

The Sunday
BusinessPost

Magazine

August 25 2019

TIPS OPTIONAL

In conversation
with restaurateur
Derry Clarke

THE LONG GAME

Louise Kennedy
on fashion that's
designed to last

THE FERTILITY QUESTION

Part three of our
special report

Fever

PITCH

Munster and Ireland rugby star
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Cover picture: Peter O'Mahony, Munster and Ireland rugby star
GERRY BALFE SMYTH

editor's note

Elaine Prendeville



‘**M**aybe it's a Munster thing, maybe it's a Cork thing, or maybe it's a Peter O'Mahony thing.’ In this week's cover feature, David Robbins meets rugby star Peter O'Mahony, finding a man

for whom distraction need not apply. The flanker's demeanour can “seem like impatience”, Robbins writes, “but maybe it's more like an intense focus on the specifics.” Read the full interview, plus O'Mahony's take on the ever-closer Rugby World Cup, from page 13.

Elsewhere in this issue, Nadine O'Regan has a full, frank and pleasingly fiery conversation with restaurateur and TV personality Derry Clarke (page 10), I ask designer Louise Kennedy to share the story behind her new season collection (page 8), and Danielle Barron contributes the third in our series on the infertility experience in Ireland, this week centring on the costly, emotionally draining, yet regularly successful process that is IVF (page 18). Until next week...



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Editor: Elaine Prendeville
eprendeville@sbpost.ie

Web: BusinessPost.ie

Books and Arts editor:

Nadine O'Regan

Staff writer:

Sarah Taaffe-Maguire

Chief sub-editor: Maeve

McLoughlin

Designer: Louise Spotten

Picture editor: Bryan Walshe

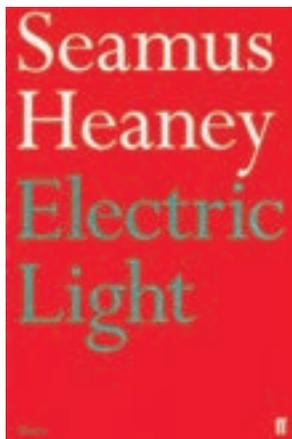
email: bryan@sbpost.ie

Advertising: Lorcan Hanlon

email: lhanlon@sbpost.ie

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Have lunch with Heaney

Every month, the National Library hosts a book club as part of the **Seamus Heaney Listen Now Again** exhibition. The August gathering is this Friday and the book of the moment is *Electric Light*, a collection of poetry by Seamus Heaney, of course. Anybody can show up at the exhibition space at 1pm in the Bank of Ireland Cultural and Heritage Centre, Westmoreland Street for an hour-long informal chat on the work, making it the perfect lunch break. Booking is required on eventbrite.ie.



Head north for homewares and more

Fashion and interiors fans take note: Belfast will gain an exciting new shopping destination this Friday. **Anthropologie** will make its first mark on the island of Ireland, stocking the fashion, accessories, home, beauty and lifestyle products that have earned the retailer a cult following. The store at Erskine House on Arthur Street complements 13 stores in Britain and 200 worldwide, and will make for some interesting pre-festive shopping trips. See anthropologie.com for a flavour.



See a smooth skin operator

Skincare geeks will know the name Olga Kochlewska. The beauty therapist whose Skin by Olga clinic in Dublin's Donnybrook is a go-to for those serious about skin is a regular award-winner and has developed a reputation for bringing the world's best skincare ranges into Ireland. The latest addition is Valmont's Purity range, a collection of luxury hard-working products from the Swiss brand listed in the little black book of every beauty insider. We trialled **Valmont's Fluid Falls** creamy fluid make-up remover and can report silky, smooth, and happier skin from first application. The full Valmont range is exclusively available at Skin by Olga, where a consultation appointment is necessary for first-time visitors. For more see skinbyolga.ie.



HEAR A FRESH VOICE IN THEATRE

A new play by **Lisa Tierney-Keogh**, associate playwright at the Abbey Theatre, begins on Monday week. This *Beautiful Village* tells the story of a piece of racist graffiti in a south Dublin community and follows the response of the local residents' association over the course of a night. It runs till September 14, with tickets available at abbeytheatre.ie from €13.



Catch Christina's gala bash

The **Christina Noble Children's Foundation** is marking 30 years of charity work with a gala ball on Saturday, September 7 in the Intercontinental Hotel. Noble will share stories of the children the foundation has helped through the years, while Des Cahill acts as master of ceremonies and Joe Schmidt appears as special guest speaker. A table for ten costs €2,500 and can be booked by calling 01-6455555.

This week



Thrill to a taste of east Cork

East Cork's food scene comes alive from Sunday next, when the **Feast** festival kicks off a week-long celebration of local food and drink. Based in the market town of Midleton, and branching out to Ballinrostig and Ballycotton, we can't imagine a more alluring destination for a week of special dinners, conversations and learning, all for the love of good food. The opening banquet on Sunday next is a must-attend, while the finale event on Sunday, September 8 will feature contributions from a host of food stars, including Kai's Jess Murphy (*above*). Certain events and workshops require booking, so have a look at feastcork.ie to plan your experience.

Jazz up your Thursday evening

Sit back, and enjoy a glass of wine, live jazz and some of Ireland's finest art at **the Hunt Museum** on the banks of the Shannon with the Summer Jazz event this Thursday. Just call in from 5.30pm to 7.30pm, pay a tenner and get entry to the Lavery and Osborne: Observing Life exhibition and a glass of wine.



Get your art on

With kids back to school soon, one might want to start something new too. **The Hugh Lane** could do the trick with their print-making course for adults. Led by artist Janine Davidson across four Saturdays from 11am to 1pm, participants will learn how to design and make prints inspired by the Hugh Lane collection and focused on nature. It's €100 and can be booked on eventbrite.ie.

Savour a meeting of minds

An historic meeting is reimagined this week as **Matriarchs** receives its Irish premiere at Westport Town Theatre. Written and directed by Grace O'Malley biographer Anne Chambers, the two-act play centres on an encounter that took place between Ireland's pirate queen and England's Elizabeth I over four centuries ago. Chambers says that contemporary issues including female empowerment and gender equality informed the drama: "Grace O'Malley and Queen Elizabeth I shine as inspirational beacons to what women can achieve even in the most demanding environments." *Matriarchs* plays on Friday and Saturday next at 8pm, with tickets priced €20 available at westporttheatre.com.



Enjoy an Italian experience

The RHA looks different than usual, and will remain thus till next Sunday. Inspired by the Puglia region of Italy, designer Róisín Lafferty, chef Killian Crowley and creative director Kev Freeney have transformed the gallery into the multi-sensory experience that is **House of Peroni**. Entry is free and there's no need to book unless you're heading to the dining experience, which is €60 for a six-course tasting menu and can be booked at thehouseofperoni.com.

CULTURE COUNTER



Anna Torv our love for the Australian actress began with investigative journalism drama *Secret City*, and has been taken to a new level with her turn as Dr Wendy Carr in Netflix's captivating *Mindhunter*. The Wendy wardrobe only adds to the appeal

Wensleydale-ay the social media sensation of the week, nay, the year. Reality TV personality Joe Wicks's alternative pronunciation of Wensleydale cheese will never, ever, get old

Socks worn with sandals officially now a fashion thing, for both sexes, if the autumn catwalks are to be believed

Sincere apologies the All Together Now Festival organisers have released a press statement which includes the line: "We are deeply disappointed that some areas of this year's All Together Now fell short of expectations, and for this, we are truly sorry." Come back, we say, all is - almost - forgiven

The V&A London's Victoria & Albert museum is set to be immortalised in documentary form. *Secrets of the Museum*, a six-part series, will air on BBC Two early next year



Hair scrubs from the Body Shop to Goop, beauty purveyors are encouraging us to scrub our scalps as we would our skin. There are simply not enough hours in the week

The high life William and Kate won favour as they stepped off a budget FlyBe flight this week - while Harry and Meghan recovered from their fourth recent trip by private jet

A Screen-shaped absence it doesn't matter how many times we pass it, the gaping hole where the Screen cinema once stood (on the corner of Dublin's Hawkins Street) always hurts the heart a little



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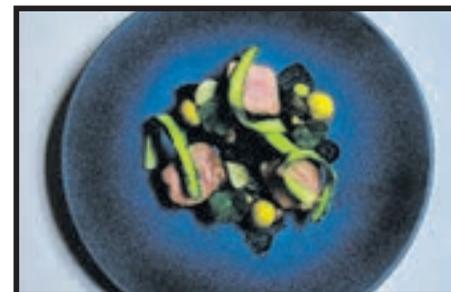
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The world. Within reach.

More and more of us are expected to be available to our employers outside work hours, for no extra pay. We're reluctant to ignore the calls and emails, even on holiday, for fear of undermining our careers. It's a problem that requires government action

Nadine O'Regan



I had a boss once who had a habit of calling me when I was in the changing room of a shop. Not his fault, I hasten to add. How was he supposed to know I'd decided to try on something too expensive and entirely needless as part of my relaxing day off? But there I'd be, a leg half in-and-out of something, or my face poking through the collar of a dress, and he'd be on the phone with a work question. It was always a Saturday afternoon. And I always picked up. It was lucky we got on, and he was being actively helpful in preventing me from frittering away my salary, because otherwise I might have been a bit miffed.

Welcome to work 2019-style, where there is a silent pressure to be available to employers, even when you know that their query is not urgent and you are definitely not supposed to be at work. I have a friend who decided to leave her job after she got a number of work calls while she was in a hospice waiting for her father to die. Another friend's walk-out moment came in a job when she discovered she was expected to be on call from 8am, on Saturdays, every weekend, even though she didn't actually work weekends and had small kids.

One of my friends has a firm rule on the matter: she considers availability in non-work hours to be about pay-grades. If you're on a high pay-grade, she insists, well, you take that call. Otherwise you should joyfully avoid your phone. Because their problem is just not your problem. Or is it? You could call us Generation Unsure Of How We're Supposed to Behave. Because often we don't mind those after-hours calls and emails: hey, we're professionals! And sometimes – usually when we're stressed and in need of the gift of gin over spreadsheets – we really do get upset.

As they say in *The Devil Wears Prada*, when you're on the verge of a nervous breakdown, that's when you know it's time for a promotion.

I used to think the after-hours-on-call question was a dilemma only pertinent to those in positions where late hours were expected:

the media and entertainment industries are good examples. But actually, thanks to the popularity of the smartphone, these days everyone in active employment is battling the drift of work affairs into personal time. It's all-encompassing, and it's as likely to affect office management as it is minions. Everyone is accountable to someone, after all.

And it's not just phone calls that are at issue: there are also the work texts, WhatsApps, emails and sometimes Twitter DMs. If you're

work hours. In doing so, they are following the French model, introduced in 2017, which ensured that workers have a right to disconnect. Minister for Business Heather Humphreys noted that, with the “increasing digitisation of the workforce”, it was important to create “clearly defined guidelines” around work.

She's right, but I wish someone in power had said it sooner – and maybe also shouted ‘stop’ to those in charge at Google HQ years ago, when they installed pool tables in their offices, and

beer bottles in their fridges. Blurring the lines between what is work and what is play has created a dangerous confusion in offices that has often advantaged employers, who get more productivity for less pay, and fostered anxiety and burn-out in employees, who don't know when to leave work or turn off their phones.

Look at those companies that operate unlimited vacation policies – usually American companies, by the way. While it can be successful in some instances, it can also create a situation where employees become weirdly competitive with each other about how few holidays they're capable of taking.

Who's going to get that promotion? Maybe, newcomers think, the employee who takes the least time off.

It's no wonder, then, that most of us feel reluctant to ignore a work email sent to us on a day off. Flicking through work emails while on a sun lounger in Majorca, plenty of holidaying employees would say they'd prefer to feel valued by receiving too many phone calls from the office than undermined by not receiving any at all. The metamorphosis in the wider work model from our job-for-life tradition to the contract-orientated gig economy is only accelerating the sense of panic.

In this context, I don't think it's a nanny state notion to assert that the Irish government needs to take back some control. Rules are a good idea – because even if they're never fully enacted or embraced, they remind people at all levels that there are standards, and they should abide by them. ■

@nadineoregan



Meryl Streep's staff were always at her beck and call in *The Devil Wears Prada*

SHUTTERSTOCK



The metamorphosis in the wider work model from our job-for-life tradition to the contract-orientated gig economy is only accelerating the sense of panic

really unlucky, it's the video call, which really is off-putting when you're having your Sunday brunch.

The Irish government has said in recent weeks that it will consider introducing legislation which will ensure that workers have the right to switch off, and can legally have clearance to avoid work-related emails outside



Paloma dress



Lara dress,
Gabriella
coat,
Cassandra
corsage

‘Buy less and BUY BETTER’

Louise Kennedy’s new season is all about the long game, with pieces designed to last for years, writes **Elaine Prendeville**

‘**W**e think the Gabriella coat is the perfect investment,’ says designer Louise Kennedy. ‘It’s a coat you will have for years, to carefully button over a formal dress or to throw on over jeans.’

A new season at Louise Kennedy will always pique interest, and this autumn/winter is testament to the power of forward-thinking. Every element of the Louise Kennedy design process is considered, from travelling the world to source exceptional fabrics, to cutting for style-meets-comfort equilibrium, to finding the ideal location in which to shoot the new season, on this occasion the Ballyfin demesne in Co Laois. ‘We have a love affair with Ballyfin,’ says Kennedy. ‘With its magnificent grounds, manicured gardens and honey-stone facade.’

Star pieces include the aforementioned Gabriella coat, a slim fit of black and white tweed; the Zola dress, worn above right with the Cassandra corsage, and the Paloma dress, pictured above, in a delicate French polka tulle that builds on the

overwhelming success of Kennedy’s tulle-driven collection for spring/summer. Colour ranges from a striking emerald, to classic black and white, and there’s also a pleasing hit of brightly-coloured tweed.

Behind the silhouettes is a sustainability story, one the designer is keen to relate. ‘We are not a fast fashion operation,’ she says, ‘so our energy consumption is low. While we do fly and ship garments around Europe, with only two collections each year, our carbon footprint is low relative to other fashion brands.’

Ultimately, Kennedy says, her label has always been about the long game. ‘We have discerning clients who appreciate the longevity of the clothes they buy,’ she says. ‘We encourage alterations, mending and the proper care of clothing, so it lasts. You will never find end-of-season Louise Kennedy clothing on a bonfire.’

‘Our eternal message, season after season,’ Kennedy concludes, ‘is to buy less and buy better.’ ■

Louise Kennedy is at 56 Merrion Square, Dublin 2; Brown Thomas Dublin; 9 West Halkin Street in London; or at louisekennedy.com.



Tyler jacket,
Natalya
trousers,
Bobbi
blouse,
Cassandra
corsage



Zola dress,
Cassandra
corsage



Aisha
sweater,
Paddy skirt



Tatiana
dress



Justine
dress,
Cassandra
corsage

‘The kids working here in the restaurant, I always make sure they’re okay. I think: “This could be my daughter or son.” You don’t get over it. Even now, you don’t’

An intensely personal motivation lies behind L’Ecrivain owner Derry Clarke’s upcoming appearance at the Banquet segment of this year’s Electric Picnic, writes **Nadine O’Regan**

Derry Clarke doesn’t want to hear the word “avocado”. The L’Ecrivain owner and chef doesn’t quite put his head in his hands when the word is mentioned – at 11am, it’s too early for dramatics: he’s a man of late hours rather than mid-mornings. But he does groan at the foodie buzz term.

“These food trends are usually about one ingredient,” he says. “I remember eating avocados in the 1970s. Then there was the kiwi fad. Then kale. The fad now is veganism. Then there’s the food intolerances. They are a fucking nightmare.”

A word to the wise: don’t start Clarke on people with food intolerances. “Yesterday, a table with allergies fucked up the whole day,” he says. “There are so many dockets coming in that the whole kitchen is getting into knots. There are seven or eight a night, at least.

“Anyone going to a restaurant with an intolerance should know that you’re causing problems for people who have genuine allergies. The real person [risks] being overlooked, because the chef is like: ‘Oh, there’s another one’.”

Listening to Clarke, you can’t help but smile at his candour, which is as appealing as it is disarming. He’s old-school. Not for him a careful tap-dance around conversational landmines.

He’s direct and to the point with his answers; he seats me at a table just inside the door of his famous restaurant off Baggot Street in Dublin 2, gets me sorted with a latte, keeps an eye on the time, and peppers occasionally too-honest remarks with queries along

the lines of “You’re not going to hang me out to dry with that, are you?”

He has the air of a man who gets things done, presumably because he is actually a man who gets things done.

This summer marks 30 years since L’Ecrivain opened in the capital city. The Michelin-starred restaurant has survived and prospered in part because of its excellence and commitment to food, but also because of the personalities at the head table: Clarke and his equally dynamic wife and restaurant co-owner Sallyanne, who takes care of front-of-house duties.

Both are consummate media professionals. In addition to his work at L’Ecrivain, Clarke has published a number of cookbooks. He appears regularly on television and radio, and takes part in many charity endeavours: today, we’re here to talk about his work at Electric Picnic’s Banquet, which benefits Pieta House and Temple Street Foundation.

The couple have been through high times and very dark times together – it’s impossible to think of Clarke and his wife without also recalling their toughest days, when they lost their son in tragic circumstances in 2012. But they persevere. And, at a time when many restaurants are closing their doors in Dublin, they endure.

