

ABBAY THEATRE
AMHARCLANN NA MAINISTREACH



FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY

2019-2023



*Front Page: Lisa Lambe and Sarah Madigan in Jimmy's Hall.
This Page: Caoilfhionn Dunne in Katie Roche.*





MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

For over a century, the Abbey Theatre has played a major role in reflecting Ireland's evolving cultural, political and social identity. It has done so through the creation and staging of an important literary repertoire which has helped Irish people to understand and communicate what it means to be Irish. This role for Ireland's National Theatre continues in a new form today as the nation's sense of identity evolves with a population that is becoming increasingly multicultural. In this more globalised world, it is vital that we continue to stand proudly amongst our international peers as a world-class national theatre, touring our work internationally and attracting great artists to work in Ireland.

This Strategy sets out key priorities for the Abbey Theatre over the next five years (2019-2023), reflecting our core responsibilities to Irish theatre-making, our audiences, our staff, our funders and our community of stakeholders. Importantly, in light of the very welcome and landmark Government announcement of funding for a new Abbey Theatre, this Strategy also sets out the framework that will support the delivery of a new National Theatre, befitting its title and responsibilities.

As Chair of the Abbey Theatre, I look forward to working with our Board and Executive in realising this ambitious Strategy for Ireland's National Theatre, with the support of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Arts Council and our individual and corporate supporters in Ireland and across the world.

Dr. Frances Ruane
Chair

DIRECTORS' FOREWORD

As the Abbey Theatre enters its 115th year, it is timely to reflect on the purpose that has made this theatre one of the world's iconic playhouses.

We rightly celebrate the lauded history of the Abbey Theatre, and, over the next five years, we put down a marker that the Abbey Theatre firmly believes its best days lie ahead.

Ireland's National Theatre, whose artistic excellence has always placed it at the heart of its nation and her history, now sets itself a re-energised Mission and Vision to guide the Theatre and its people in all their endeavours.

As this Strategy nears its end point in 2023, the Abbey Theatre will be preparing to move into a new, purpose-built home, fitting for the National Theatre of Ireland. Over the five years of this Strategy we have the opportunity to build a theatre and a company where creativity drives our every move as we build a home for brave, bold and breathtaking stories for the nation.

We look forward to working with our colleagues and our collaborators in delivering this Strategy in the years ahead.

Graham McLaren and Neil Murray
Directors



Neil Murray and Graham McLaren

OUR MISSION, VISION AND VALUES SEEK TO PLACE THE ABBAY THEATRE AT THE HEART OF THE IRISH THEATRICAL ECOSYSTEM BY NURTURING AND DEVELOPING THE ARTFORM TOGETHER WITH ITS EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED ARTISTS

MISSION

Our Mission is to effectively and imaginatively engage with all of Irish society through the production of ambitious and courageous theatre in all its forms.

The Abbey Theatre is artist-led and audience-focused: we aim to ensure our programmes are driven by ambitious, big ideas by theatre-makers of all disciplines, relevant to our times and reflective of our role as a national theatre.

VISION

Our Vision is to build a 21st-century theatre and company where creativity drives our every move, developing the artists and audiences of the future.

The Abbey Theatre intends to be a confident collaborative company, leading the way in how Irish theatre is developed, produced and disseminated; and where everyone who works with us, irrespective of their role, knows that they are contributing to the work of one of the world's great theatres.

VALUES

Our Values are excellence, inclusiveness, diversity and equality, reflecting the Abbey Theatre's place as a theatre for all.

We relate to our audiences by:

Creating: Taking bold ideas to make theatre in all its forms;
Connecting: Bringing together artists and audiences across the nation and beyond;

Challenging: Exciting audiences with productions that surprise, delight and provoke.

INTRODUCTION

As a National Cultural Institution, the Abbey Theatre exists to deliver unique, memorable, challenging experiences for audiences. We want to reflect and nurture Ireland's artists in all their diversity, by making and presenting the broadest possible range of theatre. Success will see audiences grow, at home in Ireland and abroad.

Our Strategy has three interconnected Strands:

1. Art & Audience, which are inextricably linked and at the heart of why the Abbey Theatre exists.

2. Internationalisation & Investment, which play a critical role in ensuring the Abbey Theatre can deliver fully on its mission, abroad as well as at home.

3. People & Processes, whose development will underpin and enable delivery of the Strategy.

Under each strand we identify and outline the Abbey Theatre's Goals for 2019-2023.

