A Review of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers 2017

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Research methodology
4. The story of the programme
5. Lead mentor feedback
6. Programme producer feedback
7. Programme participant feedback
8. Programme outcomes
9. Enablers and challenges
10. Recommendations
11. References
12. Appendices

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1. Introduction

Belltable, at 69 O’Connell Street, Limerick was established in 1981 and is the oldest regional arts centre in Ireland. The Limerick city venue was relaunched in April 2016 under the management of Lime Tree Theatre, which is situated on the campus of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. The Lime Tree Theatre and Belltable are supported by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Limerick Arts Office, Limerick City and County Council and Mary Immaculate College. Louise Donlon (Lime Tree Theatre Manager) and Marketa Dowling (Belltable Programme Manager) see Belltable as both a receiving venue and a centre for the development of the performing arts in Limerick. Focussing on the latter, Belltable:Connect was conceived and developed to support the professional development of theatre artists. In 2016 and 2017, the following initiatives emerged under the umbrella of Belltable:Connect:

- Mentoring programme for playwrights and directors (September 2016-June 2017)
- Theatre artist residency (January 2017-December 2017)
- Mentoring programme for theatre makers (January 2017-June 2017)

The mentoring programme for theatre makers (Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers) is the subject of this review. The programme was funded by the Arts Council through its theatre artist development scheme. The specific aims of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers 2017 were to:
- Engage and stimulate up to ten theatre artists (this number was revised following the application and selection process to twelve) to develop their skills
- Offer exposure to the practice of renowned theatre artists/companies through masterclasses, workshops, playdates and informal chats
- Activate engagement and mutual support among participants

Belltable: Connect Theatre Makers ran at Belltable from January 2017-June 2017. The programme was produced by Belltable Programme Manager, Marketa Dowling and led by two lead mentors: Deirdre Kinahan and Lynne Parker. Twelve theatre makers participated in the programme which took place over six two-day blocks (one two-day block per month). The theatre makers were paid a stipend for each of these blocks, which facilitated participation in the programme for those living outside of Limerick. During the two-day blocks, the theatre makers participated in a programme of talks, workshops and masterclasses linked to shows programmed at either Belltable or Lime Tree Theatre. In this way, they had opportunities to engage with a variety of styles, approaches and viewpoints in contemporary theatre from Ireland, Europe and beyond. The participating theatre makers also engaged in talks, workshops and individual mentoring sessions with the lead mentors. (See Appendix 1 for programme schedule.)

The programme was designed, from the outset, to culminate in the showing of new work by the participants. The form that this new work would take was left to the discretion of the participants. The final showcase of ideas performed at Belltable on 30 June and 1 July featured choral work derived from material generated by the participants in one of the programme’s masterclasses, work for young audiences, work involving movement and visual design and a rehearsed reading of a play written by one of the participating theatre makers. In the week leading up to the showcase, participants had access to the stage, studio spaces and resources of Belltable. As they collaborated to progress and hone their work, they also had access to support from the lead mentors and the programme producer. (See Appendix 2 for showcase programme.)

From the outset, a research and evaluation element was built into the programme so as to inquire systematically into its efficacy and to ensure that any future programme development would be research informed and led. The research was conducted by Dr Dorothy Morrissey,
lecturer in drama education at Mary Immaculate College, who engaged in the programme as a participant researcher. Ethical approval for the research was received from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) and normal ethical procedures were adhered to: all participants received information sheets and signed consent forms; electronic files were encrypted and research participant verifications were conducted. This review represents the research findings and aims to:

- Offer an illustrative and in-depth exemplar of a professional development programme for theatre makers
- Examine the effects of the initiative on participating theatre makers
- Evaluate the processes, benefits, challenges and outcomes of the programme
- Provide evidence-based recommendations for the development of future professional development programmes
- Present innovative ways of researching and gaining insight into the professional development needs and experiences of theatre makers

In the writing of this review, the researcher sought to include the perspectives of the key participants in the programme: the participating theatre makers, the lead mentors, the programme manager and her own. It is hoped that the review will contribute to the development of sustainable models of professional development for theatre makers at Belltable and beyond.
2. Background

In the two years prior to the relaunching of Belltable in April 2016, there had been a theatre artist development programme, HatchLK, running at the venue (which was then called 69 O’Connell Street). HatchLK was funded by the Arts Council’s Theatre Artist Development Scheme and supported by Limerick City and County Council and Lime Tree Theatre. The programme which ran over a four month period supported up to five theatre artists to make work and was led by Limerick-based theatre makers Maeve McGrath and Monica Spencer. When Belltable was relaunched, HatchLK was coming to an end and there were no plans to repeat or develop the programme. The need remained, however, for a professional development programme for theatre makers in Limerick; a city without a resident professional theatre company, a place in which theatre artists found it difficult to make work and a locale in which small groups of theatre makers tended to work primarily with one another. So, with the relaunch of Belltable and the appointment of a full-time programme manager, the stage was set to build on, and broaden the scope of, HatchLK. As a receiving venue, Belltable enabled access to international shows and expertise that had not been available to HatchLK.

Marketa Dowling, Belltable Programme Manager, envisioned HatchLK’s successor catering for theatre makers from Limerick and beyond. She saw a programme with national scope as
offering possibilities for cross-pollination of ideas and talent not just between Dublin and Limerick but between elsewhere and Limerick as well. The national scope of the programme that ensued, Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers, reflects Marketa’s belief that opportunities should not be geographically determined but should go to those to whom they are best suited, at a particular time.

While Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers built on HatchLK, it was also modelled on The SPACE Programme run by The Performance Corporation with support from the Arts Council and Kildare County Council. The SPACE Programme, an annual two-week residential programme, ran from 2008-2015 and was located at Castletown House, Co. Kildare. The programme provided space and opportunities for 6-8 arts and creative practitioners to collaborate, experiment and innovate; specifically towards a performance/showcase that would take place in Castletown House at the end of the two weeks. The SPACE Programme was open to Irish and international practitioners from a broad range of disciplines including theatre, visual arts, music, architecture, design, dance, opera, photography etc. It was conducted through the medium of English and co-ordinated by Belfast-based dramaturg Hannah Slättne. The SPACE Programme is scheduled to recommence in November 2017.
At Belltable, Marketa conceived a programme that would be spread out over a longer period of time than *The SPACE Programme*; one consisting of 6 two-day blocks over a 6 month period. She also envisaged that participants would come together at Belltable, or elsewhere, outside of these scheduled blocks to develop and rehearse their work. She planned, moreover, for Belltable to be available to the participants in the week leading up to the showcase. As in *The Space Programme*, Marketa saw collaboration in the making and showcasing of work as integral to, and indeed the main point of, the programme. This focus was iterated in the open call for participants issued in September 2016:

Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers is a 6-month theatre development programme responding to the identified need to create with guidance and support from mentors, giving participants an impetus to develop new works. The programme facilitates artists to stretch their creative comfort zone and to explore in a safe and stimulating environment.

Theatre Makers encourages collaborations with others, within the framework of a programme of talks, workshops and demonstration-performances. These take place over two days once a month from January to June 2017 … The creative ensemble of participants will showcase their ideas to the public in July 2017 (see Appendix 3 for Open Call for Participants).