At 61, Clarke looks well today, wearing a light blue shirt that catches the hue of his eyes, with just a hint of belly and a slightly sharkish look. He had a heart bypass five years ago, and has to be careful of himself.

“The last thing I need is stress,” he says. “I don’t know why we do it.”

Clarke was always a food obsessive. Born in Dublin, his first job was at Man Friday’s in Kinsale where he washed dishes under the eye of French chef Xavier Poupel. Returning to the capital, he worked in hotels and restaurants including Le Coq Hardi, before realising his dream in 1989 of opening his own restaurant, when L’Ecrivain was launched in a small basement on Fitzwilliam Street.

Looking back, Clarke recalls the time with a certain nostalgia. “We were in a pre-IT age,” he says. “We were pre-social media. Everything was by post. Now you see families all on their phones at a table – kids and everything. They’re not talking. Technology is taking over our lives.”

The clientele was also from another era: an era of long lunches, cigar-smoking and business affairs conducted often on the golf course. “It was more male-orientated,” Clarke nods. “It was the old-type businesses: banking, advertising, PR, printing companies. Lunches were bigger than dinner. People had longer lunches. Then a crowd would go to the pub.”

Celebrities were also known to frequent L’Ecrivain with great regularity – and without any fear that their conversations could be recorded for social media.

The last time *The Sunday Business Post* encountered Clarke, it was 2008 and our interview was interrupted by the late Gerry Ryan, who was exiting the restaurant in an amusing fit of expostulations. Ryan was furious, he announced to the table, because RTÉ had recently had the temerity to suggest that he not take his bonus next year because it might be embarrassing in the context of the recession. “Embarrassing?” Ryan roared, pointing a finger at





his own chest, his feet spread wide apart. “I’ll put it on a T-shirt!”

Thinking back, Clarke finds it hard to believe that a character so colourful could have existed before the microphones of the national broadcaster. “The things he’d say on radio at ten on a weekday morning,” he says. “It was amazing how he got away with it. Gerry was a great customer and he became a good friend. He was a very complex guy, a lovely guy. He was one of the best radio guys we ever had.”

The new age of the internet has exposed all celebrities to greater scrutiny, and all restaurants too. “Everyone is there to critique,” Clarke says. “It’s very stressful. People complain, and there’s someone at the end of that complaint who is going to feel it. Expectations are higher. I think people think they know more about food than they do – there’s more bluffing and more googling – you just know it, when people are googling.”

A typical L’Ecrivain menu is simple and classic, with an emphasis on seasonal choices. “I wouldn’t say our food is elaborate,” Clarke says. “I think it’s technical. I think it’s fresh.”

Speaking of keeping things fresh, that’s one of the reasons Clarke will deliver his banquet in collaboration with the rapidly rising Irish chef Mark Moriarty of the Greenhouse restaurant at Electric Picnic next weekend, partnering with Tesco Finest, which supplies the food.

“It’ll be fun to have the older guy and the younger guy together,” Clarke says. The 27-year-old Moriarty agrees. “I did my work experience in L’Ecrivain with Derry when I was 15 years old,” he tells *The Sunday*

Derry Clarke: ‘I wouldn’t say our food is elaborate. I think it’s technical. I think it’s fresh’
FERGAL PHILLIPS

Business Post Magazine over the phone. “I still have a signed book from him. He doesn’t remember me, but I remember him.”

Guests will have a silver service dining experience, with a menu that includes Irish smoked salmon, baked orzo with chilli prawn and fennel to start; and West Cork dry-aged ribeye beef or vegetarian soy-glazed portobello mushroom as mains.

Proceeds from the Banquet go to Temple Street Foundation and Pieta House, which provides specialised treatment for people who are experiencing suicidal ideation. It is a cause that is close to Clarke’s heart. His son Andrew died at the age of just 16, in the final days of 2012. He was found unconscious, having seemingly attempted suicide, in the family home in south County Dublin, with traces of cocaine and benzodiazepines in his system. He passed away days after his admission to hospital.

In the aftermath, Clarke became an ambassador for the helpline service Teen-Line Ireland, and he and Sallyanne spoke very movingly on *The Late Late Show* about how they were coping in the wake of his death.

“That’s why I do things like the Banquet,” Clarke says. “I’m conscious of people’s feelings. The kids working here [in the restaurant], I always make sure they’re okay. I think: ‘This could be my daughter or son.’ You don’t get over it. Even now, you don’t. There are times where I have shit days. I actually thought we’d have to give up the restaurant. I wanted to get out of it. I thought we’d go travelling.”

The couple didn’t go travelling, but the family did change. “Our daughter is a different girl, and Sallyanne is a different woman,” Clarke says. “One thing:

I don’t really care about what people think. Most of what we live with in this country are First World problems. Unless you’re really ill or homeless – being stuck in traffic, being delayed on a flight, who cares?”

At moments in this interview, Clarke speaks wistfully about giving it all up and buying a small restaurant by the sea with a menu of just five items. But you suspect that’s more of a pipe-dream than a genuine plan.

L’Ecrivain is their world, and so it makes sense that an understated memorial to their son sits in the corner by our table: a fibreglass egg on a raised dais made to resemble a helmet, above a picture of Andrew, who loved motor racing. Rather than keep the egg at their home in Brittas, the family elected to have it in the restaurant – maybe because it’s home to them too.

As Clarke finishes up his latte, he talks about how he intends to spend his free time at Electric Picnic. He’s going to swing by Kinara’s stall for some delicious biryani; he’ll pop by the Salty Dog stage and the Jerry Fish tent (“He’s a great character: when I get younger, I want to be like him”). And maybe, in the quiet times, he’ll think about his son and feel glad that he’s cooking for the Banquet, because it helps. ■

Tickets to the Fine Dining Picnic Banquet are priced at €120 and are available via giv2go.com/thebanquet2019. There are four sittings over the weekend, two on Saturday and Sunday at 1pm and 5.30pm, with each sitting lasting approximately two hours. An Electric Picnic ticket is required to gain entry





THE PETER PRINCIPLE

Peter O'Mahony in action against Italy in the Six Nations in Rome last February GETTY

Main picture: GERRY BALFE SMYTH

Peter O'Mahony isn't even thinking about the Rugby World Cup yet. The Irish rugby star is concentrating on the warm-up matches and refuses to take anything for granted until he is sure he will be selected for the squad. **David Robbins** meets the man who, barring injury, will most definitely be on the plane to Japan in September

There is a no-nonsense quality to Peter O'Mahony. Maybe it's a Munster thing, maybe it's a Cork thing, or maybe it's a Peter O'Mahony thing, but the Ireland rugby star just gets on with it. Doesn't over-think things, doesn't digress, doesn't muse or speculate. It can seem like impatience, but maybe it's more like an intense focus on specifics.

Take rugby. There's a big debate at the moment about how to change the game so that the team with the biggest players doesn't always win. The governing body, World Rugby, is looking at ways to de-power the game.

New rules are being trialled, amid concern for the injuries caused by huge men colliding with each other. As a player who has undergone shoulder reconstruction surgery, and someone who often tries to poach the ball on the ground, O'Mahony might have ideas on what rules need to be changed?

No. He just gets on with what's in front of him. "I don't spend a huge amount of time worried about that myself," he says. "The game is moving so fast for me at the moment and changing all the time that I don't have time to think of what rule changes are coming down the line."

"Certainly, when they're implemented, you go through a process and they take players' opinions into account. Players' associations have meetings and that kind of thing, but there's too much going on at the moment for me to be worried about that kind of stuff." ➤

O'Mahony plays mostly at No 6, at blindside wing forward. Part of his job is to latch onto a tackled opposition player and try to wrestle the ball from him. To do that, he adopts the "jackal" position, legs wide, bent at the waist, head and arms low to the ground.

It's a vulnerable place to be, as the other team try to shift you by any means possible. Paul O'Connell suffered his career-ending injury while "jackalling" at the last World Cup, and Leinster's Dan Leavy suffered an horrendous injury trying the same thing. So maybe a tweak to the rules might help protect players.

"If you look at a lot of individual moments, areas in games that probably look quite dangerous," says O'Mahony, "but you know, there's lots of guys are 15, 20 years at this now. They've got to this time, this age and are quite experienced. For me, it's part of my game. It's quite an important part. That's what I consider it. I hope they take a lot of things into consideration before making any rash decisions on areas of the game like that."

Ready for the now

O'Mahony's relentless focus on the immediate is even more evident when we talk about the Rugby World Cup. Unlike other team-mates, he will not allow himself to think about the pool in which Ireland have been drawn, alongside Scotland, host nation Japan, Russia and Samoa. He won't even speculate about going to Japan, because he doesn't want to take it for granted that he will be selected.

He will turn 30 in the course of the tournament, but hasn't any plans to celebrate, doesn't even know what day of the week his birthday falls on, and won't allow his family to make plans to come and support him or celebrate with him – until he has been selected. The most he will say is: "Hopefully I'll be over there, yeah."

Japan is not immediate. It's not the next thing. It's the thing after the next thing. The next thing is the series of warm-up matches organised to prepare Ireland for their pool games in the World Cup. When we meet, Ireland have just played the first of these (a win against Italy), and the second is a week or so away (against England at Twickenham). Home and away games against Wales come later.

"To be honest, we haven't [thought about the pool stages]," he says. "You know, the management are obviously doing a huge amount of planning and processing and that kind of thing for when we get over there, but you know, these 45 guys [in the Ireland squad] have gone to 43. That's still a huge number of guys: 43 into 31 [the number who will travel to Japan]. You do the maths."

"Guys are training hard to put their best foot forward over the next couple of weeks for selection and you can't really be looking down the line to what way the pool is setting up. You've got to be firmly focused on England over the next fortnight and that's firmly all the players are going to have their eyes on."

Barring serious injury, O'Mahony will be on the plane to Japan. He has been a talisman for the Ireland team for several seasons, captaining the side in the historic series win in Australia last summer, and getting the man of the match award in the famous win over New Zealand in Dublin last November.

Pitch of intensity

That focus becomes even more intense on the pitch. Again, it's all about whatever needs to be done next: a tackle, a line-out lift, a carry or a steal on the ground. Take a moment in that game against New Zealand. Ireland were leading, but only just. The All Blacks were attacking, and put through a grubber kick near Ireland's line.

They had scored off a similar move against Ireland before. The ball bounces up. If the NZ winger takes it, a try is certain. But the ball is snatched from his hands by O'Mahony. It's a turning point in the match, but that's not how O'Mahony sees it. "At the time, it's just that you see a guy's foot go on a ball. You either try to get in his kick space or you turn around and work as hard as you can to get back. I think the ball sat up nicely for me, to be honest. And it was important to come back, certainly, but at the



Rising star: Peter O'Mahony wins a lineout against France in the Six Nations in Dublin earlier this year

SPORTSFILE/GETTY

time it's . . . that's your instinct if the ball is kind of behind, you try and get back there."

No bigger picture. No theorising. No contextualising. Just do the next thing, relentlessly. O'Mahony's intensity on the pitch is obvious. He has "the stare", just like Paul O'Connell did. He finds it difficult to do post-match interviews, because the intensity takes a while to dissipate.

There's a famous YouTube clip of former Leinster player Reggie Corrigan interviewing him pitchside after Munster lost to Leinster. Corrigan suggests Munster didn't have enough intensity in their play. He receives "the stare", and O'Mahony just walks away at the end.

"I find them particularly hard when you're on-field, on the pitch, after a game because you're in a different state," he says. "You're in . . . your heart rate can still be at an incredibly high level. And sometimes, it isn't the best time to catch me. Particularly when we've lost. So I find it difficult at times, certainly, yeah."

Getting to that pitch of intensity for a match takes effort. He describes it as a layer he adds to the drills and moves he practises in the week before the game. He taps into his pride as a Corkman, a Munsterman, an Irishman and a family man. His natural competitiveness adds another element ("I'm hugely competitive in everything I do," he says).

"You can't be in that state of mind for long periods. It's quite exhausting. You certainly build your way into it. Later in the week, it's the time you can't just . . . it's not just a switch. At times . . . majority of times, it's not a switch. It's a conscious effort that you get to that point. And a huge amount of it comes down to having our training and our basics down. That will be there. It's the building, and later in the week is where that comes from."

Heroes from home

O'Mahony doesn't like giving hostages to fortune. He doesn't take selection for granted. He doesn't admit any weaknesses. He doesn't give his regard away cheaply. His heroes are all Cork, and if there isn't a Cork one available, they're Munster, or Ireland. When asked if there was an opponent he admired or respected, he speaks only about Munster and Ireland.

"Munster and Ireland were the teams that I used to follow hugely. Axel [Anthony Foley] was definitely one [I respected]. Guys like Paulie [Paul O'Connell], I was lucky enough to spend a lot of time with afterwards. You know, that Munster team: Quinny [Alan Quinlan], David Wallace, Micko [Mick O'Driscoll]. Donncha O'Callaghan would've been in Con [Cork Constitution].

"Guys that you would have had access to even as





Above: O'Mahony walks out for an Ireland training session at Thomond Park in Limerick

SPORTSFILE/GETTY



Left: O'Mahony rallies his teammates after their Guinness Pro 14 semi-final defeat by Leinster at the RDS in Dublin last May

SPORTSFILE/GETTY

Peter O'Mahony's favourite things

Restaurant: Butcher's Grill, Ranelagh, Dublin 6

Holiday destination: Vancouver, Canada. "I haven't been. It's on the list."

Book/author: "I read a lot, but don't have one favourite. I'm reading a lot of gardening books at the moment."

Music: Dire Straits



O'Mahony with his children Indie and Theo: 'Life moves on very quickly for them, and they seem to pull you along with them' SPORTSFILE/GETTY

Family man

There is a softer side to Peter O'Mahony, which emerges when he talks about his family and his home life. He says that being a father (to toddler Indie and baby Theo) has changed the way he feels about rugby.

"I think being a dad certainly gives you better perspective on lots of things," he says. "Better perspective on losing. I probably would've been a bit more of an irrational loser before I had kids. You know, I would've been not in a great mood for quite a while after a game we lost.

"Whereas, nowadays, you can come home after a game, the kids are there and they don't care whether you've won or lost or drawn a game. They

want to have the craic, or have you read them stories, or be out the back. Life moves on very quickly for them. And they seem to pull you along with them. And it's very refreshing."

O'Mahony is engaged to Cork solicitor Jessica Moloney. They became engaged in Dubai after the Six Nations last year. Jessica works as an employment law specialist at the family law firm GJ Moloney in Cork.

Jessica has a nice line in humour on Instagram. She and O'Mahony had been together for some years before the engagement. When he popped the question, she posted: "And I was beginning to think that knee didn't bend . . ."

a young boy. You know, training at Con. There was a huge amount of that Con team would've gone on to play for Munster. And we looked up to all them hugely and lucky enough to kind of cross paths with. Going from being a big fan to getting to train and play with them, I was lucky in that respect."

So no David Campese, no Serge Blanco, no Richie McCaw?

"We produce world-class athletes in our field. Why look any further than what we have?"

O'Mahony is a natural leader. He has captained every team he's played on, all the way up through the various age grades up to the Ireland team and the British and Irish Lions. He has even spoken to business executives about leadership. Captaincy is something he enjoys, apart from the media duties that come along with it.

"I do enjoy it, yeah. I enjoy being involved in decision-making processes and the general running of the team and the club. I enjoy that aspect to it. Above all, it's a huge honour to captain teams like Munster and Ireland," he says.

"The difficult things? There are days when the media side is difficult. It's become more and more difficult, certainly. Then, you want to take pressure off other guys, which can be difficult at times. There's some guys need minding. It can be difficult. But I would say 99 per cent of it is enjoyable, to be honest. And I get a great kick out of it."

At the end of our interview – one which O'Mahony gave as part of his new role as brand ambassador for Marks & Spencer – he steps away quickly, glad to be finished a day of media obligations. In Japan in four weeks' time, he will do all his talking on the pitch. ■

Peter O'Mahony has been announced as Marks & Spencer's first Irish sports ambassador. Marks & Spencer is delighted to extend the Munster Community programme sponsorship to 2021, underpinning the brand's commitment to community-based initiatives in Ireland.

“There are days when the media side of things is difficult. You want to take pressure off other guys, which can be hard at times



Parklets have sprung up on Dublin streets as part of the the DCC Beta project; right: the People's Parklet, Douglas Street, Cork

THE SPACE IS THE PLACE

With nightlife venues closing as fast as new hotels spring up, a sense that public spaces are under attack has taken hold. The fightback is manifesting itself in ventures such as the new People's Parklet in Cork, writes **Sarah Taaffe-Maguire**

An older gentleman walking past stopped to say: 'It would just make you smile, wouldn't it?' Out of the whole project that's probably been one of the most rewarding parts." Siobhán Keogh is recalling the reaction to the parklet she designed.

Last month, the People's Parklet popped up on Douglas Street in Cork. The concept of a parklet may be new to some, but it has been popular in North American cities for some time. Keogh's wooden design is Ireland's first long-term, purpose-built space for people to sit, relax, park bikes, enjoy flowers and have a chat. It takes up two car parking spaces in front of Cork's Flower Studios, but can be taken down and moved somewhere else.

The Parklet is a collaboration of five different Cork groups. The idea behind it was to encourage people to interact with one another in a public space and, in doing so, foster a sense of community. But Cork isn't the only place where people are trying to make public space feel more inclusive.

