



RTE star in fright of his life after skin cancer diagnosis

Rose of Tralee host Dáithí Ó Sé has warned ‘everyone needs to be vigilant’

Erin McCafferty

RTE star Dáithí Ó Sé has revealed that he received treatment for skin cancer earlier this year after he discovered a suspicious looking spot on his eyebrow.

The Rose of Tralee host admitted that he got the fright of his life last February after undergoing tests for the disease.

“I thought it was an ingrown hair,” Ó Sé, 47, told The Sunday Times. “But this spot just wasn’t going away. I was covering it up with make-up in work and when I was taking it off after the show the spot was getting agitated and part of it would scab up and come off.”

Thinking it was harmless, Ó Sé asked his GP to remove it, but she sent him to a skin specialist for a biopsy.

“I went in thinking they’d take out the freezing gas or laser it, but she was pretty sure it was a form of skin cancer.”

It turned out to be basal cell carcinoma, one of the most common cancers in Ireland. There are more than 13,000 new cases of skin cancer diagnosed in Ireland every year.

“It frightened the life out of me,” he said. “In fact, it had been there a long time, but had grown over the last year or two.”

Despite having skin cancer, Ó Sé, a father of one, said he had felt perfectly well at the time.



“She checked the rest of my glands to make sure it hadn’t spread and it hadn’t, which gave me a bit of comfort, but it still came as a massive shock. All of a sudden I was that person that had skin cancer.”

What was a 2mm bump on his eyebrow necessitated two stitches on the inside and six on the outside, as surgeons had to cut into the muscle to remove it.

Ó Sé, from Co Kerry, was relieved to get the all-clear last month and was told to carry on with his life as normal, but he was warned to wear sun cream.

“I was told to wear factor 50 for the rest of my life, winter and summer, no matter what the weather,” he said. “I even have to apply it on the backs of my hands and on my ears.”

It’s a warning to people to heed any changes, even minor ones, to their skin. “Thankfully this was a mild form of skin cancer and it was contained, but there are other more progressive forms and everyone needs to be vigilant,” he said. “It’s really made me appreciate my health and my life all the more.”

Ó Sé has been presenting the Rose of Tralee since 2010 and still gets excited at the prospect. “It only comes around once a year and I never fail to enjoy it,” he said.

This year he has a co-presenter, Kathryn Thomas, who was introduced by RTE in an effort to grow the viewing figures. Last year a large proportion of those tuning in were women.

“Initially when they came to me with

the idea of a co-presenter I thought I’d done something wrong last year, but I didn’t,” Ó Sé said.

He said there was no rivalry between himself and Thomas as they had known each other for 20 years and got on well.

“People are asking me if something has been taken away from me, but I don’t see it that way. Kathryn is a welcome addition to the show. Besides, the main focus is not on us. It’s on the roses.”

He stresses that it’s not easy for the roses to get up on stage and bare their souls on live TV.

“There are over 2,000 people in the Dome in Tralee and they’re in front of 700,000 or 800,000 people on live TV.

These days, with social media, they can have anything thrown at them and yet they’re strong enough to do it,” he said. “I think it’s a powerful message about the strength of women.”

The festival rules have changed in recent times with married women, mothers and transgender women now being allowed to enter.

However, some still consider the competition to be out of date and not representative of modern Ireland.

Ó Sé insists that it’s as relevant as ever. “The Rose of Tralee is a celebration of Irish women and of Irishness and

Dáithí Ó Sé, the Rose of Tralee host since 2010, is back up and running after his treatment. Below, with the Arizona rose Kayla Gray, left, and a rose from Texas, Danielle Ybarra

neither one of those things will ever not be relevant,” he said.

“The vast majority of people see it for what it is; and what’s more, they like what they see.”

RTE has been immersed in controversy this summer, and amid talk of the television licence fee being abolished Ó Sé said it was important that the show was entertaining.

“While we touch on serious issues with roses, we try to have the craic and make the show enjoyable to watch,” he said.