Unlike *The Space Programme*, however, Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers was confined to theatre makers (though with a mix of specialisms) and it sought to harness the resources of Belltable and Lime Tree Theatre as receiving venues to include the expertise of international mentors rather than international participants.
3. Research methodology

3.1 Research design

The research component of the programme was designed as a narrative case study. As a case study the research was designed to investigate the various phases and components of the programme within the context of the programme itself. As a narrative case study, it was designed to focus specifically on the experiences of those involved in the programme: the programme producer, the lead mentors, the participants and the participant-researcher. Adopting a narrative approach, the researcher is guided by the notion that we make sense of our experiences (often complex and ambiguous) by shaping and reshaping them into stories or ‘narratives of experience’ (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Inevitably, the narratives of experience we tell and retell are inseparable from the contexts in which we tell and retell them. Within a narrative research paradigm, research is understood as:

... a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social (ibid. p.20).

In narrative research too, the review or report tends to read something like a story.
3.2 Research participants

**Marketa Dowling**: Production manager of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers and Belltable Programme Manager.

**Deirdre (Dee) Kinahan**: Lead mentor of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers, playwright and producer (see Appendix 4).

**Lynne Parker**: Lead mentor of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers, director and co-founder of Rough Magic (see Appendix 5).

**Ann Blake**: Limerick-based director, performer and writer. Ann is a founding member of Choke Comedy Improv and a musician with The Brad Pitt Light Orchestra. She premiered and performed her own work *The Morning after the Life Before* at Belltable in May 2017 before going on to win Best English Language Production at Montreal Fringe Festival and Most Outstanding Production at London Fringe Festival.

**Caoimhe Dunn**: Freelance artist, puppet, model and mask maker, puppeteer, and youth arts facilitator. Originally from Dublin, Caoimhe is now based in Wexford. She studied Fine Art and Model-making and Design at Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (DLIADT) and has spent over 10 years working in outdoor arts, street theatre and spectacle.

**Eadaoin O Donoghue**: Theatre maker, director and performer based in Cork. Eadaoin is a graduate of Lecoq Theatre School and is an ensemble member of BrokenCrow Theatre Company. She has performed in three of the company’s shows: *Bug*, *Mantle* and *Enter Juliet*. Eadaoin also works as freelance performer and dramaturg.

**Fionnuala Gygax**: Actor/theatre-maker based in Dublin. Fionnuala’s play, *Hostel 16* was developed as part of Druid Theatre Company’s FUEL programme in 2015 and produced as part of Tiger Dublin Fringe 2016 at which the cast was nominated for best ensemble.

**Henry Martin**: Writer from Tipperary. Henry’s work has been shown at Theatre 503, Arcola Theatre, Roundhouse, Latitude Festival, and Fishamble Theatre. He has been nominated for various awards: Adopt a Playwright Award, Perfect Pitch Award and Red Planet Prize. His book on the painter Agnes Martin will be published in 2018 by Schaffner Press.

**Joan Somers Donnelly**: Dublin-based theatre maker. Joan has worked as a director, assistant director, and performer in Dublin and Berlin. She has also led workshops and created
performances with youth clubs, migrant communities, addiction recovery groups, and actors with intellectual disabilities.

**Joanne Ryan**: Limerick-based actor and theatre maker. She was nominated for an Irish Times Theatre Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role in 2014 for her performance in Bottom Dog Theatre’s *What Happened Bridgie Cleary*. She performed her one-woman multi-media play *Eggsistentialism* at Belltable and Tiger Dublin Fringe in 2016 and at Edinburgh Fringe in 2017. The show, which she also wrote, will tour nationally in the autumn of 2017.

**John Galvin**: Limerick-based multimedia artist and designer. He holds a BA in Fine Art from Limerick School of Art and Design (LSAD) and an MA in Music Technology from the University of Limerick where he recently completed a PhD by Practice in New Media Art. His multi-disciplinary practice includes digital video works, audio-visual installations, visual and sound design for theatre and opera and electroacoustic composition.

**Liam McCarthy**: Playwright from Limerick. Liam’s plays include *A Talent for Lying*, *This Night* and *Falling*, which was shortlisted for the Eamon Keane Award. He has also worked as an actor in Ireland, the UK and the USA. Liam is a founding member of the production company Octopus Soup.

**Maeve Stone**: Dublin-based freelance theatre director, originally from Limerick. Maeve is currently collaborating with Melbourne based avant-garde feminist group The Rabble to develop a play, *Unwoman*, which will be programmed in Dublin and Melbourne in 2018. A member of #WakingTheFeminists, Maeve is also co-founder of Change of Address Collective, which works to connect artists and refugees.

**Mags O’Donoghue**: Limerick-based freelance production and stage manager. With many years of experience in these, and various other technical, roles, Mags will graduate from the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick in 2017 with an MA in Festive Arts.

**Rob Moloney**: Composer, sound designer and lighting designer. In 2015, Rob was nominated for an Irish Times Theatre Award for Best Sound Design for *Between Trees and Water* (Painted Bird Productions).
3.3 Locating the researcher

Since narrative research is understood as ‘a collaboration between researcher and participants’ (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p.20), the researcher’s own narrative of experience is integral to the research process. Inevitably, the researcher brings her previous experiences, prejudices, biases and blind spots to bear on her experience of the programme, her interpretations of the programme as a participant observer and on the writing of this review. In the following text box she attempts to be as explicit as possible about her positioning.

I am a lecturer in drama education at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, where I teach drama education to undergraduate and postgraduate (primary) student teachers. I have been a teacher for many years and a teacher educator in drama for the past fifteen. Apart from my involvement in student drama as an undergraduate and my regular attendance at theatrical events, my work in drama has been located within educational contexts: as a primary teacher, as a teacher educator and as a provider of professional development in drama for primary teachers. In recent years, I have begun representing research in both play script format and theatrical form and have performed my own short one-woman play, ‘Goldilocks’s Testimony’ (a play about the marginalisation of women in workplaces), at a number of academic and professional conferences. As a participant-researcher on Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers, I was hoping to learn more about theatre making while contributing, through the writing of this review, to the continuing professional development of theatre makers at Belltable and beyond.

For most of the programme, I experienced myself as an outsider; separated from the participating theatre makers on a number of counts: I was not ‘really’ a theatre maker, I was older than them and I was a researcher as well as a participant. I experienced myself as separate from the lead mentors too; I did not share their responsibility for leading the programme and, unlike me, they were renowned professional theatre makers. It was only as we prepared for the showcase that I experienced myself as an insider on any level; only then that I felt trusted as a researcher. Since narrative research is predicated on collaboration, my experience of myself inevitably impacted on the narratives of experience generated in the various phases of the programme.
3.4 Research methods

As a participant observer, the researcher involved herself in all programme activities in the midst of which she recorded her observations in the form of field notes. She also wrote field notes after each two-day block. In these latter field notes, she recorded her ongoing reflections and analysis. All of these field notes, programme documentation (including the participants’ application forms), email correspondence and the researcher’s informal conversations with the programme producer, lead mentors and programme participants were used to write interim field texts in which the researcher engaged in further reflection and analysis.

