



Theatre for Young Audiences in Ireland

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Abstract

This chapter examines the development of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA), from its roots in educational theatre for children in the 1970s and 1980s through companies such as TEAM, Graffiti and Replay into one of the most innovative and flourishing fields of contemporary theatrical practice across the island of Ireland. The argument is that as a sector and field of practice TYA continues to resist nationalist imperatives through its aesthetic practices and organizational structures. TYA performances are always resolutely “local” in their engagement with specific audiences. This is most obviously articulated in the specific touring circuits for performances; the development of festivals for children’s arts in Dublin and in a number of regional cities; and in the creation of specialist venues for children’s arts and theatre. At the same time, the sector is characterized by direct engagement with models of practice which are shared widely internationally, producing aesthetic forms the lineage of which owes little to specifically Irish theatrical traditions, whether that be the Theatre in Education models adapted from the UK; approaches to visual theatre or modes of performance adopted from continental Europe; or texts that have been adapted, translated or imported. Critical to this is the function of the international dimension of children’s festivals in Ireland and abroad in showcasing and sharing theatrical practices and issues. In this sense then, this sector of Irish theatre serves to work against the sense of “Irishness” as a globalized commodity and the function of theatre to reflect national rather than local concerns.

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INTRODUCTION 3

This chapter examines the developing sector of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) from its roots in educational theatre for children in the 1970s into one of the most innovative and flourishing fields of contemporary theatrical practice across the island of Ireland. As noted in Sara Keating's 2014 article for the *Irish Times*, "Baboró and beyond: Irish kids' theatre comes of age", children's theatre in Ireland has a strong aesthetic identity, dedicated venues and a deep connection with Irish audiences. Today in Ireland, a TYA production may be explicitly local in its engagement with a specific audience yet draw on models of practice that are shared widely internationally, within an aesthetic form the lineage of which owes little to specifically Irish theatrical traditions. Such aesthetic forms might include Theatre in Education (TiE) models that originated in Coventry's Belgrade Theatre; approaches to visual theatre or modes of performance adopted from continental Europe; or texts that have been adapted, translated or imported from any number of contexts and sources. Critical to this international exchange is the function of festivals in Ireland and abroad in showcasing and sharing theatrical practices and issues. Nonetheless, the sector is distinctively organized through separate organizations on each side of the border. In this sense then, this sector of Irish theatre serves to work against any sense of "Irishness" as a globalized commodity and the function of theatre to reflect national rather than local concerns, while simultaneously drawing strength from collaboration across Ireland that make it distinctive. 24

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26 It is not possible within the scope of this chapter to chart exhaustively the pre-
27 cise origins of a professional sector of theatre for children. Eimear Beardmore
28 suggests examples in Georgian pantomime as precursors, with the annual pan-
29 tomime season at theatres like Dublin's Gaiety and the founding of the Lambert
30 Puppet Theatre in 1972 providing more recent precedents. The proposition
31 here is that the contemporary field draws on the heritage of three specific com-
32 panies that were focused, at least initially, on using theatre's power for educa-
33 tional purposes: TEAM in Dublin, Graffiti Theatre Company in Cork and AU4
34 Replay in Belfast. These pioneering companies initiated and established many
35 of the parameters for practices within the sector today and the issues that they
36 have faced remain perennial for contemporary companies.

37 As Beardmore notes, TEAM was founded after the disbanding of the Young
38 Abbey, Ireland's first TiE company in 1975.¹ In its early days, it was able to
39 avail of ongoing support from the Abbey, so that for example, *Wonder Ponder*
40 *Time* in December 1975 was directed by Nuala Hayes and Joe Dowling and
41 was produced in association with the Abbey, being staged in its rehearsal room.
42 When Martin Drury took over as artistic director of TEAM in 1981, he sharp-
43 ened the focus of the company's work by commissioning and developing new
44 work by writers such as Frank McGuinness, Bernard Farrell (both of whom
45 were appointed as writer in residence) and John McArdle. The company pub-
46 lished works by these writers in the volume *Three Team Plays* (Drury 1985):
47 these were *Borderlands* (1984) by McGuinness, Farrell's *Then Moses Met*
48 *Marconi* (1983) and McArdle's, Farrell's *Then Moses Met Marconi* (1989). AU5
49 McGuinness would also contribute *Gatherers* in 1985, while McArdle's *Two*
50 *Houses* was staged in 1984 and remounted in 1987 and 1990. The company
51 mounted two further plays by Farrell: his adaptation from the German of *Max*
52 *und Milli* by Volker Ludwig as *One, Two, Three, O'Leary* in 1985 and *Because*
53 *Just Because* in 1986. Drury extended the reach of TEAM's touring to the
54 Midlands, North East and North West of Ireland. Perhaps core to the compa-
55 ny's success under him was that he pulled together a core company of actors
56 committed to TiE practice, a number of whom would later be influential in the
57 development of the TYA sector. These included Philip Hardy, current artistic
58 director of Barnstorm Theatre Company, and Patrick Sutton, who was to take AU6
59 over as artistic director for TEAM in 1989. Drury himself was to go on to be
60 the founding director of The Ark (1992–2001), Ireland's only arts centre spe-
61 cifically for children. Sutton went on to take up the role of director of the
62 Gaiety School of Acting in 1993, a post he continues to hold.

