

# To The Worlds is a true, uplifting hour about unlikely skating champs



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Published 3 hours ago Updated January 16, 2019

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To The Worlds revolves around six women raging in age from 40s-70s, who skate for exercise and fun in Kelowna, B.C.

CBC photo

When I was in Dublin recently and crossing one of the bridges over the Liffey I saw the new ferry that carries people and cars to England. It is named “W.B. Yeats.” It’s noble to name a ferry after a poet but I wondered, “Is Yeats utterly out of fashion?”

He is scorned by younger writers for the perceived sexism and the class snobbery in some of his work. A poem such as *Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?* must be deeply problematic to some of them. It's a bit angry, dealing with disillusion and rather scornful of women who found their own way in life.

A wonderful, stand-up-and-cheer documentary airing on CBC on Friday is a rebuttal to all that poem expresses. It's about women not yielding to age, fears and the expectations of others.

*To The Worlds* (Friday, CBC Docs POV, 9 p.m.) is about a group of "mature" women (as CBC calls them) who are preparing for the International Skating Union's 2018 International Adult Figure Skating Competition in Germany. After many setbacks, they actually get there. That in itself is a victory but, right to the end, the viewer discovers they did more than turn up.

It's a simple story, universal in appeal and it has been told before as fiction. Variations on the story can be seen in the British movies *Calendar Girls* and *Made in Dagenham*. Women decide they have been classified by others as weak, demure, old, and decide to rebel, proving something to themselves as much as to others. And there are many sports movies about that improbable season or improbable triumph – usually by a group of misfits – who triumph over adversity in a crunch game at the end of the season.

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The women prepare for the International Skating Union's 2018 International Adult Figure Skating Competition in Germany.

CBC photo

Here, however, it is all very real, genuinely anchored in the Canada we know. “Imagine Skate Canada meets *The Real Housewives*” is CBC’s description but that’s just silly. There is no false and implausible emoting here. It’s just people. The people are six women ranging in age from 40s-70s, who skate for exercise and fun in Kelowna, B.C. They enjoy it, enjoy the company and some are rather good. Then, as the story tells us, one of the group entered them into this major competition in Europe. They decided to give it a go.

Made by the team at Bountiful Films, the documentary is directed by one of the skaters, 59-year-old Wendy Ord, who only took to the ice in her 50s when she needed distraction after a difficult divorce. “There were very few old lady skaters,” she says ruefully. But the group came together and, yes, they are misfits. Karen, who is 46, annoys some of the others, according to Ord, just because she’s a beautiful skater. Then there is Isabella, 49, originally from Romania, who trained as a gymnast when she was young and later served in the army. Driven, laser-focused and private, Isabella is more interested in her discipline and training than in group routines and costumes. Tensions mount as the group gets ready for a local event in Canada to prep for Germany.

And, yet, of course, everything comes together in the end. There are falls on the ice, injuries and disappointments. There are family crises that make the skating seem frivolous. But something drives these women to get to Germany and succeed.

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A woman skater, 76, pushing herself over and over to not only compete, but do it with grace and good humour.

CBC photo

There are remarkable scenes, especially those of a woman, 76, pushing herself over and over to not only compete, but do it with grace and good humour. It is moving at times but is careful never to be sentimental. It's about ambition and, while the CBC website says it is about "the power of female friendship and the pursuit of happiness," it is actually about friendship itself. It's just that the women featured in the program rarely get the attention they get here. It is also about transcending the expectations culture puts on you, me and others. It's about joy. But, watch until the end and you'll find out that this journey, wonderfully chronicled for us, isn't about a lark at all. It's about winning.

Why should older women not be mad in every sense of the word? Another poet, Alfred Tennyson, wrote about people, "Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will/To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." These wonderful women in this fine feel-good documentary aren't weak at all.