

AXIS 2021

Directors Report



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Some figures for 2021

70+ shows and events performed online, in the theatre and outdoors spanning over **105** performances

50 FREE in-person events for the community, outdoors & indoors

40 free outdoor shows throughout Dublin parks – Dublin Alive w/ DCC

9 festivals saw Axis projects & productions featured at a local, national & international level putting Ballymun on the cultural map

3 top acts – Damian Dempsey, KeyWest & Aslan took part in Otherworld Halloween Festival, Finglas Fright Night programmed with DCC

70,000+ online views in 2021 across digital content

50+ free or pay-what-you-can digital events

45 short films created as part of Breathe / Breathe Pride

31 days free access to a free concert celebrating Traveller culture and mental health, fully funded by Axis

6 Poetry animations as part of St Patrick's Festival

5 work-in-progress showings

4 Free Story-sessions from a drag queen as part of Pride month

3 brand new digital full productions: *Muck*, *Sun Bear*, *The Messenger*

1 gig, *Mary Coughlan Live at axis* was streamed on TV as part of St Patrick's Festival

1 free Irish Language digital festival

2000 at-home art & activity packs created for local families

29 Axis Assemble Artists including artists from Ballymun & Finglas

28 Free theatre shows/streamings offered to every school in Ballymun

3 major community projects; Sing, Community Vaults, Home is a Place, in partnership with local people

2 world premières by local writers for Dublin Theatre Festival: *Glue*, and *Rearing is Sparing*

242 artists paid, employed, or funded via Axis programmes & productions

40 staff between full time and part time employed in Axis, Civic Centre & the Lab (approx 80% from the North West Area) plus up to **60** additional freelancers on average each year

1 community café employing **7** local staff serving over **10000** local people (curtailed due to Covid restrictions)



2021 In Detail

Despite ongoing disruption and varying levels of closure and restrictions through the year, axis maintained consistent in its service and operations as an arts and community resource centre both in person and digitally. The creche remained open throughout providing a vital service to community members and working parents/guardians and the centre, while closed to the public when necessitated by public health guidelines, remained open for essential activities and services and maintained a consistent programme of community support and audience engagement. This included:

- Over 70 shows and events performed online, in the theatre and outdoor
- Spanning over 105 performances
- Three brand new digital full productions: *Muck*, *Sun Bear*, *The Messenger*
- Two world premières: *Glue and Rearing is Sparing*
- Five work-in-progress showings
- 40 free outdoor shows throughout Dublin – Dublin Alive
- Over 70,000 online views in 2021 across content
- One viral video – *Síúcra* by Roxanna Nic Liam
- Over 45 short films created as part of Breathe / Breathe Pride
- Three Story-sessions from a drag queen
- 50 FREE in-person events for the community, outdoors and indoors
- One concert celebrating Traveller culture, free ran for a whole month.
- Over 50 free or pay-what-you-can digital events
- One free Irish Language festival
- Three top acts – Damian Dempsey, KeyWest and Aslan
- Created employment for, paid or awarded funding to over 240 artists. (242)
- 2000 family packs created for local families
- One community café
- Took part in festivals such as, Patrick's Festival 2021, Dublin Fringe Festival, Dublin Theatre Festival, Otherworld Halloween Festival, Finglas Fright Night, Social Inclusion, and Integration Week created our own festivals
- One gig, *Mary Coughlan live at axis*, streamed on TV as part of St Patrick's Festival
- Six Poetry animations as part of St Patrick's Festival
- 3 major community projects; Sing, Community Vaults, Home is a Place
- Over 5,000 tickets sold in 2021
- Free theatre offered to every school in Ballymun

In house we continued where possible the necessary capital and refurbishment works which will set the building and its operations up to enhance its operations as a local and regional resource into the future.

Towards the end of the year, Axis was delighted to welcome back classes and groups to the building under new safety guidelines including the Active Living Dance Classes, Rhythm Room drama classes for adults with Intellectual disabilities, Children's drama, Irish Dancing and more. The café re-opened & continued to thrive under the new guidelines and axis once again found itself as a hub for the community.

Guidelines for theatres changed at several points during the year with theatre capacity was reduced to 50% (106 tickets) before a new curfew introduced meant that all shows were required to end by 8pm. Axis continued to adapt to these new restrictions, adding additional shows where needed and making the decision to move or postpone performances as necessary.



