

Business Post

Magazine

July 2 2023

**YE
VAGABONDS**

BRÍAN MAC GLOINN
ON HIS INFLUENCES

FINE TUNES

THE CRAFT OF
INSTRUMENT MAKING
IS ALIVE AND WELL

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EITHNE SHORTALL

If you want to keep fit and healthy as you get older, you've got to move with the times – literally – which is why I've joined the running battle to keep the effects of ageing at bay

@eithneshortall

have recently returned to running. It had been three years since I'd last pounded the pavements and I got quite the shock when my lungs threatened to give up after the first two kilometres. Maybe it was just one kilometre, actually, but it felt like two.

Don't worry. I am not going to spend the next 800 words smugly extolling the virtues of exercise and bragging about how I've essentially found God through sweat. If I wanted to do that, I'd tell you about my concurrent return to sea swimming. The only thing worse than a born-again runner is a born-again sea swimmer.

While I am enjoying the euphoria that comes post-exercise, especially if I manage to increase my distance or reduce how often I have to slow to a walk, that's not why I'm doing it. I have dug my runners out from the back of the wardrobe for one reason alone: I am getting older.

A few months ago, I heard a health expert on the radio talking about how dangerous inactivity is as you age. Pro-

fessor Niall Moyna from DCU's School of Health said that the aim is to live as long as you can, but also to spend as many of those years as possible in good health – and activity is the best thing you can do to ensure this. When I look at older people I know, the benefits are clear in the ones who have been continuously moving. They have so much energy, seem notably younger and have better general health.

While I like to think that at 37 I'm a way off breaking a hip or struggling to get out of an armchair, this is the time when you establish habits that will hold into later years. It's remarkably easy for inactivity to set in. To quote Professor Moyna: "If you don't use it, you lose it." Having young children means I could never be fully sedentary, but it also leaves less time for meaningful exercise – the sort that makes you sweat.

I used to work in an office and cycled there and back every day, so exercise was built into my daily life. I still cycle as my main means of transport, but I have fewer places to be. I was always an active, fit person and for the first time in my life I am having to make a conscious effort to exercise. If that first run back didn't kill me, there was still a chance I'd die from the shock at how difficult I found it. My baseline fitness hadn't so much slipped as plummeted, and I hadn't even noticed.

Perhaps the greatest sign that I'm getting older – assuming sense increases with years – is that this is genuinely why I have returned to exercise. In my 20s, I might have said I was doing it to "get strong" when really I meant get thin. But now health is my sole priority. Besides, research shows that exercise has little impact on weight – although I do think it puts you in a better mind frame to eat well, which may have a knock-on effect.

I used to fear getting older, but such concerns are a luxury afforded only to the young. Ageing, I now realise, is a lot better than the alternative. I once thought achievements were impressive only if you made them young – now I am in awe of people who start out on new paths or achieve their dreams later in life when responsibilities and obstacles tend to multiply. Perseverance is more impressive than anything. So, I'm leaning into ageing and embracing all the tells.

Gone are the days of watching movies and admiring the beautiful people in them. Now I get my kicks from ogling the sets; a particularly lovely wooden floor or well-designed kitchen. My favourite part of steamy scenes is probably the thin-stemmed wine glasses they're chinking before falling into bed.

I remember the dread I felt as a child if I knew a Saturday was to be spent at a garden centre; now I can think of little better. My younger self would balk at the fact that I now pay someone to place pictures in a frame for me, but increased wisdom knows a good border enhances that which it surrounds. Likewise, my ideal night out now starts at 6pm and is over by 9.30pm. Blissful.

Last weekend I went to a hen party that involved a hike, dinner and everyone being tucked up in bed by midnight. I had a grand total of two drinks. We were all women on this side of 35 and there wasn't a word of objection.

Incidentally, the hike was led by the mother of the bride – a woman of 73 who has been hillwalking regularly since 50 and was striding ahead of some of us 35 years her junior who had stopped to catch breath. She was an inspiration – and a reason to keep up the running. ■



Sole priority: engaging in regular physical activity is the best way to optimise your health as you age GETTY

'I used to fear getting older, but such concerns are a luxury afforded only to the young. Ageing, I now realise, is a lot better than the alternative'

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ANTON SAVAGE

Inherited from the tech sector, disruptor philosophy has crept into areas of our lives where it is least appropriate – and most risky

@AntonSavageShow

Move fast and break things. That was famously Mark Zuckerberg's guiding principle when he set up Facebook and it led to a generation of entrepreneurs who espoused his 'fix it on the fly' approach.

And there was good reason for them to espouse it. Venture capital wanted growth. Lightning-fast growth. Maximum market share in minimum time. Boring things like cash flow and profits could come once market dominance was achieved. That dynamic incentivised getting things launched, not getting them right.

In the tech industry, this wasn't a major deal. The world didn't end because Twitter's algorithm had a glitch or Facebook fell over. But the tech bros' approach began to infect industries in the real world.

First we saw WeWork, the office space rental company which managed to convince us that giving people a desk and a broadband connection was somehow life-changing. This magnificent display of high-octane marketing smoke and mirrors caused the business to climb to a valuation of \$47 billion.

That was in 2020. When the smoke cleared, the investor community realised this was a business which lost money hand over fist and was run by a man seemingly more focused on his private jet than returning private equity. WeWork has since lost \$46.5 billion of its peak valuation.

Then we saw the same attitude appear in the car industry, thanks to Tesla. Elon Musk reached peak by literally

moving fast and breaking things – this time his own products. He hosted a launch and said the company's Cybertruck would be available in 2021 with bulletproof windows. He demonstrated the bulletproof nature of the windows by flinging a steel ball, which caused them to shatter. He demonstrated his company's capacity to deliver on its commitments by missing the 2021 delivery deadline, which is now . . . who knows? They still haven't offered the Cybertruck for sale.

But for Tesla, that doesn't really matter. They are reaping the upside of the disruptor philosophy by gaining market share, regardless of whether or not they have a truck to sell. In high-growth new industries like tech and electric vehicles, the public and investors forgive almost everything except slow growth. Where problems start is in established industries on which people depend. Like healthcare.

In healthcare we rely on companies being slow, heavily researched, rigorously tested and scrupulously regulated. But the disruptor attitude crept into even this most vital industry in the form of Theranos. This was the blood testing company started by Elizabeth Holmes and governed by a board made up of four-star generals, former US cabinet members and billionaires, all of whom believed that Holmes was the "disruptor" who would make them more billions.

And for a while, she did. Her Edison blood analysis machines were supposedly able to run hundreds of tests on just a drop of blood, revolutionising her industry and bringing cheap predictive healthcare to the masses. Except they couldn't.

Theranos went from apparently saving lives to demonstrably risking them. It became clear that the company was providing tests it knew to be unreliable, on which physicians and patients were making life-and-death decisions. The firm went belly-up and Elizabeth Holmes went from an estimated personal net worth of \$5 billion to federal prison, where she currently resides.

This was the first major red flag indicating that the disruptor ethos was appropriate only in low-risk, high-reward, fast-growth companies. In the "normal" world, doing things right still matters. But despite warnings like the fate of Theranos, the ethos continued to spread into industries where it was dangerously inappropriate. Like submarine exploration.

The OceanGate tragedy is the logical zenith of that worldview. This was a submersible built by a man who scoffed at regulation (too slow!), mocked standard practice (stifling innovation!) and sneered at testing (too constricting!). He took the disruptor attitude into a century-old industry that is slow, methodical, highly regulated and careful. An industry that knows it has to be all of those things because the stakes are so high.

If you get something wrong 4,000 feet under water, it isn't that an algorithm glitches, or a truck delivery gets delayed, or a shared workspace gets overvalued. If you get it wrong 4,000 feet under water, people die.

OceanGate proves the need to move beyond "disruptors". Wrecking things at speed must never again be our measure of success. Even in the tech industry, we are coming to learn the damage done by that approach. Damage to our democracies, to our social fabric, to our national and international discourse.

As we move into an era where social media and artificial intelligence have immeasurable implications for all our lives, we need to change back to the philosophy we used to live by. Trust experts, get things right – and most importantly, move slowly and try not to break anything. ■



Stockton Rush, OceanGate's chief executive, perished in his own submersible

ANTON IS...

Streaming: Mentour Pilot on YouTube. A training pilot for a large European airline who does brilliant aviation accident analyses as a sideline gig

Reading: *The Ship Beneath the Ice: The Discovery of Shackleton's Endurance* by Mensun Bound

Following: @everyringfort, the account which provides pics and locations for every ring fort in Ireland (we have a LOT of ring forts)



Quality TV the amount of good television available is often overwhelming. But one programme worth catching up with is *The Bear*, ahead of its season two release this month. It follows a young chef from the world of fine dining who comes home to Chicago to run his family's Italian beef sandwich café after the suicide of his older brother.

Public donations autograph hunter Liam Bluett has gifted hundreds of signed photographs of Irish actors to the National Library of Ireland. The collection includes 519 head shots dating from the 1960s to the 2020s, and features stars such as Maureen O'Hara, Liam Neeson, Pierce Brosnan, Saoirse Ronan and Colin Farrell.

River cycles work has begun on phase 3 of the Royal Canal Greenway project, which will provide a segregated 2.1km cycle route along the banks of the Royal Canal from North Strand Road to Phibsborough Road. When complete in 2025, the project will connect Dublin to Longford with a 130km cycle track.

Irish documentary Netflix's *The Deepest Breath* by Irish filmmaker Laura McGann will open in Irish cinemas next week. It follows record-breaking ocean diver Alessia Zecchini and a heroic safety diver, Stephen Keenan, from Dublin, as they try to make history with a risky dive.

Culture Counter



Street violence the Abbey Theatre and Catherine Martin, the culture minister, have condemned an unprovoked attack on a Ukrainian actor in Dublin. Oleksandr Hrekov (pictured below) was in the Irish capital to perform in Brian Friel's *Translations*. He was hospitalised after being attacked by three people on Eden Quay.

Dublin's club scene nightclubs in the capital were added to the endangered species list years ago, and long-promised licensing reform have seemingly stalled. A series of four pop-up raves planned in Dublin Port this month by Temporary Pleasure seemed to provide a lifeline but have been postponed due to "unforeseen insurance issues".



THIS WEEK

you will love



Barbiecore for your feet

Irish accessories brand Nicki Hoyne won Best New Brand at the acclaimed Drapers Footwear Awards in London last month. From elegant mules and quirky pumps to a glitzy 'Out Out' sandal, her collection has hit the mark with women looking for something a little more elevated than standard high-street fare. Pictured is the Oversized Bow in neon pink, perfect for adding that touch of on-trend pink to your summer evening wear; €220 at nicki-hoyne.com.



Georgian charm on your arm

Mullingar brand My Name Is Ted recently launched the latest addition to its Door Bag Collection with this cute and versatile **Door Phone purse**. Handcrafted from Italian leather and luxury suede, it has a removable chain handle and leather crossbody strap, so it can be carried by hand or worn crossbody. Vertical in shape to emulate a Georgian door, it's a great gift idea for anyone living abroad. Iridescence Mini Door purse, €595 at mynameisted.com.



Pillows with personality

Never shy of making a statement, Joanne Hynes' collection for Dunnes Stores includes this gorgeous abstract **Muse Lady velvet cushion**. Showing hand-drawn faces from the designer's own sketch books - and with a different drawing on each side - the cushion is beautifully finished with vintage tassels and a cord trim in gold and cream. It will bring warmth and interest to any room in your home; €50 at dunnesstores.com.

Stories of art and lives

Cairde Sligo Arts Festival is a unique coming together of artists and audiences, which kicked off yesterday and runs until next Sunday. Highlights this year include a performance called Freedom Letters, which will take the audience on a poetical-musical journey through the lives of Constance Markievicz and Valeria O'Connor-Vilinska, exploring their roles in the liberation of Ireland and Ukraine respectively. The amazing **Loah** (below) will also perform on Saturday, at 8pm. Visit cairdefestival.com for the full line-up.



Pretty soap stories

This beautiful **Lavender Confetti hand-made soap** by Wicklow-based brand Bread & Weather looks almost too pretty to use. Scented with pure lavender essential oil and made with Irish rapeseed oil, which is great for the skin, the soap is topped with rose petals and lavender flower for a gorgeous decorative finish. Bread & Weather also offers a range of chemical-free scented candles. Handmade soap, €3.50, and scented candles, €23.50, at breadandweather.ie.



Family fun in the park

Dublin City Council's **Funtropolis** returns to Merrion Square and Mountjoy Square with two weekends of free family fun in July and August. First up is the southside park from next weekend, July 8 and 9, from 12pm to 6pm, followed by the northside event on August 19 and 20. Go Dance for Change, a multicultural dance network, will also be performing at both events, while the council's brand new mobile child sensory unit which will be available for use by children who identify as neurodiverse. For more information, see www.dublin.ie/funtropolis

BRÍAN MAC GLOINN

Folk musician

Ye Vagabonds are very much a family affair. Formed by brothers Brían and Diarmuid Mac Gloinn, they have been credited with being at the fore of a new wave of Irish folk. Born and raised in Carlow, the brothers grew up surrounded by music and speaking Irish at home.

“I grew up in Palatine, a few miles from Carlow town, with four older siblings and always lots of visitors around the house,” Brían says. “Then I moved to Dublin and found myself a community there as well. I’ve always been singing and playing music and I started earning money from busking and playing gigs when I was 13 or 14. Music has always been my life, not just my living.”

Brían says his brother-in-law Jesse Smith taught him to play the fiddle and also “generously” shared his music library with him, which informed his earliest taste.

“A lot of it was early 1920s-’50s field recordings of Irish traditional music, but also some American old-time, folk and blues. None of that music would have been easy to come by back then and I spent a lot of time on my own with it. This gave me a taste for minimal arrangements and simplicity in recordings,” he says.

Ye Vagabonds are known for their harmonious blend of traditional and contemporary folk, combined with Brían’s soulful vocals. They have released four albums, and picked up six folk awards from RTÉ Radio 1 and BBC Radio 2, alongside another four nominations.

What was your earliest ambition?

I think I wanted to be a fireman, a builder, a postman, and a musician, maybe all at once. Who knows, maybe there’s still time.

Did your Leaving Cert exams matter in the end?

I did what I needed to do to get into college, and that was the main thing. I really enjoyed all my subjects, though, and that helped a lot – I did art, music, French and business, all of which I’ve found very useful in my life as a musician.

Which five famous guests would you love to have at your dinner party?

I don’t know how famous these people are to most people, but I’d have Sarah Makem, Eddie Butcher, Geordie Hanna, Róise Bean Mhic Grianna and Jean Ritchie over, if I could bring them back to life. They’re all some of my favourite traditional singers – I’ve spent so much time listening to them that I feel like I know them at this stage.

Which musicians are your biggest influences and why?

Fleet Foxes were my favourite modern band as a teenager, along with Grizzly Bear and Animal Collective. These days, Sam Amidon, Big Thief, Lisa O’Neill, Adrian Crowley, Lankum, Aoife Nessa Frances, Anna Mieke, John Francis Flynn, Cormac Begley, Nils Frahm, Lil Simz, Laura Quirke and Rachael Lavelle all really inspire me.



Brían and Diarmuid Mac Gloinn, aka Ye Vagabonds: a new wave of Irish folk

What’s a scent that you associate with your childhood?

When they started roasting sugar beet at the sugar factory in Carlow every year, the whole town would smell like a kind of sweet cinnamon.

What’s your motto for life?

I have a few. Most of them come from my friend Ron Kane, such as: “It’s always good to travel on an egg.” My main motto for life, however, is: “Yes, and . . .” For years, I’ve had a policy of saying yes to any opportunity I am offered.

Are you an introvert or an extrovert?

I love being on my own – it gives me energy to go out and socialise with people or perform. Once I realised that and started to look at introversion as a positive thing, it made a big difference to my life and reduced the amount of forced socialising I did.

What is your favourite piece of clothing?

An orange jumper my mam made me a few years ago. It’s been on a lot of adventures at this stage.

What’s a personality trait that you admire in others?

A good and kind sense of humour has always been most important to me.

Regrets, we’ve all had a few – can you tell me one of yours?

I wish I’d done more travelling outside of touring in my early 20s. I kept saying yes to so many gigs that I didn’t give myself time to just wander a bit more.

What’s more important: ambition or talent?

I grew up not really believing in talent as much as I did determination and practice (I’m extremely stubborn, and patient), but at some point I also had to pursue the things I was naturally better at. For a long time I found it really hard and frustrating to make the music I wanted. I still do struggle to do that, but I’ve just developed my playing more by now. I think ambition is probably more important to me, when it comes down to it.

What’s your favourite show on television?

Twin Peaks. Nothing else will ever come close.

Humanity’s most useless invention is . . . ?

Banana and apple-shaped plastic cases.

What do you wish you could be better at?

I’d love to be an amazing dancer and a fantastic cook. I really enjoy both, but I can only imagine how much cooler I would seem to everyone if I was unbelievably good at both too.

Your home is burning down – what item would you rescue before fleeing the building?

My tenor guitar, made by Frank Tate. Instruments like that are truly irreplaceable to me.

What’s your party piece?

Mostly upbeat traditional songs with a bit of humour in them, like *In the Town of Ballybay* or *The Whistling Thief*. Once I start performing a song on stage, it stops being a party piece – so I keep some songs away from gigs.

What’s a good piece of advice?

My friend Ron would often sincerely tell me to enjoy myself, and say it slowly to let the meaning sink in, like when I’d be headed away on tour somewhere or going to a session or a gig. It’s easy to forget, but I always try my best to stay present and enjoy whatever I’m doing.

Describe your perfect day.

May or June, warm and bright. Up early: coffee, porridge and a record on. A walk and/or cycle, maybe up a mountain, including jumping in a river or sea and a picnic somewhere. Maybe even a puck around with a hurley and ball on the beach or wherever. Then into afternoon or early evening, tunes or songs with friends or family in a quiet pub. Good food for dinner, like Indian or fish. Then an episode of something and bed.

Ye Vagabonds headline Tradition Now in the National Concert Hall on October 7 before touring a number of cities in Britain. For more see nch.ie and yevagabonds.com.

'I don't have all the answers. I just invite everybody to get dirty with me and think about the questions'

Yellowface author Rebecca F Kuang says writers should be free to imagine characters outside of their lived experience once they do the necessary research and avoid replicating harmful stereotypes



KATE DEMOLDER

Early in her new bestselling novel *Yellowface*, author Rebecca F Kuang delivers a searing account of professional jealousy that protagonist June Hayward feels when gazing into the eyes of the “beautiful, Yale-educated, international, ambiguously queer woman of colour”, Athena Liu. “What is it like to be you?” she writes.

“What is it like to be so impossibly perfect, to have every good thing in the world? And maybe it’s the cocktails or my overactive writer’s imagination, but I feel this hot coiling in my stomach; a bizarre urge to stick my fingers in her berry-red painted mouth and rip her face apart, to neatly peel her skin off her body like an orange and to zip it up over myself.”

It sets the tone for the story to come; an immersive first-person voice tackling questions of diversity, racism and cultural appropriation, not only in the publishing industry but wider Western white society. In the opening chapters, Hayward, a white American author, steals a manuscript from the home of Liu, a celebrated Chinese-American novelist who has died in a bizarre accident, before passing it off as her own.

The cover of *Yellowface* is eye-catching, completely canary yellow apart from two slanted eyes looking off to the side.

“It [the cover] is great because it’s such a good metaphor for how reductive racial labels eradicate everything else about a person,” Kuang tells *Business Post Magazine*.

It’s a grey Thursday morning when we meet in the warm, bright foyer of a Dublin city centre hotel. Tourists ask doormen for local recommendations (“not the phoney kind”) as Kuang wheels a tiny suitcase into the main dining room. “Do you have, like, biscuits or anything?” she asks the waitress who delivers a black tea. “I just haven’t had breakfast,” she smiles again.

Born in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou before moving to Texas at age four, Kuang “ran mostly with the Indian-American kids,” who, like her, bore witness to a certain ilk of frustration when seeing the same racist, uncritical, under-researched stereotypes pepper every form of media. She first made her name with the *New York Times* bestselling *Poppy War* trilogy, a fantasy series which drew plot and politics from mid-20th-century China. It was an immediate success, not only because Harper Voyager’s editorial director David Pomerico acquired the novel after a heated auction on Kuang’s 20th birthday.

“Everyone loves a prodigy, everyone loves a freak,” Kuang says of that time. She speaks to me today as a 27-year-old who, by any metric, boasts enormous success. A fantasy writer, Marshall Scholar and translator, Kuang also holds an MPhil in Chinese Studies from Cambridge, an MSc in Contemporary Chinese Studies

from Oxford and is currently pursuing a PhD in East Asian Languages and Literature at Yale. In person, she is petite, polite and serious in her question-answering. She laughs quietly and rolls her eyes often, as flecks of the deep purple lipstick she wears changes intensity in the mid-morning light.

With *Yellowface*, Kuang takes her understanding of white privilege to a chilling place, daring to ask the question – what would you do to be adored? Throughout the wickedly on-the-nose story, June (publishing under the racially ambiguous moniker Juniper Song) works to maintain the lie that her first successful novel *The Last Front* (about Chinese workers in the British Army during World War I) is all her own – miraculously trapping herself in the process.

“That’s been the key to staying sane throughout all of this,” June tries to convince herself mid-way through the book. “Holding the line, maintaining my innocence. In the face of it all, I’ve never once cracked, never admitted the theft to anyone. By now, I mostly believe the lie myself.”

A galvanising centre plot challenges the idea of who is allowed to tell, and most notably profit from, certain stories. In one scene, June is challenged by a reader at a talk she’s giving (where the person who invited her assumed she was Chinese and was shocked to realise she wasn’t) on this exact question. She responds: “I think it’s dangerous to start censoring what authors should and shouldn’t write... I mean, turn what you’re saying around and see how it sounds. Can a black writer not write a novel with a white protagonist?”

Kuang’s personal view on this, however, is less murky. “The point of storytelling is, among other things, to imagine outside of your lived experience and empathise with people who are not you, and to ideally write truthfully, and with compassion, a whole range of characters,” she says. “Otherwise all we could ever publish are memoirs and autobiographies and nobody wants that.”

“I think it’s natural that people are curious about the background of the writer and try to read things about the writer’s own personal experiences and the stories that they’re able to tell – and that’s a valid kind of literary criticism, too. It’s not my favourite kind, but people do do that,” she says. “I think it is lazy and reductive, though, when you read everything autobiographically. Because it ignores the fact that writers are storytellers who want

to do research, right? [You] don’t necessarily have to hold writers to such strict standards of authenticity that you can only write about things you’ve personally been through – that would make for a really boring story,” she laughs.

Yellowface could only have been written by an author familiar with the absurd idiosyncrasies of the publishing industry and its Twitter-centric

petty politics. Its underbelly is marinated in a cynicism; the packaging and marketing of authors and ideas; how bestsellers are chosen and boosted; and why marginalised writers and employees are overworked, underpaid and often maligned.

I ask Kuang how she thinks the book might have been perceived had she been white. “I would hope that people would still enjoy it,” she says in her delicate, Dallas tones. “I mean, that question really gets to the heart of the question I have about the publishing industry,” she smiles. “There are valid concerns about cultural appropriation right? About people replicating harmful stereotypes or being lazy and not doing their research, and just writing based on previous literary representations by folks outside of communities. And that’s a separate question. But I think that’s a question that comes in at the level of literary criticism. We can say a text is bad when it’s lazy and reductive. But language that suggests writers shouldn’t even attempt certain things from the outset, I think, is very restricting and damaging,” she says.

In 2011, American academic, educator and author Robin DiAngelo coined the term “white fragility” to describe the disbelieving defensiveness that white people sometimes exhibit when their ideas about race and racism are challenged – particularly when they feel implicated in white supremacy. It’s a concept DiAngelo fleshes out at length in her 2018 book of the same name, which argues that our largely segregated society is set up to sheathe whites from racial discomfort so that they fall to pieces at the first application of stress. It’s a concept June clothes herself in, gripping to her new literary identity until her fingers bleed.

Kuang says that in late 2020 “everybody seemed to be having conversations about diversity and representation and racism” within the publishing industry. “People were saying all this stuff about announcing new initiatives, hiring new editors, signing new writers. There were all these promises being made,” Kuang says between sips. “And then, very quickly, that support dried up. It [became] clear that this was a cynical, performative thing and not any serious attempt on the structural level to change the way we select which voices are valid and worthy of being heard.”

Contrastingly, the value of *Yellowface* lies in its diagnostic, irrefutable exposure of racism in the industry and beyond, as well as its call for humility and vigilance. So how do you write a book about a person’s – and trade’s – racial awakening? As far as Kuang is concerned, you don’t.

“I don’t like my novels to have clear moral messaging like parables,” she says, her face serious now. “I think it’s hubris to think that I have the answer to all the problems. So the way I approach all my stories is just sort of inviting everybody to get dirty with me and think about the questions over time.” Mirroring this is an Instagram post she then-26-year-old author posted in February while holding up an early copy of her manuscript. It was captioned: “In 2023 we get mad spill the beans and don’t care.”

Yellowface is published by HarperCollins and available now





Rebecca
F Kuang:
author of
Yellowface
JOHN
PACKMAN

Don't take me to CHURCH



Mairéad Gallagher and John O'Reilly opted for a humanist wedding
KEVIN MORRIS

Traditional Catholic church ceremonies are in decline as more marrying couples from all walks of life choose to create secular ceremonies – humanist or civil – in country houses or in more unusual locations, writes **Niamh Donnelly**

Not long ago, getting married was synonymous with going to a church. Any other type of wedding was almost unheard of. But while religious weddings remain popular in Ireland, the traditional Catholic ceremony is in decline.

In the 1990s, more than 90 per cent of weddings were Catholic. This had dropped to 65 per cent by 2012. Five years later, it fell to 50 per cent. Last year it was lower

again at 40 per cent. The trend suggests that non-religious ceremonies will soon overtake Catholic weddings.

These days, the number of non-religious weddings is more or less on a par with the number of Catholic ones. In 2022, 36 per cent of people chose to have either civil or humanist weddings (the only two forms of non-religious marriages available here). Marriage itself is still a widespread practice – the number of couples who tied the knot in 2022 was the highest in at least a decade – but the types of wedding we have are changing.

Pat Clarke-Browne became a humanist celebrant in 2017. At the time, there were just 22 registered in Ireland. Today there are 50 and the Humanist Association of Ireland plans to grow this number to 60 within the next year.

