

'MY WORD IS MY BOND'

New play from Leitrim, presented at
ABSOLUT Fringe 2011, Dublin *Jo Holmwood*



THE CREATIVE PATH is a strange one, and sometimes inexplicable and unexpected.

When I moved to Leitrim in 2008, despite knowing the area very well having been here many times as a child and as a university student, it still felt like a leap into the unknown.

One of my main concerns was whether there would be enough opportunity for creative endeavours and encounters. As a graduate of the Samuel Beckett Centre at Trinity College, my first passion was always theatre, and in more recent times, while living in Dublin, I had committed myself more to writing and was a member of a weekly writers' group, meeting at the Teachers' Club at Parnell Square. Would Leitrim have enough to offer culturally, I wondered?

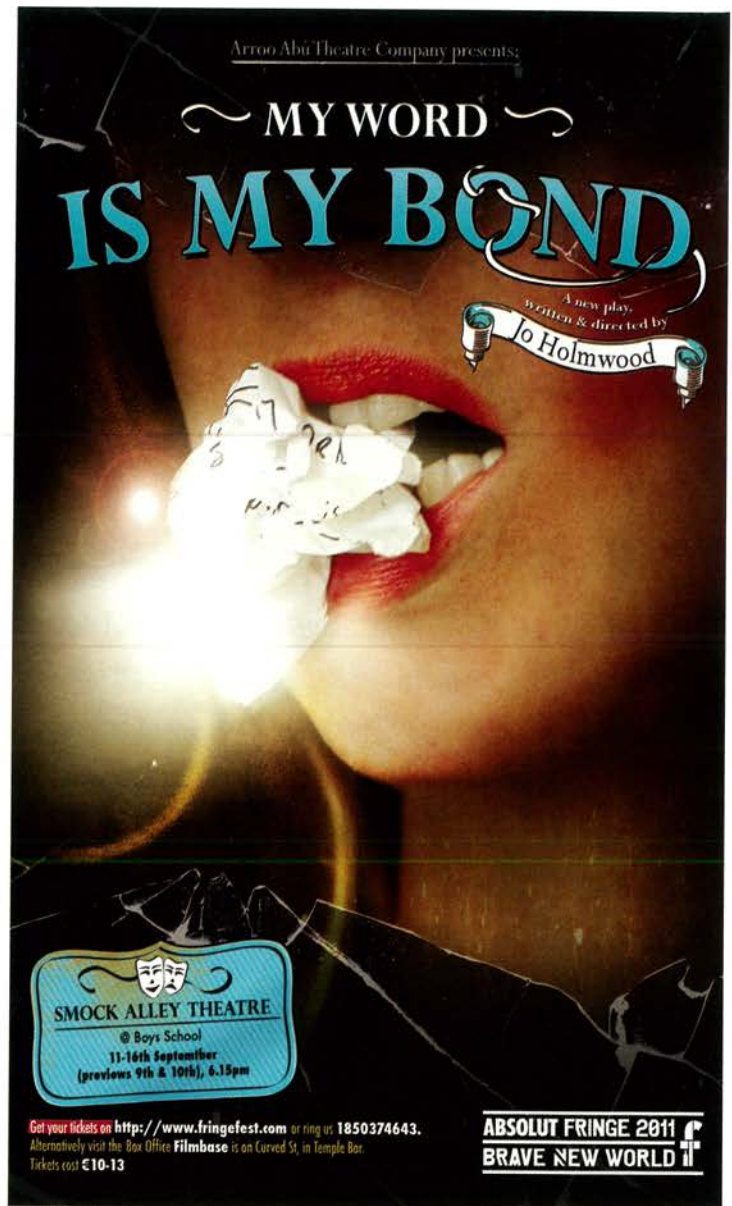
What I didn't expect was that within three years, I would present my first stage play at the Glens Centre in Manorhamilton, and later in the same year, at ABSOLUT Fringe in Dublin.

Shortly after settling in Leitrim, I was delighted to discover that there was a

group of local writers (calling themselves the 'Pig Executive') who met regularly at the Glens Centre under the tutelage of Dermot Healy (former Glens Writer-in-Residence) and that they were going to let me join their meetings. Perhaps it was the new inspirational surroundings of the Leitrim landscape, coupled with the mutual encouragement and support within this new group but soon I was writing — and what emerged was a play called 'My Word is My Bond'.

With this new play script, I was lucky enough to get some clear and positive input from Gavin Kostick, Literary Manager at Fishamble: The New Play Company, in Dublin. I also received some invaluable input and support from Dermot Healy in developing it further.

The last step that enabled me — and prompted me — to take it right through to production, was when I received a small bursary award from Leitrim County Arts Office to support the staging of the play. I knew then that there was no turning back!





The support I received from the Glens Centre was also tremendous. Following a meeting with Anna Legge, (Glens Centre Director) about the project, it was agreed that the play would be presented as part of the Glens Centre's Platform Productions Initiative, which aims to support emerging writers/directors in the presentation of their work to a public audience.

Rehearsals began in January towards a 3-night run in early February, which was very well received. With this production behind me, I was keen to develop the play further and to present it again. I submitted an application to ABSOLUT Fringe in March, which was accepted and 'My Word is My Bond' was then scheduled to run at the Boys' School at Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin in September.

In working towards this new production within a more national context, I established Arroo Abú Theatre

Company as a brand new Leitrim-based theatre company, dedicated to the presentation of new writing for theatre, and now feel confident that the company will go on to present more new works for theatre in the future.

Having worked in the theatre and arts sector in Dublin for some years, particularly in Temple Bar, it was strange presenting work at Smock Alley as a Leitrim-based company, and representing Leitrim within this high-profile festival. But my overriding feeling was one of pride. It is a lifelong affinity and connection with Leitrim that led me to move here in 2008, and since then, I have discovered what a vibrant, creative and imaginative county it really is.

While, as a student in the 1990s, mention of my connection with Leitrim was met with bemusement or disinterest ("Where is Leitrim?" people would ask!) now, I notice increasingly

that it is recognised as a place of cultural and artistic excellence, and as having a very strong arts community, which I am proud to be a part of.

Thanks to all the Leitrim and Sligo-based performers with whom I worked with this year: In January: Paul Gibson, Caoimhe Gleeson, Maura Logue, Dave McEvoy, Catherine O'Keeffe, Michael Roberts and Eileen Slevin; and for ABSOLUT Fringe: Anthony Brennan, Patrick Curley, Paul Gibson, Noírin Hennessy, Mary Morris, Deirdre O'Meara and Eileen Slevin.