Organizational

Staff Structure changes

- Director/CEO Mark O' Brien was appointed Executive Director of The Abbey Theatre and stepped down in May 2021
- Programme Manager Niamh Ní Chonchubhair returned from maternity leave and was appointed Interim Director/CEO for a period of six months or until year end 2021
- General Manager and Programme Co-coordinator given additional responsibilities and pay rise to reflect same to enhance interim staffing structure.
- Ticketing company changed. More multi-functional and online capabilities.
- Creche expansion finalized and is awaiting Tusla inspection (backlog due to covid)
- Refurbishment of dressing rooms, green room completed
- Match capital funding secured from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to replace boilers and theatre dimmers
- Two project coordinators taken on to run specific projects and to meet additional organizational capacity required as events spaces re-opened and we resumed producing and hosting in-person projects and events. This was a replacement of staffing capacity who had moved on to other roles but who were not replaced immediately due to lockdown.

Axis Artist's Supports, Bursaries and Commissions

Axis continued our work supporting artists locally and nationally with our programme of bursaries and commissions. Axis supports these artists through our Pop-Up Literary department, weekly green arts circles, meet-ups space, mentoring and more. Over 80 artists were resourced to come and develop work with us. These ranged from existing and emerging artists in the NorthWest Area of Dublin to artists city wide.

- 29 artists awarded Axis Assemble Bursaries
- Green Arts Department with Lead Artist Maeve Stone
- Pop- Up Literary Department with lead artist Aoife Spillane-Hinks
- Axis programmed and facilitated the programming of outdoor Covid compliant live events that were available free of charge to their communities in Ballymun and all across the DCC parks infrastructure

Axis Ballymun was delighted to announce six artists who will be developing new work and ideas with Axis in 2021 via bursaries, a residency, and a commission. We were honoured that Pom Boyd, Felispeaks, Lorraine Maher, Jane Mc Carthy, Rosaleen McDonagh and Seán P. McLoughlin will be supported as they develop their respective scripts, ideas and programmes of engagement. Each artist will receive a bursary/commission fee as well as access to Axis' suite of artist supports.

The Pumphouse Bursary was a new Bursary that was funded by donations from the December 2020 showings of The Pumphouse Presents Series. Axis and Dublin Port have shortlisted three artists from a longlist of 34 artists, to receive The Pumphouse Bursary. Recipients were visual artists John O'Reilly and Tara Keane and playwright Robbie O'Connor have accepted their bursaries.



Festivals, In-House Productions & Co-Productions

Axis continued a very successful Festival season with one axis production, one axis co-production and one axis Work in Progress featuring in the Dublin Theatre Festival. Axis were delighted to once again highlight and support artists and work from Ballymun and North Dublin on both a national and international level.

Another important Festival for axis in quarter 4 was the annual Otherworld Halloween Festival. Axis was delighted to work with the Festival Steering committee and to also collaborate with Finglas Fright Night on a collaborative online festival.

Breathe – Online Programming

Following the extremely successful Breathe Series in February 2021; axis launched BREATHE X PRIDE a series of mini-commissions highlighting and amplifying the voices of LGBTQ+ artists and allies in different disciplines. Like the previous iteration of Breathe, this series was a moment of daily reflection, an injection of beauty and an antidote to those suffering from “digital burnout”.

Beginning on June 1st axis released pieces of reflection, peace, calm, an artistic response from some amazing folk offering a respite from the crowded world of darkness, to offer a couple of minutes a day to step away and breathe, a chink of light, of communion, of stillness.

Videos appeared on Facebook and YouTube daily Monday to Friday and were re-shown at the weekends. They now remain on demand on YouTube for viewers to enjoy. Featuring Poems, Visual Arts, Music, Song, Silence- from over 50 artists specially commissioned and curated by axis.

The fact that theatres remained closed did not stop axis from producing new work which was shared on our ever-growing digital platform. This platform continues to grow for axis, giving us the opportunity to share work on both a local and national scale. Axis continues to shine as both a production house and as a venue and we were delighted to première new work digitally.

Recordings & In-house readings – Highlights

Although the Theatre remained closed to the public for several months in 2021 axis were delighted with changes in regulations which meant artists could be welcomed back to the Theatre for recordings. Axis supported the work of a number of artists in developing new work for the stage and in recording these developments.

Axis began 2021 with an in-development of the brand new play MUCK by Axis Assemble artist Roseanna Purcell as part of First Fortnight.

Is féile dhrámaíochta nua a bhí Scríobh, ag céilliúradh drámaíochta as Gaeilge go digiteach! Le sceideal línte le cainteanna neamhfhoirmiúla, cruinnithec cómhraíte, léiriú d'obair idir lámhe, léitheoireacht & níos mó ar fáil ó ealaíontóirí den scoth.

