

ABBAY THEATRE



THE **ABBAY** THEATRE **5X5**

JACINTA DIXON FROM THE IRISH
WORKING DEMENTIA GROUP ON
STAGE AT THE ABBAY THEATRE



Photo: Aengus McMahon

NEW VOICES, NEW STORIES

THE ABBEY THEATRE IS IRELAND'S NATIONAL THEATRE.

FOUNDED IN 1904 BY W.B. YEATS AND LADY GREGORY, IT HAS SERVED AS A HALLOWED STAGE FOR RENOWNED ACTORS, WRITERS AND DIRECTORS PRODUCING CULTURAL TREASURES AND THEATRICAL WORKS. BUT WITH A PEDIGREED HISTORY CAN COME THE PERCEPTION THAT THEATER IS EXCLUSIVE, ONE-DIMENSIONAL, AND ONLY FOR A CERTAIN AUDIENCE. **THE ABBEY THEATRE'S 5X5 INITIATIVE IS AIMING TO CHANGE ALL THAT.**

“NOTHING ABOUT US...WITHOUT US.”

“We came up with the 5x5 concept in the summer of 2017,” says Jen Coppinger, Head of Producing at the Abbey Theatre. “We put the call out to the community that year with the questions:

‘DO YOU FEEL UNDER-REPRESENTED?’

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?’

WOULD YOU LIKE TO DEVELOP THAT STORY IN FIVE DAYS?’

We’re not asking people to put on a full play, though some have. What we are asking is are there stories that haven’t had an opportunity to be told before? How can we help change that?” The groups chosen are incredibly diverse and deliberately so. From those experiencing dementia to teenagers who are refugees to children on the autism spectrum, individuals from marginalized or rarely-heard-from communities are finding the Abbey Theatre is a new outlet for creative storytelling.



The Irish Dementia Working Group

**THE IRELAND FUNDS FLAGSHIP AWARD HAS ENABLED
THE ABBAY THEATRE 5X5 TO OFFER EACH YEAR:**

⇒ **5**

DIFFERENT ARTIST GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES

⇒ **5**

DAYS’ WORTH OF SPACE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

⇒ **€5,000**

TO DEVELOP A THEATER PIECE

Run of the Mill Theatre



CHANGING HEARTS, CHANGING MINDS

"All too often we go and see shows about cultures that feel marginalized and locked out of the mainstream," says Graham McLaren, Co-Director of the Abbey Theatre. "But it's written by someone and performed by people who are certainly not locked out. There is a really simple mantra that I've encouraged the team to think about, which is, 'nothing about us...without us.' So, if we're going to do a show about Alzheimer's or a show about the Travelling community, or a project about mental disabilities, then let's include the people — let's put their voice there.

You must be open, and open to peoples' experiences and their truths. And even if that's uncomfortable and even if it's directly oppositional to you and everything that you hold dear. It changes hearts. It changes minds. And that changes communities...and that changes the world," says Graham. "That's why we do it. It's irrelevant how many see these 5x5's. There are some which will grow and come into big, mainstage shows. There's one right now which I think has the potential to become a phenomenon and will change thousands of minds. But if we only change one or two minds, then it's still completely worthwhile."



SoloSIRENs

WITH A FLAGSHIP AWARD FROM THE IRELAND FUNDS OF €70,000 OVER TWO YEARS, TEN GROUPS FROM 2019 THROUGH 2020 WILL RECEIVE SUPPORT TO TELL THEIR STORIES FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THE NATIONAL STAGE OF IRELAND.

A SAFE PLACE

Jacinta Dixon has lived in Dublin all her life and attended many performances at the Abbey Theatre over the years. Jacinta was diagnosed with Alzheimer's after working in the disability sector for 15 years. Today, she is an active member of the Irish Dementia Working Group, one of those selected to participate in the 5x5 initiative in 2019.

"In Ireland, dementia has been something that was kind of pushed to the side," says Jacinta. "It was a stigma and was considered something wrong in the family. People with dementia were told to sit down and have a cup of tea and be quiet, more or less...but there's only so much tea."

Coming to the Abbey Theatre, Jacinta was hardly sitting in the corner having tea. She and other members began to work. "The first day of walking into the Abbey, just the feeling of walking onto the stage, it was a great

experience. The Theatre team was interested in our production of things. Because of that, it didn't feel like an exercise."

During the development week, theatre company Bow Productions worked with members of the Irish Dementia Working Group to explore issues of dementia and Alzheimer's which resulted in a piece representing the voice of those living with the conditions.

"There was camaraderie and a safe place for what we were doing," explains Jacinta. "Knowing that nothing was going to go out of the room was important. It was truly a safe space. But for me, this theatre is also an almost-holy place. It is personal. Even talking about it now, I feel goosebumps that I was there."

Jacinta

2019 5x5 PARTICIPANTS

THE IRISH DEMENTIA WORKING GROUP

A group supporting and advocating for people living with dementia. Group members are early in their dementia and campaign for a human rights-based approach to the condition to make life better for the 55,000 people living with dementia in Ireland.

TAILTIU THEATRE COMMUNITY

A group helping participants to find creative ways to explore their identities including working with people living in Direct Provision Centres (locations across Ireland where asylum-seekers and refugees live while their cases are reviewed).

SOLOSIRENS

A group of women living in Tallaght, one of the largest suburbs in Dublin with a diverse migrant population and vibrant cultural life. They come together as a women's collective to share and present stories that are rarely told.

LISTEN UP!

A group working with children on the autistic spectrum. During their development week, the team collaborated with a group of children on the autistic spectrum to create an interactive multi-sensory musical performance piece.

RUN OF THE MILL THEATRE

A community-based theatre collective supporting people with intellectual disabilities. During their development week, they devised, created and developed Making a Mark with the support of a team of creative designers culminating in a rehearsed reading of the piece. Making a Mark went on to premiere at the 2019 Dublin Fringe Festival.

WHAT'S NEXT IN 2020?

Five new groups will be participating in 2020. The communities represented include working class Irish women from Dublin City Centre, LGBT+ Irish speakers, blind and visually impaired people, those living in Direct Provision, and a men's shed based in Co. Louth. This strong group of participants for the second cycle of the project looks set to build upon the already strong results of 2019.



VIDEO:

Watch each of the 2019 5x5 participant groups share their experience.