

Press release for immediate use

Big Telly Theatre Company to premiere *Department Story* at Belfast International Arts Festival 2021

Pioneers of immersive, site-specific theatre production, [Big Telly Theatre Company](#) are set to present the world premiere of *Department Story* as part of this year's **Belfast International Arts Festival**. This new production created for both in-person and digital audiences by Big Telly Theatre's **Artistic Director Zoe Seaton** and interdisciplinary artist **Jack Hardiker** runs from **20 – 31 October 2021**.

It's time to tell a different story...

Having developed a well-established and respected reputation over the last 30 years for innovation and accessibility, Northern Ireland's Big Telly Theatre have earned world-leading status in live digital theatre production over the course of the pandemic. The company has produced innovative, boundary breaking works during lockdown including; *Macbeth*, *Incognito* and *Dear World*. Following a year of hijacking audiences' homes with virtual mayhem, the company are back and are going hybrid with *Department Story*, a heady mix of the live and the digital. A unique experience where a digital audience can collude with a physical one and be part of a real-world experience in a way that has never been done before.

Department Story is a site-specific production set in empty retail units in Belfast's City Centre which smashes together flash theatre and physical fiction in a killer spree through a department of stories, where everything returned has a tale to tell - a talking toaster, a dress with a past, accessories after the fact. Browse through classic brands like Gogol or take a punt on our new collection of global writers. Take stock, grab your shopping list and be sure to ask the staff (?) for help. But of course, this is no ordinary Department Store. Customers *have* choice but alongside choice comes great responsibility and before long there are decisions to be made. When the in-store shoppers end up with more than they bargained for, their fate lies with those online - but can they deliver?

The new production is also a testbed for **Remote Control**, a transformative white label platform which revolutionises digital audience engagement, maximising the potential of a unique relationship between physical and remote (digital) live audiences. Developed with London based creative studio [afew](#), the new platform offers digital audiences as much interactivity and quality as the physical audience, by presenting both groups complementary experiences of equal value. Remote audiences will have a different perspective, be given different information and have digital influence through IOT (Internet of Things) and CCTV, being able to speak directly to physical audiences and live actors through the show, influencing the route, action and outcome remotely.

The development of Remote Control reflects Big Telly Theatre's belief that now is the time to combine their previous success in reaching communities and creating work outside traditional arts spaces with recent success in digital innovation. The company firmly believe the new platform represents a genuinely unprecedented opportunity to finally redress the inequality of professional arts provision across Northern Ireland. It will lead to a reduction in isolation, redefine the sense of community on both an individual and communal level, help individuals better and more emotionally respond to the town they live in and also on a more global sense be part of a wider community, and joy, it will create a lot of joy.

Zoe Seaton, Artistic Director of Big Telly Theatre Company said: "I couldn't be more excited about *Department Story*. It feels like it's the coming together of projects in shops like Worst Café, with the theatricality of something like Melmoth the Wanderer or

Faerie Thorn and the digital wizardry we've explored throughout lockdown. The creatives are a dream team and the cast couldn't be more charismatic. This is our first major collaboration with Jack Hardiker who really does 'tell better stories with art and technology' – Department Story is full of amazing stories, beautiful visuals and the most special of effects”.

“I just can't wait. One of the most exciting things about it, there are many, is that we're launching a unique platform called Remote Control, which will enable digital audiences to play a part in and actually influence the live show. Always at our best when we're breaking new ground and throwing away the rule book, projects like Department Story are why we do what we do”.

Jack Hardiker said: "For a number of years I have been exploring ways to improve access to the arts using ubiquitous technologies such as phones and computers. Covid-19 has accelerated this objective. Big Telly Theatre Company has done incredible work through the pandemic, developing Zoom shows entirely remotely. As the world opens back up again, we have the opportunity to explore new, hybrid models for performance. We now have an opportunity to help define an exciting new chapter for theatre and the arts. I'm thrilled to have brought together a talented team of designers and developers in the creation of Remote Control.”

