



## THE LYRIC THEATRE

The Ireland Funds have long-supported Belfast's Lyric Theatre rooted in the belief that its work and worth stretches far beyond just entertainment. The Lyric Theatre is a powerful place where actors, writers and the entire community come together to create much-needed dialogue, cultural experiences, and great theater. Today, it is the only full-time producing theater in Northern Ireland.

Often cited as a "beacon of hope" during Northern Ireland's Troubles, the theater stood as a place where messages of tolerance and peace were shared by all members of the community. It remains

the spiritual home to such greats as the late Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, actor and theater patron Liam Neeson, and the late playwright Brian Friel.

Today, it is a magnet for top playwrights and some of Northern Ireland's finest actors. Thanks in part to support from The Ireland Funds, the theater resides in a new award-winning building that soars above the banks of the Lagan River. Names of numerous Ireland Funds' supporters etched on a dramatic two-story wall are among the first things seen by visitors entering the space which has quickly become a South Belfast landmark.

# THE LYRIC THEATRE

**BELFAST'S CULTURAL TREASURE SHOWS THAT THEATER IS FOR EVERYONE**



Among its many community offerings, the Lyric Theatre offers Drama Studio: a course for 18-25 year olds considering a career in acting. Consisting of 14 weeks of Saturday workshops led by experienced local and international practitioners, each Drama Studio culminates with a full-scale production.



Connect Magazine sat down with Ciaran McAuley, Chief Operating Officer at the Lyric Theatre to learn about the latest initiatives of the Lyric and how it is using the power of live theatre to empower, inspire, engage and educate.

**Q. Ciaran, what makes the Lyric so special?**

**A.** The Lyric is Northern Ireland's only full-time producing theater. There are other theaters where they receive productions that are on tour. We don't do that. We make it here. So from the moment of inception we get the writer and the director, we employ the designers and the actors. We have a technical crew, our stage management crew and a project could run for 3 months or even 18 months before it ever hits the stage. We're also the largest employer of theater practitioners in Northern Ireland.

**Q. So you consider the Lyric an incubator rather than a shell?**

**A.** Yes – we're an incredible breeding ground for talent. What we do is we make great theater. Everyone here from the person who sells you your tickets to the actor on the stage is part of that. Every night, all of us collectively go on stage, we rip the hearts out of people's chests, we play around with them for two hours on stage, and we stick them back in their chests and say, "now go home and think about what you've just seen." Hopefully, they'll love it. But they can hate it as long as we created an emotional reaction in that person.

**Q. During the Troubles, what was the Lyric's role in the community?**

**A.** The idea for the theater began in the 1950s but the first theater was opened in 1968, much smaller than this: one space, one auditorium, 308 seats. The Troubles were just starting at that stage so Northern Ireland was in a period of conflict. And throughout that time the Lyric created a space where people could come to explore ideas without any sense of one side or the other. It was a true mutual space.

I think the joy of experiencing theater is you experience it as one. You come in as 300 individual people, but you're sharing in something. So while it's not overtly about bringing people together, there's no doubt in my mind that theater contributes to that process of healing and bringing communities together.

**Q. How about the Lyric's role in the community today?**

**A.** It has also enabled us to invite the community in to a great new space and experience. We love changing people's impressions that theater is snooty or not for them. We believe it is for them. This building gives us the space and allows us to change that perception. We've lifted everything we do to a new level. The new building we're in has two spaces, one with 400 seats and one with 120 seats. So our capacity for doing work has increased.

**Q. Can you share an example?**

**A.** We're working with young people from Hydebank Wood Young Offenders' Centre, a facility for 18-24 year olds who are incarcerated. Young people have come and served as hosts or worked on productions and have learned about the theater process, often expressing a level of pride they didn't have before. They have also consulted with our Drama Studio program in creating a play called "Blackout" about a young man who wakes up in jail and his understanding of the consequences of his actions. One of the young men said, "I want to go out and tell people of my age, from my community, what happens if you get it wrong."

