

Roscommon County Youth Theatre celebra

The 25th anniversary of Roscommon County Youth Theatre (RCYT) was marked at Roscommon Arts Centre with celebrations of joy, jubilation and enduring achievement.

A special video message from Boyle actor Chris O'Dowd highlighted the importance of RCYT to the local cultural landscape. He congratulated RCYT on their success suggesting "all the best stories come from 'small towns'." From humble beginnings the success of RCYT has mirrored that of what is today a burgeoning local arts centre. At the time of their inception the youth theatre did not have a dedicated arts centre nor was there any programme for youth theatre in the county.

Now RCYT, working from their spiritual home at Roscommon Arts Centre, continues to be supported by the Arts Office of Roscommon County Council as well as Youth Theatre Ireland and the Arts Council of Ireland.

In their 25 years of existence over 1,000 students have come through the doors, supporting careers in dramatic performance, staging, lighting, production, media and other forms of creative expression.

Highlights of the recent gala night included a premiere of a specially commissioned documentary called 'Open Your Mouth', directed by Graham Cantwell with the original production written by Catherine Sheridan. The screening highlighted last year's unique production which

emerged from the challenges and reflections shared by RCYT members.

Earlier, some of the many highlights of RCYT's 25 years were also screened, showcasing the many and diverse productions undertaken in that time, ranging from Alice in Wonderland, Romeo and Juliet and The Crucible as well as a special production of 'The Snow Queen' to mark Roscommon Town's inaugural Christmas Festival in 2021.

Throughout the 25 years RCYT have also produced innovative theatre. To mark the centenary of the 1916 Rising 'If I Was In The GPO, We Would Have Won', written by Catherine Sheridan shone a contemporary light on one of Irish history's most tumultuous events. Last year's 'Open Your Mouth' emerged from engagement with members on the challenges facing young people today.

Opening proceedings Artistic Director of RCYT, Catherine Sheridan said her group was "a flagship programme of Roscommon County Council where young people find advocacy, agency and empowerment – we nurture creativity in all its forms.

"Young people have mastered their particular craft with us and have gone on to have very successful careers. But it's the values that have been instilled in our members such as friendship and community that are important too – we're not just a theatre, we're a family too," said Ms Sheridan.



Past and present members of the Roscommon County Youth Theatre with members of the creative team at the 25th anniversary celebrations at Roscommon Arts Centre. Pic: Cian Flynn

Current and past members of RCYT also addressed the gala event.

Youth theatre leader and light and sound designer Michael Foley has worked with the group for the past thirteen years, the last eight of which have been working in the areas of lighting

and sound. He described his experience as "finding his voice", adding: "Youth Theatre has shaped my entire career. I've studied in Spain and in the United States and worked on tours across Europe. We (RCYT) work to a professional standard. It's not about little

theatre for little people," he added.

Similar sentiments were expressed by past and current RCYT members Claire Muldoon, Emily Hough, Kiera Gardner and Aaron Byrne, all of whom spoke about how the traits of leadership, team-

work and confidence building helped them in their careers as well as overcoming issues such as anxiety.

Director of Youth Theatre Ireland (YTI) Eoghan Doyle congratulated RCYT. He said the group was one of 57 youth groups under the remit of

YTI, supporting 3,000 actors and 350 leaders. Youth theatre is special; it's about the holistic development of the young person.

"Young people have an important voice. Someone I know said to me recently 'young people aren't the future – they



Catherine Sheridan, Artistic Director RCYT, and Eoghan Doyle, Director Youth Theatre Ireland, at the Roscommon County Youth Theatre's 25th anniversary celebrations at Roscommon Arts Centre. Pic: Cian Flynn



Issac Naughton, Liam Dunne, and George Naughton at Roscommon County Youth Theatre's 25th anniversary celebrations at Roscommon Arts Centre. Pic: Cian Flynn

ates silver jubilee 'of speaking their truth'



Catherine Lee, Roscommon Arts Centre, at Roscommon County Youth Theatre's 25th anniversary celebrations at Roscommon Arts Centre. Pic: Cian Flynn

are the now'. Your success takes vision, passion and belief. It also takes the support of parents and families.

"The success of youth theatre is what happens when you put sustained investment in the arts and young people. It's evident from the reaction

here that you know you're lucky to have Catherine (Sheridan). Here's to 25 years and more," Mr Doyle remarked.

Presenting the special screening of 'Open Your Mouth', documentary maker Graham Cantwell urged members of RCYT

"to speak your truth. We need to hear what you say. Keep 'opening your mouth' - keep standing up and keep speaking out." He paid tribute to Isaac and George Naughton who are supported by RCYT and the 'Join Our Boys' campaign.



Ivy O'Connor, Mary Boland, Issabell Lucas, Abbie Gibbons, Ace Porter, Aby Arthur, and Kiera Gardner at Roscommon County Youth Theatre's 25th anniversary celebrations at Roscommon Arts Centre. Pic: Cian Flynn



Film maker Graham Cantwell speaks to young people at the celebrations marking 25 years of the Roscommon County Youth Theatre. Pic: Cian Flynn

Red carpet rolled out for a night with the stars

The red carpet was rolled out at Roscommon Arts Centre for the 25th anniversary celebrations of Roscommon County Youth Theatre (RCYT).

The idea of a youth theatre group for the county emerged from the experience of the group's artistic director, Catherine Sheridan, who, while a student in Dublin, was a member of Dublin Youth Theatre. The germ of an idea to create a similar group in Roscommon was born and the rest, well, is history that continues to be made, 25 years on.

Speaking at the recent celebrations at Roscommon Arts Centre, the Leas Cathaoirleach of Roscommon County Council, Cllr Larry Brennan acknowledged the considerable artistic

influence of the group upon past and current generations of young people.

"Tonight celebrates what Roscommon County Youth Theatre is all about, providing a platform for young people between the ages of 10 and 18 to express themselves, celebrate their lives and the lives of others. Your vision has enriched the lives of many young people. Past and current members enjoy enduring and successful careers in performance, lighting, sound, journalism and performance management.

"Leading that vision has been Catherine Sheridan. From a family rich in creative expression, the Simons of Boyle, Catherine is the powerhouse behind

RCYT. Her energy, commitment and dedication are boundless and rubs off on all who are part of your wonderful journey to date.

"It is important also to recognise the role of Roscommon County Council, who have supported our youth theatre in those 25 years. For that I salute the support of Arts Officer Rhona McGrath and Arts Centre Manager Catherine Lee and her team, the youth theatre's home.

"Members have been busy rehearsing this week for their next production, and I urge you to return from May 1st to 3rd for performances of The Wind in the Willows," said Cllr Brennan.

Arts Officer with Roscommon County Coun-

cil Rhona McGrath also acknowledged the achievements of RCYT.

"Roscommon Arts Centre didn't exist 25 years ago, nor did the office of arts officer. I'd like to thank you for your vision, innovation and dedication. You work in an inspiring way and provide great leadership," Ms McGrath said.

As well as the group's annual production of the 'Wind in the Willows', RCYT have been honoured this year as one of ten youth theatre groups participating in the Youth Theatre of Ireland National Festival of Youth Theatres in Kilkenny in June. Members will also be participating in the annual Cruinniú na nÓg celebrations on June 7th next.



Cllr Larry Brennan, Leas-Cathaoirleach Roscommon County Council, at the celebrations marking 25 years of the Roscommon County Youth Theatre. Pic: Cian Flynn



Catherine and Luke Sheridan at the celebrations marking 25 years of the Roscommon County Youth Theatre. Pic: Cian Flynn