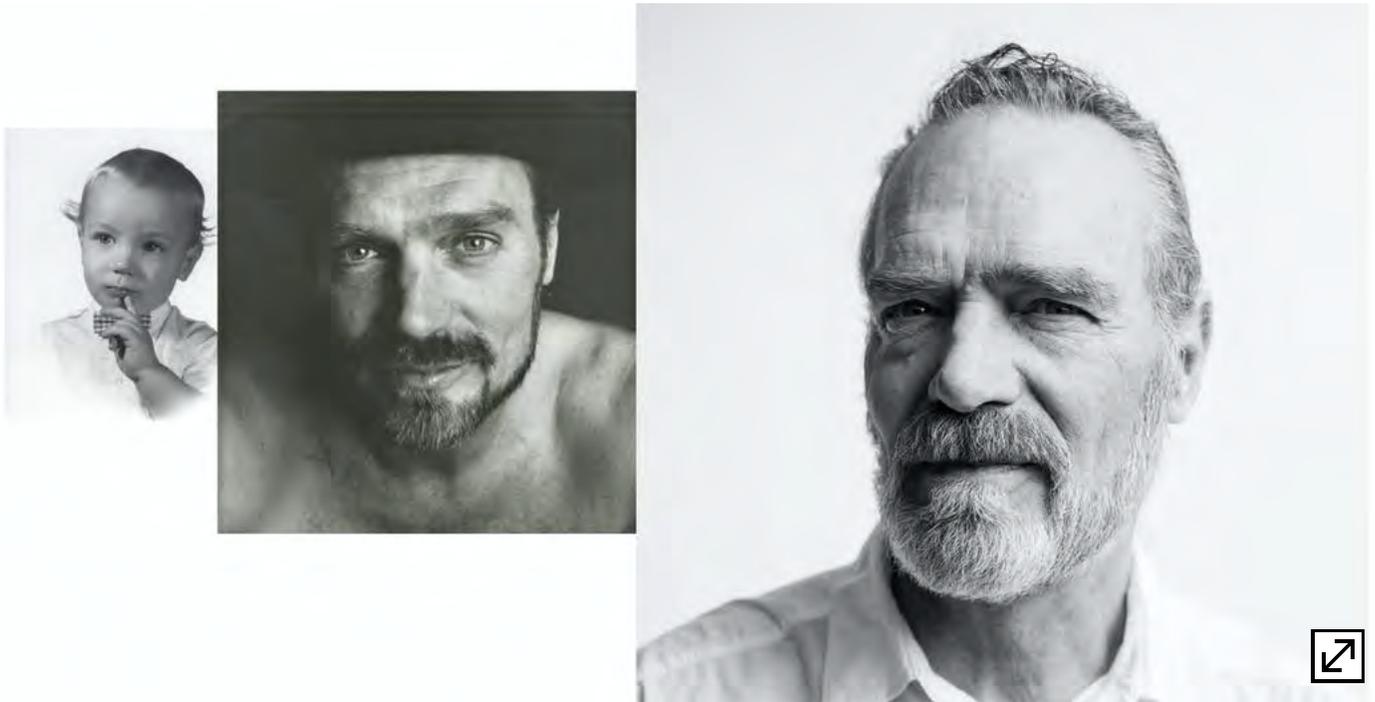


In the new play 'The 3rd Act,' aging is not a problem it's a celebration

Patrick Scully's new virtual play embraces getting old.

By **Chris Hewitt** Star Tribune | APRIL 22, 2021 — 11:08AM



The three ages of Patrick Scully. Photographers, from left: L-r. Elwin studio, Ann Marsden, Sara Rubinstein.

Patrick Scully is old and he's ready to have a conversation about it in his new play ["The 3rd Act."](#)

"I play myself, openly exploring this question: I'm 67. I'm seven years into being old and I feel lost. Where do I go from here?" said the [theatermaker, dancer and choreographer](#).

The one-hour show began with Scully's realization that he had passed 60, the age he had always thought constituted "old." A couple of years later, a teaching job came to an abrupt end, forcing him to think about collecting Social Security and contemplating what to do next.

