

LIME TREE THEATRE | BELLTABLE



LEADERSHIP GROWTH LEGACY

A Strategic Framework for 2026–2031





A message from the Chairman

As Chair of the Board of Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable, I am proud to present our Strategy 2026 – 2031, a bold and considered roadmap that builds on the firm foundations laid over the past five years. This strategy represents a confident step forward, informed by reflection, driven by ambition, and rooted in our enduring commitment to artistic excellence, community engagement, and sustainable growth.

Between 2021 and 2025, our organisation not only weathered the disruption of a global pandemic, but emerged stronger, with a renewed sense of purpose. The achievements in this period speak for themselves: an in-house production model of national significance; a growing and diverse audience base; deepened relationships with schools, artists, and communities; and the professionalisation of our governance and operational structures. These milestones have positioned Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable as a dynamic cultural anchor in Limerick and the mid-west.

Looking ahead, our new strategy retains the four strategic priorities - Create, Connect, Collaborate, Consolidate - that have proven both effective and adaptable. These are not isolated ambitions, but interdependent and mutually reinforcing principles that will guide our work in the years to come.

Our commitment to Create remains central. Through the development of a regional theatre development and production model, we aim to place Limerick firmly on the national cultural map - not just as a presenter of work, but as a generator of it. This will ensure artists can live, work and thrive in the region, while audiences benefit from work that reflects and celebrates their lives and perspectives.

In Connect, we commit to fostering a more inclusive and equitable arts ecosystem. Whether through expanded artist supports, increased access to resources, or innovative programming for young people, our goal is to create spaces, both physical and creative, where meaningful engagement can flourish.

Our ambition to Collaborate reflects our belief that culture thrives when it is shared. From local schools and festivals to national theatre organisations, we will continue to co-create opportunities that enrich lives and bring people together. The evolution of the Bualadh Bos Children's Festival into a legacy project for the region exemplifies the kind of long-term, community-centred thinking we intend to pursue.

Finally, through Consolidate, we will future-proof our organisation. That means ensuring our funding model is robust, our governance resilient, and our infrastructure fit for purpose. It also means nurturing our people - our staff, the artists we support, our board - and continuing to strive for best practice in sustainability, accessibility, and inclusion.

This strategy outlines a six-year journey of growth - with the artists we support, the communities we serve, and the audiences we inspire. It reflects our belief in the transformative power of theatre and the arts, and our conviction that Limerick has a vital role to play in Ireland's cultural future.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my thanks to the executive team, our funders, partners, and audiences. We invite you to join us as we take the next step in our shared story.

Brian McEnergy
Chairman





A message from the Executive Director

This six-year strategy for Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable builds on the achievements of the past five years and outlines the ambitions for the future with an emphasis on leadership, growth and long-term legacy for the performing arts in Limerick and the mid-west. It offers a clear blueprint for our organisation's future and will guide our decision-making and implementation. It builds on a period of transition, transformation and consolidation that began in 2016, when Limerick City & County Council, An Chomhairle Ealaíon / The Arts Council, and the Lime Tree Theatre, entered a partnership to stabilise and secure the future of the Belltable, acknowledging its prominence as one of the city's prime cultural assets.

In 2024, having successfully navigated the challenges and impact of Covid-19 on our venues and our audiences, we reached higher attendance figures than pre-pandemic (2019). This is an opportunity to thank our loyal audiences and to channel that support into the next phase of our contribution to cultural life in Limerick and the region. We are focused on maximising the value and potential of the wonderful assets that we are privileged to manage for artists, audiences, and communities. We are uniquely placed to provide a platform for the next generation of Limerick writers and actors to produce and perform their work, creating landmark theatre made in Limerick for venues in Ireland and abroad.

The opportunity to produce our own work will provide employment for actors, designers, directors, and technical crew and help to support sustainable careers in the arts in the mid-west. We will provide invaluable experience to the full complement of theatre practitioners, bringing skilled professionals to the city – either those who may be returning home, or those who live and work in Limerick – to earn their living through a combination of professional performance, production, touring and education.

