

# Tinderbox Legacy

## **2003 – 2006**

During this period Tinderbox began to take its current shape. Under new artistic leadership, the company appointed Northern Ireland's first full time Dramaturg, and changed its Outreach Director post from project-funded to permanent. The Joint Sectoral Dramaturgy Project began, with all of the established theatre companies taking the opportunity to develop their projects and processes away from the pressure of production.

Despite these initiatives, and a clutch of awards and nominations for *Revenge*, it was a difficult period for the company. A large deficit had been building up for some time and had to be addressed. Three new commissions awarded by the ACNI could not begin for lack of match funding, only two full productions were staged, and Tinderbox had to withdraw from a co-production with the Lyric of Damian Gorman's *1974*.

## **2006 – 2010**

The three strands of Tinderbox's operation took full effect during this period. Nine plays were produced, two of which opened on successive nights in Northern Ireland and the US. The Dramaturg worked with playwrights across the spectrum of development, introducing initiatives such as the Writers Lab and the Fireworks programmes. The Outreach Director focused on intercultural work - producing the spectacular *Bombay to Belfast* in 2007 – and then verbatim theatre. The Outreach, Dramaturgy and Production elements of the company worked together to develop and produce *Sleep Eat Party*, a play based on interviews with young men in contemporary Northern Ireland.

The period was initially challenging. Working hard to repay the remainder of its previous deficit, Tinderbox lost the opportunity to produce *Pumpgirl* in 2006 because match funding could not be guaranteed. To break the cycle of producing only one major show each year, a studio theatre production was created on a desperately small budget. This introduction of small-scale studio shows helped lift production output, and with careful and strategic use of a wider range of funding sources - and the exploration of some innovative ways of developing and producing shows - this period was among Tinderbox's most prolific and successful.

Two new sources of funding were used to create a strategic impact. The ACNI awarded Tinderbox a special commission for David Ireland's *Everything Between Us* and a grant to co-produce it with Solas Nua in Washington DC. A three-year grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for Tinderbox's proposed *New Stages* project created the opportunity to move things onto the next level.

Tinderbox continued to invest in the development of the theatre sector, playing a leading role in establishing the Pick 'n' Mix festival and creating production opportunities for emerging companies in the OMAC Studio Season, while still guiding the ACNI's highly successful Joint Sectoral Dramaturgy Project.

The Board of Directors, some of whom had been with the company since its formation in 1988, decided to step down and make way for new faces during 2008.

## **2010 – 2013**

During this period, the company continued to achieve success across the three strands of its artistic work. Six productions were staged. Three were presented in one day as the climax to the True North ensemble project. One toured in the UK, while another took place in a disused warehouse on the Castlereagh Road. Tinderbox became the first company to win both Stewart Parker Trust English language awards in the same year and also won the UK's most prestigious prize for new writing, the Meyer Whitworth Award.

What had enabled the company to increase its range of production opportunities - a new diversity of project funding sources and, crucially, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation New Stages grant – now helped to develop Tinderbox's ground-breaking Outreach activity. Grants from Belfast City Council and the Rayne Foundation and most importantly a major partnership with the Paul Hamlyn Foundation enabled the excellent Turning the Page and Revolution projects.

Changes in the company's commissioning policy made it possible to invest in the development of new ideas and emerging writers at an earlier stage. There was greater recognition of Tinderbox's unique approach to Dramaturgy, with Dramaturg Hanna Slattne invited to participate in several international initiatives as well as being the subject of regular academic research, and Artistic Director Michael Duke nominated for a Kenneth Tynan award for outstanding contribution to Dramaturgy in the UK.

The spectacular site-specific production Guidelines for a Long and Happy Life required the specialist skills of all three artistic staff and became the latest example of the three artistic strands of the company coming together in a major collaborative project.

The company's innovation in production methods - and its ability to create 'event' programming that would draw audiences in to see new writing – combined in the True North project in 2010. Creating Ireland's only new writing ensemble especially for the project, Tinderbox rehearsed three plays with one company of six actors, opening them on successive nights in Belfast, and playing the shows in rep to packed houses over a three-week run.