The trend makes sense. Hotels keep opening and late-night venues keep closing. Parnell Square Cultural Quarter in Dublin won't be going ahead any time soon. The poorest parts of our cities have the least greenery. And that's not mentioning the elephant in the room – a homelessness and housing crisis that shows no sign of solution. There's an awareness that our cities aren't built with inhabitants as the priority,

that we have space and it's technically public, but that doesn't mean the public get to enjoy it or have a stake in it.

So groups have sprung up to do something about it. People want to reclaim public space, and they're doing it in numbers with creativity and community involvement. Irish Pedestrian Network and the Dublin Commuter Coalition have set up impromptu, unauthorised barriers to block off streets from cars.

The people behind the initiative A Playful City have built temporary structures for people to chill out on, like a big zig-zag at Spencer Dock and, with authorisation, have closed off streets purely for play.

Even city councils are showing enthusiasm. The People's Parklet was created thanks to Cork City Council's placemaking fund, set up to encourage projects that enhance people's enjoyment of the city. And who can forget the trial pedestrianisation of College Green, with its barriers and rule lists? Not an initial success in the eyes of many, but by the second and third trial days, the situation improved drastically in response to public scorn.

Good ideas

College Green pedestrianisation isn't the only idea Dublin City Council (DCC) is trialling. In fact, there's a whole full-time project for trialling projects – DCC Beta.

Two years ago, coordinating DCC Beta became Shane Waring's full-time job after a career break when he set up GoCar. He perceived a challenge in

the implementation of new ideas in City Council projects because they hadn't been tested, and that there wasn't an outlet for public suggestions to be given a shot. Now, if someone has an idea, all they need to do is go to dccbeta.ie/suggest to send in their brainwave.

Many DCC Beta submissions are similar, so they're grouped together and prioritised every three months. It's a straightforward idea, Waring says. "We take an idea that somebody has, quickly test it and get it up and running as fast as possible if it is viable."

Once an idea is selected, Waring and a team from DCC get cracking. "The first stage is exploring if this a good idea at all. And if we find it seems to be good,



Streets are being temporarily opened up to people



A Playful Street in Cherry Orchard in Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

then the second stage is saying: 'Okay, how are we going to do it? How can we get funding? Who's going to run it? What's the best way of delivering it as a service?' And then the third stage is a local debate, so locals can have input."

Aside from College Green being pedestrianised, eagle-eyed Dublin rambblers may have noticed signs blocking off other city centre roads. "There was a whole pile of ideas about opening up streets to people," Waring says. The response was Open Streets, a project designed to investigate how closing off certain streets would work.

Parklets were trialled in Dublin as part of DCC Beta, too. The trial went well, and so it has moved



The Open Streets project in Temple Bar

on to the second stage. Says Waring: "We're thinking we could make some sort of light and easy parklet available for businesses, and maybe for €50 they could try it for two weeks outside their businesses and get a feel for it."

Waring is hugely positive about the DCC Beta programme. "I'm always overwhelmed with how many suggestions come in and we always get really, really great feedback," he says. "I'm blown away by how positive it is. It's very rewarding."

He says he has noticed the conversation around our public spaces getting louder as our cities expand in size. "As we move back to urban living, the streets and those public spaces become more and more important to us again . . . there's a growing debate about what's the best way to use public space."

Cities for all

Someone keen to have that debate is Neasa Ní Bhriain, a lecturer in law, an urban studies lecturer and creative director of A Playful City. "We need to consider how people would use a space instead of just thinking of business and industry," she says. "If you design a city just for commerce, people won't want to come if all they're needed for is to spend money."

A Playful City came, in part, from looking around and noticing who was frequenting Dublin city, Ni Bhriain says. "We were wondering: where are the children gone? Where are the old people gone? Where are the families? Why are they not in the city? We realise that a big part of that is because they're being designed out of cities."

Plenty of people told Ni Bhriain that their parents didn't go into the city any more as there was nowhere to sit down, or that they didn't bring their kids as there was nothing inviting them. She set out to change that through A Playful City. It's about creating cities that are enjoyable for all, that are intergenerational and designed with citizens in mind. Or as Ni Bhriain puts it, "playfulness to us is not about ball games and stuff like that, it's about not working – what you do in your off time".

Most recently, the Playful City project has seen selected streets close nationwide so kids can come out and play games from days of yore, and older residents can show them how it's done. The road you live on might just be the best place to get started.

"If we're trying to start creating public spaces that are intergenerational, the easiest, lowest-budget way to do that is to help people look at the street outside their homes as places that they should be using – not places just for cars", Ni Bhriain says. "Older people show kids the games they played, but also in some communities where older people feel isolated from their neighbours, they may look at the teenagers in the area as a threat. Now, all of a sudden, you have them all in the streets together and it breaks down barriers."

A little consideration of the potential of public spaces can go some distance, says Ni Bhriain. "We all get this fever once you realise that public space is public, it's ours. You can't really shake it and you want to do something."

Not everyone is fully on board with this idea yet, however. While the parklet is loved, it wasn't always enthusiastically embraced, Keogh says. "People were afraid that it was going to be massively vandalised, or taken apart, or there was going to be an insurance claim: everybody's afraid that someone's going to trip over and sue us."

It was a roadblock, but not an insurmountable one, Keogh feels. "If everybody's involved and feels they have a say and some kind of ownership over their bit of public space, then it's much less likely to be vandalised, or to have compo claims."

The necessity of public consultation and community involvement is echoed by Ni Bhriain. After all, it's hardly reclaiming public space if a project is something locals don't want. Separately, there's the problem of people feeling they've no say in what's built around them, she says. "One thing that's really missing in Ireland is actually engaging people in the planning process."

She understands why people wouldn't bother responding to a planning permission notice. "It's



Above and below: A Playful City floating area and the zig-zag at Spencer Dock in Dublin 1



boring, it's a sign being put up and it's legal-speak."

With space reclaiming reaching fever pitch, who knows what else could be imagined with citizens in mind. ■

To set up a Playful Street in your area, see changex.org/ie/playful-street

Upcoming events

Park(ing) Day takes place every year on the third Friday of September, this year September 20. But it's not what you might imagine. Across the world, car parking spaces will be given a reimagining and become mini-parks, or just places to sit. Take up a parking space yourself, or get in touch with the folks at dublinparkingday.org.

Bike hangars are in the process of being permanently introduced across Dublin city after a successful trialling process with DCC Beta. What look like mini bunkers are actually safe places to store your ride. Fancy one outside your house or place of work? Register your interest at bikebunkers.ie and you might just have one by Christmas.

While the future of the **Douglas Street parklet** is uncertain, there are some ideas for where it can go next. Aside from the option to have it brighten another Cork city street, it might make an appearance at Bloom next year. Keep your eyes peeled.

For more frequent updates on the parklet, see [instagram.com/thepeoplesparkletcork](https://www.instagram.com/thepeoplesparkletcork)

The LONGEST *shortest* TIME

The IVF process is emotionally intense, physically draining and astonishingly expensive. But advanced medical knowledge and pioneering lab techniques are making the ‘take-home baby rate’ for women and couples better than ever, writes **Danielle Barron**

Around 250 babies are born every minute around the world, and a growing proportion of these will have started life in a petri dish. Almost nine million babies worldwide have now been born thanks to in-vitro fertilisation, or IVF, and advances in medical knowledge as well as increasingly sophisticated laboratory techniques mean the assisted reproduction baby boom is set to continue.

The fertility industry has been the answer to millions of couples’ prayers but, not surprisingly, it has its detractors. IVF is big business, and fears persist that the market model of assisted human reproduction can muddy the waters when it comes to treatment options and decisions.

Criticisms levelled at fertility clinics include a tendency to encourage couples to jump straight

into IVF, or the offering of additional investigations and procedures that aren’t medically necessary and may not increase your chances of success.

Professor Mary Wingfield is a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at the National Maternity Hospital at Holles Street in Dublin, and clinical director of the not-for-profit Merrion Fertility Clinic. She stresses that, first and foremost, the goal should be to optimise a couple’s chances of conceiving naturally. “Undoubtedly, IVF is the best fertility treatment we have, but nature is better than IVF, so if someone can get pregnant naturally then that is much better,” she says.

“We don’t advocate rushing straight into IVF, but sometimes, particularly if the woman is a bit older, that is the only logical way to go, as they might miss the boat. That can be a difficult balance with patients’ feelings, as sometimes someone will walk into the clinic, and perhaps the man has a very ►





Fertility treatment is the lowest of the low. A man will sometimes make it to the top of my list, and we can get the ball rolling, but in general they are forced into the private system

Helen Browne of the National Infertility Support and Information Group: 'I felt my feelings were worse than grief'

JOHN ALLEN

low sperm count, and straight away you know they are going to need IVF," she says, adding that couples can be "taken aback".

For a pregnancy to occur, four things must be in order, says Wingfield; the woman must be ovulating, the man must have sperm, they need to be having sex so the egg and the sperm can meet, and the woman's pelvis must be normal.

Point three is more of a problem than you might think. Wingfield says that a small but significant number of couples have problems with sex, and can benefit "hugely" from sex therapy.

If a woman has pelvic pathology – essentially, damaged fallopian tubes – the fertilised egg can't travel back up towards the uterus. According to the Endometriosis Association of Ireland, up to 50 per cent of women with infertility have endometriosis. This condition, where the endometrial tissue that normally lines the womb also occurs outside it, can cause cysts on women's ovaries or adhesions in their pelvis. Adhesions or scarring in their pelvis from a previous infection such as chlamydia or from surgery can also be a major factor in infertility. In these instances, surgery is the first and often best option, says Wingfield.

"In younger women we would recommend surgery first, but not very radical surgery, and you have to be careful that you don't damage the ovaries," she says, adding that it should be carried out by a specialist surgeon. "This is an important part of our work in terms of treating fertility."

But when all else fails, IVF is the only option. The good news is that there have been a number of incremental improvements in IVF over the years, which has seen the "take-home baby rate" soar from 10 per cent to 30 per cent on average, says Wingfield.

"It's much better than it used to be. If the woman is under 35, then with one treatment it is 50 per cent – you can compare that to couples with peak fertility who will only get pregnant every third time they try."

To get pregnant naturally, around 15 million healthy sperm are needed, but for IVF you need about 100,000. Of course, just one sperm and one egg make a baby, but understandably with an IVF cycle they like to maximise your chances.

For more common causes of poor sperm production and motility (the movement and swimming of the sperm), urologists have a range of strategies and interventions that can help improve sperm quantity and quality.

Supplementation can help, as can hormonal medication. Surgical intervention, such as sperm retrieval, may also be an option.

All of this is available in the public system, says



Ivor Cullen, a consultant urologist working at University Hospital Waterford. "But the harsh reality is that there are very few urologists trained in male reproduction and with funding constraints, cancer and life-threatening scenarios will always trump men with compromised fertility."

The public waiting list is 5,000, Cullen says. "Fertility treatment is the lowest of the low. Sometimes a man will make it to the top of my list, and we can get the ball rolling, but generally they are forced into the private system. Any man with an abnormal

semen analysis should see a urologist, but historically in Ireland it has been managed by gynaecologists, which makes no sense."

Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), another form of IVF where a single sperm is injected into an egg, has revolutionised the treatment of male factor infertility, but some men will simply have no sperm at all, a condition known as azoospermia. Cullen received special training in groundbreaking urological procedures during his time in Britain and his endeavours to find sperm in men previously thought to be sterile are in serious demand.

A rare condition known as non-obstructive azoospermia can benefit from an operation known as microsurgical testicular sperm extraction (micro-TESE), which can retrieve small numbers of immature sperm. This has been carried out more than 40 times in the past three years by Cullen and his team, in association with fertility providers, and there have been a number of successful pregnancies as a result. "For the right couple, this has been a game-changer."

Whether it's ICSI or standard IVF, the procedure is the same for the couple. Wingfield outlines what a typical IVF cycle involves. "We try to get between ten and 15 eggs, and to achieve this the woman has to go on fertility drugs that she self-injects for ten to 15 days." The eggs are removed vaginally, and on the same day the man produces a sperm sample. The eggs and sperm are placed in culture, and by the following day, it will be obvious which eggs have been fertilised and are on their way to forming embryos. Three to five days later, all proceeding well, an embryo is selected to be put back into the woman's womb. Any extra viable embryos are frozen to be used in the future.

Embryo transfer is a controversial topic within the assisted reproduction field and thinking on the issue has changed dramatically in recent years. Transferring multiple embryos back into the womb may mean a multiple pregnancy, and this is now considered a risk in itself.

"Triplets and quadruplets in particular are very





Claire Moran of the Repromed Clinic in Dundrum: 'The lab is open seven days a week. When people come in on Monday, they don't realise I have been looking after their embryos all weekend'

FERGAL PHILLIPS



Professor Mary Wingfield of the National Maternity Hospital in Holles Street in Dublin

high-risk pregnancies, and even twins carry much higher risk than normal pregnancies," Wingfield says, adding that when success rates were lower, more embryos were put back.

"One of the biggest side effects over the years with IVF were twin pregnancies, and now it's almost regarded as a failure if you get twins. It's much safer, if you've got two embryos, to put one back and freeze the other so you have two children two or three years apart."

Lab scientists may be hidden away in the dark, but they are providing that most critical of services – babysitting your precious embryos. What happens in the lab can make or break the success of an IVF cycle.

Claire Moran is a clinical embryologist and the laboratory manager at Repromed Clinic in Dundrum. "The lab is open seven days a week," says Moran. "When people come in on Monday they don't realise I have been looking after their embryos all weekend."

Embryology is a rapidly developing field, and innovative lab techniques have contributed to the big leap in live birth rates. One of the biggest advances in IVF in the past decade is blastocyst culture, says Moran.

"We used to do our transfers on day two or three when it was still an embryo, but now it is routinely blastocyst transfer on day five. It gives a much better quality embryo because it is at the stage where it is just about to implant."

Blastocyst or embryo freezing techniques have also improved significantly. There's now a growing body of evidence to show that having a frozen embryo transfer, where the embryo from a fresh cycle is frozen, to be implanted at a later date, is optimal.

"A lot of clinics in the US are moving towards a model where they no longer do any fresh transfers – they simply freeze the embryos on day five, let the woman's hormones come back to normal, and then transfer the embryos during her next cycle," says Moran, adding that Repromed has been doing this since the beginning of 2019.

"The thinking behind that is that you can manipulate the lining of the uterus a lot better in a frozen cycle, so now about 50 per cent of them are planned frozen transfers."

The clinic has painstakingly worked on perfecting the timing of embryo transfers, she says. "We are quite picky about when we do it – we check the woman's progesterone levels before we do their egg collection and we do a test called an embryo receptivity assay to determine the receptivity of the uterus, so we know when exactly we should place the embryos in there."

These measures have seen the clinical pregnancy rate – when a foetal heartbeat is detected by ultrasound – rise and rise.

"While the positive pregnancy test rate is about 70 per cent, our clinical pregnancy rate is now 50–55 per cent. This is huge, because even if you look at British or European statistics, that used to be around 25–30 per cent," says Moran.

The availability of time lapse incubation is another development that has had a definite impact. Being able to watch the embryo's development over time can let embryologists in on whether it is developing normally or not, allowing them to make a more informed decision on which embryos to select for transfer.

The ultimate embryo selection is PIGD, or pre-implantation genetic diagnosis. Historically developed as a means to prevent certain genetic diseases or disorders from being passed on, it is slowly becoming routine practice in IVF labs around the world.

"In the US, there are hardly any IVF cycles that happen without it. The technology has come on so much that before you would check for about 28 conditions, but now we can sequence the entire genome of the embryo no problem," Moran says.

Repromed generally only offers the procedure to older patients or those who've had a number of failed cycles, but Moran believes it will soon become de rigueur. "It is invasive on the embryo itself, as you have to take cells directly from it, but I predict in the next few years we will be just doing it on every

embryo," she says. "In years to come, we will think back in amazement to the old days where we just used to transfer embryos without knowing their genetics."

Clinics where PIGD is routine practice would claim a 70 per cent live birth rate, but Moran says that it isn't routinely carried out enough in Britain or Ireland yet to obtain proper data.

Once the lab's work is done, the couple are once again dependent on mother nature. The notorious "two-week wait" to see if an embryo has implanted into the womb's lining is typically tense.

"That's usually a very difficult time for couples," says Wingfield.

If it works – hallelujah. If it doesn't, what next? If the first cycle isn't successful, couples with spare healthy frozen embryos can try another transfer with one of these. This process is significantly cheaper, at around €1,000 compared to €4,500 for a normal cycle of IVF. If they have no frozen embryos, however, the entire process must begin again.

There is no designated waiting time, but Wingfield says most couples will need a few weeks or even a few months to get over the disappointment of it not working.

"People put so much into it, they do everything to be healthy, they stop smoking and drinking and are doing everything they can. They often need time to regroup. It varies – some people just want to get back in as quickly as they can, other people want to take a break and go on holiday, but medically in most cases you can start again very quickly."

Persistence will often pay off, but this may not be feasible, either emotionally or financially, Wingfield admits.

"The treatment is very difficult, very emotionally and physically draining, and financially. If the woman is under 38 and if they can stick at it then most of them will get pregnant, but there is a big drop-out rate."

Helen Browne knows all about persistence. She founded the National Infertility Support and Information Group (NISIG) back in 1996 after her second failed IVF treatment. She says counselling – only offered by some fertility providers, and at an additional cost – helped, but she needed to speak to someone who truly understood her heartbreak.

