

## **Encore Productions Residency Round Up - March 2019**

It's been lights, camera action for most of March as the cast set about improvising their way through the Mother Courage story. Having spent a while developing their characters, writing poetry all about their imagined 'back stories' and working on some of the physical characteristics of their roles – it was time to go wild!

The play itself has twelve scenes. We broke these down into smaller chunks and – without the aid of the safety net of 'the script', the actors made up their own dialogue on the fly – expressing all the anger, energy, hope, love and despair that the characters go through during the play. The lines they came up with were vivid and true. The physical solutions that they found for some of the action were at times athletic – even acrobatic, dancing, fighting, courting – they had clearly learned a lot from the physical workshops last month with Quintessence. The energy of the Royal Exchange Theatre Performance we had attended in Manchester was also a clear influence – so much movement and connection between the actors. All of this work was filmed. We then spent a week watching the playback on the big screen in An Tain Art Centre's Studio theatre. We made notes of the best lines and most interesting shapes and arrangements of actors. From this basis we can now begin to build the world of the play.

The actors are now delighted to have in their hands a 39 page script – the challenge of learning a script is always met with relish! We won't be sitting around for long though – we will be up and moving with the lines as soon as possible – seeing how they feel and flow. No doubt the script will evolve as we realise how much a character can say with a gesture or a silence – through movement or stillness. The process goes on!

In the middle of March we were delighted to attend a 'Constellation of Practice Day' at Rua Red – South Dublin Arts Centre. Here we joined actors and facilitators from many groups including Smashing Barriers, Equinox Theatre Company, Run of the Mill and Blue Diamond theatre company. All the actors participated in 2 hours of workshops, facilitated in turn by the leaders of all the groups represented and the facilitators took part in recorded group interviews that examined best practice, group philosophy and structure, relationships with other organisations and funding.

Back at An Táin Arts Centre, we had a treat for our imaginations in the form of an illustrated talk by Carol O'Neil who shared images and lore from all over the world – magical creatures from folk traditions old and new. The talk was informative and fun – we will be able to channel some of these creatures to help with the physicality of our performances – from powerful dragons to mischievous sprites!

Over the course of 4 workshops our actors have been sharing their skills and creativity with students from St Brigid's school – using games, exercises and roleplay to encourage confidence, communication and self-expression. The students from the school have had a great time and our actors have greatly enjoyed sharing what they have been learning with their old school!

March ended with a bang in the form of a performance and workshop by Belfast based physical theatre group 'Big Telly'. In their piece 'Freakshow', two actors brought to life a host of colourful characters from a real life travelling human circus in nineteenth century Northern Ireland. The show itself was daring, brave and profound. At times moving, at others bizarre. The audience were entertained and constantly surprised. Theatre on the edge. In the workshop, the two actors of Big Telly encouraged our actors to be brave both physically and emotionally and to be unafraid of expressing the raw thoughts and feelings that came to them in the moment. All this was done with a great sense of support and fun and we are definitely bigger bolder actors on account of our time with them! With a play like mother courage to put on – we need to be!