The play toured 23 schools in Northern Ireland and gave teenagers a chance to talk to the people who had been through that experience. We took surveys afterward and 84% of people had their opinions of young people in incarceration changed by that process.

**Q. At the end of the day, what keeps the Lyric inspired?**

**A.** When we see the young men and women from Hydebank after two weeks standing tall. When we see young children come into our storytelling workshop on a Sunday and their eyes light up hearing stories from around the world. When we see a member of the community who began passing out programs and is now creating costumes for our plays. That's the work that we do, that's the changing-lives part of what we do. That's the journey we're on, as well as creating professional theater, we're changing lives. The Lyric is not just a theater. We're a lot more than that.

"We are demystifying the theater experience. We are instilling skills and instilling confidence. My objective is that a young actor from Belfast should have exactly the same expectations and confidence as a young actor from London."

*Philip Crawford, Head of Creative Learning at the Lyric Theatre*



RAMLIFE THEATRE COMPANY & THE LYRIC THEATRE  
PRESENT THE WORLD PREMIERE OF

# AS THE TIDE EBBS

17 MAY - 05 JUN 2016  
Written by Pearse Elliott  
Directed by Niall McCafferty  
Designed by Neil Fife  
Starring Norman Maclean, Michael McKeown & Billy Clarke

LYRIC THEATRE

APR - NOV 2016

# VIVID FACES

EIGHT PLAYS EXPLORING THE NATURE OF IDENTITY

HERE COMES THE NIGHT • THE PATRIOT GAME • NORTHERN STAR • SMILEY  
• OBSERVE THE SONS OF ULSTER MARCHING TOWARDS THE SHOME  
• ST. JOAN • THE NEST • THREE SISTERS

LYRIC THEATRE

4 JUN - 2 JUL 2016

# SMILEY

The new play by Gary Mitchell  
Directed by Conall Morrison  
Starring Michael Condon, Jo Donnelly, James Doran,  
Róisín Gallagher, Gerard McCabe, Gavin Padden,  
Kerri Quinlan and Tommy Wallace

LYRIC THEATRE

3 DEC 2015 - 3 JAN 2016

# LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD & THE BIG BAD WOLF

Written by Derek O'Connor  
Directed by Paul Bosco Mc Eneaney  
Music by Ursula Burns

LYRIC THEATRE

Cast includes: Róisín Gallagher, Charlotte McCurry and Christina Nelson

THE LYRIC THEATRE AND YOUNG VIC

# THE NEST

24 SEPT - 22 OCT 2016  
Written by Franz Xaver Kroetz  
New translation by Conor McPherson  
Directed by Ian Rickson

Young Vic

LYRIC THEATRE

THE

# NIGHT ALIVE

6 - 31 OCT 2015  
by Conor McPherson

TICKETS FROM £10

CAST: ADRIAN DUNBAR, FRANK GRIMES, LAURENCE KILIAN,  
IAN LLOYD-ANDERSON, KATE STANLEY BOBINAN

LYRIC THEATRE

29 MARCH - 16 APRIL 2016

BRUISER THEATRE COMPANY & THE LYRIC THEATRE  
BY ARRANGEMENT WITH EDWARD SNAPE FOR FIERY ANGEL LIMITED

# JOHN BUCHAN AND ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S THE 39 STEPS

ADAPTED BY PATRICK BARLOW FROM AN ORIGINAL CONCEPT BY SIMON COOGLÉ AND NEDDY GARDIN

Directed by Lisa May

TICKETS FROM £10

LYRIC THEATRE

23 APR - 14 MAY 2016

# HERE COMES THE NIGHT

The new play by Rosemary Jenkinson  
Directed by Jimmy Fay  
Starring Michael Condon, Neil Cross, Susan Gyles,  
Tobias Fritzenberg and Kerri Quinlan

TICKETS FROM £10

LYRIC THEATRE

FROM THE CREATORS OF MISTLETOE AND CRIME

# CHRISTMAS EVE CAN KILL YOU

21 NOV 2015 - 17 JAN 2016

Written by Marie Jones  
Directed by Dan Gordon

TICKETS FROM £10

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