HE mist is rising up from the bog, evaporating into the early morning sunshine as the Atlantic Ocean glistens in the background. All around me. people are chatting as Gaeilge with the day ahead on their minds, while I'm basking in the beauty of Spiddal, Co Galway and its environs, But not for long

as I'm about to get ready for my close up.
This week is Seachtain Na Gaeilge and where better to celebrate the Irish language than in the village of Ros na Rún, the setting for everything from seduction to skullduggery in our native

In the transmission of the desired and the des

guage soap's episodes are filmed by a dedicated cast and crew of

The idea for an Irish language soap came at the beginning of TG4 and many of those who joined the cast 29 years ago came from the local drama societies.

The Gaeltacht areas have always had a strong tradition of amateur drama and performance but before Ros na Rún it was few and far between who made it out of their parish halls and commu

Josie Ó Cúaláin had a steady pensionable job and was building a house when he heard about the auditions. He'd always been a keen actor in his local Cumann

thought.

T was working for Rehab and I worked in the local factories and did amateur drama since I was a drama in school and it was a social outlet really. We used to do a play and we'd take off and go to Donegal or Kerry or other parks of the country and have a bit of funwed and the really that it too.

There were drama groups all over the gaeltacht areas who per-formed for each other and in com-

petitions, all as gaeilge.

But when TG4 announced it was opening for business and part of that would be a soap, the audi-

tions caught Josie's eye.
"The auditions were in Galway, I
can remember it was a Wednesday night and I used to work part time in a pub. I had an old t-shirt and I landed in straight from work

The first thing you had to do was there was a double door you had to walk through and do a piece to camera and then you had to do another piece from a play.'

As Seachtain na Gaeilge begins, our writer goes behind the scenes in Ros na Rún

The TV drama that's the secret to keeping the Irish language in great health

by Maeve

with young people and Josie didn't think he'd make the cut. didn't think he'd make the cut.

"But then I received a letter
offering me 20 weeks of work,' he
says, speaking of a tough decision. 'I was in a full time pensionable job, nine to five and I didnt
know what to do I had just
started building my house and I
tout out al mortgage but I three
house and tout out a mortgage but I was a
huge gamble'.

all that and took the part. It was a huge gamble.

Josic has played Micheil Seoigs since 1996 and his character has been through the mill — his special properties of the state of the stat Josie is grateful to have had the chance to make acting his day

job. 'It's never been like a job and I It's never oeen like a job and I love doing it,' he says. 'It is seasonal so you have to do other things — I set up a small taxi company and did other bits and pieces to fill in the time when I was off screen. And now I work with Radio na Gaeltachta a couple of days a week. But if I hadn't done this, I would have regretted

it for the rest of my life.'
Like Josie, Fionnuala Ni Fhlatharta who plays Berní has been in Ros na Rún since the beginning. She grew up in Carra-roe but now lives in Spiddal and also got her part through amateur dramatics. While waiting to be

serves as the green room, the actors say they feel the language has changed as they have grown up and there are concerns about the disappearance of Gaeltacht

reas. 'Our narents' Irish was on a dif-

There are a lot of young people speaking the language'

ferent level to ours,' says Fionnu-ala. 'You can never go back to that richness in the language, it's gone. 'But there are five of us who were in Ros na Rún from the start and back then we were just so proud that TG4 was here and it had landed. And I am still proud of

he says the interest in the Irish language from young people is a positive thing. 'My father used to say we don't

speak the language as good as those who came before us and we would probably say the same now,' he says.
'But the language is there and it

'But the language is there and it is improving and there are a lot of young people speaking it.' Unlike Josie and Flonnuale, I haven't done any amateur dramatics but I do have cupla focall, albeit rusty ones and so I am cajoled into making my Ros na Run debut.

Rin debut.

This, it seems, is a complicated process as the team are very thorough.

Over in make up, the team, headed by Maire Ni Dhroighneain give me a glow up for my role.

There's a mix here of online speakers, show with school interpretable to the work of the control of scratch like Hannah Edmundson, who is originally from London but

moved to Ireland with her family and is now taking classes.
It's essential that the cast look Josie agrees — he couldn't speak a word of English until he went to secondary school, something that mentioned and Pôl O Griofa who

plays Mackpops in for a trim on his day off. Colm Gallagher, who plays Pól Penrose is from the Gaeltacht in Falcarragh, Co Donegal, After a stint behind the cameras making documentaries in Belfast, he was coaved back in front of them. He's been in the show for eight years now and each season means uprooting from Donegal to Gal-

uprooting from Donegal to Gal-way for six months and finding a new place to live which he says is becoming increasingly difficult due to the housing crist. He is pleased that the likes of An Calinc Citin has put the Irish lan-se to the control of the control of the as Colm has always made his liv-ing through speaking our mother tongue.

tongue.
'My one concern would be that this is a fashion trend,' he says of the current upsurge. 'But if people continue to be interested in it, ple continue to be interested in it, learn to speak it, use it in their daily lives and encourage others to learn and give it a go that's great and the more of it the better,' he says.

