC performers (and 40% of our LA artists) teach.

Their assets come from stocks and bonds, real estate, annuities, money markets, mutual funds, treasury bills, CD's, IRAs, SEP IRAs, gold, silver, art, autographs, china, jewelry, 401K, retirement funds, paintings, crystal, furs and other investments. In NYC, 85% had no difficulty meeting basic needs. In LA, 81% said the same. Forty-two percent of NYC performers describe themselves in the middle class, with another 44% lower, working or lower middle class and 13% upper or upper middle class. In LA, this compares to 28% in the middle class with another 45% lower, working or lower middle class, and 28% upper or upper middle class.

According to the 2000 Census 38.4% of the NYC metro employed artists were homeowners and 61% were renters.⁴³ In our study, 26% of NYC and 46% of LA performing artists own a home and 35% in NYC own an apartment (4% in LA); 17% in NYC and 10% in LA own a second home or apartment. Nevertheless, the mean/median household income in NYC is \$50,608/\$30,000 and in LA is \$53,521/\$30,000.

FINDINGS: INCOME AND EARNINGS

One-quarter of our aging NYC professional performers support themselves entirely as performing artists and three-quarters earn money through their art. Twenty percent work in the profit sector, 20% in the non-profit sector and 60% work in both. Forty percent earned their major income in the last year from their work as a performing artist. And 68% in NYC and 69% in LA, in their last paid performing job, spent between 0 and 10 hours a week performing.

The income figures show that for household income, of our aging performers, choreographers are operating at the lowest level, and for some other performers, median figures are just above the poverty level. Three quarters of our aging performers earned \$7,000 or less from performing in 2008. They also show musicians in LA and singers in NYC with the highest individual income from performing.

The total gross household income for 72% of aging NYC professional performing artists in 2008 is \$60,000 or less; the total gross individual income from performing (not including teaching) in 2008 for 75% is \$7,000 or less.

In Los Angeles, 68% of aging professional performing artists have a total gross household income of \$60,000 or less in 2008. The total gross individual income from performing (not including teaching) in LA in 2008 for 71% is \$7,000 or less. One of the difficult things for artists is that they are sometimes asset-rich and cash poor. While 89% of both our NYC and LA aging performers have savings and half in NYC and 42% in LA feel this is adequate and 71% have financial assets (73% in LA), 9% in NYC and 14% in LA still say they did not have enough money to live on in the previous 12 months.

10. RESILIENCE

HYPOTHESIS

A great deal has been written about the resilience of older people, much of it tied to engagement. Artists, who put the good news and the bad news into their work, are models of resilience and tenacity, through a life of meaning and engagement through their work.

A recent study of 70 and 80 year olds in the UK defined resilience as “flourishing despite adversity.” It points to the relationship between the individual and his “social context as crucial to understanding resilience.”⁴⁴ The economic and social adversity for performers is legendary, and includes a deep mythology about the “overnight star.” The reality of being a performer is perhaps encapsulated in the policy of Actors’ Equity Association in its early days which gave every actor a pair of shoes (or money for such) in order to pound the pavements to attend auditions.

Aging professional performing artists are similar to our aging NYC visual artists in their lifetime engagement with their art and their use of both positive and negative feelings in their artwork.

In NYC, under 9% experience abuse, irrationality, panic, guilt, dependency or thoughts of suicide, slightly less than the close to 10% for aging NYC visual artists. Forty-four percent experience ageism; 44% anxiety; 23%

⁴³ Ann Markusen and Greg Schrock, *Creative Communities: Artist Data User Guide* (New York: Leveraging Investments in Creativity, May 2008), 17.

⁴⁴ Zoe Hildon, et al., “Understanding adversity and resilience at older ages,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 30: 5 (2008): 728.

depression and indecisiveness. Fifty-three percent regularly experience flexibility, almost three-quarters experience gratification and humor, over 60% experience joy, passion, happiness, satisfaction (similar to percentages for our aging NYC visual artists) and self-awareness and self-esteem.

LA paints a very different picture: While 9% or less experience abuse, irrationality, panic, guilt, and dependency, 54% say they experience ageism even though 80% said they were not discriminated against in another part of the survey; 48% experience anxiety; 22% depression; 23% helplessness. Sixty-five percent experience flexibility; 78% gratification and happiness and self-awareness; 90%, humor; 71%, joy; 69%, self-esteem. So for LA artists the lows seem lower and the highs significantly higher.

Fifty-six percent of our NYC artists and 57% of our LA artists have anxiety about growing older. Of these, 72% in NYC and 75% in LA are concerned about depending on others for care, 76% in NYC and 82% in LA about health, 70% in NYC and 54% in LA about physical fitness or ability. Ninety-four percent of NYC artists and 98% of LA artists say these feelings, both positive and negative, contribute to their work in the arts.

In NYC, 64% and in LA, 75% say art helps resolve conflicts (compared to 71% of our aging NYC visual artists), and 86% in NYC and 96% in LA understand the big picture more than when they were younger (83% of aging visual artists).

Perhaps part of their resilience is reflected in the fact that half our NYC aging professional performing artists and 69% of our LA artists feel they are now making the best work of their lives (and 56% of our aging NYC visual artists said the same); 69% in NYC and 77% in LA feel art is very relevant to the general public. These attitudes, despite irregularity of artistic work and income, anxiety and vulnerability, are echoed in the findings of a recent Canadian study of performing, visual and literary artists.

Perhaps too, performers also understand that there are qualities they have acquired through being performers that may be useful to them outside the arts: in NYC, over two-thirds of the artists named communication skills, cooperation, team work and initiative in this regard; in LA, over three-quarters of the artists named these.

FINDINGS: RESILIENCE

In spite of their struggles, most participants sent a robust message that artists maintain a strong connection to their work. Participants described a deeply held belief in the value art provides for society. This might help to explain why artists ‘accept’ less than ideal life circumstances. Our study illustrates artists’ deeply held belief that ‘art is essential,’ which then encourages and motivates them to continue with the work they so deeply believe in, regardless of the evidence that their work may affect their economic, physical and emotional health.⁴⁵ While artists do seem to use both negative and positive experiences and emotions in their work, in LA the highs are higher and the lows lower.

Union Data

We received aggregate data on aging artists in the Los Angeles and New York City metro areas from Screen Actors Guild (SAG) which represents actors and also represents dancers, musicians and other performers working under SAG’s jurisdiction, Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) which represents actors, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) which represents performers, journalists and other artists and professionals working in the entertainment and news media, the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) Local 802 in New York which represents vocalists, copiers and arrangers, and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) which represents professional stage directors and choreographers.

⁴⁵ Keegan K. Barker, et al., “Occupational strain and professional artists: A qualitative study of an underemployed group,” *Arts & Health* 1:2 (September 2009): 147.

MEMBERSHIP

Active Members 62 and Older in 2008 ⁴⁶

Performing Arts Union	62-74	75-85	Over 85
Actors' Equity Association			
AEA: NYC	2,058	688	159
AEA: NYC (% M/F)	51%/49%	53%/47%	52%/48%
AEA: LA	1,075	355	80
AEA: LA (% M/F)	57%/43%	61% / 39%	53%/47%
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists			
AFTRA: NYC	6,351	2,185	763
AFTRA: NYC (% M/F)	52%/48%	55%/45%	53%/47%
AFTRA: LA	6,696	2,400	1,035
AFTRA: LA (% M/F)	58%/42%	63%/37%	57%/43%
Screen Actors Guild			
SAG: NYC	2,464	1,041	260
SAG: LA	4,741	1,768	467
American Federation of Musicians-NYC			
AFM: NYC, Local 802	778	394	158
AFM: NYC, Local 802 (% M/F)	79%/21%	86%/14%	83%/17%
Stage Directors and Choreographers Society			
SDC: NYC	136	31	3
SDC: LA	45	14	1

Demographic data on gender were not available from all unions.

The unions also provided us with average work salaries for performing artists 62 and older, as well as data for members receiving pension benefits. They are as follows:

Average Salaries in 2008

Performing Arts Union	62-74	75-85	Over 85
AEA: NYC	\$22,093	\$14,528	\$10,484
AEA: LA	\$20,643	\$26,140	\$4,737
AFTRA: NYC	\$2,648	\$1,750	\$359
AFTRA: LA	\$4,401	\$2,627	\$863
SAG: NYC	\$8,245	\$6,717	\$1,553
SAG: LA	\$12,751	\$8,032	\$3,466
AFM: NYC, Local 802	\$31,685	\$23,441	\$2,449

Pensions

Monthly amounts for Aging Performers in 2008 by Gender

	Male Mean	Male Median	Female Mean	Female Median
AEA: NYC	\$501.94	\$425	\$538.63	\$388.50
AEA: LA	\$150	\$150	\$595.75	\$441.50
AFTRA: NYC	\$162.40	\$150	\$688	\$156
AFTRA: LA	\$505	\$275	\$133	\$117
SAG: NYC	\$461.55	\$360	\$688	\$156
SAG: LA	\$1022.67	\$900	\$642.75	\$650.50
AFM: NYC	\$1283.33	\$1200	\$1300	\$1300
AFM: LA	\$500	\$500	\$656	\$656

Forty-two percent of our NYC and 50% of LA aging performers who collect a pension from one or more unions, took their pensions early.

⁴⁶ These were the only unions with sufficient numbers for us to use in this analysis. See full report for more detail.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Performing Arts Unions

1. UNIONS NEED TO RECONFIGURE WAYS FOR THEIR MEMBERS TO GET BENEFITS

For the third time there is an attempt to merge Screen Actors Guild(SAG) and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA). This merger might be the beginning of a merger of all performers' unions which would alleviate the current situation where one performing artist can belong to multiple unions but, if s/he does not have enough work weeks in any SINGLE union, s/he cannot receive health insurance and pension benefits. This is a merger that is long overdue in terms of equity of benefits among artists. Actors' Equity's current statistics report that the average work weeks per working member is only 17. As an example, if a performer belongs to Actors' Equity Association (AEA) , an actor must have at least 12 weeks of covered employment in the previous four quarters (12 months) to qualify for six months of coverage. If an actor works 20 or more weeks in the same period, s/he qualifies for 12 months of coverage. Participants are evaluated for health coverage eligibility four times a year.⁴⁷ It is particularly difficult for older working artists: 88% of our NYC artists and 84% of our LA performers worked 20 hours a week or less in their last job. Below are the average work weeks for Actors' Equity Association members 62 and over for 2008.

⁴⁷ Actors' Equity Association, "Health Insurance," <http://www.actorsequity.org/Benefits/healthinsurance.asp> (accessed December 29, 2010).

AEA Average Work Weeks in 2008

	62-74	75-85	Over 85
NYC:	16.3	13.6	7.7
LA:	10.6	10.3	6.5

While a small percentage of 62+ AFTRA members in both NYC and LA (21%; 27%) obtain health coverage, many performers who are members of both SAG and AFTRA obtain these benefits through SAG.

In addition to equity, a benefit of merger is the rationalization of the fragmented structure of the unions in the face of employer consolidation (e.g. NBC and Comcast). This would also stop battles between and among unions over jurisdictional disputes.

2. HELP NEEDED FOR THOSE BETWEEN AGES 55 AND 60

The normal retirement age is 65 for an artist to receive full benefits; early retirement (60-64) reduces one's benefits since they are spread over a longer period of time. Leadership at the Actors Fund which provides many subsidiary benefits to artists, often observes the difficulty for people in the 55-60 (or 55-62/65) age range. Too young for full Social Security and Medicare benefits, and without enough work to qualify for union benefits, they get caught in a no man's land. Perhaps the union could address this reality (which exists for many in the workplace, not just artists.) This is the donut hole that

many unions face including CWA/Verizon workers who can retire at 55.

3. MORE SOLIDARITY AMONG UNIONS AND WITH EMPLOYERS

In one of our focus groups, an aging dancer recounted the following tale: she was hired by a major arts institution to dance in the chorus and offered \$50 per performance, well below union minimum. She was existing on \$500 Social Security a month and took the job. Another union member in the focus group berated her for weakening the bargaining power of dancers in general and letting the employer get away with this. Her solution would have been to ask the Deputy Director of the company (all unionized companies have a union member designated as the Deputy) to complain to the union. The aging dancer’s response was that, had she done that, the employer simply would have hired a different dancer and that she had to eat.

AFTRA has 32 locals around the country, e.g. NY, Los Angeles, Boston, Phila, DC, etc. SAG contracts with AFTRA for AFTRA to provide representation services for SAG members through the AFTRA local offices in Chicago, Washington DC, San Francisco, Boston, and Atlanta. AEA on the other hand does not have locals but instead has three regions with an additional office in Florida. AEA is a national union with most decisions centralized in a very large Council of 84 members including the eight officers who vote on all decisions. Councillors are elected by the membership and represent actors, chorus and stage managers and all three regions. All of the entertainment unions including SAG and AFTRA have collective bargaining agreements that take local conditions into account. AEA has many different theater contracts; in a few of the Actors’ Equity Agreements there is negotiated language that allows for non-professionals to work in an Equity production; however, there is a limit to the number of non-professionals that can be hired. Some people observed that this allows work for members, but (from the union’s point of view) may hamper the growth of theatres (which could then provide more work). There is a growing amount of non-union work in digital media and non-union commercial work; however the non-union terms are less than the terms established for union professionals and threaten

to undermine the rates, benefits and protections professional union talent has established.⁴⁸

We learned in our study of jazz musicians in 2000⁴⁹ that jazz musicians are likely to join a parent local union (such as Local 174-496 in New Orleans), pay dues, and when they go to another local, they pay dues there (Local 802 in NYC), eroding any kind of union solidarity. AFM musicians are required to join and pay annual dues to up to five locals where they commonly work, and are required to pay work dues to each local where they work. They can get a rebate from the national union if they are in excess of two locals. Most scale rates are the result of collective bargaining. Failure to pay can mean termination of membership. So currently, a Local 802 musician pays annual dues and then pays work dues of approximately 3.5% of scale wages. This differs for live performance (3.5%, recording and electronic media (4%) and educational services (2%). Scale wages are the minimum wages agreed to between the employer and the union in a collective bargaining agreement. Local 802 contracts do not prevent musicians from negotiating wages which are higher than the minimum scale. The employer will automatically deduct work dues from an employee’s wages once he has signed a Dues Authorization checkoff card and given it to his union representative.⁵⁰ This differs from SAG and AFTRA where work dues are paid on a sliding scale.

4. GREATER DIVERSITY

A 2005 report commissioned by SAG suggested advocating for greater diversity in roles for film and television, especially since over half of SAG’s membership is over 40.⁵¹ The use of “blind” auditions for musicians is a step in this direction as is Actors’ Equity Association’s efforts towards non-traditional casting. While requirements differ by art form, performers’ unions, arts service organizations, arts organizations, arts advocacy organizations and artists should have a coordinated message, both for “above-the-line” (“creative” workers) and “below-the line” (“technical”) workers in all the arts. It should also be noted that our surveyed artists

⁴⁸ Personal communication with AFTRA, February 26, 2011.

⁴⁹ Jeffri, *Changing the Beat: A Study of the Worklife of Jazz Musicians*.

⁵⁰ Private email correspondence with AFM, February 26 and 28, 2011.

⁵¹ Raynor and Hayward, 8.

grew up in a different era, one which was much more restrictive, and that many improvements have been made since then.

5. BETTER DATA COLLECTION BY UNIONS ON THEIR AGING ARTISTS

Some of the unions have been extremely helpful to this study and carefully follow their members. Other performing arts unions have little to no data on their aging members, and/or on members who leave the union, stop employment or go on honorary withdrawal. Additionally, in most unions the health insurance and pension information is handled by a firm separate from the union (based on the Taft-Hartley Act), often with Trustees from both union representatives and employers. Also, it is difficult to know how many people in a particular sector are in a union since unions deal in absolute numbers; the Bureau of Labor Statistics has a better indication of distribution since it relies on density. Entertainment unions do not have a good handle on density, that is the percentage of entertainers/performers in a given craft who are unionized.

Some of the dilemma is the many different structures and agreements of the different performing arts unions. For example, the AFM does not have a national health plan for musicians, only a national pension plan and a few AFM locals have health and welfare plans. The way locals are involved in the pension plan is either through making contributions on behalf of their employees at the respective local or through collective bargaining agreements that they enter into with various employers in their jurisdiction. They bargain pension contributions into the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) and the employer signs the Trust Indenture Agreement with the Pension Fund and makes contributions into the Fund based on the rates negotiated in the CBA. The pension plan provides for contributions on nationally negotiated contracts (e.g. phonograph recording, TV, film) and from symphony, opera and ballet orchestras with CBAs if such contributions were bargained into the local contract. There may also be single engagement contracts that locals enter into that require pension contributions. Local 802's health plan is only for Local 802 members.⁵²

In order to put programs in place for older performing artists, it is necessary to have up-to-date accurate information. This might require, in some instances, contact with employers of the past year or several years in order to obtain accurate information. Without it, much of the programming for older artists is likely to be based on soft information and needs that are articulated, but do not necessarily represent the majority.

6. BENCHMARKING EMPLOYMENT EVERY SEVERAL YEARS

Currently performers who join a union are in the union for life, unless they actively and visibly break union rules (and there are differing levels of punishment depending on the union). In SAG and AFTRA, union dues are on a sliding scale that is based on employment income during the past year up to a certain amount. If they are no longer working, artists can take honorary withdrawal and not have to pay dues. If they wish to become active again, their dues payments also become active. There are circumstances such as showcases for members of AEA where performers can work with union sanction and not get the union's minimum pay, but they must go through the union for permission.

Aside from the above practices, there is no benchmark to determine how active performers are except by salaries paid under union jurisdiction, and therefore no practice to request they end their union membership if they are no longer active. Thus, the numbers that represent union performing artists are misleading, since they incorporate not only those actively working in the field, but those who have not worked for many years and who may consider their union dues a sort of "contribution to the field." These numbers include teachers, people who have moved on to other professions, and those who think that someday they might trod the boards or play in the orchestra again. The numbers are also misleading when they declare that x% of union members are not working, since this often means they are not working in employment covered by that particular union, not that they are unemployed. Additionally, the members who belong at a low level, ineligible for benefits, may have expectations from the union even though they are not earning enough to be eligible for benefits.

⁵² Private email correspondence with AFM, February 26, 2011.

7. HELPING PERFORMERS UNDERSTAND AVAILABLE SERVICES

While unions attempt to help performers understand available services, most insurance, pension and other official documents are written in a language not easily accessible to the common mind. More unions should give workshops, send pamphlets and emails to help the membership understand benefits that are already in place.

Place for Aging Performing Artists to Congregate and Exchange Ideas

Some of the fields represented in this study have places for older artists to exchange ideas on a regular basis. In dance, Career Transition for Dancers has its Diamond Group and the Actors Fund has the Dancers Resource Group. Screen actors can meet at the Actors Center in Los Angeles (founded in 2008) which offers learning spaces, computers, software for scriptwriting, video and audio editing, a library and a lounge and SAG also has a Silver Artists Group and created a Senior Performers Interview Project aptly called “I just want to work.” Among the Actors Center’s activities was the recent screening of a documentary of actors over 80 in Hollywood called “Troupers.” But for stage and screen actors in New York, there is no collective space where they can meet, except for those who live and work in artists housing like Manhattan Plaza or Westbeth. Eighteen percent of our NYC and 61% of our LA performing artists said one of their major needs is networking connections and 24% in both cities said they needed to strengthen their community of artists.

More Flexible Retirement Benefits for Freelancers

Outside of union jurisdiction, there are performers who freelance in a number of ways and get no benefits for health or pension for their work. This issue is one for the youngest generations just coming into the workforce as well as the older generations, since the “new normal” seems to be a life of multiple and sometimes simultaneous jobs. It is also an issue for the insurance industry and for government policy makers who will have to come

up with solutions for a growing population that often works erratically, sporadically and at multiple jobs.

In addition, for performers who belong to unions, there are sometimes periods when they take time off from their work, with the intention to return. For dancers, this often means time off due to injury or to have a baby. If a dancer is out of union work for a certain period of time, she sometimes ends up being slotted as retired. A deeper understanding of these “hiatus” periods for all performing artists and the relation of this period to their benefit schemes would help performers.

As our research on career transition for dancers shows, many dancers retire from dance in their mid-late 30s even though they expect to dance into their mid-40s.⁵³ In the UK, dancers can take retirement when they stop dancing, not at the (US) social security eligibility age of 62 or 65. Under British Actors Equity Association, dancers are allowed to take their pension benefits as early as age 35 (only contributions made from dance-related earnings qualify). As with athletes, this is a case where the physical capability of professionals has a limited life. In the National Football League (NFL), fully vested players are eligible for their pensions at 55. National Hockey League players can withdraw from their pensions at age 45.⁵⁴

Look at Models from Other Countries for Ideas

In Finland, a program lets independent artists pay pension contributions at a reduced rate by matching artists’ contributions to the state pension fund and, for artists over 60, there is an artists’ supplementary pension system.⁵⁵

In Germany, through the Kunstersozialkasse (KSK Artists’ Social Insurance Fund), independent artists who prove they are self-employed and earned at least 5,000

⁵³ William Baumol, Joan Jeffri, and David Throsby, *Making Changes: Facilitating the Transition of Dancers to Post-Performance Careers* (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, Research Center for Arts and Culture, 2004), 256.

⁵⁴ Mark Riddix, “Top Pro Athlete Pension Plans,” *Financial Edge*, <http://financialedge.investopedia.com/financialedge/0710/Top-Pro-Athlete-Pension-Plans.aspx> (accessed January 7, 2011).

⁵⁵ Joyce Zemans, “Policies and Programs of Support for Senior Artists” *D’Art Topics in Art Policy* No. 28 (Sydney: International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, 2007), 9.

Euros a year, qualify for the same degree of protection provided to employees. The KSK covers health insurance and pensions and the artist pays 17.7% of his income into the fund, an amount matched by the Artists' Social Security Department. Of this 17.7%, 10.6% is invested into a pension fund; the remaining 7.1% goes to a separate medical insurance program.⁵⁶ Austria, Croatia and other countries have some variations on these plans, and recognize the professional status of artists.

Initiate more Intergenerational Efforts

Unless they are performing in the same orchestra, show, ballet or event, older and younger artists do not have ample opportunities to communicate on a regular basis. Arts service organizations, unions and local arts councils might capitalize on the Internet where social networks are climbing for the 65+ set partly due to the fact that they bridge the generational divide.⁵⁷

Some imagination might allow these agencies to pull the generations together over common interests and share expertise, stories, experiences as well as news of live events, and resources.

Even in earlier studies with an average respondent age of 41, 25% of AEA members had experience as mentors or master artists; 44% as apprentices.⁵⁸ In this study with an average age of 73–75, 38% in NYC and 29% in LA have experience as mentors or master artists and 43% (NYC), 33% (LA) as apprentices. In the stagehands' union whole families are known to work together, train each other and work as teams on film, stage and television, perhaps more formal mentorship and apprenticeship programs in the unions (like the old Journeyman's Contract with Actors' Equity Association) would foster intergenerational learning.

For older performing artists, as we noted earlier, 51% of the NYC artists and 38% of the LA artists plan to pass on their legacies through mentoring and 58% (NYC) and 43% (LA) through working with young people.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁷ Mary Madden, "Older Adults and Social Media," Pew Internet, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx> (accessed January 7, 2010).

⁵⁸ Jeffri, *IOA II*, 3.

Use Older Artists to Teach Creative Decision-Making

Our aging performing artists have a wealth of professional experience and have worked as apprentices, mentors and master artists. The intergenerational exchange for visual artists that resulted from our *IOA III Aging* study has shown us the importance of intergenerational vehicles for communication.⁵⁹ While there are workshops for older artists at places like the Actors Fund and some unions on how to do your taxes, your finances, or how to acquire computer skills, one of the most difficult areas for young performers is how to make the appropriate creative decisions over the arc of their careers. Older artists have the experience to speak to this, both from experiences that were fruitful and those that were not.

Policy Reforms for Older Workers

1. POLICY REFORMS ACROSS THE BOARD

A 2009 Urban Institute report suggests the following potential policy reforms that could help older workers:

- Congress changing Medicare secondary payer rules to require the new federal health insurance program "to give primary coverage to workers age 65 and older with employer-sponsored health benefits" (instead of making these workers rely primarily on their employers' insurance), which would "reduce the cost of employing older workers."⁶⁰
- Congress eliminating Social Security payroll taxes "for workers beyond the system's full retirement age, since most don't gain much in benefits from those additional contributions"; and
- "Reforming labor laws to promote workplace flexibility" which might keep more older workers employed.⁶¹

⁵⁹ See www.tc.edu/artcart for a summary of this project.

⁶⁰ Richard W. Johnson. *Rising Senior Unemployment and the Need to Work at Older Ages* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, September 2009), 11.

⁶¹ Ibid., 12.

2. AGING ARTISTS AS A SPECIAL CASE

It is always tricky to demand change for a special interest group. (Our aging visual artists suggested NYC adopt a senior artists policy like the Percent-for-Art program which mandates a certain percentage of art work in city buildings.) The policies with the most chance of success are those that affect all older people, not just artists and we feel, with evidence from both performing and visual artists, that aging artists are a model for their cities and society—in resilience, tenacity, a lifetime of meaningful work into which they put the good news and the bad news. The exception is policies in organizations in the ARTS, and initiatives where older artists are not represented. Two suggestions appear below.

A. Stop Lumping Older Artists in with the Disabled or Departments of Accessibility

While it may be administratively easier, the representation of older artists in our federal arts agency, performing arts unions and other arts-related organizations under departments of “accessibility” or the “disabled” does a disservice to all concerned. When we have separate departments for the aging at all levels of government, it is short-sighted not to engage with them primarily in the areas of their art form and their age. While matters of disability and access may be issues for some of this population, they are not true for all.

B. New York as an Age-Friendly City

In Fall 2008 Mayor Bloomberg and the NYC Council, in cooperation with research by the New York Academy of Medicine, launched the campaign for New York as an Age-Friendly City.⁶² The only research on aging artists in this report was ours on aging NYC visual artists. Senior Centers, the Department of Cultural Affairs, organizations like the Rubin Museum which have active and effective programs for seniors, should make sure their information is known and disseminated by the people running this campaign. The Alliance for the Arts publishes a *Manhattan Cultural Guide for Seniors* listing discounts to cultural events. For years, Hospital Audiences Inc has produced an access guide to NYC cultural institutions.

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⁶² See Finkelstein, Ruth, Ana Garcia, Julie Netherland, and Jessica Walker. *Toward an Age-Friendly New York City* (New York: The New York Academy of Medicine, 2008).

Recommendations like better signage, information in many languages and better communication could easily use the skills of some older artists who, as we show, have substantial social networks. An idea we gave the borough arts councils after our visual artists study was to use aging artists in their communities to get the word out (whether for a blood test or an arts event) by hiring a handful of senior artists who speak a variety of languages, paying them an honorarium to act as liaisons to the community through their own social networks.

Different Services for Aging Artists

In addition to some of the laudable work of places like the Actors Fund and the unions, artists’ suggestions for their own survival are worth serious note.

1. Resources: Of course, artists need more money, but money is not the only kind of resource they need.
2. Housing: Education on housing laws—“what’s illegal”; how to get in touch with public officials; ownership for single/multiple occupancy homes in or near Manhattan; some collateral for the “irregular income” that negatively affects artists with respect to housing and loans. (In the 1970s an organization called The Piano Factory in Boston provided just this collateral needed for artists to become home/loft dwelling owners.)
3. Representation: In NYC, two-thirds of our aging performing artists are their own managers; 44% find it very difficult to obtain or maintain representation. In LA, 23% of the respondents are their own managers, and 29% state that obtaining or maintaining representation is very difficult. This can be even more difficult with increasingly technological and bureaucratic requirements to secure auditions and obtain agents who focus primarily on young performers.
4. Documentation for performing arts experiences: one artist suggested enlisting university film departments. There is a need to transfer recordings to new media, photographs and other documents to digital storage.
5. Encourage cultural activity in senior centers. A few years ago, the NYC Council brokered a \$1m relationship between NYC’s Department of Aging (DFTA) and the Department of Cultural Affairs(DCA) to provide performances at senior centers in the five

boroughs. Many quality events took place, but the program was not continued. In 2009, these two agencies collaborated again on artist residencies in senior centers and 13 sites were identified. The residencies are being handled by several borough arts councils and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and, even with the senior centers' strictures (no working at night; sometimes hard to get to, limited artists' resources), it is hoped this relationship will continue and build to include more aging artists in residence. Additional challenges are those posed to the "broker" agencies which have been allocated no money to identify and place artists in senior centers and no stipends for the artists.

Look at Models in the Non-Artist Population

In New York City, ReServe places retired professionals 55+ in part-time positions in nonprofit and city organizations throughout New York and pays them a stipend of ten dollars per hour. While ReServe makes use of the professionals' skills, it is sometimes difficult to categorize the kinds of skills artists can offer.

Experience Core, founded by Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health Dean Linda Fried, uses 55+ volunteers for added instruction for in-school and after-school elementary school students. It is well-known that arts education has been severely curtailed in the public school system in both NYC and LA. An experience corps for older artists would solve this problem, provide real intergenerational programming and make use of older artists' skills, not as volunteers, but with some payment—30% of our aging NYC performing artists and 40% of our LA aging performing artists (as well as 30% of our NYC aging visual artists) teach.

Look at the Artist over His/Her Lifetime

The findings of the MacArthur Foundation's research on aging affirms that we should be looking at artists through their lifespan:

[I]t's clear many people successfully adapt in ways that allow them to lead full, productive lives into their oldest ages. Such adaptations build on the fact

that important abilities, such as perspective, experience, social values, emotional regulation, and wisdom, may all increase with age. As we move ahead, the most productive strategy is not to focus on just one generation, such as the elderly, but to consider the entire society, and the interactions of the generations it includes. Only in this broader context can we consider the essential dynamics of the overall population and identify the key opportunities for meaningful change.⁶³

Despite the substantial impact of early life programs (e.g. Head Start) there is accumulating evidence that "interventions spaced across an entire lifetime can have cumulative benefits better than the effects of interventions made in childhood alone."⁶⁴

In our study on career transition for dancers one of our recommendations was that dancer transition should be an integral part of dancer education and training, identified as another natural stage in a dancer's development. In some of our other research we have taken exception to foundations and other funders' targeting monies to "emerging" or "mid-career" artists when there is very little hard evidence to identify what makes someone "emerging" or "mid-career." By benchmarking artists' lives and careers over their lifespans, organizations that support, care for and attend to them will have a much sounder idea of the kinds of services needed at different career points. The MacArthur research attests that "Flexibility in age at retirement, flex time, part-time work, and other forms of workplace consideration have obvious benefits to offer people at many stages in their lifetimes."⁶⁵ These are considerations for the arts as well.

As important will be information that no one has gathered, to our knowledge—what happens to those artists who leave the field entirely? Do they leave for good? Do they change art forms and return? And are their reasons for leaving subsistence ones like health insurance and a regular paycheck; do the reasons differ due to the physical and emotional requirements of different art forms? With people living longer and fitter lives, it is also likely that the career trajectory of professionals will change to

⁶³ MacArthur Foundation Research Network on an Aging Society, "Facts and Fictions About an Aging America," 19.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁵ MacArthur Foundation Research Network on an Aging Society, "Policies and Politics for an Aging America," 25.

adapt to longer-lived, healthier professionals. How will the arts respond to this?

[I]n today's and tomorrow's America older people have a wide array of capacities that are often under-used. We must find ways to use the abilities of older people. Moving forward we will have to create new institutions or revise our thinking about the limits and ranges we've set for work, education, housing, civic engagement, and other domains. ⁶⁶

Including the arts.

*“Growing old has to be treated
with a sense of humor.”*

—72-year-old actor, NYC

.....
⁶⁶ Ibid., 26.

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