



Belvoir Players Report, 2023-2024

Once again we can celebrate Belvoir success this year. Our membership has grown in both Academy and Adult companies, and both have triumphed in productions over the past year.

Our studio theatre has once again excelled, with our returning regular customers as well as new. These include:

Fortwilliam Music Society,	U3A for various classes,	Babosh,
Studio Symphony Orchestra,	Theatre three	Dramatime
Ulster Operatic Society,	NISMAT	PM Big Band
Thunder Rolls	Cinemagic	LDN Wrestling
FTDA Irish Dancing Festival	Trim the velvet Irish Dancing Festival	Mencap NI
Dreamworld Productions	Queen Musical Theatre Society	St. Itas PS
2nd Chance Ballet Company	Music First NI	DU Dance NI
Melissa Gordon photo shoots	Lambeg Players	Fleetwood Dreams
Stormont School of Singing	Magic Circle NI	Lambeg Players
Bloomfield Collegiate School	Fairy Tale Stageshow Productions	Big Love
East Broadway	Abba Sensations	Belvoir Park PS
Siddhi Dance class	Clarance Players	The Covid Enquiry interviews

I have not included our own Academy and Adult shows, as I will address them later.

The calendar 2024-2025 and indeed early 2026 is filling up! Panto 2025 dates are almost in the diary! I don't even think the panto has been selected yet! The Ulster Orchestra is coming to view our studio with rehearsal space in mind too!

We have updated our logos, which are now on display.

The Green Room got a face lift last year. This year it was the outside of the studio that had some TLC.

Staffing through the past year has been a little changeable. Unfortunately our stage manager was unwell and had to step down from Belvoir for a period of time. Karl Smyth stepped into this role, gathering volunteers to come in on Monday evenings to build, tidy and paint in the workshop. We could not have done without him and his helpers!

This also meant our theatre manager was also left with nobody at this point. He worked tirelessly to ensure the theatre and studio bookings were unaffected.

In March we said goodbye to Michael, our stage manager, in the presence of his friends and family. True to what Michael would have wanted, it was a small informal gathering, handing over gifts and sharing memories.

My heart is heavy at the mention of the passing of Helina King. Helina was a true lady, a friend, a mentor, a wealth of knowledge, an extraordinarily talented actress and director, but above these things, she was Belvoir's mummy. Her passing has left an unfillable void in many of our hearts. I cannot count the shows she both directed and acted in. She was a multiple award winning actress and director and was always with her little furry companion.

Another area of watching Belvoir Players is via social media. There is no missed opportunity for promoting shows, even when not in our own theatre! Thank you Sinead for your exuberance and relentless pursuit of PR opportunities.

Melissa Gordon also creates miracles when it comes to our shows. Her eye for detail for great pictures proves why she is an award winning photographer!

Claire Ashe continues to update our noticeboards in the minor hall. These still remain a talking point when people pass by or rehearse. When children point to someone and ask "who is that?", they are told about the Belvoir greats, Richard Mills, Helina King, Austin Braniff, Olivia Brennan and more, ensuring the names and legends live on.

Karl and his team of techies continue to meet on Friday evenings. We have and continue to update equipment to make sure we are competitive to other similar companies. Stephen Hyland has also contributed much time, helping Karl in the evenings and weekends.

Costumes have also been a busy department. Most Monday nights they have at least two bookings from schools and companies looking to hire shows! Alongside this, they provide costumes for us at Belvoir!

So now to Belvoir Players. What have we been up to?

September 2023 saw the final performances of *Strictly for the Birds*, our summer tour. While this is an annual fixture, we find some theatres are slow to release tickets and advertising, resulting in smaller audiences and then reducing the number of performances. After much discussion throughout the year, it was decided to move away from Cree this year and try a murder mystery.

Once more we have found that the world of summer theatre is dwindling. When comparing ticket sales with other companies that are still doing Cree's, we are sitting on a level par with them, so it's not the genre of play that is hitting audiences. A new venue, we played Death by Design in Coalisland, the Craic Theatre. Our audience numbers were promising for a 1st visit.

Our panto reading and casting also took place alongside the return of the summer theatre. Beauty and the Beast was directed by Jessie McGreevy in her debut as a panto director. It was a success, with meticulous attention to detail and the creation of a set that has been used so much since.

Our adults had no rest as straight after panto, Claire Ashe stepped into her debut directing role in Belvoir, with Steele Magnolias. This production met with rave reviews, even from visitors from America, who highly praised the actresses in their authentic Southern accents.

Once put to bed, Mark cast this year's summer tour. We diversified from Cree to perform Rob Urbinati's "Death by Design" playing in theatres in Enniskillen, Omagh, Coleraine and Coalisland, Cookstown and Belvoir.

Our Senior Academy bravely embraced the challenges of Les Mis, schools' version. They simply excelled. It is one of those productions that will be talked about for many, many years and is a benchmark for future productions. While Shane directed and Wilson was MD, they were joined by a young team of Ellie, Serena, Nikita and Maeve.

It was a show based on passion, artistry and vision; not just from the production team, but very clearly evident amongst the young cast.

Equally as talented, our junior academy's production of Frozen Jr in June wowed audiences. Directed by Alex, ably assisted by Ellie and Maeve, the magical world of Errindale came to life. The transformation scene was stunning, Joy in costumes creating a piece of magic from a strip of Velcro! This was only outshone by glitter and snow.

Our senior summer project this year was "Ghost". Once again we welcomed an alumini, Johnny Brown, back to direct. It was professional, imaginative, creative and minimalistically effective. Put together in just 10 days, it showcased just how promising our youth of today are.

Hot on Ghost's heels was our Junior summer project, Finding Nemo Jr. This was an all Ireland and NI premiere, directed by Alex, Ellie and Maeve. These 7 – 15 year olds met and exceeded expectation. With 10 days rehearsing, they produced a show that many other companies would take months to create.

The success of BP academy 2023-2024 is evidenced by over 150 applications! In fact, applications closed a month early due to the numbers! We have applications from as far as Magherafelt and Banbridge / Newry!

To conclude my report, I see nothing but progress, nothing but expansion, nothing but success.

I hope people ever forget that we are all volunteers, because that's what we are. Rachele's meticulous attention as treasurer is why our accounts are as accurate as they are. Caroline's CP and academy admin was highly praised as impeccable, in an EA CEET team's inspection. Shane's pure dedication to our Academy is completely unrivalled. I could go on and mention many, many more.

In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt,

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

