

2023

Annual Report

WELCOME

Welcome to our Annual Report. 2023 has been an extraordinary year of growth and development led by the goals and objectives set out in our Strategic Arts Plan Owning the Space (2023-2027). This plan is underpinned by three key priorities, Production, Progression and Provision, our guiding lights for development. In 2023 we experienced the benefits of having such a robust framework for growth.

Production

The year started with a bang as Blue Teapot was nominated for an *Irish Times Theatre Award*. We attended the glittering awards ceremony in Dublin in March. 2023 was certainly a production focus year with notable highlights including the premiere of our ground breaking documentary *Enquire Within*, Performing Arts School students raised the roof with their performances in *Peter Pan*, and our theatre ensemble embarked on a hugely exciting collaboration working with *Theatre Lovett*. This collaboration started with an initial week long workshop which resulted in Theatre Lovett returning to Blue Teapot within a month, bringing a project they had in development.

Autumn was also busy. We engaged collaboratively with Macnas, with three of our actors joining 100 performers for the first street parade in four years. We premiered *Enquire Within* at Station House Theatre as part of **Clifden Arts Festival 2023**. Directed by award winning film maker Fionn Rogers, with ensemble actor Paul Connolly assistant directing. The documentary was the culmination of a grassroots, inclusive filmmaking project that took place in Clifden (October 2022).

Progression

During the summer months, we were busy planning and developing a new work-ready programme for the actors and 3rd year students. This programme was designed to support them to have the knowledge, resources, support & skills to work within the arts sector. An application was submitted to POBAL through their **WorkAbility 5** year funding programme and we were delighted to receive notification in December that it had been successful.

During the autumn, we started our first ever **national recruitment campaign**, casting the net far and wide across Ireland in the search for new talent to join our professional theatre ensemble. Following extensive interviews and auditions, we appointed not one but three new actors to the company, two starting in 2024, with another joining in 2025.

Community Theatre Programmes, *Bright Soul and Sparkle* continue to provide a fun and creative space for both adults and young people throughout the year. For some, this is a stepping stone into the Performing Arts School or to pursuing other artistic endeavours, while for others, this continues to be their creative home.

Provision

Our Performing Arts School continues to go from strength to strength, receiving the official notification in February 2023 that we **formally re-engaged with QQI** as a provider of quality assured programmes. This recognition is testament to the dedication and hard work of the staff, tutors and students.

In 2023 we were delighted to welcome the new appointment of **Jane Parsons as Executive Director**. Since starting in July, Jane has been supporting the Board and staff by reviewing ways of implementing our Strategic Arts Plan goals, driving developments within the theatre building, updating and creating policies as well as reviewing funding and sponsorship opportunities.

By the autumn, we learnt the fantastic news that our 2024 Arts Council grant proposal *Fairy Tree* was awarded €100,000, our biggest award to date. The project comprises two creative elements that are interdependent; the premiere of a new children's play commission written and directed by Rod Goodall, performed by our theatre ensemble, in tandem with an inclusive theatre workshop led and facilitated by our actors to children of mixed abilities.

Looking ahead to 2024

Following the solid foundations laid in 2023, we are certainly embarking on a busy and exciting year in 2024. This includes the start of our new *Workability; Inclusive Pathways to Employment Programme* with targets aligned to our progression goals in Blue Teapot's Strategic Arts Plan. In the first quarter 2024, we will recruit three new project roles, a dedicated *Workability Project Manager*, *Ensemble Workability Coach* and *Performing Arts School Workability Coach*.

In 2024 we will be concentrating on **growing and nurturing our collaborative practice** with our diverse and highly respected partners, including Theatre Lovett and Macnas as well as premiering our ground-breaking inclusive project *Fairy Tree*. In order to achieve all of this, we will also be updating and upgrading our building, improving our working space, allowing us to continue to deliver our high level of artistic output.

GRATITUDE

We would like to recognise our wonderful and dedicated staff, volunteers and tutors at Blue Teapot and recognise the important role played by our funders, both big and small. The incredible public support we have received through events and donations is critical to enabling Blue Teapot to continue to develop and grow.