A focus group interview with the ten theatre artists who chose to participate (two chose not to) in the final showcase was held on 1 July 2017 at Belltable (coded as FG). This interview was audio recorded. Subsequently, a telephone interview (on which notes were taken by the researcher) was conducted with one of the other theatre makers (also coded as FG). The other provided a written evaluation of the programme (coded as EF). All participating theatre makers were invited to provided a written evaluation of the programme and programme evaluation forms were designed and distributed for this purpose by the programme producer (coded as EF; see Appendix 6). 8 (75%) of these forms were returned. Telephone interviews with the two lead mentors (on which notes were also taken by the researcher) were conducted on 7 Aug 2017 (coded as LM 1) and 11 Aug 2017 (coded as LM 2) respectively. A face to face audio recorded interview was conducted with the programme producer on 25 July 2017 at Mary Immaculate College. While in this latter interview, the researcher also sought clarification on the background to the programme (see section 2), the primary focus in all of the aforementioned semi-structured interviews was on:

- The aspects of the programme that worked
- The aspects of the programme that did not work as well as they might have
- Recommendations for future programme development

In the text box below the researcher describes her approaches to 1) interpreting the above data sources, and 2) representing her interpretations in this review.
1. ‘From research design, to data collection, analysis, and representation, researchers bring their assumptions and experiences to bear on their projects’ (Leavy 2013, p.10). So my own narratives of experience – set within the institutions in which ... [I] work, the social narratives of which ... [I am] part, the landscape on which ... [I] live’ (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p.64) – are integral to the interpretations I make in this review. However, they are not necessarily the interpretations I made during Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers or in the weeks that followed or, indeed, interpretations I might make at some future date. This review, written at particular moments in time, is, therefore, provisional and partial. As such, it is an interpretation or narrative that could always be otherwise (Greene 1998).

From the commencement of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers 2017 to the writing of this review, I revisited and revised interpretations I made at earlier stages in the light of new data, experiences and understandings. Since, as St Pierre (1997) asserts, writing is ‘not only inscription but also discovery’ (p. 408), I attained many insights in the process of writing the review itself. The interpretations yielded at the various stages are embedded in this review though the ‘actual’ chronology of the interpretive process is not necessarily adhered to. The main programme events (shows, workshops, masterclasses etc.), are presented in the order in which they occurred, though some of the activities are not.

2. In section 4, I tell the story of the programme in a first person narrative; in the format of ‘Kate’s diary’. In ‘Kate’s diary’, I use ‘techniques of fiction’ (Angrosino 1988, p.4) to construct a ‘sense’ of the experience of being a participant on the programme. Kate, a fictional character, is the ‘author’ of the diary. Cast as a participating theatre maker, Kate is a composite character derived from the multiple data sources described above (as are the co-participants to whom she refers). In this way, ‘Kate’s diary’ represents the ‘collective realities’ (Saldana 2011, p.17) of the theatre makers participating in Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers. In order to render ‘Kate’s’ diary’ credible and to ensure that none of the characters is identified with any of the ‘real’ theatre makers, aspects of the characters and of incidents/events have been invented. In ‘Kate’s diary’, however, I have not attempted to anonymise the identities of the programme producer, the lead mentors or the researcher.

In the three sections that follow ‘Kate’s Diary’, I return to the third-person in my representation of the research participants’ responses to the programme. The primary data sources for these sections are the interview recordings, my notes on the interviews and the participating theatre makers’ feedback forms. Since it would be difficult, if not impossible, to anonymise the
feedback from the programme producer, I have not made any attempt to do so. My interpretation of that feedback (in section 5) has, nonetheless, been verified with her.

In my representation of the feedback from the lead mentors in section 6, I draw, once again on ‘techniques of fiction’; conflating both mentors into one. My interpretation of the lead mentors’ feedback has been verified with them.

In section 7, which focuses on feedback from the participating theatre makers (also verified with them), the participants are given pseudonyms to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity.
4. The story of the programme

This section represents the story of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers in the form of 1) ‘Kate’s diary’ (4.1) and 2) a short paragraph on the rehearsal week (prior to the showcase at Belltable) (4.2).

4.1 Kate’s diary

27-28 January 2017; focus: object theatre

When I read the open call for Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers, I was excited by the possibility of meeting and collaborating with theatre makers outside of those I was already comfortable working with; excited by the prospect of extending my existing network and learning new skills. With a BA in music, I had worked with a friend on three shows in Donegal; as co-director on a one-man show I had written and as composer/musician on two shows for young audiences. On Friday, I arrived at Belltable around 2pm. Most of the participants, though not all, seemed to know each other. After tea/coffee and a photocall we headed to the hub next door. Our first task was to introduce ourselves. ‘Wow’, I thought; lots of talent and expertise, and in a range of areas. Next Dee and Lynne told us a bit about themselves; sketching out their career trajectories and current projects. They have so much industry knowledge and experience. We considered how we make theatre; by intellect or instinct. Most seemed to favour one over the other. I’m not so sure; sometimes favouring one and...
sometimes the other. We considered too what is meant by the term theatre maker. We didn’t succeed in pinning it down though there was general agreement that it involved multi-tasking. At the end of this session, Dorothy explained her role as a participant-researcher on the programme. I felt a bit intimidated (I think everyone did) but consented to being involved anyway. Dorothy also explained how she’d be approaching the research. I didn’t really get what she meant. I don’t think anyone else did either!

Later that evening, we attended a show at Belltable: *Ubu on the Table*; a work of object theatre derived from Alfred Jarry’s nineteenth century farce, *Ubu Roi* and performed by Théâtre de la Pire Espèce from Canada. The show’s two actors used everyday kitchen utensils in a frenetically-paced, crazy and bizarre show that occurred to me as a crazed version of *Macbeth*. At the talkback afterwards, the actors said that the show had been on the road since 1998!

Prior to this first weekend, we’d been asked to bring in 5-10 objects (not too big and not too small) for the workshop the following day. In the workshop, we arranged and rearranged the objects, described them and used them to tell short stories. We were directed to move the objects in very particular ways and to use our bodies as part of the objects. None of us appeared to be working within our comfort zones. It was probably a good way to start; the focus was on our use of the objects rather than on ourselves as we were getting to know each other. I found it a bit unnerving though that Lynne and Dee were observing us throughout. Perhaps because we’re only getting to know them too. Then, towards the end of the day Lynne asked us to prepare an audition piece for the next block. (She’ll be leading the next two blocks.) I wasn’t the only one unnerved by this prospect. Other ‘non-actors’ were clearly challenged too, as was evident from their many questions e.g. do we have to learn it off? (We didn’t.) Can we read from texts other than dramatic ones? (We could.) Lynne sees the audition as a way of enabling us to look ‘at what has to be conveyed by an actor in a short space of time’ (email correspondence 9/2/17). A ‘director’ (from the group) will be appointed for each audition. The director will leave the room while the actor explains to the rest of the group what s/he wants to get across. The director will then reenter and provide feedback on what s/he has seen.
Over the course of the programme, we’re going to have two individual half-hour sessions with each mentor. My session with Lynne is scheduled for the next block.

11-12 February 2017; focus: acting

I had my session with Lynne today. I didn’t really know what I wanted from it but it was interesting to interact with Lynne on a one-to-one basis. She was really encouraging and gave me some great tips for my next project; a one-woman show on which I am composer/musician. Afterwards, in the workshop, Lynne talked about actors and acting. When she began working in theatre in Ireland, actors had no training. Now, of course, there are many formal training procedures. Her tremendous respect, as a director, for actors was palpable. She believes that strong ensembles tend to be actor driven and, as a director, she most enjoys directing work that is actor led. Returning to the notions of intellect and instinct, Lynne believes that acting relies on instinct, but needs to be controlled by the intellect.

Next we came to the auditions. Harry and Charlie requested that Lynne audition too. I think the request was coming from their own vulnerability; neither are actors. It was interesting for me, a novice theatre maker, to see the extent of the anxiety provoked by the prospect of ‘auditioning’ (even with script in hand). The actors in the group, as one might expect, appeared most comfortable. I noticed that the ‘non-actors’ tended to choose prose over dramatic monologues. Even though I’d classify myself as a ‘non-actor’ I decided to push myself beyond my comfort zone and perform a dramatic monologue. I was glad that I did. I think I did okay even if I did lack clarity about what I wanted to get across. Something to work on! The whole process gave me a glimpse into theatre making from an actor’s perspective. It also gave me a glimpse into the anxieties provoked by performance. On top of that, I thought the sense of vulnerability generated by the auditions contributed to the group bonding process. We were all in the same boat!

