

## **Embargoed – 00:01 Tuesday, 27 February 2024**

University College Dublin

- Launch of Trapdoor theatre: 13:00 – 14:00 Tuesday, 27 February, Newman Building, UCD Belfield

### **Ambitious €2.5m ‘black box’ facelift transforms UCD’s former Dramsoc theatre into state-of-the-art performance venue**

A disused performance space once the heartbeat of amateur stage performances at University College Dublin will again nurture Ireland’s creative minds following a €2.5 million transformation into a state-of-the-art performance space.

Trapdoor, a newly developed ‘black box’ theatre based at University College Dublin’s Belfield campus will see the former UCD Dramsoc theatre venue in the Newman Building once more take centre stage when it comes to student creativity, production and performance.

From the 1970s to 2012, the UCD Dramsoc theatre fostered the talent of some of Ireland’s most distinguished writers, playwrights, and theatre and film directors including Frank McGuinness, Neil Jordan, Consolata Boyle, Marina Carr and Conor McPherson.

“In its near 100-year history, UCD Dramsoc has helped a great many of our students discover their true creative voices and talents, and nurtured them towards stellar careers in the world of the performing arts,” said UCD President Professor Orla Feely.

“Among its former members are Academy Award winners, Brenda Fricker and Neil Jordan, Irish playwrights and filmmakers, Frank McGuinness and Jim Sheridan, and the much-loved actors Rosaleen Linehan and Dermot Morgan.”

“These great creatives, each of whom attended UCD, pay testament to the university’s long and proud history of fostering talent that has reached national and international acclaim,” added Professor Feely.

“This new state-of-the-art performance space, The Trapdoor will ensure a continued stream of creative minds are given every opportunity to discover and develop their deep talents, and keep UCD nestled at the centre of Ireland’s creative community.”

“A new space for new voices and new visions to transform the arts in Ireland and continue what generations of artists from UCD have already always done, lead the way for others to follow,” added distinguished writer and UCD’s Prof Emeritus of Creative Writing, Frank McGuinness.

Fellow Dramsoc alumni playwright Marina Carr expressed her delight at the redevelopment, and said she “spent many happy days and nights there. Here’s to the next generation of theatre folk.”

Left unused for more than a decade since the early 2000s, when DramSoc relocated to the then new Student Centre in 2012, the redeveloped performance space is now a permanent 144-seated theatre with professional grade lighting, visual and audio sound systems, and seating.

Its redevelopment is styled on the black box concept of studio/theatre layout, which is typically an adaptable square room with black walls, floor and ceiling. The simplicity of the space caters to a variety of flexible stage and classroom configurations and audience interactions.

The venue was designed by a team including Oran O’Siochain, from the UCD School of Architecture, Reddy Architecture and Charcoalblue - one of the world’s leading theatre and venue design companies.

It will serve as the new home of the UCD Creative Futures Academy (CFA), under the directorship of Professor P.J. Mathews, from the UCD School of English, Drama and Film, and will connect industry practitioners with students dedicated to flexing their creative talent.

“This will be a game-changer for the Creative Futures Academy at UCD,” said Professor P.J. Mathews.

“A unique space dedicated to the development of creative talent, and fitted-out to industry standard, will ensure our students have the best chance of success in whatever path they choose.

“The redevelopment of the celebrated former Dramsoc theatre enables us to build on UCD’s international reputation in the creative and performing arts, and to nurture Ireland’s next generation of creative talent.”

Funded by UCD and the HEA Human Capital Initiative, Trapdoor was developed alongside an experimental creative arts and performance media lab, which will provide students the opportunity to develop skills in digital content creation, production, design, and cultivate their talent in the best way possible - learning by doing.

“I am delighted that funding for Creative Futures Academy through the HEA Human Capital Initiative provided a catalyst for this significant investment,” said Louise Allen, CFA Director.

“Trapdoor represents the tangible realisation of the importance of cultural expression and education. This state-of-the-art facility will nurture the creative talent and skills of generations to come. I look forward to experiencing the excitement and wonder arising from works developed here by our future producers, writers, directors, and performers.”

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris TD added that the “ground-breaking €2.5 million black box theatre and media lab in UCD’s Newman Building” were a “shining example of the impact the Human Capital Initiative is having.”

“Situated in the former UCD DramSoc Theatre, Trapdoor inherits a rich history, symbolising the future of creative industries and aligning with the broader vision of the Creative Futures Academy. This innovative space contributes significantly to Ireland’s commercial, social, and cultural needs, standing as a vital cornerstone in Ireland’s creative landscape—connecting the past with an exciting future,” he added.

A €10m collaborative HEA project between UCD, IADT and NCAD and a range of industry partners, including RTÉ and the Arts Council, the CFA is dedicated to developing Ireland’s next generation of writers, artists, filmmakers, producers, musicians, and designers.

The Trapdoor theatre will host a range of new programmes and modules, delivered by CFA academics, experts from the creative industries, including UCD Creative Fellows and the CFA Artists-in-Residence at UCD.

Among the Artists-in-Residence that will teach include Donal Lunny (traditional music practice), Jenny Jennings (theatre making), and Mark O'Halloran (scriptwriting).

“We are delighted to celebrate the launch of the Trapdoor theatre and venue in the UCD College of Arts and Humanities,” said Professor Regina Uí Chollatáin, College Principal and Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities.

“This milestone links a strong tradition of the Creative Arts with modern practice opening many possibilities for future projects.

Adding: “Tá luchtáir orm go bhfuil na healaíona á gceiliúradh sa spás seo, le béim ar ilghnéitheacht agus ar speisialachas cultúrtha a thacóidh le hoideachasóirí agus le cleachtóirí sna healaíona agus i dtionscail chruthaitheacha.”

As part of the theatre's opening on 27th February, Academy-Award winning filmmaker Steve McQueen will join for the first guest workshop led by Dr Nicolas Pillai, UCD's CFA academic lead and programme leader of the MA Writing for Stage & Screen.

McQueen's work which includes his Academy and BAFTA winning Best Picture 12 Years a Slave, and Hunger, starring Michael Fassbender, is also a BFI Fellow and renowned visual artist, writer and director of critically acclaimed film anthology Small Axe, as well as documentaries Occupied City and Uprising.

"Steve is an embodiment of the values to which CFA aspires," said Dr Nicolas Pillai, Academic Lead Creative Futures Academy. "His work exemplifies the values of experimentation, social responsibility, and ambition that we seek to instil in students."

"I am honoured to receive an invitation from UCD to join Dr Pillai and his MA students. It is the younger generations who show the greatest courage to learn, take risks and make the boldest and most exciting choices, so I'm very much looking forward to the conversation," added McQueen.

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Kenneth O'Halloran has been commissioned to photograph the event, and will release images to the picture desks on the day.

In attendance: Rosaleen Linehan, Frank McGuinness, and Stephen Rea.

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