

Colgan's PA settles with Gate

Mark Tighe

The Gate has settled a High Court claim for damages by a former employee over allegations of inappropriate behaviour by Michael Colgan, its former artistic director.

Ciara Smyth, a playwright, actress and former personal assistant to Colgan, lodged proceedings alleging "assault and battery, including sexual assault" against the Dublin theatre last May.

In her claim, Smyth sought damages for alleged "trespass against the person, negligence, the intentional and/or negligent infliction of emotional suffering, personal injuries, breach of contract, repudiatory breach of contract and breach of duty".

Smyth outlined her experiences with Colgan on the blog of Grace Dyas, a playwright who first publicised complaints about his behaviour. Smyth said she experienced a "plethora of inappropriateness and bullying" while she worked at the Gate and not all of it related to Colgan.

However, she said there was "constant touching of my thighs, back and very occasionally my bum while I sat beside [Colgan] typing from his dictation.

"He made frequent comments about the size of my breasts and whether or not I'd contemplate a breast reduction, considering my small frame. He commented on other women and asked me if I
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thought they'd give blowjobs or what I thought that they f***** like. He showed me pictures of his girlfriend in her underwear and asked me what I thought of her ass."

On one occasion she claimed Colgan "walloped me on the ass" in front of other people. Smyth said she complained to senior Gate staff about this incident.

A subsequent independent review of 56 complaints found that Colgan had a case to answer. The Gate has apologised to those who made the complaints.

It is understood Smyth agreed a settlement following mediation which includes a non-disclosure agreement. Richard Grogan, her solicitor, said the case was settled "to the satisfaction of both parties". A notice of discontinuance has been filed with the High Court.

Smyth said: "The case has been resolved and I am happy with the outcome."

The Gate confirmed it had settled the claim. Colgan was not a defendant in the action. His solicitor, Paul Tweed, said: "Michael Colgan was not



Smyth: case resolved

party to any settlement nor was he consulted."

In an article in the Sunday Independent, Colgan said he was "deeply distressed" at the realisation he had upset co-workers and he sincerely apologised to "anyone who was ever made to feel upset". He insisted his behaviour should not be equated with sexual crimes.

Colgan, who retired from the Gate in 2016, was the country's highest paid artistic executive, with a package worth €251,416 in 2014. The Arts Council has told the Gate that no part of its annual €860,000 state grant can be used to settle claims or pay compensation to staff who complained about their treatment in the theatre.