Lime Tree Theatre's role in revitalising Belltable and creating a city centre hub for artists and arts practice has been a game changer for the independent sector in the city and county while also welcoming artists from around

the country. Coupled with that is our ongoing partnership with Mary Immaculate College, which offers numerous opportunities for collaboration at curricular and cultural integration levels which can create options for artists and arts workers across the creative industries. With support from the board, and given the ambition of our strategy for the coming years, we will work to further diversify our funding model through sponsorships, membership support, new public sector grants and capital funds to enable the creation and production of Limerick-initiated theatre, children's festival development and community engagement.

We will place greater focus and channel more resources towards a programme of inclusion and participation for our diverse Limerick communities. Children and young people will play a key role in the delivery of our strategy in this area and the future development of the Bualadh Bos Festival will be a legacy to this work over the coming years. We are conscious that there are still barriers to participation in the arts in Limerick; we want to give voice to the artistic contribution that our multi-cultural communities offer and recognise the extent to which they broaden our horizons and enrich our understanding.

We will cement Limerick's place in Ireland's cultural and artistic infrastructure drawing on our proven expertise as originators and producers of new performance work and as presenters of quality work across theatre, music, dance and literature on our two stages at Lime Tree Theatre and Belltable. Our commitment to the model of both producing and presenting work of national stature will make the city a truly national city for the arts, and theatre in particular. Our focus on Limerick and the mid-west as a centre for creativity will build our audiences, contribute to the city and county's economy and inspire a future generation of artists and arts professionals to see Limerick as a place to live and work sustainably.

Louise Donlon
Executive Director

Review of Achievements: Strategy 2021–2025

Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable made significant progress across its four core strategic priorities: **Create, Connect, Collaborate, and Consolidate** between 2021 - 2025. Despite the unexpected disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and operating within constrained resources, the organisation achieved many of its stated ambitions, deepening local and national stakeholder relationships and so laying a solid foundation for the next phase of development.

Under Strategic Priority 1: **CREATE**, Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable established an in-house production model that has enabled the development and premiere of new work with a distinctly Limerick identity. This has been widely regarded as transformative for the cultural ecology, creating meaningful employment and retaining artistic talent in the region. Highlights included national tours of homegrown work and the launch of a professional commercial Christmas show, which continues to grow in audience reach. A strong and varied programme was delivered across art forms in both of our venues.

In relation to Strategic Priority 2: **CONNECT**, audience numbers by 2024 had exceeded pre-pandemic levels, and the organisation demonstrated leadership in the mid-west arts sector. Partnerships flourished—most notably through the Bualadh Bos Children’s Festival and new links with local schools, artists, and festivals. Corporate support also grew, exemplified by sponsorship for the annual pantomime. The Belltable Hub and Young Curators Programme supported emerging and established artists alike.

Progress under Strategic Priority 3: **COLLABORATE** was evident in continued partnerships with national touring networks such as NASC and the Strollers Network. The Irish Film Institute partnership significantly grew film audiences for IFI@Belltable, and productive relationships were built with local Limerick festivals and event organisers such as Limerick Early Music Festival, the Limerick Jazz Festival, the Polish Arts Festival and the Limerick Literary Festival, among others. Community engagement projects were delivered, and much valuable experience and learning was accumulated from this.

Finally, under Strategic Priority 4: **CONSOLIDATE**, Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable secured multi-annual Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon funding and established a Service Level Agreement with Limerick City and County Council for the operation and management of Belltable. Lime Tree Theatre’s governance was strengthened with a gender-balanced and skills-based board reflective of Limerick’s community.

Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable’s four strategic priorities remain entirely relevant as the organisation moves into the next phase of its work (2026 – 31) and a strong framework is in place from which to build having taken the experience of the past five years, analysed the successes, identified gaps and assessed the resource needs. A six-year period of work is now planned, focussing on ambition, inclusivity, integration and sustainability. Lime Tree theatre | Belltable will work to deepen its relationships with funders and stakeholders, show leadership in the arts sector, growth for the organisation, the artists and audiences with whom we work and the creation of a legacy that will deliver a new model for making theatre in Limerick that will have a national reach.



Our Strategic Priorities

Our four strategic priorities are forward-looking and reflect the extent of our ambition. They are purposefully interlinked and complementary:

- **CREATE**
- **CONNECT**
- **COLLABORATE**
- **CONSOLIDATE**

Vision

Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable will serve as a vital cultural anchor — an inspiring home for artists, a creative producing hub, and a destination where audiences connect, reflect, and celebrate the arts.

Mission

To **Create** and support world-class, nationally valued cultural experiences through producing, co-producing, promoting, and presenting high quality work.

To **Connect** with our audiences and communities so that they engage with emerging and established companies and artists across the performing arts.

To **Collaborate** with communities and stakeholders to stimulate, entertain and enrich cultural life through shared creative events and experiences.

To **Consolidate** our governance and funding structures, be resilient and sustainable and deepen stakeholder relationships.



Values

Ambition

Deliver excellent, quality arts experiences reflecting the talent, creativity and professionalism of our artists, staff and arts workers.

Accessibility

Enable participation and strive to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere in our venues, broadening and deepening our engagement with both our artists and our audiences.

Collaboration

Work together with our partners to co-create experiences that enrich the lives of artists and our audiences.

Diversity

Celebrate and support diverse traditions and cultures, enabling inclusive self-expression among our communities.

Sustainability

Demonstrate integrity, accountability, and transparency in our practices, organisational systems, and structures while continuing to operate in an environmentally sustainable manner.



Strategic Priority 1

Create

Create world-class, nationally valued cultural experiences through producing, co-producing, promoting, and presenting high quality work. This priority focuses on the long-term development of artists and creatives with a view to supporting sustainable careers.

Our Goals

To highlight Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable's pivotal role in the creation of work in the mid-west by:

- Setting out the framework for Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable's new regional theatre creation and producing model of professional theatre responding to the need for different approaches and interventions to be made in different locations that respond to the specific cultural needs of those locations.
- Continuing to present, produce and co-produce a broad range of diverse work from across the canon of theatre repertoire, both Irish and International.
- Providing paid opportunities for artists and arts workers to live where they work through quality sustainable employment opportunities in the mid-west.
- Create a united and seamless public identity for the Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable, its function and purpose.
- Strengthen the annual professional commercial show to maximise audience reach.

How will we know we have been successful?

1. We will agree a model of production with the Arts Council, incorporating support structures for the development and production of new work in the mid-west over the period of the plan with a robust evaluation framework to quantify social, economic and cultural impact and value.
2. We will continue to produce at least one new production every year, funding allowing.
3. We will provide support to at least two other productions or works-in-development by Limerick/mid-west based artists.
4. We will develop up to four commissions over the period of six years working with at least one young and/or emerging artist every year.
5. We will develop an optimum branding solution that recognises the uniqueness and complementarity of both venues under the umbrella of one organisation and communicate it effectively to audiences and the wider industry.
6. We will produce a commercial show each Christmas which will provide employment to professional arts workers and generate revenue that can be re-invested in the commissioning and production of new work.





Strategic Priority 2

Connect

Create opportunities for emerging, mid-career and established artists to connect with our resources, engage with audiences, and build meaningful connections with one another.

Our Goals

To facilitate emerging and established artists locally and nationally to have the freedom to imagine and generate ambitious new work.

Animate welcoming, accessible, and inclusive spaces where audiences experience local, national, and international talent by:

- Developing a suite of distinct artist supports for Belltable Hub, maximising the use of the available spaces for research, development and performance.
- Increasing, specifying and quantifying the supports to artists and arts workers as creators, participants, collaborators and community members in line with Arts Council Arts Centre Policy.
- Dedicating supports to artists from under-represented communities to respond to their needs and artform practices.
- Expanding the Young Curators programme to include a professional apprenticeship/ placement.
- Devising a masterplan for Bualadh Bos Children's Festival to involve multiple partners (see SP # 4 Collaboration).
- Formalising a Limerick Artists' Nexus Network with bi-annual meetings at Belltable.
- Providing an informal meeting and gathering space for artists and arts workers.

How will we know we have been successful?

1. We will continue and refine the Artist-in-Residence programme at the Belltable, supporting one artist per year.
2. We will host at least one intensive training event for artists and arts workers per year which will address gaps and weaknesses and address capacity in the artistic infrastructure of the mid-west.
3. We will issue an open call to identify artists from under-represented communities and commit to nurturing at least one of those artists per year.
4. We will reserve at least one paid internship every year for a young person seeking to make a career in the arts in producing, production, and/or management.
5. We will curate and deliver two artist Nexus networking events during each year with a view to developing connections, collaborations and integration.

Strategic Priority 3

Collaborate

Collaborate with our partners to stimulate, entertain and enrich cultural life through shared creative events and quality experiences with an emphasis on inclusion and cooperation.

Our Goals

Work in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders to inspire creativity, and to provoke responses to an extensive range of quality arts and cultural experiences, placing community engagement at the heart of the work.

- Create an Outreach/Participation Department at Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable to drive inclusion and integration programmes.
- Capitalise on the impact of Bualadh Bos Children's Festival and re-imagine it as an independent festival focussing on community integration bringing the very best of arts and cultural experiences to children, with particular attention to those on the margins and so become an important legacy project of this strategy.
- Place a focus on the cultural needs of teenagers and young people to identify youth programmes through different contemporary and relevant arts practices.
- Establish new co-producing partnership(s) with national theatre organisations with a view to biennial collaborations.

How will we know we have been successful?

1. We will employ a full-time Outreach/Participation Officer dedicated to addressing diversity and inclusion in the city and county through engagement with like-minded partners, artists, communities and audiences.
2. We will, with the support of Mary Immaculate College and its EDNIP programme (Embracing Diversity, Nurturing Integration Project), Doras and other relevant stakeholders, enable the Bualadh Bos children's festival to fulfil its potential as a dynamic festival for the mid-west; with a robust funding model both public and private thus becoming an independent entity, continuing to use our venues, while having its own curation, marketing, and production staff.
3. Working with partners in other educational and public organisations, we will create youth arts programmes, to engage young people from across Limerick's diverse communities and will pilot two projects (one each in city and county) across the first two years of the strategy contingent on securing new funding.
4. We will collaborate with leading national performing arts organisations to create co-productions, biennially, as part of our commitment to developing a new regional theatre producing model and maximising the capacity of the Lime Tree Theatre for Limerick audiences.
5. We will continue to deepen our long-standing relationships with national performing arts organisations and independent artists to give regional audiences access to the best of Irish work small, medium and large-scale.





Strategic Priority 4

Consolidate

Consolidate our governance and funding models, our infrastructure, technical capability and our stakeholder relationships.

Our Goals

Ensure that the Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable achieves its objectives with integrity and is managed in an effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent way.

To make Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable resilient, sustainable and fit for purpose to ensure that it can deliver on its artistic, community and business potential into the next decade.

Part 1: Future Proofing

- Agree with the Arts Council a compelling and forward-thinking and financially realistic proposal around the creation, touring, financing of work that has a long term artistic and economic legacy for Limerick and the mid-west.
- Negotiate a new multi-annual SLA with Limerick City and County Council that highlights the benefits of artistic engagement, with the Belltable at its core, for community integration, children's access to culture, talent retention and employment in the arts sector.
- Ensure we are technically equipped to meet climate action targets by adapting our infrastructure to reflect best practice and supporting the evolving needs of artists and audiences.
- Be financially sustainable in line with business best practice.

How will we know we have been successful?

1. We will successfully agree an initial three-year plan with the Arts Council for a regional theatre producing model that will deliver on policies that inform best practice and long-term legacy including, Paying the Artist, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and our Climate Action Plan.
2. We will have implemented and evaluated the objectives set out in the Service Level Agreement with Limerick City and County Council for the programming, operation and management of Belltable.
3. We will implement all elements of our Climate Action Plan and provide training for staff on modern technologies and monitoring of the plan.
4. We will, through innovative programming, production and project initiatives, develop new partnerships and funding sources and increase business and sponsorship engagement to reach the target of company reserves as required by the Arts Council.
5. We will have consolidated our close partnership with Mary Immaculate College in the delivery of our mutual goals.

Part 2: People & Places

- Build staff and board capacity, with a focus on staff retention, training & development and succession, through the implementation of a strategic organisational plan.
- Prioritise development and fund-raising opportunities to generate income to support Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable's new production model.
- Address Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable brand identity so that it has a cohesive message and profile.
- Improve the welcome for audiences in both theatres, addressing comfort, sociability and hospitality in the public spaces.
- Make access to our spaces and programmes feasible for all, including those with a disability, either visible or invisible.
- Expand access hours for Belltable Hub.

How will we know we have been successful?

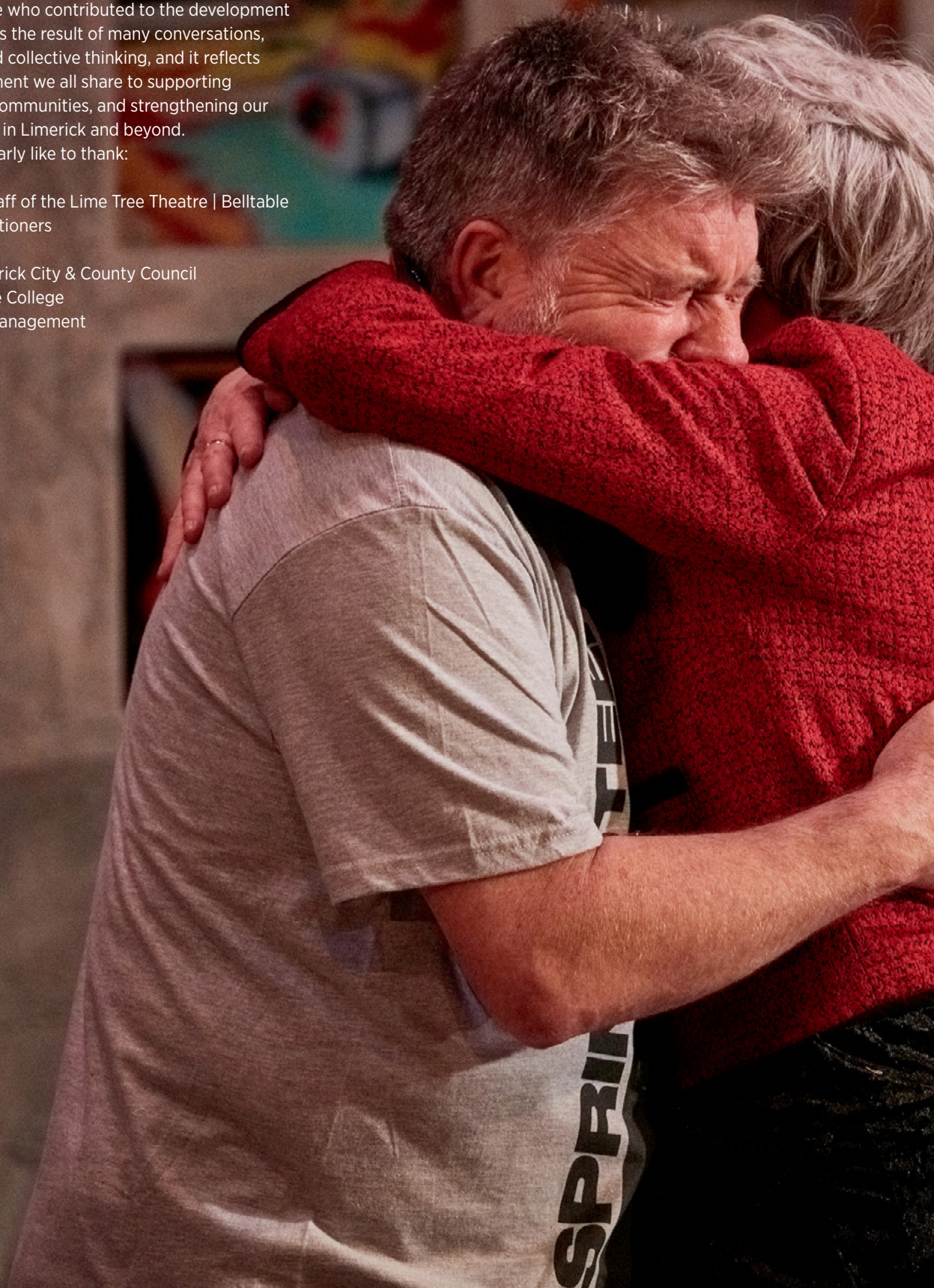
1. We will adopt a new organisational plan which will set out a new way forward for the day-to-day management of the organisation and outline succession plans for the board and senior management of the organisation.
2. We will increase staff numbers to match the organisation's increased output over the past five years and to deliver on our strategic priorities.
3. We will our maximise organisational capacity and support staff to deliver on their respective roles, secure staff retention and allow greater access to the spaces by artists and the public.
4. The Board and Executive will prioritise a fundraising and development programme to build on existing sponsorship, growing meaningful relationships with businesses in Limerick and the mid-west that will be invested in work 'made in Limerick for Limerick'.
5. We will implement a unified branding structure to better reflect the organisations work and remit.
6. We will enhance audience experiences in the foyer bar areas and encourage more pre and post-show engagement.
7. We will endeavour to make the Belltable Hub accessible outside business hours and weekends to reflect the working practices of artists.