'I wish there was more support from the Government to keep people in the Gaeltacht areas. There are plenty of people speak-ing Irish in the cities but the Gael-

tachts are dwindling and getting smaller. At home very few people speak Irish in my area any more. Bands like Kneecap are great but are people engaging with the lan-guage outside of that?'

Irish Daily Mail. Saturday, March 1, 2025

guage outside of that?

More infrastructure in the areas

guage outside of that's in the areas is what's medich he says, to keep the language alive and healthy. It is important that money is invested in promoting young people to speak the language—they over in the costume department Balthandi Ni Nualan is sorting through the rails of clothes for each character. It has expensely a continued that is not a consecutively and it is up to the costume department below the same that is not seen to the cost time of the cost when the consecutively and it is up to the cost under the cost under the make when a character walks into the cafe as when they leave.

The team know their characters inside out — they even know that when Macdara Ó Fátharta's charachter Tadgh puts on a polo neck instead of a shirt under his trademark leather jacket, he's going to be having a row with someone as it's a sure sign of a few punches being thrown.

inches being thrown. I make my way down to Gaudi's cafe for my first scenes where new character Gearoid Mac Gabhann played by Pádraig Ó Gráda is hanging out. He will make his first appearance on screen this week and grew up down the road from and grew up down the road from me in Derry but was schooled through Irish so I can understand him very well. Still, it's hard to look natural and ignore Gearoid trying to convince Pól of the healtrying to convince Poi of the heal-ing powers of a crystal. Still, I have a few sips of aon cupán caife and hope for the best as props are moved around with a warning

that any of the products on the cafe shelves have been there well past their sell by dates. Máire Eilís Ní Fhlaithearta who

Maire Eliis Ni Fhiathearta who plays Cattrions, is well used to the likes of me popping up on set. Ros Na Run has now got a cult following across the world and last year there was the visit and guest appearance from American "Haw monitor to the set of t

'We had an Austrian couple here as extras'

ple come here last year for a week. They arranged their holidays around it and asked if they could come in as extras as they always watched Ros na Rún at home.'

Times have changed dramati-cally since Máire Eilis joined the soap - she's now a mother of three and lives locally with her

three and lives locally with her kids and husband.
'Housing is a big issue here,' she says. 'And infrastructure. We do have a good bus service in recent years but there are other parts of the gaeltacht that don't. Before the gaetacnt that don't. Belore that bus service, nearly all of us had to move to Galway for college because some days you were leaving at 7am and you wouldn't make a 9am lecture and we are

only 20 minutes down the road.' Caitriona sees a bit of her young self in Penny, a new social media influencer who recently landed in the village and is causing a commotion.

She's played by Laura Heeney from Ballybodey who, although not from a Gaeliach area, is one of the new breed of Irish speakers who is passionate about her lambur to be a speaker who is passionate about her lambur to be a speaker who is passionate about her lambur to be a speaker who is passionated by the standard property of the standard property of the property of the property of the lambur to be a speaker when you are that age you don't understand the cultural and historical significance of the lambur to be a speaker when you are the standard property in the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the property in the property is the property in the propert She's played by Laura Heeney

doesn't support kids and help them in terms of Irish and their abilities. "There has been this huge awakening now of people's love for the Irish language and the housing crisis in the Gaeltacht areas is

endangering the language as peo-ple are being forced to move away.' Right now, though, the only Right now, though, the only thing endangering the Irish lan-guage is my bad acting as I am tasked with meeting the man himself down at Tigh Thaidgh. Veteran actor Macdara O

Fátharta as Tadgh is putting me through my paces.
This time I have to pretend to say go raibh maith agat at the bar when Tadgh hands me a hot drink then siul go gasta to another extra and engage in pretend conversation

All easy in theory but in practice mo brógha are making a gear-rthóg gearrthóg sound on the wooden floor of the bar as Colm,

to conduct their scene. It's hard in English, never mind for a not so fluent speaker like me, especially in the presence of such a legend as Macdara who, though not care as hy, is a bit more bashful when it comes to giving interviews. We have a great day seem that have been teach me how to pull be to the property of the property of

ave to say slán to the wonderful

cast and crew. For the last 29 years Ros na Run has covered topics that are hard hitting, some that are intrinsic to rural life, others that everyone

to conduct their scene It's hard faces like dementia to the modern

faces like dementia to the modern day scourges of drug addiction and social media bullying. And while Ros na Rún started off on its own, now Spiddal is a heartland for television compa-nies making drama and other television mogrammes as gaelige protecting something we should all regard as extremely

important.

It could just be that this tiny part of Galway is providing the boost we need to keep our language alive.



