



CallBack theatre Presents

THE ROBINSON EXPERIMENT

By John Sheehy

PREMIERES

The Schoolyard Theatre

SEPTEMBER 15TH - 21ST 2025

THE ROBINSON EXPERIMENT

BY JOHN SHEEHY

DIRECTED BY **JOHN SHEEHY**

PRODUCED BY **CORA FENTON**

CAST

CORA FENTON | Biddy/Mrs. Pat

ELEANOR O'BRIEN | Beibh Barry

BEN WADDELL | James Barry

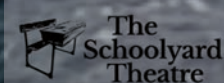
JACK HEALY | Pat/Priest/Seán

CORMAC COSTELLO | Peter Robinson/
Mac/WB/Sailor

SETTING

The Robinson Experiment explores the emotional journey of a North Cork family preparing to emigrate to Canada in the 1820's under the British Peter Robinson resettlement scheme.

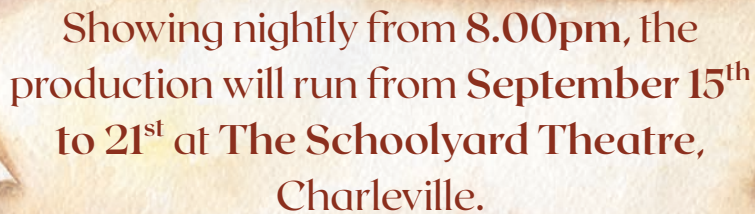
The Schoolyard Theatre
SEPTEMBER 15TH - 21ST 2025



Performance Details

The Robinson Experiment – A Powerful New Play
Premieres at The Schoolyard Theatre, Charleville

As part of the Ballyhoura Region's 200-year commemoration of the Peter Robinson settlers, **CallBack theatre** proudly presents ***The Robinson Experiment***, a newly commissioned play that brings to life one of the most poignant chapters in Irish-Canadian history.

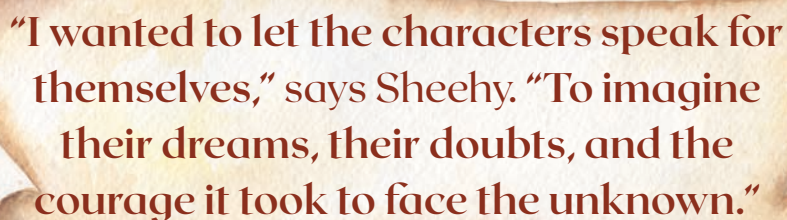


Showing nightly from 8.00pm, the
production will run from September 15th
to 21st at The Schoolyard Theatre,
Charleville.

Written and directed by acclaimed playwright John Sheehy and produced by Cora Fenton, ***The Robinson Experiment*** explores the emotional journey of a Munster family preparing to emigrate to Canada in the 1820s under the British Government's Peter Robinson resettlement scheme.

This initiative, which predated the Great Famine by two decades, saw over 500 families from North Cork, Southeast Limerick, and the Ballyhoura Region set sail from Cove of Cork (Cobh) to begin anew in Canada.

CallBack theatre, founded in 2001 by Sheehy and Fenton, has earned national acclaim for its emotionally resonant and thought-provoking productions. With *The Robinson Experiment*, the company continues its tradition of excellence, supported once again by **Ballyhoura Development**, whose long-standing commitment to the arts has helped bring local stories to national stages.



“I wanted to let the characters speak for themselves,” says Sheehy. “To imagine their dreams, their doubts, and the courage it took to face the unknown.”

The play is a centrepiece of a weeklong programme of events commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Peter Robinson settlers. Over 150 international visitors—descendants of those early emigrants— have travelled to the Ballyhoura Region to reconnect with their roots and honour their ancestors’ legacy.

CallBack theatre would like to sincerely thank: Ballyhoura Development for conceiving and supporting this production. Thank you Amanda Slattery for being with us from the beginning.

A special mention to Sheila, Jimmy and Mark and all at the Schoolyard Theatre for the wonderful hospitality and welcome given to us throughout rehearsals and performances.

Thank you to all the sponsors of this production as well as to Ger Fitzgibbon, Sinead O’Riordan, Caoimhe Reidy and John Tierney.

Welcome to The Schoolyard Theatre



Board of Directors: (L-R) Liam McCarthy, Michael Biggane, Sheila Quealey, Jimmy Woulfe, Mark Sheehan, Eddie O'Shea.