“You need light and shade in those interviews. We’ve turned it into a show where you wonder what’s going to happen next and that’s always the key to a live event to keep people tuned in.”

Ó Sé and his wife, Rita Talty, first met at the Rose of Tralee in 2008 when she was the New Jersey rose, so you’d expect it to be a romantic occasion for the couple, but she’s more interested in catching up with previous Roses. “They all have kids now and they hang out together. It’s a social occasion for her,” he said.

This year, his wife and nine-year-old son Micheál Óg (Ógie) will attend the festival for one night only.

Ó Sé’s son is not impressed by his father’s celebrity status, it appears. “He really doesn’t take any notice of my being on TV,” Ó Sé said.

“He’ll say, ‘Don’t put on Dad’s programme. Put on something else.’” Ó Sé added, laughing. “But I think he secretly likes it.”



‘Comedy is fun and I’m keeping a toe in the water’

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same side in opposing the use of preferred pronouns. “That’s the weird thing about this fight. Because it’s so insane, the people you stand with are just people who refuse to accept an insane situation, so you end up being bedfellows with people who you normally wouldn’t really have anything to do with,” he said.

The co-creator of sitcoms including *Father Ted*, *Black Books* and *The IT Crowd*, Linehan has more recently been subject to a backlash for his views on women’s rights and transgender issues.

He has spoken about the strain his involvement in the cause put on his marriage. Linehan and his wife of 16 years, Helen Serafinowicz, divorced in 2021.

The writer said he found it a “little bit sad” to visit Ireland. “No one seems to give a damn. I thought Ted meant more to people. That has been a kick in the teeth.”

Linehan also expressed concern about the hate speech legislation proposed by Helen McEntee, the justice minister, describing it as a “con”. He said he had been alarmed by the participation of transgender athletes in Irish women’s contact sports such as Gaelic football, which he regards as “dangerous”.

“We cannot allow this fragile, perpetually offended generation of activists to decree what is and isn’t hate,” he said. Linehan fears the legislation will be weaponised for political ends and used as a tool to neutralise robust discussion of the Gender Recognition Act, which was

passed in 2015 and allows Irish citizens over the age of 18 to self-identify to legally change their gender.

“Hate speech is another term that often means the opposite to what it’s intended to mean. That’s one thing the trans movement does, it flips everything on its head,” Linehan said.

Last week two venues at the Edinburgh Fringe cancelled his stand-up shows, with one citing its links to LGBT people and fears that hosting Linehan could impinge on bookings. He

Linehan outside the Scottish parliament



performed his routine outside the Scottish parliament in front of 80 people.

“Comedy is fun and I’m keeping a toe in the water but it’s not my main thing at the moment. My main thing is literally trying to end this ideology,

which I think is evil,” he said. Objecting to his views being painted as “anti-trans”, Linehan claimed he is powerless to prevent his Wikipedia entry, which calls him an “anti-transgender activist”, from further harming his public image.

“My solicitors monitored [my Wikipedia page] and they tried to change it to ‘women’s rights activist’. It switched back within 15 minutes,” Linehan said.

How much of the harm is self-inflicted, and has his approach and rhetoric, at times, been extreme? Linehan said if he had overstepped the mark, he has always been willing to say sorry. “If ever I snap at people, it’s because of my frustration that none of my friends said ‘hang on a second,

he’s not bigoted’. I’m only rude to people who are rude to me,” he said.

Despite being designated persona non grata, Linehan insisted the *Father Ted* audience had not turned its back on him. “I don’t feel betrayed by the audiences ... I’m fairly secure that Irish people as a whole do not agree with men in women’s prisons and men in women’s sports,” he said.

Linehan admits that the cancellation of his “ready to go” *Father Ted* musical, which he believed could have made his fortune, is an enduring source of disappointment. Being cancelled, he said, “hits you like a series of deaths”. “It is just being left to rot because they don’t want me talking about this extremely important subject.”