

Performers and stars of the future set to bring

The performers and stars of the future are set to take to the stage for the County Roscommon Youth Theatre's (RCYT) annual production. This year the group is staging an original production entitled 'Pay The Price,' written by the group's artistic director, Boyle native Catherine Sheridan.

The play features a cast of 26, hailing from Roscommon, Strokestown, Kiltoom, Ballygar and all points in-between.

This year's production will be performed over two nights - Friday, April 24th and Saturday, April 25th from 8 p.m. in Roscommon Arts Centre. Tickets, priced €16 with a special concession rate of €14 available from the Arts Centre box office.

There will be a couple of shows for local schools with morning performances from 11 a.m. on Thursday, April 23rd and Friday, April 24th. Tickets for these productions are €12 each.

THOUGHT PROVOKING

The production is a highly stylised and thought-provoking piece of theatre, asking pertinent questions of the world today and the price one pays to conform and equally the price one pays to be one's true self.

The play is set in the future or dystopian world of 'District North' a world where countries and counties are abolished and where people's lives and lifespan are dictated by their individual deeds and activities.

The play is a collision course between reality and ambition, expectation and control, individuality, and conformity. It is a production that demands of both its cast and audience in a positive, thought provoking and innovative way.

The main roles are based on five characters - Ciara Hourigan who plays Miriam Hale, Mary Boland in the role of



Members of Roscommon Youth Theatre pictured rehearsing for their new production "Pay the Price" written and directed by Catherine Sheridan. The play runs from April 23rd-25th at Roscommon Arts Centre. Pictures: Brian Farrell

Jessica Clarke, Alex Reed played by Robert Shannon and Isobel Fitzpatrick playing Laura Quinn.

The other roles in this year's production are played by Liam Donohoe Dunne who plays Mark Dalton, Karla Browne who performs as Shaz Malik, Ivy O'Connor who plays the ironically sounding named Vega Iden and Alex Richardson who plays Supervisor

Trent, in a role something akin to 'Big Brother' in George Orwell's 1984.

REVELATORY For Catherine Sheridan, the experience, both in the writing and preparation, has been revelatory. "I first came up with the idea for such a play during Covid-19 when we were all limited by what we could do.

"The play is about the

use of power, control and the heavy surveillance that is practised on individuals in societies. It's about how we willingly 'sign-up' as it were, to hand over our own power.

"It's also about realising and recognising the power each of us has. For me, the play looks at the pressures of those who do not conform and the devastating impact that can have. As a society, we are

totally handing over that power," she emphasises. Despite all that, the play does not preach but will allow the viewers to ask their own questions and draw their own conclusions. Nevertheless, the impact of the play mirrors how many believe tech, politics and economics all conspire to erode the self.

"When the idea first came to me for the play, it kind of flowed. There was a more 'viral' or tech element to the play at the outset. But since then, it has evolved. The play casts an eye on the future and the pace of that future for all of us.

"It also looks at 'the mask' many of us adopt to survive in our environment and casts an eye on the dangers or threats from being authentic and true to oneself. So, in a way, the play's message mirrors many of the larger debates we need to have as a society," says Catherine.

INTRIGUED In some respects, the play is coloured by Catherine's own passions for her work. "I've always been intrigued by the likes of the Lord of the Flies and how organised society can break down with competing interests. "I directed (Arthur Miller's) The Crucible

and is it worth paying for the individual?" **EXPERIMENTAL** "I think everyone who sees this play will be able to relate to the issues and themes that are raised. The production is somewhat experimental as it features a lot of tech and visual effects, creating a parallel universe. "Ultimately when one is watching this performance, they will ask big questions of themselves - the quality of expression and freedom one has defines that quality of life and the life span of that individual," believes Catherine.

The production itself is very much a physical piece of theatre, demanding much from the cast. Rehearsals began in earnest at the start of the year and Catherine has been rewarded with considerable buy-in and enthusiasm from all cast and crew.

"The cast have been brilliant. From day one, they have bought into my ideas. The play provokes and challenges in a way few pieces have - it asks as many questions as answers. Yet that is the whole point of it.

"For me, the big question of the play is what happens to society if we do not speak out? What is the price an individual must pay for speaking out? What is that price

and is it worth paying for the individual?"

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While the challenges of this play may seem profound, there is humour too - "there are, even if I say so myself, some really good lines in the play. The humour is dry and questioning yet there is also a certain poignancy about the questions it asks and whether the issues realised might ultimately resolve themselves." While the play probes, challenges and asks big questions of its cast and audience, all audiences, irrespective of age or demographic, will relate to its themes, which is approximately 90 minutes in duration.

DEMAND Though essentially an ensemble piece, there are five main roles that demand much of the performers, owing to the physical and mental worlds which are captured in the production. "There are physical, mental, and metaphorical aspects to this production. The staging and lighting reflects this world. Despite the challenges and questions posed, there is a message - of the importance of speaking out, to question, to provoke and to challenge one's world.

"I would like the message to be one should not be afraid of 'going for' what they want and that ambition and attitude should not restrict one from doing so. We should never underestimate the power of the individual.

"This play is about the power of speaking up and out, being true to oneself and the capacity of one individual voice to speak one's mind. It's not about rebellion, but the price we all pay when we turn a blind eye to the issues that affect us," says Catherine.

At the forefront of County Roscommon Youth Theatre since its inception, 26 years ago, Catherine's ambition has always been to extend the ambitions and abilities of those under her tutelage.

county's youth theatre 2026 production to the stage



Dress rehearsals for a new play, "Pay the Price", by Catherine Sheridan.

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And yet again, she has succeeded. In its 26 years, the company has amassed a worthy reputation for nurturing, enabling, and forming the artistic talent of the future. Many of RCYT's graduates have enjoyed stellar careers in drama, production, media, screenwriting, and other aspects of communication with the quality of each annual production enjoying universal acclaim among audiences and the theatrical fraternity alike.

RESOLVE "When an idea comes to me like this, I sit with it, mull over it, commit to it and invest in it," says Catherine, showing a glimpse of the steely resolve that has nurtured and supported generations of young local actors and actresses. "I like to create; it is my job. We've living in a different Ireland that is more tech based and less self-aware. Look around any public space and you see people with their heads in their phones. It is more important than ever that people realise their own power to change and transform, whether that is through active engagement on issues, like say, the environment. "The world has lost a



The play is written and directed by Catherine Sheridan.



Members of Roscommon County Youth Theatre rehearsing for their new production



Theatre group members jumping for joy.

lot of its simplicity. A play like this is just 'asking the questions and putting the 'human' in

humanity. I'm really intrigued as to what audiences will make of this production. For all of us,

it's the price one is willing to pay for speaking their own mind, their own truth." This year's

Roscommon County Youth Theatre production of 'Pay The Price' is supported by Roscom-

mon County Council and the Arts Council of Ireland in association with Youth Theatre Ireland.



When silence keeps you safe what happens when someone refuses to stay quiet? Find out at Roscommon Arts Centre.