A key element of the company's work in 2010-2013 was exploring new, cost efficient models of creation and production. The True North New Writing Ensemble was followed by the Total Theatre experiment, which explored the value of an ensemble versatile enough to perform text-based and physical theatre, music, and contemporary dance.

But as the effects of the recession started to bite, charitable trusts that could normally have been relied on for project grants began turning down requests due to impossibly high demands. It has so far not been possible to tour Tinderbox's award-winning production Everything Between Us to London.

And while commitment to the theatre sector continued with the support and leadership of the Joint Sectoral Dramaturgy Project and the Pick and Mix festival, the attempt to find new routes to funding and production for emerging artists and companies was becoming an urgent necessity.

### **2013 – 2016**

Aiming to contribute to at least one route into the industry for new and emerging artists, Tinderbox began planning with the MAC and Prime Cut for a three-stage annual programme, which would culminate each year in a new season of emerging theatre. Work began in 2014, with a pilot Development Studio followed by a period of consultation with emerging artists, geared towards creating a strategy for the sector.

Meanwhile Tinderbox won a BBC Performing Arts Fellowship; welcoming emerging director JP Conaghan into the Tinderbox team helped to strengthen the company's understanding of how to best equip young artists for professional work in the future.

After some in-depth reflection about the way forward for Tinderbox's Outreach activity, the company approached the Paul Hamlyn Foundation again for a new three-year project. The success of this application opened up a new phase of community engagement and sectoral work for Tinderbox. The CONNECT project offered participants a new level of choice and access across four strands of activity, including the use of drama and performance in group advocacy. In one of its strands, CONNECT brought six of Northern Ireland's independent theatre companies together to jointly plan and deliver their production outreach programmes, which marked a new level of co-operation and skill sharing in the sector.

Tinderbox was established as an Associate Artist at the MAC, whose artistic team shared the aspiration to commission new writing for the main stage. The company had a run of four successful productions in the MAC studio theatre before Abbie Spallen's Lally the Scut brought Tinderbox and the MAC into an ambitious co-production. The epic contemporary satire required a twelve-strong cast and a spectacular design, but there was no doubt for either party that this was the play that had to be staged for Northern Irish audiences. Bringing together a company of the finest Northern Irish theatre actors, Lally the Scut was staged at the MAC in Spring 2015.

It was during rehearsals for the show that news arrived of a major cut in the Arts Council's grant to Tinderbox. It was a blow to the growth of the company and to the sector, which lost the JSDP and the Pick 'n' Mix festival in the same funding round.

Tinderbox was deluged with letters of support, local, national, and international, which helped the staff and board appreciate and identify what the impact of the work had been in recent years. Even before Lally the Scut had completed its main stage run, work began on how to survive - and create a model that would thrive - in an environment that was becoming increasingly hostile for the arts.

In the next few months, a new, agile, and versatile model for the company began to emerge. Rather than standing over reductions and managing dwindling resources, the team would make some radical changes to the company's structure and by doing so give Tinderbox the best chance of beginning a new era, as passionately and dynamically committed to its vision and values as ever.

## **2016-2019**

In 2016, Tinderbox introduced their new artistic vision and opened its doors for artists, participants, and audiences to engage with alternative theatre practices and methods. Tinderbox placed the individual as a central component to our programming, fuelling the ambition of every engagement to be empowered by their own creative potential. The form for exploration was denoted from Le Coq methodology of play and has become an incredibly important doorway for artists to create from their own unique imagination. The result of this change of direction has been incredibly successful with the creation of 10 shows receiving critical acclaim, sell out runs and nominations from national theatre awards.

Our training programmes grew each year with Play Machine growing in popularity and prestige with over 84 emerging artists engaging in discovering their unique forms of artistic creation. Our IN8 participatory programme allowed us to take our work and methodology to prison, colleges and community groups with Citi Bank sponsoring our Perception programme

in association with Arts and Business NI. In 2018-19 we premiered a range of productions to critical acclaim such as *Ubu The King*, *A Thought for your Pennies*, *The Man Who Fell To Pieces* and *Natural Disaster*, establishing Tinderbox's excellence in developing new writing and experimental theatre.