In 2023 this support benefitted 55 ID Blue Teapot artists at varying stages of careers or interests – professional actors, performing arts students and community theatre participants - in achieving their individual potential through theatre, arts education and providing a guiding model for accessibility in the arts.







We have a strongly held ethos that people with an intellectual disability (ID), with the right supports, can make art on a par with mainstream artists.

We are committed to ensuring that the contribution ID artists make to Ireland's cultural life is recognised, valued and understood.

In 2023, our organisation benefitted 55 ID artists at varying stages of careers or interests – professional actors, performing arts students and community theatre participants - in achieving their individual potential through theatre, arts education and providing a guiding model for accessibility in the arts.

We Are Theatre Game Changers

Our Values

As a theatre company, we operate within a framework of legal and regulatory obligations and a range of codes of good practice. In addition, we are guided by a set of values that include:

A Commitment to Excellence



We promote freedom of thought and of expression to develop new ideas and new work and strive to achieve the highest artistic standards in the work we make and produce

A Belief in Equality



We are committed to equality, cultural rights, diversity in all its forms and the advancement of inclusive theatre practices

Dynamic and Sustainable



We are dynamic and adaptable and will evolve our business model to meet the changing needs of our company

Accountable and Transparent



We are open and accountable in our decision making and communicate respectfully with partners and stakeholders

Environmental Awareness



We will identify and take actions to improve our environmental practices







Theatre Sector Recognition

In March, we were delighted to receive our second nomination for **The Irish Times Irish Theatre Awards Judges' Special Award** for 'long-standing creative work with artists with intellectual disabilities'.

Our previous nomination came some ten years earlier in 2013, for the same category and as we were in the ascendant with a newly commissioned play – *Sanctuary* by Christian O'Reilly.

Irish Times Arts and Culture Editor Hugh Linehan said: "For 25 years, these awards have been a concrete signal of The Irish Times' commitment to the arts in general and the art of theatre in particular. They recognise the special place that live dramatic performance holds in Irish culture, the long and deep theatrical traditions that endure to this day, and the way in which new generations and new voices continue the process of reinventing and reimagining the theatre experience for new audiences in a fast-changing society."

Awards were presented by Irish Times Editor Ruadhán Mac Cormaic, Group Managing Director Deirdre Veldon and judging-panel chairman Nicholas Grene, as well as Linehan. Nicholas Grene attended the world premiere of our Abbey Theatre co-production *Into the Dark Woods* by Charlene Kelly.

Speaking on behalf of the judging panel, Grene said: "Over the year, across the island of Ireland, we watched over 140 shows. It is an extraordinary opportunity to see the sheer wealth of creative talent in Irish theatre. We would have liked to have been able to recognise all the wonderful performances, all the great shows we had seen. But shortlists have necessarily to be short. What we had to do, and what we did, was to look at each category in turn and apply to each one the same criteria of excellence that are laid out for the awards. We want now to salute the great theatre work which we were not able to recognise in our nominations and to express our appreciation for the enormous pleasure it gave us in 2022."

Our congratulations to all fellow nominees and the well deserving winners.



QQI RE-ENGAGEMENT

In March, we welcomed QQI's Head of Quality Assurance Walter Balfe with colleagues Marie Cotter and Yvonne Agnew to celebrate our successful re-engaging with QQI as a provider of quality assurance programme delivery.

The rigorous process by Quality and Qualifications Ireland recognises the high quality of our work in developing, enhancing and implementing quality assurance processes. It is a benchmark to be achieved by all institutional and independent providers of QQI programmes.

We met that threshold at first time of reengagement and we are grateful to QQI for this recognition along with our Programme Board, external QA consultant, tutors, staff and most importantly, all our learners.

CAIRDEAS AWARD WINNER



Blue Teapot was announced as recipient of the prestigious **Cairdeas Award** from the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland, selected by the judging panel of the West North-West region. AmCham and their member companies initiated the awards to recognise the importance of community, friendship and positive impact within the not-for-profit sector.













