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‘A healing process’ – new production honours drama teacher



Victoria Meakin | THE PRESS

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The Free Theatre's premiere season of *The Deadbeat Opera* will be performed at The Pump House in Christchurch in September. The late Samantha Boyce-Da Cruz is featured (front right) on their poster.

FREE THEATRE

A much-loved high school teacher who died suddenly this year will be central to the thoughts of the Free Theatre Christchurch company when they perform their latest work.

Samantha Boyce-Da Cruz helped devise the group's new show, The Deadbeat Opera, but [suffered a major brain bleed on February 12 and died two days later.](#)

Boyce-Da Cruz, who was contributing to the project alongside her brother, cast member Aaron Boyce, is still on the production poster and was talked about "all the time" during rehearsals, company manager Marian McCurdy said.

"It's a sort of a healing process - hopefully for Aaron most of all, but she would have loved to have been involved," McCurdy said.

"She would have loved to know that we're still doing it as well and keeping the memory of the work that we created together with her. She's very much alive in this work."

Boyce-Da Cruz, who studied drama and education at the University of Canterbury, taught at [Te Aratai College](#) for eight years.

Shocked school leaders closed Te Aratai for a day following her death, with one pupil describing her as "one of the best teachers I've ever had".





Boyce-Da Cruz, a teacher at Te Aratai College, was involved with the development of The Deadbeat Opera before she suddenly fell ill in February and died shortly afterwards.

SUPPLIED

Boyce-Da Cruz had reconnected with Free Theatre Christchurch after being involved with them as a student.

The company, which focuses on the avant-garde, has produced work since 1979 and was based at the Arts Centre until the Canterbury earthquakes.

Founding artistic director Peter Falkenberg is still in his role.


Since then, shows have been performed in numerous spaces, including old churches and tanneries, plus on the streets of Ōtautahi.

The company is committed to experimental work, McCurdy said.


“Everything we do looks completely different to the next project. We work a lot with masks and puppets and there’s always a musical element to our works as well. And we collaborate with a real diversity of different artists, depending on the project.”

The Deadbeat Opera is an adaptation of John Gay’s 18th century Beggar’s Opera, alongside The Threepenny Opera, Bertolt Brecht’s 1928 take on the work.

Free Theatre added contemporary music to the production, which highlights the previous works' themes of moral corruption, hypocrisy, capitalism and inequality.

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The Pump House

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The first deadbeat has entered the building. With his Milwaukee drill and his sawn off piano. #thedeatopera 🎫 ticket link in bio

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“We’re bringing in new meaning and bringing our own, I guess, attitudes towards this problem,” McCurdy said.

The cost of living crisis made the new production extremely relevant, she added.

“There is a line in the Threepenny Opera that resonates with us, which is, ‘Who is the greater criminal, he who robs the bank or he who founds one?’ And that’s still just as pressing a question as it was 100 years ago.”

The production is Free Theatre’s second at The Pump House heritage building in Linwood.

“It’s a part of our industrial history. It’s full of treasures, full of character. It’s like a museum, to certainly the colonial past of Christchurch,” McCurdy said.

With The Pump House operating as a salvage yard during the day, eagle-eyed visitors may spot old Christchurch treasures on the set, including a chandelier from the Catholic basilica cathedral, which was demolished after the 2011 earthquake.

Free Theatre Christchurch’s Deadbeat Opera is on at The Pump House on 544 Tuam St between September 6 and 24.

[Info and tickets at freetheatre.org.nz.](http://freetheatre.org.nz)

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