Later that evening, we attended Adventures of a Red Headed Coffee Shop Girl at Belltable. The show was written, performed and produced by Canadian theatre maker, Rebecca Perry. While I couldn’t see much of a point to the show itself, Perry’s production workshop the
The following day was very useful. It even inspired Billie to take her own show to the Edinburgh fringe. Perry really hammered home the importance of production/the producer. We can get so caught up in making theatre that production (a vital part of the process) can play second fiddle. Perry went through the elements of production in minute detail; creating shows, the kinds of shows, the logistics of shows, artist contracts, time management, self-employment, touring budgets, commonly overlooked expenses, music licensing, publicity, pitching and more. Much to chew on!

This afternoon, Marketa gave us all an edition of the *Limerick Leader* as a stimulus for the generation of ideas towards our final showcase. She and Lynne are very open about how the showcase might work. We are in the driving seat on this which is a bit scary.

9-10 March 2017; focus: contemporary dance: from choreography to design

This block began with Coiscéim’s performance at Lime Tree Theatre of *The Wolf and Peter*; an adaptation of the story scored by Prokofiev in *Peter and the Wolf*. This show (for young audiences) tells the story from the point of view of the (marginalised) wolf and combines parts of Prokofiev’s original score with a new one. The show was imaginative, humorous and moving by turns. It’s great to see Irish artists producing such high quality work.

Even though most of us had little experience in dance, David Bolger, the choreographer of *The Wolf and Peter*, made the workshop enjoyable; instilling a can-do attitude while facilitating us to embody the basis for some of the movements we had seen in the show. He spoke afterwards about the fragility of work in dance; about how, when work gets to a certain level, it often doesn’t need to be improved; that ‘improving’ or reworking it too much can damage it. Demonstrating real generosity of spirit, David exemplified his observations with reference to one of his own shows.

After lunch, we discussed the showcase with Lynne and Marketa. We talked about the ideas and themes inspired by the edition of the *Limerick Leader* Marketa had given us. We spoke about the stories it contained; stories about missing people, about Ardnacrusha, about the
launch of a book on Limerick’s pig industry and more. Inevitably, given our current obsession with Trump and all things Trump, the issue of ‘fake news’ came up. We even established a Limerick connection to Trump! There was some anxiety about the form the showcase might take and, indeed, some resistance to the notion of a showcase at all. After a lengthy, and robust, discussion, Marketa drew up a matrix on which we each ticked off the roles we would be prepared to play. I ticked dancing, acting, writing and/or collaborating (with someone more expert) on sound design. It was agreed that each of us would send a treatment of a happening or event, inspired by the Leader stories, to Lynne and Dee (who would be taking over from Lynne) before the next block. We also agreed that we would build our ideas around one of five headings:

- Data
- Ardnacrusha
- Dis-inclusion
- Fake news
- Pigs

28-29 April 2017; focus: strategies of engagement with text and performance

Prior to this block, Dee sent an email asking us to prepare to pitch our treatments blind to the group; pitching, she wrote, is such a huge part of contemporary theatre practice. Each of us would have six minutes to pitch and five minutes to answer questions. Then, having chewed on the ideas overnight we’d choose 3-5 ideas (for the showcase) the following day.

This amazing weekend began with a performance of I, Malvolio by Tim Crouch at Belltable on Friday. The show (for young audiences) spotlights Malvolio, a servant in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night who tells the story of the play from his perspective. In Shakespeare’s play, Malvolio starts out as a ‘priggish scold’ who becomes convinced that his mistress is in love with him. As a consequence he behaves foolishly and is tormented, to the point of distraction, by his ‘betters’. At the end of the play, Malvolio swears that he’ll have his revenge. And, in I, Malvolio Crouch sets out to avenge Malvolio by providing him with a forum in which to tell of the cruelties and suffering he endured (he contemplates suicide).
Throughout the play, Crouch uses comedy to poke fun at the audience for laughing (like his aggressors in Shakespeare’s play) at Malvolio’s misfortunes.

In the subsequent talk-back and masterclass (the following day), Crouch spoke personally about his experiences in, and approaches to, theatre making. His account of the depression he felt as a jobbing actor, dancing to the tunes of others, with no outlet for his own creativity was refreshing. This is a story we don’t often hear and it legitimated the experiences we’ve all had (not just as jobbing actors) in a world in which we are continuously competing for limited resources. Describing his gradual emergence (over three decades) as a theatre maker, Crouch told us that it was only when he decided not to waste time on what did not make sense to him personally that his work began to resonate with others. He was, nonetheless, candid about the fact that this did not make the work – which he sees ‘as a slow process of opening’ – easy. Like Crouch, I have experienced the futility – often in response to external deadlines – of pushing an idea that needs time to take root and grow. Inspired by Crouch’s story, I am encouraged by his mantra: ‘Don’t strain the stool’! I am encouraged too by his need to keep on moving; to keep on challenging established theatrical forms and conventions. There is nothing gratuitous about his challenges though and he insists that the form must always serve the story. The openness and generosity with which Crouch shared his ongoing quest with us was, indeed, extraordinary. (So too was Crouch’s performance of I, Malvolio.)

The final part of this block was spent discussing the showcase. Back with us for the first time since the first block, it must have been difficult for Dee to reenter the group. She hasn’t been part of the group norming process. I’m sure Lynne has been keeping her in the loop though and we’d sent her our treatments. This afternoon, we took turns to pitch our ideas to the group. The rest of the session was spent discussing how they might work. There was still some resistance to the idea of the showcase. The fear in the room was palpable. With no clear focus, we were feeling vulnerable and exposed. We also discussed how the showcase might be organised, the number of performances (Marketa had originally planned for three), ticket price etc. Marketa has made it clear that she sees the showcase as an opportunity to have our work in development seen by an audience in Limerick, and that participation in it
is voluntary. By the end of this block, we finally agreed on some pieces to show. I’m not sure we’d have come to this agreement if Karen hadn’t been so emphatic about wanting to work on her idea. When a few others agreed to work with her, it got the ball rolling. And when Joe said that he too wanted to work on an idea Paul and I agreed to work with him. By the end of this block, it was looking like the showcase would be going ahead after all and that everyone would be taking part! Then, there were the logistics of accommodation etc. to organise for the week of the showcase. I turned down paid work for the week so I was disappointed that there was no stipend available. Still, I’d committed to doing the showcase at the outset and it presented wonderful opportunities for working with new people and for having the work seen by an audience. The showcase will take place over two nights: 30 June and 1 July. At this stage we have decided on the following:

- A rehearsed reading of a play about three mothers in search of a son
- Uisce: a sensory auditory experience investigating Limerick’s relationship with the river Shannon
- A visual and choreographic exploration of the impact of Ardnacrusha
- A scripted piece about a little pig puppet who interacts with actors in a dystopian pig world
- Tim’s fugue: derived from scenes written during Crouch’s workshop and combined in some kind of showcase piece