### **2019-2021**

Tinderbox Theatre Company actively responded to the Covid-19 pandemic with a host of online programmes, training initiatives and opportunities to continue thriving as an arts organisation. With various projects such as *Solo Art*, *Repose*, *Lucid*, *Play Machine* and the *Creativity in Motion* project Jan-March, Tinderbox actively trebled accessibility and participant engagement to their work and we have collaborated with over 200 artists through creative projects and artistic discussions. Tinderbox were also selected to be part of *Culture Re:set* programme and *Manifesto* with ArtHaus Berlin where we created the necessary space to reflect, re-imagine and re-invent our current practice and artistic output. It is through these discussions that we have been able to navigate a new direction for the mission of the company, a celebrated fusion of professional production, artist and participants training and engagement through the *Creativity in Motion* model. In 2021, we delivered E-Motion creative workshops and premiered two digital productions, *The Rise and Fall of Derek Bubble* and *Immaculate*, developed *Tragik Plastik* with the Tinderbox Ensemble, developed a new training programme called Playground and premiered a live site specific performance *Sylvan* in woodlands in Coleraine and Belfast over the Halloween season

## Major Achievements

### **2022**

*Birds of Passage in the Half Light* listed as best show in The Stage and The Skinny

### **2021 National Lottery Award**

Shortlisted - Patrick J O'Reilly, shortlisted in Community/Charity and Culture, Arts and Film categories