“It’s absolutely crazy busy,” Clarke-Browne says. “I’m booked out for this year, nearly all of next year, and into the year after. I have 117 weddings left to do this year, and I’ve about 40 done already.”

Humanism is not a religion but a philosophy. It is based on a commitment to human values and an ethical belief in humanity and the individual. Virtually anyone can have a humanist wedding.

“A lot of people doing [humanist wedding] ceremonies are younger people, or people who are divorced who can’t get married in the [Catholic] church,” says Clarke-Browne. He has married a wide range of people, including an Israeli/Palestinian couple. Many members of the LGBTQ+ community also choose to have humanist weddings.

“The whole thing with humanism is, they may not be dyed-in-the-wool humanists as such but they don’t have any religious beliefs,” says Clarke-Browne. “So they would rather have a ceremony that didn’t have any religion in it. And then, of course, you get people who are members of the organisation and they want to mention the humanist part more in the ceremony.”

Apart from a humanist wedding, the only other non-religious option in Ireland is a civil ceremony. This was the most popular form of non-religious wedding in 2022. Civil weddings are conducted by an HSE registrar and usually take place in a registry office, though they can also happen in an approved public venue.

There are people who offer celebrant services but aren’t legally registered solemnisers. Couples who use this kind of celebrant will legally get married by someone else – for example, a registrar in a registry office.

Jonathan Bryans, of weddingsonline.ie, advises that there are “pros

Rosie Gogan-Keogh and Greg Spring at their humanist wedding



and cons of everything” and ultimately “couples have to decide” what is right for them. “Some people love the idea of the church wedding. Others prefer to reduce stress [and] travel, and have the ceremony at their venue.”

For those who are unsure what they want, he suggests: “Take your time, talk to others, join the Help I’m Getting Married community [the Facebook page affiliated with weddingsonline.ie], talk to celebrants and solemnisers and ensure that you connect with them.”

Mairead Gallagher and John O’Reilly got married in April this year. Neither of them is religious, and though they’re “culturally Catholic”, they weren’t keen on getting married in a Catholic church. They found that the values of humanism aligned with their own.

“I’m a scientist,” says Mairead. “John’s a social care worker. We believe in the human race, and that’s going to find the answer to our problems. We don’t believe in some higher power.”

A humanist wedding ceremony made sense to them. This also meant they could customise the rituals to suit what they wanted.

Together, they have three children (Mairead has one child from a previous relationship; John has two). “We had a sound mixing ceremony, which symbolises blending families, like kids and other extended [relations],” says John.

While some attendees were expecting a religious aspect – “My mom was like, can you have a priest show up on the day?” Mairead laughs – for the most part guests were at home with the secular ceremony.

“If any couples are worried that they don’t want to break tradition or whatever, the overwhelming response to our wedding was that it was so unique to us. It was different, but it had the traditional parts as well. If you want something that’s really centred on both of you as a couple, tailored to you and what you want, then definitely that’s the way to go.”

Laura and John Duggan also got married last April. They were taken with the “relaxed vibe” of a humanist wedding and the fact that “you can kind of put your own stamp on it”. At their ceremony they had a cherry blossom tree and got members of the wedding party to come up and water it.

“It was kind of bringing your two families together, and your roots and all that kind of thing,” says Laura. They also performed the ancient ritual of “jumping the broom”, which symbolises new beginnings. The wedding took place over Easter weekend, but guests weren’t fazed by the non-religious ceremony.

“I was conscious that some people might want to go to mass for Easter or that kind of thing,” says Laura. “But nobody raised an eyebrow. I think it’s definitely more common now [to have a secular wedding]. If you haven’t been to one yourself, you’ve definitely heard of people that have been to one.”

In fact, Laura has attended quite a few. “I’m from Dublin, John’s from Cork, and between us we’ve gone to loads of weddings. We’re both 34, and this year is the first time I went to a church wedding since my sister’s wedding 17 years ago. But John will tell you the opposite. In Cork, a lot of people still get married in churches.”

The figures line up with this observation. In 2021, just 33 per cent of Dublin weddings were religious. In Cork over the same year, 59 per cent of weddings fitted that category.

Laura and John’s wedding ceremony took place in Kilshane House, while Mairead and John had theirs in the Museum of Literature Ireland. The option of a unique location is something that appeals to many couples who have secular ceremonies.

The 2022 breakdown

23,173 couples got married in Ireland, including **618** same-sex weddings.

Roman Catholic weddings are still the most popular in Ireland, with **40%** of couples choosing these ceremonies.

Legally speaking, there are only two ways to have a secular wedding ceremony: civil and humanist. Last year there were **5,767** civil weddings and **2,157** humanist weddings.

The most popular forms of religious wedding ceremony in Ireland were Roman Catholic (**9,376**), spiritualist (**2,299**) and Church of Ireland (**284**).

Of the same-sex marriages in Ireland, **49%** were civil, **17%** were humanist, **16%** were spiritualist, and **18%** were held by other religious denominations.

Celebrant Pat Clarke-Browne officiates at a wedding



John and Laura Duggan jumping the broom at their wedding which was humanist, conducted by celebrant Philip Byers (right)
ELLA O’CALLAGHAN

There are, however, some restrictions on where you can legally marry. According to Citizens Information, venues must be either “a building that is open to the public” or “a courtyard, garden, yard, field or piece of ground that is open to the public and is near to (and usually shared with) a building that is open to the public”. These venues must also be approved by a registrar. But a surprising range of locations fit the remit.

Heritage Ireland lists a number of sites where couples can host their ceremonies, from the Céide Fields to the Blasket Centre to Charles Fort. Clarke-Browne, who is based in Shannon, often performs ceremonies on the Cliffs of Moher.

“We use a place called Hag’s Head, which is not the touristy part. Literally, we do weddings right at the edge of the cliffs. That section belongs to a local family with a car park. So that is a permanent location, and it

A lot of people doing [humanist wedding] ceremonies are younger people, or people who are divorced who can’t get married in the [Catholic] church

meets the requirements for the legal ceremonies.”

While hotel and country house weddings remain popular, many are choosing more unusual venues from restaurants to pubs to repurposed barns.

Greg Spring is a creative director and founder of Hen’s Teeth, a gallery, café and hifi lounge in Dublin 8. Known for selling art prints as well as food and cocktails, the venue hosted its first wedding when Greg and his now wife Rosie Gogan-Keogh (who co-owns Hen’s Teeth) got married there.

“We moved into the space in November 2019 and then Rosie and I got married there in December, so that was the trial run,” he says. “And then we did our first [wedding] officially about six months ago.”

This makes them a relatively new venue, though they are licensed to host both the wedding ceremony and the afters. Greg says it appeals especially to “folks that are looking for something a little different”. He adds: “There’s a lot of colour and energy, and it just feels kind of different to most other wedding venues. #

“There’s a certain personality to the space. And we’re known for, I hope, good food and good vibes.”

Hen’s Teeth has hosted a number of wedding ceremonies and “they’ve all been really special,” says Greg. “They’ve all been secular and really personal.” ■





Father and Son team Tom and Fenton Cussen from Claren Banjos, based in Clarenbridge, Galway

ANDREW DOWNES



In tune with TRADITION

There are superb craftspeople all over the country turning out everything from bodhráns and tin whistles to banjos and cellos and there are numerous courses and programmes available that teach the necessary skills, writes **Niamh Mongey**

Between 1978 and 1989, documentary makers David and Sally Shaw travelled around Ireland filming the 37-episode series *Hands* – a visual record of Irish craftspeople at the turn of the 20th century. For the Shaws, this work was an exercise in preservation, by “capturing on film the final years of traditional life in rural and urban Ireland”. The archive was viewed as a time capsule for many dying hand-crafts. Four decades on, the tradition of hand-crafting has evolved but is by no means dead.

Paraic McNeela is a master of his craft. Bodhrán-making is his specialty, but he is also a skilled concertina and flute maker. “I forget how busy Paraic makes himself,” his son Lorcan laughs when we speak. His father has been out doing deliveries all morning.

After almost half a century of crafting, McNeela is still in the thick of it. “I was in a band called Citóg [left-handed in Irish] and I was playing with a great singer called Olly Casserly – Olly wanted a bodhrán to play along with while he was singing.”

Not shy of a challenge, McNeela had been taking classes in woodwork at North Strand Tech and decided to try his hand at bodhrán making. He turned out to be pretty good at it. “Then I was asked to make bodhráns for Waltons. There was a market where I could do a bit of woodwork and that started me off.”

Music and making were always present in the McNeela household when Lorcan was growing up. He spent time with his dad at the bottom of the garden in the “man shed” where Paraic was always repairing or playing instruments. “He was constantly getting me to play around with the bodhrán, he was always encouraging me.” Now his father’s right-hand man, Lorcan explains that Paraic’s success is down to his passion for making instruments that are both excellent and accessible.

“Paraic has always been about accessibility. When it comes to the concertina, he’s always looked to buy materials from different suppliers



Muireann Ní Sheoighe Eachthighearn: making a cello in her workshop

JOHN D KELLY



Paraic McNeela is a master of his craft. Bodhrán-making is his specialty, but he is also a skilled concertina and flute maker

I'd always seen instrument making as something that gets passed down through the ages; it was always a mythical thing to me

to make something that's much more affordable. It means that you can get a concertina beginning at less than €500. That is why it has taken off, because Paraic has always tried to make sure everyone can have a chance to play something."

Clareen Banjos, another family-run business, based in Clarinbridge in Galway, was established over 40 years ago by Tom Cussen. Tom has played with the traditional music band Shaskeen for 53 years. "He's the one playing the banjo – he'd be angry at me if I didn't tell you that," says his son Fintan.

Fintan entered the family business in his late 20s after turning away from the craft to begin with. "I went in the opposite direction. I had no interest in the business – I wanted to have my own career," he says.

When Fintan returned to Galway after a few years of travelling and living in Dublin, he told his father that he'd work with him for three months. "I suppose I was ready to come home – 19-and-a-half years later, I haven't looked back," he says.

There's a reverie attached to the tradition of hand-crafting. While some assume that the only people with the skills to create such pieces have come from a long line of crafting dynasties, it is actually more straightforward.

Muireann Ní Sheoighe Eachthighearn started out as a classically trained musician. She became interested in lutherie while studying in Cork. "I'd always seen instrument making as something that gets passed down through the ages, it was always a mythical thing to me," she says.

Originally from Tipperary, Ní Sheoighe Eachthighearn has been training in London since 2019. She is preparing to move back to Ireland to begin her full-time career here.

"During my degree, I had to get my cello fixed. I went to a luthier in Cork city and he just told me about the process. I always thought you had to be taught by your grandfather, but he was like: 'Oh no, there are schools you can go to.'

"I wasn't a big fan of being on stage. I was trying to find ways of being in the music field. So creating vessels for music instead of playing them all the time – that attracted me to it."

Back in Ireland, Paul McGrattan is a traditional tin whistle and flute player and a tutor at the Ballyfermot College of Further Education's Performance and Instrument Making course.

Established by Na Piobairí Uilleann in 2018, this programme aims

to nurture the next generation of traditional wind instrument makers. "The course attracts people from many different age profiles and backgrounds, from school leavers to people of retirement age. Those who enroll are musicians with a passion for traditional music – they come to learn the craft," he says.

McGrattan explains that instrument making has become a very attractive career option for musicians. "I know how hard it is to make a living. Sometimes a musician just doesn't feel like performing, but they have to because it's their job. A performer who is also a maker and perhaps a teacher can create a more sustainable career for themselves."

Sustaining a small instrument-making business would be impossible without the support of the community, he says.

"If I have a problem, I call up one of the instrument makers – everyone shares. If someone was making a bodhrán and they contacted me, I'd supply them with skins or part of the bodhrán. Last year there were about nine of us at the Fleadh in Mullingar. We were selling and doing repairs and we looked after the people who came in. We generally do it for free – it's part of the ethos of the Fleadh, to help the community out."

This community ethos crosses the generations, just like Fintan and Lorcan who have taken the craft into their own hands. Many of the children who came to buy their first instruments from McNeela years ago are returning as adults, looking for something more bespoke, or just to say hello. "That's one of the greatest pleasures," he says.

"I'm approaching 30-odd years of going to the All-Ireland Fleadh," says Cussen. "I used to think it was an old man festival, but it's now a young person's festival. The volume of young people playing traditional instruments is phenomenal."

Ní Sheoighe Eachthighearn, who represents the next generation of makers, says: "It's a living tradition – it has been around forever, but we can definitely bring something to it."

"Maybe it's because we're on the internet more, so we need to feel more rooted in the real world. It's a way to connect to the literal landscape because it's trees, and also to each other."

McGrattan says the interest in traditional music has never been greater. "It was once a very small scene where everybody knew each other. The mainstream impression has changed through groups like Lankum and The Gloaming. They've brought the interest to a global audience. I know this has happened before with the likes of Planxty and The Chieftains, but it's great to see a whole new generation embracing the art form."

"There has been greater investment in Ireland through the likes of Comhaltas [and] their branches which are now all over the world," says McNeela.

"My hope," says Ní Sheoighe Eachthighearn, "is that the community just keeps opening up and growing. I hope that there's support – not only so that someone can make a career out of the craft, but also as an important part of our heritage." ■



An instrument is only as good as its materials

The wood used in lute making is known as "tonewood" as it is naturally very resonant and creates an even, harmonious sound. Maple wood is the first choice for lute makers, widely grown and sourced from Eastern Europe. Spruce, mainly grown in Italy or Switzerland, is used for the front, bass bar and the soundpost (also known as the "soul" of the instrument). Although spruce is widely available in Ireland, it's not a suitable wood for string instruments as it grows too quickly for there to be a tighter grain.

The bodhrán begins with a good-quality skin. There are some synthetic skins, but goat skin is tried and tested as the best. However, there are alternatives such as kangaroo and deer. A good skin will be hand-treated and stretched without dyes or chemicals. The more dense the wood, the better the resonance of the instrument.

Indian Rosewood is a highly sustainable and renewable form of timber, but some indigenous woods are suitable for the bodhrán, including oak or ash. While the bodhrán was once (and is sometimes still) played with the hand, the beaters, tippers, or cipins used today come in a variety of woods – ebony, snakewood, maple, ash, walnut and rosewood are commonly used.

Years ago, short dense tippers were all the rage. Today they are lighter, slimmer and well-balanced. Ultimately, it comes down to the feel of the tipper in your hand – "A comfortable bodhrán player is a happy one," is the McNeela motto.

As well as Colombia's renowned landscapes and cities, increasing numbers of tourists are now attracted to the wonderful coffee growing axis in the Andes Mountains, which is a Unesco world heritage site, writes **Joseph O'Connor**

When Starbucks first opened its doors in Colombia in 2014, it raised plenty of eyebrows. Locals were sceptical about the US chain coming into their country to pedal its much-prized bean. But Colombians voted with their feet. Almost one decade on, albeit with around 50 Starbucks outlets across the country, concerns about any aggressive market entry or disruption have been allayed.

"It was nice to see that people respected the culture of local specialised coffee stores here," says Daniel Gomez, founder of Bogotá-based Condor Tours who takes me on a walking tour of the capital. "Starbucks just became the place to go for milkshakes and to take photos for Instagram. They've actually closed stores in some locations."

The Starbucks story is just one of many illustrating how coffee has become a source of national pride for Colombians. While it took them some time to get there, that pride is strengthening.

Since the 2016 peace agreement ending five decades of conflict between the government and Farc rebels, Colombia's coffee production has been booming, presenting a significant opportunity for tourism and local producers. Now international travellers are not only eager to discover Colombia's renowned landscapes and cities. They want a taste



of its coffee culture too.

The place to get your fix is in an area known as Eje Cafetero, or the coffee growing axis, located in the western and central ranges of the Andes Mountains encompassing the departments of Quindío, Caldas, Risaralda, and Valle del Cauca. Designated as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2011, the area is recognised as "an exceptional example of a sustainable and productive cultural landscape that is unique and representative of a tradition that is a strong symbol for coffee growing areas worldwide".

Statistics show that interest in Colombian coffee from overseas is catching on, with large numbers travelling to the region from the US, Spain and neighbouring Latin American countries. According to state

The town of Salento which relies mainly on coffee production and tourism

Bean there, done that – exploring Colombia's rich coffee heritage



A farm worker picking coffee beans in the Eje Cafetero area in Colombia

ALL PICTURES GETTY



Farmers transporting coffee in Colombia where the precious crop has become a source of national pride



Valley de Cocora is a stunning landscape and national treasure in the coffee region

body ProColombia, in 2022 the area welcomed almost 300,000 visitors, a 93 per cent increase from the previous year. As of April 2023, approximately 102,000 tourists had visited this year, a 29.8 per cent rise from the same period in 2022.

Plenty of tour groups offer itineraries across the axis, but I opted to do it independently, renting a car in Medellín (the city synonymous with drug trafficker Pablo Escobar) and taking in large parts of the protected area en route back to Bogotá.

Three words of warning if you rent a car in Colombia: “pico y placa”. A system introduced by the government in 1998 to tackle congestion, it restricts traffic access into certain urban areas for vehicles with specific licence plate numbers on pre-established days. This was news to me when picking up the car, and looked like it might scupper my plans to travel flexibly. The workaround was changing my rental to a hybrid vehicle, which is exempt from the rules, but that came with much wrangling and additional costs.

Driving in Colombia is not for the faint at heart. Trucks are ever-present in the coffee region and most motorists lack the patience to resist overtaking them, even on the narrowest of mountain bends. Meanwhile, motorcyclists show a steely fearlessness, weaving in and out of lanes at rule-breaking speeds. But don't let this completely deter you. If you're a confident driver and can adapt to semi-extreme driving habits, you'll slot right in.

First stop on my road trip was the small town of Jardín, around 130km south of Medellín. It's a much more laid-back affair than the much-visited Guatapé, but just as endearing. Its brightly painted houses, colourful tuk-tuks, and moustachioed locals sipping coffee outside cafés dotted around Plaza del Libertador give it real colonial charm and make you want to stick around longer than planned.

There's a low-key, authentic feel to the place and plenty to do beyond coffee tasting. If you enjoy a hike, there are several trails you can try. They range from a steep 30-minute trek to the statue of Cristo Rey, where you get a panoramic view of the town, to a 16km loop to Cueva de Los Guacharos that takes in waterfalls and coffee plantations. If you're brave enough, take a makeshift wooden gondola known locally as the La Garrucha to another viewpoint where you can admire Jardín's rooftops from an open-air café.

You don't have to be an avid birdwatcher to appreciate the brilliantly red-feathered wild Andean gallitos de las rocas (cocks-of-the-rock) living in their natural habitat at Reserva Natural Gallito de la Roca. These birds are just one of Colombia's 1,966 species. Last May, the country came first in bird diversity for the 11th time at the Global Big Day Competition, an international birdwatching event. It's no surprise Colombia ranks high on bird enthusiasts' bucket lists.

In Jardín, I stayed at the wonderful Hotel Plantacion. A few minutes' walk off the main square, it promotes environmentally friendly travel. As its neatly designed “Sustainability Manifesto” states, “It is perfectly possible to enjoy your trip and vacation without it implying a trail of environmental destruction and social unbalance.” A shower egg timer, titanium water bottles you can borrow, and an entirely plant-based menu are just some of the ways it encourages guests to do their bit.

In fact, sustainability is a cause you often see promoted in Colombia. Carmen Caballero, President of ProColombia, tells me Colombia's late entry into tourism has allowed it to learn from other countries' experiences and prioritise sustainable practices right from the start. “The country has actively pursued sustainability in its tourism industry, earning recognition as one of the 12 countries worldwide with an official sustainability policy,” she says.

Around five hours' drive south of Jardín, you'll find Salento, a small town that relies mainly on coffee production and tourism. Founded in 1850, it's a great location to organise farm stays or visits, pick up some traditional arts and crafts, or use as your gateway to the spectacular Cocora Valley. With a wide range of restaurants in the town, it's also a good spot to try the traditional dish of Bandeja Paisa. While Colombia isn't known for its cuisine, this hefty platter of meats, egg, plantain, avocado, rice and beans is worth a try. Just make sure you've got space.

Factfile

Getting there: Joseph flew KLM from Dublin to Bogotá via Amsterdam in May for €859 return. Other flight options available from Ireland include Air France through Paris or Delta via New York.

Getting around: To get to the coffee region from Medellín, Joseph rented a car with Localiza.

Coffee as a symbol of peace

It's not only tourism and the economy that benefit from Colombian coffee's renaissance. The coveted bean is also contributing to a culture of peace. In rural districts, thousands of former Farc rebel fighters are being retrained to work in coffee production. Tropics – Fruits of Hope, Café de Trinidad and The Third Agreement are among the companies helping them reintegrate into society and learn new skills.

As part of Condor Walking Tours in Bogotá, you'll have the chance to buy some of this uniquely produced coffee at special artisan markets. You can book one of their walking tours at guruwalk.com or contact them on +57 302 7535503.

From Salento, I took one of the iconic US-imported Willy jeeps to visit Finca El Ocaso for its coffee plantation tour. There I get an immersive experience of the entire coffee production process, from planting seeds to savouring a freshly brewed cup. It's an enjoyable and interactive way to learn about the intricacies of coffee cultivation and why Colombia's unique geolocation is ideal for production.

I also get a history lesson on Colombian coffee, from its introduction in the 18th century by Jesuit priests to this country becoming the third-largest coffee exporter in the world and the only major producer to grow arabica beans exclusively. I discover that until recently, almost all of Colombia's high-quality beans were exported, leaving the lower-grade coffee known as tinto to the locals. This has changed over the last decade as a growing middle-class population developed a palette for premium beans. After the tour, it's worth picking up some at the farm store as they retail at a slightly lower price than the same coffee sold in town.

An absolute must when visiting the coffee region is Valley de Cocora, a stunning landscape and national treasure that inspired the 2021 Disney animated movie *Encanto*. It's where you'll see swathes of Colombia's national tree, the palma de cera or wax palm tree, which can grow up to 60 metres tall. To fully appreciate the surroundings, there are several hiking routes of the valley. If you're not particularly fit or are pushed for time, go directly to the main valley where you'll get spectacular views of the wax palms in about 30 minutes.

If you're feeling more adventurous and want to take in some special scenery and wildlife, opt for the classic five-hour loop but do it counter-clockwise. You'll be rewarded with the best sites at the end. The hike takes in forest, jungle and farmland. There's a rest stop at Acaime Farm a couple of hours in, where you can grab a coffee and watch hummingbirds whiz about the place.

Back in Bogotá, my walking tour with Daniel ends with a visit to Amor Patrio Café Literario, a cozy coffee house close to the famous Candelaria neighbourhood that feels like the complete antithesis of Starbucks. There the waiting staff present me with three types of coffee beans to inspect and choose from, before an elaborate preparation and serving hit all the right notes. A perfect way to close the trip.

“The most beautiful thing about coffee in Colombia is the human element,” Daniel tells me as I sip on my arabica. “It's a beautiful experience to be in nature, drink coffee, meet those picking the cherries, and witness the full process. Drinking and speaking with the people who make the coffee while you're surrounded by plants, hummingbirds and bees. It's truly a wonderful mix of nature and humanity.” ■



Coffee growing in the region known as the Coffee Triangle near Manizale



Gareth Naughton: chef at Neighbourhood in Naas

Go native with food inspired by the best of local produce

Chef Gareth Naughton from Neighbourhood in Naas bases his restaurant offerings on local suppliers and their produce, including the three recipes shared below, writes **Ben Haugh**

Neighbourhood in Naas opened to some fanfare late last year following a three-month refurbishment, and impressed our food critic when she visited in January.

She complimented the pedigree involved, with restaurant manager Antonia Leech and bar manager Kevin Hegarty (both formerly of Aimsir); chef Gareth Naughton, who was previously head chef at Terenure's now-closed Circa; and Jordan Bailey, who consulted on the menu.

The food at this neighbourhood restaurant takes inspiration from local produce and suppliers, with plenty of elements produced in-house, while the exceptional drinks list includes great cocktails. Here, Naughton shares recipes to try at home.

Marinated Irish tomatoes, whipped buratta and tomato and kombu broth

Ingredients, serves 4

For the marinated Irish tomatoes

400g mixed heritage tomatoes, ideally Irish

Salt to taste

10g bonito vinegar

Extra virgin olive oil

For the tomato water broth

1kg overripe vine tomatoes

2 cloves garlic

100g chervil

100g basil

22g salt

40g bonito vinegar

1 sheet of kombu seaweed

For the chive oil

100g chives

100g vegetable oil

For the whipped burrata

200g burrata

200g crème fraîche

Salt & pepper to taste

Dash of extra virgin olive oil

To garnish

Chive flowers

Marigold flowers

Dash of extra virgin olive oil

Method

1. Cut the tomatoes into medium chunks and place on a tray large enough to comfortably fit them all. Season with salt, 10g of bonito vinegar and extra virgin olive oil. Place somewhere slightly warm and allow to marinate for an hour.
2. For the tomato water broth,



3. Place in a colander lined with a J-cloth and allow to drip for 4-6 hours for all the liquid to gently leave the tomatoes; place into the fridge to chill until needed.

4. Blend chives and oil in a high-powered blender until it creates a bright green oil. Strain through another J-cloth until the liquid is completely collected and reserve until needed.
5. Mix together the burrata with the crème fraîche, salt, pepper and a dash of olive oil.

6. Place a spoonful of the whipped burrata on the plate with the dressed tomatoes to the side. Garnish with the marigold and chive flowers and dress with a few drops of extra virgin olive oil. Put a small jug of the tomato water broth on the side and add a drizzle of chive oil to the broth.

Roasted Feighcullen duck with Castleruddery beetroot, pickled blackberries and sorrel

Ingredients, serves 4

For the beetroot
 16 baby beetroot
 500g red beetroot
 50ml olive oil
 Salt & pepper
 Dash of Llewelyns Irish Apple Balsamic
 100g sugar
 100g sherry vinegar

For the pickled blackberries

125g blackberries
 100g sugar
 4 tbsp white wine vinegar

For the roasted duck

4 duck breasts
 Salt to taste
 200ml chicken stock
 Splash of sherry vinegar
 Knob of butter

To garnish

8 medium leaves of sorrel

Method

- Place the baby beets in a sheet of tin foil with a pinch of salt and a table-spoon of olive oil, fold the foil, and wrap it into a small parcel. Bake at 180°C in the oven for 40 minutes. With the larger red beetroots, follow the same process but bake for roughly one hour or until fork tender.
- Peel both types of beetroot, reserving the large ones for later.
- Dress the baby beets with the apple balsamic, olive oil, salt and pepper, and leave to marinate.
- With the larger peeled beets, chop roughly and place in a pot with the sugar and sherry vinegar. Cook the sugar and vinegar until they glaze the beets.
- Blend in a high-powered blender and emulsify with olive oil – add oil slowly until it is the consistency of a light mayonnaise. Keep warm.
- For the pickled blackberries, make a pickle liquor with 100g of sugar and white wine vinegar by heating them in a pan until the sugar

dissolves. Pour over the blackberries (immersing them totally) and leave to pickle until the liquor and blackberries cool.