63 TEAM's aim was primarily educational in the broadest sense, producing
64 theatre for children and young people that challenged, inspired and met the
65 concerns of its audience. There was an emphasis on providing an authentic
66 experience that would resonate with the lives of its audiences and thereby chal-
67 lenge them to feel, think, interact and do within the dramatic context. This set
68 of ambitions has been one of the legacies of the company to those making

theatre for children today. In meeting these aims, TEAM produced both original commissions from playwrights and devised work, annually staging two new tours and running interactive workshops with children, primarily in primary and post-primary schools. TEAM nurtured a number of writers who would go on to write for young audiences or adult theatre. Jim Nolan's *Round and Round the Garden* was mounted in 1981, *Heartstone* in 1986 and *Dear Kenny* in 1988. Amongst other endeavours, he would go on to found Red Kettle. Antoine Ó Flatharta was writer in residence, contributing *Dream Walker* and *The Native Ground* in 1989. Nonetheless, although TEAM by the end of the 1980s was firmly established and had a track record of work with many of Ireland's leading playwrights, the company's activities remained largely unseen by the general public. It was rendered doubly so by almost complete omission from critical accounts of Irish theatre practice, professional reviews and academic analyses of the work produced, a major historiographical obstacle in writing this chapter.

Although TEAM was by then running successfully in Dublin, the inspiration for the founding of the Cork-based Graffiti company in 1984 came from a workshop undertaken by Emelie Fitzgibbon at the Goethe Institute run by a TiE company from Berlin.² From its inception, Graffiti's aim was to provide a permanent professional, educational theatre company for Munster (extending later to South Leinster). The materials for its productions came from a number of sources and through different processes. While early work featured pre-existing material from established educational theatre companies, including Duke's Playhouse in Lancaster and the Belgrade TiE Team in Coventry, soon the company was producing scripts from writers in Ireland such as Roger Gregg, including his *Silence in the Ravens* (1985) and later *The Dogs of Chulainn* (1992). A number of early productions were also devised and developed by the company. Some were based on Shakespeare plays, such as *A Modern Othello* (1985) and *Merchant's Club* (1986); while others were issue-based contemporary pieces, such as the 1987 *World of a Difference*, which focused on the representations of underdeveloped countries in the media. Many of these productions were supplemented by workshops and resource materials, something further developed with the creation of an Outreach Department to offer workshops both to children and as a contribution to teacher education and professional development.

The significance of Graffiti's foundational contribution to TYA as a sector within its first five years was to extend its scope, setting up strands of activity on which later companies would pick up. The first was to make work for early years, initiated in 1984 with *Hospitals*, a TiE programme for nursery schools. The second was to take work out of schools and into both mainstream theatre venues and the streets. It had established the Ivernia Theatre as its home venue by the second year of its existence (Emelie Fitzgibbon was a founder member of The Cork Theatre Company, which had begun leasing the venue in 1982). With *Graffiti in the Gallery* in 1984 it showed its willingness to develop new spaces for performance, providing a TiE programme for 11- to 14-year-olds on

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114 attitudes to art in the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery. In 1988, it took to the
115 streets with *It's Not Fair*, which was performed as part of the Dublin Street
116 Carnival, the Cork City Carnival and at the Hammersmith Multicultural
117 Festival in London. A third innovation by Graffiti was a concern with the Irish
118 language; in 1986 it mounted *Teanga*, a play designed to heighten awareness
119 of its importance.

