

ARTS/CULTURE

Standing up to Donald Trump

SCREEN SCENE

Esther McCarthy



These Irish producers were stunned to receive a 'Cease & Desist' letter from Tump's lawyers while making *The Apprentice*. They pressed on and the finished film has now been nominated for two Oscars

It was applauded with a standing ovation at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. But within hours of showing their film about a young Donald Trump to the world, two Irish producers received a 'cease and desist' letter — from the US president.

The then-former president instructed his lawyers to issue the letter to the producers of *The Apprentice*. Among them were Irish producers Julianne Forde and Ruth Treacy from Tailored Films — whose next film project brings them to West Cork.

The letter sparked urgent efforts to save and release the film — and last month, *The Apprentice* was nominated for two Oscars.

The film has been enormously well-received, but bringing it to the world proved a challenge — especially in the aftermath of the 'cease and desist' letter, recalls Treacy. "What it achieved was it scared off distributors. We'd had private conversations with distributors who really enjoyed the film, who backed away quite quickly."

Determined to bring the film to audiences, Treacy, Forde and their production partners in Canada and Denmark succeeded in getting the film released throughout the world — including in the US.

"It became quite a difficult journey to get the film released. We knew that it had to come out before the election if it was to have any chance of ever coming out," says Treacy.

The Apprentice, released in Irish cinemas late last year and now on rental platforms, is directed by Ali Abassi (*Holy Spider*), they — with the backing of Screen Ireland — become a third-country producing partner.

The filmmakers studied at the National Film School in Dun Laoghaire, where Treacy focused on sound design and Forde on cinematography, while both of them also directed. Unconnected to the film industry while trying to build up

for Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor respectively. For the film's Irish producers, the news came as a delight and a pleasant surprise.

"Even though it had got a number of nominations for the Indie Spirits and things like that, it felt like the Oscars was the most traditional and difficult one to penetrate," says Treacy, adding that some pundits were predicting that both actors could narrowly miss out on a nomination. "We were always slightly on the edge. We might be number six out of the top five."

"When the two of them were nominated, it was just amazing. They're really great guys — they're so passionate about the film, they're dedicated to the message behind the film, and showing up all the time to talk about how proud they are of it and how important it is to them."

Stan's nomination has been particularly welcomed in US film circles as the star took on his portrayal of Trump on the eve of the country's elections. "It was a tight enough shoot, just under six weeks, and it was in -10 degrees in Toronto in December, January last year," says Forde of their leading actor.

"He was having to flip between being young Donald Trump one day, older Donald Trump the next day, and the nuances of the performance that he had to move between."

Treacy and Forde became involved in *The Apprentice* after meeting one of the film's other producers at Cannes in 2023. Intrigued by the Danish-Canadian production and fans of the work of director Ali Abassi (*Holy Spider*), they — with the backing of Screen Ireland — become a third-country producing partner.

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Julianne Forde and Ruth Treacy of Tailored Films at their offices in Dublin.
Picture: Gareth Chaney



Maria Bakalova and Sebastian Stan in *The Apprentice*; right, Jeremy Strong and Stan in another scene from the film.

their body of work, they worked together on a corporate video and found that their skills complemented each other. They gained further corporate work and ran summer filmmaking courses for young people. They were in their early twenties when they set up their production company, Tailored Films — but even at this point, there was no master plan to work as producers.

"We always wanted to be in entertainment and making entertainment, but it wasn't where we started," says Forde. "We didn't really know anyone in the film industry, which at the time was rare enough not to have some family contact or friend contact."

"We were like: 'Right we'd better get this sorted ourselves'. We were relatively young setting up the

company and doing it 20 years now, it's been a big journey."

The duo worked with filmmaker Conor McMahon on a web series called *Zombie Bashers* and when McMahon went on to direct *Stitches* — a 2011 comedy horror starring Ross Noble — they came on board as co-producers.

Since then, Tailored Films has produced several screen stories

across film and television, including 2017 gothic horror *The Lodgers*. Their latest film, *Bring Them Down*, centred around two warring Irish shepherding families and starring Barry Keoghan, is currently in cinemas.

