

# ENTERTAINMENT Culture & ARTS

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## Roscommon County Youth Theatre celebrates 25 years of creativity

### Chris O'Dowd in video tribute

Last Friday, Roscommon Arts Centre played host to a gala evening celebrating 25 years of Roscommon County Youth Theatre (RCYT). The event reflected on the group's remarkable journey, its achievements, and the profound impact it has had on young people in the county.

The evening featured a special video message from Boyle actor Chris O'Dowd, who praised RCYT's contribution to the arts, remarking that "all the best stories come from small towns." The event also saw screenings of past productions, including *Alice in Wonderland*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Crucible*, and *The Snow Queen* – the latter staged for Roscommon

Town's inaugural Christmas Festival in 2021.

A highlight of the night was the premiere of *Open Your Mouth*, a documentary directed by Graham Cantwell, which explored last year's original RCYT production of the same name, written by Catherine Sheridan. Cantwell encouraged members to "speak your truth. We need to hear what you say. Keep 'opening your mouth' – keep standing up and keep speaking out."

RCYT Artistic Director Catherine Sheridan addressed the gathering, describing the youth theatre as "a flagship programme of Roscommon County Council where young people find advocacy, agency,



RCYT members pictured at the recent event. Photo: Cian Flynn



Pictured are Youth Theatre Leader and Light and Sound Designer Michael Foley and Artistic Director of RCYT Catherine Sheridan. Photo: Cian Flynn

and empowerment." She highlighted the lasting impact of RCYT, stating: "Young people have mastered their craft with us and have gone on to have successful careers, but it's the values instilled – friendship and community – that matter most. We're not just a theatre; we're a family."

Youth Theatre Leader Michael Foley, who has worked with the group for 13 years, shared his personal experience, saying: "Youth Theatre has shaped my entire career. We work to a professional standard – it's not 'little theatre for little people'." His sentiments were echoed by past and current members, including Claire Muldoon, Emily Hough, Kiera Gardner, and Aaron Byrne, who spoke about how the theatre helped them develop leadership, teamwork, and confidence.

Leas-Cathaoirleach of Roscommon County Council Cllr Larry Brennan paid tribute to the theatre's impact, saying: "Tonight celebrates what RCYT is all about – providing a platform for young people to express themselves and celebrate their lives and the lives of others." He also acknowledged the unwavering support of the council and its Arts Office, led by Rhona McGrath, and Arts Centre Manager Catherine Lee and her team.

McGrath reflected on RCYT's early days, noting: "Roscommon Arts Centre didn't exist 25 years ago, nor did the office of Arts Officer. Who'd have thought we'd be here tonight celebrating this milestone?" She praised the group's vision and dedication, crediting its continued success to the investment in young people and the arts.

Youth Theatre Ireland (YTI) Director Eoghan Doyle also commended RCYT's work, stating: "Youth theatre is special; it's about the holistic development of young people. Someone said to me recently, 'young people aren't the future – they are the now.' Your success takes vision, passion, and belief."

RCYT's achievements extend beyond local productions. This year, the group has been selected as one of ten youth theatres to participate in the Youth Theatre Ireland National Festival of Youth Theatres in Kilkenny this June. Members will also take part in the Cruinniú na nÓg celebrations on June 7th.

The evening concluded with a standing ovation, a testament to RCYT's influence over the past 25 years. With continued support from Roscommon County Council, Youth Theatre Ireland, and the Arts Council of Ireland, the group looks set to inspire future generations of young performers.



RCYT members pictured at the recent event. Photo: Cian Flynn