

‘ It is a very different environment from the one which existed when I began as an actor. So I feel that I need to be more active and involved in investigating and pursuing the opportunities that do exist, rather than bemoaning the fact that there are not more of them ’. (prime participant)

prime

continuing professional development for actors aged 55+

reconnect ◦ upskill ◦ re-ignite

prime, developed by Irish Theatre Institute in association with Age & Opportunity / Bealtaine Festival, focuses on career sustainability, entrepreneurial skills, physical and mental health and well-being for professional actors. In an ageing society, one in which actors work well beyond the ‘normal’ retirement age, availing of supports and opportunities to manage your own career and develop your own projects is becoming a more pressing need. Working with passionate, established professionals, who proactively engage in ways to stimulate their careers, **prime** helps you stay connected and build new networks through interventions including workshops, masterclasses and sector engagements.

prime aims to:

- deliver upskilling opportunities to established professional Irish theatre actors aged 55+
- develop a set of entrepreneurial skills
- foster a sense of community with peers
- deliver a rounded more ‘holistic’ approach to training – mind, body and soul
- develop professional networks
- increase capacity to create one’s own work
- provide mentoring supports well into the future

‘ Every decade brings forth a new breed of directors, producers, actors, etc. with new expectations and rules. Not knowing how they think or what they want has been a clear disadvantage. All I have learned over this course convinces me that courses in continuing education are needed in our profession ’. (prime participant)

Since the pilot programme in May 2015, **prime** has engaged with 20 professional actors in workshops and masterclasses with some of the very best facilitators in the Irish theatre scene, including Maureen Hughes - Casting Director; Andrea Ainsworth - Voice Director, Abbey Theatre; Pat Moylan - Theatre Producer, Former Chair of the Arts Council; Gaby Smyth of Gaby Smyth & Company Chartered Accountants.

Direct outcomes of participation in **prime** include roles in *Acceptable Risk* (Saffron Pictures / Soho Moon Pictures co-production) and *Ros na Rún* (TG4) and new plays currently in development. **prime** actors presented a sold out rehearsed reading of Flann O'Brien's *Thirst* produced by ITI at the International Literature Festival Dublin 2016.



←: Jack Walsh, PJ Brady, Liam Burke, Angela Harding and Michael Judd during rehearsals for the staged reading of Flann O'Brien's *Thirst*, May 2016



←: PJ Brady and Michael Judd in staged reading of Flann O'Brien's *Thirst*, International Literature Festival Dublin, May 2016

‘ Being part of prime (...) has created a whole new perspective on both a career and personal level, all for the better ’. (prime participant)

prime 2015 – Pilot

The pilot programme offered six days of training, workshops and industry engagement across May – September 2015, focusing on three complementary strands:

Physical and Mental Well-Being

Warm-up techniques and exploration of other physical and mental practices e.g. voice, movement, memory.

- *Voice Techniques*, Andrea Ainsworth, Voice Director Abbey Theatre
- *Alexander Technique Workshop*, Sarah Shepherd, Irish Society of Alexander Technique Teachers (ISATT)
- *Wake Up the Body/Sharpen the Mind*, Annie Ryan, Artistic Director, The Corn Exchange
- *Yoga: Developing Your Routine*, Kathy Scott, founder of The Yoga Salon
- *Pilates: An Introductory Session*, Nóirín McCarthy, True Pilates Dublin
- *Warm Up and Movement*, Philippa Donnellan, *Broadreach* Director and Choreographer, CoisCéim Dance Theatre

Entrepreneurial Skills. Managing Your Career (I)

Advice and information on social welfare and pensions, financial planning, grant application, self-promotion in a technical age, and networking.