This Strategy enshrines the organisation's ongoing pledge to ensure that equality, and specifically gender equality, and diversity remain at the heart of the Abbey Theatre's plans and all its activities. This commitment applies to every aspect of the Theatre's operations – from art and audience, to outreach and education, workforce planning and development, income generation and financial sustainability.

The Strategy ensures a consistent focus on new work, providing space and time to support artistic exploration and experimentation, alongside the Theatre's relationship with established Irish playwrights and artists. Furthermore, the Theatre's commitment to new approaches and interpretations of the rich Irish theatre repertoire is a core part of our vision.

The Abbey Theatre's success is predicated upon its people and their individual and collective roles in driving this Strategy. Their pivotal contributions will be articulated in the internal plans which will drive the achievement of our goals over the duration of the Strategy.

The Strategy covers a period that will see the theatre begin a long overdue, landmark project – planning for and building the new Abbey Theatre. Consequently, income generation and the maximisation of all possible revenue streams will be vital given the project's scope and scale.

The new Theatre will provide a fit-for-purpose, state-of-the-art workplace for artists and employees, allowing them to achieve excellence and follow best practice in all their activities. Importantly, this development also opens up further opportunities for touring and international activity, aligning with the Theatre's ambitious outlook for its artists and audiences, and its contribution to Ireland's Cultural Policy.

AT THE HEART OF THE ABBEY THEATRE'S STRATEGY IS A ROBUST COMMITMENT TO ARTISTS, AUDIENCES AND THE THEATRICAL ART-FORM - THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND INTERNATIONALLY - SUPPORTED BY THE THEATRE'S PHYSICAL AND OPERATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE.

OUR STRATEGY IN SUMMARY

ART & AUDIENCE

Goal 1: Support new work, enhance artform development and build interdisciplinary practice

Goal 2: Maintain and develop relationships with established artists

Goal 3: Make and show work that is relevant and interesting to a modern diverse Ireland

Goal 4: Take the Abbey Theatre beyond Dublin



PEOPLE & PROCESSES

Goal 1: Build an organisation that

supports a modern outward-looking theatre

Goal 2: Ensure our people, their talent and

capability is actively nurtured and supported

Goal 3: Develop business processes suited to a theatre that continuously innovates and tours nationally and globally

INTERNATIONALISATION & INVESTMENT

Goal 1: Take the Abbey Theatre beyond Ireland

Goal 2: Foster work that relates to national and international audiences and issues

Goal 3: Build a new world class theatre in which to present the best of Irish and international theatre

Goal 4: Build capacity to raise funds from private sources to complement State investment

STRAND 1: ART & AUDIENCE

The Abbey Theatre plays a unique and pivotal role in the Irish theatre landscape. We lead, are led by, and are responsive to artists who are seeking to engage with Irish audiences, with the Irish diaspora and with global audiences. We listen to and engage with our audiences, making work that is reflective of Ireland today in all its diversity.

As the National Theatre, we have a particular responsibility to produce work of the highest quality, and to nurture current and future generations of artistic talent across all areas of theatre.



This Page: Clare Monnelly in *The Unmanageable Sisters*.

Next Page: The company of *Ulysses* perform alongside audience members seated onstage.

GOAL 1: SUPPORT NEW WORK, ENHANCE ARTFORM DEVELOPMENT AND BUILD INTERDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE

Key Actions:

- Commission plays, new ideas and theatrical works, delivered to the very highest standard
- Build new artistic relationships, including co-productions, to increase and broaden access to the Abbey Theatre stages
- Collaborate with new and innovative theatre companies
- Work through community and education programmes to develop the artists and audiences of the future
- Lead the way in how Irish theatre is developed, produced and presented.

GOAL 2: MAINTAIN AND DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH ESTABLISHED ARTISTS

Key Actions:

- Commission new work from established playwrights and theatre makers
- Support the development of new work in the Irish language, working with key partners to do so
- Continue to work with vibrant contemporary artists on plays from both the Irish and international canons.



GOAL 3: MAKE AND SHOW WORK THAT IS RELEVANT AND INTERESTING TO A MODERN DIVERSE IRELAND

Key Actions:

- Produce a programme of work that is gender balanced
- Develop a programme that attracts and challenges the widest possible audience
- Build an audience that is representative of a modern diverse Ireland.

