

## BYT rise to the challenge

Well known for their hilarious annual pantomimes, Longford's Backstage Youth Theatre (BYT) took on a new challenge earlier this autumn, in conjunction with the Backstage Theatre.

For the two groups, 2015 is a momentous year, as they both celebrate 20 years in existence. To mark the occasion, they joined forces for the theatre's annual in-house production – and what a production it was.

Lead by renowned director Niall Cleary, more than twenty youth theatre members, along with the theatre's backstage team, brought Pat McCabe's 'Frank Pig Says Hello' to life.

A darkly funny, and at times extremely raw piece of theatre, the play, which is based on McCabe's novel, 'The Butcher Boy', was a first for the youth group in their twenty year history, and while there were initial concerns about the suitability of the piece, they were soon assuaged.

"I didn't think it was suitable to do with a youth group because there's some heavy issues in there," Niall explained. "Then I came up and met the group and I said, 'sure I'll bring it up anyway, I'll bring up a section and we'll use it during the workshop'.

"The scene that I brought up, it was a scene that when I read it, I didn't have a notion how to stage it, so I said 'I'll bring it up and I'll see how they work, I'll see what they can do with it', and they were brilliant!" he continued.

"I was really kind of taken aback at how good everyone was and how up for it everyone was."

Niall also added praise for Backstage Theatre's Sean Mulroy, Doug Fox Roberts and Mairtín Kenny who also lent their talents to the production.

While he was surprised at first by the talent contained within BYT, Niall quickly came to expect the same level of professionalism at each rehearsal, and he happily reported that the cast members delivered the goods each and every time. He also revealed that rehearsals were a largely collaborative process, with cast members contributing ideas as they worked through the scenes.

"There's some tricky scenes to stage but I stepped back from them myself a lot – I've stepped back from directing more with this group than I've ever done with a group."

It's a method of which General Manager of Backstage, Mona Considine approved, as she added, "It's great to see how involved they were and the input they had into the creative process.

"I think it's really key and I think it was a great experience for them. It's really going to stand to them in the future if they're thinking of a career in theatre."

It's also this process that helped the two local groups choose Niall as a director, as Mona revealed, "There's directors, professional directors out there, but not every director can work with young people."

According to Chairman of BYT Paul Higgins, the play was an unmissable opportunity for the local teenagers, who he claimed got more out of this experience than they did in several years with BYT.

"Doing something like this – I would never have dreamed of it. To get our members to work on a professional basis, it's brilliant.

"It could be something that maybe we'd do every few years."

Rated by Mona as a definite highlight of the theatre's season, the show, supported by Longford Arts Office, The Ireland Funds and Flynn & Lynch was performed over three nights at the end of September. With this hugely successful project behind them, the group now turn their full attention and their newfound skills and experiences, back to their self-written Panto, set to take Backstage by storm in January.