



in conversation with Zoe Seaton of Big Telly

On Tuesday the 3rd of November, we had the privilege to chat with Zoe Seaton, Artistic Director of Big Telly Theatre Company.

How it all started.

Raised in Portstewart, Zoe's interest began at the Riverside Theatre, here she was in the cast of 'Oliver!' in 1978, along with actor James Nesbitt and BBC NI presenter Mark Carruthers. It was through that production Seaton and her friends developed an appetite to develop their understanding of theatre. Consequently, with the support of Jeremy Lewis (Riverside's Artistic Director), her Mother and the Arts Council NI, the Riverside Youth Theatre was founded and granted these young people an opportunity to gain experience in their art form.

Whilst enjoying acting, Zoe slowly found her interest to be moving to directing and creating theatre. As she applied for University, she found a course in Kent that allowed her to explore this avenue more and gained experience in directing throughout her time there.

When she graduated, she found that her and a number of her course mates wanted to set up their own company and mount new work. From there, Zoe called the director of Flowerfield Arts Centre and asked if there was potential for them to host a theatre company there. The answer was a resounding yes and in 1987, Big Telly Theatre Company was formed.

Staging the 'impossible'

Since then Big Telly has carved out quite the reputation for staging inventive and daring productions, these have ranged from the 'water theatre' tours of The Little Mermaid and Sinbad, to The Picture of Dorian Gray and an adaptation of Spike Milligan's 'Puckoon'. Alongside this, they operate various community arts projects that seek to develop the creative talent in local areas.



When asked about their wide-ranging portfolio of work, Zoe states that *'we are particularly interested in Irish material, and with that we love the opportunity to be as visually and theatrically ambitious as possible'*. She goes on to say that many writers will cut out challenging scenes, but Zoe is the opposite, adding that she *'want plays with car chases and storms – I want plays that are impossible to stage'*.

Gulliver

She goes on to say, that this philosophy of theatre-making, is central to their adaptation of 'Gulliver's Travels'. Swift's original novel is full of sweeping landscapes, changes in scenery and incredible characters, and Zoe felt that it could be considered 'impossible' to stage, a challenge she readily took on.



From there, Seaton and her co-writer Shelly Atkinson re-read the novel, and in doing so, they found themselves drawn to the question: '*what is it like to have a stranger in your home?*' She adds that in the novel, Gulliver has only spent 9 months at home in 25 years and, as a result, Big Telly wanted to explore Gulliver's return home from his adventures, and explore the affect this would have on the family he left behind. However, it is clear that whilst this production could be considered a 'sequel' of sorts, it is faithful to the original novel and Big Telly exemplify this by staging many of Gulliver's adventures found in Swift's text.

Having completed a run in Belfast, and toured in England, the play has been receiving great reviews, being noted for its daring staging and comedic brilliance. Described by one reviewer as '*absolutely unlike anything I've ever seen before*' the production promises to be quite an experience for the audience! Seaton seemingly revels in this idea, and when asked to describe '*Gulliver*' in three words, she returns to their original tag-line:

'uproarious, outrageous and unexpected'.

So, why not come along on Thursday 12th November at 8pm to see this wonderful production from a fantastic theatre company?

Call us on 02870124430 or book online at:

<https://tickets.riversidetheatre.org.uk/default.aspx>.

Finally, to find out more about Big Telly's work go to www.big-telly.com, like them on Facebook or follow them on Twitter (@BigTellyNI).