"Our vision is to produce edgy stories that are underpinned by strong societal themes," says Treacy. "*Bring Them Down* and *The Apprentice* both really adhere to that, because *Bring Them Down* is really about the toxic element of men not talking, and how things can build up for so long before they erupt into something that they never needed to erupt into. The allegory of what it takes to stop a war, and how easy it can be for a war to start."

"Then with *The Apprentice*, it's obviously not just about an individual. It's about a system, and the relentless pursuit of power at all costs. We want to be able to take risks in the projects we take on. We want to work with filmmakers that are bold and brave. If we could continue to work on projects like *Bring Them Down* and *The Apprentice* like that would be amazing. Films that have something to say, but that are also exhilarating to watch."

In fact, their next film comes from one of Ireland's most exciting filmmakers - Bantry's Damian McCarthy - and follows the international success of his smart and suspenseful horror, *Oddity*, shot on the grounds of Bantry House.

Severance star Adam Scott stars in *Hokum*, currently filming at West Cork Film Studios. It centres around a horror novelist who visits a remote Irish inn to spread his parents' ashes, unaware of rumours it is haunted by a witch.

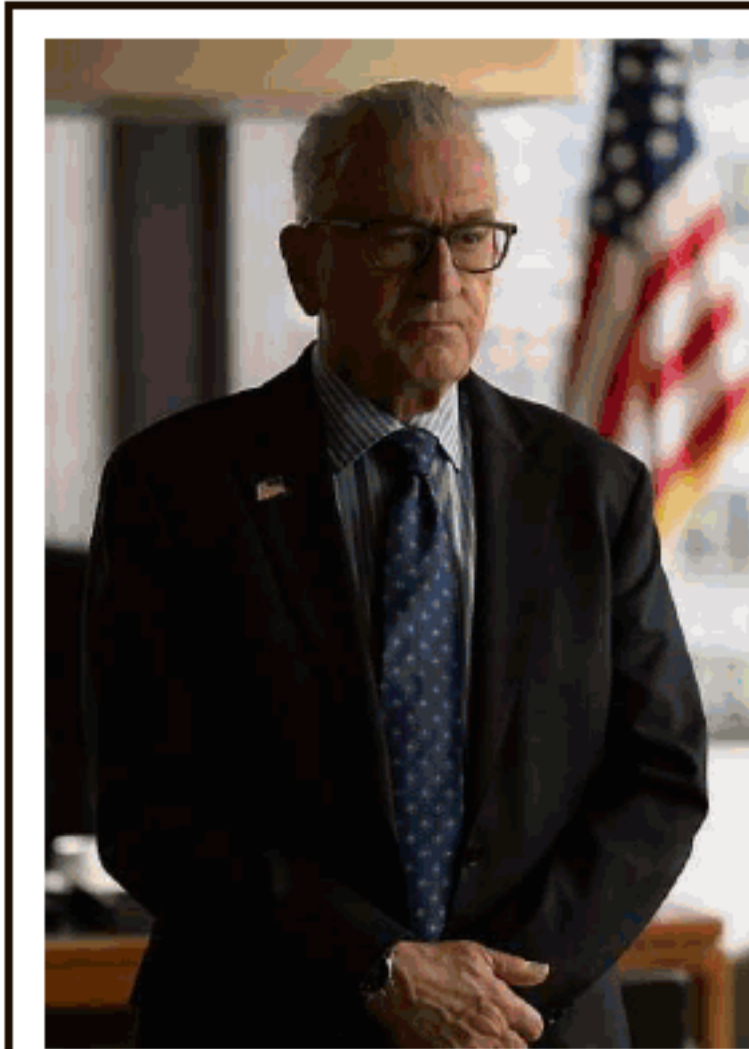
"It's been really great," says Forde of the project so far. "We've got a huge amount of West Cork crew on board, as well as other talented members that we worked with from all corners of Ireland previously. All the accommodation providers, all the crew, all the talent, everybody's just been really nice and welcoming."