"I had gone to counselling, but I felt I wanted to meet other people who had gone or were going through what I was going through. I felt my feelings were worse than grief," she says. Browne eventually had seven failed cycles and throughout this period continued to provide support for couples going through their own fertility journeys. Now the group runs regular support meetings, and Browne mans a 24-hour phoneline.

Peer-to-peer support can be a lifeline for people struggling with infertility, she says.

"People want to know that their emotions are normal. I see men in couples who think their wives are driven crazy, that they are obsessed, and then they come to our meetings and realise it isn't just her, it is everyone who is on the same journey. It's so hard for men, all they want to do is fix it, and they can't. Men need to be looked after too."

NISIG receives no public funding, and Browne admits continuing the badly needed service is often a struggle. But she says their support is essential for the hundreds of couples who contact them each week.

"The clinics in Ireland do wonderful work; even in the absence of legislation, they carry it out under strict guidelines. But we are the people who pick up the pieces."

Human biology may dictate that we are all here to procreate, but the deep yearning for a baby is something that women experience on a whole other level, says Browne.

"As a little girl, what's the first toy you are given?" she asks. "A doll. You are placed in the caring role from the very beginning." ■

Part four of The Fertility Question will feature in the Magazine next Sunday, September 1

FEEL THE CAREER FEAR AND DO IT ANYWAY

The act of changing careers comes with many risks and obstacles, but a growing number of people are taking the plunge regardless, writes **Arlene Harris**

There was a time when the holy grail for workers was having a job for life. These days, it's estimated that people will change their job up to 15 times in their lifetime. In fact, a 2017 study by LinkedIn suggested that millennials would change jobs four times in their first decade after college.

But while many of these role changes are within the same field, a growing number of people are doing a complete about-turn and throwing caution to the wind by retraining in a completely different sector, or setting out on their own and following personal goals.

Career and coaching psychologist Sinéad Brady says that "how to change career" was the most Googled professional term in 2018.

"By 2025 we will have a global skills shortage," she says. "And to fill that shortage, the average worker will need to spend between 101 days and 12 months upskilling, reskilling or retraining. This tells us that career change is the new norm and something that we will all have to learn to live with."

There are no official statistics charting the number of people who change their career in Ireland each year, but anecdotally it appears that many are embracing the trend.

Susan Keating from Clare is one example. On paper, it looked as if she had job security for life, having spent two decades in the aviation industry, primarily in commercial sales before heading the global sales and marketing department for a large aero engine leasing company.

While she enjoyed her career, three years ago she decided to jump ship and set up her own company making skincare products from seaweed. "I felt privileged with the opportunities my career offered," she says, "but felt I needed a different type of challenge. And because I was travelling a lot, I was missing out on everyday family life and didn't want to regret that further down the line."

In 2014, a meeting with Professor JJ Leahy from the University of Limerick was the catalyst for change. Keating was intrigued by his knowledge of natural resources and their chemistry, and his insights, coupled with memories of her childhood on the Loop Head peninsula in Clare, were the deciding factors.

"Growing up on the coast was a big factor in deciding to work with seaweed," she says. "But the fortuitous meeting with my co-founder Professor Leahy was what enabled my change in direction."

"I remember being blown away by the depth of his knowledge. He has such a deep understanding about seaweed's lipid chemistry and its innate ability to retain moisture and suppleness in often tough conditions on Ireland's west coast. From the outset, our mission was to capture and replicate these two unique abilities – hydration and elasticity – and apply their benefits to personal care and nutraceutical products."





Susan Keating of Seagreen Bio

ARTHUR ELLIS



Patricia Fitzgerald, artist at Healing Creations

MAURA HICKEY



Sinéad Brady,
career and
coaching
psychologist

FERGAL
PHILLIPS

Peter Lee gave
up his life as a
sound engineer
to become a
chef and baker
BARRY CRONIN

A different path

Due to the somewhat uncertain aspect of going solo, just over 16.5 per cent of the workforce in Ireland is self-employed. But despite a guaranteed pension and job security, the lure of carving a different path is just too great for some, including Patricia Fitzgerald, who left a job in the civil service after more than a quarter of a century.

“My dream was always to be an artist and I was happiest when creating, dreaming, making patterns and colouring,” she says. “But in the 1980s, being an artist was frowned upon, so I applied and got a job as a library assistant. I didn’t give up on the dream, as I also put myself through art college at night and carried on working as a librarian in south Dublin for almost 27 years.

“In 2012, life took a sudden and unexpected turn, and I found myself in the midst of a divorce and having to sell the family home. When crisis hits our lives, it often causes a seismic shift within us and a reassessment of priorities. For me, this meant a return to creativity, even though I hadn’t picked up a paintbrush in more than 20 years. All of a sudden, my creativity burst at the seams and exploded onto canvas. It was the gift this crisis gave me.”

Fitzgerald continued to work while painting in her spare time. An increasing interest in her creations saw her apply for a career break. This request was twice refused, so she began to think about quitting. Initially, the idea of leaving a permanent pensionable job at 46 was considered “an insane thing to do” but, as time went on, she decided to listen to her heart. In 2017, she left the library and became a full-time artist.

“The last month at work was the scariest,” she recalls. “I remember sitting in my office with my stomach tangled in knots. But then I would read an inspirational blog post from someone who had already made the leap and survived and thrived. So I vowed to go ahead with it and write a blog to help others.

“Two weeks after I resigned, I received an email asking me to write a book from somebody who had been following my journey on social media, and so I did. It’s a personal development book for women called *Who Would You Be If...* and was published by Red Stag Books in November 2018.”

Fitzgerald feels totally fulfilled with her new business Healingcreations.ie, and says that while many people will discourage you from taking the leap, “if you feel it’s right, you should believe in yourself”.

Practical advice

Susan Keating urges a word of caution, and says it’s vital to be 100 per cent clear on the corner of the market you plan to work in, or what problem your business will be solving from the outset.

“Get your product or market fit right at the very start, and you’ll save a lot of time and money further down the track. I’m speaking from experience!” she laughs.

“For anyone contemplating starting a business, I’d recommend speaking with a business adviser at the Local Enterprise Office, which provides a great starting point for practical advice and feedback on your business idea, and all at no cost.”

Sinéad Brady agrees, and says that while career change can be daunting, there are ways to make it easier.

“Accept and acknowledge that you feel daunted and realise that change takes time, no matter what anyone tells you,” she says. “Understand that you are going to have to upskill or retrain in some way, and never leave your current role without a strategy in place or unless you are in a financial position to do so.

“Do some risk-free experimentation in the area you think you might like to work in. It’s possible to do some excellent introductory courses for free on platforms like Edx.org, Futurelearn.com or Springboard.com. Commit your time to learning through these platforms or reach out to someone who works in this area to get a balanced view. Also, you are likely to need some objective professional support.” ■

The basis of their business – Seagreen Bio, produced in a lab in UL – is on the scientific development of bioactive extracts and compounds for use in personal care and the consumer skincare brand Neuu.

The joy of creating

It was a bold change, but one fellow entrepreneur Peter Lee can relate to. The Kildare man was working as a sound engineer for most of his adult life and happily admitted to being “useless” in the kitchen; when a limited budget saw him having to prepare a meal with a few meagre ingredients.

The result of his first foray into cooking wasn’t exactly Michelin-star quality, but he was so inspired by the sheer joy of creating a meal from scratch that he decided to retrain as a chef and baker and has since devoted his working life to all things edible.

“I worked as a sound engineer and lighting technician in theatres, recording studios and with touring bands,” he says. “I always enjoyed it and hadn’t thought about changing careers until, one day, I went to the supermarket with just €50 in my pocket and I realised how cheap vegetables were in comparison to meat or fish. So I bought a whole load of them and decided to try and make a meal for Alison [his wife] and I.

“I had always been a fussy eater and couldn’t cook at all, so I put on a Gordon Ramsay video, got to work and found it enjoyable.”

Lee didn’t quit his sound job straight away. Over the course of the next few years, he developed a stronger interest in cooking and in 2016 took a three-month course at Ballymaloe Cookery School. Next came a giant leap, as he became a baker before setting up his own food blog and pop-up restaurant business.

“After doing the course in Ballymaloe, I went from taking turns doing the cooking at home to taking it over completely because I loved it so much,” he says.

“It took five years from the first lightbulb moment to finally leaving my job in 2016. I worked as a baker for a year, but the hours didn’t suit, so started my business, Kinneaghkitchen.com, where I write blogs, give cookery lessons and run pop-up restaurants.

“I do a bit of everything and am currently doing some work at the Wine Buff in Newbridge, too. It is absolute joy to be working with food every day as it doesn’t feel like a job. Every morning I can’t wait to get up and start the day.”

Keating also finds her new career more rewarding, although she does work longer hours. “As an entrepreneur, you end up working harder and longer days, but you gain flexibility,” she says.

“The downside is that it’s hard to switch off and I often end up working well into the night, but it’s been a worthwhile trade.

“The other trade-off you make when you leave a PAYE job to start up a business is financial certainty and stability, so you have to be able to absorb that challenge.”

BACK TO SCHOOL for adults

The task of giving your home office an autumn overhaul can be a tricky one, so **Sarah Taaffe-Maguire** has found 16 of the swishest and handiest accessories out there

Sekretär Niklas desk, Anton Doll Wood Manufacturing, €1,297, antondoll.de



Task lamp in goldfish orange, €66.56, Annabel James, annabeljames.co.uk



Karlsson Mr Blue Steel Rim Wall Clock, €84.66, The Design Gift Shop, thedesigngiftshop.com

Highland Stag Notice Board, €34.96, Sophie Allport, sophieallport.com



24-carat gold fountain pen, €67.45, Ted Baker, arnotts.ie



Personalised notebook with monogram, from €39, Mein Monogramm, meinmonogramm.de



For Good Measure set, €44.95, Kate Spade, arnotts.ie



Striped monthly planner, €4.20, Søstre Grene, sostrengrene.com

Clippen pencil clip, €12.82, Animi Causa, animicausa.com



Jysk, jysk.ie

Bobino adjustable phone stand, €6.11, yellowoctopus.com.au



Eames-style lobby chair, €995, CA Design, cadesign.ie



Joss three-litre bin in yellow, €13.52, made.com



The Brilliant Reading Rest, €42.76, Animi Causa, animicausa.com



Soho desk, €579, Baker, arnotts.ie



Søstre Grene, sostrengrene.com

Chef's table

THIS WEEK, take a culinary journey of the city of Tel Aviv with four recipes from a new book of the same name (Murdoch Books) with recipes from Haya Molcho and Elihay Biran

Tastes of Tel Aviv

Asian trout with cashews

If you want to impress your guests, ask your fish seller to cut open the whole trout like a butterfly, as in the picture. Tapioca flour and kaffir lime leaves (fresh or frozen) are available at Asian grocers. The cashews can be roasted a day ahead – or you can fry them until golden brown in the oil left from frying the fish.

Ingredients, serves four

40g cashews
100g palm sugar
50ml fish sauce
50g tamarind paste
Juice of two limes
40g fresh ginger
20g lemongrass
20g fresh red chilli
80g shallots
8 garlic cloves
8 kaffir lime leaves
2 limes
8 trout fillets
Tapioca flour, for dredging the fish
Vegetable oil, for deep-frying

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 240C and

- roast the cashews on a baking tray lined with baking paper until golden brown for 7–9 minutes. Remove and allow them to cool completely (only then do they become crispy).
2. Slowly melt the sugar in a small saucepan, and stir in the fish sauce, tamarind paste and lime juice.
 3. Peel the ginger and cut into thin strips.
 4. Remove the stem and tough outer leaves from the lemongrass and cut the inner part into thin slices. Cut the chilli into rings; peel the shallots and garlic and cut into very thin slices. Finely slice the kaffir lime leaves. Cut the limes into thin slices and each slice into quarters.
 5. Mix everything together with the sauce and leave for at least 30 minutes.
 6. Roll the trout fillets on both sides in the tapioca flour, shaking off the excess. Heat an ample amount of oil in a wide frying pan, add the fish and deep-fry.
 7. Remove the fish from the pan and arrange on plates or a serving platter, along with the Asian salad and the roasted cashews.



Deep-fried sardines with green aioli

Since it is difficult to make a small amount of aioli, make a bit more of it – as I do here. It keeps in the fridge for five to six days. In Israel, people often eat the small, deep-fried sardines on the street with their hands.

Ingredients, serves four as a starter

For the aioli

270ml grapeseed oil
125ml olive oil
2 garlic cloves
1 cayenne pepper
1 whole egg
1 egg yolk
Half tsp sea salt
1 sprig flat-leaf parsley
1 tsp lime juice
1 tsp red wine vinegar

For the sardines

Vegetable oil, for deep-frying
Sea salt
Wheat or chickpea flour, for dusting
250g sardines (have your fish seller clean them for you)
Chimichurri sauce to serve

Method

1. For the aioli, mix both oils together.
2. Peel the garlic and de-seed the cayenne pepper. Purée both, along with all the remaining ingredients except the oil, until smooth with a stick blender or in a blender. Slowly pour in the oil in a thin stream while blending, until you have a creamy, homogeneous mixture.
3. For the sardines, heat the oil in a deep saucepan. Mix the salt and flour and spread on a plate. Toss the sardines in the flour and deep-fry them in the hot oil until golden brown. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.
4. Serve the crispy sardines with the aioli and the chimichurri sauce.





Stewed cabbage with goat's cheese and chimichurri

Ingredients, serves four as a main course

For the stewed cabbage

1 large white cabbage, as young as possible
 4 cherry tomatoes
 1 cayenne pepper
 3 garlic cloves
 175ml white wine
 10 sprigs za'atar or oregano
 5 sprigs rosemary
 5 sprigs sage
 125ml olive oil
 Sea salt

For the chimichurri

10 sprigs of za'atar
 30g oregano
 1 spring onion
 2 garlic cloves
 Grated zest of 1 unwaxed lemon
 1 tsp sea salt
 1 tsp sugar
 100ml red wine vinegar
 160ml olive oil
 To serve, 4 slices goat's cheese

Method

1. For the cabbage, preheat the oven to 240C. Line an ovenproof dish or a deep baking tray with aluminium foil and place the cabbage with the stem down on the

foil (there should be enough foil to completely enclose the whole cabbage later).

2. Cut a hole 2-3 cm in diameter in the centre of the cabbage head, almost down to the root.
3. Quarter the cherry tomatoes and halve the pepper. Peel the garlic and halve as well. Stuff the tomatoes, pepper and garlic into the hole in the cabbage and pour in the white wine.
4. Distribute the herbs evenly on and around the cabbage. Drizzle with olive oil, season inside and out with salt and wrap the aluminium foil firmly around the cabbage. Stew in the oven until the cabbage is very soft, about two and a half hours.
5. Meanwhile, prepare the chimichurri. Pluck the za'atar leaves from the stems and finely chop. Trim the spring onion, peel the garlic and finely chop both. Combine with the remaining ingredients in a bowl, and marinate for two hours at room temperature.
6. Take the cabbage out of the oven and let cool for a bit. Then remove the foil and cut the cabbage into eight wedges. Place on plates, spoon chimichurri over the top and sprinkle with a bit of salt. Arrange the goat's cheese on the cabbage and caramelize with a culinary torch. Serve warm.

Green shakshuka

Ingredients, serves four to six people for breakfast

100g leek
 30g butter
 250g spinach
 25g flat-leaf parsley
 25ml cream
 Sea salt
 1 small fennel bulb
 2 spring onions
 1 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
 50g kashkaval, or another kind of mild, full-fat cheese
 20g parmesan, plus extra to garnish
 6 eggs
 Sourdough bread, to serve

Method

1. Halve the leek lengthways, trim and cut into strips 1cm wide. Melt the butter in a saucepan, add the leek and cook over a medium heat until soft, about 15 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool.
2. Wash the spinach and remove the thick stems. Set aside about 50g of the leaves. Blanch the remaining spinach along with the parsley (with stems) for 10 seconds in boiling, salted water. Strain and immediately submerge in ice water. Firmly press to remove all liquid.
3. Purée the leek, spinach-parsley mixture, cream and 75ml of water with a stick blender or in a blender until creamy. Season to taste with salt.

4. Halve the fennel, remove the stalk and cut the bulb into thin slices. Trim the spring onions and cut in half widthways.
5. Warm olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat, add the spring onions and fennel and sauté very lightly for three minutes. Season with salt, transfer to a plate and set aside.
6. Add the remaining spinach and one to two tablespoons of water to the same pan. Sprinkle with salt and distribute first the spinach-parsley mixture and then the fennel and spring onions evenly over the spinach. Coarsely grate the kashkaval cheese and 20g parmesan and scatter over the vegetables.
7. Using a spoon, make six small wells and break one egg into each. Salt well, especially the egg yolk, cover and cook for four to five minutes. The egg whites should be firm but the yolks still runny (like a poached egg).
8. Grate extra parmesan over the eggs. Drizzle with olive oil and serve with fresh sourdough bread. ■



Tel Aviv is published by Murdoch Books, approx €36



Wine

Three to try

Zenato, Custoza, DOC 2017 (90) around €15.95 from Searsons Wine Merchants, Monkstown Crescent, Blackrock, Co Dublin and good independent off-licences

All three wines today, though vastly varied in style, are from the hinterland of Venice: the Veneto, north of the city of Verona. They all have one other hugely important factor in common, the vast and impossibly beautiful Lake Garda. Each wine comes from vineyards that have been prized for well over two millennia. Custoza is just south-west of Valpolicella, inland and slightly warmer, so we get a little full-bodied ripeness here. The wine is aromatic but with a wisp of baked apple, then a rising acidity and fine crisp finish. An everyday charmer.