6-7 May 2017; focus: theatre from the point of view of design

I had my meeting with Dee. She’s going to introduce me to a composer/musician/sound designer who has done a lot of work at the Abbey; someone I’d never have had the confidence to approach on my own. I’m delighted. There were a few people absent this weekend; attending to other theatrical commitments. This meant that we didn’t make much progress with the showcase. Mike Finn’s (Mike is playwright in residence at Belltable) workshop on set design and the playwright was interesting. Using examples from published plays, and from Mike’s own work, we explored the varying degrees to which playwrights prescribe the design of a show and the degrees to which those prescriptions may or may not be adhered to.
On Saturday evening, we attended Handel’s *Radamisto* at the Lime Tree Theatre. About six stalwarts managed to stay awake for the whole performance. I wasn’t among them! Even as a musician myself, I find opera fairly inaccessible though I appreciate the skill and technique involved. *Radamisto*, in particular, is full of repetition and *da capa* arias. I can’t imagine what it would be like to direct. The show itself marked director Wayne Jordan’s opera debut. In Sunday’s workshop, Jordan referred to his production of *Radamisto* as ‘a lofty clown show’. It was certainly lofty, with big costumes which looked to me like an amalgamation of Elizabethan and Classical period costumes. Jordan drew comparisons between the show and his earlier production of *Twelfth Night*, which I’d seen at the Abbey. Speaking about directing the show, Jordan gave us some insight into his approach to directing a work so full of repetition and *da capa* arias. He explained how he introduced a mute actor as a sort of puppeteer arranging and rearranging the furniture and the singers’ gestures and faces on stage. This, combined with the stylised costumes and pale make-up of the singers, picks up on the stylisation of the Baroque opera and its reputation for artificiality (reflected in the narrative itself). Jill (who stayed awake for the entire show) said that she found the puppeteer distracting; especially when he was rearranging furniture and gestures mid aria.

1-2 June 2017; focus: final project and showing of work

Dee and Lynne were both in attendance for this block. We spent the first afternoon discussing our showcase pieces in our small groups before feeding back to the whole group. On Thursday night we went to see Mikel Murfi in *I hear you and rejoice*. The play, set at the idiosyncratic rural funeral mass of Gaelic football coach Kitsy Rainey, presents snapshots of Kitsy’s life in a small rural community. These snapshots involve a cluster of people (including Kitsy herself), all played by Murfi, who are attending the funeral mass. Among the mourners is Kitsy’s widower Pat who though mute in ‘reality’ possesses an inner ‘gift of the gab’. In the play, Murfi evokes a tender portrait of Pat and Kitsy’s happy later-years marriage. The ease with which Murfi moved (bringing his audience with him) between both characters and anecdotes was mesmerising. Once again, it was great to see an Irish artist producing such high quality work. In Friday’s workshop Murfi was enthusiastic, generous and encouraging by turns. He explained how his craft has evolved from his training with Jacques Lecoq; putting it simply: there is the architecture and the space; there is the written text and the
subtext; there is the text of the body and the subtext. And, in an effort to enable us to understand what he meant, he took us through some spatial/physical exercises.

We spent the rest of Friday discussing the showcase pieces (more discussion!) and sorting out the logistics for the rehearsal week. As I live in Donegal, I’ll have to stay in Limerick. Marketa’s booking accommodation, which is great. Dorothy was to have a session with us today but she decided to defer until the end of the rehearsal week. I think everyone was glad. We were exhausted.

4.1. The rehearsal week (Monday 26th June – Friday 30 June)
Before the rehearsal week, two of the participants decided not to participate in the showcase. Throughout that week, the rest of the group worked from 9-5 each day. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, each group worked on its own piece for most of the day; coming together at some part of each day to rehearse ‘Tim’s Fugue’ (which became ‘In-tents-ive Care’, a whole group choral piece in which the scripts generated in Crouch’s workshop were retained) and at the end of each day for a production meeting. On Tuesday and Wednesday, Dee consulted with each of the groups as they devised and rehearsed. On Thursday, Lynne took over and, having viewed all the pieces, she decided on the final running order for the showcase. Technical rehearsals were held on Thursday and a full dress rehearsal was held on Friday morning. Lynne attended the first showcase on Friday night and Dee attended the second one on Saturday. While there was no stipend available for the rehearsal week, participants received *per diem* expenses. Accommodation, for those who required it, was also paid for. In addition, participants shared in the showcase box office takings.
5. Lead mentor feedback

In this section, the lead mentors are conflated into one.

5.1 Aspects of the programme that worked

The initial reaction of the lead mentor to the programme was that it was ‘brilliant’ (LM 2) and that it provided an ‘extraordinary opportunity’ (LM 2) for everyone involved. Specifically, she saw the support of the programme by Belltable and its location at Belltable as important. The services and facilities provided by the venue, via its programme manager, established Belltable as a locus not just for receiving artists’ work but for supporting artists as well. That this venue was located in Limerick, outside of Dublin – in an area of the country not provided for in terms of professional development for theatre makers – was also seen as an advantage. She emphasised the importance of the programme in providing theatre makers outside of the capital with, otherwise unavailable, opportunities to collaborate and show work. The lead mentor also spoke of the importance of having ‘work to bounce off’ (LM 2) in the form of the shows at Belltable and Lime Tree Theatre. That these shows were varied in style, genre and standard was seen as a positive; it opened participants up to new ideas while simultaneously enabling them to ‘learn as much from what doesn’t work’ (LM 2). The structure of the programme which meant that the participants viewed the work before interrogating it with the artists involved was also commended. In addition, the lead mentor found the one to one sessions with participants particularly valuable in terms of getting to know them.
The final showcase was identified as an ‘overwhelmingly positive’ (LM 1) component of the programme; an ‘essential’ (LM 1) and ‘key’ (LM 2) element of its success. As the lead mentor put it, nobody ‘could have imagined how important it was’ (LM 2). She commented on the courage and generosity shown by those participating in the showcase as they overcame their fear of exposure to create a strong and supportive group dynamic. She also identified generosity and courage as essential qualities for success in theatre making more generally. She added that to work as part of a theatre making team, one needs to ‘chuck out self-consciousness’ (LM 1) and ‘be prepared to be embarrassed’ (LM 1). The lead mentor saw the ‘auditions’ earlier in the programme as playing an important role in this regard; referring to the auditions as an exercise in ‘tough love’ (LM 1). She commented, moreover, on the opportunity provided by the showcase for participants to progress beyond talking about ideas to bringing their ideas to fruition and getting them shown. In this, she underlined, once again, the importance of supporting artists outside of Dublin (and Druid in Galway) to make and show work and so include a greater variety of perspectives in Irish theatre.

5.2 Aspects of the programme that could be improved

The lead mentor was keen to emphasise that any comments she made in this regard were in the context of a programme that was really successful. She felt that participants located outside the capital had the most to gain from Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers. While the programme was designed to culminate in the showing of work, and while Marketa introduced a stimulus towards this end as early as the second block (in February), there was strong resistance among the participants to the showcase. The lead mentor was of the view that such resistance might be mitigated by giving more time to creating work on the two-day blocks. The lead mentor might also play a more active role in facilitating the development of this work.
6. Programme producer feedback

6.1 Aspects of the programme that worked

When asked about the aspects of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers that worked, Marketa, like the lead mentors, mentioned the showcase which she described as a ‘rich’ and ‘wonderful’ (PM) experience. Indeed, the making and showing of theatrical work was, for Marketa, the main point of the programme from the outset. She noted the connections – local, national and international – forged by the participating theatre makers as a result of their participation on the programme. And, she cited the programme outcomes (see section 8) as further evidence of the programme’s success. Like the lead mentors, she felt that the opportunity to view and respond to work in a variety of genres and styles worked and she felt that the two-day blocks worked as well.