On the first weekend of March, Treacy and Forde will head to Los Angeles and the Oscars, to cheer on their two actor nominees and celebrate Ireland's creative involvement in a major international movie.

"We have never been before, so we don't fully know what it looks like, but we have our flights booked, and we're heading over," says Treacy, adding that many Irish people worked on the film.

"Hundreds of VFX people worked on this. If you look at the credits and all the Irish people that worked on it, it was very much an Irish creative co-production that everyone should be very proud of."

■ *The Apprentice* is available to rent on streaming platforms including Apple TV and Sky Store. *Bring Them Down* is now in cinemas.



Streaming: Zero Day
Netflix, available now

Robert De Niro's first major television role, *Zero Day* is a US political thriller wherein a former US president — the 81-year-old De Niro — is tasked with an inquiry into the cause of a cyberattack that claimed dozens of lives. The heavyweight cast includes Jesse Plemons, Lizzy Caplan, and Matthew Modine. All six episodes are available to stream now.



Cinema: The Monkey
General release, Friday, February 21

A horror comedy based on a Stephen King short story from 1980, Theo Jones (*White Lotus* season 2) plays the dual roles of twin brothers Bill and Hal, who find their father's old monkey toy in the attic. It's the first of two King adaptations for the big screen this year — *The Life of Chuck* arrives in summer.



Gig: Pantera
3Arena, Dublin, Friday, February 21

Their first tour in over 20 years, heavy metal kingpins Pantera return to Ireland for a headline show at Dublin's 3Arena. Featuring original members Philip H Anselmo (vocals) and Rex Brown (bass), alongside Zakk Wylde (guitar) and Charlie Benante (drums), the show and tour continues the celebration of the lives of late founding members Vinnie Paul (drums) and Dimebag Darrell (guitar).



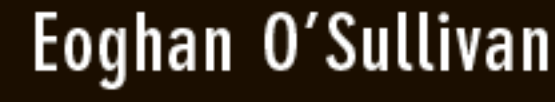
Comedy: It's Wine O'Clock with Norma Sheahan
Cork Opera House, Sunday, February 23

Starring actress Norma Sheahan and directed by Michael Scott, Norma is newly divorced, and believes 50 is the new 30. Her three teenagers tell her to "get a life and get a fella", as they take over her 'glow-up' from Badger to MILF. The comedy stage show sees Sheahan and Scott reunite, having worked together previously on *Shirley Valentine*, *Vagina Monologues*, and *The Matchmaker*.



