

DECLAN GORMAN
Arts & Events

Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall
Fingal County
Council



THE GREEN BELT ARTS INITIATIVE

MOMENTUM 2021 – THE STORY OF A UNIQUE FESTIVE EVENT CELEBRATING THE
PEOPLE AND PLACES OF RUSH & LUSK, COUNTY DUBLIN.



PROLOGUE: THE OUTCOME

- A 2-day festival of outdoor performances
- 25 performance sites across 10 square miles
- 60 volunteer performers
- 60 off-stage volunteers (stewards etc)
- 3 professional stage managers
- 1 professional guest artiste (Jed Murray)
- 1 lead artist (Declan Gorman)



Xs and Os: an original play by David O'Neill at the ruins of Kenure House, Rush

ACT 1: AN IDEA TAKES HOLD

- In 2019, Declan Gorman is awarded a Public Art commission by Fingal County Council to collaborate with individuals and groups in the East Fingal area towards a series of site-specific performances that will celebrate the unique landscapes, seascapes and social culture of this distinct region.

The Fingal motto is “Abundance of Land and Sea”



In 2020, after a year of approaches to potential partners and a narrowing of focus to a realistic geographic and demographic spread, a callout is issued.

When the first Covid Lockdown lifts, a public meeting proceeds at the Millbank Theatre, home of one key strategic partner, Rush Dramatic Society.

Two weeks later, the nation is placed on Level 5 restrictions, and the project moves online for the time being.

The image shows a slide for 'THE GREEN BELT' initiative. At the top, the title 'THE GREEN BELT' is displayed in large, bold, yellow capital letters. Below it, the subtitle 'a community theatre initiative for Rush and Lusk' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The background of the slide is a photograph of a lush green field of tall grass. In the foreground, there is a white rectangular box containing text. Inside this box, the text reads 'FOR MORE INFO or to JOIN UP: e-mail manager@millbanktheatre.ie'. Above this text, there are three small rectangular logos: 'Declan Gorman Arts & Events' (orange), 'Caroline Cowley Fingal County Council' (purple), and 'Millbank THEATRE' (blue).

Above: Callout on Social Media



Left: Caroline Cowley, Public Art Officer with Fingal County Council, addresses the public meeting.

From September 2020 to June 2021, weekly or fortnightly workshops take place on Zoom, initially in focus groups of six (including Declan) and eventually as a full group of 16.

The participants range in age from 18 to 70. Some have experience of drama or creative writing, many have neither.

A new community is formed through fun games, shared ideals and collective creative endeavour.



The work begins to take shape under three strands, with participants electing to specialise in one or more of these areas:

RESEARCH: Oral history / Interviewing of living members of the community, including new migrants / local topography and industry (mainly horticulture and fishing / trends in commuting etc

DRAMA IMPROVISATION: In small breakout rooms, improvising imagined scenes across a 50-year timeline in East Fingal, based loosely on research

CREATIVE WRITING: Overlaying the historical/geographical maps with fictional stories and poems: re-imagining Fingal East



X's and O's
A play by David O'Neill

August 2000. Elaine (32) is standing between two of the portico pillars. Her child, Ava (4), off, is crouched down to look at something. It is dusk.

Elaine: What's that? Eh? What have you got there? No, Ava. No. Dirty.

Elaine walks the perimeter of the Portico, looking over her shoulder to Ava to make sure she is safe.

Elaine: It's getting dark, Ava. Bedtime soon, eh. That will be nice. I know it's cold. Come on. You're okay. Your Dad will be here soon.

Mark (30) approaches the Portico

Mark: There's my little girl. Hello princess.

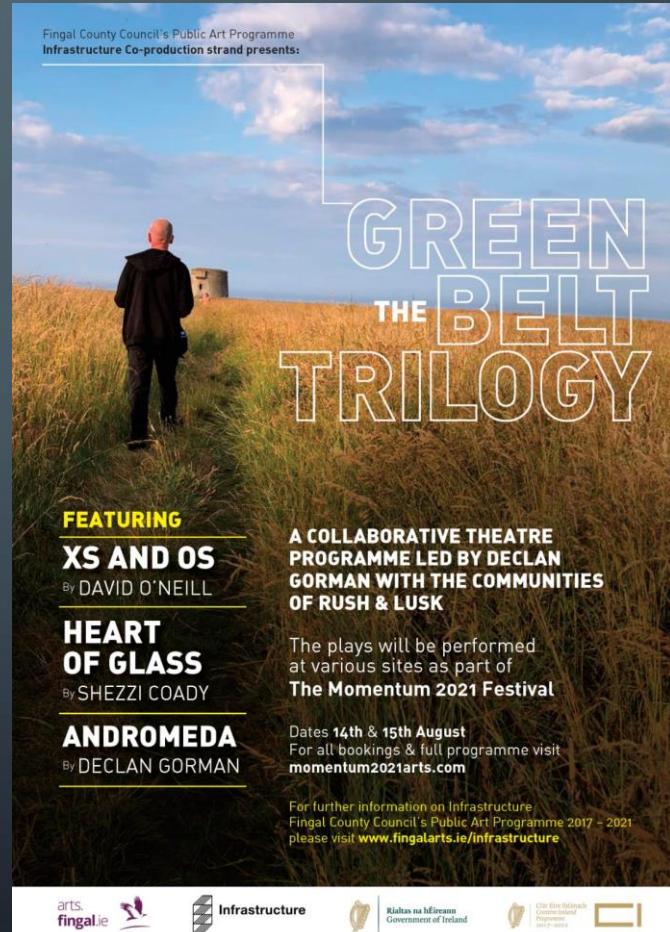
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ACT 2: BUILD UP TO THE EVENT