PERFORMING PETER PAN

Live performance is the unifying aspiration shared by all engaging across our three programme strands.

It is essential that we fulfil these aspirations by offering high quality performance opportunities, especially outside of the regular, day-to-day training or QQI curricular.

Putting 'performing' in to the Performing Arts School post COVID pandemic became a priority, especially for those new students who had spent some of their first year under lockdowns and Zoom tutoring.

In July, the second and third year students had the opportunity to tread the boards in their end of term performance in front of an invited audience of families and friends.

Adapted and directed by Rod Goodall, the cast of 10 students put on a fabulous show playing the well-known characters of Peter Pan, Wendy, John & Michelle Darling, Tiger Lilly and arch nemeses Captain Hook.

As always, high production values and a creative team of professional theatre makers gave every performer the chance to shine. Creating Peter Pan generated income for freelance artists - Director, costume designer, sound operator, musician/composer and lighting designer.

Peter Pan was supported by funding from a philanthropic trust.











Teapot ACTORS JOIN IN MACNAS HALLOWEEN PARADE



Macnas is an award-winning internationally acclaimed performance group from Galway, Ireland, renowned in particular for their immersive and spectacular street parades.

Blue Teapot's actors participated in the 2023 Macnas street parade **Cnámha La Loba** which comprised 100 performers, dancers, giant puppets and live musicians coming together for the first street parade since the global pandemic.

The main artistic benefits for our actors was in having a different type of live performance experience — a moving spectacle through the streets of Galway, to tens of thousands of spectators.

Each Thursday in October, Valerie Egan, Patrick Becker and Richard Hickey (Performing Arts School graduate) attended rehearsals at Macnas for a parade section known as 'Birds'.

On parade day, they were also joined by Blue Teapot's Grace O'Brien who volunteered in the make-up department. The team were supported by staff.



First Encounter with Theatre Lovett

A hugely exciting collaboration began in September working with one of Ireland's most critically acclaimed, most imaginative and indispensable companies at work today – Theatre Lovett.

The aim of this initial week was to facilitate an artistic encounter between Theatre Lovett's co- Artistic Directors Muireann Ahern and Louis Lovett and our professional ensemble.

While it is not always guaranteed that artistic chemistry will occur, happily it did this time.

The result being that Theatre Lovett returned to Blue Teapot within a month for a second encouter, bringing a project they had in development *Echo & Narcissus*, along with their creative collaborators, writer & musician Nico Brown, choreographer Kévin Coquillard and dancers Marion Cronin and Emily Kilkenny Roddy.









November: Second Encounter with Theatre Lovett working on Echo & Narcissus





DOCUMENTARY PREMIERE

ENQUIRE WITHIN

In October, the premiere screening of our documentary *Enquire Within* took place at Station House Theatre to a capacity audience as part of Clifden Arts Festival 2023.

Directed by award winning film maker Fionn Rogers, the documentary was the culmination of a grassroots, inclusive filmmaking project that happened in October 2022, supported by Galway County Council Arts Office.

The week-long filming involving artists with disabilities from Ability West's Criost Linn day service and members of Clifden's community in front of and behind the camera.

The documentary's subject matter is a critical examination of issues facing young people and people with disabilities in accessing employment in the Clifden locale.

Blue Teapot's Paul Connolly gained hands-on experience behind the camera as Assistant Director, working with Fionn Rogers and Jason Scott (sound/editing) and Dave Donovan (artists' support).