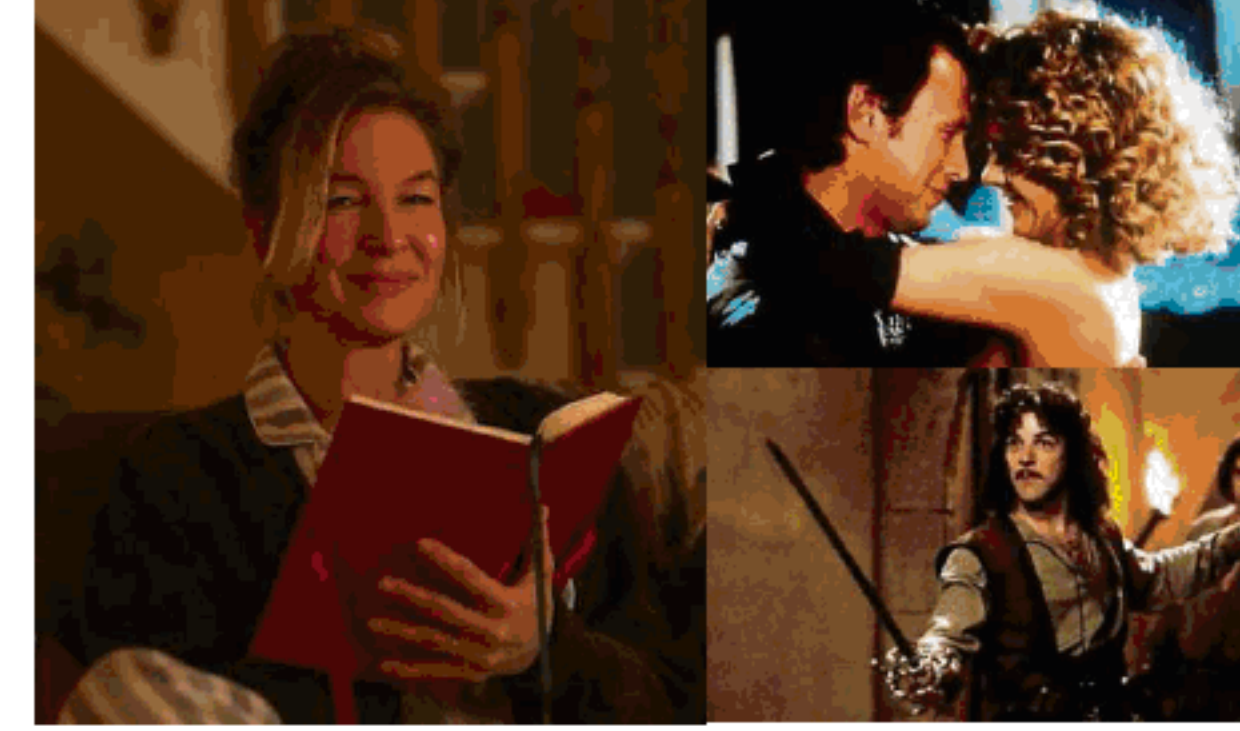
Festival: Ortús Chamber Music Festival
Various venues, Cork, Wednesday, February 26-Sunday, March 2

Curated by cellist Sinéad O'Halloran, the 10th edition of Ortús kicks off with a concert at St Peter's Church in Cork city at 1pm on Wednesday. Other venues playing host to classical and traditional concerts over the ensuing days include UCC's Aula Maxima, Dripsey Castle Estate, and Sirlus Arts Centre in Cobh.



Eoghan O'Sullivan

Try our rom-com quiz:



Bridget Jones, When Harry Met Sally, and Princess Bride feature in our questions.

1. Bridget Jones returned to our screens this month. Who co-stars in *Mad About The Boy* as her caddish ex, Daniel Cleaver?
2. In which decade was *When Harry Met Sally*, starring Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan, first released?
3. Which Irish actor stars as a recently widowed man in *Love Actually*?
4. Kate Hudson stars as Andie Anderson in *How To Lose A Guy In 10 Days*, but what is the name of the fictional magazine she was writing her article for?
5. *Fire Island* is a queer rom-com from 2022. Which Jane Austen novel is it inspired by?
6. A junior copywriter goes undercover in her old high school in *Never Been Kissed*, but what actress stars as Jodie Geller?
7. What country is *Crazy Rich Asians* set in?
8. Sydney Sweeney and Glen Powell star in this 2023 rom-com where a couple is reunited at a wedding following a disastrous first date.
9. Which publication does Hugh Grant's character pretend to work for in *Notting Hill*?
10. Who directed *Sleepless in Seattle* and *You've Got Mail*?
11. What is the name of Mandy Patinkin's character in *Princess Bride*?
12. Which actress stars opposite Gregory Peck in *Roman Holiday*?
13. What song does Heath Ledger sing to Julia Stiles in *10 Things I Hate About You*?
14. Alicia Silverstone stars as Cher Horowitz in which adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma*?
15. Who is this?

ANSWERS

1. Hugh Grant
2. 1990s (1989)
3. Liam Neeson
4. Composure
5. Pride and Prejudice
6. Drew Barrymore
7. Singapore
8. Anyone But You
9. Horse & Hound
10. Nora Ephron
11. Inigo Montoya
12. Audrey Hepburn
13. 'Can't Take My Eyes Off of You' by Frankie Valli
14. Clueless
15. Colin Firth

Denise O'Donoghue