- Preheat the oven to 180°C. Prep the duck breasts by removing any sinew from the underneath and scoring the skin. Season with salt and leave to rest for 30 minutes.
- Cook skin side down until the duck fat renders and the skin becomes brown and crisp. Place into the preheated oven and roast for 4 minutes or until the duck is medium rare.
- Remove from the pan and rest for 5-6 minutes. Remove the fat from the pan. Place the empty pan back on the heat. Add the chicken stock to the pan and reduce until the liquid resembles a sauce consistency. Add a splash of sherry vinegar and a knob of butter to finish.
- Add two spoons of the beetroot purée to the plate and dress with the pickled baby beetroot. Add 2 slices of the cooked and rested duck, 4 pickled blackberries, and 2 sorrel leaves, and finish with the sauce over the duck.



Roasted organic chicken breast with celeriac, girolles, peas, broad beans and asparagus

Ingredients, serves 4

For the chicken

4 chicken breasts, skin on
 40g salt
 1 litre water
 4 cloves garlic
 4 sprigs thyme and rosemary
 Zest 1 lemon

For the celeriac purée

1 large head of celeriac
 50g butter
 2 sprigs of thyme
 2 garlic cloves
 100ml cream
 100ml milk

For the fricassée

8 slices smoked streaky bacon
 Knob of butter
 2 cloves of garlic

100g girolle mushrooms
 100g chicken stock
 2 tbsp crème fraîche
 100g peas
 100g podded broad beans
 Small bunch of tarragon

To garnish

12 spears asparagus
 Pea shoots

Method

- Combine the salt, water, garlic, thyme, rosemary, garlic and lemon zest and submerge the chicken. Allow it to brine for 1 hour. Remove the breast and allow it to air dry until ready to cook.
- Sweat the celeriac with the butter, 2 garlic cloves, and thyme for 5 minutes, then add the cream and milk and cook for a further 30 minutes. Remove the thyme, blend in a high-powered blender until a velvety texture is achieved and keep warm until needed.
- Sweat the bacon in a generous knob of butter and allow the fat to render. Add 2 cloves of finely

chopped garlic and the mushrooms. Allow to sweat for 2-3 minutes. Add the chicken stock and allow it to reduce by half. Add 2 tablespoons of crème fraîche and allow it to reduce by half again. Once ready to serve the dish, add the peas, broad beans and tarragon. Keep warm.

- Blanch the asparagus spears in boiling salted water for 1-2 minutes or until fork tender.
- Preheat the oven to 180°C. Place in a warm pan skin-side down and allow the skin to render for 4-5 minutes or until nicely browned. Place into the preheated oven for about 8 minutes or until the chicken reaches the desired temperature and allow to rest for a further 8 minutes.
- Place a nice spoonful of the purée on the plate, then carved slices of the chicken, spoon over the vegetables and the sauce and finish with pea shoots.



Cathal McBride on wine



The best old vines can be found in the south of France, Spain and Chile, where winemakers see the potential in ancient vines GETTY

Intense and complex, old vines which become better with age

Old vines – vieilles vignes, generally over the age of 20 years – tend to be more vulnerable to disease and produce fewer grapes – but the elegance of their wines is not to be missed

Sometimes wine imitates life. Just as maturity often gives us a sense of style, older wines have an elegance reflected in the age of the vines that produce their fruit. The term ‘old vines’ (or vieilles vignes) is often seen printed on the labels of wine bottles. But is this something winemakers just say to make their product more appealing and romantic or is there some substance to it? Perhaps it’s a little bit of both.

Although there’s no legal definition, vines over the age of 20 years are generally considered “old”. Like us all, old vines are more vulnerable to some diseases. As time goes on, the grape yields lessen. What you tend to be left with, however, are grapes of more intensity, concentration and complexity – which is reflected in the wines. Other positives come as roots deepen further into the soil, absorbing more of the minerals within and becoming less prone to drought.

So why doesn’t every winemaker revert to old vines only? Well, aside from the impracticalities of waiting at least two decades for your vines to mature, the most important factor is that older vines produce less fruit. This means less wine, and of course less profit for the winemaker.

In terms of the best old vines, the south of France tends to be a fine well to source from. There are also some fantastic expressions to be found in Spain. But first my hat is thrown into the Chilean ring, where cabernet sauvignon and the Spanish variety país offer some exciting quality.

País (listan prieto) has a long history. Once the most widely planted grape in Chile, over recent decades it has fallen under the shadow of international varieties cabernet sauvignon and merlot. However, many Chilean winemakers have since begun to see

the potential in ancient vines.

Pedro Parra is one such oenologist. His Vinista País 2019 (The Corkscrew, WineOnline.ie, Green Man Wines, €25.95) from 120-year-old vines in the Itata Valley is rustic but pure, earthy with crunchy red fruits. Lively and bright, it has a fresh acidity and a pleasing savouriness. This is a wine with soul and ideal for those who like Beaujolais or Pinot noir.

For cabernet, the Viu Manent Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2020 (Baggot Street Wines, Firecastle Kildare, The Drink Store, €22) comes from blocks planted 100 years ago. Full of cassis aromas with a fleck of spice, this is rounded with succulent fruit and a fine tannic structure. You should also check out their ‘La Capilla’, a single-vineyard cabernet that I featured last year.

From France, the Vallée des Aigles Vieilles Vignes 2020 (Boutique Wines, The Wine Pair, Bradley’s Off-Licence, €23.50) is made with 100 per cent carignan from 75- to 120-year-old vines. It’s extended with aromas of dark and red berries plus some initial eucalyptus that delves into a touch of leather. Well formed with integrated oak, fresh but with depth, this is a wine of integrity. If you’re a Cabernet Franc fan, check out Amirault Vignerons, Clos des Quarterons 2020 from the Loire (Searsons, €29.95) for a top-notch expression.

There are many exciting examples from Spain, one being the El Escocés Volante, Mazuelo, Parcelas Singulares 2018 (Searsons, €29.95). Winemaker Norrel Robertson has an ethos of supporting old vineyards with sustainability at the core. This mazuelo (carignan) planted in 1994 comes with a rich purity of bramble fruit. Supple, lengthy yet bright with fresh acidity, it’s a winner.

Finally and also from Spain, the Estrecho, Bodega Enrique Mendoza 2017 (Deveney’s of Dundrum, Sweeney’s D3, €37) comes from 70-year-old monastrell vines in a single Alicante estate. A fine balance of fruit integrated with oak evolves on the nose. Precise with a fine acidity that makes for a well-balanced structure, its fruit is pure and ripe with a lengthy finish. This is a serious wine of pure elegance, representing the terroir. ■

TO TRY, BUY AND PUT BY

TO TRY

Château De Fesles Chenin Sec, Anjou, France, 2019 (ABV 14 per cent), 92

This majestic chenin blanc presents with pure, ripe fruit that reels you into its brilliance, before citrus spritz refreshes. The palate is a perfect balance of on-point mouth-coating texture before vivacious acidity arrives to cleanse immediately. I’m continuously drawn back to chenin blanc and this is a perfect, great-value example of why.

Available from *Whelehans Wines* (whelehanswines.ie), €21



TO BUY

César Márquez Parajes Bierzo, Spain, 2021 (ABV 13 per cent), 93

From plots with 50- to 100-year-old vines, the main variety here is mencía along with some Alicante bouschet and 5 per cent other grapes. It’s deeply seductive with pure blackberry fruit, a scintilla of eucalyptus and wild fennel. Fresh, balanced and tantalisingly seductive with an engaging minerality, this is a must for those who enjoy a well-structured red.

Available from *WineSpark* (winespark.com), €18.33 (traditional price €32)



TO PUT BY

Château La Baronne Piece de Roche, France, 2017 (ABV 13.5 per cent), 93

A swift decanting is beneficial for this. Within minutes the fruit reveals itself, presenting a wine that is pure, elegant and sumptuous. A blend of carignan, grenache and cinsault, it’s full of depth with black fruits and a flicker of sweet spice. Aged for 12 months in barrels and terracotta eggs, this is rich but restrained, elegant but with edge, complex yet ultimately delicious.

Available from *Wines Direct* (winesdirect.ie) in Mullingar and Athlone, €43.25



WINE RATINGS

This is the international marking system for wine ratings. The 100-point scale works on a percentile, not a percentage scale, which is based on the US educational grading system.

95-100: exceptional, of world-class quality

90-94: very good quality

88-89: average but lacks greatness

85-87: average to modest

80-84: below average

70-79: poor

Below 70: unacceptable quality



Jordan Mooney
on dining out @JordanMooney_



Arán Artisan Bakery and Bistro on Barrack Street Kilkenny

DYLAN VAUGHAN

Feel like one of the family when you break bread at Arán Bistro

Arán Bistro

8 Barrack Street, Kilkenny

arankilkenny.ie

Chef patrons: Nicole Server-Pawlukojc and Bart Pawlukojc

Kilkenny really is a great town for food and recently I found myself completely spoiled for choice when deciding where to eat. There was one spot, though, that seemed a cut above the rest – especially based on recommendations from friends – which is why I ended up sitting down in Arán Bistro on Barrack Street earlier this month.

Arán is split into two parts on either side of the road: Arán Deli and Bakery is a take-out spot that supplies locals and Arán Bistro on the other side of the road with freshly baked breads and treats, including the Blas na hÉireann award-winning sourdough breads and citrus tart. As we sat in the airy, bright restaurant perusing the menu and playing with the incredibly cute miniature Schnauzer at the table beside us, staff were constantly flitting back and forth between the two properties for pastries or to check on stock. It gave the whole setting a really nice family-like feel.

Open six days a week, Arán Bistro is currently on a break from dinner service, so brunch is the only offering at the minute. The menu has ten options and is quite different from your regular full Irish-led list – amid French toast, Turkish eggs and avocado toast, there were Filipino-style sisig eggs, a Korean chicken wrap, rarebit and bruschetta (spelled broo-sketta to assist with pronunciation). Entirely unique, the menu was absolutely jam-packed with local suppliers and details on provenance.

Eventually, while we sipped on iced lattes (€4.30 each, plus 60c extra for syrup in one) and truly excellent Highbank Orchards apple juice (€3.80), we landed on the spring French toast (€13) for herself and huevos rancheros for me (€16.50).

The food came along quickly enough and was absolutely mammoth in size – you're really getting a lot of bang for your buck here. Two thick, batch-sized slices of bread made up

the French toast base, which was topped with cleverly made whipped citrus and Highbank Orchards apple cream cheese. Tart poached rhubarb added delicious acidity, while fresh strawberries, mint leaves, edible flowers and a sprinkle of freeze-dried raspberries made the dish pretty as a picture. Although a little salty overall, this dish was summer on a plate.

My huevos rancheros looked unassuming at first but was extraordinary to eat. Birria, a Mexican stew made with marinated meat that's then cooked in a broth, has become hugely popular in Ireland, mostly due to Instagram and Tik Tok I would say, but many versions I've had have been weirdly disappointing. Here, the meat was tender and packed with both flavour and gentle heat.

Three quesabirria tacos accompanied it – each made with two soft corn tacos filled with melted cheese and dipped in birria broth, then lightly toasted – alongside perfect smashed avocado, garlicky yoghurt and pickled jalapenos. Crowning the dish was a runny fried egg from Ballon Farms, which doused the whole thing with yolky goodness.

Although the food was completely delicious we became full very quickly, so decided to pack up our leftovers, pay up and venture to Arán Bakery and Deli to get a sweet treat to enjoy while we strolled through Kilkenny.

Faced with shelves of freshly baked goods and an intoxicating aroma, we spent a good 10 minutes trying to decide before settling on that award-winning citrus tart (€3.80) and a rhubarb frangipane square (€4.30). One bite and it was clear why the tart was a winner – luscious meringue gave way to perfect lemon curd and a burst of berry coulis within a delicate pastry shell.

The rhubarb square was big enough to serve two or three people and absolutely jammed with sweet, tart filling.

We ambled around the city, nibbling away for a while before admitting defeat and returning to our cars, treats packed away to be enjoyed later in the day, along with our savoury leftovers.

Busy and buzzy, Arán is a gem in Kilkenny's crown, somewhere I would genuinely drive from Dublin to eat at semi-regularly. If you're looking for a specific pastry, go early, but otherwise just enjoy the vibes and exceptional food.

Two dishes, two coffees and two juices at the Bistro came to €46.30 before tip, while our two pastries were €8.10. ■

Watching the pennies

To eat: spring French toast with Irish rhubarb, €13

Sweets: croissant, €2.50

To drink: Highbank Orchard Organic Apple Juice, €3.80

Brunch for two: €38.60

Breaking the bank

To eat: huevos rancheros with Irish birria, €16.50, plus sharing sides of Korean fried chicken goujons, €7.50, and butter-toasted sourdough with butter and jam, €5

Sweets: Black Forest gâteau, €4.80

To drink: glass of house prosecco, €8.50

Brunch for two: €72.10



Arán's beverage list opens to a number of cold drinks (€2.30 to €4.80) including Kilkenny's own fantastic Highbank Orchard apple-based juices and non-alcoholic cider. Further Irish representation is seen with Donegal's SynerChi, who produce a range of exciting fermented kombuchas and kefir.

They are currently only open for brunch and lunch (plans are afoot for Friday and Saturday dinner service to resume at the end of July or mid-August), and this is reflected in their wine list.

Working with neighbouring Le Caveau as their supplier, evening service presents a wider choice of wines (3 reds and 3 whites) which naturally slims down for daytime. You have the typical boozy brunch selection of a G&T and a mimosa (€9.50) and beers from O'Hara's Brewery in Carlow (€6.80).

Wine is limited to a single choice of red, white and prosecco, all served by the glass (€7.50 to €8.50). Both the red and white come from the organically run co-operative Cantina Tollo in the Terre di Chieti IGT in Abruzzo. The "madregale" bianco is a blend of trebbiano and chardonnay, dry, light and refreshing, that would work well with the spring salad. A typical montepulciano and sangiovese blend from the region, the red is fresh and dry with cherry and herb notes to make a good pairing with the huevos rancheros.

Could it be larger? Of course, and yet I would imagine that Arán's offerings perfectly meet the requirements of their customers. It's difficult to judge for a lack of wine when many other brunch outfits offer none.

For simple organic wines and a selection of other drinks with a focus on local and Irish, Arán ticks many boxes.

Cathal McBride
Rating: ★★

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Sara Keating on the arts



The cast of *Translations*, a Lesya Ukrainka National Academic Theatre production which visited the Abbey last week

How art is able to spark radical acts of empathy in dark and trying times

A few weeks ago, American author Elizabeth Gilbert decided to withdraw her latest novel, *The Snow Forest*, from publication. This decision came about after a flurry of negative comments from Ukrainian readers on the review site Goodreads, which objected to her publishing a book set in Russia.

The Snow Forest focused on a family who exile themselves in Siberia for 40 years while attempting to escape Soviet oppression. Most of the Ukrainian reviews, which have now been removed from Goodreads along with the book's entry, criticised Gilbert for highlighting Russian suffering at a time when a genocide was happening in their country.

Since the war started last year, there have been many debates about the appropriateness of giving a platform to Russian cultural products, whether historic or contemporary. The idea of a cultural boycott was initially suggested by Ukraine's culture minister Oleksandr Tkachenko, who argued that the Russian invasion represented "a civilisational battle over culture and history". Here in Ireland during the early days of the war, Bord Gáis Energy Theatre cancelled a scheduled visit by the St Petersburg Ballet Theatre, while the Helix removed the Royal Moscow Ballet from its bill.

For every critic of Russian cultural hegemony, however, there have been others arguing that we have much to learn from Russian artists – past and present. Many of them risked, or are risking, their lives by critiquing a totalitarian regime and defending free speech.

This alternative view was first expressed by German-Turkish journalist Deniz Yücel. It has become a widespread defence of art as divorced from and indeed superior to politics: "The enemy is Putin, not Pushkin." Through art, we can gain a greater appreciation of the conditions that enable totalitarianism and the suffering it causes.

What marks the Gilbert controversy out, however, is the author's role in suppressing her own work. Instead of defending her reasons for choosing her setting (which, needless to say, did not include pro-Russian sentiment), she apologised for her own insensitivity. Had she set a similarly themed book in Ukraine, however, she would have been questioned about her authority to do

so. In those circumstances, narrative resistance to cultural imperialism would be offered as cultural appropriation.

The Lesya Ukrainka National Academic Theatre production of Brian Friel's *Translations*, which visited the Abbey Theatre last week, is particularly relevant in this context. The dialogue between this seminal Irish work – set at a critical time in the country's cultural colonisation history – and a radically different contemporary political moment is both interesting and important. The Ukrainian ensemble made no attempt to transpose *Translations* to a contemporary setting. They were confident instead to let the natural plasticity of good art speak for itself.

Significantly, this production ended with a musical number in which the large ensemble set the popular sea shanty *The Wellerman* against a traditional Ukrainian brush dance. To a Western audience the juxtaposition might have seemed bizarre, but in the context of the current war there was both a political and artistic logic. In 2022 the TikTok hit had been repurposed by pro-Russian propagandists. The Ukrainian performers were reinterpreting that gesture, throwing its powerful percussive beat back as an act of defiance.

Surely all voices that keep the current horror of the Ukrainian situation in our mind are worth listening to? A reader should be able to hear what Gilbert has to say about Soviet oppression in 1930s Russia. But they should also read Andrey Kurkov's *Grey Bees*, set against the backdrop of the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, or Serhiy Zhadan's *The Orphanage*, set in the eastern part of Ukraine controlled by Russian-backed separatists.

It is in the radical acts of empathy initiated by art that a deeper understanding of the war's significance will emerge. ■



Elizabeth Gilbert: withdrew her novel

The Rachel Incident ploughs the horrid awkwardness of adolescence for belly laughs



JOHN WALSHE

Cork-born Caroline O'Donoghue's third novel for adults explores similar territory to that of Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends*. In both books, the main protagonist is a self-obsessed university student who develops a complicated relationship with an older couple. O'Donoghue, however, ploughs a far funnier furrow that playfully navigates the traumatic tightrope between adolescence and adulthood with belly laughs aplenty.

In 2021, 31-year-old Rachel Murray is a successful Irish journalist living in London, happily married with her first child on the way. Then she hears that one of her old college lecturers from University College Cork, Dr Fred Byrne, is in a coma. This sends her mind hurtling back to 11 years ago when she was a final-year English undergraduate.

The 2010-era student Rachel is in awe of her camp and probably gay but closeted co-worker in the bookshop where they both work part-time. So much so that when James Devlin asks her to move in with him, she agrees immediately, leaving the relative comfort of her familial home for a frigid, run-down house share.

Rachel and James contrive to organise a book launch for Dr Byrne, as a means by which Rachel can seduce said lecturer upon whom she has a crush. Rachel even places fake orders from deceased customers to feign interest in the Kensington Diet, Dr Byrne's academic exploration of Irish writers during the Great Famine. Things, however, do not work out as planned.

O'Donoghue's prose is note-perfect, capturing Rachel's sense of wanting to experience everything life has to offer without getting a reputation. "I was desperate to be touched; I was terrified of being ruined."

Rachel feels rounded and real, grounded in a way that makes her hugely sympathetic even as she does despicable things to people who definitely don't deserve it. "Perhaps if I had been a

Caroline O'Donoghue: The author's new novel is genuinely funny
AKIRA SUEMORI



more melancholy girl," she muses, "I would have been able to recognise that I was in the middle of a trauma."

A veteran columnist and podcaster, O'Donoghue is cutting and perceptive all at once, whether she's describing how two people can spot each other's loneliness like "litter mates of solitude", the "droopy uselessness" of an arts degree or how Rachel's adolescent brother was "all long and teenage, looking like he had extra hands and feet".

Particularly on-point is Rachel's assertion that 2010-era Dr Byrne and his wife attend concerts the same way 2021-era Rachel goes to gigs with her own husband ("fun, dinner first, home by eleven, something to do") rather than the "spiritual commitment" of a younger music fan.

O'Donoghue often elicits the kind of genuine laughs not usually encountered outside stand-up comedy. James's month of coming out is

dubbed "The Gaynaissance", while Rachel's growing attraction to a would-be paramour "came on like food poisoning".

Funniest of all is Rachel's quirky tendency to have indecent thoughts every time she finds herself in a confined space with a man she's not related to. "I could be standing next to a seventy-year-old

man in a lift and think: I hope he doesn't want to have sex; I'm still on my period."

She nails the intensity of someone's first serious relationship in just a few lines. "Our love had short fingernails. It was clawing and mischievous and it wrapped us in spit." She's equally insightful about when things go bad and you end up "in the kind of fight where both people act like they're in a film, mugging for a camera that didn't exist... saying strident, passionate and broadly untrue things".

While the story is reasonably light-hearted and certainly amusing, O'Donoghue's characters deal with some genuinely big issues – from pregnancy to fidelity, coming out to coming of age, accepting responsibility for your actions and realising you have the ability to hurt those you most care about.

I have a few quibbles, such as wondering whether anyone in Cork would have used the term "bougie" in 2010.

Also, the plot definitely starts to plod around two-thirds of the way through. These are only minor issues, however, and **The Rachel Incident** is the kind of warm-hearted and genuinely funny novel that's the perfect antidote to a bad news day.

FICTION

The Rachel Incident

By Caroline O'Donoghue

Virago, €20.99



Una Mannion: author's literary sensibility lifts novel above the confines of genre fiction

JAMES CONNOLLY

Tell Me What I am - an uneasy thriller seen through the prism of loss



BRENDAN DALY

Una Mannion's taut novel **Tell Me What I Am** is haunted by an absence. In 2004, Deena Garvey is living in Philadelphia with her young daughter Ruby and her sister Nessa. One morning, Deena leaves for work but never arrives.

Deena has shared custody of Ruby with her estranged partner Lucas. Nessa believes Lucas is responsible for Deena's disappearance, but can't prove it.

Lucas then moves Ruby over 600 kilometres away to live with him and denies Deena's family any contact with her daughter. This triggers Nessa's desperate efforts over 14 years to reach her niece, in an unsettling story about the construction of identity and the ferocity of grief.

Mannion's brisk narrative presents a lacerating portrait of domestic abuse. As well as the physical scars Lucas inflicts on Deena, we see the mechanics of the psychological assaults he perpetuates.

Deena moves in with Lucas three weeks after they meet. Almost immediately, Lucas exploits Deena's vulnerabilities and tries to persuade her to cut contact with her family and friends.

By dismantling Deena's sense of self, Lucas reduces her capacity to resist his manipulation. The novel adeptly illustrates how an abuser can make a victim complicit in their abuse.

"I always felt safer with him than with anybody," Deena says of Lucas. "The person who was most dangerous to me was the only person I believed could keep me safe."



Mannion draws chilling parallels between Lucas's treatment of Deena and Ruby, but there are important differences. As Ruby is only a child, Lucas can control what she knows and remembers of her mother.

Mostly, he refuses to talk to Ruby about Deena. When Lucas does speak of her, it's to highlight Deena's frailties and to emphasise that she ultimately abandoned her daughter. "I am nothing," Ruby believes, "except what I've been told I am."

For Nessa, Lucas (who works in cybersecurity) is attempting to "overwrite" her sister's story. While the loss of Deena and Ruby devastates the Garvey family, it affects Nessa most profoundly. She views life through the prism of Deena's disappearance and becomes consumed with trying to reconnect with Ruby.

Under the strain, Nessa sabotages her relationship with her boyfriend and, inadvertently echoing Lucas's manipulation of Deena, alienates her friends. Even talking about Deena makes Nessa feel like "someone had stepped off the see-saw and dropped her to the ground". While her brother filled his life with his children, Nessa had "emptied hers".

Unfolding between 1998 and 2018, the novel skilfully shifts back and forth across this timeline and between characters' perspectives. Its tense, uneasy mood is evoked through a largely spare style.

If Mannion is occasionally overwhelmed by trying to juggle the book's extensive themes (some, like gentrification, are introduced but never developed), she is particularly strong in her characterisation. Telling details are often revealed obliquely.

During the 2016 US presidential campaign, for example, Lucas

won't refer to the Democratic candidate as "Hillary" or "Clinton" – just "Mrs Clinton".

One strand of this novel is decoding cultural differences between the US and Ireland. The author is well placed to interpret these: she's from Philadelphia but lives in Sligo.

Mannion has won prizes for her poetry and short stories and received the 2022 Kate O'Brien Award for her debut novel *A Crooked Tree*. Like *Tell Me What I Am*, that book revolved around an Irish-American family in Pennsylvania and crackles with suspense. While a coming-of-age story was central to *A Crooked Tree*, however, it's in the background here.

Mannion's concern with language and communication runs through this novel like a watermark. It's touched on in Hiberno-English expressions like "Howerya?" used by the students from Galway on J-1 visas that Nessa's father hires for his building company.

But it's examined more deeply in Mannion's depiction of Lucas, a man who employs silence as a punishment. During characters' confrontations with him, their words are "blocked" and "swallowed". When – at a moment of crisis – even Lucas can't speak, it feels particularly ironic for a character who talks in a way that is "practically scripted".

Tell Me What I Am has the momentum of a thriller, but Mannion's literary sensibility firmly elevates it beyond the confines of genre fiction.

FICTION

Tell Me What I Am

By Una Mannion
Faber & Faber,
€14.99



Shane Lowry celebrates winning The 3 Irish Open at County Louth Golf Club as an amateur in 2009 GETTY

How great sporting moments can lift life above the ordinary



DERMOT BOLGER

Some years ago, my brother and I travelled to a remote rural cottage to pay our respects to a deceased man whose son had shown kindness to our late father. Looking back, I can't remember the dead man's name or the location of his tiny home.

But what I vividly recall is how the only item displayed in his open coffin was a 60-year-old GAA medal, carefully placed between his entwined fingers. He was the last survivor of a team that had won his parish their only ever county club final. While every neighbour who offered condolences mentioned other aspects of his life, all referenced his medal with reverence. His identity was irrevocably linked to that day, decades ago, when he helped bring sporting glory to his community.