6.2 Aspects of the programme that could be improved

While Marketa felt that the two-day blocks worked, she felt that two days may not have been long enough for the group to gel. She was somewhat disappointed that the participating theatre makers did not make as much use of the facilities provided by Belltable, outside of the two-day blocks, as they might have. She had hoped that they would use the facilities for creating and rehearsing to a greater extent than they did. She is more convinced than ever of
the importance of making and showing work and feels that this aspect of the programme could be improved on by making it the central focus of the programme from the beginning.
7. Programme participant feedback

7.1 Aspects of the programme that worked
The programme participants felt that the programme put Belltable and Limerick on the theatrical map. They valued the fact that the theatre makers had diverse backgrounds and came from a variety of disciplines and communities. They liked that the programme was spaced out over six months; that it wasn’t an intensive programme. They also appreciated the opportunities provided by the programme to view and discuss diverse shows with each other, the lead mentors and the artists involved. Tim Crouch’s show and masterclass stood out for everyone as being highlights of the programme. They found Crouch’s openness and generosity reassuring and his articulation of his ongoing questioning and insecurities resonated with their own experiences. The openness, generosity and high calibre of the lead mentors was also commented on. As one participant observed: ‘They were encouraging and positive and helpful. Dee set me up with a meeting in the Abbey and Lynne is helping me out with something I want to work on after this’ (FG, theatre maker 1). Indeed, the participants found the connections they forged with the mentors (lead and otherwise) and with each other to be an invaluable aspect of the programme.

The opportunity provided by the rehearsal week and the showcase to collaborate on work and get it shown was acknowledged by those who participated in it as invaluable. This
experience was in striking contrast to the theatre makers more usual struggles to make and show their work. One participant wrote:

It’s very rare to be offered the opportunity and resources to write and stage a new piece of writing all within a few weeks. The development and production process in most theatres is very long, so it was a breath of fresh air to be able to work with focus on something in a finite amount of time (EF 3).

Marketa’s vision for the programme as a platform for creating and showing work was explicitly acknowledged and commended by the showcase participants. Commenting on her participation, one participant said: ‘I’m really glad. It’s a cool thing to have done ... it’s easier to do it again’ (FG, theatre maker 2). Another remarked: ‘I think what was really great was to see everyone’s work and everyone’s practice in this week ... projects that hopefully have legs for further development ... the power is in the making’ (FG, theatre maker 3). Echoing a view expressed by one of the lead mentors, another showcase participant observed: ‘People were buzzing with a week to go ... the difference between talking about something and having to do things ...’ (FG, theatre maker 4). Yet another commented that: ‘the showcase was great to provoke me to stop talking and get working in a very low risk supportive way’ (EF 2). It was acknowledged by the showcase participants that making work enables one to get better at it. One participant stated that the showcase had ‘a domino effect upon the group. Each piece emboldened the other’ (FG, theatre maker 1). Indeed, the collaborative nature of both the rehearsal week and the showcase itself were commented on repeatedly by those who participated in them. As one participant put it, if the showcase had not gone ahead ‘collaboration would just have been an abstract word’ (FG, theatre maker 5). Another mentioned that it was ‘really wonderful to feel such support’ (FG, theatre maker 6). It was also noted by the showcase participants that this support enabled them to move beyond their comfort zones and to take risks.

7.2 Aspects of the programme that could be improved
Like the lead mentors and the programme manager, the theatre makers who had participated in the showcase felt that more structured time should be given to creating work throughout the programme as a whole; that time in each of the two-day blocks should be set aside for making work even at the expense of losing out on shows or masterclasses. One participant suggested that more explicit links be made between the shows viewed and the making of
work; that they ‘feed into each other’ (FG, theatre maker 7). The showcase participants observed that while they experienced a crisis of confidence, and substantial stress, around the showcase, the programme could be structured more carefully so as to ensure that this did not happen. One participant described the experience as follows:

Two things that were very frustrating at times and that I would suggest addressing is the lack of clarity around the creative aspect of the programme and the roles of the mentors as facilitators. It wasn’t clear how the final showcase might actually work, how collaborators would assemble, how ideas would be selected and presented and when they would be developed. I understand that it was the first iteration of the project and that it was hoped that the group would collectively figure out a way for it to happen successfully as part of the process and, in theory, that approach has merit. In practice, however, it created quite a bit of confusion, frustration and anxiety and a lot of time was wasted over several concurrent sessions as we tried and failed to come up with a clear, fair and workable model (EF 4).

Another participant suggested that:

... a day of practical work could have been built into each workshop weekend ... the ideas, viewpoints and working methods presented in the workshop could be practically applied by the group to generate and workshop ideas for the Showcase. This might have allowed us to gel collaboratively at an earlier stage and may have helped overcome perceived time pressures toward the end of the process (EF 5).

The showcase participants, like Marketa and the lead mentors, felt that the making and showing of work needed to be central to the programme from the outset. They also felt that when it came to the showcase itself, production and technical expertise needed to be hired for the rehearsal week so that all of the theatre makers could concentrate on making theatre. The two programme participants who did not participate in the showcase would have liked more focus on experimenting with and progressing their own practice; more emphasis on process and less on product. One of them wrote:

I think my expectations were a little misaligned with those of the programme. My understanding of what a showcase of ideas is in the context of a maker mentorship programme relates to a creative conversation around the nature of collaboration, the different methods we use to begin a project and how those ideas change over the course of the six months. I think I have been focused on ideas of exchange and engagement; conversations about the challenges and experience of collaboration ... I've been resistant to a fixed or finished practical outcome that places the emphasis on production and not on process (EF 1).

Finally, all of the participants felt that they should have been paid a stipend for the rehearsal week; as one of them put it:
... in relation to the unexpected [though the showcase was heralded in the open call for participants] week of work leading up to the showcase. It would be useful to formalise these elements in advance of future programmes so that participants aren't in either financial or scheduling difficulty (EF 1).
8. Programme outcomes

As is evident from the previous sections of this review, the specific aims of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers 2017 were met as follows:

- Twelve theatre artists were engaged and stimulated to develop their skills
- The programme offered exposure to the practice of renowned theatre artists/companies through masterclasses, workshops, playdates and informal chats
- The programme activated engagement and mutual support among participants (this was particularly evident in the lead up to the showcase)

In addition, the following outcomes were achieved:

- Joanne Ryan was inspired by Rebecca Perry’s production workshop to take her one-woman show, *Eggsistentialism*, to the Edinburgh Fringe. Joanne was accompanied to Edinburgh by fellow Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers participant Mags O’Donoghue who was her production manager. At the Edinburgh Fringe, Joanne won the Lustrum Award and the Melbourne Fringe Award and she was also awarded a Best Storytelling Bouquet. Showing her work in Edinburgh has led to touring offers, for Joanne, from Australia, the US and the UK.
- John Galvin was commissioned as audio visual designer by Rough Magic (artistic director: Lynne Parker) on *Melt*, a modern fairy tale exploring the human condition and set in the Antarctic. *Melt* premiered at the 2017 Dublin Theatre Festival.
• Eadaoin O’Donoghue’s interest in choral work was reawakened by her direction of theatre makers in ‘In-tents-ive Care’ for the showcase. As a result, she performed as a member of the chorus in a new version, by David Craig, of Aeschylus’s *The Suppliant Women* at the 2017 Dublin Theatre Festival. She is currently working on a play in which the chorus is central.

