

LITTLE JOHN NEE RESIDENCY

Understanding Our Shared History

Peace III Project: Programme for reconciliation through our shared history.
 Running Time: 9 Months (July 2010 – March 2011)

Overview: This is a large-scale project working on the ethos that drama and theatre can function as a mediator in conflict resolution. The aim is to focus our programme on celebrating the things that link us together as human beings and as citizens living in a border community. The programme will link a number of groups both sides of the border in workshops, performance, seminars and master classes with the emphasis on social inclusion, diversity and cultural understanding.

Objectives:

- To offer new skills and opportunities to those community members who have due to social, economic or geographic circumstances been unable to avail of arts workshops and performances previously.
- To offer the opportunity to build on existing skills.
- To bring old and new communities together under an arts umbrella to explore our shared heritage.
- To promote a positive link between the community and the theatre by development of its educative and outreach programme
- To foster mutually supportive relationships with our professional colleagues and other arts practitioners on a cross border basis.
- To work towards peace and reconciliation on a cross border and cross community level.

The Programme: To achieve our stated aims and objectives we have devised a programme that will target specific community groups and individuals on both sides of the Donegal – Derry and Donegal – Tyrone border. The programme will be delivered in five separate sub-projects that are both process and performance based and they will target various ages and community organisations alongside a participating theatre from each border county Derry, Donegal and Tyrone.

Detailed Description

I. Understanding our shared history – Little John Nee Artist Residency

The idea behind this project is to have the artist Little John Nee in residency at An Grianán for a period of 6 months from October 2010 until March 2011. John Nee is a Donegal artist with a huge back catalogue of work – at least fifteen plays from the last ten years. As a Donegal artist his work is very much grounded in the historical and contemporary issues, which we face in this North West corner of the island, and his work shows a keen understanding of the particular issues that affect the border dwelling communities.

Artist's Statement

"This commission would allow me the opportunity to develop the themes of my work in a collaborative environment where the common intention is that highest of aspirations: to create a society based on respect, tolerance and understanding. A common thread in all my work is the exploration of themes of identity and the need to belong. That basic human need to feel we are not alone - the need for community - has the potential to lead us into a sectarian identification that feeds on blame and paranoia. Alternately it has the power to lead us into relationships that foster a more expansive understanding of ourselves and each other. I feel it is my responsibility as an artist not to preach but to illuminate through storytelling and dramatic

presentation. It is my responsibility not to further alienate people with my own idealism and vision of a society that embraces us all, when many of those who practise sectarianism and racism are themselves often marginalised and are acting out of fear. I see my work as 21st century seanachie; integrating all the traditional techniques of fireside storytelling with a host of contemporary theatre influences from around the world, it is my job to recognise communities, to tease and play with the boundaries that define us and ultimately to affirm our connectedness.“

From his plays of the last ten years we would like to fashion a retrospective of his work, which features, talks, master classes, workshops, exhibitions, performances and a publication. We will focus on three plays in particular and work closely with target groups which are most closely linked to the subject matter of the plays. The partners for this project are The Donegal Arts Office, Donegal Museum, The Waterside Theatre Derry and The Alley Theatre Strabane which will co-host a number of performances and workshops and an exhibition. The aim is that in each two month period of the residency we will focus work around one play exploring the themes of the play undertaking performances and working closely with the target groups in a specifically designed workshop programme. The theme of the workshop programme is “From Inspiration to Realisation” and it aims to create a short effective workshop, which is linked to performance, deepening the participant’s understanding of the elements that go into creating theatre as well as creating a doorway to access their own creativity. This is a gentle exploration of creativity with an emphasis on beauty and having fun and how this affects our well-being. The workshop programme will be specifically targeted at senior citizens and people with difficulties assimilating in a modern Ireland such as HSE clients. A secondary aim of this project is to showcase the strength of the dramatic tradition, which is produced in Donegal, and to create a cross border showcase for one of Donegal’s leading artists.

The three plays are as follows:

“The Derry Boat” - Originally commissioned by the Earagail Arts Festival this play deals with issues of immigration, emigration and resettlement. It explores the causes of migration including geographical isolation, social and economic disadvantage and how it feels to begin life again in a new environment. It also has a focus on the close ties between the North West of Ireland and Scotland.

“The Mental” – Originally commissioned by the Axis Theatre Ballymun and the HSE in Donegal this play focuses on the rich history of St Conal’s Hospital in Letterkenny. The story centres on Misfit Joe Boyle as he struggles to find a safe place in the world, a journey that lead will him down a road of frustration, isolation, and ultimately breakdown. In St. Conal’s, he becomes aware of past resident Seosamh MacGrainne, the Irish language writer. Unlike MacGrainne, Joe wants to express his soul through music. The show also features live music and songs that go from Sean Nós to New York Punk.

** A very important part of this segment of the project is an exhibition on St Conal’s Hospital which will be mounted at the Donegal County Museum in December 2010 – January 2011.

“Rural Electric” was originally commissioned through the Donegal County Council Public Art programme. It is the story of one of the last parishes in Donegal to get the “electric”, and as such reveals the changing landscape of the Northwest in terms of social and economic development as well as addressing issues around migration and resettlement.

Key Contacts

[ARTIST NAME]
[CONTACT DETAILS]

[NAME]
Director, An Grianán Theatre
[CONTACT DETAILS]

[NAME]
Programme Development Officer,
Peace III
[CONTACT DETAILS]

[NAME]
Manager, Alley Arts and Conference Centre
[CONTACT DETAILS]

[NAME]
HSE
[CONTACT DETAILS]

Progress Report/Targets

Target Groups - Senior Citizens, New Communities, Ex Prisoners, People with Mental health and social issues, secondary level school children (Transition Year)

Target Areas - Donegal, Derry and Tyrone

Outputs - 24 Workshops and 15 Performances

Target Audience Numbers –

- approx 30 people per workshop Total - 720
- approx 300 per performance Total – 4500
- approx 900 to exhibition