NATIONAL SEARCH FOR TALENT

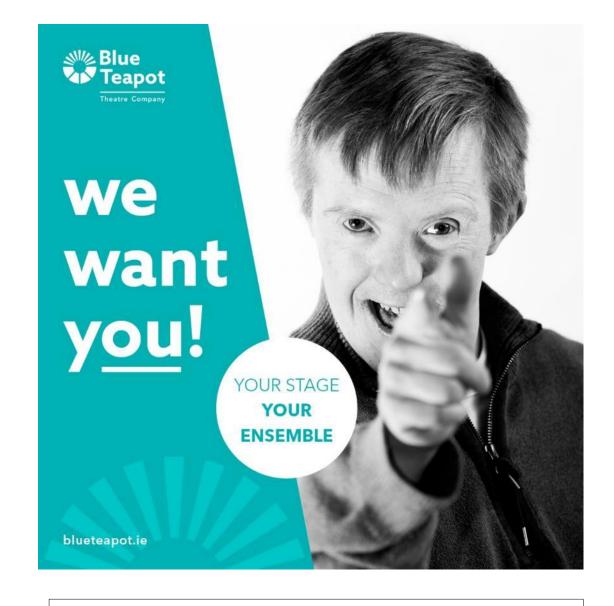
For almost thirty years, we have worked consistently to radically transform theatre practices by telling stories through the lens of disability, paving the way for inclusive practices to become the norm. Artistic achievements in theatre include *Sanctuary, Dancing At Lughnasa* and 2022's production of *Into the Dark Woods* written by our own Charlene Kelly

A national campaign was launched in autumn, casting the net wide across Ireland in the search for new talent to join our professional theatre ensemble. Speaking about the opportunity, Artistic Director Petal Pilley commented:

"Previous acting experience is not necessary; many actors come to their careers as diamonds in the rough looking for an opportunity to shine. The successful candidates will join our vibrant, experienced cohort of actors to develop and perform theatre on Ireland's mainstages and beyond".

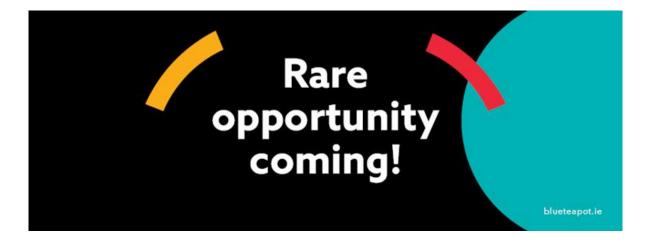
In November and December, we interviewed, auditioned and appointed three new actors to the company. Successful candidates will soon join our vibrant, experienced cohort of actors to develop and perform on Ireland's main stages and beyond. Two will start in 2024 and the third joining in 2025/2026.

The new actors will bring in additional income through day service funding, increasing artistic programming budgets. This positive development is part of an overall expansion, aligned to the company's Strategic Arts Plan (2023-2027).



"Be yourself, be proud of the fact you have a disability. When you're on that stage, it's a whole different world" – Kieran Coppinger, Actor.

















BRIGHT SOUL

Bright Soul caters to a variety of ages, with some long-standing members joined by newer participants in 2023, some of whom had a pathway from Community Theatre Programme **Sparkle.**

Both programmes offer spring & autumn terms which comprises 8-10 weeks per term, with Bright Soul facilitated by drama tutor Rebecca Malone and supported by volunteers. This is a committed group, participating for many years to their Monday evening slot, with some participants travelling from outside County Galway.

Performance

During the spring term, participants got to perform in front of their families and connections. The story chosen was of an alien abduction - *How did we get here?* Those that were abducted had to fight for their lives in a series of competitions. However, in typical Bright Soul fashion, this was not a story with a happy ending. Instead, the winner was forced into a lifetime of servitude to the planet Zen!

Autumn term saw the group focus on working collaboratively on brainstorming new narratives to be developed into improvised scenes for performance in 2024. These processes exercise the muscles of imagination and cooperation, two vital building blocks in theatre creation.

Bright Souls autumn term was supported by a grant from Creative Ireland







SPARKLE is the first point of

contact a young person aspiring to perform can make with Blue Teapot, being specifically catered to teenagers 13-17 years, to encourage development of their creativity and social skills.

Tutors focus on the basics of theatre techniques; group work, concentration and exploring imagination through playful improvisation.

In 2023, Sparkle's participants began to work towards a short performance piece which will now be produced in 2024, codirected by Rebecca Malone and Lali Morris (former Artistic Director of Baboró, International Arts Festival for Children).