The Schoolyard Theatre was founded in 1993 in the old schoolhouse on the Old Limerick Road in Charleville. The building was originally built as the national school in 1833 and it opened its classrooms to both boys and girls in 1837.

32 years old this year, The Schoolyard Theatre continues to offer the best of drama, music, comedy and movies. The Shoestring Theatre troupe, the anchor group in the theatre, has been entertaining the community for decades with a wide range of plays.

Today the theatre continues to thrive as a community hub and the expanded programme is led by a volunteer board of directors and a dedicated group of local volunteers.

In addition to the cultural programme the board are dedicated to preserving this old beauty of a building and ensuring that it lives on well into the future.

Come and experience the magic of theatre with us!

**AUTUMN
PROGRAMME**



CREDITS

Cast in Order of Appearance

<i>Biddy/Mrs Pat</i>	Cora Fenton
<i>Beibh Barry</i>	Eleanor O'Brien
<i>James Barry</i>	Ben Waddell
<i>Pat/Priest/Seán</i>	Jack Healy
<i>Peter Robinson/Mac/WB/Sailor</i>	Cormac Costello

Production Team

<i>Director</i>	John Sheehy
<i>Producer</i>	Cora Fenton
<i>Costume Design</i>	Jean McGlynn
<i>Lighting Design</i>	Pius McGrath
<i>Set Design</i>	Olan Wrynn
<i>Sound Design</i>	Martin Corcoran
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Sarah McDonagh

Photography & Videography

Brian O'Keeffe

The Schoolyard Theatre

<i>Mark Sheehan (Chairperson)</i>	<i>Jimmy Woulfe</i>
<i>Sheila Quealey (Secretary)</i>	<i>Michael Biggane</i>
<i>Liam McCarthy (Treasurer)</i>	<i>Eddie O'Shea</i>

CAST & CREATIVES

John Sheehy

Writer/ Director



John works extensively as a writer and director and is co-founder of CallBack theatre.

His plays to date include the acclaimed *Set in Stone*, *Fred & Alice*, *Men Without Souls*, *The Hole*, *Dog Shit City* and *Janey Dillis*.

John has also adapted some of his plays for radio, winning a PPI National Radio Bronze medal for drama with *Fred & Alice*. John has previously been awarded Theatre Artist in Residence for 2

years in Friars' Gate Theatre by The Arts Council. John has written a new play called *Deca Deca Dory* which he hopes will go into production next year.

John has also worked as a mentor to upcoming and established writers and regularly facilitates writing workshops. As well as writing, he works as a director and as Project Manager for CallBack's touring plays.

Cora Fenton

Producer & Biddy/ Mrs Pat



From Kilmallock, Co. Limerick, Cora works as both an actor and producer with CallBack theatre, and is delighted to be producing *The Robinson Experiment*.

Her recent theatre highlights include *Rapunzel and Aladdin* (The Lime Tree Theatre), the premiere of *The Red Army*, and ongoing tours of CallBack's *Fred & Alice* and *Janey Dillis* by John Sheehy.

Other stage credits include *Tenebrae* (Ger Fitzgibbon), *Punk Rock* (Simon Stephens), *Arsehammers & Bonfire Night* (Claire Dowie), *Mary Motorhead* (Mark O'Halloran, PPI National Radio Award), *Playhouse Creatures* (Empire Line), *Where in the World is Frank Sparrow* and *After Dark* (Graffiti), *Set in Stone* and *Men Without Souls* (CallBack), *End Game* (Blue Raincoat) and *Lovers* (Everyman, Cork).

Film/TV credits include: *Swing Bout*, *Glitterbug*, the multi-award-winning *The White Horse*, *Eipidéim* (TG4), *Widows of the Revolution* (RTÉ), *Cogadh ar Mhna* (TG4/RTÉ), *On the Hemline* (RTÉ), *The Young Offenders*, *Deception* (TV3), *Loving Miss Hatto* (BBC), *Torment* (October Eleven), *Sucking Diesel*, *Dead Along the Way*, *Pat*, *Most of the Time*, and various sketches with CCCHoots.

Eleanor O'Brien



Eleanor O'Brien has built an impressive career across film, TV, and theatre. Recent screen credits include her lead role in *Báite* (Danú Media/TG4) - for which she was nominated for the Bingham Ray New Talent Award at the 2025 Galway Film Fleadh - and the short film *Claonadh*, set to screen at the GAZE Film Festival later this year.

