

# County's Youth Theatre celebrates 20th anniversary

By Darragh Kelly

Members of the County Roscommon Youth Theatre (CRYT) group were in celebratory mood last week when the organisation celebrated twenty years at a special reception in Aras an Chontae, Roscommon.

To mark the occasion, a special photographic and exhibition of artefacts from the group's twenty years was officially launched in county buildings. It will run until the end of the month. The launch was performed by the Cathaoirleach of Roscommon County Council, Cllr Paschal Fitzmaurice.

To date, CRYT has become one of the foremost youth theatre groups in the country with many of its graduates making a name for themselves in the world of theatre and artistic performance.

CRYT Artistic Director Catherine Sheridan, a native of Boyle, set up the group in 1999, attempting to fill an access gap for young theatre engagement as well as promoting artistic and creative expression. The organisation is a member of Youth Theatre Ireland (YTI) the umbrella organisation supporting 55 youth theatre groups in Ireland.

YTI encourages the development of the whole person and uses a range of drama methods to respond to the personal needs of participants. The organisation also contributes towards the development of the creative, physical, social and intuitive intelligence of all participants.

To this end, CRYT's core values are to ensure the provision of quality and theatrical experience for young people and equality of participation for its members. All of its work is youth-centred, striking a balance between artistic quality and participation.

Plans are already being advanced for the CRYT's seasonal production, 'Pay The Price', written and directed by the group's aforementioned Artistic Director, Catherine Sheridan, is a lively and exuberant performance, in keeping with the group's previous productions.

The show is a challenging production in which the plot centres on a world where young people are judged and scored by their actions. The show takes place in Roscommon Arts Centre on Friday, April 24th and Saturday, April 25th at 8 p.m. There will also be school's shows at 11 a.m. on Thursday and Friday, April 23rd at 24th.

Throughout its history, CRYT has provided opportunities for young people who have a passion for acting and



Holly Connaughton and Laura Glynn, Athleague, pictured at the Roscommon County Youth Theatre Exhibition, marking 20 years since its formation. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin



Paul D'Alton, Roscommon town; Michelle Carew, Youth Theatre, Ireland and Peter McLoughlin, Boyle, pictured at the Roscommon County Youth Theatre Exhibition, marking 20 years since its formation.

performance. Though many members aspire to a career on stage, for many the social aspect of being involved in fun-filled group is a considerable draw in itself.

CRYT attracts members from all over the wider Roscommon region. Its members range in age from thirteen to twenty-two years. It's estimated that as many as one-fifth or 20% of its members go on to study in third-level.

CRYT has also been successful in blending the abilities of many different young

people in an environment where they can learn and develop their skills in a non-judgemental atmosphere. No previous acting experience is necessary.

As part of their extensive drama engagement with members, RCYT also provides a high-quality programme of theatre workshops and training throughout the year with an ethos of learning by doing.

The mission statement of the group's workshops is based on the concepts of op-

portunity, empowerment, access and artistic excellence. Workshops, which are coordinated by Catherine Sheridan feature many guest facilitators.

The workshops take place during the term on Saturday mornings from 10 a.m. to 12 midday in Roscommon Arts Centre. Instruction is given on physical theatre, voice work, improvisation, movement, ensemble work, production, set design and technical performance.

Some of the theatrical professionals who have worked



Marie Gillooly, Robert Mazurkiewz, Cllr Kathleen Shanagher, Mike Hourican and Greta Mazurkiewz, pictured at the Roscommon County Youth Theatre Exhibition, marking 20 years since its formation. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin

with the group include Gus Hanly from Longford, Wilma O'Keefe, Galway Film Centre, Wayne Jordan, Padraic McIntyre, Mikel Murfi and Adrea Irvine.

Theatre trips also form a major part of members engagement with visits to shows in the Abbey and Hawkswell Theatres, the Project Arts Centre, the Town Hall Theatre in Galway as well as the Roscommon Arts Centre.

The group is continually in the process of seeking new members. Former members of the RCYT have developed careers as drama facilitators,

youth theatre leaders, professional actors, theatre technicians, production managers, stage managers, filmmakers and journalists.

Tickets for this season's production of 'Pay The Price' are priced €6 for school productions and €12 for evening performances with a concession rate of €10 for students and unwaged. Tickets can be purchased by phoning 090-6625824. The production is supported by the Arts Council Youth Ensemble Scheme and Roscommon County Council. The production is suitable for children aged twelve years and over.





Lorraine, Eithne, Catherine and Denise Sheridan, Boyle, pictured at the Roscommon County Youth Theatre Exhibition, marking 20 years since its formation. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin

## Performance with a passion

By Darragh Kelly

Tributes have been paid to the work of the County Roscommon Youth Theatre (CRYT) and its legacy of artistic excellence by the outgoing Roscommon Arts Officer Mary Mullins.

To mark the group's 20th milestone anniversary, the group recently launched an extensive exhibition in the county council buildings highlighting the many achievements and productions with exhibitions of costumes and an extensive photographic exhibition by photographer, Brian Farrell.

Addressing the launch, Cathaoirleach of Roscommon County Council, Cllr Paschal Fitzmaurice paid tribute to CRYT members, past and present, noting that the group "had a passion for acting and performance, expanding the minds of young people."

