

# CENTRE FOR ELDER RESEARCH

# CREATIVE AGING

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the June 2014 issue of our e-newsletter. You will see we've made further modifications to the look to match the style of the recently updated Sheridan website. We hope you like it.

*“Take a music bath once or twice a week for a few seasons, and you will find that it is to the soul what the water-bath is to the body.”*

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

The 'Noteworthy Research' and 'Arts in Practice' segments both feature the power of music – something we know intuitively in a general way. As a former amateur tap dancer I've experienced the joy that music can bring. Also, listening to my favourite iPod playlist while washing dishes or cleaning house makes these less engaging activities (for some of us) a lot more enjoyable. The research literature shows us some of the ways to harness that power.

In our 'Gallery' section you will also meet 86-year old Jack Gilbert, fine-art photographer. His beautiful 'Barrels of Flowers' photo was in our 10th anniversary 2014 calendar.

Please send items of interest and comments to me at [ann.anas@sheridancollege.ca](mailto:ann.anas@sheridancollege.ca). We always welcome feedback, so let us know how we are doing.

*Ann Anas*

Editor

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## Dear Readers,

As most of our readers know, the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) celebrated its 10th anniversary in September 2013. Since then, we have been developing a fresh updated look to guide us into the future. You saw some of those changes in our March e-newsletter and we have continued to evolve with this issue. **We are now called the Sheridan Centre for Elder Research** and our newsletter is simply 'Creative Aging'. While the creative and performing arts remains our focal point, our new name acknowledges that aging creatively is broader than the arts.

*Is it just me or are you seeing more and more stories about people who are aging creatively?!* One such story that recently jumped out at me profiled an 80 year-old woman dancing with her partner in a talent competition. I must admit my heart was literally pounding as her partner threw her high in the air and under and through his legs! What an incredible performance.

There's more! Johanna Quaas, an 88 year-old competitive gymnast writes "The stereotypes of weak older people hurt us all. I like showing younger people what's possible".

Musician Joe Vento, 95 years old, still entertains and has the following business card:

On the front, it says: Pianist-Accordionist-Big Band Leader-Las Vegas -New York-Los Angeles (& The World). The other side says Composer/Arranger/Musicologist. *That card reflects a lifetime of achievement!*

Closer to home and living in Vancouver, we find Canadian Olga Kotelko, 95 year-old track and field athlete. Olga holds 17 world records for her age category. These are just a few of the stories I have come across in recent weeks.

Let me be clear. I am fully aware that not everyone is going to win athletic awards or continue as a professional entertainer at age 95. The point, really, is that we can all do something that will contribute to our own aging with attitude, with spirit, creatively – however you want to frame it! We get to choose and, at the Centre, we truly believe in letting go of any self-limiting beliefs that many of us harbour. *Choose, instead, to soar!*

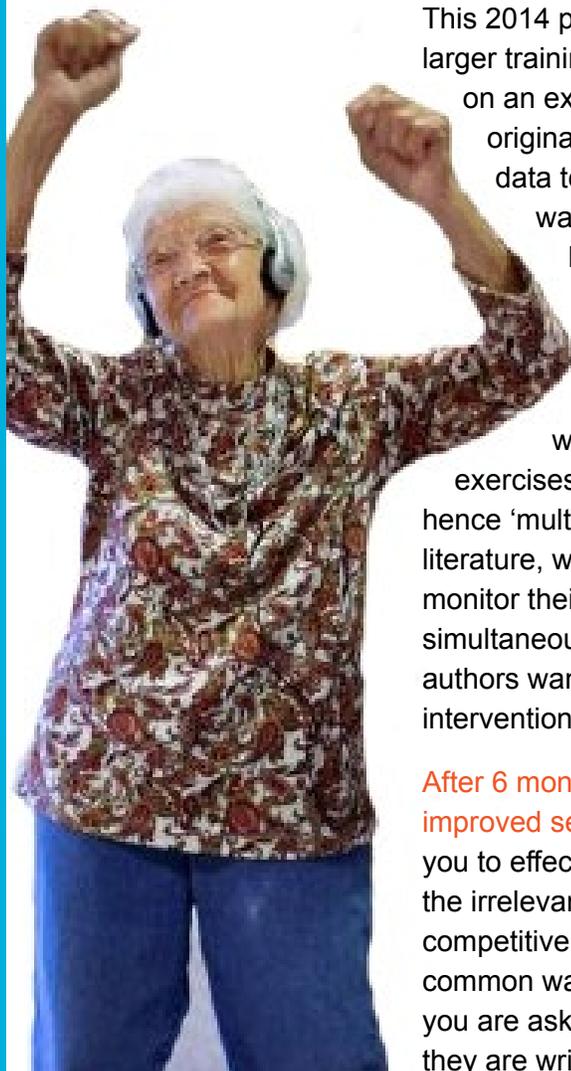
Send me your stories about aging creatively and you just might find yourself featured in a future issue.