GOAL 4: TAKE THE ABBEY THEATRE BEYOND DUBLIN

Key Actions:

- Tour work nationally each year to a wide range of theatres
- Make and tour work to surprising and inspiring new locations
- Make and open work with and for specific communities throughout Ireland.

STRAND 2: INTERNATIONALISATION & INVESTMENT

Since its foundation, the Abbey Theatre has played a role on the international stage and has contributed to Ireland's cultural reputation globally. Today, as Ireland's National Theatre, this means taking our world-class performances to international venues as well as showcasing them in a new Abbey Theatre, a venue that is fit for our 21st century vision. This new theatre will contribute to Ireland's reputation as a great centre for culture, attracting additional global audiences to Dublin. This necessitates an entirely new building funded by a partnership of the public and private sectors, alongside harnessing the potential of existing income streams.



This Page: Stephen Rea in *Cyprus Avenue*.

Next Page: Janet Moran, Kate Stanley Brennan, Julie Maguire and Ciaran O'Brien – *The Plough and the Stars* at the Lyric Hammersmith in London.

GOAL 1: TAKE THE ABBEY THEATRE BEYOND IRELAND

Key Actions:

- Tour the Abbey Theatre's work internationally, breaking into new territories, showcasing all dimensions of Irish theatrical talent, reaching out both to the Irish diaspora and to audiences new to Irish theatre
- Strengthen existing relationships and build new relationships with key international venues and companies through shared networks and targeted invitations – including hosting international theatre conferences and events
- Engage with the Abbey Theatre's alumni and friends, whose reach, following and networks offer unparalleled production and positioning opportunities.

GOAL 2: FOSTER WORK THAT RELATES TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES AND ISSUES

Key Actions:

- Promote Irish artists who seek to focus on new global issues facing society today and respond flexibly in the development and commissioning of work
- Partner with leading international artists and companies to create and develop their work, through co-productions and presentations based on collaborations with Irish artists.



GOAL 3: BUILD A NEW WORLD-CLASS THEATRE IN WHICH TO PRESENT THE BEST OF IRISH AND INTERNATIONAL THEATRE

Key Actions:

- Engage key stakeholders in supporting the early development of the new Abbey Theatre – a building to showcase world-class Irish and international theatre
- Create a compelling case for individuals, companies and foundations to invest in a new iconic national theatre on its historic Dublin city site
- Develop an enhanced digital presence to ensure visibility of the Theatre's work during the construction phase for the new theatre.

GOAL 4: BUILD CAPACITY TO RAISE FUNDS FROM PRIVATE STAKEHOLDERS TO COMPLEMENT STATE INVESTMENT

Key Actions:

- Work with supporters to identify and find new ways of strengthening the Abbey Theatre's and Ireland's reputation as a centre for theatrical excellence
- Build capacity to raise significant capital funds for the new Abbey Theatre and develop sustainable private investment for an ever-more ambitious artistic programme
- Consistently review ways to build on existing and ancillary revenue streams - including Box Office.

STRAND 3: PEOPLE & PROCESSES

To achieve our objective of creating great theatre in Ireland and internationally, and to grow our audiences, the Abbey Theatre needs to be responsive and flexible. These attributes will ensure that we are effective in attracting and supporting the best talent. We will foster an environment that creates and nurtures an inclusive culture among all artists and staff. As such, the theatre's internal operations will reflect our commitment to develop new partnerships with artists, companies and funders, which will in turn contribute to the theatre ecosystem in Ireland.



***This Page:** Witney White and Harrison Wilding in Room.*

***Next Page:** Participants in our Young Curators programme 2018.*

GOAL 1: BUILD AN ORGANISATION THAT SUPPORTS A MODERN OUTWARD-LOOKING THEATRE

Key Actions:

- Facilitate the evolving requirements of the Theatre's creative ambition and output by building capacity within key business areas
- Enhance the play commissioning and new work development process through improved development and production facilities within the New Work Department
- Continue the Theatre's strong commitment to diversity and equality, particularly gender equality, within its programming/new work processes, supported by HR policies which safeguard diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation.



GOAL 2: ENSURE OUR PEOPLE, THEIR TALENT AND CAPABILITY IS ACTIVELY NURTURED AND SUPPORTED

Key Actions:

- Create a learning environment that nurtures and develops our internal talent
- Actively review HR policies, processes and budgets to ensure they align with this goal, and where required, adjust accordingly
- Increase employee engagement and satisfaction, and strive to make the Abbey Theatre a great place to work.