- In February 2021, we determined to undertake 2 overlapping projects:
- A 2-day festival of diverse short performances, interventions and ancillary community arts events
- At the heart of this festival, a Trilogy of longer plays (20 – 30 mins) along a 5KM hike from Drumanagh Promontory to Kenure Demesne
- Additional funding was secured from Creative Fingal



We had less than just over 2 months from the lifting of restrictions to the event itself in August.

A team of 3 professional production workers under Production Manager Christina Matthews came on board.

Serious event planning proceeded, from Covid safety to Garda vetting to site inspections.

Auditions went ahead. Nobody who came forward was declined a part. We kept writing more and more to accommodate all.



Rehearsals took place on a rolling basis over the final 3 weeks, in the Millbank Theatre, various halls in Lusk and Rush and onsite.

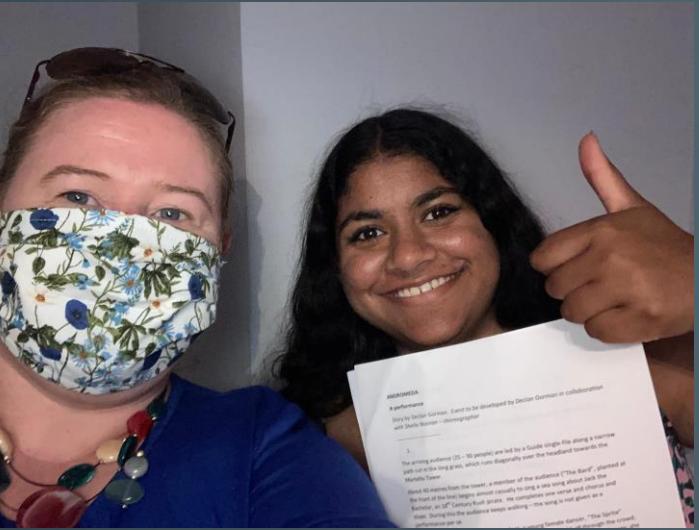


Left: Declan Gorman directs Green Belt core group member Ailbhe in her self-written monologue

Centre: Mayor of Fingal Cllr Seána Ó Rodaigh launches the festival. Teenage dancer/choreographer Sheilagh enjoys a break from rehearsal



Above: Production team members enjoy a frolic during a site inspection at Lusk



ACT 3: MOMENTUM 2021



In spite of poor weather forecast, the morning events of Saturday 14th August go ahead:

At the Sports Hub in Lusk, Grasshoppers Early Years – a mini-festival within a festival – is opened to an audience of Under-5s and their families

Meanwhile at Rush Athletic Football Club, a short first play by Green Belt participant and local sports coach Shay Dempsey, aimed at family audiences, celebrates the life and achievements of “Rush lad” Con Martin (1923-2013). An international soccer star and legend, Con was denied a Leinster GAA medal for 30 years at the time of the ban on foreign games.



AFTERNOON STREET PERFORMANCES

- Saturday afternoon is cancelled due to storm forecast, but extra performances are scheduled for Sunday. Twelve months of research, writing and try-outs by the Green Belt Arts Initiative finally reach fruition. In two towns, 6KM apart, small audiences set out at 20-minute intervals, on town centre strolls to witness an artistic re-imagining of the past 100 years of life in the very streets they are now walking.





Lusk 2014: Revolutionary hero Thomas Ashe addresses the village people, urging them to take up arms against the British Empire. Just along the street, Annie, widow of Jack (Rover) McCann who took up Ashe's invitation, reflects on his brutal murder by British Black and Tan forces seven years later in 1921.



Twenty years later, RIC widow
Kathleen rests at the same spot. A
“blow-in” from Cavan, nobody in
Lusk knows her story – nor ever will.

1986: Kathleen is still alive and being minded by her loving grandson, Nick – the only lad of his peer group to have found work at home in the recession. Kathleen has kept her painful secret. Nick has no idea his grandfather was an RIC man.