The experience of performing live in front of an audience will no doubt increase the young participants' confidence. 'Being seen' can often be the game changer in a young person's creative development.

Sparkle's autumn term was supported by a grant from Creative Ireland.





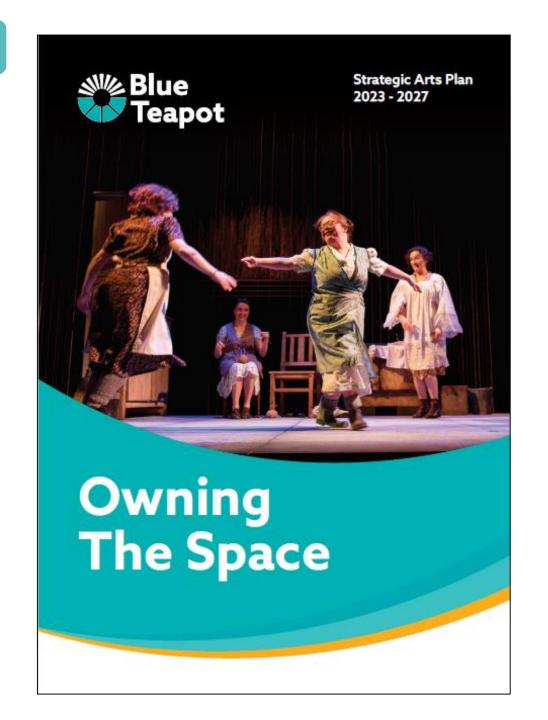
STRATEGIC ARTS PLAN 2023-2027

Owning The Space is our first Strategic Arts Plan and sets out our vision for the next five years. The plan is built on three key priorities of **Production**, **Progression** and **Provision** and is a response to the positive development of disability arts in Ireland over the last 20 years. Creating the strategy took two years involving company artists, staff, Board and freelance tutors and was developed in consultation with arts advisor and cultural planning specialist Mary McAuliffe.

Owning The Space purposely aligns with the Government of Ireland Culture 2025 policy and the Arts Council's 10-year strategy Making Great Art Work. It informs the development and delivery of artistic programmes and shapes Blue Teapot's role as influencers in the longer-term for disability arts across Ireland.

"The Board of Blue Teapot is delighted to be presenting such a visionary and progressive Strategic Arts Plan. Delivering on its goals and objectives will nurture and progress the skills and talents of the company artists and help inform arts and disability policy in Ireland. We look forward to ambitious and exciting times ahead" Fiona Coffey, Chairperson.

The plan is available to view/download at <u>www.blueteapot.ie</u>
Our website includes accessibility controls for the visually impaired.







RECRUITMENT of EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Prior to the launch of our Strategic Arts Plan, we recognised for some time the organisational gap that we needed to fill within the small staff team. From February – April, we began the search for an Executive Director by outsourcing the recruitment campaign to talent specialists ICE Jobs.

This post holder will work closely with the Director of Services/ Artistic Director on leading organisational strategy and business development, funding partnerships and financial planning on local, national and international projects.

In July, we welcomed Jane Parsons as the newly appointed Executive Director, having had several years' experience working in the arts sector, previously as Capital & Development Manager at Hawk's Well Theatre, Sligo where she was involved in all aspects of development, accessibility and community engagement. In early 2023, Jane graduated from Masters in Business with a first-class honour in Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and was awarded the EisnerAmper Award for educational excellence.

Since her appointment, Jane has been supporting the staff team and reviewing ways of implementing goals set out in our Strategic Arts Plan. Jane has been driving developments within the theatre building, creating and updating governance policies as well as identifying new streams of revenue through funding and sponsorship opportunities.



Blue Teapot Theatre Company has a new role for the position of Executive Director & are working exclusively with ICE Group to source the ideal candidate for the role.