GOAL 3 : DEVELOP BUSINESS PROCESSES SUITED TO A THEATRE THAT CONTINUOUSLY INNOVATES AND TOURS NATIONALLY AND GLOBALLY

Key Actions:

- Streamline operational processes and procedures to accommodate the flexibility required of the Theatre's more dynamic programming approach
- Design work practices and contracts to match and support more intense engagement with Irish artists and companies and a greater touring focus
- Develop the Theatre's capacity to be a resource to the Irish theatre community through provision of professional opportunities and supports for artists.



DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

This Strategy sets out our future focus, building on recent successes and on the vision of our founders. It highlights the areas that require particular actions during this five-year period, and the way in which these areas intersect – organisationally and operationally.

It is being launched at a time when the Theatre's long-time need for a new building has been recognised and is being strongly supported by Government. Realising this ambition will require a clear and well-planned approach to managing the Abbey Theatre's presence as a producing company both at home and abroad, whilst the construction of the new theatre is underway.

At this time of substantial change, the Theatre's Staff, Management and Board, as well as its stakeholders – audiences, donors and supporters – will all have an essential role to play. In achieving the goals of this Strategy, the Theatre will work closely with its stakeholders, collaborators, partners and colleagues both at home and internationally, ensuring it leads the Irish theatrical ecosystem in a meaningful and consistent way.

As Ireland's National Theatre, the Abbey Theatre plays a key role in advancing the theatrical artform and the profile and careers of its artists, with diversity and equality at the heart of its decision-making.

As with any strategy, it will be essential to measure outcomes and analyse drivers of success to establish whether its goals are being achieved. It is designed to be a living, adaptive document, guiding the Theatre through an exciting, ambitious and focused period of growth. The Abbey Theatre's Board will have oversight of the implementation of the Strategy working in partnership with the Theatre's Directors. Progress on achieving the goals within the document will be monitored continuously by the Board and reported on publicly in the Theatre's Annual Report.

In setting out this Strategy, it is timely to reflect on the Abbey Theatre's story: an ambitious, revolutionary theatre, steeped in ideals of artistic excellence, ground-breaking work and unparalleled audience engagement. In an ever-changing world, the Abbey Theatre remains committed to retaining and deepening its relationship with long-term audience members, whilst consistently seeking to widen its audience reach – both at home and abroad.

Our founding principles are never more relevant than they are today, as we seek to ensure that Irish people everywhere and all newcomers to Ireland have a national theatre that earns their pride and support.

Graham McLaren and Neil Murray
Directors





This Page: Marie Mullen in On Raftery's Hill.

THE ABBEY THEATRE SINCE 1904

27TH DECEMBER 1904

The Abbey Theatre opens with performances by its founders W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory.

1907

The Playboy of The Western World by J.M Synge premieres.

1911

First American tour by the Abbey Theatre.

1923

W.B. Yeats awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1924

Juno and the Paycock by Sean O'Casey premieres.

1925

The Abbey Theatre receives an annual subsidy from the State, the first English speaking theatre in the world to do so.

1926

Riots at The Plough and the Stars by Sean O'Casey.

1951

Fire destroys the original Abbey Theatre. Company moves to the Queen's Theatre, Pearse Street pending rebuilding of the theatre.

1966

The new Abbey Theatre opens.

1975

The Sanctuary Lamp by Tom Murphy premieres.

1983

The Great Hunger by Tom MacIntyre premieres.

1985

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards The Somme by Frank McGuinness premieres.

1990

Dancing at Lughnasa by Brian Friel premieres, transferring to London and New York where it wins both the Olivier Award for Best Play and the 1992 Tony Awards for Best New Play, as well as Tony's for Brid Brennan (Best Featured Actress) and Patrick Mason (Best Direction of a Play).

1998

By the Bog of Cats by Marina Carr premieres.

2004

Centenary of the Abbey Theatre.

2007

The Abbey auditorium is reconfigured by renowned theatre design consultant Jean-Guy Lecat.

2014

Noble call by Panti at the Abbey Theatre goes viral being viewed over 800,000 times.

2017

The Abbey Theatre launches Free Previews.

2018

Government announcement of major capital investment to redevelop the Abbey Theatre on its current site.