120 Emelie Fitzgibbon calculates that by 1989, TEAM and Graffiti were between [AU9](#)
121 them playing to over 130,000 spectators in some twenty counties. Together
122 these two companies had proved that there was a year-round audience for pro-
123 fessional theatre for children in Ireland. They had established themselves as
124 part of their immediate communities, but a further aspect also widened the
125 span of their activities. Both companies not only toured to their local schools,
126 but quite early on also began to make links internationally. In 1987 and 1988,
127 Graffiti toured *Circles* to schools in the Poitou-Charentes region of France, and
128 in 1993 toured *Infidel* to the United States as well as remounting *Frog & Toad*
129 as part of the Scottish International Children's Festival. Under Martin Drury,
130 TEAM had already toured to London, representing Ireland twice at the inter-
131 national TiE festival in Stratford East, and Fitzgibbon (1989) noted that the
132 company had also toured to Leeds and to France in the 1980s.

133 Fitzgibbon notes that this international dimension was consolidated when
134 the two companies came together with Wet Paint to found ASSITEJ-Ireland, [AU10](#)
135 the Irish Centre for the International Association of Professional Theatre for
136 Children and Young People. However, despite its initial energy, the collabora-
137 tion was to go into dormancy for several years until it was revived in 2007 as
138 TYA-Ireland. Since then it has served as the national association representing
139 and promoting professional organizations and individual artists whose work
140 primarily focuses on engaging Irish children and young people through the-
141 atre. It provides a crucial link between members, the arts sector, the wider
142 community and government, addressing the relative invisibility of the sector
143 and, crucially, fostering the training of its own members and an international
144 dimension to its work. With TYA companies such as Graffiti and Barnstorm
145 also running their own youth theatres, there is a degree of cross-over with the
146 National Association of Youth Drama, which since its founding in 1980 has
147 both supported the development of youth theatre and acted as an advocate for
148 the benefits of the involvement of young people in theatre.

149 It was in 1988 that the first northern counterpart was added with the found-
150 ing of Replay Productions in Belfast. Artistic director Brenda Winter had been
151 one of the founding members of Charabanc, and she had initially conceived of [AU11](#)
152 the new company as “a kind of Charabanc for schools. In other words, it was
153 to be a group that privileged the language of this place, the culture and history
154 of this place—and brought that work into the schools”.³ Thus, just as with
155 TEAM and Graffiti, a focus on the lived experiences of audiences within a spe-
156 cific geographical locale was a defining characteristic of Replay's work from the
157 outset. This was articulated within its early years through devised work and
158 site-specific performances such as Brenda Winter's *Timetrekker To Tea Lane*

(1989) at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and *The Normans at Carrick* 159
 (1992) at Carrickfergus Castle. 160

However, the company's first production in 1988 was Marie Jones's *Under* 161
Napoleon's Nose, directed by Ian McElhinney, bringing back together some of 162
 the former Charabanc team in a play set in Belfast and revisiting the experience 163
 of the Blitz of 1941. In many respects, the production provided a model to 164
 which the company was to return repeatedly in charting the relationship 165
 between Belfast's history and the present day of its audiences within a dramatic 166
 frame. The response to that first production convinced Winter of the demand 167
 from schools for high-quality professional theatre. Winter, however, did not 168
 see it as a TiE company in the mode of Coventry's Belgrade TiE company; 169
 rather, it was to produce theatre for an audience that happened to be in an 170
 educational setting.⁴ Such a description might not only be applied to much of 171
 the work of its two contemporary sister companies, but also indicates a shift 172
 from the practices of TiE to those more closely associated with TYA; although 173
 within Ireland the distinction between the two fields is far from absolute. 174

While there are rarely single watershed moments in any cultural practice, 175
 one can see that by 1989, the main characteristics of the Irish theatre for children 176
 sector had been established, so that it was with some justification that 177
 Emelie Fitzgibbon could champion the contribution of TEAM and Graffiti 178
 (here extended to Replay, though not in her original) as 179

a substantial force within an Irish theatre scene which does not confine itself to 180
 received images of performance, audience and space. It is a force which philo- 181
 sophically is not inward looking and which concerns itself with topics, modes and 182
 methodologies which are internationally recognized but rooted by the compa- 183
 nies' expertise in the audience's own experience.⁵ 184

