

ARE YOU AN OLDIE? WARREN MITCHELL

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London-born Warren Mitchell claims to have cornered the market in elderly Jewish-American roles, though he is best known as Alf Garnett from the television programme *Till Death Us Do Part*. A RADA trained actor who has won two Olivier awards (both for Arthur Miller plays) Mitchell was just seven when he first had acting lessons. He joined the RAF while still at school, trained to be a navigator and can still remember his number: *3001164 Sir!* His physical chemistry degree course at Oxford University was curtailed by the war, after which he was encouraged in his acting career by Richard Burton. His first broadcast parts were in *Educating Archie*, and *Hancock's Half Hour* and after a long and distinguished stage and TV career, he was voted TV Actor of the Year in 1965. Now 82, he suffers pain from nerve damage and supports the Neuropathy Trust. He enjoys watching Spurs, playing the clarinet and sailing. His latest play is *Visiting Mr Green* by Jeff Baron.

Do you find that OAPs are starting to look younger to you? That's brilliant! There's no answer to that!

Have you ever been offered a seat on a train or bus? Yes and I take it; it doesn't bother me.

When you hear of 'Big Brother', do you still think of George Orwell? I think of being supervised from cradle to grave, no privacy, cameras everywhere.

Do you have remote controls you don't know how to use? I've got one that's something to do with the video, but I've no idea how to use it. I've got Groucho Marx sitting in a cardboard box waiting for me to watch him.

Do talk to yourself? My wife does. I do find something disturbing about it - the way, when I ask her what she's saying, she says, 'Oh never mind.' Then I get rather angry. That's part of being an oldie – going deaf!

Do you know quite a lot of poems by heart? Lumps of Shakespeare, perhaps.

Do you save string? No; only old *Yachting Monthly* magazines.

Do you write letters? Yes; I'm not capable of sending an email. I've got an Amstrad computer which should go into a museum. It's just for writing letters.

What do you think about the state of literacy? Very poor and the standard of speech is appalling, even on the beloved BBC. Our generation is better at everything.

Are there at least 10 people in your address book who are dead? Yes and I'm definitely interested in the obituary pages. I don't cross people out of my address book, because I find it a bit rude. I just try and ignore them.

Are you frightened of going to the Barbican? I wouldn't be thrilled if you told me you had tickets for something there.

Can you waltz? Yes but I can't do anything which involves my legs at the moment. I used to be a fanatical jitterbugger. They would clear the floor to watch my wife and me. We were rather good.

Have you ever changed your mobile ringtone? Wouldn't know what it is, though I might want a phone which doesn't embarrass me in public.

Own an iPod? No. New technology does interest me but not the point of having to sit down and learn how to do it. You buy something new and you feel excited and want to play with it; you don't want to have to sit down and read a book of instructions for half an hour. I can't even change the time on my digital watch; it has to go to the shop.

Do you have to nap in the afternoon? Yes but not if I'm rehearsing.

Frothy mocca cappuccino, or a nice cup of tea? Espresso is very nice. I always say, I'll have a Sammy Davis Junior – a short black.

What's your view of political correctness? It's a pathetic coward's hiding place. I'm Jewish and have a deep prejudice against Germans. I was very keen to fly during the war because I had a loathing of the Krauts and wanted to shoot a few down.

Have you a favourite rant? Kenwood. It's not a place for pop concerts. The whole summer is ruined, you can't sit in the garden because of the noise. I went to a Camden Council meeting about the fireworks every Saturday and they said people wouldn't come without the fireworks so I said, 'OK, just give 'em the fireworks, but cut out the music!' And *Classic FM* offends me. They have a great work of art and take a lump out of it because they think that's all your attention span will cope with.