• ‘This Little Piggy’, a show for young audiences, is currently being developed from an idea presented in the showcase. This show, which is scheduled to tour nationally, involves three of the participants from three different counties: Liam McCarthy (Limerick), Caoimhe Dunn (Wexford), and Dorothy Morrissey (Tipperary). The show, based on an idea by Caoimhe Dunn, is produced and written by Liam McCarthy and designed by Caoimhe Dunn. All three participants are acting in the show; with Caoimhe Dunn acting as puppeteer. The making of this show marks a collaboration between theatre makers and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and it marks Dorothy’s debut in professional theatre.
9. Enablers and challenges

In this section, the enablers and challenges identified in research participant feedback (see section 7) are combined and condensed.

8.1 Enablers

- Support of the programme by Belltable and its location at Belltable (a venue outside of Dublin)
- Marketa’s steadfast vision for the programme as a platform for creating and sharing work
- Accessibility of high quality shows in a variety of genres and styles at Belltable and Lime Tree Theatre
- Access to a variety of masterclasses by established professional theatre makers, enabled by Belltable’s and Lime Tree’s positions as receiving venues
- Access to high quality lead mentors from different backgrounds and with different, yet complementary, skills
- Opportunities provided for forging connections (national and international) with more experienced theatre makers
- Spacing out of programme over 6 months to allow relationships and ideas to develop
- Payment of a stipend to participating theatre makers for each two-day block
- Courage, generosity and mutual support exhibited by all who participated in the showcase

8.2 Challenges

- The initial resistance to, and fear of exposure, generated by the showcase
- The perceived lack of structure provided towards creating and showing work
- The perceived lack of clarity about the role of the lead mentors in facilitating the making of work
- The dearth of time devoted to making work in the two-day blocks
- The lack of an explicit connection between looking and responding to work by other theatre artists and the making of one’s own work
• The reluctance by the participants on Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers to use the facilities provided by Belltable outside of the time-tabled two-day blocks
• The issue of payment for the rehearsal week
10. Recommendations

- That the Arts Council continue to direct funding into initiatives such as Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers so as to provide opportunities for theatre artists located outside of Dublin to make and show their work and to forge connections with other theatre makers.
- That the making and showing of work be clearly established as the central focus of Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers and other such programmes from the outset.
- That making work be a focus on each block.
- That the sole focus of at least one of the blocks be on making work.
- That the role of the lead mentors in the making of work be clarified (there is an identified need for someone to take a lead role, from the outset, in this regard).
- Clarity about what is expected from the beginning so as to avoid difficulties re participants’ financial and work scheduling arrangements.
- Consideration be given to the payment of a stipend to the participants if they need to be in attendance for a rehearsal week.
- That explicit connections be made between looking and responding to the work of other theatre artists and the making of participants’ own work.
11. References


Leavy, P. (2013) *Fiction as Research Practice: Short Stories, Novellas and Novels (Developing Qualitative Inquiry)*. Walnut Creek: West Coast Press.


Appendix 1

Programme schedule

BLOCK ONE

DATES: Friday, January 27 and Saturday, January 28, 2017

PLACE: On Friday, we will first meet in the foyer of Belltable, 69 O’Connell Street, Limerick. On Saturday, we will meet in Belltable Hub, Room 1 on first floor.

SCHEDULE FRIDAY:

2.15pm - Teas and coffees in Belltable foyer
2.45pm – Press photocall outside Belltable
3.00pm – First meeting:
Welcome from Marketa Dowling, introductions, programme outline. (30mins)
Dr. Dorothy Morrissey – briefing on research element (20 mins)
Deirdre Kinahan and Lynne Parker – discussion around challenges in practice, areas of interest, desired outcomes of the programme (2hrs)
6.00pm – Tour of Belltable Hub and stage, familiarisation with resources available
6.30pm – Break
8.00pm – attend Ubu on the Table in Belltable, post-show discussion with the team in foyer after performance. Finish at 10.00pm.

SCHEDULE SATURDAY:

10.00am-4.00pm – Masterclass with Theatre de La Pire Espece (break for lunch 1-2pm)

BLOCK TWO

DATES: Saturday, February 11 and Sunday, February 12, 2017

PLACE: Belltable Hub, Room 1 on first floor.

SCHEDULE SATURDAY:

3.00pm – Session with Lynne Parker
6.30pm – Break
8.00pm – attend Adventures of a Redheaded Coffee Shop Girl at Belltable; written and performed by Rebecca Perry, Canada. Finish at 9.30pm.

SCHEDULE SUNDAY:

12.00pm-4.30pm – Workshop with Rebecca Perry (break for lunch 2pm-2:30pm)
5.00pm-6.00pm – Generating ideas for showcase with Marketa and Lynne

BLOCK THREE

DATES: Thursday, March 9 and Friday, March 10, 2017

VENUES: On Thursday, we will meet in Room 2 in Belltable Hub. The performance will be at 7pm in Lime Tree Theatre (Mary Immaculate College, Courtbrack Avenue).
On Friday, the morning masterclass will be in Dance Limerick (John’s Square) and the afternoon in Room 2 in Belltable Hub. Dance Limerick have two restrooms that operate as changing rooms, or you are welcome to change in the studio. The building is open from 9am, please be changed and ready to start the masterclass at 10am sharp. All venues are easily walkable on foot.

SCHEDULE THURSDAY:

12.30-2.30pm – 4x Individual session with Lynne (Belltable Hub)

3-5.30pm – session with Lynne (Belltable Hub)

5.30pm – Break

7.00pm – attend The Wolf and Peter in Lime Tree Theatre. Finish by 8.30pm.

SCHEDULE FRIDAY:

10am-1pm – masterclass with David Bolger. Company class (1-1.5hrs), followed by talk on contemporary Dance in Ireland. Is choreography the same as directing for theatre? Q&A. (Dance Limerick, John’s Square)

1-2pm – lunch break

2-4pm – session with Lynne & Marketa, shaping the final showing of work (Belltable Hub)

4.15 – 5.15pm - 2x Individual session with Lynne

BLOCK FOUR

DATES: Friday, April 28 and Saturday, April 29, 2017

VENUES: We will be in Studio 1 in Belltable Hub on both days. The performance will be at 12.30pm in Belltable on Friday.

SCHEDULE FRIDAY:

12.30pm-1.30pm – attend I, Malvolio in Belltable

Break

3pm-4pm – attend In Conversation with Tim Crouch, facilitated by Dr. Michael Finneran) in Belltable

4-6pm – session with Dee

6.30-8.30pm – 4x individual session with Dee.

SCHEDULE SATURDAY:

10am-4pm – masterclass with Tim Crouch in Belltable Hub, Studio 1, includes lunch break

4-6pm – break as necessary, session with Dee

BLOCK FIVE

DATES: Friday, May 6 and Sunday, May 7, 2017
VENUES: Studio 1 in Belltable Hub on both days. The performance will be at 8.00pm in Lime Tree Theatre on Saturday.

SCHEDULE SATURDAY:

11am-1pm – individual sessions with Dee

2-4pm – discussion with Mike Finn, Belltable Artist in Residence on the playwright and design

4-6pm – session with Dee

8pm – Radamisto in Lime Tree Theatre

SCHEDULE SUNDAY:

10am-12noon – individual sessions with Dee

12-1pm – session with Dee

2pm-6pm – masterclass with Wayne Jordan

BLOCK SIX

DATES: Thursday, June 1 and Friday, June 2, 2017

VENUES: Studio 1 in Belltable Hub on both days. The performance will be at 8.00pm in Belltable on Thursday.