Women's Stories



Left: 1941 – In Ailbhe Noonan’s piece, teacher Miss Kelly leaves Lusk National School for the last time. She is due to be married and under Irish law, must give up her job to become a full time housewife

Centre: 1954 – her cousin Constance is tipped to be the first Irish female judge since the Revolution. She takes her kids to Katie Hunt’s sweetshop to celebrate. We learn later she was passed over. The first female judge of the Irish Free State was not appointed until 1962

Right: 1971 - Miss Kelly’s daughter Julie bemoans the absence of a supermarket in Lusk. Like her mother, she has been compelled to give up her job in the bank upon marriage. But, inspired by the ‘Contraceptive Train’ which she witnessed hurtling through the local station, Julie is expressing her feminist desire for a better life for women in Lusk and Ireland.



MEANWHILE, 6KM AWAY, IN RUSH:

“John” our mythical, Eternal Actor opens and closes the town walkabout, initially in a comic scene imagining the chaotic origins of Rush Dramatic Society in 1927. The Dramatic Society have been at the cultural coalface of the town ever since.

In a moving epilogue, “John” in 2021, commends the child actors of both Rush and Lusk who will keep the theatrical flame burning; remembers recently deceased elders of the Society and recites from Samuel Beckett’s prescient early work “Fingal” (1934), in which a free-spirited young man looks across from Portrane Lunatic Asylum at the beaches and small houses of Rush.





In Rush, as in nearby Lusk, we move over and back in time, from children playing in 1932 at the old Mill tower; Teasie who “never married”, on the day of the closure of her shop in 1938 and Miss Timmins dealing hilariously with the communications challenge of a school nits outbreak in 1957; to doleful Dolores, an obsessive Johnny Logan fan, reflecting on life and love outside the old and new Catholic chapels. in the great Eurovision years of 1981 and 1992.



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Fictional but familiar: Luke, the pot boy at Kenure House describes a workplace humiliation. A generation later, his son Terry who never knew him exchanges banter with his Polish employee Alex. Luke's widow, Molly rests on her way home from winkle-picking by the shore, where

she has found shards of a vase she once gifted to her friend Annie, who, as we have already learned, flung it in anger at her drunken husband!





spouse Noirín have a row about cakes as they prepare for a meeting. They are nonetheless at important work, establishing a community development group. Children of Lusk Creative School lead the audience in an exercise to “close your eyes and picture Lusk in 20 years”, and “share what you see”. The children end by inviting the audience to visit an exhibition by Lusk Heritage Group in the new school hall.

BACK IN LUSK
Comedy and pathos blend, as 1950s farmer Albert hints that he will bequeath the family farm to unorthodox daughter Jackie rather than his son Seamus: Jimmy-Joe and

THE GREEN BELT TRILOGY

AS EVENING FALLS, AUDIENCES OF 50 AT A TIME ASSEMBLE AT A CENTRAL POINT AND ARE LED OFF IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS ALONG A 5KM HIKE TO ENJOY 3 SHORT ORIGINAL PLAYS.

XS AND OS



HEART OF GLASS



ANDROMEDA





David O'Neill is a published short story writer. In this, his first play, Xs and Os, he has a young couple meet under the ruins of the Kenure portico to discuss their defunct relationship, while 'ghosts' of the recent past of the house in decay pass through. A powerful meditation on how the architectural and social changes of a place affect human lives.





First time playwright Shezzi Coady wrote about three young working class girls on the evening before the Live Aid concert, contrasting their dreams of pop bands with the rough reality of working for a lewd male boss in a hot, sweaty glasshouse. Their clothes are covered in “green tomato cack”, but these are savvy and strong young women, looking out for one another, aware their world is changing.





Declan Gorman's "Andromeda", combines myth and realism. Young fishing apprentice Andrea comes to ancient Drumanagh where ghosts of Roman traders and warlike Vikings hover. She is welcomed by a modern bard and two dancing Echoes. Andrea/Andromeda signs her story, assisted the The Bard and the dancers who interpret her tale for the hearing audience. Her boat capsized and she was lost at sea before being washed onto a rock, where she was imprisoned by sea anenome. Rescued in a catatonic state, she was airlifted to Beaumont and survived, but "changed". Now she lives as a star in the sky looking down over the fields, sea, islands "and all the good people" of Fingal.

WHAT WAS ACHIEVED?

- Friendships formed, and bonds forged through online collective artistic practice during a time of social isolation, have lasted.
- 120 volunteers and several hundred audience members (in spite of numbers restrictions) took active part in the weekend events, as a small creative seed grew into something quite huge.
- Through research, creativity and performance, the familiar streets, beaches, farmlands & glasshouses; the environment and social geography, were considered and re-lived anew.