This county final may have lacked the grandeur of Ronnie Delany's 1956 Olympic gold in Melbourne or Ray Houghton's goal against England at Euro '88. But that didn't matter to each elderly neighbour who touched his medal and found themselves transported back to their own young lives.

As Paul Rouse explores in his reflective miscellany of a book, this is because every sport lovers' relationship with it is unique to them yet also part of a collective experience. Countless people are bound together, all experiencing the transcendent moment when their ordinary lives seem suspended. Individually and collectively, they are gripped by a try scored or a putt that provoked rapture – such as the moment when unknown amateur Shane Lowry won the Irish Open amid gales of rain.

Only in recent years have historians started to seriously examine the role of sport within Irish society and how it filters into the diverse and complex strands of our identity. Sometimes such books bear tell-tale signs of having started life as theses or commissioned works of academic research.

A UCD professor, Rouse has already written the superb historical study *Sport and Ireland: A History*. While his new publication lacks the scope of that mammoth work, it may find an equally wide audience.

Written in a knowledgeable but conversational tone, it doesn't form a single structured narrative but instead addresses the moments and figures within Irish sport that spark Rouse's imagination. It flows more like an informed, informal evening of conversation than a lecture and is deeply enjoyable for the unexpected stories it explores.

Rouse's heroes are not the obvious famous names. Instead we have Eddie Heron, thrilling the crowds who surrounded Blackrock Baths in 1968 to see him yet again become Ireland's three-metre springboard champion. This time he is 57 and

has only been lured back into competition (18 years after his official retirement) because his swimming club needed someone to represent them at the event.

Heron would have been a favourite for Olympic gold if Ireland had sent a team to Berlin in

1936. When the games resumed after World War II, he was past his prime. But even after he retired, he never stopped diving for pure pleasure and for the enjoyment he gave people in Blackrock who gathered every time he quietly appeared.

Rouse also examines the forgotten life of Kilkenny's Mabel Cahill, who won five US Open tennis championships before vanishing from history. Details of her death from TB in a workhouse in 1905 were only unearthed decades later.

Numerous such figures pass through these pages. Rouse examines everything from the Hillborough tragedy to his own embarrassment at being caught by an old GAA rival when he is tempted to try on a pair of football boots in a shop, even though he wryly admits that he is too old to wear them. But that's what sport does – it lures you back, stirring memories and allowing us to yield to what Rouse calls "the glorious disease of hope".

Approaching sport from myriad angles that take Rouse's fancy, *Sport in Modern Irish Life* is a perfect gift for a favourite uncle or aunt who would secretly prefer if you bought them a new pair of boots. Instead they can savour the many conversations that this eclectic collection of essays will undoubtedly spark.

SPORT

Sport in Modern Irish Life

By Paul Rouse

Merrion Press, €17.99



Engrossing and informative case study of the capita



ANDREW LYNCH

Timothy Murtagh's vivid and sober history of a city centre tenement takes its title from a passage in James Joyce's 1914 short story collection *Dubliners*.

"A horde of grimy children populated [Henrietta Street]," a character observes while walking around Dublin city centre. "They stood or ran in the roadway, or crawled up the steps before the gaping doors, or squatted like mice upon the thresholds. He picked his way deftly through all that minute vermin-like life and under the shadow of the gaunt spectral mansions in which the old mobility of Dublin had roistered."

Spectral Mansions' subtitle, meanwhile, sells this book a little short. While Henrietta Street between 1800 and 1914 is indeed its

main focus, the narrative actually expands to chronicle Dublin's changing fortunes well before and after those dates. Richly illustrated with photographs, paintings and newspaper cuttings, *Spectral Mansions* also shows one thing very clearly – this unfortunate city has mostly been run by people who feel no great affection for it.

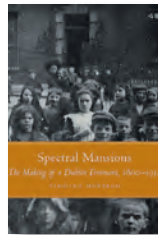
Henrietta Street is a perfect case study because its identity changed so dramatically over this period. During Georgian times it reflected Dublin's status as a thriving social and commercial hub, second only to London within the British Empire. Built in the 1720s, this fashionable area became an elegant row of massive town houses with "six titled residents, two military generals, three archbishops and two speakers of the Irish House of Commons".

Georgian Dublin was also riven by poverty, however, which is why one pamphleteer in 1796

POLITICS

Spectral Mansions: The Making of a Dublin Tenement 1800-1914

By Timothy Murtagh
Four Courts Press, €28



called it "a gorgeous mask". The 1800 Act of Union ripped off that mask, shutting down Ireland's parliament and prompting a mass exodus of wealth and power to England. A century later, Dublin had the worst slums in the United Kingdom and Henrietta Street was home to over 900 people squashed into just 19 buildings.

What made 19th-century Dublin tenement life particularly grim? As Murtagh explains, tenements in comparable cities such as Belfast and Glasgow were usually purpose-built with at least some minimum standards. Dub-

lin's had been erected at a time when sanitation was barely understood, which meant running water, indoor toilets and even rubbish collections were often non-existent.

Tellingly, we know much more about Henrietta Street's landlords than its tenants. Murtagh provides sharp pen-portraits of Joseph Meade and Thomas Vance, successful merchants who were elected to Dublin Corporation.

"Both men reflected the unsavoury and hypocritical nature of Victorian capitalism," he writes, "living in the suburbs but making their money from investments in the city centre, campaigning for better working-class housing but still profiting from tenements."

Like many good history books, *Spectral Mansions* shows how much some things change and others stay the same. Then as now, there were occasional calls to ban heavy vehicles from Dublin city centre.

This had nothing to do with global warming, however, rather a fear that vibrations would cause tenements to collapse – which duly happened on several occasions and nearly always killed residents.

After the 1916 Rising, a British government report speculated that poor housing conditions "might have accounted for an underlying sense of dissatisfaction". The response from playwright George Bernard Shaw was typically sardonic: "Why, oh why, didn't the artillery knock down half of Dublin while it had the chance? Only 179 houses destroyed... I'd have laid at least 17,000 of them flat and made a decent town of it."

While independent Ireland eventually moved Dublin's tenement dwellers out to the suburbs, Murtagh convincingly argues that it didn't do much for our capital's built environment. The writer Frank O'Connor noted Henrietta Street's "funereal air" in 1947, while as late as 1980 RTÉ found it to be a perfect filming location for an adaptation of James Plun-

A pacey and enjoyable legal yarn, *The Trial* is great holiday material



PAT CARTY

Everybody loves a courtroom drama, although it's the last place any of us actually want to be in the real world. Books of this stripe are almost guaranteed to sell, whether they're from the pen of John Grisham or (even better) Michael Connelly or concern the slightly more down-to-earth adventures of the cigar-smoking, wine-drinking, fried breakfast enthusiast Rumpole of the Bailey. That beloved character started out on television before his popularity led to a series of novels and short stories by his creator Sir John Mortimer.

Like Mortimer before him, Rob Rinder (who was called to the bar in 2001) knows a thing or two about the legal profession and mass media. For six years, he

appeared in the ITV reality courtroom show *Judge Rinder*. This was only the start of his television career, which has included reviving the 1970s show *Crown Court* and turning up on everything from *Strictly Come Dancing* to *Celebrity Goggle-*

box to Good Morning Britain.

Although he has been a columnist for several newspapers, *The Trial* is Rinder's first novel. We open with Detective Inspector Grant Cliveden "striding down Fleet Street towards the Old Bailey" in the sunshine. He's feeling good about himself, although he wouldn't be if he were privy to the information offered in the opening sentence: "It was the day he was going to die."

Wearing a dress uniform, even though an officer of his rank is not required to, Cliveden notices when others notice him. A documentary about an assassination attempt on the queen which he foiled has just been repeated on television and he recalls the admiration in the eyes of *Good Morning Britain* presenter Susanna Reid (the same Miss Reid who Rinder appeared beside on *Celebrity Gogglebox*) when "he'd delivered his solemn vow of service".

The security staff flirt with this good-looking man who enters "the courtroom with his usual swagger". As he places his hand on the Bible, however, his body begins to fail him. He clutches his chest, he falls to his knees and everything goes black.

The story then shifts to Adam Green, an exhausted and overworked pupil barrister. Having been selected for "prestigious pupillage at Stag Court Chambers", he is on a year's probation to see if he's worthy of a permanent job.

Setting his narrative around Green is a clever move on Rinder's part, as it allows him to point the finger at shortcomings in the legal system while also explaining its intricacies to the layperson. Green's disagreeable and hopelessly vain pupil master Jonathan Taylor-Cameron is assigned (much to his chagrin) to defend Jimmy Knight, the man accused of dispatching Cliveden. Knight has spent ten years behind bars thanks to Cliveden and was only released two



weeks before the detective inspector's final court appearance.

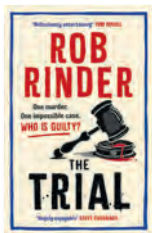
The evidence against him is pretty convincing. There's a laptop recovered from his home which reveals repeated internet searches relating to Cliveden as well as a burner mobile that was used to send a message to the phone of the dead policeman.

Most damning of all is CCTV footage from the Old Nag's Head. It was in this pub that Knight met Cliveden on the morning of his death, a meeting arranged through that text. The footage doesn't actually show Knight poisoning the victim's drink, but it demonstrates that he had the opportunity. On top of that, this meeting falls within the small window that toxicology experts have given as the most likely time

FICTION

The Trial

By Rob Rinder
Century, €19.60



Its changing fortunes



Residents of tenements on Chancery Lane in Dublin

kett's classic tenement-set novel *Strumpet City*.

Today, 14 Henrietta Street houses an award-winning museum about its chequered past.

Murtagh is a historical consultant there and this book shows the weight of his formidable learning. Striking information on subjects such as people's diets, child labour and public drunkenness builds

into a narrative that is always engrossing if sometimes a little disjointed.

James Joyce obviously regarded his Dublin as a shadow of its former self. If Dubliners vote for a directly elected mayor next year, then anyone who wants the job should read *Spectral Mansions* – and see how hard it is to bring a ghost city back to life.



when Cliveden ingested the botulinum toxin (Botox, the showbiz wrinkle suppressor) which did him in.

Taylor-Cameron is as convinced of Knight's guilt as anyone else and much more concerned with another, more lucrative case. The idealistic young Green – and that name can't be by chance – is determined, however, to give Knight a fair shake.

The Trial is not the kind of book that's going to change anybody's life, apart from perhaps Rinder's if it shifts enough copies. Instead it's a pacy and enjoyable courtroom yarn that manages to not tax the brain too much while also being perfectly satisfying. If you happen to be taking a flight anytime soon, this is the kind of thing you should have in your carry-on luggage. ■

Rob Rinder: the lawyer and TV personality has now penned a courtroom novel

Design for life

My young daughter gets very upset when I show affection for my partner

This week, our expert advises a reader whose 18-month-old daughter has started to become extremely jealous of her mother's loving relationship with her partner

Dear Expert,
I am a first-time mother in my early 40s, with an 18-month-old daughter. I am in a happy long-term relationship with my boyfriend, who I love very much. After I gave birth, I decided to stop working for a couple of years to focus on looking after our daughter. This has been great as I have been able to spend a lot of time with her. But it has caused one unexpected side effect.

About six months ago my daughter started to become extremely jealous when my partner showed me affection. If she sees me touch her dad, she becomes very upset. She cries and becomes angry when we kiss or hug.

I don't think this behaviour is healthy and I want my daughter to have a strong relationship with both of us. How can I manage this in a respectful way?



Dear Reader,

This is a really good question because it is a common issue that can arise for many families. We are seeing this dynamic in much older children as a result of Covid lockdowns and more parents working from home, so you are not on your own. This is common and very fixable.

First it's important to see the issue through the eyes of the child. At 12/18 months a child can only understand the world in the most concrete terms. They have no ability to understand context, nuance or process. The toddler sees the world as mine and yours, not ours. The concept of sharing anything is difficult to comprehend and ownership is a very tangible and physical process.

When an infant is born they are led to believe that they are the centre of their mother's world and the mother is the centre of their world too. This territorial relationship is necessary and helps them to feel safe as they have this adult in the world who is dedicated and devoted to meeting their every need. There needs to come a time however when this period of what Winnicott called "primary maternal preoccupation" must be weaned and the child needs to individuate from the mother and realise that there are other adults in their world with whom they can feel safe with too.

This process can meet some resistance when the baby or toddler feels threatened by the fear of losing the incredibly close relationship they have with their mother. Naturally they can be pretty demonstrative of their discontent that their mother is now having to be shared and they must be given time to acclimatise to this change.

This threat to the ownership of their mother can occur in the context of the arrival of another sibling or a jealousy towards the father who is seen to be trying to entice the mother away from the child. This is attachment anxiety and is more common in cases where mothers are at home full time and spend a majority of their time with the small child. Because this closeness has never been disrupted, the arrival of any sort of threat will be met with resistance.

In this case your daughter is threatened by your partner. She believes that if you give your love to him her love care and attention will be halved. The key here is to convince her that her capacity to be loved is doubled by mam and dad. Encourage her to spend one-on-one fun time with dad. Include her in your hugs of each other.

Reassure her that she can be apart from you and you still hold her in mind and that proximity is not the only display of love, but obviously in more toddler friendly language. If managed well, she will grow out of this phase soon enough, but you are talking weeks not days.

Got a problem or something you'd like advice on? Contact us anonymously by email at: thisweek@businesspost.ie and we'll match your query with the best expert we can find on the subject



DR COLMAN NOCTOR

Dr Colman Noctor is a child and adolescent psychoanalytical psychotherapist.

Specialising in the treatment of emotional disorders, he is currently a lecturer in SETU Waterford and is the author of *The 4 to 7 Zone*, a book about how to achieve balance in your life. For full details of his work, see colmannoctor.com.

Indy's last outing is a well-crafted venture that illustrates value of relics like our hero



REVIEWS BY
**JOHN
MAGUIRE**

Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny

Directed by James Mangold
Nationwide, 12A

★★★

At one point in *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, the fifth installment of a mostly beloved franchise that defined the 1980s blockbuster, Phoebe Waller-Bridge's character makes a crack about how "we're all stealing from each other, and that's capitalism!"

The theft – or perhaps more politely, the homage – started when Steven Spielberg and George Lucas recruited Harrison Ford to play the kind of square-jawed hero from the film serials they loved as children; part Tarzan, part Flash Gordon. It continued when the kinetic thrills and breakneck spills of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* went on to influence an entire generation of Hollywood action film-makers.

The circle closes almost 40 years later with this handsomely produced and solidly entertaining summer adventure, co-written and directed by a newcomer to the franchise, James Mangold, with Spielberg producing. Waller-Bridge's quip is Mangold's way of telling us early on that he won't stray far from the brief, but this sense of self-awareness thankfully doesn't seep into the story. And anyway, is it stealing if the owner hands it to you?

Dial of Destiny will be the now 80-year-old Ford's last time cracking the whip as the dashing, daring archaeologist. The guy who defied death countless times has gotten old and the hero defined by his struggles is yet to escape them. We have followed him since the early 1930s and it's the late 1960s now. Heroes aren't digging around in the ruins of a forgotten past, but strapping themselves to rockets and aiming at the moon.

Indiana is a hero from another age, and he feels every day of it. Approaching mandatory retirement from his university teaching post, he is navigating a rapidly changing world; a relic himself, searching for meaning. Living in a cold-water apartment beside a rollicking gang of hippies, lonely, creaky Indy is recently divorced from Marion (the returning Karen Allen), who has never forgiven him for a tragedy involving their son Mutt (the not returning Shia LaBeouf).

Mangold opens the story with an extended prologue, set in Germany near the end of World War II. A deftly de-aged Ford happens upon Archimedes' Antikythera, one half of a fabled contraption invented by the Greek mathematician 2,000 years ago. Grabbing it before unhinged Nazi scientist Jürgen Voller (Mads Mikkelsen) can use it for evil, Indy secures it in the vaults of his New York university where it lies undisturbed for decades.

Then Voller returns, under a new name and with a new job as a Nasa rocket engineer. When he comes looking for the device which he believes will allow him to go back in time and change the outcome of the war, Indy and his roguish god-daughter Helena (Waller-Bridge), a dealer in stolen artefacts, must join forces to stop him. The ensuing two-hour chase



Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Harrison Ford in *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*: Indiana's last hurrah

is perhaps a little repetitive, but Mangold crafts his film with artistry and affection.

There's a sense throughout that Dial of Destiny is a cover version rather than the original. We get a lot of action, but nothing approaching the kinetic thrill of a rolling boulder or a chase through a mine in a rickety wagon. Still, there's a hint of the old magic, that familiar touch that has survived decades of reiteration and generations of copycats, and that is enough.

King on Screen

Directed by Daphné Baiwir
VOD, 15

★★

The rest of summer's tentpole releases having long since ceded this weekend's box office to Indiana Jones, without the good doctor having to swap it for so much as a bag of sand, there's a chance to flick around the streaming services for an interesting documentary.

Belgian actor turned director Daphné Baiwir's *King on Screen* certainly has a captivating premise, analysing how the novels of the most popular writer of his generation have been adapted for film and television. But the documentary's potential is wasted by a distinct absence of curiosity.

Baiwir doesn't help the cause by opening proceedings with a bewildering seven-minute short film starring the director herself, crammed with references to Stephen King's books and the movies created from them. There are 140 such nods, we are told, but no good ones. Worse, the jarring transition from fiction to actual documentary is as disconcerting for the viewer as it seems to be for the assembled talking heads; all film-makers who have adapted one or more of King's works.

Dividing the material into two arbitrary groups (horror and non-horror), Baiwir guides her interviewees through a series of anecdotes about the difference between a novel and a film that might have been more appropriate for a DVD extra, back when they were a thing.

Things improve markedly when Frank Darabont pops up. A King specialist who wrote and directed adaptations of *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Green Mile* and *The Mist*, the film-maker shares details of his relationship with the writer (who appears only in archive footage) and the richly detailed, often terrifying worlds that still hold his fascination. Later, a discussion about Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (which King famously detested) doesn't reveal anything the curious didn't already know.

To be fair, with a list of more than 80 King films to discuss, the documentary has a lot of ground to cover. This makes it more a representative sample than a comprehensive list. The titles that do make the final cut are an odd combination, raising the question of whether this documentary was structured around the key texts of the writer's career – or around which of the film-makers were available to interview.

The Idol

Directed by Sam Levinson
Sky Atlantic, 18

★

I struggled to get a handle on Euphoria creator Sam Levinson's new five-part series *The Idol* (Sky Atlantic) until I realised I could watch it without engaging any part of my mind. Its vapidness is so complete that

Stephen King is the subject of the uneven documentary, *King on Screen* GETTY





each episode becomes a mental holiday, the equivalent of an hour-long session in a sensory deprivation tank.

Not camp enough to raise a laugh, not sexy enough to fire a synopsis, and not smart enough to require any response beyond a glassy-eyed stare, the show's resounding emptiness becomes the entire tone, like faint echoes of a bell rung far away that might just be the sound of your own blood rushing through your ears.

Ostensibly a cautionary tale about the perils of superstardom, *The Idol* sees Levinson team up with Abel Tesfaye (also known as pop star The Weeknd) and LA nightclub promoter turned producer Reza Fahim to lift the curtain on the grubby and exploitative side of show business – by being grubby and exploitative.

We first meet Jocelyn (Lily-Rose Depp) shortly after her grasping manager (Hank Azaria) and cruel record company boss (Jane Adams) share a dialogue scene that explains how she is the biggest pop star in the world. She's also mounting a comeback after the death from cancer of her mother slash manager and a concurrent mental breakdown.

Gathered in her vast and dimly lit LA mansion,

Jocelyn's team have concocted a new single that they all hope will mark a change in direction towards an attention-grabbing bad girl.

Then someone does their work for them by uploading an intimate photograph of Jocelyn to the internet.

The second episode takes place mostly on the troubled set of the gyrating video that will accompany the single, which Jocelyn now concedes is rubbish.

Isolated, uncertain, and embarrassed, Jocelyn falls in with shady nightclub owner Tedros (played by Tesfaye) and the two start an affair as exploitative as it is unlikely.

Shallow as a paddling pool and libidinous as a teenager on their first day of unsupervised internet access, two hours of *The Idol* is as far as my Zen-like state of nothingness would extend.

Fittingly for a show so concerned with ideas of artificiality and superficiality, nothing exists beyond what we can see on the surface.

Perhaps that is the point? Perhaps there is no point? Perhaps the fact that there is no point is the point? See what happens when you try to think about it? ■

Abel Tesfaye, aka The Weeknd and Lily-Rose Depp in *The Idol*, a shallow drama



Albums



REVIEWS BY
**TONY
CLAYTON-LEA**



SINGER-SONGWRITER

Julie Byrne

The Greater Wings (Ghostly International)



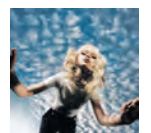
Buffalo, New York singer-songwriter Julie Byrne can blame her father for her musical education. His finger-style guitar playing laid the ground for his daughter's vocational career, and by the time she was 17 she had appropriated his guitar in homage to his influence. Three albums in from her 2017 debut (*Rooms with Walls and Windows*, a compilation of previously released cassette-only songs from 2012 and 2013), Byrne releases **The Greater Wings** into the wilderness in the hope that it will spark the imagination and strike a chord. Indeed, it does.

Grief expressed is the main narrative thrust, as she outlines "what death does not take from me" in a sequence of songs that express gratitude for the memory of her partner, producer and collaborator Eric Littmann, who died suddenly in 2021. The mood throughout is sombre, perhaps inevitably. But Byrne's voice is a special instrument that leans into the music, which frames her fingerpicking with carefully placed sprinkles of piano, synthesiser, harp and strings. The songs are mostly superb and, although underlined by tragedy, manage to remove misery from the outcome by a level of optimism that is equal parts uncertain, courageous, and admirable. ★★½

POP/ROCK

Maisie Peters

The Good Witch (Gingerbread Man Records/Asylum Records)



It didn't take too long for acolytes of Taylor Swift and Lorde to come out of the undergrowth, write a bunch of songs, upload them into the ether and then get signed by major record labels (or in this case Gingerbread Man Records, which is overseen by Ed Sheeran). Despite Maisie Peters' best attempts at corralling her influences, **The Good Witch** is Lorde-heavy and Swift-lite. Songs such as *Coming of Age*, *Lost the Breakup*, *Wendy* and *Two Weeks Ago* may be decent pop tunes, but fail at convincing that they are anything more than generic, radio-friendly fodder. ★★½

ALT ROCK

Eur(elle)

Avoiding the Problem (EUMU)



Dublin songwriter, singer and (self-described) "multi-genre mentalist" Neil Eurrelle has been involved in music from his mid-teens with bands such as *Stand and Empire Circus*, and latterly as a soundtrack composer for various film and television projects. **Avoiding the Problem** highlights Eurrelle's far-reaching experience and casts its creative net across various shades of alternative rock music in a way that assures the listener they are hearing an authentic voice. If your preference for alt rock veers towards a blend of *The National*, *The Cure* and a bleaker/murkier version of *The Blue Nile*, then stick around. ★★★



The Opel Astra Electric is a highly energy-efficient car for city driving; the interior (inset, below) features plenty of tech

SPECS

Model: Opel Astra Electric
Electric system: 115kW electric motor, 54kWh battery
CO2 emissions: 0g/km
Annual motor tax: €120
Energy consumption: 14.8kWh/100km
Price: TBC

PERFORMANCE

Max power: 156hp
Max torque: 270Nm
0-100km/h: 9.2 seconds

PROS AND CONS

Likes: In-car tech, handling and performance
Dislikes: Dull interior, reduced boot space



Dave Humpreys
 on motoring

Opel bucks the SUV trend with efficient new Astra Electric

There's a variety of flavours available for the Opel Astra, but the new electric version is the most appealing yet

Opel is adding the final piece to its Astra jigsaw by launching a fully electric version of the five-door hatchback. This battery-powered model bolsters the Astra range, which already includes diesel, petrol and plug-in hybrid options across hatchback and estate body styles.

The Astra Electric joins an increasingly electrified model range at Opel. The German marque hasn't (at least so far) designed its electric cars as standalone models, which means they appear as no different to the other versions.

All that will tell you this Astra is electric is the small "e" badge on its rear hatch. That and the stylish 18-inch wheels which are aerodynamically optimised to improve efficiency, thanks to plastic inserts that "fill up" between the wheel's spokes.

The car's handsome design benefits from upmarket features such as a contrasting black roof and matching door mirrors. Opel's black "Vizor" grille neatly integrates with the LED headlight units, which on

higher-grade versions include the company's "Intelli-Lux" matrix system made up of 168 individual LED elements that dynamically light the road without dazzling others.

Indeed, Opel isn't shy about lavishing tech on the Astra Electric. Its latest driver assistance system – Intelli-Drive 2.0 – combines numerous assistance functions under one umbrella, such as semi-automatic lane change and intelligent speed adaptation, which means the car can adjust to changing speed limits at all times once confirmed by the driver. Adaptive cruise control also keeps the Astra a safe distance from the vehicle in front and can operate in start-stop traffic.

It sounds like there's a lot going on, and there is. But it's all relayed clearly to the driver either through the full-colour head-up display



projected on to the windscreen or via the digital instrument display. The latter is part of the “Pure Panel” dashboard layout that features a similarly sized touchscreen for the infotainment system.

Besides the usual Android and Apple wireless mirroring, a “Hey Opel” virtual assistant is on hand.

The interior isn’t awash with bright colours (something Opel could do better at), but it’s well made and everything feels reassuringly solidly built. Supportive front seats get the stamp of approval from the German AGR campaign for better backs. So if you’re a company car driver doing big mileage, you may appreciate this aspect.

There’s sufficient space for two adults to sit comfortably in the rear, but the middle seat gets a reduction in room. That’s to be expected from a car in this segment of the market, especially one that isn’t expressly designed to be an electric vehicle. More compromise comes in the boot, which accommodates 352 litres of luggage – that’s significantly less than the 422 litres available in the petrol-fuelled Astra. Still, the rear seats fold down to increase cargo volume – and if you need more, Opel plans to introduce an estate-bodied version of the Astra Electric.

Energy comes from a 54kWh battery that provides a 418-kilometre driving range. For improved efficiency, Opel fits a heat pump as standard and gives the Astra 11kW AC charging ability, allowing it to make greater use of the more widespread on-street chargers. Faster DC charging at up to 100kW means a 20 to 80 per cent recharge can be done in about 28 minutes.

