



“Assisted Living: The Musical” – Laughing in the Face of Aging



by Sue Sveum
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When the writer/performer duo of Betsy Bennett and Rick Compton decided to write a play about aging and assisted living, the idea was simple. The [Naples, Florida](#)-based entertainers wanted to cast the subject in an uplifting, bright light. (No, not that bright light!) Realizing that the perception of aging is often a gloomy one, Compton and Bennett decided to have fun with it. And they did.

“Assisted Living: The Musical” was born.

Assisted Living: The Inspiration

According to Bennett, the title actually came before the idea. “We had just finished a performance at a local theater, and they asked what our next play was going to be about,” Bennett explains in a phone interview. “Basically we had nothing.”

Compton noticed an older couple putting a walker in their car nearby and joked that the next show should be about [assisted living](#). Bennett promptly responded: “Oh yeah, right! Assisted living – the musical?” And from there the idea took hold. “It was a fortuitous accident,” Compton says, laughing.

[The show](#) introduces the residents, staff and visitors of the fictional Pelican Roost retirement community. Two actors – Compton and Bennett when the show is performed in South Florida – play 18 characters.

This isn’t the first collaboration for [Compton and Bennett](#), who have been working together for about 20 years. But much of their previous work was political satire. If you know anything about [Florida](#), however, you also know it’s fertile ground for the topics of aging and [senior living](#). The pair had a wealth of material surrounding them.

When asked their own ages, Compton promptly replies, “I’m 67,” while Bennett chimes in, “And I’m not!” Clearly they have a palpable friendship, much of it based on mutual respect and humor. And that’s reflected in their “Assisted Living” musical as well.

Assisted Living: The Research

Baby boomers themselves, the pair both had experienced the aging process with their own parents. But as Compton puts it, “They aren’t going to tell you any more about their life than you told them about yours when you were a teenager.”

So they turned to their friends for insight. “Most of our friends were a little older,” says Compton. “So we had access to a lot of different perspectives and a lot of personalities.”

Their “research” for the musical included many lunches and cocktail parties with seniors.

“But everyone down here is that age,” Compton says, laughing, “so we didn’t really have to go too far – these were the people we already hung out with.” And they’re the ones who ultimately inspired the kooky cast of characters in “Assisted Living: The Musical.”

Assisted Living: The Lessons

What did they learn throughout the process? Mostly that aging can be funny. And funny is good.

“It happens all around us,” says Compton, “But it’s really not anything to get upset about.” He says some people see using a walker as an infirmity, for example, but other people see their walker as a way to get somewhere.

Bennett and Compton say that while their target audience for the musical is actually baby boomers, plenty of older seniors have seen the play and loved it.

“We think of this as the best time to be alive,” Compton explains. In the show, they don’t do adult-diaper jokes, F-bombs, or sad songs – though they’re not above winking tunes like “The Uplifting Viagra Medley.”

“We poke a little fun at aging, but we want this to be a play about people who live with these changes,” he says. “They may be getting older, but they’re still partying and having fun.”

Compton’s advice on aging? “None of us really know what’s going to happen so it’s important to live in the moment,” he says. “It’s up to us to decide what kind of day we’re going to have.”

And playgoers can’t help but have a great day after listening to them sing original (and hysterical) lyrics like “Help! I’ve Fallen (for You) and I Can’t Get Up,” and “These Halls Are Made for Walkers,” all set to familiar tunes.

Assisted Living: The Future

From a modest start at Fred’s Diner in Naples, Florida, the show has been performed from New York to San Francisco. This past summer, Compton and Bennett did an 80-performance run – two shows a day, four days a week – in [The Villages, Florida](#). The show just closed in [San Antonio](#); it’s already [booked for Milton, Delaware](#), in September 2018. And it’s now [being licensed](#) to community theater groups.

“The play has been in continuous production since February 2017,” Compton says proudly. Why? “We make people laugh for an hour and a half.”

“An older woman came up to us after one of our shows,” adds Bennett, “and she told us: “Thank you so much. You celebrate who we really are.””

Mission accomplished.

Assisted Living: The Holidays

Watch for Compton and Bennett’s next venture – the same characters in different situations – in “Assisted Living: The Musical – The Home for the Holidays.” It kicks off at the [Savannah Center](#) in The Villages, Florida, on Dec. 4. You’ll find yourself humming holiday tunes such as “My Motorized Wal-Mart Shopping Scooter” while you go about your holiday tasks!