

# Review



## Stopping traffic

How Covid-19 could herald  
a cycling revolution



### Barry Ward

The Dublin actor talks about hit Ibiza thriller 'White Lines' and new Irish film 'Dating Amber'

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# Zeitgeist

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Cover photo of Susan Lannigan with her daughters Isobel and Aoileann Grant. **Photo by Gerry Mooney**

**Published by** Independent Newspapers Ltd, 27-32 Talbot Street, Dublin 1.

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Production by Gareth Murray and Naomi Richardson

# Agenda

News, Analysis, Interviews & more



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### Highs and Lows

#### Good week for

**Claudia Borgogno**  
The Italian accountant (58) won a Pablo Picasso oil painting valued at €1m in a charity draw. Her son had bought her the winning €100 raffle ticket for Christmas.

**Joe Rogan**  
The US TV host-turned-provocateur has signed a \$100m multi-year deal to give Spotify exclusive rights to the *Joe Rogan Experience* podcast. The show was downloaded 190 million times a month last year.



#### Bad week for

**Eamon Ryan**  
The Green leader faces an election to keep his job. Deputy leader Catherine Martin, who is less keen on going into government with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, has secured enough nominations to challenge him.



**Ronan Farrow**  
The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist whose work helped expose Harvey Weinstein was accused of misleading reporting by a *New York Times* columnist. He denies the claims.



### THE PICTURE

## Church pays tribute to coronavirus victims

Patrick Hand adds more crosses to the 2,000 that have been placed on the walls of the Church of the Ascension of the Lord and parish centre in Balally, south Dublin. Each cross represents a victim of the Covid-19 pandemic on the island.

### THE NEWS

## Trump endorses malaria drug in Covid-19 battle

I hear Donald Trump, *right*, has found a cure for Covid-19. Not quite. The US president told a press conference on Monday that he had been taking the drug hydroxychloroquine for a week and a half. It was developed to combat malaria, but is also used to treat arthritis and lupus, an anti-immune disease. Trump had previously touted it as a potential cure for the coronavirus and claimed it could be "one of the biggest game-changers in the history of medicine".

**Great. So why aren't we all taking it?**  
Medics in New York, Louisiana,

Massachusetts, Ohio, Washington and California told Reuters last month that they used the drug on hospital patients with Covid-19. But several added that they had seen no evidence that the drug had any effect on the virus.

#### But it couldn't do any harm, right?

Wrong. Regulators have said that hydroxychloroquine could cause heart problems and have warned against using it anywhere other than in hospital. Asked what his evidence was for taking the drug, Trump said: "Here's my evidence: I get a lot of positive calls about it."

#### Has anyone tried to persuade him otherwise?

Rick Bright, the scientist who was heading the



US's attempts to find a vaccine, said he was removed from his role after resisting attempts to promote hydroxychloroquine. He claimed he had been "pressured to let politics and cronyism drive decisions over the opinions of the best scientists we have". The US department of health denies his allegations.

#### So we're still waiting for a miracle drug?

Afraid so. Clinical trials to measure hydroxychloroquine's effectiveness against Covid-19 are under way in the US and in the UK, which has stockpiled 16 million tablets. Meanwhile, the British government said that this week it could have a vaccine — rather than a treatment — ready by September. Most estimates have said it would take at least another year.

**W**hen Susan Lannigan was coming to terms with the Covid-19 lockdown, she quickly noticed some unexpected positives. The quality of the air in her south inner-city Dublin neighbourhood improved significantly and noise pollution dropped. The absence of car traffic had an immediate impact.

She decided it was the perfect time for her seven-year-old twins, Isobel and Aoileann, to learn to cycle. She had always been deterred by the volume of traffic on her street and the adjacent South Circular Road, but in the early weeks of lockdown, the number of cars had reduced to a trickle.

The solicitor and seasoned bicycle commuter bought a pair of children's bikes and every day she and the girls ventured outside. The twins quickly got the hang of cycling. For several weeks, Portobello seemed to be theirs — and that of all the other cyclists who were enjoying both sunshine and car-free roads.

"It was like going back in time to when the houses were built," she says, of the Victorian streets. "It was one of the really positive things that came out of lockdown and it showed just how many people would cycle if they thought it was safe to do so."

It is a sentiment echoed by Martina Callanan on the other side of the country. The project manager cycles everywhere in Galway city and she was heartened to see a striking increase in the number of people on bicycles.

"People feel safer when there are fewer cars on the road," she says. "I saw elderly men on their bikes who may not have cycled for decades. There are bikes that have been taken from garages and used for the first time in maybe 20 years."

In Cork city, TJ Murphy says the enormous reduction in traffic encouraged him to cycle from his home near Kent Station to his medical equipment manufacturer job in Carrigtwohill, 15km away. "I wouldn't have dreamed of doing it before because it's a bit of a no-go area for cyclists near the Dunkettle roundabout, but it was so easy when the traffic was reduced," he says.

There were weeks when he worked in the office for four days and he clocked up 120km on his cycling commute. "My fitness levels went up. I felt healthier. Of course, the good weather helps, but it showed me just how doable it is to cycle to work and I think far more would do it if they felt safer."