Masi, Campofiorin, Valpolicella, Rosso del Veronese IGT 2016, around €18 from Super Valu; Tesco; independent off-licences and €13.95 from September 1, on sale while stocks last from O'Brien's Wines stores nationwide (90)

This wine can lay claim to be the first truly rebel wine in Italy, a sort of Super-Veneto from Venice. It was first made in 1964 by the current leader of the Masi family, Sandro Boscaini, and his father. It was initially described as a baby Amarone, as it used the process of using dried grapes just like an Amarone. With time, pouring Valpolicella over dried Amarone grapes became known as Ripasso, but Campofiorin adopted a dried way of infusing Amarone goodness into more basic Valpolicella grapes. Today, dried grapes are still the key here to adding heft and complexity and giving Amarone-style joy at Valpolicella prices.



Rizzardi, Villa Rizzardi, Amarone della Valpolicella DOCG 2011, €44.95 from O'Brien's Wines stores nationwide and at obrienswine.ie (93)

The Rizzardi wine estate, now headed by Giuseppe Rizzardi, has been owned and controlled since 1450 by one admittedly large family, the Guerrieri-Rizzardis. Amarone is now the region's most prestigious wine, but it is a relatively recent invention, having emerged after World War II. Before that, this sweet Recioto was the region's icon. Fermenting Recioto to dryness by extending fermentation created the sour one, Amarone, of Valpolicella. This hefty dry red with Rioja-like ageing, Pomerol depth and just a hint of port-like opulence became their heroic wine. An autumnal warmer to beat all others.



The old king of Italian wine

wine

Tomás Clancy



Barolo used to rule the roost before it fell out of favour. Could its time be coming again?

Until the 1980s, the name Barolo was as famous as Rioja, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Saint-Émilion or Pomerol in Ireland, and indeed around the entire wine world.

The word Barolo meant a huge, powerful, dark and tannic wine that was expensive and loved by the super-wealthy and the nobility of Europe. It was a brilliant wine to give or receive as a gift, no explanation of its high regard was necessary. If someone gave you a Barolo, you had made it.

It was Italy's great gift to the world of fine wine, and was regarded as the gold standard of wine production in Italy. In line with the idea of greatness in red wines that was dominant until the 1980s, it was built to last. Age-worthiness was one of its glories. It was made in vast 5,000-litre ancient oak barrels that stood 12 to 15 feet in height in vast, dark cellars.

These huge oak vat-sized barrels were decades old, and gave almost no perceptible oak impact to the wines of Barolo. At this size, the ratio of oak-to-wine contact is minimal, so you will not find toasty, sweet oak elements in the wine. Nor will the interaction of the vast old barrel soften the tannins. In fact, these barrels acted as an almost inert fermentation and ageing vessel, just as steel tanks do today.

The resulting Barolo wines in the 20th century and up until the 1980s were big, austere-fruited, tannic, long-ageing heroes that could last decades and needed hours of decanting, even at 20 or 30 years of age.

Their charm was that Barolo wines were made from the nebbiolo grape, which had many similarities to pinot noir in profile and so produced wines that had complex and intriguing aromatics, typically said to evoke tar and roses on the nose. The wine then counterpointed that grace with a wallop of tannic heft.

People who could afford it, adored it. That was until, in the 1980s, US wine critic Robert Parker anointed big, uber-ripe wines as the key indicator of brilliance.

From then on, Barolo – tannic, requiring long ageing, and even then savoury and austere – was doomed.

Barolo and the Oak Wars

Barolo's well-regarded style resulted directly from the use of vast 5,000-litre oak vats, but an upstart fashion had landed in Italy a decade earlier in Tuscany.

In thrall to Napa Valley and modern Bordeaux, a small coterie of wealthy and noble producers in Tuscany began blending



Nebbiolo grapes, which are used to make the newly-fashionable Barolo wine GETTY

Chianti's sangiovese grape with cabernet sauvignon and merlot.

These new, Super-Tuscan wines such as Tignanello and Sassicaia made in small expensive French oak barrels were uber ripe and became cult wines overnight. The international varietals such as cabernet and merlot and the small oak barrels they used supercharged the opulent fruit pushing it along the scale of ripeness perception.

So Tuscan wines with these characteristics became the icons of Italian fine wine and Barolo looked like a fading, musty star.

The fightback came from young, adventurous rulebreakers who had been trying to break up Barolo and its neighbour Barbaresco's image and style since the 1960s. Now was their moment.

The most famous of these producers was Angelo Gaja, who came from Barbaresco. He pioneered the use of small oak barrels and of bottling individual vineyards in the Burgundy manner.

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

Non-identical twins of Piedmont

The Piedmont region in Italy's north-west is today centred on Turin. The two hilltop wine villages of Barolo and Barbaresco are located north and south of the smaller city of Alba, some 30 miles south-east of Turin. Previously, this had been the Kingdom of Savoy.

The king of Sardinia, Vittorio Emanuele II, and various political leaders, including those ultimately responsible for Italian unification, like Count Cavour, all hailed from Piedmont. Many, including Vittorio Emanuele II and Cavour, had wine estates in the Barolo hills.

All this attention from the power elites led to its reputation in post-unification Italy and across the world.

That wine seems slightly different to today's Nebbiolo wines. Barolo was loved as a sweet or off-dry red wine, with tawny port-like character. It was the standard history to say that all this changed when Vittorio Emanuele II and Cavour imported French oenologists in the middle of the 19th century.

However, in the book *Barolo and Barbaresco*, author Kerin O'Keefe found documentary evidence that Italian or Lombardian wine makers were already moving towards dry red wine styles, and indeed made both styles – no French help required.

The Piedmont wine from the nebbiolo grape had two broad styles. Barolo was the home of the dry, austere, tar and roses tannic beast, while Barbaresco produced a fruitier, less tannic and more approachable wine.

From the 1980s onwards, this Barbaresco style, supercharged by small oak barrels, came to dominate and many Barolo producers adopted the Barbaresco or Gaja style.

Today, a backlash dominates. Traditionalists have returned to large oak vats and to their, dry, age-worthy and savoury styles of Barolo wines are back in fashion. Barolo and Barbaresco are seen as the authentic voice of terroir-driven Italian wines, rather than the internationalist Super-Tuscans.

Prices are not cheap, but Barbaresco often offers better value and Nebbiolo from the Langhe DOC is a source of the best-priced Nebbiolo in Piedmont. Barolo, the savoury king, is back to seek his throne from Tuscany.

Piedmont's Nebbiolo strikes back

● Maretti, Langhe Rosso Nebbiolo 2016, €19 (90), Green Man Wines and independents

● Principiano, Coste, Langhe Nebbiolo 2016, €26.95 (91), Mitchell & Son

● Ascheri, Barolo DOCG 2015, €35.95, on sale at €25.95 from September 1 (92), O'Briens

● Silvano Bolmida, Barolo Vigne Dei Fantini, 2015, €36.90 (92), Wines Direct

● Mario Giribaldi Barbaresco DOCG 2014, €42.95 (92), The Corkscrew

● Massolino, Barolo 2014, €49.95 (93), Mitchell & Son

● Pio Cesare Barolo 2014, €65.95 (93), The Corkscrew

● G.D. Vajra Bricco delle Viole, Barolo 2011, €72 (94), 64 Wines

● Gaja, Dagromis Barolo DOCG 2007, €89.50 (95), Terroirs of Donnybrook ■

E-mail: wine@sbpost.ie
Twitter: @tomasclancy



The Ramen Bar on South William Street in Dublin 2: serving the ultimate comfort food

FERGAL PHILLIPS

Find yourself in the soup on South William Street

food

Gillian Nelis



The Ramen Bar

51 South William Street, Dublin 2
01-5470658, the.ramenbar.ie

Got your tickets booked for the upcoming Rugby World Cup? Lucky you. It's been a while since I've been there, but I can say confidently that there are few more interesting, exhilarating and at times downright baffling destinations than Japan.

There's brilliant shopping at all price points (some of the department stores in the swankier parts of Tokyo make Brown Thomas look like Dealz), incredible history and culture and, of course, food.

That food ranges from the sublime (top-class sashimi at far lower prices than you'll pay here) to the truly grim (natto, fermented soybeans typically served with Japanese breakfasts that looks and smells a lot like snot).

But if and when you find yourself in need of comfort food, there's only really one thing to go for: ramen. There are around 200 regional variations of this dish of noodles in soup, and you'll find ramen bars almost everywhere you go.

You'll also increasingly find them here in Ireland. And before you ask why you'd bother getting excited about a bowl of soup, you should know that a really good ramen can take as long as ten hours to make, include over 20 ingredients, and be obsessed over by chefs and customers alike.

Iain Conway attempted to tap into that obsession when he opened the Ramen Bar on South William Street in Dublin city centre. It'd be easy to miss it if you didn't know it was there – the front of the premises is given over to a sushi bar – but it takes up both the back area and the first floor. Conway, who imported a noodle-making machine from the Japanese district of Kagawa for his restaurant, has 19 varieties of ramen on the menu, priced from €11.50 to €14 at lunch time, and €15.50 to €17 at dinner time.

A starter of salmon tartare (€8 at lunchtime) was a rather odd mix of diced sushi-grade salmon served on little crispy rice cakes. The flavours were good – the spicy mayo at the bottom of the cakes was very tasty – but the

fish had a curious mushy texture that wasn't all that pleasant. The prawn dumplings (€7.50), traditional gyoza which were steamed then served with chilli, were better, but a bit forgettable.

Thankfully, things were about to get a lot better.

Tonkotsu (not to be confused with tonkatsu, which is a deep-fried pork cutlet) is probably Japan's most famous variety of ramen. It's a regional variation that originated in Fukuoka on the island of Kyushu, and comprises a soup made from pork bones topped with sliced pork belly and assorted other ingredients.

The Ramen Bar's version was priced at €11.50 at lunchtime and was a deep bowl of deliciousness.

“

The tonkotsu was a deep bowl of deliciousness. That long, slow-cooking of the stock had more than paid off – it had layers of flavour – and the toppings of succulent pork, bamboo shoot, beansprouts, nori and a seasoned egg were spot on

That long, slow-cooking of the stock had more than paid off – it had layers of flavour – and the toppings of succulent pork, bamboo shoot, beansprouts, nori and a seasoned egg were spot on.

I'd have ordered an extra egg (€2) if I'd known how good they were going to taste – they're soft-boiled before being marinated in things like soy and mirin, then popped on top of the ramen to provide extra unctuousness.

I love the smell of garlic, which is a good thing, as my guest had gone for the garlic lover's ramen (€13). Here the noodles came in a mix of tonkotsu and miso broth, and were topped with grilled chicken, beansprouts, another one of those lovely seasoned eggs and a hefty dose of both grated garlic and black garlic.

It was very tasty, but it was no tonkotsu. The flavour of that main course has stayed with me so clearly that it's going to be one of my go-to lunches in Dublin city centre from now on.

You'll find, if and when you do end up in Japan, that good restaurants there tend to focus on one thing – be that sushi, katsu or ramen – and do it as well as they can. Even if the starters were a bit meh, the Ramen Bar has certainly brought that level of quality to its soups.

Lunch for two, with two soft drinks, came to €44. ■

BREAKING THE BANK

Starter: salmon tartare, sushi-grade diced seasoned salmon on crispy rice with tobanjan mayo and unagi sauce, €8

Main course: beef brisket ramen, noodles in a light chicken and miso broth with chilli paste, slow-cooked brisket, okra, grilled spring onion, beansprouts, seasoned egg and tempura flakes, €16.50

Wine: bottle of the Duke Sauvignon Blanc 2018 €34

Dinner for two: €58.50

WATCHING THE PENNIES

Starter: edamame beans sprinkled with Himalayan salt, €5.50

Main course: vegetable soup broth with grilled tofu, baby spinach, beansprouts, seasoned egg, dried nori, spring onion and seasoned bamboo shoots, €15.50

Wine: two glasses of Decalogue Merlot, Languedoc-Roussillon, €6.50 each

Dinner for two: €34

TOMÁS CLANCY RATES THE WINE LIST

The wine list here is short, quietly functional and reasonably well-priced. It runs to 12 wines in all: five red, five white and two sparkling. This brevity is not in any way problematic, and several of our most highly rated wine lists this year have had very compact selections.

Here, the wine selection offers well-priced versions of popular everyday wines, so we have the Decalogue Merlot, Languedoc-Roussillon 2017 at €28 and Les Bourgarels, Chardonnay 2018 at €31. Both wines offer good indicative versions of the grape varietal's taste profile, but are unlikely to set a wine lover's heart pounding.

All of the wines, bar the Champagne, are under €35. Seven of the 12 wines are available by the glass from €6.50, with the Bollicine Prosecco NV at €7.50 a glass or €29 a bottle.

Our white wine pick is The Duke sauvignon blanc from Marlborough 2018 at €34, while our red is the spicy Finca Las Moras, Barrel Select Malbec, Argentina 2018 at €32.

Rating:
★ ★ 1/2





Eminence Organic Skincare at Portmarnock Boutique Spa



Portmarnock Hotel & Golf links launch celebrity favourite Eminence Organic Skincare in the Boutique Spa

Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links have just announced the launch of the highly anticipated celebrity skincare brand, Eminence Organic Skincare, in The SPA Portmarnock. Eminence Organic Skincare will offer guests a revolutionary organic treatment with Bio-dynamic ingredients.

Eminence Organic Skincare is taking the beauty world by storm. The brand is favoured by well-known faces including Victoria Beckham, Jennifer Lawrence and the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, whose must have Eminence product is the Citrus Exfoliating Wash.

Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links sits along Dublin's Velvet Strand with some of the most breath-taking views of uninterrupted coastline. The boutique SPA, led by Head Beauty



Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links

Therapist, Ashleigh O'Connor, embraces the tranquillity and serenity of the hotel's natural surroundings, transporting guests to a sea of calm and peacefulness.

The Hungarian based beauty brand is well-known for its award-winning combination of natural ingredients, using a mix of fresh fruit pulps, plants and exotic spices to create the Eminence products. The precious ingredients are combined with thermal hot spring water to create products that contain potent healing and beautifying properties.

The SPA Portmarnock offers five luxurious treatments including the Yam and Pumpkin Facial, the Blueberry Detox firming & stimulating multi acid peel, the Arctic berry peel & peptide illuminating skin peel, the Mangosteen Gentle Resurfacing Peel, and the Acne Advanced Treatment, which are all carried out by a team of beauty experts.

Eminence Organic Skincare is rooted in a holistic approach to farming and production. A tree is planted every time you purchase one of their retail products and to date, the cruelty free brand has planted over 7 million trees worldwide.

Each Eminence product spends three years in research and development before it is launched into the market. Eminence uses the latest technologies with trademark ingredients to deliver skin professionals a healthy result driven brand.

Speaking about the new line of treatments, Head Beauty Therapist, Ashleigh O'Connor,



Ashleigh O'Connor, Head Beauty Therapist

said; "Our team in The SPA Portmarnock always strive to offer guests the most premium experience possible and we're delighted to host a unique brand like Eminence Organic Skincare. Through the use of organic and wholesome ingredients, Eminence products leave long-lasting, positive effects on the skin. The Acne Advanced Treatment is the newest Eminence treatment we have available in The Spa Portmarnock. The popular facial treats acne naturally without using harsh chem-

icals, instead using botanical-rich, organic ingredients."

A full range of Eminence Organic Skincare treatments available at Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links can be found <https://www.portmarnock.com/EminencePeels.html>

To book, call The Spa team on 01 866 6564 or email: thespa@portmarnock.com

'SUMMER GLOWING' SPECIAL OFFER:

- Eyebrow Wax & Shape
- Eyebrow Tweeze & Shape
- Eyebrow Tint
- Eyelash Tint
- Lip & Chin Wax
- Elemis Face & Body Scrub
- Elemis Taster Facial
- Express Manicure
- Express Pedicure
- Two Week Gel Polish
- Muscle Melting Back Massage
- Elemis Mini Facial
- Full Body Exfoliation
- Half Leg Wax
- Bikini Wax

*Subject to Availability

Eminence Treatment list:

- Yam & Pumpkin Peel €85
- Blueberry Detox Firming & Stimulating Multi Acid Peel €85
- Arctic Berry Peel & Peptide Illuminating Skin Peel €95
- Mangosteen Gentle Resurfacing Peel €100
- Acne Advanced Treatment €100

THE GUIDE

- The best of this week's **Books, Arts & Culture** in review
- **Film reviews, Chess** and **Classical Notes**
- Sara Keating's guide to the latest **Theatre**

Singer/songwriter Soulé sees her songs as a way of reaching people and sharing experiences, she tells **Michael Lanigan**

SOULÉ SEARCHER

The Irish music scene has shifted in the last four years," Soulé says, as she discusses her new single *Butterflies* with *The Sunday Business Post* Magazine. "Growing up, I didn't feel I had representation in a male-dominated industry, but you know what? We have that platform to be able to make change now."

You may not be overly familiar with the name Soulé just yet, but it's likely that you've heard her songs on the radio. Her debut single *Love No More*, released in 2016, was nominated for the Choice Music Prize Song of the Year. "Things blew up for me at that stage," she says. "It was mad." Her subsequent songs *Troublemaker*, *What Do You Know* and *Good Life* have amassed millions of Spotify streams between them. With influences including Janet Jackson and Lauryn Hill, she has been named an RTÉ 2FM Rising Artist and won critical praise for her performances at festivals including *Forbidden Fruit*, *Body & Soul* and *Electric Picnic*.