*Pat Spadafora*



**“Is it just me or are you seeing more and more stories about people who are aging creatively?!”**

## Effect of music-based multitask training on cognition and mood in older adults



This 2014 publication explores the effect of music and rhythm as part of a larger training program. The authors here performed a secondary analysis on an existing data set from a randomized control trial; that is, after the original research goals were completed, they took another look at the data to answer a different question. The secondary question in this case was whether or not 6 months of music-based multi-task training had beneficial effects on cognitive function and mood.

The original study put 134 older adults (65+) who were at risk of falls into either a multi-task training intervention or a control group. In the training intervention, participants were required to walk along in time to changing music patterns or perform rhythmic exercises while also handling objects or answering challenging questions, hence 'multi-tasking'. The expectation, based on strong evidence in the literature, was that multi-task training might allow those individuals to better monitor their gait and walking patterns, even when performing other tasks simultaneously, thereby reducing their fall risk. In this particular paper, the authors wanted to look beyond fall risk to measure the impact of this training intervention on the cognition and overall mood of the participants.

**After 6 months of this once-weekly intervention, participants showed an improved sensitivity to interference.** A situation with interference requires you to effectively pay attention to the important information and ignore the irrelevant information, even when they are presented together or competitively. If you've ever heard of the Stroop test, this is one of the most common ways to evaluate your sensitivity to interference. In the Stroop test, you are asked to pay attention to the meaning of words, but ignore the colour they are written in, or vice versa, even though the meaning and colour are closely related and sometimes conflicting pieces of information. Training the participants to follow along to the music while performing other tasks, made them better able to resist the effects of this type of interference. Cognitive function in general was also improved in a broader sense, much in line with the notion that a multi-task intervention can improve skills and abilities in multiple domains.

Perhaps most interesting though is that the music-based training group showed reduced levels of anxiety when compared to the control group. While there is strong evidence that exercise can impact mood, **it is striking that even a simple program such as this, where subjects are essentially just walking along to music while doing other things, can result in a decrease in anxiety.**

It speaks to the importance and value of music in our lives, even in situations where you might not expect it to have an impact! So, if you want to improve your mood, or work on some of your cognitive skills, try going for a walk with music, and changing the way you walk depending on the music. You may see some extra benefits that you don't get from your regular walking regimen!

**Perhaps most interesting though is that the music-based training group showed reduced levels of anxiety when compared to the control group.**

Photograph by Ted Schurter  
The State Journal-Register

Reference: Melany Hars, Francois R. Herrmann, Gabriel Gold, Rene Rizzoli & Andrea Trombetti. *Age and Ageing* 2014; 43: 196-200 (Published electronically November 7, 2013)

## Music therapy – one iPod at a time

Through history and across cultures music has served many important functions: cultural, spiritual, social, emotional, psychological. Over the past 20 years, the neuroscience of music has been a rapidly growing field of research, which has helped us understand how music is processed in the brain and how it can be used as a cognitively protective or rehabilitative tool.

In a review article by Särkämö et al. (2012) the neural basis and therapeutic possibilities of music are discussed for individuals living with dementia. Music is a low cost intervention and, as research has shown, it can have a variety of positive effects for individuals living with dementia and their caregivers.

Perception of music engages a vast network of brain areas including not only the auditory cortex which processes acoustic information from the inner ear, but also the areas responsible for emotion regulation, feelings of reward, attention and memory, areas that control movement as well as those that regulate hormones, the autonomic nervous system and the immune system.

Music as a therapeutic tool can reduce anxiety, improve autobiographical memory, verbal fluency and spatial reasoning. *“The capacity of music to evoke emotions and influence mood, arousal, and cognition is often preserved in the case of advancing dementia, which makes it a unique and very useful tool for stimulating and maintaining emotional, cognitive and social function of [individuals living with dementia]”* (Särkämö et al., 2012)



**Music is a low cost intervention and, as research has shown, it can have a variety of positive effects for individuals living with dementia and their caregivers.**

The ‘Music and Memory: iPod Project’ brings this research into practice by providing personalized music on iPods to individuals living with dementia.

Started by Dan Cohen as a pilot project in a retirement residence in New York in 2006, his idea was to provide iPods with personalized playlists to residents living with dementia to alleviate some of the negative symptoms associated with the disease. In 2008, with some funding and larger scale testing Dan was able to establish Music and Memory as a non-profit organization, now providing iPods to over 60 American and Canadian care facilities.

In Ontario, the Music and Memory Project was launched in January 2014 by the Alzheimer Society of Toronto and supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The goal of the Project is to distribute 10,000 iPods over three years along with personalized playlists and technical support, to individuals diagnosed with dementia. Through their [website](#) individuals or care facilities can apply to receive free iPods which will be loaded with personalized playlists according to the listeners’ preferences. There are also opportunities for people to donate money or iPods, or to volunteer as technical support for the Project. A [video](#) produced by the Alzheimer Society of Toronto provides some testimonials from caregivers about the positive impacts of the Music and Memory program including the same ones documented in the research: improved mood, enhanced communication, memory stimulation and social benefits.