Scríobh was a new digital Irish language theatre festival that ran at the end of March. With a line-up filled with informal talks, meetings, conversations, and presentations of in-development work.

Aoife Spillane-Hinks, lead artist on axis' Pop-up Literary Department hosted a series of online panels celebrating the theatre we love.



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axis was delighted to partner with St Patrick's Festival again in 2021 to commission the short film Outside History from Mark Smith and Aisling Byrne of Run of the Mill theatre and Arcade films. Outside History is reproduced with the kind permission of Carcanet Press.

Axis were delighted that work developed by axis assemble recipient Sarah Richardson as part of Axis Pop Up Literary department and of the axis assemble bursaries, hit the digital stage in a presentation supported by the Arts Council Ireland. Directed by Aoife Spillane-Hinks of the axis Pop Up Literary dept, Sun Bear ran for three evenings in April and received excellent feedback.

Axis has a long-standing relationship with author and playwright Dermot Bolger. To mark axis' out-going director Mark O'Brien's last production with axis, he once again chose to produce one of Dermot's works. The Messenger was originally commissioned as part of Press Play, an axis project run as part of the wider National Neighbourhood Project in 2016. Mark and Dermot returned to this piece, which had originally been produced on the Abbey Stage as part of the project, to mark 80 years since the North Strand Bombings.

Stewart Roche an award-winning Axis Assemble bursary recipient recorded a staged reading of a new play by award-winning writer Stuart Roche which was shown as part of Carlow Arts Festival: "The Twenty Club" is a fast paced, female lead genre piece which will delight fans of history and spy stories in equal measure.

Other work recorded by axis in the theatre for future dissemination included upcoming projects by Lee Coffey, Roderick Forde and Sarah Kinlen.

The Windy Lady returned in May as part of axis' Bealtaine programming with three new digital shorts; Bin Day, Useful Sentences and Zoom Call. These short films, written by, directed by and starring the fantastic Pom Boyd (recently seen in Channel 4's Frank of Ireland) straddle the line between comedy and theatre. These new pieces were commissioned by axis to celebrate Bealtaine.

Axis was delighted to receive funding from Culture Ireland to bring our hit production Charlie's a Clepto to Edinburgh Fringe via a digital/on demand collaboration with Assembly Festival. It received a suite of stellar reviews.

Theatre - In Person Highlights

Theatre returned to the axis stage with an axis in-house production of TKB's Rearing is Sparing as part of Dublin Theatre Festival 2021. This production continued axis' promotion of authentic working class voices, following on from recent axis successes with Clare Monelly's Charlie's a Clepto and Colm Keegan's For Saoirse. This production marked axis' first without former Director Mark O'Brien and we are delighted with the reception for the sold-out run. Axis also filmed a digital version of the production to ensure that we continue to reach audiences beyond our locality and that the play is available to those who don't yet feel ready to return to indoor theatre. Featuring Denise McCormack and Karen Ardoff and directed by Jason Byrne. The production sold out (on a reduced capacity due to Covid restrictions) and received four star reviews and audience and critical acclaim.

Axis were delighted to première another new Dublin play as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. Glue was written by Ballymun native Robbie O'Connor and developed with support of axis over several years. The piece was co-produced with the renowned company Rough Magic. Glue deals with the difficult subject of male sexual assault and highlighting the importance of mental health supports for men.



Axis was delighted to commission and present *The Fortune Brothers*, an in-development showcase of Lee Coffey's latest work. Continuing axis' work of supporting and promoting working class Dublin voices and stories.

Ballymun's Irish speaking population lead the movement for an urban Gaeltacht in Dublin and are a community axis supports and contributes to with joy. Axis were delighted to bring Manchán Magan's show about language and traditional bread making to the theatre for two shows which welcomed local Irish classes, groups and ciorcal cómhra. Axis was delighted to once again be a hub and gathering space for this dynamic community.

Axis were delighted to welcome Rose Henderson back with her one-woman show *According to Sydney* for two shows as part of Inclusion and Integration week 2021. These afternoon shows were free and local active age and community groups were invited to join us.

A particular highlight for axis was the U3A's production of *The Pawn Shop*. The University of the Third Age are a group for older people who wish to continue learning and embarking on new experiences. In 2020 they began writing a play outdoors while meeting in the park. In early 2021 axis began to support them in the development of this piece and organised rehearsal and workshop space for them in the building. The U3A had never written or produced their own show before but axis was delighted to support their first venture financially and with mentorship. The result was a two-night run of *The Pawn Shop* in November 2021 and the beginning of a new relationship between axis and the U3A. The group have been without a home due to Covid Restrictions in the Library but will now have a home in axis for 2022.

