

Roscommon County Youth Theatre all set to stage unique retelling of 'Romeo and Juliet'

By Richard Canny

Every year, Roscommon County Youth Theatre (RCYT) stages a signature production, but the excitement levels are especially high in 2023 because the big offering. A unique retelling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is the group's first since the pandemic.

Work on the production started back in November, involving exploring the play's famous themes and characters, while rehearsals started in earnest last January.

For audiences going along to this year's production, RCYT is promising it will bring one of Shakespeare's most popular plays to life in "a contemporary, fast paced and insightful abridged retelling."

The cast — made up of 13-17 year olds from all different parts of the county — will be showcasing their talent when the play features at Roscommon Arts Centre on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, April 27, 28 and 29. Matinees for schools taking place on April 27 and 28 are sold out, while the evening performances take place on Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m.

When the *Roscommon Herald* spoke to RCYT artistic director and *Romeo and Juliet* director Catherine Sheridan, the cast and production team were in the middle of intensive daily rehearsals over the Easter break.

Amid the busy rehearsals, a clear sense of the positivity and importance of theatre and drama had emerged, especially post-covid. Catherine, who has many strings to her bow includ-

ing being a freelance drama facilitator, a theatre and arts education practitioner, and lecturer in drama education, reflected on how the performing arts are playing an important role in rebuilding children's confidence.

"I work nationally and I see it across the board. Any colleagues I work with are saying the same thing. Covid had such an impact on young people. It's only now in the aftermath of covid that you see it, and I see it all the time when I am working in school settings or working with children and young people. Their confidence and resilience is gone," said Catherine, a Boyle native who now lives in Galway.

"Their self-confidence and what they are capable of is not what it was at all. Even for people who don't want to be professional actors, being involved in youth theatre is so great — for your confidence, for your sense of character, for your self-esteem.

"One of the big things that our members say



Conor Pearce (Romeo), Ivy O'Connor (Mercutio), and Mary Boland (Benvolio), rehearsing a scene from the Shakespearean tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* at Roscommon Castle. Directed by Catherine Sheridan, it will run at Roscommon Arts Centre from April 27-29. Picture: Brian Farrell

here in youth theatre is that it's like a real hub, like a real band of mates. They always associate themselves like a family.

"With theatre and drama, week by week you can see the positive impact being involved in youth theatre has and is having on our members, and I see it first-hand.

"I see how they have really progressed and developed and matured — the confidence and self-belief and self-esteem in themselves and their encouraging of one another is amazing," she said.

Another development that emerged for RCYT post-covid was the development of a junior youth theatre aimed at 10 to 12 year-olds.

"There was such a demand for it and covid impacted them, as much on that age group as the older ones," said Catherine.

Established in 1999,

RCYT is a professional youth theatre organisation designed to provide opportunities for young people who have a passion for acting and

performance. It is supported by Roscommon County Council Arts programme and the Arts Council of Ireland, and

has now become a flagship element of the council's Arts programme.

As with all productions, the young cast of its upcoming production of *Romeo and Juliet* benefit hugely from working with a professional team such as a director, set designers, costume makers, and professional lighting and sound personnel.

"This is another big point. 20% of our members moving on to college always end up doing theatre and performing arts at third level."

Catherine said that many of them go on to have very successful careers in the world of theatre.

Many past members, once they finish their time with RCYT, also come back to help out as youth theatre assistants.

■ Ticket bookings for the *Romeo & Juliet* evening shows on Friday and Saturday, April 28 and 29, can be found at: <https://roscommonartscentre.ticketsolve.com/ticketbooth/shows/1173634781>



Conor Pearce (Romeo) and Ruth Cunningham (Juliet) rehearsing at Roscommon Castle. Picture: Brian Farrell

Geevagh set to host Community Health and Wellbeing event

A Geevagh Community Health and Wellbeing event will take place in St. Brigid's Church, Highwood, on April 27th at 7.30 p.m..

The event was recently launched by singing star Sandy Kelly. Speaking at the launch, Kelly stressed the importance of looking after our mental health. She stated that most houses have been affected by mental health in some way, including her own. She spoke of the importance of these events in creating an awareness of mental health issues and their role in encouraging

people to talk about their problems.

Valerie Cogan explained the urgent need for the event, saying: "We live in a world where we can communicate with one another like never before and yet we live in a world where people are lonely and disconnected from one another. Through our work as community mental health nurses, the one common denominator that causes the most problems is loneliness and the feeling of isolation.

"Indeed, some of us know all too well from

our own experience just what that is and what it feels like. Sometimes the most connected people are the most disconnected."

This event is being run in association with Geevagh LGFA and the Lidl One Good Club initiative. Lidl One Good Club is run in association with the LGFA and Jigsaw. The One Good Club programme is based on Jigsaw's '5-a-day for your mental health' framework that provides a simple set of evidence-based actions for people to improve their wellbeing.

Speakers will include Sean Keane, traditional singer and musician, speaking about dealing with personal grief from his experience of his wife's death; Cora Staunton, Gaelic footballer, author and RTE sports pundit; Frank Diamond, Chief Operating Officer, ALPS suicide prevention and Sandy Kelly.

Special guest will be Charlie McGettigan, singer/songwriter & broadcaster and former Eurovision winner.

The conference moderator will be broadcaster and playwright Tommy Marren (Midwest Radio).



27th April
St. Brigid's Church
Highwood
F52 P110
7.30pm

Geevagh Community Health & Wellbeing Night
Lets Talk About It!


 Cora Staunton
Widow Ladies GAA, Author & RTE Sports Pundit


 Tommy Marren
On the night, Midwest Radio, Broadcaster & Playwright


 Sean Keane
Traditional Singer & Musician


 Charlie McGettigan
Former Eurovision Winner, Singer & Songwriter


 Sandy Kelly
International Singer & TV Personality


 Frank Diamond
Chief Operating Officer, ALPS


 Dr. Lúmar McManis
Family and Psychotherapist, PhD

FREE EVENT

Raffle on the night






