

The alternative arts lab hidden away in Glasgow

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The innocuous-looking black door that leads to the Southside Studios may be in Glasgow, but the oasis of creation behind it has more of the feel of an alternative arts lab in Berlin, Prague or New York.

By Neil Cooper



TEAM WORK: Eilidh MacAskill, Fergus Dunnet, Kim Moore (seated), Rose Ruane, Stef Smith, Martin O'Connor, Gilly Roche. Picture: Eoin Carey

Since last summer, Southside Studios has also been the base for Team Effort, an initiative driven by producer Gilly Roche to bring together six artists from different disciplines to work collectively and organically, without any specific end in sight.

The artists involved in Team Effort include the writer of hit play Roadkill, Stef Smith, co-founder of the Fish and Game company, Eilidh MacAskill, and writer and performer Martin O'Connor. Also on board is musician, composer and former member of group Zoey Van Goey, Kim Moore, while from the visual art world comes painter Fergus Dunnet, and Rose Ruane, who works with sculpture, video and live performance.

With this group having worked closely over the last few months, the Team Effort event that takes place at Tramway in Glasgow this coming Saturday night as part of the venue's Rip It Up season won't be a full production. Nor will it be a work in progress. Rather, the Team Effort collective will present something that has been shaped over a week's residency in Tramway, and is likely to exist for just one night only.

"I was really keen to retain the spirit of spontaneity and adventurousness everyone's been working with," says Roche, "but to create a safety net in which the audience can trust us to create a new piece of work that's still powerful. Everyone will be going into Tramway with different sets of ideas taken from everywhere. There'll be bits of text and sound and other things, and we'll start to craft all these different elements over the week. Everyone works in wildly different forms, but we want to ramp up the theatricality of things and unify the audience and the artists. We'll be walking this brilliant tightrope between it being terrifying and thrilling."

The roots of Team Effort go back to a chance meeting Roche had several years ago with Ben Walker, who had just opened Southside Studios as a going concern.

Walker asked Roche if she might be interested in putting on a play there. As an emerging producer, Roche leapt at the opportunity to put on work outwith regular theatre spaces, and produced a piece by Rob Drummond. Another show followed, and "it became apparent that there was a desire for this sort of work, where there were no expectations, and where the audience and performers could become one".

With support from the National Theatre Studio in London, the National Theatre of Scotland, Playwrights Studio Scotland and others, Roche began to look at the potential for developing work in Southside Studios in a more holistic way than is possible in many venues.

"I wanted to find a project and create a space where artists could explore their work and take risks in a way that you can't in other buildings," Roche says. "The artists we approached were people who I felt were at an important point in their careers, and who I felt were bold in terms of exploring ideas.

"The dynamic of the space here is very important as well. It's dusty and dirty, and is always constantly changing. It's very unassuming from the outside, but once you come in there's this beautiful eclectic mix of artists working in a space where ideas are constantly evolving."

The first fruits of Team Effort's multi-faceted activity was a series of

seven events held at the Southside Studios last summer under the name IF. These were effectively a set of show-and-tells by what had effectively become a community, presented in a safe and trusting environment.

Roche stresses the support she and Team Effort have had from the likes of Caroline Newall, the director of artistic development at the National Theatre of Scotland, from Ben Harman, the Curator of Contemporary art at GoMa, and from Johnny Lynch, aka The Pictish Trail, one of the driving forces behind Fence Records before founding his own Lost Map imprint. Digital artist Kim Beveridge and trainee curator Allan Madden have also made substantial contributions, as has director Debbie Hannan.

Now Team Effort is venturing out of its comfort zone for the Tramway event, it will be interesting to see how audiences respond to such a collective approach. "Audiences should expect to be surprised," says Roche. "One of the things we said at the IF events was that the work is still in development, and we ask audiences to watch with a certain amount of generosity. It will be very raw."

Team Effort is at Tramway, February 15. www.teameffortglasgow.com