Performance is modest, with maximum outputs of 156hp and 270Nm. A standing-start sprint to 100km/h will take 9.2 seconds, though it feels brisker at lower speeds. The delivery of that performance is smooth. You can switch to a “Sport” driving mode that sharpens accelerator response, but the Astra feels better when left in its default setting.

The steering has a light touch and the front goes precisely where you want it to. Its higher speed stability is never in question, thanks to a suspension setup that does a superb job of combining bump absorption and maintaining keen handling.

Noise levels are also impressively low, courtesy of acoustic optimisation and the electric powertrain. Official energy consumption figures put the Astra Electric at 14.8kWh/100km, which is more efficient than the average electric SUV. It improves on that consumption figure by selecting the “B” mode on the transmission to increase energy recuperation. Unlike some other EVs, however, choosing different stages of recuperation via steering wheel-mounted paddles is not possible.



RIVAL

Renault Megane E-Tech Electric: from €37,495

Renault has been making electric cars for some time, but this electric is the first of its new era and packed with great tech plus a healthy dose of style. It has a larger battery than the Opel and a bit more range, while also being just a bit more practical – though you won’t find an estate model in the Renault line-up.

Taking to the motorway, a higher cruising speed doesn’t make too severe a dent in the Opel’s range, but it’s in urban and city settings where it begins to prove itself as a highly energy-efficient vehicle. During our time driving the car, its trip computer indicated consumption figures well below what Opel quotes, which is positive.

There will be buyers who automatically look past the conventional hatchback in favour of a more costly electric crossover or SUV. With less weight and likely less cost (once pricing is confirmed), the Astra Electric is a prime example of why we should not only be considering a switch to electric – but also switching to a more sensible category of vehicle.

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*The Hyundai 5-Year Unlimited Mileage Warranty applies only to Hyundai vehicles that have been originally sold by an authorised Hyundai dealer to an end-customer, as set out in the terms and conditions of the warranty booklet. Local terms and conditions apply. Model shown for illustrative purposes.*Dealer and delivery charges apply. Fuel consumption 5.2-7.8 l/100km.

DRIVEN IN IRELAND

New badge, same great Dacia Jogger

BY SHANE O'DONOGHUE



Last year, Dacia celebrated its first decade in Ireland. The Renault Group's value-focused subdivision is having an incredible 2023, as it's deep inside the list of top ten best-selling new car

brands.

Along with that success, the firm is in the midst of a corporate identity makeover. This can be found across the dealer network already and it extends to the cars as well,

from the humble Sandero and Sandero Stepway to the Duster SUV and also one of the company's most impressive cars yet, the Jogger tested here.

The Jogger is a seven-seat estate with a

rugged look and raised ground clearance. It has a large and versatile interior and it majors on comfort. Thankfully, none of that has changed.

Indeed, the new badging – including white lettering across the back and a new adventure-inspired logo at the front – enhances the image of the car, especially when paired with the distinctive new green paint colour and new "Extreme" trim level.

Remarkably, the Jogger starts from just €25,040 with petrol power. While that's perfectly adequate, Dacia will launch a more powerful hybrid model later in the year for those who need a little more oomph and an automatic gearbox without increased fuel consumption. For full details, see dacia.ie.



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DOWN THE ROAD



Lotus returns to Ireland – with an SUV

BY SHANE O'DONOGHUE

A new showroom has opened in Dublin representing the return of the Lotus Cars brand to this country. And while the occasion was marked by a cavalcade of classic models from the British brand (celebrating its focus on lightweight sports cars), the new model spearheading its resurgence is the Eletre, the firm's first-ever SUV.

As the name suggests, the Eletre is fully electric. While diehard fans of the Lotus marque may not approve of including an SUV in the line-up, they are promised a vehicle that will live up to the badge on the bonnet and its great history.

To that end, the Eletre is equipped with a high-performance electric system using two motors and a minimum of 600hp – there will be even more powerful versions. Conversely, thanks to the use of a large battery pack, the Eletre comes with a range between charges of as much as 600 kilometres.

Irish pricing for the Eletre has yet to be confirmed, though it is expected to start at close to €150,000 when the first examples arrive later this summer. Traditional Lotus buyers will be glad to hear that the Irish showroom will also sell the Emira sports car – billed as the company's last-ever petrol-powered car. For full details, see lotuscars.com ■



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KINGPINS OF
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EITHNE SHORTALL

When you're sitting at home feeling helpless about whatever injustice is taxing you, protesting with others for a collective aim is an excellent course of action

@eithneshortall

usually start the day with breakfast. Sure, exercising or working first thing sounds good, but when it comes to it, I'm a traditionalist – I reach for the muesli and the kettle. Last week, though, I tried something different. I kicked off my Tuesday with a protest.

We live on Richmond Road in Dublin's Drumcondra. It's not a main road, but there is constant traffic. It's also not a wide road. As a result, cars regularly mount the curb and drive along the footpath as though it were an extension of the road. It is entirely possible, if not inevitable, that one day someone – probably a child – will skip out of their garden gate on to the footpath, where they assume they are safe, and get knocked down. It is beyond dangerous.

Residents have been asking Dublin City Council to do something for years. Some of the solutions supported by locals – such as a one-way traffic system – have been rejected by officials. A parking permit scheme has been promised, and the council hopes this will ease the traffic problems, but we await implementation. In the meantime, the residents have decided to take to the street.

It's a rolling protest, taking place during commuter rush hour every week until a solution is found. I was abroad for the first one but heard it had gone well. Still, I was a smidge apprehensive as I exited the house last Tuesday morning, steeling myself for some pre-8am aggression. Instead, it was a positively meditative start to the day. There were a couple



Richmond Road: cars regularly drive on the footpath

'A parking permit scheme has been promised, and the council hopes this will ease the traffic problems, but we await implementation. In the meantime, the residents have decided to take to the street'

of dozen neighbours standing along a stretch of footpath where cars often mount, holding signs that declared 'Paths are for People'.

It's such an obvious message. Of course, paths are for people. And yes, individual motorists should not mount the curb, but when there is a repeated problem like this it is also the authorities' responsibility. It's much the same as how people shouldn't litter but, equally, the council should provide bins. If we want a large body of people to do the right thing, we have to make it simple for them.

It's so easy to feel helpless when faced with injustices, be they daily ones like dangerous driving or bigger issues of war and social inequality. But herein lies the power of protest. One person asking for change might have the door closed on them, but it's harder to ignore the masses. And more again than effecting change – though that is always the aim – there is a comfort in standing with others who feel similarly outraged. Protest provides connection, solidarity. It creates community.

My next novel, *The Lodgers*, is about an older woman who takes in two younger tenants. There is also a storyline about a local community centre earmarked for redevelopment as a hotel. The lodgers, and a motley crew of community centre users, don't accept this, and they too take to the streets. I wrote it at a particularly bleak time in the news cycle – Russia had just fully invaded Ukraine and the cost of living crisis was in full swing – and I was desperate to find good in the world. More than that, I wanted to believe in community. I took a cast of characters who felt helpless and gave them a collective aim.

Last Tuesday morning, I had a similar sense of solidarity. There were several beeps of support from passing motorists, and what little aggression there was, was not directed at us. One lad in a school uniform did declare us all "dopes" as he cycled past, but that provided a decent laugh.

The atmosphere was cordial. So much so that one European neighbour had quipped about making the protest a little more French. Even when the mood is angrier, the sense of solidarity that comes from protesting tends to have an oddly calming effect.

The first protest I remember attending was against the war in Iraq. It was a few months before my Leaving Certificate and I marched with friends, but all of my family were present. At university, I really got into the swing of it. When you're sitting at home feeling helpless, protesting is an excellent course of action. It helps the cause, yes, but it also helps you. Not to mention peaceful assembly being an important human right. The last time I stood on a street for a cause was early last year after the violent killing of a young woman. I was so devastated for her family and for her. Attending the vigil was the only thing I could think of doing.

My three-year-old got his first taste of people power on Tuesday. He was a little late to the footpath protest because he was busy making his own poster – 'Stop Bad Driving' – but he instantly got into the swing of it, leading a chant and looking for any other 'bad drivers' he might admonish on the way to Montessori.

I returned to muesli and tea on Wednesday, but it didn't quite deliver the same hit. I'll be back on the streets this week, brandishing a sign and exchanging pleasantries with my neighbours. Power to the people. ■

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ANDREA CLEARY

Omitting women from the Leaving Cert music syllabus teaches girls that they have no place in the field and ignores the fact that girls hugely outnumber boys in music classrooms

Every spring, when music festivals announce their line-ups, my eyes scan the lists to count the number of women featured. At this stage, it's barely a conscious act. I am so used to feeling disappointed with women's representation across the music industry that it's the first issue my mind jumps to.

In terms of radio play, the charts, gigs, award nominees, orchestras, technology and composition, women still struggle to gain the same opportunities or receive the same acclaim as men. However, conversations around the representation of women in these contexts have moved into the mainstream. If you are announcing an all-male line-up, you can expect to receive at least some backlash. This doesn't fix the problem, but at least we know it's there.

Hidden away from this discourse, however, is the issue of music education in Ireland. When I was sitting the Leaving Certificate back in the late 2000s, our "set texts" – pieces we studied for the "music appreciation" portion of our exam – were composed by Mozart, Deane, Berlioz and *The Beatles*. In 2023, students still do not learn about a single female composer (this year's set works are Bach, Tchaikovsky, Gerald Barry and *Queen*).

In fact, as Dr Laura Watson put it when she raised this topic in *The Journal of Music* in 2015, "The only woman even peripherally associated with the current core 'Listening' strand is Harriet Smithson, the Irish actress who inspired Berlioz's *Symphonie*."

I'll admit that this omission didn't ring any alarm bells for me at the time. Every social group I belonged to, from school to friends to family, subtly suggested to me that women in music were an anomaly. My young

mind hadn't yet developed the kind of critical eye needed to call this kind of thing out. Even if it had, I was too busy dealing with being a 17-year-old in a Catholic secondary school to make a fuss.

I was vaguely aware that Mozart had a sister who was also a musician, but I had no idea that Nannerl was a prodigious composer in her own right. Fanny Mendelssohn *Hensel* is believed by many musicologists to have shown greater virtuosity than her brother Felix, but I didn't know this until I studied music at third level. And as for the contemporary portion of our set texts, the decision to choose either *The Beatles* or *Queen* (depending on the year) seems rather pointed when you consider the contributions of Kate Bush, Nina Simone or Patti Smith.

Considering the fact that girls vastly outnumber boys in Leaving Certificate music classrooms (roughly two to one), the omission of women from the syllabus is nothing short of damaging. How are young girls who dream of careers as musicians supposed to interpret what is presented to them as the canon of Western art and popular music? Must they believe that women are completely absent?

Some will be exposed to a broader range of composers and styles in supplementary music education like outside piano or singing lessons, but not every student has the means to take such classes. And besides, this curriculum shouldn't be designed just for those who want to pursue music at third level. It should also consider those who simply go on to enjoy music as part of their everyday lives.

Music is an integral part of how we relax, socialise and understand ourselves. But the way we teach music at secondary level ignores this social and cultural value. Learning how to write a harmony, how to play chords on the piano or how to understand a modulation is only part of learning how music actually functions in the world – as a means of expression, of protest or community building.

Consider the contributions of black jazz artists at the turn of the 20th century, London punks in the 1970s, the blues tradition in the US Deep South, the Riot grrrl subculture in the early 1990s and the folk revival in the 1960s. None of these topics appears on courses until third level, but each offers the opportunity to learn about musicianship and composition as well as the role that music can play in cultural and political movements.

I don't accept for a moment that young people are not ready for these kinds of nuances.

If we continue to teach girls that they don't have a place in music, we can't be surprised when they are too disheartened to try. Many will find role models through their peer groups, their parents' record collections, internet communities or even playlists on Spotify, but we cannot continue to outsource representation in this way. Girls need to see women being taken seriously if they are going to advocate for themselves in their own careers, and educators should not be forced to uphold the Western canon boys' club when teaching them about music.

A revision of these set works that includes contributions from women and other marginalised groups is not only desirable but necessary if we are to treat the subject seriously. It was overdue in 2015 when Dr Watson drew attention to the issue. Now in 2023, the song remains the same. ■



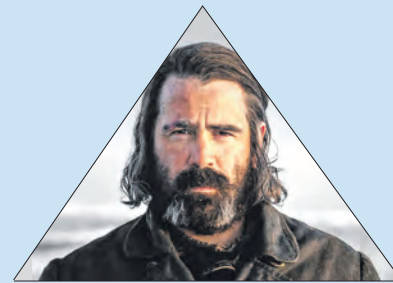
Kate Bush's contribution to musicianship deserves to be recognised

ANDREA IS.....

Reading: *Happy Place*, the new rom-com from author Emily Henry

Watching: Season four of *Succession* (along with everyone else in the world)

Listening to: *If Books Could Kill*, a hilarious podcast that debunks some of the most damaging popular science books of the past 20 years



Work boundaries Colin Farrell suffered heart palpitations and swollen feet after putting on weight for his role in historical horror *The North Water*. "I really won't be doing that again, to be honest with you," he said.

Ghostbusters there's nothing more frustrating than waiting for a bus that never arrives, its ETA vanishing from the digital screen. But commuters can now fight back. A new website (missingbus.ie) allows ghost buses to be logged and automatically emailed as a formal complaint to the NTA.

Irish tales short story *The Blackhills* by Dubliner Eamon McGuinness has been selected as an O. Henry prize winner and will be featured in a collection of the best writing of the year. The tense story, set in suburban Dublin, was first published in Irish literary magazine *The Stinging Fly*.

Pray For Our Sinners the film by Sinead O'Shea, which chronicles the resistance to Catholicism in her hometown of Navan, is number nine at the Irish box office – quite the feat for a documentary.

Culture Counter



Anonymity podcaster Blindboy Boatclub is not happy about being named in an article by *The New York Times*. "I have a pen name and a pen face because I like privacy and going to Aldi. I'm diagnosed autistic and having a very quiet life and simple life is important to me," he said.

Endangered animals two of 12 cheetahs brought from Africa to India's Kuno National Park have died. The big cats were transferred in an attempt to reintroduce them 70 years after they were declared extinct.

Quality journalism Fox News and presenter Tucker Carlson "agreed to part ways" after the network paid a \$780 million settlement to Dominion Voting Systems after being sued for defamation over vote-rigging claims.



THIS WEEK

you will love



Saying yes to this dress

Heritage brand Magee 1866 has your summer workwear wardrobe solved. Its latest collection offers a sophisticated edit of mix-and-match separates in beautiful, breathable Irish linen. This striped shirt dress is a perfect workday to weekend staple, and there's a trouser and jacket co-ord available in the same fabric if you need a more formal look for the office. Rebecca Irish Linen Shirt Dress in Raspberry Stripe, €325 at magee1866.com.



Slow fashion for your feet

New York-based Irish designer **Eileen Shields's** curated edit of flat shoes defines modern luxury. Handcrafted in Tuscany, each pair is made from non-toxic, locally and ethically sourced natural materials and treated with mostly plant-based or metal-free dyes. From a contemporary take on the classic ballet flat to modern-day Mary Janes, each style looks effortlessly elegant and is made to wear season after season. Mary Glove Nappa shoes, €267.07 at eileenshields.com.



Seeing an iconic film on stage

If you loved the multi-Oscar-nominated film **The Shawshank Redemption**, then you'll enjoy reliving this powerful story at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre from Wednesday. Based on a Stephen King novella, the play centres on an unlikely but heart-warming friendship between two inmates at a maximum-security prison. Tickets cost from €21.50 and the production runs until May 13.

A walk in the woods

A bank holiday weekend wouldn't be complete without a good trek through nature, and the **May Sunday Festival & Art Trail** in East Cork provides the perfect excuse. Taking place at Glenbower Woods since the 1830s, this year's event runs from April 29 to May 14, with a programme of arts, crafts and woodland activities. The festival also features a dawn chorus walk, foraging talks, Dogsercise, a Family Fun Day, sculpture in the woods and botanical silk printing. For more information see: greywoodarts.org/may-sunday



A bag for all seasons

Kilkenny-based **Tinnakeenly Leathers** designs exquisitely crafted bags and wallets that are made to age beautifully. Its Messenger, Satchel and Crossbody bags come in classic shapes, timeless shades and durable leather, making them the epitome of slow fashion. We love this seasonless, soft leather Saddle bag in tan with adjustable shoulder strap, €120 at tinnakeenlyleathers.com.



A Middle Eastern feast in the north-west

Foam café in Bundoran is renowned for its speciality coffee, seasonal food and welcoming atmosphere. This week it's hosting a Spring Supper of Middle Eastern-inspired food in collaboration with chef Emily Duggan. The delicious three-course feast, which kicks off at 7pm on Wednesday, May 3, will be vegetarian and celebrates the vibrancy, colour and flavour of cuisines from countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Tickets cost €40 per person and can be booked at eventbrite.com/e/spring-supper-tickets-622460144047.

SARAH GILMARTIN

author

Sarah Gilmartin should be an inspiration to all aspiring novelists. Born in 1982, the Limerick woman always loved fiction but did not start seriously trying to write her own until the year she turned 30. Before that she had studied English and German at Trinity College Dublin and earned a masters in journalism at DCU, then worked as a business magazine reporter and a bank communications manager.

Doing a course with the award-winning author Claire Keegan followed by a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in creative writing at UCD, however, gave Gilmartin the inspiration she needed. Published in 2021, her debut novel *Dinner Party: A Tragedy* was widely acclaimed for its sensitive portrayal of a family coping with various childhood traumas. It was also shortlisted for Best Newcomer at the Irish Book Awards and for the Kate O'Brien Award.

Next week Gilmartin will publish her second novel *Service*, which concerns a chef accused of sexual misconduct at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Celtic Tiger-era Dublin. She also writes weekly book reviews for *The Irish Times*, lectures in features journalism at DCU and has edited the anthology *Stinging Fly Stories*.

What was your earliest ambition?

I don't know - to be fed and changed? But if we're talking career-wise, to be a theatre actress.

Did your Leaving Cert exams matter in the end?

I had two papers rechecked and got better grades in both, enough to do my first choice of law. But I'd already started English and German in Trinity, so I decided to stick with it. I think I would have come around to writing eventually either way.

What's a scent that you associate with your childhood?

Diorissimo by Christian Dior, my mother's perfume.

Are you an introvert or an extrovert?

It's changed as I've gotten older. I would have been an extrovert in my teens and 20s, less so now. I always liked alone time, though - lots of daydreaming and meticulously plotted fantasies.

Which writers are your biggest influences and why?

I've learned a lot from Claire Keegan's writing and her classes, which are superb. The same goes for Anne Enright, who was a terrific teacher during my MFA. Also Brian Friel - I find something new in *Faith Healer* every time I read it. The American author Anne Tyler is another influence. The way she writes so skilfully from multiple perspectives within the one family over decades really stayed with me.



SEAMUS TRAVERS

'A good piece of advice? Can't go wrong with Samuel Beckett: Try again. Fail again. Fail better'

What is your favourite piece of clothing?

A navy blazer with a black leather collar from Sandro. I lost it in a London nightclub about ten years ago and ended up buying it again. Still on the go, still looks good as new.

Which five famous guests would you love to have at your dinner party?

Leonard Cohen, Michaela Coel, William Shakespeare, Bill Hicks and Nora Ephron.

What's a personality trait that you admire in others?

Patience.

Regrets, we've all had a few - can you tell me one of yours?

Giving up acting.

What's your favourite show on television?

Right now? *Succession*. Of all time, *This is England* with *The Wire* as a close second.

Humanity's most useless invention is...?

A bidet. Did they ever get used?

What do you wish you could be better at?

Singing.

What has been your most expensive purchase, outside of a home or car?

A Louis le Brocquy lithograph from his *Táin* series.

What is your favourite one-line joke?

What do you call a three-legged donkey? Wonky.

Your home is burning down - what item would you rescue before fleeing the building?

Judge, our life-sized toy dog. Handily enough, he's always at the front door keeping watch.

What's your party piece?

An Irish goodbye.

What's a good piece of advice?

Can't go wrong with Samuel Beckett: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

What do you wish you'd known at an earlier point in your career?

There's software that can transcribe interviews.

Describe your perfect day.

A sea swim, papers, a dog. A friendly husband. Pasta and wine.

Is there an afterlife?

I don't believe in one, but would love to be proven wrong.

Sarah Gilmartin's new novel Service will be published by Pushkin Press on Thursday

‘I like to think of myself as someone who is courageous, who cares a lot about my contribution to the Irish and black and queer community’

Nigerian-Irish performer and writer Felicia Olusanya, known as Felispeaks, cares deeply about giving back to the Irish and black and queer community that helped make them



SARA KEATING

On a sunny morning in Dublin’s Temple Bar, the poet, playwright and performer Felispeaks, is sitting in the dark auditorium of the New Theatre. They have dressed for the day with professional care – dark suit jacket, bright white shirt, shiny black shoes – and they speak with quiet confidence and studied precision, though serious statements are often punctuated with friendly laughter.

Felicia Olusanya, who uses they/them pronouns, is comfortable in this space. It was on the stage before us where Felispeaks performed their breakthrough theatre piece, the 2018 play-poem *Boychild*. A collaboration with Dagogo Hart, it won the multifaceted artist a nomination for Best Performer at the Dublin Fringe Festival.

Boychild was an episodic interrogation of ideas about masculinity, specifically in relation to young African men. It chimed neatly with the themes Olusanya was already exploring in their poetry. Their 2017 verse *For Our Mothers*, recently set as a text for Leaving Cert English, examines expectations around gender roles in contemporary culture through the lens of the artist’s own experience of growing up in Longford during the early 2000s.

Born in Nigeria, Olusanya moved to Ireland in middle childhood after several years in France. They credit the local African-Irish community with sowing the seeds of their fledgling artistic identity, in particular the social scene at the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

“We had a bustling youth group,” they remember, “and there was a lot of activity. We were always camping or hosting concerts or other youth groups. There was a choir and we had a great colour palette for the uniforms. I learned a lot about organisation and leadership and planning and logistics from all the events, because I was always helping someone or another. But I also got the freedom to write a play and assist in this or that. It was a really creative place.”

Meanwhile, at Meán Scoil Mhuire secondary school Olusanya found an outlet in the Young Social Innovators club. They acted as spokesperson, commandeering the school announcement system for initiatives like

Healthy Eating Week where they would make the announcements in a “slightly comedic” American old-school-style radio voice. “It was quite ridiculous, but I had a way with words, so it was easy for me. I wasn’t very shy growing up,” they laugh, as if acknowledging an understatement.

Despite their talent for public speaking, Olusanya didn’t immediately see a pathway into public life.

“Being a professional poet definitely wasn’t the plan,” they explain. “Growing up, the thought was maybe you’d be a doctor or work in the medical profession, but I quit that idea at the start of the Leaving Cert cycle. I just thought, I’m not doing that. I knew I had a knack for performing and media-related things, for ‘people-ing’! So I was considering work in radio, TV, film.”

However, being on the public performing side of these industries “wasn’t on the cards, so I had to make [my ambition] a bit more academic to be realistic. I was thinking more about the production side of things, or journalism”.

After studying English and sociology at Maynooth, Olusanya moved to Dublin and pursued a postgraduate degree in public relations and communications. They worked in a bank during the day and studied at night, with the occasional “cute little gig” where they performed their own poetry.

“I was hoping to get some professional framework around my talent,” they say wryly about this time. “I was actively trying to adult the way I knew how.”

Since childhood, poetry had been an outlet for Olusanya to process their feelings and experiences. “Even though I was very good at speaking, performing,” they admit, “I wasn’t so good at expressing emotion. Poetry was the only way I could properly express myself for a long time.”

Their early work, like *For Our Mothers*, was a type of processing. However, while it was “thematically autobiographical, it was not specifically autobiographical”. It was driven more by issues they saw in the culture that impacted the possibilities available to them, socially, economically and artistically: black-Irishness, queerness, patriarchal oppression. Their experience of limited opportunity, they recognised, wasn’t unique to them. It was structural.

By necessity, then, Olusanya’s path to becoming a professional artist was self-determined. “I pretty much mentored a lot of my path. I joined a collective called Word Up and I would get gigs hosted by [them], which was a really good push. But in terms of what steps to take, what way to direct my career, that was very self-driven. It was all hard bets. I just wasn’t going to

wait for gigs. I just stayed creating.”

Their persistence paid off. Visibility in the city’s spoken-word circles meant new connections, including a key meeting with fellow artist Dagogo Hart. This ultimately resulted in the runaway Fringe success *Boychild*, Felispeaks’ first flirtation with the idea of poetry as a play. They have since written “two and a half” more poetry-plays, including most recently *Bent*, a Transatlantic Commission from Fishamble: the New Play Company and the Irish Repertory Theatre in New York.

However, Olusanya credits a different kind of performance as their “big break”. This was a new poem, called *Who Will March for Us?*, unveiled at the Olympia Theatre as part of the Artists’ Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment.

“For me, it wasn’t written as a personal decree,” they say. “It was written, even without me considering it, for a mass number of ears. I didn’t think about it at the time, but it was like – what’s this thing they say in closing statements? – a call to action.”

“The interesting thing is, I come face to face with that a lot in my work. Without intention, it is inherently political.”

“Being black, queer and a woman is political. There



Felispeaks, Nigerian-Irish poet, performer and playwright: poetry is an outlet to process their feelings and experiences

FERGAL PHILLIPS



isn't any way for me to speak about anything without that."

The very public role this often entails perfectly complements the role of a poet, they say, "specifically the bard or the griot", invoking ancient Irish and African storytellers. "Those histories have always been about storytellers reflecting community and the time they are living in. It is work that is largely connected to service."

These days, Felispeaks' service to their community involves a variety of different collaborative projects. They recently posed as Anne Devlin (who conspired with Robert Emmet during the 1803 rebellion) in Emily Quinn's remarkable photographic exhibition *Art of Strength* at Atelier Now, where the artist invited 12 prominent Irish women to play historical figures.

"I can be a bit finicky about the things I take on. But I remember reading the brief and doing some research on Anne, to discover more about who she was and why I should pose as her. I was astounded by her story. I couldn't believe someone could be that strong and not give up her integrity. She died for her truth, the truth, and that was impressive.

"I like to think of myself as someone who is coura-

geous like that, who cares a lot about my contribution to the Irish and black and queer community. I think that goes back to knowing everything [I stand for] is political with a big P. [The project] made me think how important it is to not be shy about what that reality is and the position I am in as an artist."