THE CONTEMPORARY SECTOR 185

From those roots the sector has grown rapidly to become what it is today. 186
 Writing, performing or directing theatre for children is no longer an appren- 187
 ticeship for proper grown-up theatre-making. Although TEAM was wound up 188
 in 2013, over the course of its history it nourished a number of writers who 189
 would go on to make a significant contribution to the sector. Maeve Ingoldsby 190
 had her first play, *Firestone*, produced by the company in 1990, with three fur- 191
 ther plays staged by TEAM, before going on to spend ten years as writer in resi- 192
 dence and then script editor with Barnstorm. Graffiti too has commissioned 193
 and engaged with a large number of writers. Raymond Scannell scripted a 194
 number of productions for the company, including *Striking Distance* (2001), 195
A Day in the Life of a Pencil (2004), *Closed Circuit* (2006) and *Permutations* 196
& Palpitations (2009). Graffiti has also sought to make such work available by 197
 publishing playscripts, including Scannell's *A Day in the Life of a Pencil* and *The* 198
Lost Ones by Laurie Brooks, a script for professional production to younger 199
 teenagers. 200

201 Replay has a similar track record of commissioning a range of new writers
202 and supporting their development through a variety of projects. There have
203 been original commissions of plays from Northern Irish playwrights, including
204 Winter herself. Marie Jones has written six plays for the company, including *It's*
205 *a Waste of Time, Tracey* (1989), *The Cow, The Ship and The Indian* (1991) and
206 *Hiring Days* (1992). Damian Gorman has contributed four plays, including
207 *Ground Control to Davy Mental* (1992) and *Sometimes* (1998). Other notable
208 Northern Irish writers producing original work for the company include Nicola
209 McCartney and Gary Mitchell.

210 Both Graffiti and Replay have been eager too to extend the repertoire of
211 work beyond Ireland. Graffiti has commissioned new plays from writers such as
212 Mike Kenny, including *The Lost Child* (2002) and *Cloud Pictures* (2008) (some
213 of which were also produced in Irish translation) and producing existing scripts
214 from other anglophone contexts, including the Canadian Joan MacLeod's *The*
215 *Shape of a Girl* (2011) and *Hoods* (2014) by Australian playwright Angela
216 Betzien. The company also commissioned an original piece from Betzien,
217 *Where in the World is Frank Sparrow?*, in 2012. Replay too has turned to exist-
218 ing repertoire elsewhere, producing works such as *The Lost Child* by Mike
219 Kenny (1998) and Moira Buffini's *Marianne Dreams* (2012).

220 Alongside Graffiti and Replay, the range of companies working currently
221 includes Barnstorm Theatre Company, Branar, Cahoots NI, Cups and Crowns,
222 Fíbín, Meitheal na mBeag, Monkeyshine Theatre, Moonfish, Pignut
223 Productions, Púca Puppets, Sticky Fingers and Theatre Lovett. There is scarcely
224 a region or county where children will now not have access to high-quality
225 professional theatre made specifically for them. These companies have each in
226 their own way followed the precedents that TEAM, Graffiti and Replay pio-
227 neered. The rest of this chapter, then, will explore how they have maintained a
228 fundamental commitment to local audiences; developed an international per-
229 spective; and engaged in cross-sectoral collaboration. I will argue too that these
230 features are most fully expressed in the growth of an additional feature: inter-
231 national festivals of theatre for children.

232 PERFORMING THE LOCAL

233 The commitment to local audiences within TYA does not just involve return-
234 ing repeatedly to the same set of schools for audiences (though such relation-
235 ships are important), but is expressed in a number of other ways. Replay's
236 Brenda Winter notes, for example, parallels between the tastes of audiences for
237 popular political performance advocated by John McGrath and the tastes of the
238 school children in Replay's audiences, including localism of place and identity.⁶
239 Thus, the most straightforward expression of localism is in choosing subject
240 material that engages with and matters to the audience.

241 One example of an approach to this is Gary Owen's play *Bulletproof* mounted
242 by Replay Productions, then under the directorship of David Fenton, in 2010.
243 The piece was in response to increasing concern in the local media about

mental health issues amongst young people; the company's own growing awareness of these issues through their work in secondary schools; and Owen's own experience of suicide by young people in his home town of Bridgend, Wales. These were given sharp focus in a government report on mental health in 2007. Owen interviewed young people in Belfast and used their words and stories to construct an adapted form of Verbatim Theatre, in which real experiences were fictionalized in the mouths of his two central characters, brother and sister Michael and Alex. Using the technique of direct audience narration, the play recounts the events leading up to and the aftermath of Michael's suicide. This use of verbatim and its close references to Belfast provided a compelling sense of authenticity that tied the play to both a specific geographical location and an issue of vital concern to its audiences.