- *Personal Finance & Tax Affairs*, Gaby Smyth, Gaby Smyth & Co Chartered Accounting
- *Financial Planning into Older Age*, Aidan Kelly, Independent Financial Advisor
- *Social Media: Staying Connected*, ITI Team
- *Microsoft Office: Shortcuts and Top Tips*, ITI Team
- *Self-Taping: A Practical Guide*, Mark Cantan, playwright, performer, video producer

Creating Your Own Work. Managing Your Career (II)

Supports to discover new ways of working, collaborating and resourcing the individual's practice, working beyond the normal retirement age. prime 2015 speakers included contributions from representatives of funding bodies, theatre directors, producers, casting directors, literary managers, venue programmers.

- *Making Work: Origination & Development*, Gavin Kostick, Literary Manager, Fishamble: The New Play Company
- *Case Studies: Show in a Bag/Touring*, Marion O'Dwyer, Maria McDermottroe, Pat McGrath, actors and writers
- *Producing and Touring*, Pat Moylan, Theatre Producer, former chair of The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon
- *Dublin City Arts Office: Supports and Opportunities*, Ray Yeates, Dublin City Arts Officer
- *The Arts Council*, David Parnell, Head of Theatre, The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon
- *The Funding Landscape*, Jane Daly and Siobhán Bourke, Co-Directors, ITI

- *Guest Director #1*, Lynne Parker, Artistic Director, Rough Magic Theatre Company
- *Guest Director #2*, Louise Lowe, Director ANU Productions
- *Casting Session #1*, Maureen Hughes, Casting Director at Maureen Hughes Casting
- *Casting Session #2*, Kelly Phelan, Casting Director, The Abbey Theatre
- *Programming: Decisions and Expectations*, Iseult Golden, Administrator and Colm Maher, Lighting Designer and Technician, Bewley's Café Theatre
- *Programming: YPCE focus and Venue Tour*, Maria Fleming, Theatre Programmer, The Ark

↓: Irish Theatre Institute Co-Directors Jane Daly (L) and Siobhán Bourke (R) with prime 2015 actors.

→: PJ Brady with Phillippa Donnellan, Broadreach Director and Choreographer, CoisCeim Dance Theatre. September 2015



↑: PRIME 2015 participants Angela Harding, Liam Burke, Michael Judd and Liam Quinn in conversation with Pat McGrath (actor, writer), Pat Moylan (Theatre Producer, former Chair of The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon) and Maria McDermottroe (actor, writer). May 2015

prime 2016

WEEKEND 1

Self-Taping Workshop with Casting Director Maureen Hughes

This 2-day self-taping workshop provided hands-on learning around the self-taping process with Casting Director Maureen Hughes at Bow Street Studios. Participants learned new, and improved existing techniques, gaining confidence around what it involved. Actors shot one-to-one auditions with direction and critique from Maureen, and viewed their work on a cinema screen together with evaluation and feedback.

‘ (...) the demystifying of the self-taping concept. It wasn’t “explained”, it was done. It left me with a realistic practical knowledge of it. The courtesy, warmth, respect and encouragement that permeated the 2 days led by Maureen, was evident in the whole group ’. (prime participant)

‘ Maureen’s workshop was a tremendous learning experience. She listened attentively to all our frustrations and very sensitively set about guiding each individual through the techniques needed and how best to deal with our scripts. Watching each person going through the same process of self-taping helped reinforce all that was being learnt ’. (prime participant)

WEEKEND 2

Masterclasses and Industry Engagements

The second series of sessions provided an intensive programme of physical masterclasses, followed by discussions and engagements with industry professionals across two days. Focus was placed on developing and increasing networks and engaging with a community of peers as well as approaches to working comfortably and safely late into your career.

Four Temperaments Masterclass facilitated by Raymond Keane, actor, director, theatre-maker, explored the constitutional types of the Four Temperaments and how they manifest in the shape and rhythm of the human being. The class helped increase flexibility and range of physical and vocal expression.

A *Voice Masterclass* with Andrea Ainsworth, Voice Director, Abbey Theatre offered the opportunity to return to the basics of breath and body work, to open up greater voice flexibility, colour and range, and explored techniques to warm up the voice before performance.