The group produces theatre from comedies to tragedies. This is a quality project that Roscommon County Council is delighted to support. The programme is broadening the scope of the arts in the county," said Cllr Fitzmaurice.

Stephen Ryan of Creative Ireland (CI) said the endurance of CRYT "was a landmark. Amateur drama is the bedrock of rural society." He said his organisation was happy to support the work of the county council and Youth Theatre Ireland (YTI) as part of its engagement and activity programme.

Mr Ryan said at a local level, CI was represented in the county through the engagement of the Council's Director of Services Majella

Hunt. He said CI supported young people finding their own creative skills and in collaborating with each other.

He added that his organisation was not just creating a plan, but to embed a love of creativity.

He remarked that one of the joint winners of this year's Booker Prize for literature, Bernadine Evaristo would not have achieved success in her career without her experience in youth theatre.

Michelle Carew, Director of Youth Theatre Ireland (YTI) said her organisation supported 55 youth theatre works countrywide, offering a range of shared experiences and futures to all of its members. "We have a commitment to develop young people as theatre makers and as people. We do it deliberately to articulate young people's experiences by offering an ensemble and group approach. It's about creating opportunities to be committed to a higher ideal."

"Youth theatre is transformative. This county's Youth Theatre is exemplary. The quality of the exhibition represents the quality of the work of CRYT. We need commitment, support and engagement from young people. This allows Youth Theatre to plan and grow," Ms Carew remarked.

She also paid tribute to the work of the group's Artistic Director Catherine Simon, whom she described as "committed, ambitious and a serious leader who is also compassionate and pastoral."

"The support of Roscommon County Council has also been absolutely vital," she concluded.

## A major milestone worth celebrating

By Darragh Kelly

"It may be twenty years ago since Sergeant Pepper told the band to play" according to the Beatles, but for Catherine Sheridan, Artistic Director of County Roscommon Youth Theatre (CRYT), twenty years are for her, a significant milestone worth celebrating.

Ms Sheridan acknowledged the support of Roscommon County Council and agencies such as Creative Ireland and Youth Theatre Ireland in promoting the work of youth theatre in the county when she spoke at last week's official reception marking twenty years of CRYT at a special reception in Aras an Chontae.

Ms Sheridan said she grew up with a love of theatre but was restricted in accessing it due to a lack of opportunity for young drama enthusiasts. "I performed as a 'duck' in a junior infants play in school and have always loved being on stage. That play was like flicking on a light switch and its never gone off. I've always wanted to study drama and Irish. I got in touch with the National Association for Youth Theatre and I subsequently joined Dublin Youth Theatre.

"When I was with them, I really felt this could be done in Roscommon and I contacted the then county's arts officer, Philip Delamere - he believed in my vision. At that time, the arts centre hadn't even been built.

"When we started out, we worked out of a hall in the local convent school here in Roscommon town. I travelled down to Roscommon from Dublin every Sunday morning and worked with young theatre enthusiasts. In that time it's great to see young people being transformed by what we do," she said.



Martin Wynne, Catherine Sheridan, Philip Delamere, Cllr Orla Leyden and Cllr Tony Waldron, pictured at the Roscommon County Youth Theatre Exhibition, marking 20 years since its formation. Picture: Gerard O'Loughlin

"I am a hard worker. It was my father who told me 'if you're going to do a job, do it right'". Ms Sheridan thanked Roscommon County Council, Creative Ireland and Youth Theatre Ireland for their ongoing work and support.

She also noted that members of the group had gone on to work in a wide variety of roles in theatre. Currently, members of CRYT are studying physical theatre and

drama in the likes of Trinity College Dublin, NUI Galway, Aungier Street and DIT.

As well as being Artistic Director with CRYT, Ms Sheridan also lectures in NUI Galway in Physical Theatre as well as lecturing part-time in Drama Education in Mary Immaculate College in Limerick. She currently resides in Craughwell in Galway.

During the official launch, a scene from CRYT's critically acclaimed production 'If I

Was In The GPO We Would Have Won' was performed by Misha Fitzgibbon and Tomas Clayton, both from Roscommon Town.

An extract from 'Alice In Wonderland' was also performed by Roscommon Community College student Sean Egan, accompanied by Casper Mazurkiewicz, a fellow student at Roscommon CBS, both members of CRYT.

During its twenty years of performances, members of CRYT have mixed new writing with acclaimed plays, performing works such as '20/20 Hindsight', 'Three Meet Again' along with classic's such as Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible' and George Orwell's 'Animal Farm'.

Roscommon County Arts Officer at the time of the foundation of CRYT, Philip Delamere said the formation of the group was in part attributed to his own interest in youth theatre in Limerick as well as his own involvement in street theatre.

"Catherine (Sheridan) approached me and it took off from there. It's been a serious investment by the county council on a consistent basis and the group's performances always ensure a high quality experience.

"Youth Theatre is becoming stronger and stronger. Every young person should have the opportunity of engaging in youth theatre. It helps develop strong skill sets among young people," stressed Mr Delamere, who is now County Arts Officer in Leitrim.

A number of presentations were made to the assembled guests, including a presentation to outgoing County Arts Officer, Mary Mullins who has recently retired from her position after ten years of service to the arts community in Roscommon.