This highly successful & expanding company is looking to recruit an experienced, strategic-thinking, business-driven individual with a proven track record in income generation & increasing revenue. The post holder will work closely with the Director of Services/Artistic Director on leading organisational strate... See more





Strategic Arts Plan

PRODUCTION

Grow investment in theatre productions

- ✓ 2023-24 Trust funding allocation achieved.
- ✓ Core funding to be increased in 2024 budget.
- ✓ Arts Council grant awarded.

Diversify productions

- Festival venues provisional booked.
- ✓ Theatre Lovett workshop complete.
- ✓ Annual Collaborations Macnas Parade.
- ✓ Invitation to 2024 Oska Bright Film Festival UK.
- ✓ Prophecy screening as part of Culture Night.
- ✓ Diversity & Inclusion Policy approved.

Environment & Green Arts Policy

- Energy usage data collected to quantify current CO2 emissions.
- ✓ Dialogue and meetings with SEAI & Galway City Co.
- Registered with the SEAI Sustainable Energy Community programme
- ✓ Identified potential financial support for environmental upgrades.

Strategic Arts Plan

PROGRESSION

- New supports to meet individual needs of our artists
 Develop structured progression pathways
 - Applied for funding for 5 year progression programme (WorkAbility).
 - ✓ New Collaborations Theatre Lovett.
 - Identify individual skills development pathways for theatre ensemble.
 - ✓ Attended recruitment and school leaver fairs.

- ✓ School prospectus being created.
- ✓ Met with Mike Masterson (NLN) to discuss work experience programme for PAS students.
- Ensemble Recruitment, local and national campaign.
- ✓ Alumni Database created.

Strategic Arts Plan

PROVISION

- Securing a permanent home
 - ✓ Building purchased 2022.
 - ✓ Renovations planned for 2024.
 - Investigating environmental upgrades.
- Skilled, resourced & develop business supports
 - Executive Director recruitment complete.
 - ✓ Staff training opportunities provided.
 - ✓ Policies created, reviewed and updated.

Advocate for Inclusive theatre work practices

- ✓ Diversity & Inclusion policy approved.
- Attend sector steering groups and symposiums.
- Contributed to -Levelling Access local authority commission
- ✓ Disseminate BTTC production.

Capitalise on Technology

- Media room being created.
- ✓ Animation workshops organised.

Information sharing and network

- ✓ Attended Equinox Theatre symposium (Dublin).
- Crossing The Line European network continues.









GOVERNANCE

CRO: 471758

CRN 20071912 / CHY 18643

REVENUE: 9709656J

At the AGM held Wednesday 5th July 2023, serving Directors Sean Conneally and Gerardine Lally resigned and were reinstated. In November, Directors voted to appoint a new Director, Eilish O'Sullivan, Human Resources specialist.

Prior to 2020, the Board's corporate governance had been in compliance of The Governance Code (2017) for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations whereby company policies, rules of engagements, sub committees and working practices are formally approved.

In 2020, we completed the mandatory Charities Governance Code for the Charities Regulator with the only change being the dissolving of the Fundraising sub-committee. Fundraising is the on-going concern for the whole Board.

The company maintained a core staff team of 7 part-time employees, one employee (Director of Services) seconded from Brothers of Charity Services Ireland- West Region and supported by 3 part-time Community Employment Scheme workers and project based volunteers.



2023 FINANCIAL STATEMENT



PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY & REVIEW OF BUSINESS

The main objective for which the company is established is to benefit and advance education and participation in the arts in the county of Galway as defined in the Arts Acts 1951, 1973, and 2003.

We do this through the operation of a Theatre Company and performing arts education to promote inclusion, social development and the artistic expression of people with intellectual disabilities.

2023 turnover was €558,935 reflecting artistic outputs, the start of a five –year investment by a philanthropic Trust and capital grants ring-fenced for building developments in 2024/2025.,

Strategic growth for Performing Arts School continued with annual intake of new students each September.

As outlined next, we were blessed to benefit from once off grant awards and external fundraisers that contributed to earned income and fundraising targets.