Born in London to Congolese parents, Soule – better known to her family as Samantha Kay – was two years old when her family moved to Balbriggan in north Dublin. The Kays are a musical bunch – her mother and sister are singers in their own right, and by the age of eight, Soulé realised that she harboured musical ambitions too.

"I remember writing this cringey song the day before Christmas," she says. "It was about me not being able to sleep because I couldn't wait to open my presents, and I really thought I had written a Grammy-nominated song."

In her teens, Soulé attended a Loreto all-girls school alongside singer-songwriter Farah Elle. Her first effort at breaking into the industry came through an X Factor audition when she was 16. Although she had talent, the producers told her, she was too young and needed to develop her skills. It was constructive criticism, Soulé says, and it worked to spur her on. "I'd have ended up in a music-related working environment no matter what."

After studying French and Tourism in DIT, Soulé briefly moved to Paris where she worked as an events coordinator at Disneyland. Then, in 2015, one of her friends began recording music with Diffusion Lab, a production collective designed to foster budding talent in the realm of electronic pop, hip hop and R&B, Diffusion provided a space for such Irish artists as Jafaris, DAY_S and Super Silly to write and record.

"My friend wanted to collaborate, so he said come down to the Lab," Soulé recalls. "It was a place to

“That’s the beauty of being creative. Every studio session is like a therapy session



Soulé: 'I tap into negative moments and share them on paper'

ARMAN JOSE GALANG

be creative and free, so we recorded a demo. Then the guys said they'd love for me to just record some songs too."

Songwriting for Soulé has offered her an important catharsis. "I tap into all of these negative moments like break-ups and share them on paper, but the one positive thing from all of this is you realise you're not alone," she says. "When I put out music, I get all of these messages from people relating to it and that's the beauty of being creative. Every studio session is like a therapy session."

Soulé's latest track is a collaboration with the Irish singer-songwriters Elaine Mai and Sorcha Richard-

son. Produced by Mai, *Butterflies* is a stripped-back, swirling piece of electronic pop devoted to the early days of a romance.

In a way, it feels like a continuation of the love story Soulé delved into on her recent EP *Love Cycle*. "I only realised that after it came out! It could've fit," she laughs. "But I just love that the three of us were able to come together and put our completely different styles on this one track, because it really represents the diversity of Irish music today." ■

Butterflies by Soulé, Elaine Mai and Sorcha Richardson is out now. Soulé plays *Lost Lane* in Dublin on September 20

Books

Lyra's final literary legacy hints at what might have been



ANDREW LYNCH

HISTORY

Angels With Blue Faces

By Lyra McKee
Excalibur Press, €10.92



This is a difficult book to review objectively. Lyra McKee began investigating the 1981 murder of Ulster Unionist MP Robert Bradford seven years ago, using crowdfunding to support her research. She completed a final draft on April 9 of this year, then was shot dead while observing a republican riot in Derry ten days later. The journalist and LGBTQ activist was 29 years old.

Not surprisingly perhaps, *Angels With Blue Faces* is littered with unconscious forebodings of the tragedy that was to come. The very first sentence references St Anne's Cathedral, where McKee's funeral service was attended by political leaders from across Ireland and Britain. Later on she wonders about the possible danger to reporters who "ask too many questions", then chides herself for being "paranoid".

In itself, McKee's posthumous publication is a

fragmentary affair modelled on the longform articles commonly found in US magazines such as the *New Yorker*. "I wanted to do something similar," she explains in the foreword, "something I hadn't seen done in Northern Ireland before, and write a non-fiction story that read like a novel." She may not have quite achieved that ambition first time round, but this is still an intriguing cold case study in which her earthy and idealistic voice shines through the bleak subject matter.

On the face of it, there was nothing particularly mysterious about Bradford's death. A former Methodist minister who had a trial with Sheffield Wednesday before entering politics, he once demanded the reintroduction of hanging for terrorists. In other words, he seemed like an obvious IRA target and they duly shot him (along with a caretaker) at his constituency clinic one Saturday morning.

A dig through the files in Belfast's Linen Hall Library, however, convinced McKee that this was more than a standard Troubles-era atrocity. Bradford had apparently been making inquiries about Kincora Boys' Home, which is now known to have been the centre of a paedophile ring involving senior civil servants. Is it possible that British intelligence used its moles within the IRA to eliminate their common enemy before he could raise Kincora in the House of Commons?

Although McKee's speculation can occasionally make her sound like a conspiracy theorist, she cites some facts that are at the very least striking coincidences. Bradford certainly had a heightened sense of danger, taking out additional life insurance just weeks before his death and giving staff strict instructions about what to do with his files. Moreover, the RUC's Special Branch got a tip-off that revealed exactly when the IRA would strike – but their officers' briefing dragged on right up until the moment when Bradford's demise was announced on radio.

McKee provides a step-by-step account of her



Sinister and state-of-the-art twist on a truly



ANNA CAREY

FICTION

The Turn of the Key

By Ruth Ware
Harvill Secker, €16.45



It's a tale as old as the gothic novel itself. A young woman arrives at a rambling, isolated country house. She's an outsider, an employee – a nanny or a governess. This should be the start of a prosperous new life for her. But something is wrong in the house. There are strange sounds coming from unseen rooms. Unexplained objects turn up. The children act strangely. And ultimately, the young woman realises that her mental and physical health – and perhaps even her life – are in danger from forces

that may be supernatural.

Ruth Ware's utterly compelling new novel is a fine modern ad-

dition to a tradition that includes everything from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to *Jane Eyre* and, most significantly, Henry James's 1898 novella *The Turn of the Screw*, from which her book draws its title. *The Turn of the Key* is the story of a young woman called Rowan, who answers an ad from a couple called Sandra and Bill Elincourt, two architects who are looking for a new nanny and are willing to pay an incredibly generous salary to anyone who will commit to staying with the family for at least a year, after losing several nannies over the past 18 months.

This should and does set off alarm bells, but Rowan is determined to get the job. When she arrives at the Elincourts' remote

Scottish residence, Heatherbrae, she discovers that what at first glance is just a sturdy Victorian country house is actually an ultra-modern high-tech "smart home", run by an app called, rather creepily, *Happy*. There's no keyhole in the front door, everything from the curtains to the bedside lights to the shower are controlled by smartphone and hidden digital panels, and there are cameras and speakers in pretty much every room.

Although the children are slightly surly, the domestic technology is unnerving, and her bedside locker contains an unfinished note from her predecessor addressed to "the new nanny", Rowan happily accepts the job – even when one of

the children tells her not to take it because "the ghosts wouldn't like it". The reader already knows that this decision will turn out to be a mistake, because from the opening pages we are aware that Rowan is telling her story from a prison cell. Whatever happens in Heatherbrae during Rowan's time there, a child will end up dead, and Rowan will be blamed.

Ware isn't the first novelist to exploit the horror potential of a smart house – JP Delaney's *The Girl Before* also featured a high-tech home – but she does so to tremendous effect. Even when Rowan is logged into the *Happy* system, the house tech remains difficult to control – and Ware brilliantly shows how unsettling

Lynch returns with haunting South American rural reverie

Lyra McKee's posthumous book examines the 1981 killing of Ulster Unionist MP Robert Bradford (inset)

ALLAN LEONARD

detective work, which chiefly involves speculative conversations in living rooms and coffee shops. Tellingly, however, some interviewees are veteran reporters simply rehashing their own experiences and this gives the narrative a slightly second-hand feel. It soon becomes frustratingly clear that the trail has gone cold, with one of Bradford's fellow MPs warning: "Whatever happened [. . .], you'll never find it. It's like smoke. Gone with the mists of time. Trying to find the answers is like trying to grab air."

As a result, perhaps the real value of *Angels With Blue Faces* (its title refers to the décor of a hotel where boys were abused) lies in McKee's personal reflections on the North itself. Growing up in

a working-class Catholic area known as Murder Mile, she regarded the conflict as "a catalogue of fucked-upness, an A-Z guide of the barbarity of human nature". Even so, her guiding philosophy is summed up by the final line of a letter she wrote to 14-year-old Lyra a decade later: "Keep hanging on, kid. It's worth it."

Robert Bradford's opponents saw him as a bigot, but McKee argues that the Troubles distorted his and many other people's decent instincts – and this is the fundamental reason why they must never be allowed to return.

Angels With Blue Faces has some of the weaknesses often found in first books. McKee's prose is often clunky, there are unnecessary repetitions and the fictionalised sections do not really work. The unsentimental verdict must be that it hints at rather than fully delivers on McKee's huge potential – but is still well worth reading as a poignant reminder of what a profoundly good person she was.



JOHN WALSHE

Paul Lynch has followed up his award-winning novel *Grace* with another lyrical, fantastical and almost hallucinatory tale, this time set far from home shores. Where *Grace* narrated a hellish trip through Famine-era Ireland, *Beyond The Sea* is set just off the coast of an unnamed South American village, where two men get stranded in the Pacific Ocean following a heavy storm that leaves their vessel without power.

Bolívar is the boat owner who insists on setting out from shore despite the weather warning, as he needs cash fast. He owes money to a mysterious stranger, who has been going around their village vowing to cut his ears off if Bolívar doesn't pay up. The threat of violence prompts the fisherman to suppress his natural instincts and head out to sea, not with his usual partner, the highly experienced Ángel, with whom he has had a falling-out, but instead with Héctor, "a long-haired youth . . . an insect from the mangroves", whose only fishing experience is in his father's boat in the safety of the lagoon, far from open water.

When the storm hits, leaving their small fishing boat cast adrift without engine or radio, Héctor isn't much help. Too terrified to bail water, he stays inside the tiny cabin, leaving Bolívar alone to try to battle the elements. Indeed, at one point, it is only the fisherman's great strength that saves the young man, hauling him back by the hair when it seems Héctor's body is set to be washed out to sea.

When the storm clears, however, the duo must form an alliance if they are to survive their ordeal. Lynch paints a wonderful picture of both the vastness of the ocean and the claustrophobia of the two men on the tiny boat, as their world shrinks to a few vital elements: water, food and warmth. When the rain finally falls after days without water, each precious pearl is "a drop of time and life distilled".

Bolívar and Héctor become closer, their initial animosity dissolving in a miasma of shared experience and necessity, eventually confessing their innermost sins and secrets to one another. Snippets of their past lives on shore are gradually revealed, and their conversations take on a metaphysical Beckett-esque bent, as they wonder if in fact they are already dead and float-



Paul Lynch: conjuring up a vivid and watery world

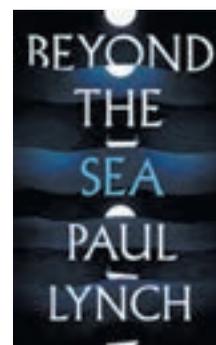
GETTY

FICTION

Beyond The Sea

By Paul Lynch

Oneworld, €16.45



ing on a purgatorial sea.

There are echoes of Gabriel García Márquez, not just in the setting, but also in the manner in which Lynch manages to slowly and teasingly reveal some of the harsh realities of living in a narco-controlled area, while also tantalisingly unveiling some skeletons in the characters' closets. It's also there in the smaller anecdotes and tales about minor characters, like the way Héctor's grandfather would make his wife carry their statue of the Virgin Mary into the cornfield in a drought and pray that the rain would fall in his field but not his neighbour's across the road.

There are also hints of Lear, as sickness, weariness and solitude take their toll on both men's mental health; the writing becomes ever more illusory and chimerical as both drifters and reader struggle to make sense of what is real and what is not. While the language used is far from difficult, this is not an easy read. A strong constitution is also necessary as Bolívar takes to catching sea-birds and breaking their wings to keep them alive on-board for when he needs their flesh fresh.

Lynch's prose, while simple, is lyrical, whether describing how one character's face is ageing ("the flesh is coming loose over the bones . . . it is happening as you watch") or how the sea and sky seem to meld together to form "a prison of single colour risen above him towering towards infinity". He manages to convey how, for the two men, time ceases to tick by in the usual way, becoming elastic, expanding and contracting at its own will and then seeming to pause altogether, so that it feels that they have been cut off, not just from their previous lives, but from the passing of time itself.

Like the protagonists, the reader too experiences a sense of disassociation from reality while traversing this haunting, dreamlike novel. ■

timeless story

it would be to need a device in order to just draw your bedroom curtains or turn on your bedside light when a strange noise wakes you in the middle of the night.

When the Elincourt parents head off on a work trip, leaving Rowan in sole charge of the children, things get even more sinister. Doors seem to unlock themselves, the gate of a walled garden full of poisonous plants is left open, and things are literally going bump in the night. It's not clear to either Rowan or the reader whether what's happening at Heatherbrae is caused by a malevolent human being – or by something supernatural. And as Rowan's fairly justified paranoia grows, Ware expertly ramps up

the tension, creating a brilliantly creepy atmosphere of fear and distrust.

Over the course of her previous four books, Ware has shown her ability to write truly sinister stories with morally complex, sympathetic protagonists, and she's done it again in *The Turn of the Key*.

Rowan isn't always straightforward, but she always retains the reader's sympathy, right up to the book's powerful conclusion – which, unlike James's novella, leaves the reader in no doubt as to whether the incidents at Heatherbrae were supernatural or not.

This is a book that will keep you up late into the night – and will put you off digitally controlled lights forever.

Guide

ALBUM
REVIEWS

TRADITIONAL

Martin Hayes & Brooklyn Rider

The Butterfly (251 Records)



During the past decade, renowned Clare fiddler Martin Hayes has taken several steps outside of his traditional solo oeuvre with a host of collaborations, most notably with Irish-American supergroup the Gloaming and Chicago acoustic guitarist Dennis Cahill. This latest alliance, with New York string quartet Brooklyn Rider, while not a million miles from the recent work of his own Martin Hayes Quartet, could be among his most intriguing. The project seeks to revive or re-evaluate music rooted in the Celtic tradition, to tease out new depths and drama in familiar trad tunes and styles while staying true to their historical origins. In the main, this is achieved with virtuoso aplomb. There is a happy, if occasionally tense, marriage between Hayes's sparse but passionate melodies and the quartet's sombre, subtly cinematic undercurrents. This is displayed most overtly on jaunty pieces like O'Neill's March or Maghera Mountain, a gloriously invigorating tune written by Hayes in his teens; and with a more nuanced touch on Jenny's Welcome Home to Charlie and on the evocative, slow-burning title track. All told, this is a beautifully conceived and emotionally involving album.

★★★★JC

Download: Maghera Mountain

FUNK/SOUL

Join Me In The Pines

Monomania (Decal Records)



Those Bell X1 lads certainly know how to keep themselves busy. When the group's singer Paul Noonan isn't collaborating with the great and the good, his trusty cohort and colleague Dave Geraghty is beavering away in his home studio composing music for award-winning film and television projects. Between his solo work and Bell X1, Geraghty is a five-time Choice Music Prize nominee, so it's little surprise he knows his way around a music sheet. Monomania is his fourth non-Bell X1 album (his second under the band moniker of Join Me In The Pines), and sees him radically change stylistic tack from JMIP's 2014 album, Inherit. In short, Geraghty has a serious dose of the funk. Spurning previous cerebral pop routes (many of which brought you to very fine music) for songs that instruct you to shake a limb might have the undesired effect of distancing the tuned-in Bell X1 fan, but Geraghty's skillsets are subtle and sneaky. Influences here range from Grace Jones and Prince to David Bowie and Stevie Wonder, and truly, from start to end, the funk doesn't stop or disappoint.

★★★★½TCL

Download: She Steps Into The Light

INDIE

Bon Iver

i,i (Jagjaguwar)



Justin Vernon's fourth album under the Bon Iver name initially sounds like it's going to be a difficult listen, taking up where 2016's discordant 22, A Million left off, all Vocoder vocals, cacophonous crashes and oddball effects. But while i,i has its share of idiosyncrasies, in the shape of cut-and-paste arrangements, ghost-in-the-machine shudders and oblique lyrics, alongside a host of nonsensical song titles, it's far more cohesive than his recent output. Vernon has roped in a host of musicians to help him achieve his vision, including the Dessner brothers from the National, Polića vocalist Channy Leaneagh, producer Wheezy, British electro pioneer James Blake and, bizarrely, 1980s singer-songwriter Bruce Hornsby. The result is an album that combines the tender acoustics of his 2007 debut, For Emma, Forever Ago, with the more experimental electronica of his later work, perfectly encapsulated in iMi, which flip-flops easily between the two. There are hints of our own James Vincent McMorrow in the strident falsetto and off-beats of We, while U (Man Like) is like Randy Newman for millennials, and Faith soars and swells like Sigur Rós at their greatest. For the most part, the meaning behind Vernon's words is difficult to decipher, but there's no debating his admission, "I'm happy as I've ever been," on Holyfields. A content Vernon belies the nonsense that great art only comes out of pain and suffering, as i,i is beautifully complex and quietly stunning.

★★★★JW

Download: U (Man Like)

Reviews by Johnnie Craig, John Walshe and Tony Clayton-Lea

THEATRE
REVIEW



Kayi Ushe poses with the Angels in Kinky Boots at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre

HELEN MAYBANKS

The shoe fits for an effervescent and toe-tapping musical romp



SARA
KEATING

Kinky Boots

By Harvey Fierstein and Cyndi Lauper

Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, Dublin

Rating: ★★★★★

Until August 31

It seems like a touch of madness to make a musical about the closure of a shoe factory, but there have been musicals made from stranger material: Thatcherism (Lee Hall's socialist Billy Elliot), public toilets (the Tony award-winning Urinetown), and one of the lesser-known Founding Fathers of the United States (Lin-Manuel Miranda's hip-hop extravaganza Hamilton).