‘ I rediscovered my sense of joy in my work with Raymond – and rediscovered my lungs with Andrea – both workshops were inspirational ’. (prime participant)



↑: Voice Masterclass with Andrea Ainsworth, Nov. 2016

←: Four Temperaments Masterclass with Raymond Keane, Nov. 2016

Afternoon meetings and engaging discussions with industry professionals created an opportunity to hear about directors' and producers' approach to their practice, the experiences, challenges and opportunities of casting older actors.

- Lynne Parker, Artistic Director, Rough Magic Theatre Company
- Jim Culleton, Artistic Director, Fishamble: The New Play Company,
- Paula McFetridge, Artistic Director, Kabosh Theatre
- Jen Coppinger, Independent Producer

Moderated by Irish Theatre Institute Co-Director, actor Tom Hickey took part in an inspirational 'In Conversation with', touching on his illustrious career in Irish theatre and tv, the challenges and sacrifices of the actor's experience, and the motivations to keep working.



←: prime group with guest speaker Tom Hickey, November 2016

prime 2017

Now in its 3rd cycle, **prime** offers professional actors an opportunity to re-ignite their creative dynamism, develop their ideas and build their skills in writing for theatre across four days of intensive workshops from May to August. Participants with a strong idea, experience of writing for theatre, or an existing draft of a script will work with dramaturg Hanna Slättne to assess their practice and learn valuable insights into the dramaturgical process. By the end of the programme, participants will have gained valuable knowledge, practical experience and confidence in creating their own work.

WORKSHOP #1

[Ideas, Story and Structure](#)

A day long intensive workshop on the exploration of ideas, stories and structure led by Hanna Slättne, Director of New Work Development at Tinderbox Theatre Company. This session will include an introduction to dramaturgy and how it can assist you in writing that play that's waiting to be written. Participants will work towards drafting their own script for submission and feedback.

WORKSHOP #2

[Drafting to redraft – Exploring the Script](#)

A day long workshop on redrafting your script where each participant will engage in a one-to-one feedback session on their individual scripts.

WORKSHOPS #3 and #4

[On the floor – Putting learning into practice](#)

Two full days of workshopping together on the floor. Working as a group and consolidating the learning points from the programme, explore your scripts in this practical weekend of feedback and discussion. These sessions will identify practical opportunities around supporting each other in writing into the future.

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The stage is set for a fight against ageism

The Prime project helps older actors to get on top of cyber auditions and to get ahead in a notoriously ageist industry



Sara Keating

You can hear the actors before you see them. For several thousands recruited after one of their most important projects in years. Between them, they have more than 200 years' experience on stage, radio, television and film. They graduated from the Irish Theatre Institute's inaugural Prime programme in 2015, and have been busy ever since, filing out landing applications, polishing final drafts of new plays, performing around the country.

Prime was developed by the Irish Theatre Institute in association with Age and Opportunity's Bealtaine Festival. It was designed to provide career support and training opportunities for theatre practitioners aged 50-80, covering such ground as the minutiae of physical and mental wellbeing, interpersonal skills, social welfare, social media and funding, as well as providing opportunities to meet arts practitioners, theatre makers and directors.

For actor Michael Judd, the project came at exactly the right moment. He was not long out of hospital after open-heart surgery, and it was a "terrific, gratifying" experience to get back into the professional world again. Judd spent most of his professional life working the regional circuit in New York - the city where his heart problems were first detected.

"I was going for an acting job," he says. "As part of the casting process you had to have a full medical. As an Equity member in America, you are medically insured every year. I'd never work again until the bills were paid."

Age, however, grates. His career back to Ireland in 2003, but looks back upon his American endeavours with nostalgia. "There is ridiculous housing, right to the walls of Manhattan, and actors' housing lotteries" - because there are no similar supports in Ireland. However, what Judd finds most precious is the lack of status accorded to actors in their age.

In England there is an industry system where the great actors are acknowledged and appreciated for what they contributed to the country. It would be great for there

to be something similar here." P.J. Brady, an actor, producer, director, screenwriter, increasingly feels the invisibility of his generation. He started acting professionally in 1967, working at the Abbey and the Gate, touring Britain and a play about Patrick Kavanagh all over the world. "When I started acting it was not unusual to see people on stage who were 70 or 80, but you don't get that now. Now there are younger casts everywhere, often phasing older people. And it's a pity, age gives the practical to carry characters."