The strongest commitment to a locale is evident where companies have set down roots in running venues specifically for children's theatre. Graffiti now runs its administrative offices, its outreach department, an auditorium and studio space in its premises on Assumption Road in Cork. It also has two attached youth theatres, blurring the lines between theatre *for* and theatre *by* young people. Barnstorm's commitment to its home locale in Kilkenny for over twenty years similarly includes running its own venue, The Barn Theatre, close to the city centre. From that base, the company not only mounts its own productions and outreach activity, but supports its youth theatres, Community Theatre and adult theatre clubs.

The development of The Ark as a specialist, purpose-built cultural centre for pre-teen children might be seen as the boldest initiative in providing a home for theatre for children. When the Irish government was considering how to regenerate the area of Dublin's Temple Bar in 1991, Martin Drury was engaged to conduct a feasibility study for just such a venue. With the support of the city council, national government and European funding, The Ark opened its doors in 1995 as Europe's first custom-designed arts centre for children. It commissions and hosts professional work, activities and workshops across all art forms. It has had notable successes in commissioning theatre work, premiering *The Giant Blue Hand* by Marina Carr, which received a nomination for an *Irish Times* Theatre Award in 2009, for example. In 2010, Louis Lovett was appointed The Ark's first theatre-maker in residence, and *The Girl who Forgot to Sing Badly* was presented by The Ark in association with Theatre Lovett in the spring of 2011 and as part of the Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival, followed by a national tour.

A further dimension of the localism of Ireland's TYA sector is the way in which companies engage in sustained outreach projects with their local communities. One example of this is Barnstorm's engagement with the Townlands Project (2010), a creative exploration of the north Kilkenny landscape within the nine townlands of the old civil parish of Rathcoole. Barnstorm's involvement culminated in a production of *The Spooky Feast in the Scary Field* on 24 June. This was a collaborative project between artist Alan Counihan, Johnswell National School and Barnstorm's Outreach Officer, Anna Galligan, that used

289 material that had been generated by pupils of the school some seventy years
290 previously as the basis of a performance by the contemporary pupils. As docu-
291 mented on Barnstorm's website, the overall aim of the drama strand was to
292 present the local place to local people in a new way. To achieve this each class
293 group worked in a different way. The youngest worked primarily through
294 movement, visuals and group rhymes. They devized around the idea of seasons
295 and what happens to the land throughout the year. The largest group with the
296 widest age range was the first to third class group. Six of the stories taken from
297 the pupils of 1937–38 were chosen to be presented in storytelling form with a
298 narrator and characters speaking the lines; as well as the whole group working
299 to create a story, which they then performed as a chorus.

300 A more distinctively Irish expression of localism has been in the turn toward
301 the Irish language. In 1999, Graffiti produced its first show *as Gaelige: Scéal*
302 *faoi Bhláth*, which toured to Irish-medium schools and schools in the Munster,
303 Connemara and Donegal Gaeltachts. However, of all the companies that have
304 produced work in the Irish language, it is Galway's Branar Téatar do Pháistí
305 founded by Marc Mac Lochlainn in 2001 that has generated the most sus-
306 tained output. Its mission statement is "Insíonn muid scéalta móra do shaorán-
307 aigh Beaga / We tell big stories to little citizens", neatly summarizing both its
308 ambition and its commitment. As with many of its sister companies, Branar's
309 work is multi-faceted involving professional productions, outreach activities
310 and a commitment to training artists and teachers.

311 Their productions (one or two new shows opening annually alongside pro-
312 ductions in the repertoire) play in schools that may be Irish-medium or where
313 Irish is just part of the broader curriculum. This has had implications for the
314 work, which although performed in the Irish tongue, cannot rely on its audi-
315 ences having even a basic knowledge of the language. This awareness has
316 prompted experimentation with different visual forms, including object manip-
317 ulation, mask, commedia dell'arte, physical theatre and puppetry. One benefit
318 of both the company's development of its repertoire of puppet shows and its
319 highly visual performance modes has been the facility to tour the work
320 internationally.

321 *Clann Lir* (2010) exemplifies this link between local rootedness in Irish
322 language and culture and the international. A re-telling of the myth of the
323 Children of Lir, the performance uses puppetry and newly composed tradi-
324 tional Irish music by Michael Chang and Freda Nic Giolla Chatháin to create a
325 vividly visual and hauntingly beautiful sonic experience for audiences from six
326 years of age upwards. It was developed initially as a music-led piece but was
327 reworked subsequently to give greater prominence to a poetic text that would
328 match the music and movement of the puppets. As part of the Branar reper-
329 toire, it has been remounted in a number of tours across Ireland. In 2012, for
330 example, it was presented at six venues and festivals across Ireland, and was
331 performed internationally for the first time at the Cologne Children's Literature
332 Festival in Germany.