At the upcoming International Literature Festival Dublin, meanwhile, Felispeaks is curating *New Nurturing*, a multidisciplinary performance that brings poetry, music and visual art together to consider contemporary Irish womanhood. Felispeaks will appear alongside Farah Elle, Anna Mullarkey, and Tobi Bello, and they are excited for what the collaboration will bring.

"I love working with a team, where you are all working towards the same goal," they say. "It can colour your talent differently. You learn a little bit about yourself, your art, and art in general. You start to understand what other people's art looks like at its best and how to arrange your own work around that."

Finally, as WeAreGriot, the collective they formed with Dagogo Hart and fellow poet Samuel Yakura, Felispeaks is performing this month at direct provision centres as part of the Festival in a Van initiative.

WeAreGriot is a particularly important source of inspiration, they explain.

"We have a chemistry as artists, not just because we are all Nigerian and Irish. We come from different worlds in terms of how we settled in Ireland, so even though we look like the same people and share a culture, we also bring different things."

Crucially, Olusanya says, the artists' success both collectively and individually has allowed them to give back to writers of colour. To this end, they run regular slam competitions and workshops, eager to "pass on an optimistic baton of hope. [We want to show] poets and rappers: this is something you can do. This is something you can even be paid for".

To show them there is a path to professional artistry available, as Felispeaks has forged theirs. To show them they might even one day find their work being taught in schools around the country, where talented young people from minority communities are studying, hungry for inspiration. ■

New Nurturing: Felispeaks is at Speranza, Merrion Square on May 19 as part of International Literature Festival Dublin. For more detail, see ilfdublin.com



Ciara Whooley created a business selling Christmas baubles and now runs a marketing company
FERGAL PHILLIPS

The young and THE RESTLESS

Undaunted by the challenge of running their own businesses, three young entrepreneurs reveal to **Arlene Harris** how they got their ventures off the ground while still studying at school

We've all heard that necessity is the mother of invention. For 13-year-old Anthony Gorman from Offaly, a burning desire to upgrade his phone without accessing the family coffers meant he had to find a means of making his own money. The enterprising teenager came up with the idea of making reindeer decorations from pieces of wood, fitting them with battery-operated fairy lights and adding the obligatory red noses. In 2019, he sold 50 of them to his teachers at Tullamore College, neighbours and relations.

Gorman's business teacher was so impressed with his ingenuity that she entered him into the annual Student Enterprise Programme (SEP) run by local enterprise offices across the country. This was an inspired move. After winning the county final, Gorman refined his product and expanded his market.

He set up a Facebook page dedicated to generating publicity and sales, which proved even more successful. The following year Gorman, then 14, made 1,000 reindeer before achieving his first big commercial order.

"After releasing my page on social media, everything blew up really quickly, probably because it was during Covid and people were on their phones a lot," he says. "I got a lot of interest and then my dad got diagnosed with cancer. So I made a plan that I would buy him a tractor for Christmas, and I did. After making 1,000 reindeer, I had enough money and he was blown away by it."

The story made the news, and Gorman was contacted by Dunnes Stores – which wanted to trial 50 of his products in its Newbridge store in Kildare.

"I couldn't believe it at first," he says. "But after going to the head office



to talk it through, my dad and I brought 100 up in early November 2020. Within a couple of hours, they were all gone. So we knew there was big demand – and that year between myself and Dunnes, we sold 3,000."

Gorman also enlisted the help of family and friends. Since his initial foray into the commercial sector, demand had grown, and last Christmas 10,000 of his reindeer were sold in 45 branches of Dunnes Stores.

Gorman is now 18 and studying for his Leaving Cert. He is just one of thousands of young people around Ireland who are quietly making ripples in the business world, hoping to one day make waves.

For the past 21 years, their entrepreneurial spirits have been nurtured and promoted by the SEP with more than 25,000 students from 500 schools taking part each year. Each county has a designated schools' enterprise co-ordinator.

Schools can avail of workshops, free teacher and student resources and visits by local entrepreneurs who will endeavour to motivate with advice from their own experiences.

With three categories (Junior, Intermediate and Senior), students are encouraged to establish their own business and compete for a place in the national final, which this year takes place on Friday.

“The aim of the programme is to encourage and nurture the next generation of Irish entrepreneurs,” says Yvonne O’Neill, its national co-ordinator. “To instil an entrepreneurial spirit and passion for innovation in our young students with the hope that in the future they may consider entrepreneurship as a viable career choice.

“Students get to set up their own business and do everything a real-life entrepreneur would do, from coming up with the business idea to marketing and writing a business plan.”

O’Neill says the programme helps them learn that self-employment is a real option after school.

“It also helps students put what they learn about business at school into operation in a hands-on way. They learn so many life skills, such as teamwork, creativity and innovation, financial management, public speaking, how to promote themselves, how to solve problems, how to pick yourself up and overcome obstacles,” she adds.

Solving a problem is what prompted Jack O’Mara, now 19, from Tipperary and his now-business partner Daniel Ruddy to launch their product, the Handy Hose Holder. They entered the SEP in 2020 and won both the county and national final – an achievement that has changed the course of their careers.

“Daniel had a problem in his [family] milking parlour as he was continuously bending down to pick up the wash-down hose from the floor,” says O’Mara. “So we created the Handy Hose Holder, a simple magnet designed to latch on to the top of the hose, meaning the user could attach it to the side of the parlour so it would always be on hand. It would relieve stress on farmers’ backs and could be used for other items on the farm.

“We came up with this idea in our transition year in school. As well as entering it into the SEP, we set out to create a business, designing our branding and setting up social media accounts to raise awareness and sales.”

The young business duo ended up winning the SEP county final and later the national prize, after competing against mini businesses from all over Ireland.

“Following our success, we gained a lot of publicity and promotion for the product and our business continued to grow, to the point that it is now available in Glanbia stores and co-ops all over Ireland,” he says.

Fellow SEP winner Ciara Whooley, now 28, represented Wicklow in the 2012 national final with her business Irish Baubles, which sells Christmas decorations hand-painted with images of local and national landmarks. After securing the overall prize, her business grew rapidly. Instead of winding it down once transition

‘After making 1,000 reindeer, I had enough money to buy dad a tractor and he was blown away by it’

year was over, she decided to continue and expanded into corporate gifts, wedding favours, merchandise for charities and commemorative baubles.

“The opportunities [SEP] rewarded me were priceless,” she says. “It sounds dramatic, but it totally changed my life. I won the competition when Ireland wasn’t in a great place and money was definitely tight, but the SEP programme showed me that at a young age I could achieve financial freedom. And because I kept my business going after the awards, I was in a position where I could do things like travel and get a car.”

Having tested the entrepreneurial waters at a young age, Whooley was bitten by the business bug and decided that this was the career path for her. So in 2020 she started another business called CNOCII. It’s a marketing agency that helps existing businesses and start-ups to “develop a brand identity and story” to take customers and clients on a journey.

“People, especially in established businesses, want to see you succeed,” she says. “So I would advise [young entrepreneurs] to take advice and guidance from entrepreneurs who have been on the journey before. I would also encourage them to follow their instinct – that’s probably the best advice I was given on my journey.”

There are 82 entries, consisting of both single applicants and groups of students, in the SEP finals taking place on Friday, in Croke Park. They include products and services from many sectors, including tech, health, fashion, beauty, education, sustainability and finance.

Winning the national title is undoubtedly a huge achievement. While not everyone will triumph or end up running their own business, O’Neill believes they will all have gained from the experience.

“The SEP alumni definitely have more strings to their bow [after] taking part,”

she says. “In particular, those who fulfil the position of MD in their student enterprise have a greater appreciation of what’s involved in managing a team of people and how important it is that everyone pulls their weight.

“They will have developed very strong pitching and promotional skills from going out selling and promoting their products. Year after year, our students blow us away with how confident they are in this area. Overall, they will have an excellent appreciation of what it takes to make a business a success and the issues facing employers.”

Indeed, O’Mara, who is currently studying commerce in UCC, says he would encourage any young people with an idea that might work to check with their school and see if they can enter the SEP.

“For any current students who are nervous about pushing their idea, I would say just go for it,” he says. “Every business has to start somewhere and yours won’t grow without you trying to push it. Making phone calls, designing promotion and gaining sales are all everyday essential tasks for businesses that anyone can do – you just have to give a small bit of time and effort toward it.”

Whooley agrees. “For students in the programme and those thinking about taking part next year, I would encourage them to consider keeping their business going afterwards,” she says. “Because although running your own business is hard, it is also incredibly rewarding.

“Also, they have the advantage of being digital natives. [They] probably know more about social media, influencer marketing and gamification than some marketing managers. So take a risk – and you never know what might happen.” ■



Anthony Gorman with his reindeer and planters on sale in Dunnes
JEFF HARVEY



Jack O’Mara (right) with his business partner, Daniel Ruddy

‘Fast fashion is a form of corporate colonialism’

Best-selling author **Dana Thomas** on the true cost of our clothes

The journalist and author discusses sustainability in the fashion industry in a *Business Post Magazine* interview exclusive with **Elaine Prendeville**

Fast fashion garment workers at a factory in Narayanganj, Bangladesh
GETTY



Last week marked a decade since the world woke up to the true impact of unsustainable fashion. On April 24, 2013, the Rana Plaza factory in the Dhaka district of Bangladesh collapsed, killing 1,134 and injuring more than 2,500 others. It was and remains the deadliest garment factory disaster in history. It was entirely avoidable.

The day before, workers and management at the Rana Plaza became aware of significant cracks in the building. It is believed they were caused by its unsanctioned use as an industrial building, and of its substandard construction materials. The machines used to produce clothing for fast fashion chains including Primark and H&M were too heavy for the building to support.

The staff, each earning about \$38 a month, were too numerous. Workers who expressed concerns about showing up for the next day's shift in an unsafe building were given short shrift: turn up, the top brass said, or lose your job. Fast fashion deadlines were fast fashion deadlines. Infants, sleeping in the Rana Plaza nursery, were among the deceased.

“Rana Plaza was the turning point for me,” says Dana Thomas, a *New York Times* bestselling author and the European sustainability editor at *British Vogue*. “After that people around the world were like, wait a minute: this is how our clothes are made? We began to realise that fast fashion came from somewhere, that it had an impact, and that it could be deadly.”

Thomas is sitting in a discreet room at *Brown Thomas* in Dublin; her personal style redolent of a seasoned, internationally renowned fashion journalist. The only snag is that Dana Thomas is not a fashion journalist. She is rather, as she'll share with a smile, a journalist who has written about the fashion industry in a way no one else has dared to.

Thomas has worked with many of the great journalists and editors across many great titles, from *The Washington Post* to the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, the *Wall Street Journal* and now on *Vogue*. She has hurled rocks at certain ivory-towered fashion houses for their treatment of workers, and has asked consumers across the planet to think twice about the true cost of that \$20 dress.

Her books include *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost its Luster*; *Gods and Kings: The Rise and Fall of Alexander McQueen and John Galliano* and *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes*. In her books and articles she captures the zeitgeist in unflinching narrative, and persistently demands that the luxury fashion industry wises up to what sustainability ought to mean.

“I wrote *Deluxe* almost 16 years ago,” she says, “because I could see what was coming.” The book relates how luxury was once the preserve of the monied elite, and how its democratisation – everyone now feels they deserve some designer luxury in their lives – has come with severe health warnings.

“I pivoted to sustainability, because I could see, with my news radar, that this was the next thing coming. In the social media age transparency was clearly coming to the fashion industry, as it had everywhere else.

“You couldn't just orchestrate backstage shoots with friendly photographers and make the whole thing look perfectly beautiful; the truth of the how and the why of clothing pro-

duction was going to come out,” she says.

“I realised that the fashion industry needed to get on the green train, and that it was one of the last industries getting around to doing so. And I discovered that I knew more than most about what needed to be done.”

Thomas is straight talking in a luxury retail setting, having accepted an invitation from *Brown Thomas Arnotts* to be involved in its *Power of Positive Change Festival*, a three-day series of events and panel discussions which sought to highlight the brands tackling sustainability with conviction. The retailer has in truth made inroads into its sustainability journey in recent years, taking its lead from parent company *Selfridges*, whose chairperson from 2019 to 2022, Alannah Weston, is a voluble advocate for the cause.

Weston vowed to embed sustainability at the heart of the *Selfridges Group* business ethos; pioneering initiatives such as *Project Earth*, which includes a commitment to resale and repair offerings across the company's department stores, and a commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. For Thomas, navigating the luxury fashion *Catch-22* is best approached pragmatically.

“Look, we're always going to shop,” she says. “In *Deluxe* I wrote about how cavemen were decorating their furs with bits of sticks and sparkling



mica to set the whole look off... luxury has been in our culture since the dawn of time. We're always going to want beautiful things from beautiful places, and there will always be wealthy people who want nice stuff. We're not going to change that, and that's fine, but what we need to do is to treat people properly."

Sustainability and economics are for Thomas inextricably linked, and a "tabasco splash of Marxism" might not go astray, she says, in today's consumption-centric world. "The fact that one of the richest men in the world right now is François Pinault (of the behemoth fashion group Kering) owns a luxury company selling you stuff you don't need, well that says a lot about society. Then we have Jeff Bezos selling us everything else. It's all about sales. But there shouldn't be anyone who is poorly treated, especially in the luxury fashion supply chain.

"Any brand that says 'we had no idea about working conditions or inhuman salaries' when they are simultaneously hyper-focused on the colour and the finish of everything they produce, well that's just not credible. It's clear cut corporate colonialism. You should know your supply chain and how much people are being paid, and if you can't keep track of that, you're bad at business."

Thomas cites some positive developments, most notably the state of California's recent decision to hold brands accountable for wage theft. "In California you can no longer say, 'Oh I had no idea our subcontractors were paying people a dollar-fifty an hour.' You're accountable. And that's important."

She continues: "We're never going to solve sustainability unless we pay people what they are worth. You can't pigeon-hole sustainability and say: 'Let's make things green.' And you can't solve climate change if you don't tackle poverty."

'Any brand that says "we had no idea about working conditions or inhuman salaries" when they are simultaneously hyper focused on the colour and the finish of everything they produce, well that's just not credible'

Thomas, who lives in Paris with her husband of 28 years, Herve d'Halluin, and their daughter, Lucie, is 59. She shares fond memories of her first job as the "intern wheeling around the trolley" at *The Washington Post* where she bathed in a Woodward & Bernstein mist, both learning from and befriending the legendary duo.

"Those guys – and Ben Bradlee, plus James Reston and Tom Wicker at *The New York Times* – they were my heroes," she says. "They raised and trained me to be a straight up, dogged journalist. Everyone who came through the *Washington Post*, especially back then, had investigative journalism in every fibre of their being. You always dug in deeper, to find out what the real truth was, rather than being 'spun'. When you grow up in that environment, you naturally question everything, no matter what your beat is. You're taught to never take anything at face value."

Vogue is of course a different beast to the *Post*, relying so considerably as it does on high fashion advertising. How, then, does Thomas square that circle? "With the right editor, the right stories will be published," she says. "At *Newsweek* we weren't going to write about hemlines and shoes, but we were going to write about the business of fashion. We did a cover story on Giorgio Armani and we got a war photographer to do his portrait, for example. And even at *Vogue*, I am given permission to be tough. If someone spouts something to me that just isn't kosher, I'll question it.

"I've done some tough pieces about how the fashion industry was cancelling its orders in Bangladesh and leaving people starving in the streets as a result.

"*Vogue* asked me to do that story, and they ran that story, and it di-



A woman is lifted out of the rubble by rescuers on April 25, 2013, at the site of the multi-storey Rana Plaza factory building that collapsed, killing 1,134 people, in Savar, a Dhaka suburb, in Bangladesh

AP



Selfridges' Lets Change The Way We Shop facade on Oxford Street, London



Former Selfridges chair Alannah Weston pioneered sustainability initiatives such as the company-wide Project Earth resale and repair scheme

rectly criticised their advertisers, which I think is courageous of them."

Thomas remains a news junkie, consuming a battery of titles each morning over espresso at her Left Bank apartment. Today in Dublin she produces from her handbag a century-old edition of Emile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise*. "I was reading it in the sunshine in St Stephen's Green earlier and realised it has sparkles perfectly intact in the paper. They really went for it when they made this, didn't they? That's sustainability right there." ■

Dana Thomas
at The Power
of Positive
Change event
in Brown
Thomas, Dublin
KIERAN
HARNETT

Food&Wine Magazine team

Chefs' choice selection of recipes for the long weekend

Take advantage of the extra day this bank holiday by cooking up these recipes by top chefs from some of the hottest new cookbooks around

Aishling Moore's smoked haddock risotto

I love to cook this recipe at home. It's a one-pot wonder and it reheats well a day later too. Smoked haddock is a great product with a good shelf life, so it's rarely unavailable.

Ingredients, serves four

1.2 litres fish stock
Olive oil, for cooking
1 onion, diced
1 celery stick, diced
Half a leek, diced
Salt and ground white and black pepper
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
65g butter
300g Arborio rice
125ml white wine
250g natural smoked haddock, diced into 1cm pieces
100g frozen peas
1 bunch of fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped
Juice of half a lemon

Method

1. Put the fish stock in a saucepan set on a medium heat to keep warm.
2. Heat a splash of olive oil in a large heavy-based pot over a

medium heat. Add the onion, celery and leek and sweat gently for five to six minutes, until softened. Season with salt and white pepper, then add the garlic and sweat for two minutes more.

3. Add the butter and allow it to melt, then stir in the rice and cook for two minutes, making sure all the grains of rice get coated in the butter. Add the wine and allow it to bubble up to cook off the alcohol, stirring until it has all been absorbed into the rice.
4. Using a ladle or a measuring jug, add approximately 100ml of the warm stock to the rice at a time, stirring regularly and allowing the rice to absorb all the stock before you add the next 100ml. This will take 20-25 minutes.
5. Once all the stock has been absorbed by the rice, add the diced smoked haddock and frozen peas and cook for two minutes. Stir in the chopped parsley and lemon juice and season with salt and lots of black pepper. Serve straight away.

Aishling Moore is head chef at Goldie in Cork. This recipe features in *The Gathered Table: A Taste of Home* (€30), compiled by Gather & Gather, with all proceeds going to Peter McVerry Trust. To order a copy, see: ninebearrowsbooks.com.





Sumayya Usman's prawn karahi

This goes beautifully with pulao rice, though it's equally delicious with sourdough as a quick lunch. Based on my maternal grandmother's recipe, this is best made with fresh raw prawns, rather than already cooked ones.

Ingredients, serves four

2 tbsp ghee, or 1 tbsp unsalted butter and 1 tbsp sunflower oil
 1 heaped tsp cumin seeds
 ½ tsp nigella seeds
 ½ tsp carom seeds (optional)
 1 cm ginger, finely grated
 4 large ripe tomatoes, coarsely grated, skins discarded
 2 tbsp tomato paste

¼ tsp turmeric powder
 ½ tsp Kashmiri chilli powder (or other chilli powder or paprika)
 Salt, to taste
 450g shelled, deveined fresh raw prawns

To garnish

Juice of half a lemon
 2.5cm ginger, cut into fine strips
 2 tbsp chopped coriander leaves
 1 green chilli, deseeded and finely chopped

Method

1. Place a wok or frying pan over medium-high heat and add the ghee. When it is hot, add the cumin, nigella and carom seeds (if using) and fry until fragrant, about one minute.
2. Next add the ginger and fry for 10-15 seconds, until fragrant, then stir in the tomatoes. Lower

the heat slightly, add a splash of water and keep stirring until it starts to simmer. Add the tomato puree, turmeric, chilli powder and salt.

3. Keep cooking until the sauce thickens and the oil begins to rise to the surface, about 7-9 minutes. Once this happens, add the prawns and cook, stirring, until the prawns turn pink, about 3-4 minutes. Be careful not to overcook the prawns, or they will go rubbery.
4. Turn the heat off, add the garnishes and cover, then leave to infuse for a minute or so before serving.

Sumayya Usman is a Glasgow-based Pakistani food writer. This recipe is taken from her book *Andaza: A Memoir of Food, Flavour and Freedom in the Pakistani Kitchen*, out now from Murdoch Books (£25)



Tim Vasilakis' chicken gyros

Traditionally, the meat for gyros is cooked on a vertical rotisserie and then carved very thinly before adding to warm pita with sauce, fries and salad. It's easy to recreate this at home if you follow our recipe. Although it takes a while to cook, the hands-on time is minimal.

Ingredients, serves four

- 4 boned, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 boned chicken thigh, skin on
- Half a white onion
- 4 pita breads
- 8-12 tbsp tzatziki
- A few crisp Cos lettuce leaves, shredded
- 4 ripe tomatoes, sliced or coarsely chopped
- 1 medium red onion, thinly sliced
- Flat-leaf parsley, for sprinkling
- Smoked paprika, for dusting
- French fries, to serve

For the marinade

- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp sea salt
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp ground coriander
- ½ tsp grated lemon zest
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 2 tbsp olive oil

Method

1. Mix all the marinade ingredients together in a bowl until well combined. Add the chicken thighs, turning them in the marinade. Cover the bowl and leave to marinate in the fridge for at least two hours or, better still, overnight.
2. When you're ready to cook the chicken, preheat the oven to 130C.
3. Remove the chicken from the marinade and place the skinless thighs on top of each other in a stack. Cover with the remaining chicken thigh, skin side up, and then place the onion half on top. Secure with four bamboo or wooden skewers, inserting them through the onion and all the chicken layers. Transfer to a baking tray and cook in the oven for three hours until the chicken is very tender.
4. When the chicken is cooked, place the stack on a board and, with the skewers in place to secure the meat, slice down through it very thinly with a sharp knife to 'shave' it and create the gyros effect.
5. Warm the pita breads in the oven or on a hot griddle pan. Spread the tzatziki over them and pile the sliced chicken on top.
6. Add the lettuce, tomato and onion together, along with some French fries. Sprinkle with parsley and dust with smoked paprika, then fold the pitas around the filling and roll up in some baking parchment or tin foil to hold the filling in place.
7. Alternatively, arrange the shaved chicken, warm pita breads and fries on a serving board or platter with a bowl of tzatziki and another of tomato, red onion and lettuce. Sprinkle with parsley, dust with smoked paprika and serve, allowing people to help themselves.

Tim Vasilakis founded the London Greek food truck firm The Athenian. This recipe is taken from his new book Eat Like A Greek, out now from Ebury

Ahmet Dede's spiced lamb shoulder with bulghur wheat

This isn't a complicated dish, but it does require a bit of advance planning to allow a full 24 hours for the meat to marinate. It makes a beautiful meal to share with loved ones and it gives me pleasure to make it for them.

Ingredients, serves six to eight

100ml olive oil
2 onions, thinly sliced
4 garlic cloves, sliced
Peel of 1 lemon
6 dried or fresh lime leaves
1 tbsp za'atar spice mix
1 tbsp ground cumin
2 tsp dried chilli flakes
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 sprigs of fresh mint
1 medium-sized lamb shoulder, deboned (ask your butcher to do this for you)

For the bulghur wheat

Approx 1 litre chicken stock
100ml olive oil
1 onion, diced
1 red pepper, diced
6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
3 green jalapeños, deseeded and finely diced
2 tbsp red pepper purée or tomato purée
1 tbsp dried mint
1 tbsp paprika
1 tsp smoked paprika
1 tsp ground cumin
400g bulghur wheat
1 preserved lemon, finely diced (or the zest of one lemon)
50ml lemon juice
20g fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped
20g fresh mint, chopped
150g feta cheese, crumbled
extra virgin olive oil, for drizzling

To serve
Flatbreads

Method

1. Heat a good amount of the oil in a saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally and being careful not to let them burn, for 20 minutes, until they have a nice colour and are lightly caramelised.
2. Add the rest of the olive oil along with the garlic, lemon peel, lime leaves, za'atar, cumin, chilli flakes and half a teaspoon ground black pepper. Reduce the heat to low and warm gently for 20 minutes - you are not cooking anymore, but rather allowing the flavours to infuse. Remove the pan from the heat and add the mint sprigs, then allow to cool.
3. Rub the lamb shoulder all over with this spiced oil, then leave it in the fridge for a full 24 hours to marinate.
4. The next day, preheat the oven to 210C (190C fan). Wrap the lamb shoulder in foil to create a parcel. Make sure there are plenty of layers of foil and that they are all tightly sealed so that the steam stays locked in.
5. Put the foil-wrapped lamb in a roasting tin, then cook in the preheated

6. oven for 45 minutes. Reduce the temperature to 150C (130C fan) and cook for another 1.5 hours, then drop the temperature yet again to 110C (90C fan) and cook for another three hours. Switch off the oven and let the lamb rest - do not open the tin foil until it cools.
7. Meanwhile, to prepare the bulghur wheat, put the chicken stock in a small saucepan, bring it to a boil and keep it simmering.
8. Heat the oil in a large saucepan on a medium heat. Add the onion, red pepper, garlic and jalapeños along with one teaspoon of salt. Cook for 10 minutes, until softened, then add the pepper or tomato purée and cook for two minutes. Add the dried mint and spices and cook for one minute more, then raise the heat to high, stir in the bulghur wheat and toast it for one minute.
9. Pour the boiling stock over the

- bulghur wheat mixture, making sure there is enough to cover the bulghur with a centimetre or so above to spare. Stir once to level the stock off around the pan, then cover with a lid. Turn the heat down as low as possible and cook for 10 minutes exactly.
10. After 10 minutes, take the pan off the heat and remove the lid. Put a clean tea towel on top of the saucepan, then put the lid back on. Let this rest for 40 minutes.
11. To finish, open the lid, remove the tea towel and fluff up the bulghur wheat with a fork. Stir in the preserved lemon or lemon zest, lemon juice and chopped fresh herbs. Taste to check the seasoning, adjusting with salt and pepper as needed. Transfer to a nice serving bowl, sprinkle the crumbled feta on top and drizzle with extra virgin olive oil.
12. To serve, open the foil parcel, being careful in case any hot steam

escapes. Tip the lamb out into the roasting tin with all the juices from the foil parcel and pull apart into nice chunky pieces. Season to taste, then transfer to a serving platter and bring it to the table with the bulghur wheat. Traditionally, we would also eat this with a yogurt flatbread as a dish made to be shared and enjoyed together.

Ahmet Dede is the chef/patron at Dede at the Custom House in Baltimore, Co Cork. This recipe features in The Gathered Table: A Taste of Home (€30), compiled by Gather & Gather, with all proceeds going to the Peter McVerry Trust. To order a copy, see ninebeanrowsbooks.co



Ursula Ferrigno's Amalfi lemon tart

This is the ultimate lemon cake with the best texture and crumb. You will make it time and time again and never tire of this wonderful recipe from my Nonno. I am so grateful that I have this recipe. When soaked with rum and served with fruit and cream, it is perfect for celebrations.