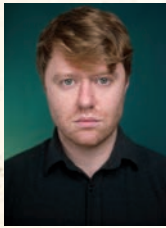
She has also appeared in *The Wonder* (Netflix), Disney's

Disenchanted, *Lynley* (BBC), *Foundation* (Apple TV), and the recurring role of Emily Blast in *Blasts From the Past* (Firebrand Productions).

On stage, Eleanor has led productions at the Lime Tree Theatre and performed in innovative site-specific works including, *Rising and Waiting for Poirot*. Trained at Bow Street Academy, she is a skilled actor-musician, fluent in Irish and an emerging playwright, with original works including *Honey Butter* which premiered at the Richard Harris International Film Festival in 2023.

Beibh Barry

Ben Waddell



Dublin-based actor Ben trained at The Lir Academy.

Stage work includes *Hand Me Down the Moon* (Dublin Fringe), *Meeting Ghosts in College Park* (Trinity 16:16), *A Day Out* (Testemonies), *Balsamic Vignettes* (Edinburgh Fringe), *A Life in the Theatre* (Smock Alley), *Othello*, *Romeo & Juliet* and *Macbeth* (Mill Theatre), *Staging the Treaty* (ANU), *This in This That and the Other* (Cork Arts Theatre), *The Mill* (2023),

The Pride (Anseo 2024), and *The Misadventures of Oliver Goldsmith*.

Screen credits include *The Man with the Hat* (Galway Film Fleadh 2018), *Red Rock* (Virgin Media), *Sherlock and Daughter* (2025), *Wednesday* (2025), *Murder Most Puzzling* (2025), and music video *So Simpatico* (Villagers). He is represented by First Call Management.

James Barry



Jack Healy

Pat/Priest/Seán



Cork-based theatre maker Jack Healy has worked professionally since the 1980s, with a focus on new plays and countless world premieres. With his company Theatre Makers Ltd., he has collaborated extensively with playwright Ger Fitzgibbon (*The Bed*, *Tenebrae*, *The Hairdresser's Calendar*, *Ghostlight*) and is currently developing a new version of *The Táin*. His acclaimed solo work *Shostakovich* was performed at London's Southbank Centre as part of The Rest is Noise Festival.

Jack has written and staged works for children, including *The Man in the Moon*, *Aesop's Fabulous Foibles and Fables*, and *Glenanaar* (Cannon Sheehan adaptation).

He has also written for RTÉ Radio and The Everyman. Most recently, he appeared in *Declan's Got Talent* with Fight to Flight Theatre, which toured Ireland.

He continues to work with Cork companies including Meridian, Corcadorca, Graffiti, and The Everyman, and teaches acting at UCC.

Cormac Costello

Peter Robinson/Mac/WB/Sailor



Cork actor Cormac Costello trained at the Gaiety School of Acting & the Westminster Institute, London. He returned to Ireland in 2023 after 13 years in Australia, appearing in *Beauty and the Beast* (Everyman Panto). Previous Everyman highlights include *Bouncers* and *Singing in the Rain*. Other stage credits span Cork Opera House, Graffiti, Island Theatre, Theatremakers, and the Gaiety Theatre. He toured *Alone It Stands* to Australia in 2003.

Film/TV credits include: *Fallout*, *No Tears*, *The Clinic*, *Mystics*, *Fair City*, and web series *Thingy Walks into a Bar*. Australian credits include *Day of the Roses* (award-winning miniseries), *Kings in Grass Castles*, *Cody*, *Big Sky*, *Bordertown*, and *Chameleon* (Paramount). Sydney stage work includes *The Sweet Science of Bruising* (BroadwayWorld Award nomination), *Morning Star*, *Life is Impossible*, *Minding Madness*, *Next Fall*, and *The Big Meal*.

This is his first collaboration with CallBack theatre, and he is thrilled to be working with Cora and John.



A Homecoming of Heritage & Heart

Commemorating the Peter Robinson Settlers of the
Ballyhoura Region – September 15th to 21st, 2025

The Ballyhoura region proudly hosts a week-long series of commemorative events marking the **200th** anniversary of the **Peter Robinson Settler Emigration Scheme**. From September 15th to 21st, communities across North Cork and Limerick will come together to honour the brave families who left these lands in 1823 and 1825 to begin new lives in Canada.