If work in the Irish language represents one way of engaging with the specifics of the local audience, a further way has been the creation of bespoke forms of performance that have extended the understanding both of who the audience of TYA might be, and what might even count as *theatre* for such an audience. Under Anna Newell's artistic directorship, from 2011 to 2016, Replay evolved two new strands of work that saw the company making even more bespoke forms of work for children. *Babble* (2013) was the first in a series of works engaging with babies that included *Tiny* (2014) and culminated in *BabyDay* in 2015, which saw the staging of over eighty events at more than twenty venues all over Belfast, focusing on families with babies and young children.

A second focus of bespoke theatre-making under Newell was a return to a strand of work that the company had initiated in the 1990s, making work for children with special needs. Projects such as Paul Boyd's *Smelly Won't Behave!* (2001) usually involved bringing a short play into designated special schools and then working as a company-in-residence to make a performance piece with the pupils. Newell reviewed that model and after a period of consultation, the company changed direction to embark on the task of making work for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities that would blend participation and performance, through projects such as *Bliss* (2012), *Closer* (2014) and *Into the Blue* (2015).

Such opening up of the performance process to the participation of the audience as a means of creating bespoke theatre was also developed for more mainstream audiences in *Once Upon a Time*, by performer/illustrator Patrick Sanders and performer Mary Jordan. This interactive piece for 5- to 8-year-olds finds Sanders and Jordan as The Very Trusted and Nearly Excellent Guardians of Tall Tales and Small Stories, who look after a magical library containing all the stories ever made. Following a fire, the guardians have had to reconstruct the library and they have managed to do this with one last exception. Unfortunately, neither of the guardians can remember the details of the story and they enlist the audience to construct it for them. With Jordan engaging the audience through a series of guided questions and suggestions, the mute Sanders communicates by drawing out the suggestions as an extended sequence of cartoons. Once the story has been created and the drawing finished, Jordan is then able to retell it in its completeness. While the process for this work is fundamentally the same, the outcome is a bespoke performance for the particular audience in that place and time: a uniquely local production.

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE 370

While in the previous section I emphasized the ways in which TYA in Ireland is resolutely local, such localism is informed by and engages with practices drawn from other countries and theatre cultures in a way that has been largely resisted by mainstream theatrical and dramatic practice in Ireland. This internationalism has had several effects: it has informed the choice of dramatic repertoire;

376 collaborations with artists from other countries and contexts have led to the
377 adoption of models of practice from other theatrical cultures; and the engage-
378 ment with audiences outside of Ireland through touring and appearances at
379 festivals and events in other countries has developed the confidence and exper-
380 tise of Irish TYA makers.

381 As discussed earlier, each of the pioneering companies turned to works or
382 writers from outside Ireland to develop their repertoire. In some instances, this
383 has produced longer-term relationships that mean companies repeatedly com-
384 mission the same writer or produce their work. Thus, Barnstorm has staged a
385 range of works by Mike Kenny including *Big Sister, Little Brother* (2008), *Boy*
386 *with a Suitcase* (2009), *The Song from the Sea* (2011) and *Ice Child* (2014). It
387 has also collaborated with Sarah Argent from Welsh company Theatr Iolo to
388 write *The Bockety World of Henry & Bucket* (2013) and *Me Too!* (2015), for
389 example. CAHOOTS NI has a similar track record of working with Charles
390 Way, staging his *A Spell of Cold War* (2012) and *Nivelli's War* (2013) and com-
391 missioning *The Gift* (2015).

392 A more significant aspect of internationalism is that it has enabled compa-
393 nies to collaborate directly with artists from other countries and contexts. In
394 2009, Marc Mac Lochlainn invited Bjarne Sandborg of Denmark's Teater
395 Refleksion to work through an extended rehearsal period for *An Seanfhear*
396 *Beag*, itself an adaptation of *The Story of the Little Old Man* by Swedish writer
397 Barbro Lindgren (a staple source for TYA performances in continental Europe).
398 This collaboration was picked up again in the 2012 production of *Croí á*
399 *Mhúscailt*, a version of the book *The Heart and the Bottle* by Oliver Jeffers for
400 children between 7 and 12 years old. Again using custom-made wooden pup-
401 pets, it was co-directed by Mac Lochlainn and Sandborg. The project deep-
402 ened the collaboration, since the Branar company worked with Teater
403 Refleksion for a week in Denmark, opening the show for a short run of four
404 performances in Aarhus, before a ten-venue tour in Ireland. A third collabora-
405 tion between Branar and Teater Refleksion, again involving an adaptation of a
406 book by Jeffers, *The Way Back Home*, premiered at the Dublin Theatre Festival
407 in 2014. The designer for the production was Teater Refleksion's Mariann
408 Aagaard. Such collaborations have developed the practice of Branar as the Irish
409 host company in the field of puppetry as well as broadening its visual aesthetic.
410 They have also encouraged and supported the company's confidence in under-
411 taking collaborations with other Irish artists, both working within theatre and
412 in other art forms. So, for example, for the 2014 adaptation of John Light's
413 book *The Flower*, produced as *Bláth*, the company commissioned paper artist
414 Maeve Clancy to design and build the paper set and Colm Mac Con Iomaire of
415 the pop group The Frames to compose the original score.