SCHEDULE THURSDAY:

1:30-6:30pm – Session with Lynne and Dee in studio 1

8-9:30pm I hear you and rejoice in Belltable

SCHEDULE FRIDAY:

10:30am-1pm – Masterclass with Mikel Murfi

2-5:30pm – session with Dee and Lynne

5:30pm-6:30pm – debrief with Dorothy Morrissey
Appendix 2

Showcase programme

In January this year, 12 theatre artists from around Ireland - Ann Blake, Caoimhe Dunn, Eadaoin O’Donoghue, Fionnuala Gygax, Henry Martin, Joan Somers Donnelly, Joanne Ryan, John Galvin, Liam McCarthy, Maeve Stone, Mags O’Donoghue and Rob Moloney - came together to create, collaborate and stretch their creative comfort zones. Showcase of Ideas is the culmination of this programme.

The new collaborative pieces presented tonight were sparked off by the Limerick Leader edition of 11 February 2017, and created in Belltable Hub. Made in Limerick and for Limerick, this collage of creative exploration offers glimpses of Limerick life in a new and exciting way. Whether an ensemble spoken choral piece inspired by the workshop with Tim Crouch, or a puppet and live performance show touching on Limerick’s love affair with pigs, or a movement and visual design reflection on the architecture of Ardnacrusha, or a brand new short play Three Mothers in Search of a Son, we hope you find your favourite.

Theatre Makers’ monthly meetings in Belltable Hub were mentored, guided and supported by playwright Deirdre Kinahan and director Lynne Parker, with masterclasses by leading Irish and international theatre gurus. We wish to say a huge THANK YOU to all mentors, in particular Deidre and Lynne, for their generosity, enthusiasm and can-do attitude.

Programme

Lights for all pieces by John Crudden and Gary Lysaght

Production Management by Mags O’Donoghue and Henry Martin

In-Tents-ive Care

Directed by Eadaoin O Donoghue

A spoken word/choral speaking piece created with text written by all the participants of Belltable: Connect Theatre Makers Programme. The texts were created during a workshop with Tim Crouch.

***

This Little Piggy

Little Pig: Little Pig
Assistant to Little Pig: Caoimhe Dunn
Rasher: Liam McCarthy
Sausage: Dorothy Morrissey
Radio Announcers: Henry Martin and Deirdre Kinahan
Puppet, Set and Costume design: Caoimhe Dunn
Sound design: Rob Moloney

Based on an idea by Caoimhe Dunn with additional scripted material by Liam McCarthy.

Of course you know the story of the Three Little Pigs, but do you know what happened next? 100 years ago, the last straw and stick houses were blown away by the big bad wolf. Now, many tears later, a pig family, Sausage, Rasher and Little Pig, live inside a huge brick house. Unlike the lazy and fearful older pigs, Little Pig longs to escape the cosy confines of home and go on an adventure. This Little Piggy is a play for younger audiences. This is an extract from a work in progress and has been devised by the cast with the assistance of Dominic Palmer. Special thanks to Deirdre Kinahan. We’d love to know what you think as we continue to develop this piece – talk to us after the show.

***
Choreography of Progress
Devised by John Galvin, Joan Somers Donnelly and Cast

Video Design by John Galvin
Choreography by Joan Somers Donnelly
Performed by Ann Blake, Gill McNamara and Eadaoin O Donoghue

Sound Design by Rob Moloney

A piece combining visuals, audio and movement, inspired by the construction of the Shannon hydroelectric scheme at Ardnacrusha and the project of modernity in Ireland and further afield.

***

Three Mothers in Search of a Son

Writer/ Director: Henry Martin

Sound: Rob Moloney
Visuals: John Galvin
Lights: John Crudden

Cast: Ann Blake, Monica Spencer, May O'Halloran, Ruben Blake (VO), Kevin O'Gorman

Three Mothers in Search of a Son is inspired by numerous articles in the Limerick Leader, and research into missing people in Ireland. It shows three moments in the life and afterlife of one woman as she tries to find her son in three different scenarios and moments in time. The play is short, concentrated, and character-driven; a journey into one woman's mind as she navigates every parent's worst nightmare, shifting between hope, fear and everything in between.
Appendix 3

Open call for participating theatre makers

Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers is a 6-months theatre development programme responding to the identified need to create with guidance and support from mentors, giving participants an impetus to develop new works. The programme facilitates artists to stretch their creative comfort zone and to explore in a safe and stimulating environment.

Theatre Makers encourages collaborations with others, within the framework of a programme of talks, workshops and demonstration-performances. These take place over two days once a month from January to June 2017, in Belltable, 69 O’Connell Street, Limerick City. The programme facilitates engagement with a variety of styles, approaches and viewpoints in contemporary theatre from Ireland, Europe and beyond. The creative ensemble of participants will showcase their ideas to the public in July 2017.

Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers 2017 is led by two main mentors – playwright Deirdre Kinahan and director Lynne Parker. Visiting mentors include Tim Crouch (UK), Théâtre de la Pire Espèce (Canada) and Rebecca Perry (Canada), among others.

For more information and to download application forms click here. Closing date for receipt of applications is strictly 21 November 2016 at 5pm. Successful applicants will receive a stipend to help cover their costs.

Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers 2017 is supported by the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon under the Theatre Artist Development Scheme.
Appendix 4

Biographical details: Deirdre (Dee) Kinahan

Deirdre is actively involved in the Irish Theatre Sector both as a playwright and a producer. She is a member of Aosdána and currently sits on the Abbey Board (Ireland’s National Theatre) and on the Stewart Parker Trust advisory committee, the mission of which is to encourage new writing for the stage. Her work is translated into many languages and produced regularly both in Ireland and internationally. In 2016, Deirdre had plays produced in Chicago, New York, Washington, London, Warsaw and Ireland. Her work is published by Nick Hern Books.

Deirdre’s latest play *Wild Sky*, commissioned by Meath County Council Arts Office, commemorates events leading up to the 1916 Irish Rising and was premiered in 2016 at various venues in Ireland and the US. She has written for The Royal Court and Bush Theatre London and in Ireland, she has written for Fishamble: The New Play Company, Abbey Theatre, Civic Theatre, Project Arts Centre, Tall Tales and Livin’ Dred. Her plays include: *Wild Sky, Spinning, Halcyon Days, Bogboy, Moment, Hue and Cry, Melody* and *Maisy Daly’s Rainbow*. Her plays for radio include: *Bogboy* (RTE) and *A Bag on Ballyfinch Place* (BBC).

Among Deirdre’s playwriting awards are The Scotsman’s Fringe First for *Halcyon Days* in 2013 and the Tony Doyle Bursary with BBC Northern Ireland in 2009. She is the recipient of the Jim McNaughton Tilestyle Bursary 2013, a Peggy Ramsay Award 2014 and the Arts Council of Ireland Commission Award 2015.
Appendix 5

Biographical details: Lynne Parker


Lynne has numerous other theatrical productions and awards to her credit. She was awarded the Irish Times Special Tribute Award in 2008 and an Honorary Doctorate by Trinity College Dublin in 2010.
Appendix 6

Programme evaluation form

We’d love to get your feedback!

Thank you so much for taking part in Belltable:Connect Theatre Makers. Do let us know what you think so that we can improve on the development opportunities we offer. Please note that the information that you provide may be shared between Lime Tree Theatre, Belltable and the Arts Council.

Did the Theatre Makers programme meet your expectations? Why/why not?

What was the most valuable part of it?

Was there any part you didn’t enjoy or that wasn’t worthwhile?

Was there anything else you would like to have covered?

Was the length of the programme suitable (or too long, too short)?

Would you recommend the programme to others if we ran it again in the future?

Are there other training courses/ development programmes you would like us to run?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Name – optional: