

Hooked



Don Wycherley, director, with Central Arts' Ciara O'Connell and writer Gillian Grattan.

Central Arts on The Quay kick starts the new year with the world premiere of *Hooked* by Gillian Grattan from 27th to 31st January. Directed by Don Wycherley (*Bachelors Walk*, *Father Ted*) and produced by Evil Little Genius Productions, the production stars Tina Kellegher (*Sharon Curley in The Snapper*), Steve Blount (*Game of Thrones*) and Seana Kerslake (*Dollhouse*) and is, according to Central Arts director Ciara O'Connell, shaping up to be one of Waterford's theatrical highlights of 2015.

"They are an amazing team and it's fantastic to be able to open our doors to them at Central Arts. We're indebted to Conor Nolan and Waterford City and Council for having the faith in us to stage this production. We needed an opportunity to prove ourselves and the Council has been wonderful in seeing our vision, what the company has the potential to do.

"The support we've received across Waterford has been overwhelming from the local theatrical, artistic and musical community. John Halligan TD has agreed to become our first patron and his support has been amazing. We're also very grateful to Cllr Eddie Mulligan for his help over the last few months.

"Then there's the encouragement we've gotten from audiences. In just four months, we've had 3,000 people across the threshold. We've staged 11 productions, numerous workshops and held 44 musical events. When you take into account that the company is being spearheaded by an unwaged staff, I think we're doing ok so far!"

Hooked tells the story of attractive young Dubliner, Lydia (played by Seana Kerslake), who retreats to a small country village in an attempt to escape from her past and reinvent her future. She moves in next door to Tom (Steve Blount) and Mary (Tina Kellegher), the typical country neighbours, or are they...? Lydia quickly becomes the object of curiosity not only for Tom and Mary but the community at large. Tension mounts between the two women, setting in motion a gripping and unexpected chain of events that threatens to expose the secrets and lies bubbling beneath the surface in this small, close-knit rural community.

Serious stuff? Well, it is and it isn't, says writer Gillian Grattan.

"The story explores what happens when this gorgeous young thing moves into a rural fishing community. Mary takes an instant dislike to her and it goes from there but all is not as it seems. There's a good mixture of comedy and drama, with lots of laughs so it's not too heavy going."

Dublin native Gillian has lived in Thomastown for the past 8 years and is currently studying the Higher Diploma in Television Production with Nemeton TV in An Rinn, Co Waterford. She previously studied theatre at the University of Ulster as a mature student. *Hooked* has been selected for the Galway Theatre Festival Stage Write Series and a radio adaptation of the play won silver in the 2011 PPI National Radio Awards. In March 2012, it was produced by the Irish Classical Theatre Company in New York under the title *Fish Out of Water*. Gillian acknowledges the work done at Central Arts' predecessor Red Kettle in bringing *Hooked* to the Waterford stage.

"I moved to Thomastown when my daughter is born, I love it there. I started the Nemeton course last year as another string to my bow, really. It's all done through Irish but I'm finding it so worthwhile.

"I wrote *Hooked* several years ago and it was originally supposed to be produced by Red Kettle. None of this would have happened without the support of Ben Hennessy in the early days. I am very grateful to him for getting the ball rolling. I can't wait to see how Waterford audiences are going to react to it."

Director Don Wycherley reckons the show will strike a special chord with people from a small town background.

"I'm from a small town myself and I recognised so much in the play about the way things go unspoken about so I think the play will hold a particular resonance for a small, rural community, in particular. What I can say to people thinking of coming along is that they will laugh heartily and hopefully be moved as well. In fact, there's a fair few belly laughs in the play.

"The play is set somewhere in the sunny south east, though it doesn't specify exactly where. Seana's character Lydia moves

into the area and throws a cat amongst the pigeons. Steve's character Tom is delighted but not so his wife Mary, played by Tina. She does her best initially, heading over to welcome her new neighbour with an apple tart, as one does. But she quickly decides that this pretty young one is not worth knowing and then things begin to sour. Lydia is new so she doesn't know the rules - that so much is kept under the surface. The result is hilarious at times but it's also quite serious.

"Gillian is a new voice in theatre and, to be honest, I haven't come across anything like *Hooked* before. There have been a couple of attempts in the last few years to bring this show to the stage and I'm delighted that Waterford City and County Council came up with the backing."

Tina Kelleher, who plays Mary, last appeared in Waterford in *The Memory of Water* at the Theatre Royal. Her character Mary, she says, has a long story to tell.

"Mary is very closed, emotionally. She's become hardened, for reasons that become apparent in the play. That might sound very serious but there's actually loads of comicability there as well, as the drama unfolds. But I don't want to give too much away about that because I'll only spoil it for the audience. Tell them to come along and find for themselves, I don't think they'll be disappointed."

•Tickets are selling fast for *Hooked*, which runs at Central Arts, The Quay, Waterford, from 27th to 21st January, with a special preview price of €12 on the 27th. Regular price €15, all shows 8pm except for the 31st which is 6pm. Tickets can be booked at www.centralarts.ie