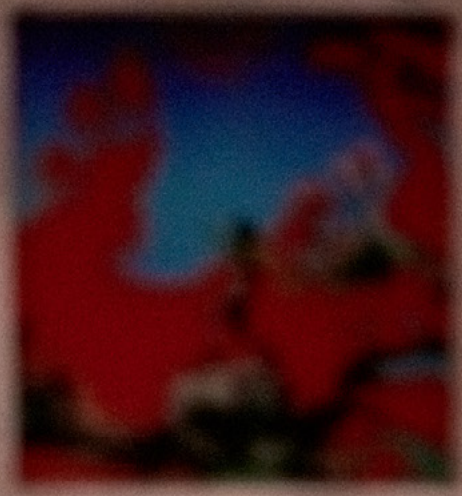


Acknowledgements

The Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable wishes to acknowledge and thank all those who contributed to the development of this strategy. It is the result of many conversations, collaborations, and collective thinking, and it reflects the deep commitment we all share to supporting artists, engaging communities, and strengthening our organisation's role in Limerick and beyond. We would particularly like to thank:

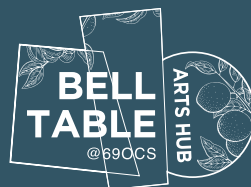
- the board and staff of the Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable
- artists and practitioners
- our audiences
- Arts Office, Limerick City & County Council
- Mary Immaculate College
- Jane Daly Arts Management





LAUGHTER

ANNIZZA



www.limetreebelltable.ie