### **2021 ABTT Stephen Joseph Award**

Shortlisted - A Twenty-First Century Company

### **2021 Arts and Business NI**

Shortlisted - Most Creative Response/Adaptation to Pandemic

Shortlisted – Arts Board Member of the Year, Chair Stephen Beggs

### **2021 LGBTQ Unbordered Film Festival, Delaware**

Winner – *Immaculate*, Merit Award

### **2020 Arts & Business NI**

Winner - Creative workplace award

Shortlisted - New sponsor award

Shortlisted - Arts Innovator Award, Patrick J O'Reilly

Shortlisted - Arts Organisation of the year award

### **2019 ZeBBie Awards**

Nomination for best play; *The Man Who Fell to Pieces*

**2017 Arts and Business NI**

Winner - Arts Board Member of the Year, Chair David Gould

**2016 Kenneth Tynan Award for Dramaturgy**

Winner –Hanna Slattne

**2014 ZeBBie Awards**

Shortlisted – Abbie Spallen for Lally the Scut

**2014 Windham Campbell Prize**

WINNER - Abbie Spallen for Lally the Scut

**2014 ZeBBie Awards**

Shortlisted – David Ireland for Summertime

**2013 Irish Times Award**

Best Actor – Nomination – Ryan McParland as Isaac in Summertime

**2012 Kenneth Tynan Award**

Shortlisted – Michael Duke

**2012 Irish Times Theatre Awards – Best Lighting Design**

Shortlisted – Ciaran Bagnall for Guidelines for a Long and Happy Life

**2011 Meyer Whitworth Award**

WINNER – David Ireland for Everything Between Us

Shortlisted – Jimmy McAleavey for The Sign of the Whale

**2011 Stewart Parker Trust New Playwright Bursary**

WINNER – Jimmy McAleavey for The Sign of the Whale

**2011 Stewart Parker Trust BBC Radio Drama Award**

WINNER – David Ireland for Everything Between Us

**2010 Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queens Audience Award**

WINNER – God’s Country by Colin Bell

**2009 Stewart Parker Trust Awards**

Shortlisted – James Johnson for Choking the Butterfly

**2008 Susan Smith Blackburn Award**

SPECIAL COMMENDATION – Girls and Dolls by Lisa McGee

**2007 Stewart Parker Trust New Playwright Bursary**

WINNER – Lisa McGee for Girls and Dolls

**2007 Irish Times Theatre Awards – Best New Play**

Nominated – Girls and Dolls by Lisa McGee

**2005 Stewart Parker Trust Awards**

Shortlisted – Michael Duke for Revenge

**2005 Irish Times / ESB Theatre Awards – Best New Play**

Nominated – Revenge by Michael Duke

**2004 TMA UK Theatre Awards**

Best Supporting Actress – WINNER – Barbara Adair in Revenge

Best New Play – Nominated – Revenge by Michael Duke

**2003 Stewart Parker Trust New Playwright Bursary**

WINNER – Tim Loane for Caught Red Handed

**2003 Irish Times / ESB Theatre Awards**

Best New Play – WINNER – Caught Red Handed by Tim Loane

Best Actor – Nominated – Dan Gordon in Caught Red Handed

Best Supporting Actor – Nominated – Alan McKee in Caught Red Handed

**2000 Irish Times / ESB Theatre Awards**

Best production – WINNER – Convictions

Best Company – Nominated – Tinderbox Theatre Company

Best Design – Nominated – Houston Marshall for Convictions

**2000 Critics Pick of the Year**

Convictions – multi authored production staged in Crumlin Road Courthouse, Belfast

Chosen by BBC Radio 4 Front Row, BBC2 Review Programme, The Observer, The

Guardian, and the Sunday Tribune

**1999 Stewart Parker New Playwright Bursary**

WINNER – Joseph Crilly for Second Hand Thunder

**1999 Belfast Arts Awards**

Best Drama – WINNER – Northern Star by Stewart Parker

Best Partnership – WINNER – Co-production by Tinderbox and Field Day of Northern Star  
by Stewart Parker

**1998 Irish Times Theatre Awards**

Best Company – WINNER – Tinderbox Theatre Company

Best Lighting Design – WINNER – Conleth White for Northern Star

**1998 Arts Council of England / Meyer Whitworth Award**

WINNER – Daragh Carville for Language Roulette

**1997 TMA / Barclays UK Theatre Awards**

Best New Play – Nominated – Language Roulette by Daragh Carville

**1997 Stewart Parker Trust New Playwright Bursary**

WINNER – Daragh Carville for Language Roulette

**1994 Belfast Telegraph EMA Award for Best Production**

WINNER – Pentecost by Stewart Parker Awards

# Production Chronology

**October 2023** Rhino by Eugene Ionesco (adapted by Patrick J O'Reilly), Lyric Theatre Belfast

**June 2023** Dressed for Space by Patrick J O'Reilly at DakenDagen, Rotterdam

**March 2023** Something Different by Keith Singleton and Tinderbox, The Mac, Belfast

**August 2022** Birds of Passage in the Half Light by Kat Woods, Gilded Balloon and The Duncairn,

**October 2021** Sylvan, By Jonathan M Daley

**March 2021** Immaculate, By Louise Mathews, Feile an Earraigh 2021

**January 2021** The Rise and Fall of Derek Bubble (Patrick J O'Reilly)

**June 2020** Ignition 2020 'Lucid' (by Patrick J O'Reilly and the Play Machine Ensemble - year 3)

**October 2019** Engine programme. International collaboration with Manifesto Poetico, Belfast 1919

**August 2019** A Thought for your Pennies, By Daniel Kelly East Side Arts Festival

**May 2019** Ignition 2019 'The more I see, the less I know for sure' (by Patrick J O'Reilly and the Play Machine Ensemble - year 2)

**March 2019** Natural Disaster by Roisin Gallagher

**February 2019** Ubu the King (artist collaboration)

**October 2018** The Man Who Fell to Pieces (Patrick J O'Reilly)

**September 2018** Rossini: Hidden Extras (La Cambiale di Matrimonio) (co-production with NI Opera Studio)

**June 2018** Ignition 2018 'Insects' (by Patrick J O'Reilly and the Play Machine Ensemble - year 1)

**May 2018** Hubert and the Yes Sock (by Dan Leith)

**February 2018** The Man Who Fell to Pieces (Patrick J O'Reilly)

**June 2017** Ignition 2017 'Cuck' (by Eileen McClory and the company)

**May 2017** #filtered / Conscientia (by Sarah Lyle and Abby Oliveira)

**March 2017** Famla (John McCann)

**September 2016** What We're Made Of

Comprising:

History (Daragh Carville)

Hen (devised)

Hiatus (Jonathan Bailie, Ivor Martinic, John McCann,

Vedrana Klepica)

**June 2016** Ignition 2016 'What would we be if we weren't so afraid?' (Devised by Patrick J O'Reilly and Hanna Slättne)

**March 2016** The Virgin Father (Jimmy McAleavey)

**December 2015** All Through the House (Judith King)

**April 2015** Lally the Scut (Abbie Spallen)

**March 2015** One World (devised Outreach production)

**November 2014** Unhome (Jimmy McAleavey)

**March 2014** Sound Stories at SARC (various)

**December 2013** Human Rights Cabaret (various)

**November 2013** Summertime (David Ireland)  
**April 2013** Opening Doors devised Outreach production  
**February 2013** Planet Belfast (Rosemary Jenkinson)  
**November 2012** Swing State Cabaret 3 (various)  
**October 2012** Huzzies (Stacey Gregg)  
**February 2011** RJ's Leaving Day devised Outreach production  
**October 2011** Guidelines for a Long and Happy Life (Paul Kennedy)  
**May 2011** Everything Between Us (David Ireland) Tron Theatre, Glasgow  
**October 2010** TRUE NORTH Ensemble  
                   The Cleanroom (John McCann)  
                   God's Country (Colin Bell)  
                   Everything Between Us (David Ireland)  
**March 2010** The Sign of the Whale (Jimmy McAleavey)  
                   Everything Between Us (David Ireland) US Tour  
**October 2009** Sleep Eat Party (scripted by Damian Gorman)  
**April 2009** This Other City (Daragh Carville)  
**February 2009** The Virgin Father (Jimmy McAleavey)  
**November 2008** Swing State Cabaret 2 (various)  
**September 2008** Bruised (M Connolly, S Gregg, R Jenkinson, M Mc Manus)  
**June 2008** Choking the Butterfly (James Johnson)  
**October 2007** Duke of Hope (Conor Grimes & Alan McKee)  
**October 2006** Girls and Dolls (Lisa McGee)  
**March 2006** Chaat Masala devised Outreach Production  
**November 2005** Family Plot (Daragh Carville)  
**December 2004** Happenstance devised Outreach Production  
**November 2004** Swing State Cabaret by (various)  
**March 2004** Revenge (Michael Duke)  
**November 2003** Vote Vote Vote (various)  
**February 2003** The Chairs new adaptation by Owen McCafferty  
**October 2002** Massive (Maria Connolly)  
**February 2002** Caught Red Handed (Tim Loane)  
**October 2001** No Place Like Home (devised with text by Owen McCafferty)  
**November 2000** Convictions (D Carville, D Gorman, M Jones, M Lynch, N  
 McCartney, O McCafferty and G Mitchell)  
**April 2000** Ruby (Marie Jones)  
**February 2000** On McQuillan's Hill... (Joseph Crilly)  
**May 1999** The Green Shoot (Ian McElhinney)  
**May 1998** Second-Hand Thunder (Joseph Crilly)  
**January 1998** Into the Heartland (John McClelland)  
**October 1997** Dumped (Daragh Carville)  
**May 1996** Language Roulette (Daragh Carville)  
**March 1994** Galloping Buck Jones (Ken Bourke)  
**March 1993** Independent Voice (Gary Mitchell)  
**February 1991** This Love Thing (Marina Carr)  
**March 1990** Catchpenny Twist (Stewart Parker)  
**November 1989** Theatre of Paranoia (Miche Doherty) &  
                   Fingertips (Thomas McLaughlin)  
**April 1989** Triple Bill (Howard Brenton)



**November 1988** Stone (Edward Bond)

**June 1988** The Dumb Waiter & One for the Road (Harold Pinter) -  
(Presented as Theatre 101, pre-cursor to Tinderbox)