Department Story is presented as part of Belfast International Arts Festival and runs from 20th October – 31st October 2021 online and in-person. To book visit – <https://belfastinternationalartsfestival.com/event/department-story/>

ENDS/

Press enquiries

For press enquires including image, interview and review requests please contact Magda Paduch | The Corner Shop PR | magda@thecornershoppr.com | 0758 316 4070

IMAGES AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

LISTING INFORMATION

Title: Department Story by Big Telly Theatre Company

Location: a secret location in the city centre of Belfast & online

Dates: 20th October – 31st October 2021

Time: Wednesdays and Thursdays 8.30pm, Fridays and Saturdays 6pm & 8.30pm, Sundays 6pm.

Ticket Price: In-Store Shoppers: £16 (£14 concession). Online Shoppers: £15 (per device)

Booking: <https://belfastinternationalartsfestival.com/event/department-story/>

CAST

Chris Robinson

Nicky Harley

Cillian Lenaghan

Laura Hughes

Niamh McGrath

CREATIVES

Zoë Seaton – Director

Jack Hardiker - Creative and Technical Director

Euan Wilcox (afew) - Web Development

Max Shearer (afew) - Web Development

Jo Portus - Infrastructure Development

Felix Luke – Visual Designer (Remote Control)

Stage Management - Sinead Owens and Megan Joyce

Production Management - Daniel Hoole

Composer - Garth McConaghie

Designer - Ryan Dawson Laight

Design Assistant - Elliot Squire

Movement Assistant - Bryan Burroughs

LX Technician - **TBC**

Producer - Big Telly Theatre Company

Intern - **TBC**

NOTES TO EDITORS

Big Telly Theatre Company

We design professional theatre productions, site specific, immersive games and participatory community driven projects, throughout Northern Ireland and internationally. With work spanning over 30 years, the company has a reputation for innovation and accessibility. We work across sectors, using arts to deliver objectives for health, education, heritage, tourism, economic development, social development, rural development and town and city regeneration. As a company, we seek to innovate how and where culture is made and performed and how theatre can be used as a tool to regenerate and serve the community to create long term impact. Our work is multi-platform and cross sectoral, fueled by a belief in the intrinsic value of arts practice and its potential to deliver a range of educational, economic and social outcomes. Influences in our work to date include, gaming and escape rooms, computer hacking, burner phones, AI, AR, emotional computing and binaural sound.

<https://big-telly.com/>

afew

afew specialise in making innovative digital experiences for the web. A full stack creative studio based in London; they take online projects from the planning stage all the way through to delivery using the latest web technologies. They are a founding member of The Vigilante Group (<https://vigilante.group>), a newly-formed collective of creative businesses.

<https://afew.london/>

Zoë Seaton

Zoë Seaton is founder and Artistic Director of Big Telly Theatre Company. In July 2018, Zoe was awarded an honorary Doctorate from Ulster University for her contribution and commitment to the dramatic arts in Northern Ireland. She has also devised and directed several pieces of interactive game theatre, including A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest for Creation Theatre in Oxford. Since March 2020, Big Telly have been transforming their entire program onto digital platforms and have created five brand new pieces of immersive work, in isolation for live audiences - reaching over 10,000 people in 25 different countries and receiving international acclaim from NY Times, The Guardian, The Financial Times, and many more. Other digital projects include issue-based forum-style theatre and live entertainment interwoven into virtual conferences and forum. Heritage projects include several audio pieces, a series of miniature art installations for shops called Trade Secrets, and an app called Echoes of the Causeway, which was launched in March 2020. Zoe is just about to launch INCOGNITO - a fragmented reality experience hosted on a mobile app, played in towns/cities, which is a cross between live theatre and a multiplayer game.

Jack Hardiker

Jack Hardiker is an interdisciplinary artist, designer and technologist. He works with both established and emergent creative techniques to tell important stories in playful, memorable, and unexpected ways. Jack's collaborative practice employs web/app design, non-linear storytelling/film, physical computing, AI, VR, AR, projection, spatial audio, and installation design. He is currently working with a number of arts organisations and theatre companies in exploring ways to engage new audiences using technology. Jack also lectures in immersive media, user experience design and creative technology at the Royal College of Art and UAL. Jack has led the design and development of Remote Control.

<https://jackhardiker.com/>