Creative Community Engagement

axis continued our long-lasting relationship with the HSE in 2021 to expand on the existing work of the Creative Space project, examining the importance of creativity for positive mental well-being and health. Developed as a response to the needs of Trinity Comprehensive, axis worked with local artists to create a programme of digital films and supports that examine identity, race, gender and sexual orientation through the prism of creativity, aimed to help young people express themselves and find an outlet. The project will be rolled out nationally in 2022, sharing the learning of Ballymun with the rest of the nation

Axis collaborated with the local DCC area office on Inclusion and Integration week 2022 with events such as *According to Sydney*, a free screening of *Zootopia* for local families and a free lunch-time gig and talk from Traveller-artist Sharyn Ward.

A collaboration with the Young Ballymun, *Home is a Place* was a project for families who are now or have in the past two years of Covid, experienced homelessness. This was a two-pronged project; while the parents (all mothers) worked in one room with Dramatherapist Betty Duffy to vocalise their own experiences, the children worked in another space with drama facilitator and early-years specialist Anita Nicholson to create a book documenting their own experiences. The final result was a film (made in collaboration with Ballymun Communications) which expressed the trauma felt by families who have experienced homelessness during Covid-19.

After missing *Sing* in 2020 axis were delighted to launch the choral project in 2021. Due to Covid, participants were limited to 16 in number. The group worked with Chamber Choir Ireland to create a classic Christmas Concert featuring favourite Christmas Carols. This concert, featuring Chamber Choir Ireland and local participants singing together, is free and has become a staple of Christmas in Ballymun.



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To mark Traveller Mental Health week 2021 axis produced and released Building Hope: A Celebration of Traveller Culture. Hosted and curated by Sharyn Ward. Featuring an online concert and discussion on Traveller Culture and Mental Health the event features performances and discussions with Trish Reilly and Steo Wall as well as guest appearances from leading figures within the community. The event streamed from the 8th of October (the Second Annual National Traveller Mental Health Day) to the 31st of October. This event was free to view or Pay What You Can to ensure as many people as possible could experience the event. With all proceeds going to the Traveller Counselling Service who provide free mental health supports to members of the Travelling Community in Ireland.

Axis was delighted to programme a strand of Dublin Alive! for local families and for those in the North Dublin area. This was a wonderful opportunity to reengage with local audiences whilst also bringing a touch of Ballymun, where arts and culture are at the core of the community to other areas in the North West Area such as St Anne's Park, Mount Bernard Park, Cabra and Mount Joy Square.

Community was at the heart of Otherworld 2021. This innovative form of the festival mixed digital content with onsite interaction done with covid safety in mind. Although Live events were restricted by guidelines and by weather, axis did offer a number of Covid-Safe live events throughout the local area. Live events included: Free Christmas performances from Cúpla Clowns took place in FYRC Finglas and in Poppintree Sports Centre for local children and families.

The imagination clinic returned with indoor performances in three local crèches.

Axis was delighted to host free in-person screenings of Coco & Hocus Pocus for families on Halloween day. With costumes encouraged and actors performing as the characters these were great live events for younger families. With interactive dance parties, story-telling, arts and crafts and more happening throughout the day online. The highlight of the online element of the festival was the Monster Mash Up: a concert featuring interviews with local people, performance from the best of Ballymun talent as well as Aslan, KeyWest and Damian Dempsey.

Cruinniú na nÓg

Axis worked with artists Pat McGrath and Anita Nicholson to develop an activity booklet Sabháilte Sa Bhaile for Cruinniú nan Óg. The booklet was developed as a tool for families and youth services to look at offline/ traditional games, crafts and activities. Axis was aware that there was a level of zoom fatigue affecting local families and children, rather than host further online or digital events to mark Cruinniú in 2021, axis instead developed a pack that would encourage families to step away from the screen. This would be an entirely "offline" way to enjoy Cruinniú na nÓg. These booklets will also remain as tools for families to use beyond Cruinniú na nÓg and will be helpful to families as Covid-19 safety measures continue to impact them. 2200 packs were delivered to local schools, youth and family services for dissemination and axis hopes to continue printing of this booklet

Recovery Month

Recovery Month is always a highlight of the axis programme in September and 2021 was no different. axis produced the third annual Ballymun Does Recovery Gig to launch the month on September 4th, hosted by local comedian Willie White and highlighting work from the community while sharing performances from national and local talents this concert has had over 6000 views online as of writing.