Highlights of the Week Include:

Commemoration Concert on Culture Night

Hosted at **Saint George's Arts and Heritage Centre**, Mitchelstown, this special evening of traditional Irish music, song, and dance will honour the legacy of the Peter Robinson settlers and over two centuries of emigration history. The concert features performances by Ceoltóirí Mhúscraí, representing Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Ballincollig – Craobh Niall Ó Cathasaigh.

Fri 19th September @ 8pm

The Peter Robinson Settlers Emigration Conference at Saint George's Arts and Heritage Centre, Mitchelstown

A one-day event featuring expert speakers from Ireland, Canada and the United States, exploring the Peter Robinson settlers history and historical context and the enduring ties between Ballyhoura and Canada.

Sat 20th September @ 10am

Closing Commemoration at Griston Bog & Woodlands, Ballylanders

A deeply moving ceremony to honour the memory of the emigrants and their descendants, culminating in the creation of a permanent memorial at Griston Bog – a symbolic return to the roots of those who left, and a celebration of those who remain.

Sun 21st September @ 11am

Throughout the week, visitors can also enjoy **heritage walks, community tours, storytelling, traditional music and community meet-and-greets** in the very towns and villages from which the settlers hailed.

Join us! Whether you're a descendant of the original settlers, a local resident, or simply curious about this remarkable story, we invite you to be part of this once-in-a-lifetime celebration of resilience, remembrance and reconnection.

Find out More:

www.ballyhouradevelopment.com/Event/ireland-canada-homecoming-2025



Book on Eventbrite

www.eventbrite.ie/cc/the-ireland-canada-homecoming-2025-4102903



The Peter Robinson Assisted Emigration Programme and the Ireland Canada Homecoming to the Ballyhoura Region 2025- A Forgotten Emigrant Tale

For many of us, we associate mass Emigration from the island with the Irish Famine of 1840, and whilst true it is rare to uncover a story of planned emigration such as that of the Peter Robinson Settler scheme, one that took place 20 years previously. Rare that a story in those intervening years could be forgotten here in Ireland, but for a few historians who remembered. In parallel these historic ties have formed the very cultural roots of thousands of descendants in communities across Canada and America, and now two hundred years on, Ballyhoura Development with communities across North Cork and East Limerick remember them and the resilience of these young families to establish lives anew on the other side of the Atlantic.

The Peter Robinson assisted emigration scheme was one of many such schemes during the nineteenth century, where emigrants from Ireland to overseas were 'assisted' with funding and supplies to set up life in a new country. It has been estimated that as many as 300,000 emigrants availed of such schemes.

In this instance, the scheme was funded by the British Government and under the direction of its employee, Peter Robinson, involved a total of eleven ships, 2 taking 564 emigrants from the Cove of Cork (Cobh) to the Bathurst region of Upper Canada in 1823 and in 1825, nine ships brought 2,024 emigrants to what is now the Peterborough region of Upper Canada (Ontario),

In total 2,500 people comprising 500 nuclear families departed, the vast majority to Ontario departed under “recommendation” from local landlords. It was in 2013, as a legacy of the Gathering, that local volunteers with support from Ballyhoura Development started to explore this piece of our forgotten history.

Why did this occur? The stimulus for this scheme came from a number of factors. The depression following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 saw the agricultural economy falter while at the same time the introduction of the Corn Laws that same year kept food prices artificially high. Both factors operated against a background of a steep rise in population assisted by the new ‘super-food’, the potato.

The Tithe Composition Act of 1823 added further pressure to the peasant farming community as the obligatory tithe payments from farmers to the Protestant Church were linked to the Corn Laws and so kept high.

The most common occupation listed for emigrants in the Robinson scheme was the term ‘reduced farmer’, a term which seems to mean a farmer forced off the land by low prices for agricultural produce and high landlord rents.

Robinson was specifically instructed to target the ‘disturbed baronies’ of North Cork, that is, places where agrarian outrages and lawlessness among the rural peasantry were common. Most of the emigrants were farmers, reduced or otherwise, the remainder being made up of labourers and tradesmen.

All were required to be ‘paupers’, that is, having no means of their own. The majority of emigrants hailed from northern Co. Cork and southeastern Limerick, but there were others from Tipperary, Kerry and Clare, as well as one from Wicklow and another from Kilkenny.

The uptake? Robinson established “recruitment centres” across North Cork including Charleville, Mitchelstown, Newmarket and Doneraile within the Ballyhoura area and all villages and rural areas within those circles or a 15mile radius.

