

Press release for immediate use – Wednesday 13 October 2021

Leading writers lend their stories to Big Telly Theatre's *Department Story*



Contributing writers; Cathy Carson, Roisín O'Donnell and Jan Carson

IMAGES AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

Three leading female writers, **Jan Carson**, **Cathy Carson** and **Roisín O'Donnell** have lent their tales to ***Department Story***, the latest theatre production by **Big Telly Theatre Company** which premieres next week (20th October) as part of **Belfast International Arts Festival**.

The dark comedy takes audiences, digital and in-person through an immersive shopping experience they're not likely to forget, or escape. Sited in a vacant retail unit on Belfast's Royal Avenue, shoppers are welcomed instore by an overly enthusiastic team of staff who are only *too* happy to help. But it's not long before things take a sinister twist: the shop is closing, forever.

Department Story smashes together flash theatre and physical fiction in a killer comedic spree through a department of stories, where everything returned has a tale to tell - a talking toaster, a dress with a past, a tight-lipped Hoover who may well be a key witness - accessories after the fact. Browse through classic brands like Gogol's Overcoat or take a punt on the latest must have tales as contributed by acclaimed writers Jan Carson, Cathy Carson and Roisín O'Donnell. The hunt for bargains shifts to a hunt for escape, as stories lament the perils of our relentless desire to bag the perfect life, as in-store shoppers end up with more than they bargained for, their fate lies with those shopping online - but can they deliver?

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 demonstrates next level hybrid theatre made possible by the newly created **Remote Control**. The transformative white label platform 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.

The development of Remote Control reflects Big Telly Theatre's combined 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, and to continue to fight to ensure theatre is as accessible as possible, either online or in-person.

Zoe Seaton, Artistic Director of Big Telly Theatre Company said: "Department Story is full of twists and turns and tales of the unexpected. It stocks the old, the new and the borrowed. Jan, Roisin and Cathy have contributed not only beautiful words, but bold and deeply human characters, who we are delighted to bring to life in this new-fangled world of ours."

Roisín O'Donnell said: "I was immediately taken by the idea of a Department Story. I think for all of us, objects act as such powerful repositories of story. I love the idea of a veil, a toaster, a pair of red shoes as a type of teleporter. A trapdoor into the quicksand of the past."

Jan Carson said: "It's always exciting to see how fellow artists explore and interpret your work. I was delighted to have Big Telly bring a new lease of life to one of my Postcard Stories and am looking forward to seeing what magic they breathed into my words."

Cathy Carson said: "It's a real thrill to work with such an innovative creative group of people dedicated to pushing the corners of performance and audience experience. I really enjoyed the challenge of taking a character who could be everyone and anyone and exploring how they would react when all the buttons have been pushed."

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 Kate Bouchier-Hayes | The Corner Shop PR | kate@thecornershoppr.com | 078 2533 5489

Press night takes place online and in person at **8:30pm on Thursday 21st October**. For press tickets please contact Kate Bouchier-Hayes

IMAGES AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

LISTING INFORMATION

Title: Department Story by Big Telly Theatre Company

Location: Royal Avenue, 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

Choreographer - Sarah Johnston

LX Technician - Ross McDade

Producer - Big Telly Theatre Company

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/>