Brady thinks the reason for this is practical as well as social. These days, a lot of casting takes place online, and Brady says he and his generation find that difficult and intimidating. "The cyber world is too big for me, and if you are not up to speed you miss out."

Last year, for example, he was put forward for *Game of Thrones*. "But you need to submit a self-directed video piece within three days and I couldn't do it, so that was that." The Prime project was "an opportunity to get those sort of skills. It is continuous professional development, the kind of thing you need to master what industry you are working in."

Cherrie is up next. Actor Angela Harding agrees. "The emphasis on training, particularly in the theatre and film business, is always on younger people. But I have been learning all my life. As I work, yes, but also taking courses, at the London Actors Centre and in New York." For her, Prime was another opportunity to upskill, which is important not just for your career "but for your personal growth."

Harding, who played lead roles in dozens of RTE and BBC dramas, as well as on Irish and London stages, stopped acting professionally to raise her family when she was in her 50s. "I was working at the Abbey at night, doing plays in the Phoenix at weekends, so from the practical point of things it wasn't possible with being a mother. But I also found that when I was playing a leading role, it was too difficult to balance the emotional and physical needs of an actress and my emotional and physical needs as a mother."

She returned to work as a radio announcer with RTE, eventually finding her way back into performance through radio drama. It was then that Harding realised "the technology for putting yourself out there as an actress had changed so much". Prime allowed Harding to hone some of those skills, and she welcomed the practical aspect of the course. "We talked about penance and funding and application fees, and why not have an oldie to base



From left: Angela Harding, Sheila Flynn (in foreground), Liam Burke, Michael Judd and P.J. Brady at the Irish Theatre Institute, Dublin. "You don't retire, no matter what age you are - as long as you're healthy, you'll say 'I'll do it'."

some, like me, it was brilliant." Actor and director Liam Burke has plenty of experience in business. He spent most of his working life in hotels, after leaving a permanent job at the Gate Theatre in the 1970s for a Hollywood part. Prime, he feels, is a struggle for performers and practitioners of his generation to engage with every of the mechanisms of professional theatre. "It is not that there is no help," he says. "It is that there are so many choices."

Brady, who trained in drama at DIT and such a member in directing at UCD after retirement, recently applied to the Arts Council for funding for an arts participation project. "It was a struggle even to get into the arts, let alone do the application. In fact, it is one of the reasons Prime was founded, because older actors and directors and writers weren't applying for things."

Sheila Flynn has just applied to the Arts Council for the first time after completing the programme. She hopes to get funding to employ a dramaturg and launch a play. "And the fact is that I don't even have to get it put on - that I can do it for my own sake."

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It was not unusual to see people on stage who were 70 or 80, but now you don't get that. Now there are younger casts everywhere, often playing older people

As 82, Flynn is the oldest of the participants. "I'm actually too old to be here, according to the application guidelines," she jokes. She was so energised by the course she has applied to do it again, if she has time. Flynn is constantly working, either with the one-woman show *Alone*, which she tours around the country in access to retirement opportunities and nursing homes, or as television or film jobs. She finds the film industry again. "They ask what age you are when you are filling out applications, and then discount you if you don't fit their profile. So I put down, check it, 'What age do you want me to be?'"

Judd, who is working hard on a re-imagined version of Michael Mac Linnam's character piece *The Impersonator of Being Oscar for Bewley's Cafe Theatre*, has clearly been taking inspiration from Flynn. "That's the thing about working in the arts, so TV, in film you don't know, so matter what age you are - as long as you are healthy, you'll say 'I'll do it'."