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Children's Programming

Axis was delighted to welcome back the "I am Baba" team for three sold out shows in November. Axis believes in the importance of an arts-rich childhood, something we aim to make realistic for every child in Ballymun through high quality affordable schools and youth programming. A magical adventure of song, lights and textures for babies aged 0-12 months. I Am Baba is a show about identity, agency, and personhood. For babies. Pricing this show at €5 for a parent and child axis offered local babies their first theatre experience.

Axis invited local schools with students aged 3rd to 6th class to join us for Alice and the Wolf and important show about internet safety through the prism of fairy tales. Axis offered free viewings of this show to local schools as a welcome back to the theatre.

Alice spends virtually all her time in Wolf Wood. You know, the world's deepest, darkest online game. Why not? Her dad isn't around, her mother's gone to Canada to meet a lumberjack and her best friend's dumped her for a YouTube star. But what happens when the people you meet online come looking for you in real life? Who can you trust, and who is the Big Bad Wolf? This re-telling of the Little Red Riding Hood story is a digital fairy tale that's deliciously funny and full of dangerously dark twists.

axis was aware that bringing schools to the theatre was impossible for some schools in 2021 due to restrictions and classroom pods and social distancing. Axis therefore offered this digital show for free to all local schools with students in Jr Infants to Second classes. Six schools took part and enjoyed the show safely in their own classrooms.

With changing restrictions meaning Christmas was uncertain for a lot of families, axis offered a free Christmas treat with "A Christmas Robin" free online art workshop from Pat McGrath. Streamed across Christmas week this funny and creative workshop gave children the chance to occupy themselves while building beautiful Christmas Decorations. A now annual event, axis once again marked Christmas Eve with a special reading of The Night Before Christmas from beloved television star Bosco. This event is viewed for free on Facebook and YouTube.

Community Vaults

Axis continued our work to merge the worlds of the arts and climate adaptation and mitigation led by our Green Arts department and artist Maeve Stone. As we figure out a new future for ourselves and the generations to come we take a moment to ask what is best about now? And what do we want to change?

In the far reaches of the arctic is a small island called Svalbard, and underneath the ice hides one of the most important rooms in the world. It is a vault, a seed bank, holding millions of seed samples with the potential to regrow crops and plants in almost every country.

We know that we are at a turning point in human history and so we have made preparations for how to rebuild and regrow, should we need... but what are the seeds of culture and society that we would want to protect for the future? What ideas, people, places, memories or hopes would we want to put into a community vault for Ballymun? Over eight weeks artist Maeve Stone collaborated with Ballymuners to answer those questions and create the first submissions to the Community Vault. The Community Vault Project includes collaborations with artists Kasia Kaminska with a focus on local weed life and reframing nature in urban spaces, and Kaethe Burt-O'Dea who gave a workshop on Rain Planters and nature based flood solutions



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Some highlights of our community engagement programme are summarized below:

- World Première produced of a new play from a Ballymun artist supported by axis for several years.
- Affordable event for Ballymun Irish Language Community – Arán & Im by Manchán Magan
- 2 x free theatre shows (According to Sydney) for local elders in the Ballymun Community as part of Inclusion and Integration week.
- 1 x free family film screening as part of Inclusion and Integration Week
- 2 x free family film screening & games as part of Otherworld 2021
- 1 x free lunchtime concert as part of Inclusion and Integration week
- Affordable programming for babies- I am Baba
- Every primary school aged child offered the chance to engage in theatre via local schools (Alice and the Wolf / How to Catch a Star)
- Creative Space mental health programme developed with local input
- Free online family digital engagement – Otherworld / Christmas etc
- Free Classical Christmas Concert
- 4 week Choral project with Chamber Choir Ireland
- 8 week climate project with local participants – Community Vaults
- Collaborative project on Homelessness with Young Ballymun
- A celebration of travelling culture developed with local travelling communities and released in aid of Traveller mental health.

Technical Production

- This is an area that we have invested in both in time and resources and now our in-house team are very adept in this arena and we have become an industry leader in the online space.
- Online gigs, Live Conversations, Streamed content, are just some of the event types that we have rolled out with more planned which makes us able serve audience with a variety of access needs and comfort levels in relation to in person v digital events.
- Axis has continued to upskill and now has the ability to produce quality in-house filmed productions. We have become an industry leader in this context