Conditions were set as to the “selection” process which included no one older than 45, thus families tended to be young with many small children undertaking the journey, which some did not survive. In fact the births on the 6 week voyage balanced the deaths on board. The response to the recruitment in 1825 was 50,000 requests for approx. 2,000 spaces indicating just how dire the circumstances were at this time.

Ballyhoura Development in the intervening years has identified many of the families who left the region 200 years ago to Ontario and Ottawa in Canada. Many descendants finding us and sharing their family’s history. We know so much from this time due to the records of the scheme maintained by Peter Robinson.

These show that there was a total of nearly five hundred distinct nuclear families and unattached adults in the scheme, the great bulk being families with two parents and their children.

The records of the scheme list the passengers on each ship under family headings and give ages, occupations and former residences. There is also a ‘remarks’ column where each supporting landlord is named, and where in many cases comments are recorded on the disposition of the adults, deaths occurring during the voyage, and other comments, written by Robinson.

On April 2nd 1824 Robinson writes to Lord Bathurst

“During the voyage nothing happened of importance; the rations were abundant and comfortable; the men were allowed cocoa for breakfast, and nearly half a pint of spirits, which was, perhaps, not too much. The women and children were allowed tea and sugar. The best proof of the attention paid to them on the voyage, arises from the good health which they enjoyed, as only one woman and eight children died on the passage, and these from the small pox, which had unfortunately got into both ships, and not from any causes that could be attributed to their change of circumstances or situation.

It may be worth remarking, as it is so characteristic of the fondness of the Irish people for potatoes, that the men preferred them to cocoa, which they refused for several days to taste, till they saw the officers of the ship repeatedly breakfasting upon it. The children during sickness called constantly for potatoes, refusing arrowroot or any other ailments more congenial to their situation; and nothing could prevail on man, woman or child to eat plum pudding, which as is usual on ship board was part of the Sunday's dinner.

Few of them would eat the best English cheese; and when it was served out as part of their ration, it was most commonly thrown overboard”

Dedication

We dedicate this production, The Peter Robinson Experiment, to the families aboard the ships of 1823 & 1825 and their descendants who have come to Ireland for the 200th Commemoration of the Peter Robinson Settlers programme in September 2025.

Hebe 1823

Stakesby 1823

Mara's, Rathcormac
O'Briens, Lisscarroll

Fortitude 1825

Leahys, Convamore
Leahys, Kilworth
Carews, Donaskeigh
Hartnetts, Churchtown
Dorans, Clonmel
Lonergans, Templetenny
Moloneys, Ballyhooly

Resolution 1825

Clancys, Kilworth
Allens, Galbally
Williams, Doneraile

Brunswick 1825

Donoghues, Kilbehenny
Condots, Brigown
Hurleys, Mallow
Powers, Churchtown
Driscolls, Cape Clear

Albion 1825

Healys, Doneraile
Collins, Askeaton
Lynchs, Churchtown

Regulus 1825

Collins, Listowel
Sullivans, Brigown
Heffernans, Kilworth
Sheehans, Mallow
Callaghans, Mallow
Handlons, Ballyhooly

Star 1825

Hurly, Kilmanogue
McMahons, Newmarket
Hickeys, Mallow

Amity 1825

Crowleys Templetenny
Stack, Listowel
Fitzgeralds, Templetenny
O Learys, Kilbehenny
Costellos' Listowel
Inglis, Templetenny

Elizabeth 1825

Connells, Freemount
Houlihans, Charleville
Galeavons', Listowel
Connells, Liscarroll

John Barry 1825

Youngs, Newport
McAuliffes'. Churchtown



This production, The Robinson Experiment is dedicated to the families aboard the ships of 1823 and 1825 and to you the descendants who join us in 2025.

**“Ó chruatan go dóchas agus tús nua -
is é a neart ár n-oidhreacht.”**

“From hardship to hope and new beginnings - their strength is our heritage.”

The Robinson Experiment is generously supported by Ballyhoura Development CLG., the Cork County Council Commemoration Fund, the Boss Murphy Foundation (through Community Foundation Ireland), and LEADER 2023-2027.



Community
Foundation
Ireland



Comhairle Contae Chorcaí
Cork County Council
This project is supported by Cork County Council's Commemoration Committee.



Riailtas
na hÉireann
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Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040

Arna chomhchistiú ag An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta
Co-funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

Ár dTodhchal
Tuaithe
Our Rural
Future



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach
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