Full set of accounts are audited annually and published along with this Annual Report on our website blueteapot.ie/governance

FUNDERS, FUNDRAISING EVENTS & DONORS

Our gratitude goes to all funders & individual donors who enabled our service provision throughout 2023, in particular major funding partners Brothers of Charity Services Ireland – West Region, Ability West and Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board and a philanthropic Trust. Highlights of funding achievements in 2023 include:

ARTS & TRAINING

- Galway City Council Arts Office contributed €5,000 funding towards First Encounter with Theatre Lovett.
- Creative Ireland (Galway City Council) funded €3,570 towards Community Theatre projects Bright Soul and Sparkle.
- Galway County Council Arts Office contributed €1,200 toward artists fees and premiere screening of Enquire Within at Clifden Arts Festival.
- The Ireland Fund Heart of The Community Fund awarded €10K award (2022) for Performing Arts School programming and teaching equipment.
- The American Ireland Funds awarded €20,000 for building refurbishments and conversion of dedicated media resource room.

FUNDRAISING

- The annual Christmas Swim campaign raised €4,705 by multiple generous donors.
- €2974 was donated by a number of individuals throughout the year.
- Breakdown of earned income can be viewed in the full Financial Statement available on our website blueteapot.ie/governance

ARTS COUNCIL AWARD

In October, we learnt the fantastic news that our 2024 Arts Grant proposal FAIRY TREE was awarded our biggest arts grant to date and is ring-fenced for a project that comprises two creative elements that are interdependent: Premiere of a new children's play written and directed by Rod Goodall, performed by Blue Teapot, offered with an inclusive workshop programme in autumn 2024 to participating schools in Galway City, Ballinasloe, Clifden and Tuam.



2023 COMPANY

DIRECTORS Fiona Coffey (Chair), Sean Conneally (Secretary), Gerardine Lally, Anthony Casey,

Mary Seale O'Flaherty, James C Harrold and Eilish O'Sullivan.

COMPANY MEMBERS Lali Morris, Claude Madec, Noelle Burke, Ann Loughney, Michelle Kenny,

Eamon Loughrey and Marina Moore.

DIRECTOR OF SERVICES/ARTISTIC DIRECTORPetal Pilley.

EMPLOYEES Sonja Brodie, Hillary Kavanagh, Ana Bella Alvarez, Jason Scott,

Judith Wolf, Dave Donovan, Jane Parsons.

C.E. SCHEME Michael Patrick Breen, Rosah Mangan, Anna Walsh.

VOLUNTEERS Tonya Lenhart, Oonagh Hassett, Doreen McKenna.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES Bernie O'Brien (Chartered Management Accountant), MK Brazil (Auditors), Plato Now

(Payroll), Federation of Voluntary Bodies (Pension Administration).

TUTORS (freelance) Charmian Goodall, Rod Goodall, Aine Lawless, Lali Morris, Fiona O'Dea, Sinead Hackett, Train

Station Gym, Catherine Collins, Debbie Wright, Rebecca Malone, Brendan Savage, Judith

Higgins, Michael Patrick Breen.

PAS PROGRAMME BOARD Trish Cunningham, Mike Masterson, Sean Conneally and Fiona O'Dea.

2023 FUNDERS

We *greatly appreciate* the funding agents, organisations and every individual who choses to fund or nominate Blue Teapot as a beneficiary. No matter how small or large the donation, we are so grateful. Heartfelt Thank You to all.



