The participants of Prime 2016 will receive a rehearsal reading of Flynn's *Alone* in the Lord Ganesha Bar, Dublin, on May 20th at 8pm and May 27th at 1pm as part of Bealtaine Festival. The importance of *Alone* is at Bewley's Cafe Theatre until May 14th. irishtheatreinstitute.ie

Bealtaine comes of age Highlights of the 21st annual festival

- Bealtaine celebrates its 21st birthday this year with more than 600 events in the series, arts centres, rare settings, galleries, local halls and community centres countrywide. The theme is comic Citizens, and the wide range of activities includes poetry readings, writing workshops, traditional music events, and art exhibitions. The highlights include:
 - Writer Brian Leydon is the Bealtaine national writer in residence. His book *The Home Place: A Memoir* is Bealtaine book of the month. His residency includes three performances with musician Seamus O'Dowd in Clare, Dublin and Leitrim, along with visits to writers' groups in Sligo, Loughard, Dublin, Portlaoise and Navan.
 - Visual artist Deirdre O'Mahony will present *First Citizens Speak*, a film that explores the lives of a community of older people in north Clare.

- prompted by the Campbell Communities. This will be complemented by an exhibition at Duner House Gallery in Rosscariff of the work of painter Andrew Flin.
- Wildfowl Theatre Company tour's *Conjuring the Festival*, and will be running workshops with staff in Inagh.
- The Ark centre for children in Temple Bar hosts a reading event for grandparents and their grandchildren led by Maria Costin-Muliana and Sarah Webb.

- Another intergenerational literary event features writer Mary Moriarty and poet, Cliona O'Rourke and her son Eoin Wiley.
- This is Not My Beautiful House seminar examines how creativity and the arts contribute to better ways of living as we age. It will address how creativity should shape residential and community design to enhance human dignity and growth.

bealtaine.com



encounters with new technology

Michael Judd, a professional actor in his mid-50s, has been working in Irish theatre, film and TV since the 1980s. Like many others in that decade, he emigrated to the US and the New York stages in particular, where he worked for a period of 14 years. While in New York, he co-founded the theatre company Barba's Crown with his wife Siobhán Cahir and four other actors. In 2002, he returned to Ireland and has taken on many roles including that of Oscar Wilde in his and Siobhán's own adaptation of *Michael MacLiammóir: The Importance of Being Oscar*.

Michael is also a recent graduate of PFIME – an initiative of Irish Theatre Institute (ITI) in association with Age & Opportunity's Bealtaine Festival – which offers bespoke training to a group of older theatre actors to allow them further develop their own professional skills including their digital skills.

Do you think that PFIME was a help to you?

A friend of mine told me about PFIME. We had worked together and I knew he was very focussed on his career. Michael, he said, you have to put your horns in and realise that there

are aspects of the business that you are totally unaware of. That opened my eyes. PFIME was very instrumental in sharpening my skills in the digital skills because the whole profession of acting has changed.

What is the most important change for you in terms of how you use digital technology in your acting career?

When on the PFIME course, we met with casting agent Maureen Hughes and she said to me Michael, (I know who you are but you don't have any online presence I won't think of you

‘ A sincere thank you for this great opportunity! Onwards and upwards! ’

‘ (...) it was very worthwhile and great to meet so many new people with whom I have so much in common. Thank you! ’ (prime participant)

About Us

Irish Theatre Institute is a lead national organisation in the provision of supports and resources to the Irish theatre sector

ITI nurtures, promotes and drives the ambition of Irish theatre makers and Irish theatre, from its grassroots beginnings to its presentation on the world stage. We seek to maximise creative opportunities and resources for performing artists and producers across theatre and dance in all Ireland and international context.

We provide mentoring, training and continuing professional development for theatre makers; from writers and performers to producers, directors, behind-the-scenes staff and company managers. We run workshops and seminars, host tailor-made websites and searchable databases. We support dedicated spaces where creativity and innovation can flourish undistracted. Our mission is to create opportunities abroad and strengthen resources at home for theatre artists, companies, venues and festivals.

Find out more at www.irishtheatreinstitute.ie

prime programme is provided free of charge to participating actors (funded by the Arts Council and Age & Opportunity / Bealtaine Festival).