Even so, it is difficult to get excited about the subject matter for Harvey Fierstein and Cyndi Lauper's 2012 musical, Kinky Boots.

Based on the 2005 film of the same name, which was itself inspired by real events, Kinky Boots is set in recession-hit Northampton, where Price & Sons shoe factory is facing closure.

After his father's sudden death, Charlie Price (Joel Harper-Jackson) is charged with saving the factory, and the jobs of employees who have worked there for their entire adult lives. A chance encounter with drag queen Lola (Kayi Ushe) gives Charlie an unlikely opportunity to diversify his products with specially made shoes for performers like Lola.

If the general thrust of the dramatic action doesn't capture your imagination, however, the characters will, as

Fierstein ensures they are anchored by a far more compelling and complex story than economic survival. Kinky Boots is as much a about self-acceptance as it is about shoes.

Director Jerry Mitchell starts the production at a cracking pace, with Lauper's first three songs ably setting the tragicomic tone. However, within ten minutes, Fierstein brings us deep inside Lola's Den, where the extraordinary performance artist and her band of Angels show us the Land of Lola in all its glamour and glory. It is hard for any other song in the restless score to compete with this raucous rousing pop number, although Everybody Say Yeah, which closes the first act and is performed on moving conveyor belts on the factory floor, comes close.

Lauper's songs span the whole range of popular music styles, with Latin flavours, soft rock ballads and buoyant

bouncy earworms. Mitchell's choreography exploits the humour in her lyrical approach, particularly in the large ensemble pieces, such as the stylised fight scene of In This Corner and the exposing solo The History of Wrong Guys, which Paula Lane, as the goofy Lauren, pulls off with hilarious aplomb.

All eyes are on Lola, however, who models Gregg Barnes's costumes with serious style, whether they be the muted menswear she resorts to as she tries to blend in or the outrageous series of stilettos that inspire her range of Kinky Boots.

Ushe gives a show-stealing, star-making performance as Lola, with a vocal range that sits comfortably in the high registers of the Whitney Houston-esque Hold Me In Your Heart, the bassier tones of Not My Father's Son and the vampy drama of Sex Is In The Heel.

Kinky Boots is probably the best musical about shoes that you will ever see. It runs at the Bord Gais Energy Theatre until August 31.

The Eyes have it at Smock Alley

Joe O'Neill's new play **Bright Eyes** is a story of mourning. A dark comedy, it brings together four strangers for an evening, where wine and whiskey whet their appetites for self-revelation. As the evening unfolds and they share their darkest secrets, they realise that their meeting was perhaps not accidental, and far more sinister than they might have ever imagined.

Directed by Eimear Keating, and starring O'Neill alongside Cat Coyle, Eoghan Collins and Kevin Maher, Bright Eyes runs at Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin 2 until August 31. ■



Joe O'Neill and Cat Coyle in Bright Eyes at Smock Alley



Vagabones by Raymond Deane will visit four venues around the country next month

Closing in on the Witch of Youghal

Classical Notes

Dick O'Riordan



Witch trials seem to have flared up in the musical imagination in recent months. The flames of terror rise to the surface on an annual basis during the Kilkenny Arts Festival, when the town's infamous Alice Kyteler sensibly did a runner there in the 14th century rather than face an auto da fe.

Now, a new touring opera has focused on another witch trial, this time that of Florence Newton, the so-called Witch of Youghal, in 1661.

The opera, titled *Vagabones* and composed by Raymond Deane, will tour four venues, Tallaght, Dundalk, Youghal and Waterford, from September 6 to 13.

Musical accompaniment is by Donnacha Dennehy's Crash Ensemble,

which has more or less been installed in a deserved central importance in Irish contemporary opera. Deane is an esteemed musician whose unfinished but much-lauded opera *The Alma Fetish* had a startling impact at the National Concert Hall in 2013.

Vagabones is likely to create high-pitched excitement this time as well. It is based on Emma Donoghue's stage adaptation of her 1996 RTÉ radio play *Trespasses*, a fictionalised account of the judge's own account of the case.

This new production includes a cast comprising Rory Dunne, Carolyn Holt, Kelli-Ann Masterson, Rory Musgrave, Sarah Power and Ross Scanlon, all singers who are continuingly impressing in various events.

Ben Barnes is artistic director, while Sinéad Hayes conducts *Crash*.

Donoghue says: "In the mid-1990s, when I came across the trial record of Florence Newton, what seized me was how rare a situation it illuminated – it's one of only a tiny handful of Irish hunts – and how interesting the details were.

"The case grew out of Protestant-Catholic and settler-native misunderstandings and tensions that still affect the Northern peace process today.

"The story of a kiss that makes someone violently ill also asked questions

about powerless women, what they might have to resort to for survival. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* was one helpful reference, as was Brian Friel's *Translations*.

"With this chamber opera adaptation, I am absolutely delighted that this appalling tangled tale is coming to life again in a whole new art form."

The stellar cast of meticulously assessed young Irish talent has been expertly chosen for the roles they play by Opera Collective Ireland, a group formed in 2014 which produces just a single production a year, but which has attracted a continuously high approval rating.

Co-founder and international tenor Paul McNamara, who is domiciled in Germany, says: "The singers we have chosen and matched specifically with the parts available have been an undoubted success. Many have gone on to perform on the great opera stages of the world, including Covent Garden, La Scala Milan, Teatro Real Madrid, Oper Frankfurt and Salzburg Festival.

The *Vagabones* venues are: Civic Theatre, Tallaght (September 6-7); An Táin, Dundalk (September 10); St Mary's, Youghal, semi staged, (September 12) and Theatre Royal, Waterford (September 13).

Full prices and bookings can be found at operacollectiveireland.com.

strings and warped bows for the glory of authenticity.

The Franco-Austrian group attracted a capacity audience to the final of three consecutive afternoon sessions in the magnificently restored Black Abbey, medieval sanctuary of the Dominicans. Each of the sessions featured works by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven – father, son and radical innovator in that order.

Haydn's No 52 of adagio and fugue was composed with his second London visit in mind, and deliberately provided the sort of surprises he believed his fans would expect.

Unusually, the opening allegro set a slow pace and gradually picked up speed with a melodic central core, but real themes never seemed to take hold, with Haydn contrasting high and low registers instead, before introducing an unusual ending through a recapitulation of the fugue-like opening. Overall, this was delivered with delicious pace, but plea-

surably rather than memorably. Mozart's adagio and fugue to follow indicated the young chap's talent for enhancement rather than innovation.

But it was Beethoven's String Quartet No 9, the last of his three groundbreaking (some may say earth-shattering) Razumovsky works, that was always going to knock people's socks off here, and it did so in some style. The capacity audience was rendered not just silent, but rigid in attention to the stunning tapestry that confounded its early 19th-century listeners and injected a life-altering force into chamber music that exists to this day.

Amazingly, Beethoven's work had not a single distinctive theme, something that did not go down immediately well. However, it always remained one of his own treasured works and even received its nickname, the *Eroica*, in tribute.

A memorable experience of musical elegance in a work deliberately meant to rattle the cages. ■

CHESS



SAM COLLINS

Vidit Santosh Gujrathi vs Sebastian Bogner 52nd Biel GM 2019

The 52nd Biel International Chess Festival consisted of tournaments with different time controls and in multiple formats, including Chess 960 (a variant endorsed by the former world champion Bobby Fischer). The elite closed GM group consisted of classical, rapid and blitz games, and was won by Vidit Santosh Gujrathi, a very strong young Indian GM with a Karpovian style.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3

This is the critical move (compared to the sidelines 4.e3 and 4.Qb3, which Vidit essayed against Sam Shankland in the same event). In addition to the line Bogner chooses, Black often plays 4... dxc4 or 4... e6.

4... a6 5.e3 Bf5 6.Nh4 Bg4 7.Qc2 e6 8.h3 Bh5 9.g4 Nfd7 10.gxh5!

Much more incisive than 10.Ng2 as was played in S Shankland vs T Gareyev, Las Vegas 2012.

10... Qxh4 11.Bd2 dxc4 12.Bxc4 c5

12... Qxh5 led to a quick victory for White in another GM clash, B Gledura vs E Paetz, Wijk aan Zee 2019.

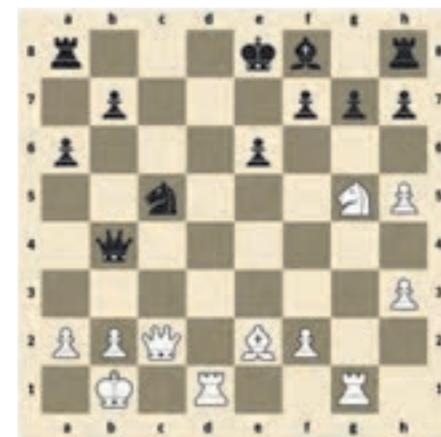
13.0-0-0 Nc6 14.Rhg1 cxd4

Opening more lines is dangerous with the black king in the centre, but this move is not a mistake and it's difficult to suggest good alternatives.

15.exd4 Qxd4 16.Ne4 Nc5 17.Ng5 Ne5 18.Be2 Ned3+?

This tempting check loses too much time. 18... h6 is better, although White retains wonderful compensation. Computers can easily defend such positions but in games between human players I would expect Black to score very badly here.

19.Kb1 Nb4 20.Bxb4 Qxb4 (D)



21.Rg4!

Manoeuvring the rook via g4 to b4, in homage to the classic game A Karpov vs V Hort, Alekhine Memorial 1971.

21... Qb6 22.h6! g6 23.Qc3

Black's dark-squares can't be defended and the knight landing on f6 will be lethal.

23... Rg8 24.Nxh7 Bxh6 25.Nf6+ Ke7 26.Rb4 Qa5 27.Ne4 Rac8

27... Nxe4 28.Rxb7+ wins the queen.

28.Qf6+ Kf8 29.Nd6 Rc7 30.Nc4 1-0

30.Nf5 would have forced mate but Vidit's move, winning decisive material, is more than good enough.

A golden old-style afternoon in the Black Abbey

Quatuor Mosaïques at Kilkenny Arts Festival: Mozart, Haydn & Beethoven

The Black Abbey, Kilkenny, August 15

Reviewed by Dick O'Riordan

There is no genre of music where connoisseurs and analysts hyperventilate with more enthusiasm than the string quartet, so the return of Quatuor Mosaïques to Kilkenny Arts Festival provided the opportunity to savour the delights of one of the greatest quartets on the planet.

This foursome of distinction have delved into the heart of the classical genre for more than 30 years and still perform with the freshness and nobility that is their trademark, using catgut



Emile Hirsch in *Never Grow Old*

A Wild West tale told searingly well

film

John Maguire



Having made a series of independent contemporary features in the last decade – gripping dramas, gory horrors and devastating social critiques among them – Irish writer and director Ivan Kavanagh makes a huge leap forward with his first big-budget period film **Never Grow Old**, a revisionist Western set on the forbidding American frontier in 1849.

In this dark and violent fable about the poisonous effects of greed on an immigrant Irish undertaker, Kavanagh continues to experiment with classical genres while extracting stirring performances from a well-chosen cast of established international actors.

Patrick Tate (Emile Hirsch) was making the arduous journey across America to California with his capable French wife Audrey (Deborah François) and their two young children when he stopped in the new town of Garlow, somewhere on the Oregon Trail.

A carpenter by trade, Pat has since built a home and a business as an undertaker. That business is slow until a gang of outlaws led by the wolfish Dutch Albert (John Cusack) arrive in

Cinema

Never Grow Old

Directed by Ivan Kavanagh

Nationwide, 16

Rating: ★★★★★

Pain & Glory

Directed by Pedro Almodóvar

Nationwide, 16

Rating: ★★★★★

town. Flush with years of stolen money and meeting little opposition from the terrified local sheriff (Tim Ahern), Dutch sniffs an opportunity.

After a little midnight arm-twisting, he buys out the sleepy local hotel and turns it into a raucous gambling saloon and brothel. Soon Pat is run off his feet, morning to night. Dutch pays him a couple of dollars each to bury customers who step out of line and anyone else who looks at him crooked, money Pat hides in a lockbox to finance his dream of continuing west.

But as the town's fire-brand preacher (Danny Webb) warns from the pulpit of his church, directly across the street from Dutch's saloon, a day of reckoning is coming and only the pure will survive it.

Filmed on location in Connemara and Luxembourg, although you'd never know it, Kavanagh's team create a credible, lived-in world from little more than wood, sky and mud, with cinematographer Piers McGrail finding gritty textures and arresting frames among the flashes of gunfire and gouts of blood.

As the slow-drip tension mounts and the body count soars, an increasingly sympathetic Hirsch grows into his role as a man trying to achieve the American dream without staining his soul, while Cusack, rarely more charismatic than as a black-hatted villain, whispers ice-cold threats and greasy enticements indistinguishable from one another.

Kavanagh's Potato Western buries a challenging morality tale in familiar ground and is perhaps too cruel and rigid about it to please everyone, but it pleased me.

● Kavanagh's cowboys might never grow old, but Pedro Almodóvar has, according to Pedro Almodóvar. His latest film **Pain & Glory**, a sumptuously crafted memoir on waxing years and waning creativity, tells the story of a Madrid film director (regular collaborator Antonio Banderas) crippled

with pain both physical and spiritual, struggling to recover his spark. It's the Spanish master's most autobiographical work since the anarchic *Law of Desire* back in 1987, filled with a mood of nostalgia and regret that could only derive from a deeply personal space.

The irony, of course, is that there's nothing jaded about the film at all: if anything, it's Almodóvar's best in years.

Banderas plays Salvador Mallo (crossword puzzlers might find a near anagram), a gay, middle-aged filmmaker recovering from spinal surgery and coping, badly, with a series of other medical ailments, including tinnitus and anxiety. He also has chronic writer's block, and hasn't worked seriously in years. He barely leaves his apartment in fact, with only his maid (Sara Sierra) and agent (Nora Navas) for company.

When the Spanish Film Institute announces it has re-mastered one of his early films and would like the director to attend a gala screening, Mallo is forced to reunite with his roguish leading man, Alberto Crespo (Asier Etxeandia), now a jobbing soap opera actor with a heroin dependency. They haven't spoken in decades.

Already rattling with a bellyful of painkillers that no longer work, Salvador decides on a whim to join Alberto in a hit of heroin, "chasing the dragon" in his sunny garden. The drug – which Salvador continues to use – sparks a series of spiritual reconciliations and deep-rooted memories; in dreams about his mother (Penélope Cruz and, later, Julieta Serrano), his childhood in a house built into a cliff where as a boy (Asier Flores) he taught a handsome village handyman (César Vicente) to read and write, and in real-life, a reunion with an ex-lover Federico (Leonardo Sbaraglia), visiting Madrid from Argentina.

Banderas's performance, which won him the Best Actor award at Cannes earlier this year, may be the best he's ever given: an actor famed for his zeal and energy, creaking and groaning as his body fails, while Almodóvar trades his signature extravagances for honest reflection in what is a meticulously tuned story of love and loss. ■

ALSO ON



Crawl (nationwide, 15A)

A cross between an old-fashioned creature feature and a disaster movie, Alexandre Aja's horror has Kaya Scodelario and Barry Pepper play daughter and father hunted by ravenous alligators after becoming trapped in their flooded home during an apocalyptic hurricane.



Angel Has Fallen (nationwide, 15A)

Gerard Butler's third outing as a crack Secret Service Agent – following the already fallen Olympus and London – has the spy framed for an attempt to assassinate the US president (Morgan Freeman) evading the encircling law enforcement agencies while trying to clear his name.

Scary Stories To Tell In The Dark (nationwide, 15A)

Guillermo del Toro produces this adaptation of Alvin Schwartz's VA horror series that tells three spooky stories centred on a group of teenagers in 1968 Chicago facing their worst fears – in the form of various toothy monsters – while spending the night in a remote mansion.



Once Upon a Time... In Hollywood (nationwide, 18)

Quentin Tarantino's meticulously designed, determinedly entertaining elegy for 1960s Hollywood follows Leonardo DiCaprio's washed-up actor and Brad Pitt's laconic stunt double whose roundabout adventures butt up against Sharon Tate (Margot Robbie) and Charlie Manson's Family as the Summer of Love draws to an abrupt close.

Transit (selected, 16)

Christian Petzold completes his loose trilogy of historical films about the legacy of Nazism on his native Germany with this stunning modern-dress alternate history, adapted from a 1944 novel, about a refugee (the sensational Franz Rogowski) assuming the identity of a dead dissident writer while attempting to flee a fascist Europe.



Antonio Banderas in *Pain & Glory*

tv

Jonathan O'Brien



Saga of post-Rising pensions wrestles with too much good material

A documentary about military pensions doesn't exactly sound like must-watch TV, but **Keepers of the Flame** (RTÉ One) undeniably strove hard to transcend its subject's inherent dramatic limitations. It half succeeded. It gathered together a large amount of fascinating material – but not all of that material was entirely germane to the subject under discussion, and too much made it into the finished product.

A deep dive into the correspondence between the fledgling Irish state and its soldiers in the years following the 1916 Easter Rising and the subsequent War of Independence, *Keepers of the Flame* was the usual mix of contemporary talking heads, voicecovered reconstructions and grainy clips from the vaults. Things were padded out with more general observations on the wars – some of them a little bit too general, as we'll see.