IMAGE CREDITS

- 5 Ensemble with dancer & choreographer Kévin Coquelard (centre) Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- 7 Valerie Egan & Patrick Becker, *Into the Dark Woods* by Charlene Kelly. Image: Andrew Downes
- 8 Mbappé by Performing Arts School Student (PAS) Jess Howard Image: Jason Scott
- 9 Actors Kieran Coppinger & Paul Connolly at The Irish Times Theatre Awards. Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- Top: Marie Mattimoe, Robert Comber, Walter Balfe, Damien Quinn, Marie Cotter, Maria Hannon & Yvonne Agnew. Image: Declan Colohan Jack Walsh and 2nd Year PAS students. Image: Hillary Kavanagh
 - Bottom: Mark Redmond, CEO AmCham, Minister Dara Calleary, Hillary Kavanagh, Producer Blue Teapot, Petal Pilley, Artistic Director Blue Teapot,
 - Seamus Five, President AMCHam, Laurence May, Head of KPMG Image: AmCham
 - Performing Arts School class of 2023. Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- 11 Performing Arts School students Catherine Mulkerrin & Elizabeth Brennan in Peter Pan adapted by Rod Goodall Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- Performing Arts School students Stanlin Joy Hirang, Francis Carr (as Crocodile) and Damien Quinn. Images: Hillary Kavanagh & Andrew Downes
- 13 Performing Arts School students Robert Comber, Mary Grace Best Lydon, Stanlin Joy Hirang & Leah Connolly in Peter Pan adapted by Rod Goodall
- 14 Valerie Egan in *Cnámha la Loba*, Macnas's Halloween Street Spectacle Image: Andrew Downes
- 15 Michael Hayes & Valerie Egan with Theatre Lovett co-Artistic Director, Louis Lovett. Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- 16 Grace O'Brien, Charlene Kelly & Jennifer Cox, First Encounter with Theatre Lovett. Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- Main image: Ensemble with dancer Emily Kilkenny Roddy (centre) during Echo & Narcissus development week, Second Encounter with Theatre Lovett. Top Right: Michael Hayes, Louis Lovett and Nico Brown. Bottom right: Kieran Coppinger, Charlene Kelly, Kévin Coquillard & Emily Kilkenny Roddy. Images: Hillary Kavanagh
- 18 Top: Fionn Rogers, Enquire Within Director & Assistant Director Paul Connolly.
 - Bottom Right: Paul Connolly interviewing Chloe Conneely, Críost Linn. Images: Jason Scott
 - Bottom Left: Enquire Within crew pic.

IMAGE CREDITS

- 19 Patrick Becker. Graphic Design by Clair O'Brien, Image: Reg Gordon
- Graphic Design by Clair O'Brien. Images: Reg Gordon, Andrew Downes & Aengus McMahon
- 21 Bright Soul participants Aaron Keogh & Karl Flaherty. Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- Top. Bright Soul participants: Aaron Keogh, Sean Monaghan, Karl Flaherty, front row, Elva Grace Fray, Jennifer Keaveney, Sean Fahy, Maire Connolly.

 Bottom. Sean Monaghan. Bright Soul Volunteer, Oonagh Hassett.
- Sparkle Participants, left to right: Leo Deidda, Alison Bourke, Katie Ní Neachtain, Adrian Carney Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- 24 Sparkle Facilitator Lali Morris. Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- Performing Arts School Students Class (PAS) of 2023: Back Row Left to Right: Damien Quinn, Stanlin Joy Hirang, Leah Connolly. Front Row, Elizabeth Brennan,, Catherine Mulkerrin & Grace O'Brien Image: Mike Shaughnessy.
- From Top left to right, Mayor Eddie Hoare with PAS student Stanlin, Joy Hirang, Leah Connolly, Training Co-ordinator Ana Alvarez & Damien Quinn, PAS Programme Support Dave Donovan & Elizabeth Brennan, Classroom Assistant Michael Breen & Damien Quinn.
- 27 Strategic Arts Plan Cover Photo; Jennifer Cox in *Dancing at Lughnasa* by Brian Friel. Image: Andrew Downes
- 28 Unicorn by Performing Arts School student Niamh Mitchell. Image: Jason Scott
- 30 Mary Grace Best Lydon, PAS Student. Level 2 Costume Design. Image: Hillary Kavanagh
- 34 Gold Fish by Performing Arts School Student by Sinead Molloy. Image: Jason Scott
- 35 Patrick Becker, First Encounter, Theatre Lovett. Image: Jason Scott
- 36 Still from Sanctuary (feature film 2016). Dir: Len Collin. Image (D.o.P): Russell Gleeson
- 37 Kieran Coppinger, Fairy Tree Script Read Through. Image: Hillary Kavanagh



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