Reference: Särkämö, T., Laitinen, S., Tervaniemi, M., Numminen, A., Kurki, M. & Rantanen, P. (2012). Music, emotion, and dementia: Insight from neuroscientific and clinical research. *Music and Medicine* 4(3), 153-162.

## Meet Jack Gilbert, BA., D.Jur., LL.M., QC., SCA Fine-art photographer

I am a self taught fine-art photographer and practitioner of Photoshop. I didn't study photography at a technical school, nor earn a degree in Fine Arts. In fact, I was a practicing lawyer for some 50 years. But I was born into a family of well-known photographers: My father, Nathan Gilbert, a Master Photographer and retoucher founded the Gilbert Studio, now in its 92nd year; my brother, Al Gilbert, C.M. ([www.gilbertstudio.ca](http://www.gilbertstudio.ca)) is one of the world's pre-eminent portrait photographers.

The Wikipedia definition of Fine-Art Photography refers to photographs that are created in accordance with the creative vision of the Photographer as Artist. Art is not about the tools used to make it; it is about the artist's understanding and appreciation of the organization of colour, line, composition, rhythm, perspective, balance and their interplay to support

the subject matter or intent. A brush on canvas or a photographer's computer code and processor are simply the tools of the art making process; without the artist or photographer's involvement, they are merely inert 'stuff'. A photograph can qualify as art but it does not automatically become art simply by virtue of being a photograph. With a fine-art photographer, the final image is his artistic creation.

Photography is the world's most popular hobby. Man has always wanted to record himself, his activities and the environment around him. Although photography is only about 175 years old, it has become a powerful means of

communication and mode of visual expression; it pervades if

not dominates, every aspect of our culture. There are also chief curators of photography for the collections in prominent museums (e.g. the Museum of Modern Art in New York) and sales of fine art photography in the millions have resulted from auctions by Sotheby's in London and Christie's in New York.

I have been asked if I have favourite photograph. It is always the last photograph taken, completed and signed... for the moment... as another is already being considered and rolling about in my head. (for more about my creative process, go to <http://jackgilbertphotography.com>).

From a wealth-creation standpoint, I can't think of a worse business or career than one in photography. However, there is no dishonour in cultivating a parallel career to support oneself. My law practice and, at 86, continuing to be active in several business pursuits have given me the resources to follow my photographic passion unreservedly. Since 2002, when I began exhibiting my work, I have devoted all my net proceeds of sales to charity.

I live with my dear wife of 62 years, Ina, also an artist (see <http://www.art4today.com>), and an early President and one of the founders of the Society of Canadian Artists.



Jack as Speaker at Arts and Letters Club, Toronto  
on the History of Photography

*“The camera need not be a cold mechanical device. Like the pen, it is as good as the man who uses it. It can be the extension of mind and heart.”*

~ John Steinbeck

## Resources in the field of creative aging

### Articles/Books

Deiner, E., & Chan, M. Y. (2011). Happy people live longer: Subjective well-being contributes to health and longevity. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-being*, 1(3), 1-43.

Jeffri, J., Raveis, V. H., & Miller, P. A. (2014). ART CART: SAVING THE LEGACY, a model for positive aging and the productivity of professional artists. *Arts & Health*, 6(2), 184-190.

Lindauer, M. S. (2003). *Aging, creativity, and art: A positive perspective on late-life development*. New York, NY: Springer.

Selhub, E. & Logan, A. (2012). *Your brain on nature: The science of nature's influence on your health, happiness, and vitality*. Mississauga, ON: Wiley & Sons Canada. See also: <http://www.yourbrainonnature.com/book.html>

Wilkinson, F., MacLeod, A., Skinner, M. W., & Reid, H. (2013). Visible voices: Expressive arts with isolated seniors using trained volunteers. *Arts & Health*, 5(3), 230-237

### Websites

Leyden Academy on Vitality and Aging [www.leydenacademy.nl](http://www.leydenacademy.nl)

Narrative Magazine: The Best in Storytelling [www.narrativemagazine.com](http://www.narrativemagazine.com)

Oakville Literacy Council: Learning for Life [www.oakvilleliteracy.ca](http://www.oakvilleliteracy.ca)

Daily Good News that Inspires [www.dailygood.org](http://www.dailygood.org)

Dotsa Bitove Wellness Academy [www.dotsabitove.com](http://www.dotsabitove.com)

**Jack Gilbert Photography Exhibition** (see the Gallery page in this issue) at Loft Gallery during the month of June with opening reception on Saturday June 7, when he will be in attendance at Loft Gallery.

**Joshua Creek Heritage Art Centre** in Oakville, See ongoing events calendar.

**International Federation on Ageing, 12th Global Conference on Ageing, Health, Security and Community**, June 10-13, 2014, in the Hyderabad International Convention Centre in Hyderabad, India.

**43rd Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting of the Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG)**, October 16-18, 2014, Niagara Falls, Ontario.

**6th Annual International Arts and Health Conference**, November 11-13, 2014, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.