The story of the post-conflict service pensions is one of a brutal lottery in which three-quarters of the contestants lost out entirely. Some 85,000 people applied on behalf of themselves and deceased spouses, but only 18,000 got lucky.

The initial criterion essentially amounted to: "Did you fire a shot at the British?" This meant that women, who were mostly non-combatants at the time, could not apply for the pensions. An amendment in the mid-1930s corrected this, but some hardline republican widows were still too proud to draw a pension from a compromise Free State government. A few could afford not to do so, but many went hungry at times rather than take the tainted shilling.

Others had no such qualms, invariably out of necessity. One application for a dependant's allowance, written by the widow of Kerry-born volunteer Michael Mulvihill, was little more than a begging letter: "My son Michael [jr] was a civil servant attached to the GPO in London . . . he contributed liberally to my maintenance, as my late husband was in receipt of a very small pension and the other members of my family were and are unable to give me any assistance." She got her money eventually.

Muriel McAuley, the granddaughter of the executed Easter Rising leader Thomas MacDonagh, recalled with visible sadness that "my mother and uncle had

Free State Army troops at the Bank of Ireland on College Green in Dublin in 1922: most would not have received any pension
TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY/GETTY

an horrendous time". Her mother Barbara Redmond encountered numerous difficulties while filling in the labyrinthine application form, and wrote back: "I found the form a little baffling . . . I assume I am correct in replying Yes to 2B. The disability contracted in the period which commenced on April 23, 1916, and ended on July 11, 1921, would have been the loss of both parents as a direct result of the Rising. My father, Thomas MacDonagh, was executed on May 3, 1916. In July 1917, a holiday in Skerries was arranged for the widows of the dead leaders. On the first day of that holiday, my mother got [sic] a heart attack while swimming, and died. The result was a horrifying childhood and youth for my brother [Donagh MacDonagh, the future judge and writer] and me. It left us both emotionally and physically scarred for life."

Some applicants were more equal than others. The increasingly ubiquitous Diarmaid Ferriter, whose father-in-law John Maher was one applicant, explained: "Some form of hierarchy of benefit [was] operating . . . the leaders of the Rising [were] in a category of their own." The biggest names qualified for a pension of IRE500 a year, a small fortune in the bleak 1930s and 1940s. Others, though, were left in "abject circumstances".

The mother of Sean Treacy, a volunteer who was her only child "and only help in this wicked world" before he was killed in the War of Independence, got a one-off payment of IRE100. "[The Army Pension Office], to my great grief and loss, humiliated and insulted me with the shabby sum of a IRE100 gratuity for my suffering, both financial and otherwise, since 1916," she wrote. "I returned it as an insult and a desecration of the name of my noble son."

The Army sent an emissary – none other than future Blueshirts leader Eoin O'Duffy – to her house, which had slipped into dereliction while she was still living

in it. A later offer to her of an extra IRE50 was also turned down.

There was undoubtedly a sizeable amount of gold bullion in *Keepers of the Flame*, and it had been assembled into a sweeping mosaic with the kind of attention to detail that only comes with a deep and abiding interest in a subject. Most of the two dozen or so interviewees (who included everybody from UL historian Catriona Crowe to President Michael D Higgins) had something worthwhile to say, with the French-born archivist Cécile Gordon particularly illuminating in her explanations of how and why some applicants cleaned up while others had to lose out.

Unfortunately, the programme was much too long at 105 minutes, with the slow pace of proceedings often causing the attention to wander. All too often, also, the cinematographers resorted to pristine but serenely bland drone footage, a tactic that by now has been thoroughly flogged to death in RTÉ's documentaries.

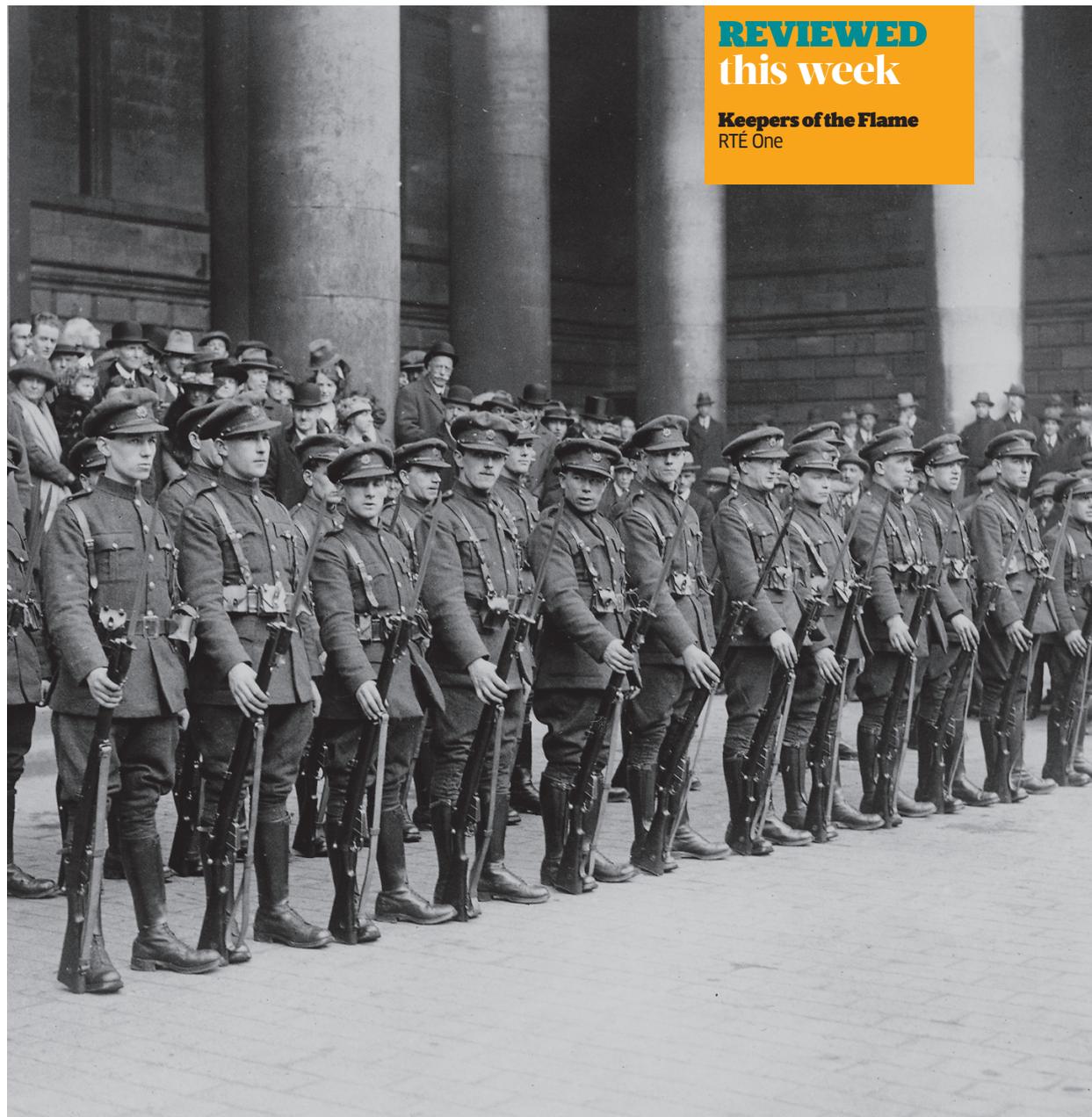
Unnecessary digressions abounded. A segment on how Kilmainham Gaol fell into squalid disrepair in the 1920s and 1930s was swiftly followed by a clip of Conor Cruise O'Brien risibly explaining why 1916 should never have been allowed to happen, for the good of the country. All very interesting, but surely not that relevant to the topic.

The dozens of pensive shots of forests and rivers (and, at one point, some apples in a meadow), all set to mournfully keening trad music, heightened the sense of an impressive but flawed documentary that would have had twice the impact at two-thirds the length.

There will be probably half a dozen similar efforts hitting our screens in the next three to four years, as the War of Independence and then the Civil War hit their hundredth anniversaries. Let's hope they manage to retain all that was good about *Keepers of the Flame* while shaving off the inessential low-hanging fruit. ■

REVIEWED
this week

Keepers of the Flame
RTÉ One



Emer McLysaght



APPETITE FOR DISTRACTION

Desserts come and go, many of them evoking sweet memories – but none so much as the delicious, sophisticated and, yes, glamorous Viennetta

I've bought two HB Viennettas in the past week. I've gone years without even thinking about them and now I've bought two in the past week. If you're as online as I am, or online at all really, you will have seen a viral video "from the Viennetta factory" doing the rounds. These videos have been on YouTube for as long as the site's been in business.

Every once in a while, a bright spark uploads a clip to Facebook or Twitter and we are once again mesmerised by the fluttering sheets of ice cream and the light yet constant mistings of chocolate that make up those pillowy, ruffled, delicious layers. Those paper thin, alternating coats of dark and light. Those innocent yet decadent... Jesus, there I go again. In a Viennetta fog. You can see how I ended up buying two in a week?

Viennetta is one of those fancy childhood confections that elicit a knee jerk nostalgia response in people. Fat Frogs have a similar effect. And Banshee Bones. But neither have the glamour of a Viennetta. In 1980s and 1990s Ireland, choice was limited (on many



This means plenty to me: ohhh, Viennetta

fronts) and Sundays for many were punctuated by Mass, roasties going in the oven, the floors being mopped (if it was my house), dinner with paper serviettes and the Nice Glasses at the dining table in the Good Front Room, and a dessert of some description. Often homemade – an apple crumble or a jam tart – but sometimes shop-bought. Sometimes, a Viennetta.

We could hear it calling to us from the freezer. We couldn't sleep if we knew there was one in the house. We were a family of five, so there was plenty to go around, but my older brother still concocted a lie when I was at my most gullible in order to steal my portion for himself. "Did you know they put brown sauce in Viennetta?" he'd said nonchalantly, knowing my hatred for HP. "That's what the brown stuff is.

It's mixed with the chocolate." I'd like to think his success with this scam was brief, or at least a parent intervened, but it certainly goes to show the lengths to which a preteen was willing to go to steal candy (or Viennetta) from a baby (or a five-year-old).

Viennetta was posh, there was no doubt. It was obviously affordable, though, otherwise we wouldn't have ever had it. It was the ultimate in dessert sophistication. It was rare enough that it sticks in the memory and invokes the kind of nostalgia this week's video elicited. It was king of ice cream in a world of vanilla, banana and raspberry ripple. That was, of course, until Romantica came on the scene.

Romantica entered sometime in the early 1990s and truly straddled the line between ice cream and cake. Where

once a Black Forest Gateau might have been the go-to birthday treat of choice, now there was a newer, fancier horse in town.

It was expensive, probably IRE4. It was nearly too decadent, saved for the holiest of all dessert slots: Christmas Day. The general Irish palate just couldn't handle hazelnut ice cream more than once or maybe twice a year.

And so, Viennetta thrived. The later 1990s saw the introduction of newer versions – caramel and biscuit – probably as a stop-gap for consumers between the traditional vanilla Viennettas and the unadulterated filth of the annual Romantica. Viennetta Biscuit might come out on Easter Sunday. Or maybe on St Stephen's Day. It knew its place in the pecking order.

And how does that order stand now? Well, Romantica Ireland is dead and gone, and with O'Leary in the grave. It's rumoured you can get your hands on a bastardised Carte d'Or version these days, boasting about a "new recipe". Viennetta Biscuit is gone, too. Only vanilla and mint have stood the test of time (although if you see others out in the wild, please send word).

It was with nostalgia in my heart and ice cream on the brain that I sought out those two Viennettas last week. I presented one to a friend after a dinner invitation to her house. Her two-year-old – a Viennetta virgin – delivered a garbled "Oooh, this looks delicious" when a slice was placed in front of her. And so the candle was passed from one generation to the next.

The second Viennetta I bought is in the freezer. Waiting for today. Waiting for Sunday, and its rightful place in the world. ■

EMER'S WEEK

This week, I am:

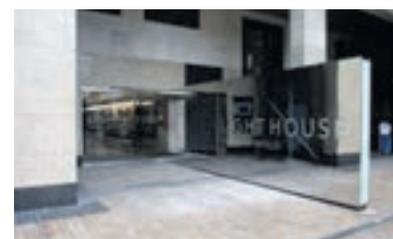


Addicted to... THR Roundtables

The Hollywood Reporter's Roundtable series on YouTube is fascinating viewing for anyone with any interest at all in film and TV making, acting, writing and creativity. Every few months and during awards season, they gather some big Hollywood names and sit them in a circle to pick their brains. There's a great back catalogue to choose from, too.

Bingeing on... Glow

Netflix's *Glow* (Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling) is a show that sits on just the right side of bizarre and it is glorious for it. Based on the true tale of a 1980s push to make ladies wrestling as popular as men's, it's funny, it's sexy, and it's issues-led without being preachy. Marc Maron as the grumpy and intriguing director and unlikely main love interest is an added bonus. Season three is on Netflix now.



Loving... the Lighthouse

The Lighthouse Cinema in Smithfield serves a varied community, including the older population of nearby Stoneybatter and beyond. They offer a 'Silver Screen' special on a Friday afternoon, which includes a newly-released film and a tea or coffee before the main event for just €6. An early afternoon trip to the Lighthouse is worth it any day just to see the glam older ladies and gents enjoying their scones and chats.



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Oceanview Stateroom €2,239 now **€2,029pp**

Balcony Stateroom €2,499 now **€2,089pp**

Concierge Class was €2,679 now **€2,319pp**

www.cruisescapes.ie book@cruisescapes.ie 01 294 1000

Booking Remarks: Prices shown include all reductions and offers & are subject to availability • Prices based on 2 sharing • Payment plan available • Non-refundable deposit due at time of booking. Full payment due 16 weeks from departure • Optional insurance available • Fully licensed and bonded by CAR (TA 0348)



Eastern Europe Escorted Tours

Explore this fascinating region with its beautiful scenery, stunning cities, exotic cuisine, and friendly people. Our tours feature luxury coach transport and knowledgeable English speaking guides.

The Czar Route

8 night escorted tour - May to September 2020

The imperial delights of Russia welcome you on this 8 night tour as you travel from Helsinki to Moscow. Discover the western charms of St. Petersburg. Explore atmospheric Moscow and uncover the colourful history of the Czars that makes Russia such an interesting country to visit.

Includes:

- ✓ Flight from Dublin to Helsinki & Moscow to Dublin
- ✓ Transfers on luxury coaches
- ✓ 2 nights in Helsinki, 3 nights in St Petersburg & 3 nights in Moscow in 4★ hotels
- ✓ Breakfast daily
- ✓ Scenic train from St. Petersburg to Moscow
- ✓ Tours of Helsinki, St. Petersburg & Moscow
- ✓ Service of English speaking guide throughout ✓ 15kg Check in Bag

8 nights was €1,749 now from just **€1,649pp**

Single room supplement **€650**

Baltic Highlights

8 night escorted tour - March to October 2020

This Travel Escapes tour brings you to three gems of the Baltic – Vilnius, Riga & Tallinn; the beautiful capital cities of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia respectively - on what is sure to be a memorable experience.

Includes:

- ✓ Return flights from Dublin
- ✓ Transfers on luxury coaches
- ✓ Welcome meeting with champagne, cocktail or juice
- ✓ 3 nights in Vilnius, 3 nights in Riga & 2 nights in Tallinn in 4★ hotels with breakfast
- ✓ Tour of Vilnius including a walking tour of Old Town Vilnius & the Hill of Crosses
- ✓ Tour of Riga including Rundale Palace
- ✓ Tour of Tallinn including Alexander Nevsky Cathedral
- ✓ Service of English speaking guide throughout ✓ 15kg Check in Bag

8 nights was €1,399 now from just **€1,299pp**

Single room supplement **€420**

www.travelescapes.ie book@travelescapes.ie 01 294 1000

Booking Remarks: Prices based on 2 sharing • Non refundable or transferable booking deposit €250pp • Payment plan available • A Russian Visa is required for Czar Route and the Russian Embassy charge €86 • Optional insurance available • Prices are subject to availability • Fully licensed and bonded by CAR (TA 0348)

**SAVE
€100pp!
Book by 30
September**



Eastern Europe & Russia





**THE
FERTILITY
FORUM
2019**

**Croke Park, Dublin
Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th November**

Explore the range of options available at every stage of your fertility journey and discover what may be your most suitable path to parenthood...

Looking to start or expand your family? The inaugural Fertility Forum will take place in Dublin over two days this November and will cover the full range of fertility and reproduction issues.

Topics to be covered include IVF, egg-freezing, sperm donation, surrogacy, complimentary therapies, government responsibility & regulation, financing treatment, travelling for treatment, hormone treatment, male and female fertility issues and education. You will hear from and speak with a large range of experts, consultants and specialists from across different stages of the fertility journey. There will be the opportunity to explore, in a discreet and supportive capacity, the different options on what may be a suitable path to parenthood for you.

The packed two-day schedule will include seminars and workshops from a leading panel of experts in the field, real life stories from people on various stages of their own personal fertility journey and exhibitors from all areas of the sector.

You can talk with consultants in a private, face-to-face setting and learn of all the options and services available to you, so you can make an informed decision on which path is best for you and your family.

**Tickets
only
€30**

THEFERTILITYFORUM.ie