416 A similar example of collaboration can be seen in the process by which Sligo-
417 based Monkeyshine developed its original show *Losha* in 2011. The show was
418 created over a year as part of the theatre-maker in residence scheme with
419 Roscommon Arts Centre and Roscommon County Council. Under a mentor-
420 ing scheme through which young Irish groups were paired with established

companies in other countries, the artistic director of Baboró, Lali Morris, arranged for Karen Pennefather and James Jobson of Monkeyshine Theatre to be mentored by Charlot Lemonine of the acclaimed French company Theatre Vélo. *Losha* is the story of an unusual creature who collects other people's forgotten moments. She finds them stuck in a variety of discarded objects, which she gathers during the night. A lost shoe holds a love story, a birthday candle still holds the wish that blew it out and a soft toy is filled with forgotten fears of the dark. The influence of Theatre Vélo's long history of creating performances where actors interact with objects to create images, using few or no words, is evident in what has become a signature piece for Monkeyshine.

Irish TYA has further benefitted from its engagement with audiences in other cultures and contexts through touring and appearances at festivals. Most straightforwardly, this has involved extending tours to other parts of the British Isles to take in festivals and events, such as when Barnstorm's *Boy with a Suitcase* toured to the Opening Doors International Festival in Wales in 2010, or following its original runs of *The Bockety World of Henry & Bucket* with stagings at the Imagine Festival in Edinburgh and then a tour across the UK in 2015. Similarly, The Ark/Theatre Lovett's *The Girl who Forgot to Sing Badly* toured to Scotland as part of The Bank of Scotland Imagine Festival in May 2011. Companies have also taken up invitations further afield, such as when TEAM's *Devotion* by Leo Butler toured to South Africa in September 2010 or when Fíabín travelled to Malawi to perform *An Rón Dall* and conduct puppeteering workshops with the local children in March 2011.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the TYA sector of the United States has also provided opportunities for Irish TYA artists to engage internationally. New Visions, New Voices at the Kennedy Centre, Washington DC is a biennial national festival for plays-in-progress that has supported the development of projects by Irish theatre-makers. In 2014, the festival invited Graffiti to bring *Gile na Gealái* and CAHOOTS NI *The Gift* as part of the development of each of these new works. The United States has also become a more feasible option for the touring of Irish TYA work. In 2013, Replay remounted its co-production with Assault Events of *Wobble* for five days at the Irish Arts Center in New York, alongside workshops and seminars. It followed this, in 2015, with a remount of another of its shows for babies, *Babble*, at the New Victory Theatre on New York's 42nd Street for a run of seventeen performances. In 2016, CAHOOTS NI undertook a sixteen-venue tour of the States with its production *Egg*.

Such internationalism has been championed too by the involvement of both TYA-Ireland and TYA-NI (a constituent member of TYA-UK) with the work of ASSITEJ. Representatives attend the organization's congress, interim events, artistic gatherings and festivals. They contribute too to its organization and policy development, as well as participating in its networks such as Small Size, for example. In collaboration with TYA-UK, the Irish organizations won the right to stage an artistic gathering in Birmingham, *On the Edge*, showcasing work and providing a week-long programme of seminars and workshops.