Ingredients, serves six to eight

Zest and juice of 3 unwaxed lemons

5 large eggs
350g caster sugar
Pinch of sea salt
540ml double cream
275g Italian '00' flour, plus extra for dusting
1 tbsp baking powder
100g butter, plus extra for greasing
3 tsp vanilla extract
1 tbsp apricot jam
200g icing sugar

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 160C fan/180C. Grease and line a 26cm non-stick baking tin with baking paper.

2. Place the lemon zest, eggs, sugar and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer and beat at a high speed for at least 10 minutes until the mixture is light and mousse-like. Fold in the cream.
3. Sieve the flour and baking powder together, then fold that into the wet mixture. Lastly, gently fold in the cooled melted butter and vanilla. Spoon into the cake tin and bake in the preheated oven for about 55 minutes.
4. Turn the cake out onto a wire rack to cool but leave the oven on. When the cake is cold, brush with apricot jam all over the surface and sides.

5. Make a glaze. Put the juice of two of the lemons and the icing sugar in a saucepan over a medium heat until the sugar melts and is syrupy.
6. Brush the syrup all over the cake and sides and return the cake to the oven (just placed on the oven rack) for one minute to set the jam and syrup. This will also improve the keeping quality of the cake.

Ursula Ferrigno is a food writer and chef. This recipe is taken from her new book *Cucina di Amalfi*, published by Ryland Peters & Small (€23)





Cathal McBride on wine



While dry, sparkling and white wines are the most common choices for aperitifs, sherries and cocktails offer a fresh approach GETTY

Whetting your appetite with the perfect aperitif

Along with the usual suspects of white, dry and sparkling wines or cocktails to prepare your palate for food, one should not overlook sherry's potential as a luscious alternative

As I write, the sun has decided to make a guest appearance on Galway Bay, hopefully offering a sneak peak of what's in store as we ease into summer. It makes for a perfect backdrop as I explore an oft-mentioned category on this page: aperitifs.

While broadly understood and subsumed into our own modern vocabulary, this word is derived from the Latin 'aperire' which means 'to open'. It ended up as 'aperitif' in 19th century France.

An aperitif or aperitivo is essentially a drink served before a meal (as opposed to a digestif, which is served afterwards) and designed to whet the appetite.

Dry, sparkling and white wines tend to be the most common choices. Others like sherries and cocktails such as an Aperol spritz or Negroni (or the new kid on the block, the Negroni Sbagliato), offer a fresh approach ideal for serving with appetisers before a main meal.

It's tough to beat Champagne's elegance and charm as the ultimate aperitif. The Jacquart, Mosaïque Rosé NV (Deveney's Dundrum, Thomas's of Foxrock, €77) is one of my favourite Champagnes in the rosé style.

A classic blend with one-third chardonnay, 44 per cent pinot noir and 23 per cent pinot meunier, this is a joy to behold. It's embedded in aromas of sweet wild strawberries and red berries with further enchantment from Turkish delight, white florals and pastry notes. A full mousse, its red fruits continue on the palate in a fresh, crisp expression with exuberant acidity. There's a real playful side to this, but also a serious depth of complexity. A standout Champagne, it's highly recommended.

Franciacorta, an Italian sparkling wine made using

the traditional method, is certainly on trend this year. The Il Palagio, Franciacorta DOCG Brut Millesimato, 2017 (Barnhill Stores, the Wine Pair, Emilie's of Glenbeigh, Boutique Wines, €51.95) bears delectable aromas of biscuit and toasted macadamia plus pear fruit and lemon spritz. With a well-rounded body, structure, and medium mousse, it has a pleasing balance between being quaffable and complex. This is certainly light enough to enjoy as your first glass before proceeding to a weightier wine of choice.

It's also time that we started to think a little differently about the other, more common Italian sparkling, Prosecco. Though it is often associated with excessively saccharine mediocrity, there are serious high-quality expressions that can alter your impression.

The Ruggeri Giustino B 2020 Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superior (Thomas Woodberrys Wines, €36.95) is one such example. This has a touch of jasmine flower, wild honey, orchard fruit and citrus in a clean, fresh and precise nose. A persistent foam forms, leading into a palate that is delicately balanced in a pleasingly elegant expression of Prosecco. Quaffable but stylish, this is ideal for sharing with snacks as a handsome welcome drink.

For still white wines, xarel-lo is one of the grapes used in the traditional making of Cava. It encompasses that dry approach and lip-smacking acidity to create an excellent pre-dinner drink with nibbles. The Jean Leon Xarel-lo, 2021 (Brown Thomas, Fallon & Byrne, Neighbourhood Wine, €24) has slightly nutty aromas with fresh pear, white peach and a citrus backbone. Light and fresh but offering a clean, linear acidity and a smooth finish from some lees ageing, it's food-friendly but also an engaging wine on its own.

Finally, sherry is all too often overlooked as an exciting choice for an aperitif. The Lustau Tabanco Amontillado NV (Mitchell & Son, €23.95) is excitedly aromatic with deep toasted hazelnuts and dried fruits. The palate has undulating layers of nut flavours, orange peel and a mild salinity. Try this with some tonic water for a deliciously refreshing aperitif, ideal served alongside cheese, roasted almonds and tapas. ■

TO TRY, BUY AND PUT BY

TO TRY Masi Fresco di Masi Bianco, Verona IGT, Italy, 2021 (ABV 11 per cent), 91

The aromas here present refreshing lemon spritz and orange peel with a tinge of florals. Easygoing and light with a blend of 60 per cent garganega, 25 per cent chardonnay and 15 per cent pinot grigio, this is low in alcohol, offers a fresh pineapple finish and has summer written all over it. Organically made, unfiltered and sold with plastic-free packaging of 100 per cent recycled paper labels in line with Masi's sustainability approaches, it ticks many boxes. Available from Donnybrook Fair (donnybrookfair.ie), Next Door Off Licences (nextdoor.ie), Number 21 Off Licences and Neighbourhood Wine (neighbourhoodwine.ie), €17



TO BUY Vermut Dimobe, Malaga, Spain, NV (ABV 15 per cent), 93

A blend of moscatel and pedro ximénez, this is a different sort of vermut from Malaga. It's a fortified wine of substance, flavoured with various botanicals. PX nutty caramel sweetness and bitter orange peel with copious amounts of body, nearly akin to a complex Negroni. Featuring perfectly balanced spice with iodine notes, serve this over ice and be ready to finish the lot. Available from Sheridans Cheesemongers (sheridanscheesemongers.com), Ely Wine Store (elywinebar.ie), MacCurtain Wine Cellar (maccurtainwine.ie), Lennox Street Grocer (lennoxstreet.ie) and Nelly's in Drumcondra (nellysdublin.com), €23



TO PUT BY Mélanie Pfister 'Mel', Alsace, France, 2021 (ABV 13 per cent), 93

A blend of four native Alsace varieties, riesling, muscat, pinot gris, and gewürztraminer, its nose leads with lemon curd plus subtle florals and a lick of spice. This is an expertly balanced blend full of stone fruit with vibrant acidity that extends into a chalky mineral finish. There's a real elegance here, with a marriage of each grape's characteristics into a delightful composition. Perfect as an aperitif with nibbles, it will also keep for ten years. Available from Wine Spark (wine-spark.com), €22.85 with a monthly subscription (traditional price €37)



WINE RATINGS

This is the international marking system for wine ratings. The 100-point scale works on a percentile, not a percentage scale, which is based on the US educational grading system.

95-100: exceptional, of world-class quality

90-94: very good quality

88-89: average but lacks greatness

85-87: average to modest

80-84: below average

70-79: poor

Below 70: unacceptable quality

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Sara Keating on the arts



Max Porter and Jarlath Tivnan in a staged reading of *Shy* at the Cuir International Festival of Literature, Galway

EMILJA JEFREMOVA

Max Porter exemplifies art's ability to connect empathetically with young men in a crisis

In 2018, Landmark Productions staged the Irish premiere of *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*. This adaptation of Max Porter's novel was written and directed by Enda Walsh and starred Cillian Murphy. It was a uniquely simpatico collaboration, involving artists whose distinctive approach to mapping emotional landscapes on both the page and the stage lent the production a breathtaking visceral edge.

Like Porter's moving short book, Walsh's show created a felt world where words, music and visual effect held a physical resonance for the audience. It was no coincidence that Porter's text was a key part of the experience, with words projected on the backdrop of Jamie Vartan's extraordinary domestic set at various pivotal moments.

Porter has just published his third novel, *Shy*. It's the final part of a loose trilogy that began with *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* in 2015 and was followed by *Lanny* four years later. What unites the three books is their short, intense narratives

and gently experimental form, which sits on the page as a clash of typographical fonts and competing voices. Text is curled into shapes, or set on the wrong side of pages as if in dialogue with the blank space around it. Sometimes it crosses the pages entirely.

This prose has the formal freedom of poetry (Porter has also published poems as well as a 2021 prose-poem, *The Death of Francis Bacon*) and the imaginative visual thrust of contemporary art (Porter studied both History of Art and Radical Performance Art at undergraduate and postgraduate level). However, the emotional effect of his stories – each domestic in its own way – is never dimmed. Instead, it is richly enhanced by the books' unusual presentation.

Speaking at the Cuir International Festival of Literature in Galway last weekend, Porter also said the trilogy of stories is united by their preoccupation with masculinity. "Basically, we have a problem with young men." They are struggling against the weight of patriarchy's recent and historic failures, peer pressure and

the prevalence of toxic "heroes" like Andrew Tate. They are struggling to achieve across educational levels. They are more likely to experience depression or addiction and to commit suicide.

Porter is, of course, a writer and not a psychologist. What art can do, he suggested, and exemplifies expertly throughout his books, is provide an empathetic connection with young men at a moment of crisis.

Shy is set in the Last Chance boarding school, a residential home for troubled youths. The 16-year-old title character has good reason to be there. He has been abusing drugs as well as the trust of his friends and parents. Expelled from several schools, he is regularly engaging in violent behaviour.

As the book opens, *Shy* is running away and walking towards death, a heavy bag of rocks on his bag. Throughout this journey, voices from those who care about him interrupt his own narrative. They include social workers, doctors, his mum and stepdad, and most significantly the group of miscreants who he realises have become a lifeline to him, offering him a community of understanding that is therapy in its own vital way. They provide a chorus committed to saving him, even as he rejects them at every turn. The other key lifeline for *Shy* is music, specifically drum and bass. The rhythmic beats offer a pulse to Porter's language too.

During his appearance at Cuir, Porter performed an excerpt from *Shy* against the rumbling soundtrack of jungle tracks which lent an extra, pressured emotional edge to the interior monologue. The spotlighted presence of actor Jarlath Tivnan, standing aggressively tense with his hood up and earphones round his neck, also served to highlight *Shy*'s psychic pressure. The resulting 30 minutes of staged reading was electric, a unique collaboration that suggested Porter was taking notes from Walsh and Murphy at the *Galway Arts Festival* five years ago. ■

Clear-sighted advice for parents dealing with teenage ground zero



HENRIETTA MCKERVEY

In her recently published memoir *You Could Make This Place Beautiful*, poet Maggie Smith writes of the fear and bewilderment she experienced when her daughter was born. She and her husband were busy, happy in their fledgling, postgraduate college careers, and the disruption overwhelmed her. “What had I done,” she asks, “insisting on more of us?”

Whether through support, treatment or natural change, that early anguish fades for the vast majority of women. But it can return with a wallop when that baby becomes a teenager. You find yourself wondering: who is this stranger in my house? Can this really be what I signed up for? How do I relate to them? What is my teen trying to tell me, I wonder, when I receive the barest of replies in response to what I assume are uncontroversial queries such as “How was school?” or “Have you any plans this weekend?”

Psychotherapist Stella O’Malley (a self-described former “demonic teenager”) is only too familiar with the twisting paths and dark tunnels waiting to trip parents up on planet teen. In the introduction, she writes that **What Your Teen is Trying to Tell You** “isn’t too concerned with the easy-going teenager who is sailing blithely through adolescence . . . rather, this is for the parents of the teenager in distress”.

But there is a lot to be said for being forewarned. One way to be ready to meet problems halfway (or even sooner) is to have the skills to recognise trouble as it starts to loom over the horizon.

O’Malley’s sections on connecting with a teenager – covering communication styles, emotional intelligence and approaches to conflict – are useful regardless of a parent’s current circumstances. It’s natural to feel more equipped to deal with a deep-end situation after practising across a range of smaller, straightforward ones.

I’d imagine most parents feel that the spell of childhood vanishes as their adolescent

navigates the teenage years. But before the 20th century, there were just two main stages in life: childhood and adulthood. As O’Malley drily notes: “Humans have been turning 13 for hundreds of thousands of years, but only in the last hundred years or so did we consider that the bridge between childhood and adulthood deserves its own name.”

Yet it is a stage in life like no other. A teen’s unique chemistry means that connections between the emotional part of their brain and the decision-making centre are still developing. Because these aren’t necessarily in sync with each other, however, a teenager is more likely to act first and think later.

For ease and practicality, O’Malley uses case studies (names have been changed) to give in-depth scenarios for cognitive, emotional, social, physical and behavioural developmental milestones. She explains coping mechanisms and suggests strategies for parents.

The book is arranged as a six-part toolkit: Understanding the Teenage Mind, Growing Up in the 21st Century, Exploring Tension, Fear and Rigid Thinking, The Reckoning – Coming to Terms with Ourselves and Our

Bodies, Facing Complex Challenges and Establishing Positive Family Dynamics.

This classification system and its sub-divisions create a useful resource, especially for dipping in and out of. In fact, unless you are facing a crisis, I’d recommend treating the book as a pick and mix, reading a chapter or section at a time.

The many topics and issues tackled include anxiety, obsession with technology, blended families, body confidence, hygiene, neurodiversity and the sexual self. O’Malley’s writing is simple and unambiguous, but there is a lot to take in. I found sitting with the ideas and suggestions for a while was helpful, even with apparently straightforward concepts such as the difference between complaining and venting. “Complaining suggests that something needs to be fixed; venting indicates your child needs to be understood.”

One of O’Malley’s strengths is that she doesn’t dole out how-to advice.

Rather, she shows the many perspectives and points of view at play in a situation, offering common sense strategies on when to intervene and how to support your teenager in working the answers out for themselves.

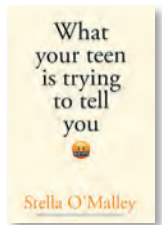
She quotes the novelist Harlan Coben: “Make no mistake, adolescence is a war. No one gets out unscathed.” If so, this book is a smart and clear-sighted ally.

PARENTING

What Your Teen is Trying to Tell You

By Stella O’Malley

Gill Books, €17.99



Stella O’Malley: advice on navigating the difficult teenage years



Whip smart and really funny while staying right side of twee



JOHN WALSHE

Having tackled subjects as diverse as an alternative sliding-doors version of Hilary Clinton’s life (*Rodham*) and a modern Ohio-set take on *Pride and Prejudice* (*Eligible*), cult US author Curtis Sittenfeld has used a famous television show as the background for her seventh novel.

Sally Milz begins *Romantic Comedy* as a 36-year-old, Emmy-winning scriptwriter on a hugely successful TV comedy show called *The Night Owls* (which bears a remarkable resemblance to *Saturday Night Live*). With a failed marriage in the rear-view mirror, Sally has given up on love. She is content to reset her sexual clock via regular hook-ups with a man she met online but never sees in public.

Cynical about the dating scene, Sally creates a sketch about her fellow writer Danny Horst, who has been seeing a film star. It’s based on the premise that a famous, attractive female will date a less attractive male partner, but the reverse is never true. As Sally argues, “A gorgeous male celebrity would never fall in love with an ordinary, dorky, unkempt woman. Never. No matter how clever she is.”

When pop star Noah Brewster is both guest host and musical star on the show, however, Sally is forced to question her opinion as sparks of attraction start to fly. Hampered by an unerring ability to mess things



Curtis Sittenfeld's new novel *Romantic Comedy* is an enjoyable read that engages the head and the heart

up when it comes to her love life, Sally insults the singer after the show and her opportunity disappears out the door. She ruefully ruminates on “the problem with celebrities”, namely their ability to “deploy their charisma at will, and you basked in its glow, and then they shifted it away from you and the world reverted to being cold”.

Two years later, in the midst of a global pandemic, Sally unexpectedly receives an email from Noah. He is locked down in his California mansion and thinking back over what might have been.

Romantic Comedy is whip smart and extremely funny as Sally careers from sceptic to romantic and back again, often in the course of the same conversation or email exchange. A brilliant character, she admits that this duopoly isn't confined to her interactions with Noah. She worries about whether her in-person presence, which she deprecatingly refers to as “a mild-mannered woman of average intelligence and attractiveness”, or her writing persona who creates “wilfully raging sketches about sexism and bodily functions”, is her “real self”.

Romantic Comedy's opening, set during a normal week on the set of the TV show, is particularly brilliant. Sittenfeld manages to convey the madcap creativity and insanity of a fast-moving programme as we swing from meeting to rehearsal and the live event itself, followed by the inevitable parties. Sally is the perfect guide to this environment, knowledgeable and humorous.

FICTION

Romantic Comedy

By Curtis Sittenfeld

Doubleday, €21



notes, “things were said at TNO, often on camera, that would have constituted sexual harassment in any other workplace except the current White House.”

The second act is entirely made up of emails between Noah and Sally, as the two begin to form a tentative bond, neither quite sure whether it's amorous or merely friendly. The third and final part dips a little toe into twee territory, which this reader would have believed anathema for a writer of Sittenfeld's talents. Noah comes across as perhaps a little too perfect; surely she could have even given him bad breath or a propensity for cold sores.

Just when you start to suspect that the tone has switched irrevocably from cool and edgy to Mills & Boon, however, Sittenfeld delivers a killer comedic line such as Noah admitting that “it's hard for normal life to measure up after you hang out with the Obamas”, and you realise these are minor quibbles.

Romantic Comedy remains an enjoyable read that engages both the head and the heart. Sittenfeld playfully examines how much of our true selves we reveal to others, both in our everyday interactions and our most intimate. As one character memorably asks, “As if there's a clear distinction between real and fake for any of us. Aren't we all performing the role of ourselves?”



Brendan Behan: comprehensive collection of the writer's journalism makes for fascinating reading

GETTY

Behan's early columns show a young writer in love with words



DERMOT BOLGER

My 40 years of earning a living as a jobbing writer has involved travel to festivals across the world and spending time backstage with authors I previously didn't know. Listening to their conversations, I've learnt to differentiate the professional artists from the literary equivalent of Sunday painters.

The Sunday painters generally discuss art. The professional writers generally discuss money. At one reading, the Welsh novelist Bernice Rubens told me what it meant to become the first woman to win the Booker Prize in 1970. “It bought three years free from financial worries when I could simply write.”

Occasionally, writers score a success that buys them far more than three years. Brendan Behan hit the jackpot twice in 1958 with the phenomenal success of his play *The Hostage* and his autobiographical novel *Borstal Boy*. On Bernice Rubens' scale, it should have purchased him a decade to focus on writing major works. But as we know, a destructive cocktail of fame, alcoholism and diabetes meant that he published almost nothing of consequence between then and his death in 1964, aged 41.

His final books, dictated into a tape recorder, are not without their moments. But they feel like getting Brendan Behan at second-hand. They repeat once-fresh anecdotes, like a pastiche of the younger Behan who once mesmerised late-night drinkers with brilliantly comic tales and silenced Gaeltacht pubs with renditions of *An Chúileann*.

That's what makes this first truly comprehensive collection of Behan's journalism between 1951 and 1957 such fascinating reading. It is obviously a labour of love and a work of deep academic research by its editor, Professor John Brannigan, head of English at UCD. He has not only compiled the articles but annotated them with extensive footnotes to explain their numerous references so that we can “enjoy Behan in his own time”.

Behan's time was the heyday of that great satirical magazine, *Dublin Opinion*. Numerous studies of Ireland at that time are illustrated with *Dublin Opinion* cartoons, where we can grasp the humour but not the true topicality of their barbed captions.

Brannigan's 33 pages of notes gives us the societal context in which Behan was writing and catches his irreverence, with Micheál Mac Liammóir becoming “Me Hall Mock Lallamore” and a Belfast Orangeman pronouncing De Valera as “Dave O'Leary”. They also show what an extensive range of references Behan expected his readers to grasp, from Crimean War battles and Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin (the pre-Famine diarist) to Salvador Dali and vaudeville ragtime songs.

The bulk of these discursive, engaging and sometimes fantastical columns appeared in the *Irish Press* between 1953 and 1956, when its new editor Jim McGuinness (who had been interned with Behan in the Curragh) commissioned the relatively unknown young man to write a weekly article for five pounds.

On one level they are the journeywork that all writers who know the financial realities of Grub Street do to support their families. Brian O'Nolan similarly supplemented his income with a famous *Irish Times* column under the pen name Flann O'Brien.

It must be said that Behan's newspaper pieces, while always entertaining, rarely match the verbal dexterity of O'Nolan's, while Behan's invented characters like Mrs Brennan and Crippen are not as memorable as O'Nolan's “The Brother”.

Behan's columns, however, strike me as less damaging to his serious writing than O'Nolan's *Irish Times* pieces were. O'Nolan invested vast amounts of creative energy in them, which probably cost him the mental space to write more novels.

Behan's are more relaxed, almost an extension of the conversation with which he would entertain fellow drinkers later in the day. His wife Beatrice remembered how he “wrote his newspaper articles with ease”, rising early to type them out before bringing her breakfast in bed.

He was not in direct competition with O'Nolan, but the *Irish Press* was with the *Irish Independent*. Its humorous columnist was the deeply conservative John D Sheridan, a voice for an emerging pious middle-class of hard-working civil servants building new lives in the suburbs. Although now forgotten, Sheridan is worth reading to gain a wry sense of that conformist, respectable Dublin.

Behan's columns gathered here, written in haste and mischievousness to earn money, give readers a more anarchic Dublin while also taking us on excursions across Ireland and to his beloved Paris. They show an apprentice writer, vibrantly in love with words – and with no idea where those words would lead him in the few short years to come.

LITERATURE

A Bit of a Writer: Brendan Behan's Complete Collected Short Prose

Edited by John Brannigan

Lilliput Press, €25



Benevolent Betjeman biography a true reflection



ANDREW LYNCH

John Betjeman had a pretty good understanding of what makes this country tick. “The Irish are not at all ideological,” the future British poet laureate wrote soon after arriving in Dublin to work as a propagandist during World War II, “and not really interested in totalitarianism versus democracy. They are, however, intensely interested in Irishmen.”

As Dominic Moseley shows in his whimsical but charming book about Betjeman’s Irish experiences, this quintessential Englishman shared that passion. He even learned Gaelic and practised it on the top deck of buses, with enthusiastic locals correcting his pronunciation. He became a fixture of Dublin pubs as well as country house parties and jokingly signed his letters “Sean O’Betjeman”

in Gaelic script.

Betjeman in Ireland, its author warns at the outset, is not a scholarly work. Instead, it’s a collection of anecdotes, biographical snippets and literary digressions, arranged by theme rather than chronology. Clearly a labour of love, it’s written with great warmth and insight – but is probably best appreciated by readers who have a prior knowledge of the subject.

Betjeman first visited Ireland in 1925, an Oxford undergraduate with a teddy bear called Archie usually tucked under his arm. This later became the inspiration for a character in his friend Evelyn Waugh’s classic novel *Brideshead Revisited*. Waugh also considered buying Gormanston Castle in Co Meath, but decided he couldn’t stick the neighbours.

“The peasants are malevolent,” he complained. “All their smiles are false as hell... Awful incompetency everywhere. No native capable of doing the simplest job properly.”

BIOGRAPHY

Betjeman in Ireland

By Dominic Moseley
Somerville Press, €15



Moseley neatly contrasts Waugh’s snobbery with Betjeman’s benevolence. The poet urged the novelist to reconsider, since for him Ireland was “the most perfect place on Earth”. Betjeman adored the country’s overt Christianity, eccentric characters, ruined buildings and neglected places which he celebrated with verses such as *The Small Towns of Ireland*. “London seems like some mad dream,” he wrote to TS Eliot, “in all this green, wet civilisation.”

When Britain’s Ministry of Information sent Betjeman to Dublin as a press attaché in 1941, his official role was to secure favourable media coverage of the Allies’ war effort. In reality, he was

also gathering intelligence while analysing news sheets from the German and Italian legations. Behind Betjeman’s bumbling exterior, he had a shrewd political brain and urged his employers to respect Irish neutrality.

“There is no doubt that [Éamon de Valera] and most of his ministers feel the better interests of Eire will best be served by a British victory,” he explained. “For this reason, [he] is Britain’s best friend in Ireland.”

Betjeman’s biggest publicity coup was persuading Laurence Olivier to shoot his film version of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* at the Powerscourt Estate in Wicklow. This story of plucky Englishmen overcoming a European enemy was perfectly timed, but the battle scenes actually featured Irish farmers who were paid extra if they brought their own horses. In any case, it was a win-win situation, with the film boosting British morale while generating a healthy return for Ireland’s economy.



Perhaps for that reason, the IRA regarded Betjeman as “a person of menace” and decided to kill him. According to one rumour, the plot was abandoned after a senior republican read the Englishman’s poetry and concluded that he could not possibly be a spy.

The more mundane reality is that Betjeman’s would-be assassins gave up because they found

An impossible peak, with a thrilling and entertaining climb



PAT CARTY

The most important factor in any science fiction novel is the plot device from which the author hangs everything else, that central conceit Alfred Hitchcock used to call the MacGuffin.

Think of Michael Crichton’s dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*, Bram Stoker’s vampire, or even Andy Weir’s bloke stuck on Mars. Mind you, you could say the same thing about any class of thriller as they all need a robust tent pole.

Following his 2020 novel *Professor Everywhere*, Nicholas Binge has come up with a good gimmick to hook potential readers. An enormous, Everest-dwarfing mountain has appeared in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

We’re told about this geographical oddity through the letters of Harold Tunmore. They are discovered by his brother Ben after Harold’s suicide, which was brought on by “schizophrenic episodes and intense psychotic moments” in hospital. Harold had been missing for decades and the fact that he was alive at all is only revealed to Ben by a chance encounter. The letters are all addressed to Ben’s daughter, Harriet, who would have been in her mid-teens at the time.