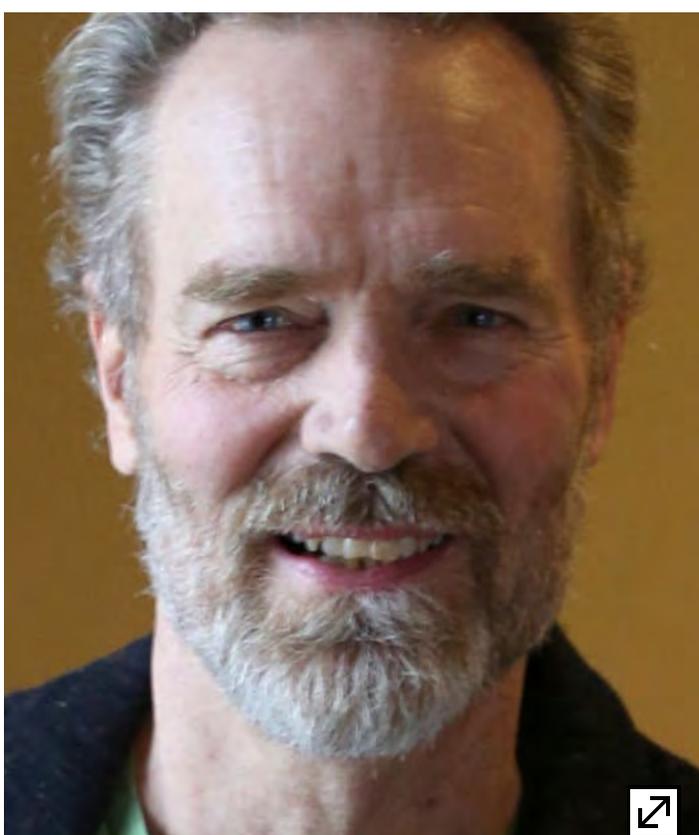
As has often been the case for Scully, that question became a play, which he'll perform April 24-25 on Zoom, via Illusion Theater. The artist who brought us "Leaves of Grass — Illuminated," "Thrive!" and "Queer Thinking" began not with an outline for a new piece but with questions he figured others were curious about, too. So he asked about 30 people he knows, including writer Marcie Rendon and performer T. Mychael Rambo, to talk about aging.

"I kind of naively thought I was going to discover some commonalities," said Scully. "I got a lot of great ideas — books they recommended, things they were engaged with. But not so much commonality. As I've thought about that, I think maybe that's because the path through Old, through the third act, is as uniquely different for us as each of our lives have been up to this point."

If there was a common theme, says the Worthington, Minn., native, it was the approach he and his buddies gravitated toward: embracing old age, not fighting it.

"Generally speaking, it felt like this was something that the people I chose to interview hadn't spent a lot of time talking about. In that way, I feel like the cultural taboo sneaks in and then people end up maybe not even thinking about it," Scully said.

That emerged as a theme of the show, too. If we're lucky, we're all going to get there so why don't we talk more about the thing a Betty Friedan book (recommended to Scully by dancer Wendy Oliver) calls "The Fountain of Age"? Scully found the book especially illuminating.



"I think it's impossible for us to not be ageist. We live in such an ageist culture that even as we become old people, it's hard. I found that, for example, in myself as I tried to find language to talk about this," Scully said. "Do I call myself 'old'? There's still a little bit in me that resists that. Like, I'm comfortable with the word 'queer' but I'm old enough to remember when 'queer' was not something anybody was going to be."

A gay man who has been living with HIV since 1985, Scully says the concept of getting older has special poignancy for folks who knew many people who never had the chance to grow old.

"I want to make the most of this time and that's one thing Betty Friedan's book points out: The thing our culture is best at is problematizing being old," Scully said. "I think that's why she chose to name her book 'The Fountain of Age,' to focus on, 'Yeah, we're all going to die and some of us will get sick, but that's an incomplete picture.'"

Scully, who bats around the idea of a "coming-of-age party for being old," said he didn't magically learn all the answers on how to grow old while creating the show, which he plans to continue developing and eventually perform in person. But, using the metaphor of aging as a trip, he has found a few travel guides that will help with the planning.

Ultimately, Scully thinks it's a simple but worthwhile message for both the evolution of "The 3rd Act" and for always-evolving humans: Embrace the process.

Chris Hewitt • 612-673-4367

The 3rd Act

When: 7:30 p.m. Sat. and 2 p.m. Sun. Conversation with Scully, 7:30 p.m. April 29.

Where: Zoom link available from Illusion Theater.

Tickets: Free, but reservations required at illusiontheater.org.

Theater critic **Chris Hewitt** previously worked at the Pioneer Press in St. Paul, where he covered movies and then theater. Also, he occasionally gets to write book reviews.

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