FESTIVALS

467 One of the key developments in the sector in Ireland that has supported both
468 this international exchange and the consolidation of the cross-sectoral collabora-
469 tion that is distinctive about TYA in Ireland has been the creation of festivals
470 across the country. Although TEAM had participated in the Dublin Theatre
471 Fringe from its early days, it was Graffiti that led the development of festivals
472 for children with its *ACTIVATE* Festival in 1992 in conjunction with the
473 Everyman Theatre in Cork. From this precedent have grown festivals across
474 the country. Since then children's arts festivals have sprung up across the coun-
475 try, including Roscommon Arts Centre's *Lollipop*s, a programme of events for
476 children and young people; Castlebar's RoolaBoola Children's Arts Festival;
477 the Sticky Fingers Festival in Newry; and Hullabaloo! in Offaly. October 1997
478 saw the first festival in Galway, Baboró, now one of the biggest festivals in the
479 country. Initially an off-shoot of the Galway Arts Festival, under the fourteen-
480 year leadership of Lali Morris it established an international reputation when it
481 became a stand-alone event, attracting children's artists, dramatists and educa-
482 tionalists from all over the world. A similar trajectory can be seen in Young at
483 Art's annual Belfast Children's Festival under the leadership of Ali Fitzgibbon,
484 who took over the role in 2003 after six years as the producer at Replay, step-
485 ping down in 2016. From programming theatre performances, she also
486 expanded the experience of performance for its audiences, including through
487 transforming the large-scale space of the Waterworks park in North Belfast as
488 *Festival Goes to the Waterworks* (2008 and 2010) and creating the world's first
489 *Baby Rave* in 2005.

490 Such festivals not only showcase the best of Irish TYA, but also open up the
491 field for both artists and audiences to the influence and example of the best of
492 work from across the globe. Thus, for example, Belfast Children's Festival has
493 programmed work by La Baracca, Italy; Compagnia RODISIO, Italy; Daniel
494 Morden and Oli Wilson-Dickson, Wales; Erfreuliches Theatrefurt, Germany;
495 Het Filiaal, The Netherlands and Junges Ensemble, Germany. A further effect
496 of such festivals is to provide a focused and concentrated opportunity for audi-
497 ences to see work of the highest quality. As Hauptfleisch notes, "[t]he argu-
498 ments for the festivalization of culture in the world today⁷ (Kapstein 1996)
499 seem to suggest that the arts festival circuit may actually in some cases have [AUT2](#)
500 come to represent the theatrical 'season' in certain countries".⁸ Collaborating
501 with other festivals across both Ireland and the whole of the United Kingdom
502 has also made it possible in some cases to combine costs and make tours
503 viable.

CONCLUSIONS

505 In this chapter, I have charted the development of TYA on what might appear
506 to be an untroubled linear path to success. Each and every artist and company
507 has nonetheless faced different challenges and obstacles that have conditioned

the work, including the inevitable processes of applying for and securing funding from private sponsors, public agencies and third-sector partners. That they have managed to shape a sector of practice the quality of which is recognized internationally within these conditions is praiseworthy. Yet its significance is much more than that: this sector has expanded the conception of what constitutes Irish theatre. Rather than focusing on specific dramatic tropes or thematic concerns that might hitherto have been regarded as distinctively or uniquely Irish, or returning to the lineage of Irish literary theatre, TYA has embraced a diverse range of forms of expression, topics and modes of practice, reaching a wide range of audiences, across the country (and abroad) and across a wide social demographic. Its internationalism has engaged with and mirrored the fracturing of hitherto dominant conceptions of a homogeneous Irish identity in the last twenty years in particular. By doing so while retaining a commitment to its specific audiences, it has simultaneously brought the global to the local, recognizing and validating the lives and experiences of its spectators as important; a counter-narrative to the sense within mass media that the universal is elsewhere. Yet, these achievements remain obscured in Irish theatre history and historiography. Few scripts are published and even fewer studied in formal educational settings, despite a substantial legacy of new writing. By comparison with other sectors, there is little formal training at higher-level education institutions. TYA may have come of age, but it remains a hidden gem.

NOTES

1. Eimear Beardmore, "And the Adults Came Too! Dublin Theatre Festival and the Development of Irish Children's Theatre", in *That Was Us: Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, ed. Fintan Walsh (London: Oberon, 2013).
2. Aidan Harman, "Graffiti", *Theatre Ireland* 23 (1990): 37.
3. Brenda Winter, "Brenda Winter interviewed by Eugene McNulty", in *The Theatre of Marie Jones*, ed. Eugene McNulty and Tom Maguire (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 68.
4. *Ibid.*, 69.
5. Emelie Fitzgibbon, "TiE Hits Back", *Theatre Ireland* 19 (1989): 17.
6. Winter, "Brenda Winter interviewed by Eugene McNulty", 69.
7. .
8. Temple Hauptfleisch, "Festivals as Eventifying Systems" in *Festivalising! Theatrical Events, Politics and Culture*, ed. Temple Hauptfleisch *et al.* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 39.

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AUI3

AUI4

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