Tunmore, a theoretical physicist, recounts a visit from two members of some shady government/military organisation. He’s brought to a desert facility and presented with a former colleague who can apparently predict the future with complete accuracy. John McAllister had been working at a secret site when he “started exhibiting strange behaviours” and asking Sisyphian questions.

Harold is taken to the mountain and joins an investigative team at the base camp 15,000 feet above sea level. The crew includes, as these things always do, a chemist, a biologist, an anthropologist, a geologist and several other experts whose descriptive nouns end with “ist”. One of them happens to be Dr Naoko Tanaka, the ex-wife that Harold left abruptly years before. She’s the only person who made it back from the first team they sent up.

SCIENCE FICTION

Ascension

By Nicholas Binge
Harper Voyager,
€19.60



Nicholas Binge: despite its faults, his new novel is a page turner

of the man himself



John Betjeman, poet Laureate: the quintessential Englishman swapped witticisms with literary friends such as Patrick Kavanagh in the Palace Bar GETTY

to ensure it would start. No wonder he spent so much time in the Palace Bar, swapping witticisms with new literary friends such as Patrick Kavanagh and Flann O'Brien.

Moseley's gently meandering approach to his material can feel a little self-indulgent. Betjeman occasionally disappears for pages at a time, replaced by other colourful figures such as the Irish peer Lord Kilmorey, "who liked to rehearse his own funeral by getting his servants to push him on a trolley from his house to his mausoleum".

As an affectionate tribute, however, Betjeman in Ireland has a light heart and a generous spirit – qualities that the great man himself would have surely applauded.

themselves under Garda surveillance.

Moseley skilfully evokes the atmosphere of Emergency-era Ireland when even relatively wealthy people had few creature comforts. At Dunsinea House in Castleknock where Betjeman stayed, mould grew on his black suits and the maid sprinkled holy water over his car every morning



We're also introduced to Sir Roger Bettan, brought in because "the last expedition lacked mission experience". He has the kind of CV that will make any potential screenwriter's job easier should the rights be optioned.

"I'm a soldier," he tells Tunmore. "Australian Special Forces, First Commando Regiment. And yes, I've climbed more mountains than you've ever seen. Everest, K2, Annapurna. All of the Seven Summits." Furthermore, he's a complete bastard whom Harold describes as "some kind of mountain god . . . a force of nature". The reader recognises that get-the-job-done character, essential to any novel of this stripe.

It wouldn't really be right or proper to reveal too much more of the plot. But you'll hardly be shocked to hear that they're not alone on this new Olympus, a place where the accepted laws of physics, biology and any other branch of the sciences you might care to name take a few days off.

Tunmore comes to a realisation fairly early in their climb. "I don't think we should have come here, Hattie," he writes. "This is not for us." "Don't any of these people read books or go to the cinema?" he sigh. The only way out, however, is up.

Ascension is not without problems. The epistolary format certainly worked well for Bram Stoker, but in this instance you have to wonder, what with everything that's going on around him, where Tunmore finds the time or inclination to write his letters. And speaking of said missives, would an uncle really include recollections of "adult time" with the aunt of the young girl he's addressing? On top of that, there's a twist that will make you groan like an old man getting out of a particularly comfy chair.

Despite all this, Binge's yarn rattles along in an enjoyable manner. There are more than enough questions about life, the universe and all the rest of it to keep you interested, alongside plenty of page-turning thrills, and a few classical references thrown in for good measure.

If you're in need of further recommendation, my 17-year-old daughter, a discerning individual, was intrigued by the premise and devoured it in a day.

Hokum? Certainly. Entertaining? Definitely. ■

Design for life

I know I'm a poor 'body positive' role model for my teenage daughter

This week, nutritionist and counsellor Niamh Orbinski advises a mother to help her daughter to have a healthy relationship with food and body image by first helping herself

Dear Expert,
I am a mother in my late 30s from Limerick, with a 12-year-old daughter. I am trying to be a good role model for her by being body positive, teaching her to enjoy food and not be sensitive about how she looks.

But I feel like a fraud, because I care far too much about how I look. I wish I didn't, but I do. When I'm away on holidays, I try to hide the parts of my body that I'm not proud of while at the beach. When I feel like I'm carrying extra weight, I skip meals. When choosing outfits, I go with clothes that make my body look good rather than items I like the most. I know children mimic their parents' behaviour. How can I be a good role model when I'm talking the talk but not walking the walk myself?



Dear Reader,

Thank you for your question and your honesty. It sounds like you have been trying hard to be the best parent you can, despite your internal struggles with body image. I can hear in your words how important being a positive influence for your daughter is to you.

It's hard for us to be good role models for others when we don't know how to be one for ourselves; this can be an uphill battle. I work with many mothers who have similar struggles. I always start by saying that to be a good role model for our kids around appearance, we need to prioritise our own relationship with food and body image. As the saying goes, "Monkey see, monkey do."

It's clear to me from your letter that you wish you didn't care so much about what you look like. I can empathise with how difficult this is and how much time, energy and mental headspace it takes up.

How would it feel to put yourself first and work on this, knowing that it's the best way to be a good role model for your daughter? When we spend time working on our own relationship with food and body image, our behaviours and attitudes change.

Other people, including your daughter, see and notice this. It becomes much easier to combat sticky situations that arise, and will continue to arise, as your girl navigates adolescence. These include toxic beauty standards on social media and the pressure to diet, change or shape the body.

You will feel much more equipped to have these conversations because you will be doing it for yourself.

There are three stages we need to move through to live a life free of food and body insecurities. Firstly, we need to remove what you've learned from diet culture that keeps you stuck in a place of food stress and obsession. Secondly, we must reconnect with the needs of our mind and body. Finally, we will then be ready to re-establish health-promoting behaviours from this new perspective.



NIAMH ORBINSKI

Niamh Orbinski is the author of *No Apologies: Ditch Diet Culture and Rebuild Your*

Relationship with Food, published by HarperCollins Ireland, priced €13.99. She is a nutritionist, certified intuitive eating counsellor and yoga teacher. Her work is HAES (Health At Every Size) aligned, meaning that she encourages health-promoting behaviours regardless of their outcome on weight.

If you're thinking, "Why can't you just tell me exactly what to do?" you're not the first and you definitely won't be the last. I could do that, but I would need to be with you at all times – which is obviously not realistic.

Working on our own stuff can be difficult, but it's always worthwhile to do so.

Remember: it is not selfish to put yourself first. Rather than wondering and worrying if you are doing the right thing at every turn, you will feel confident that you are doing the best you can – not just for your daughter, but for yourself.

Got a problem or something you'd like advice on? Contact us anonymously and we'll match your query with the best expert we can find. Email: thisweek@businesspost.ie

Shining a cold light on those who left Ann Lovett to her fate



REVIEWS BY
**JOHN
MAGUIRE**

Ann

Directed by Ciaran Creagh

Selected, 15A

Rating: ★★★

Rumours are “the worst kind of caring”, a Catholic priest says early on in writer and director Ciaran Creagh’s dramatic recreation of the last day of Ann Lovett’s life, **Ann**. You might remember Ann’s name. She was the 15-year-old girl who died giving birth at a grotto in the town of Granard, Co Longford, in January 1984. Her death was a tragedy that shook the country and, in turn, generated no end of gossip.

At the time, Ireland was a country that didn’t have the collective power or, let’s face it, the will to effect the social changes that might have saved the lives of Ann and her baby. It was a place of systematic secrecy, shame, control and denial. The priest was wrong. There were far worse kinds of caring.

In one of those occasional cinematic coincidences, just last week Sinead O’Shea’s new documentary *Pray for Our Sinners* included an archive clip of Gay Byrne, scanning the headlines while closing *The Late Late Show*, dismissing a front page report on Ann’s death with the line “nothing terribly exciting there”. But there was something there, and 40 years later there still is.

That four-decade span takes on an additional significance when it comes to adapting an infamous moment in Irish social history for the cinema. We know how the story turns out, but Creagh brings us into the mind of the girl at its centre, giving us a sense of the cold, tightly-controlled world she inhabited and the reason she felt compelled to keep her secret.

Unfolding in 17 long, unbroken takes that divide the day, the film opens with Ann (Zara Devlin) waking in her bedroom and getting herself ready for school. She is nine months pregnant, something she has managed to conceal from her mother (Eileen Walsh), her family and friends, and her teachers at the local convent school. Ann knows the baby is coming. She doesn’t go to school. Instead, alone and frightened, she wanders the streets of the town looking in vain for a safe place to give birth.

As cinematographer David Grennan’s mobile camera follows the almost silent Ann, we are occasionally sidetracked by local people who speculate about her growing belly, her darkened demeanour, the fact that she is skipping school. In tight and efficient strokes, Creagh paints a picture of a claustrophobic society controlled by men like Ann’s terse and controlling father (Ian Beattie), the nosy former Garda sergeant (Joe Mullins), the prying shopkeeper (Jim Roche) and the pious priest



Little Richard: gave Jimi Hendrix his first gig



(Philip Judge).

Despite some inconsistent supporting performances and a wavering focus in its terrible, inevitable ending, Creagh’s retelling is bolstered by newcomer Devlin’s vital ability to conjure tangible emotion from thin air.

Little Richard: I Am Everything

Directed by Lisa Cortés

Selected, no cert

Rating: ★★★

Director Lisa Cortés presents an enthralling portrait of rock’n’roll icon Little Richard in the bombastically (but not inaccurately) titled **I Am Everything**. It’s a riotous account of the transgressive singer’s storied life from cradle to grave, replete with a jukebox selection of his most enduring hits.

Opening with a glittering approximation of the big bang, Cortés positions Richard as a revolutionary genius forged in the heart of a supernova in Macon, Georgia, who would become a touchstone creator and a boundary-breaking originator for generations of musicians.

Richard’s father was a Christian revivalist minister with a profitable sideline in moonshine and nightclubs, suggesting the kind of divided loyalties that his youngest son would later transform into a show business image. A young, gay black man touring the Deep South in the pre-Civil Rights era, Richard hid behind his brash personality, high-energy stagecraft and pompadour haircut. Even his existence, someone says, was a revolutionary act.

Then, just at the point where he was becoming as popular as Elvis Presley or Pat Boone (who had both covered his songs), Richard quit music. He surprised everyone by marrying a woman, enrolling in Bible college and releasing a gospel album.

Going straight didn’t suit him. By 1962 he was back on the road, louder and more flamboyant than ever. His first British tour turned into a nightly riot. *The Beatles*, huge fans who had yet to release a record, hit it off with the singer when they supported him in Hamburg. The following year, he toured Britain again where a pub cover band called *the Rolling Stones* were his opening act. Six decades later, Mick Jagger still looks like he can’t believe his luck.

Richard gave Jimi Hendrix his first gig, discovered James Brown singing in a juke joint, and inspired countless artists from David Bowie to Prince. “His DNA was everywhere,” one of the doc’s many talking heads says in reference to percussive piano playing and thunderous antics on stage. Given the appetite Richard had for a good time, they might have been speaking literally.

The 1960s and 1970s were a blur of cocaine, heroin, pills and booze. His addictions nearly killed him, but he endured as much as his music did before passing away peacefully in 2020 at the age of 87. This loud, jubilant, astutely assembled film is a worthy tribute.

Barry

Directed by Bill Hader

Sky Comedy, 18+

Rating: ★★★★★

Succession, Mrs Maisel, Ted Lasso: television shows we watch and love are drawing to a close, lucky enough to survive the cut from executives crunching viewing figures and arrive at the natural end intended by



Zara Devlin in Ann, Ciaran Creagh's dramatic recreation of the last day of Ann Lovett's life

their creatives. As these things should be. Good stories conclude, they don't just suddenly stop being told when they're suddenly told to stop.

Season four of **Barry** will also be the last. Bill Hader's ink-black comedy drama about a hitman turned actor was always more a cult hit than a ratings smash, but the multi-award-winning show has survived a three-year pandemic related hiatus to take its final bow on its own terms. Those of us who consider Barry one of the greatest American television series of the last decade will sorely miss it.

One consolation is that in this new world of streaming, audiences have as much a chance to say hello as goodbye. If you are new to Barry and think catching up sounds too much like homework, I envy you. But you should perhaps turn the page. I wouldn't want to spoil it.

The premise might have come from a sketch on *Saturday Night Live*, the long-running US comedy review where the writer and star earned his stripes. His former marine turned Mob assassin goes to Los Angeles for a job and is bitten by the acting bug. But he can't just turn his back on his old life; there are too many scary people who depend on him. They include sneaky former handler Monroe Fuches (Stephen Root) and effusively upbeat Chechen gangster NoHo Hank (Anthony Carrigan), to say nothing of the bumbling cops following the trail of bodies.

Through a series of botched decisions and missteps rooted in his existential angst, explored over the previous three seasons, Barry (Hader) has drawn those around him into the crossfire. The queue of those wanting revenge includes egomaniacal former acting teacher Gene Cousineau (Henry Winkler) and the scheming, grieving Moss (Robert Wisdom). Former girlfriend and fellow actor Sally (Sarah Goldberg), who has just discovered Barry's secret sideline, doesn't know what she wants.

Not content with being nail-bitingly tense and uproariously funny, Barry tackles big issues: abusive relationships, PTSD, abandonment and the aftermath of violence. Always a risky proposition, Barry continues upending expectations right to the end, shifting gears halfway through this season in an audacious twist. Directing all eight half-hour episodes, Hader switches nimbly from high comedy to intense drama in a series of tight, impeccably controlled bursts, sometimes mid-scene. ■



Bill Hader in Barry: the latest season of the black comedy will be the last

Albums



REVIEWS BY
**TONY
CLAYTON-LEA**



POP/SOUL

Freya Ridings
Blood Orange (Good Soldier/AWAL)



Freya Ridings no longer has to dine out on the fact that her father, actor Richard Ridings, voices Daddy in the children's television series *Peppa Pig*. That changed a few years ago when her 2019 self-titled debut breached the British top three. Since then, between the pandemic and mulling over the end of a long-term relationship, she has had enough time on her own to conjure up numerous scenarios that place her initially in the middle of turmoil and subsequently on the periphery from where perspective sets in.

Blood Orange advances Ridings' way with a powerful pop/soul anthem, especially melodramatic songs such as *Dancing in a Hurricane*, *I Feel Love* and *Weekends* (which slaps on the misery, just in case you don't know how despondent she is, with lyrics like "I'm drunk in some pub with people that I hardly know, but I'm so f***ing lonely, no one really knows me, you are still a heart I hope to hold.") What saves this album from galloping into the abyss is a complementary batch of tracks that tell stories of love regained.

This is an emotional rollercoaster, for sure, but Ridings holds on until it stops, unbuckles her safety harness and walks towards a happy ending.

★★★½

POST-PUNK

The Church
The Hypnogogue (Easy Action Records)



Music fans of a certain vintage will recall Australian band **The Church** as being at the vanguard of post-rock psychedelic music, delivering hazy, often exceptional guitar pop. Over 40 years since the group was founded and with original member Steve Kilbey remaining front of stage, they continue to pack a decent pop/psych punch. There's a hint of prog rock/Bowie in the mix, too, with a sci-fi concept about the titular machine that sucks music out of dreams. Still worth attending? Take a pew.

★★★

PUNK/POP

The Damned
Darkadelic (Earmusic)



The first British punk band to release a single, the first to release an album, and a primary influence on goth culture, London's **The Damned** – a going concern since 1976, believe it or not – return after 2018's *Evil Spirits* with a bunch of highly serviceable punk/pop songs. Their trademark sense of humour is woven throughout a record that also features, unsurprisingly, taut musicianship, but the overriding pleasure is how they have smartly unglued themselves from formulaic songwriting, as evidenced on the mariachi-style *Motorcycle Man* and the plaintive *Western Promise*.

★★★



Shane O'Donoghue
on motoring

Chinese brand BYD arrives in Ireland with big dreams

The BYD Atto 3 is the first of up to nine new models bound for Ireland from the massive Chinese car maker

BYD stands for Build Your Dreams, a whimsical name that belies the behemoth of a company behind it. The Chinese conglomerate only came into being in 1995, starting out as a manufacturer of rechargeable batteries, but it has expanded beyond belief since.

Among its many products – including buses, bicycles, trucks, forklifts, batteries and solar panels – it's claimed that some 20 per cent of all smartphones on the planet feature components made by BYD. And that's before we get to BYD Auto, its car-making division that was launched in 2003 and last year overtook Tesla to become the world's largest manufacturer of electric cars.

The numbers associated with this achievement are staggering. Today, BYD employs over 600,000 people, including nearly 50,000 working in R&D alone, where it claims to be filing new technology patents at a rate of 19 per day. It cites its core competencies as design, development and manufacture of batteries, motors and semiconductors.

It is in the process of replacing its first purpose-built design centre in China with a larger facility as it expands its design team from 650 people to a target of 1,000 designers by the end of 2023. BYD's turnover for 2022 was a mind-numbing €57 billion, which explains how it could



The interior quality of the BYD Atto 3 is good, featuring synthetic leather seats and some quirky details like the guitar-inspired door panels

afford to commission its own fleet of transport ships for its cars when it became exasperated by delays caused by third parties.

And now, on the twentieth anniversary of BYD Auto's inception, the brand has launched in Ireland as part of an onslaught onto the European market. Distribution of BYD cars in Ireland will be managed by Motor Distributors Limited (MDL), a well-established firm in the industry previously associated with Toyota, Volkswagen and Mazda and today responsible for the Mercedes brands. In a whirlwind of less than two years, the deal between MDL and BYD has been inked and cars are already on the ground and ready for delivery as of this week.

Indeed, the first two BYD showrooms are already open in Dublin – one in Deansgrange in the south of the city and another on the Navan Road in the north. A third outlet will open next month in Cork, and it's

The BYD (Build Your Dreams) Atto is the first model to arrive in Ireland from the Chinese EV manufacturer with prices starting at a little over €37,000



for them. An entry-level C-segment hatchback called the Dolphin should undercut the Atto 3 on price, though it uses the same electric powertrain and technology throughout. It's expected to start at in the region of €30,000, targeting the MG 4 and Volkswagen ID.3, for example, and a short drive in a pre-production prototype suggests that it is up to the job, giving Irish buyers another relatively affordable electric car to choose from.

But BYD plans to spread its wings much further – and ultimately wishes to be seen as a premium maker of electric cars. To that end, it will launch the Seal in Ireland this year as well. Scoff all you like at the aquatic theme of the cars' names, but you'll stop laughing when you clap eyes on it. It's a four-door sports saloon that looks sensational, easily as desirable as a Tesla Model 3 or BMW i4.

It has the firepower to take those on, too. It'll be available in rear or all-wheel-drive formats using one or two electric motors, respectively, both powered by a 82.5kWh battery pack. The rear-drive model has a projected range between charges of 570 kilometres and it's no slouch thanks to an output of up to 313hp. A quick test on a handling circuit revealed an agile chassis and engaging driving manners, too, comparable to its rivals.

The all-wheel-drive model gets up to 530hp and on the Chinese market it even comes with a '3.8S' badge on the back, alluding to its rapid 0-100km/h time of 3.8 seconds. Aside from the impressive performance and range stats, the Seal has a luxurious cabin with lots of space, though we'd be surprised if the built-in karaoke system makes it to the Irish market.

All going well, the Seal and Dolphin could go on sale this summer, though that – and their pricing – has yet to be firmed up. We do know, however, that there could be as many as six further BYD models on the way to these shores in the next few years, a rapid rollout of a new brand that some could only dream of. ■

The BYD Dolphin is an entry-level C-segment hatchback that's expected to challenge the likes of VW's ID.3

BYD Seal: a sensational four-door sports saloon that will compete against rivals such as Tesla's Model 3

expected that a dozen more will follow in the next couple of years as the BYD line-up expands. There are already nearly 200 examples of the launch car in the country ready to buy.

That first model to arrive is the BYD Atto 3. It's a five-door, five-seat electric car, shaped like a cross-over with a tall body and modest ground clearance. In size terms, the Atto 3 sits between the Hyundai Kona and the Volkswagen ID.4, though BYD has launched it with keen pricing starting at a little over €37,000 – including government incentives to buy an EV. The most expensive model still comes in at under €39,000 and that's fully loaded with equipment.

Just one electric powertrain is offered for the Atto 3, featuring a front-mounted electric motor producing up to 204hp. Its 60kWh battery pack, using BYD's much-hyped 'blade' battery technology, is officially good for up to 420 kilometres on a charge. Initial driving impressions of the car suggest that it's efficient, too, using that modestly-sized battery pack to good effect.

On the road, the Atto 3 is smooth, refined and has a surprising turn of speed when you push the accelerator all the way down. In fact, those that prejudge the Atto 3 on the basis of its origin may be surprised how polished a performance it puts in.

On the outside, the Atto 3 is designed to fit in rather than stand out. After all, it competes in one of the largest sectors of the car market and needs to appeal to a wide cross section of buyers. It's neither offensive looking nor particularly memorable, though it carries off bright paint colours well.

There's a lot more to say about the interior, as it features a few unusual details – such as the guitar-inspired door panels and gym weight-inspired air vent controls. However, the quality is good, the synthetic-leather-upholstered seats are comfortable and supportive, and there's an above-average amount of room for the price point.

On the long list of standard equipment is a rotating touchscreen in the middle of the dashboard. Press a button on the steering wheel – or on the screen itself – and it rotates from portrait orientation to landscape, or vice versa. Some might see it as a bit of a gimmick, but, for example, the built-in navigation works even better when the screen is upright, so it has a function. Regardless of what you think of that, there's no arguing with the excellent infotainment software, putting many well-known brands to shame.

The same system has been confirmed for use in the next two BYD models to come to Ireland, too – and buyers won't have to wait long

SPECS

Model: BYD Atto 3
Electric system: 150kW motor, 60kWh (net) battery
CO2 emissions: 0g/km
Annual motor tax: €120
Price: from €37,128 including incentives

PERFORMANCE
Max power: 204hp
Max torque: 310Nm
0-100km/h: 7.3 seconds

PROS AND CONS
Likes: Good specification, competitive pricing, smooth driving manners
Dislikes: A little too quirky in some of the detailing





ANTON SAVAGE

So much more than a rabble rouser, Springer changed the face of modern TV

The subject matter of The Jerry Springer Show may have featured deadbeat dads, closeted sexuality and love triangles, but making ordinary people celebrities made possible the likes of Big Brother, Love Island, the Kardashians and even YouTube and TikTok content

Many people have been credited with changing TV. Usually this translates as ‘they did it for a long time and we liked them’. Letterman didn’t ‘change TV’, he just did it very well. Same for Oprah, Paxman, Parkinson, Cronkite and Carson. They were masters of their craft. But not change agents. Springer was a change agent. He made a difference. He both personified and catalysed one of the biggest shifts in the history of broadcasting.

The facile way to characterise Springer is as a vacuous rabble-rouser forcing the uncouth to perform for the uneducated. He was much more than that, both personally and professionally. Long before the crowds chanted “Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!” he achieved extraordinary success; a law graduate of the prestigious Northwestern University, he

served on Robert Kennedy’s campaign before becoming a partner in a Cincinnati Law Firm. He juggled law and politics (becoming a city councilman and mayor of Cincinnati) while also developing the broadcasting career that would make him so famous.

That career started ‘traditionally’. He worked his way from reporter to local news anchor and then dragged his news show from worst in the local ratings to best. The remarkable thing is he did it by being utterly traditional – he even finished broadcasts with a small paternalistic sermon. This would later become the “final thought” segment on The Jerry Springer Show, wherein he would philosophise about mutual respect after 30 minutes of goading cousins into hitting each other with chairs.

He even channelled the legendary Ed Murrow (three decades his predecessor) by developing an anchor ‘catchphrase’. Where Murrow had “Good night, and Good luck”, Springer ended newscasts with “Look after yourselves, and each other”. That too found a place in incongruous perpetuity on his TV show; as bouncers dragged guests off roaring, he would look to camera and end the show using that line (often with deeply considered and utterly inappropriate paths).

Many would ask why a man so smart and capable would lower himself to do such a show. That misses the point of broadcasting. As Gay Byrne said, whether you are in news or in chat, every broadcaster is in the entertainment business. None of it matters if nobody is watching.

Springer clearly learned that lesson when the success of his news programme caused his station to offer him a talk show. The original Jerry Springer Show was modelled on The Phil Donahue Show. It was informed and thoughtful. It featured guests from the worlds of news and politics. And it was dull.

Often people with dull programmes convince themselves nobody watches because the show is too smart for their audience. The American chat-show host Dick Cavett founded his entire autobiography on the implied conceit that he never matched Johnny Carson’s success because he was too intellectual. But people don’t turn off intellectual programmes. They turn off boring ones.

And after three years of serious, considered, well-informed boredom, Springer and his producer decided to make changes. Gone were the politicians, gone were the news stories, gone were current affairs. In their place; deadbeat dads, closeted sexuality, love-triangles, betrayals, affairs, cuckolds, prostitution, addiction, deceit and degeneracy. And America (and the world) lapped it up. The show ran for 27 seasons, 5,000 episodes and on many occasions beat the juggernaut that is The Oprah Winfrey show in markets across the US.

Springer did more than feeding sensational red meat to the masses. He and his team predicted and preceded what we all now take for granted; the voyeuristic fascination with peering at the lives of our fellow man. His approach has become ubiquitous; Instagram, Facebook, Big Brother, Love Island – celebrities are no longer big business, the money is now made selling the dingy corners of ‘normal’ people’s personal lives. And if celebrities want a piece of that pie, they better be willing to get in the gutter with the rest of us; The Kardashians, after all, are little more than an extended episode of The Jerry Springer Show with better make-up and fancy locations.

But not only was he prescient about what the modern TV audience wanted to watch, he predicted how they would perceive TV. Ironically, for a man who was so rooted in the historic grammar of broadcast television, from his catchphrase to his final thought, his show abandoned much of that grammar to reveal the wizard behind the curtain – the sets got destroyed, security personnel became characters, the camera roved backstage through corridors and clutter and the audience was co-opted as a participant. This is YouTube. This is Twitch and TikTok and Snapchat. This is the world where viewers are gathered en masse by random people with iPhones, not networks with huge studios.

Jerry Springer was the fulcrum around which that pivot happened. The question is, are we better off because of it? ■



Jerry Springer and his team predicted what we now all take for granted; the voyeuristic obsession with peering into the lives of our fellow man GETTY

‘The Kardashians are little more than an extended episode of The Jerry Springer Show with better make-up and fancy locations’



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