But as the traffic has started to build again, especially since the start of Phase 1 of lockdown-easing on Monday, his old concerns have come back. "I'm in two minds about

Pedal power: Martina Callanan, who runs the Galway Cycling Campaign, says retailers have nothing to fear from a rise in the number of cyclists. PHOTO BY ANDREW DOWNES



*'Research shows that women tend to benefit more from higher cycling levels'*

whether or not I will cycle to work or drive. I really want to cycle, but if I feel it's dangerous again, I won't," he says.

Lannigan is less inclined to take Isobel and Aoileann cycling on the streets as she had been just a fortnight ago. "There's been a steady increase in traffic," she says. "It's not nearly as bad as it used to be, but you can definitely see more and more out in their cars."

Cycling campaigners point to international studies to show how safe cycling can be, but dangers remain, especially at busy urban junctions that have seemingly been designed exclusively for car users. Eight cyclists were killed on Irish roads last year.

### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

There have been other upsidestides to reduction in car journeys. A study published this week by University College Cork showed pollution from cars halved in the period immediately after lockdown was imposed. It showed there were 85pc fewer car journeys than normal.

The environmental impact internationally has been arresting, too. Carbon emissions globally were down 17pc as a result of Covid-19 lockdowns, aided chiefly by the virtual collapse of air travel and severely restricted car journeys. The skies cleared over cities with notorious smog problems, including Los Angeles.

There is growing pressure around the world to use this pause in our lives to gauge the damage caused by cars and to seek a better, healthier and more sustainable alternative. For many, that better way is on two wheels. The World Health Organisation's Covid-19 advice includes cycling or walking "wherever feasible" as this helps with social distancing and exercise.

Already, cities around the world have introduced temporary cycle lanes to ensure that people can abide by social distancing guidelines. Cycling infrastructure has been quickly put in place in Ireland too, with a new segregated cycle lane on Dublin's north Liffey quays the most noteworthy of all. Campaigners had long fought for this car-thronged artery of the city to be remodelled to safely accommodate cyclists. The Liffey cycle route had been promised for years but the pandemic accelerated its installation.

Dublin City Council published a report on Thursday outlining changes to the city's transport system as the lockdown is eased. It highlighted "the need to very significantly increase the numbers of people walking and cycling into, and around, the city".

# On your bike: how the commute may change forever

*The big read: Covid-19 stopped the traffic and made us rediscover the joys of cycling, but as lockdown is lifted, can the trend continue, asks John Meagher*

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This includes a goal of trebling the number of bicycle journeys into the city centre. This may involve removing on-street parking and reducing traffic lanes to create cycle paths, adding bollards to keep bikes and cars segregated and the installation of at least 1,000 bike stands.

“By choosing to walk or cycle, users will not only accommodate their own mobility but will leave the public transport system for those who don’t have the same alternatives, and we would therefore ask people to carefully consider if this represents a viable option for them,” the report said.

There have also been calls to end the so-called ‘rat run’ in the Phoenix Park. Chesterfield Avenue — the central thoroughfare — accommodates about 10,000 car journeys between west Dublin and the city centre on a typical weekday. A local Green Party councillor, Michael Pidgeon, started an online petition last weekend to stop through-traffic in the park and it had more than 7,000 signatures within a few days.

The Office of Public Works, which manages the park, introduced measures that would curtail traffic, and side entrances remained closed to cars. The result has turned Dublin’s most significant green lung into something of a cycling Mecca.

“Undoubtedly, this lockdown period has given a lot of people pause for thought,” says Ciarán Cuffe, the Green MEP for Dublin. “They’ve seen that when unnecessary car journeys are reduced, everyone benefits. We can’t go back to the old way of needless car congestion. We have to do it differently.”

**INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE**

Cuffe believes a carrot-and-stick approach is needed to get more people out of their car seats and on to their saddles. “The cities that have a vibrant cycling culture are those with a really good cycling infrastructure, where there are dedicated cycle lanes that make them question why they would take their car on certain journeys,” he says.

“This is not a question about people getting rid of their cars and always cycling; it’s choosing to cycle, rather than take an unnecessary car journey. And I think if motorists think about their car usage, they’d see that many of the trips they make could just have easily been done on bike — and their journey time might have been quicker, too. But investing in a cycling infrastructure in our towns and cities is essential for that attitude shift.”

That’s the carrot. What’s the stick? “We have to stop things like parking for civil servants,” he says. “If there’s a free space available, people will drive into work just to use it. People need to be incentivised to leave the car at home. Car ownership is high in places like the Netherlands, but we know how high bicycle usage is.” Amsterdam has long been considered one of the world’s most bike-friendly cities, but it wasn’t always like that. In the 1960s, it was choked with cars. It took an increasing toll of child traffic deaths and fierce activism to transform it into the cycling capital it is today.

For Cian Ginty, editor of *IrishCycle.com*, such transformation can happen when there is a political will to allocate capital spending to a cycling infrastructure. “There are a lot of people out there who would consider cycling if they felt it was safe, and when you create dedicated cycle lanes — not a strip of paint on a road — they will use it,” he says.

“And you’ve got to actively stop rat-running in urban areas. Bollards were erected in Drumcondra [in north Dublin] a couple of years ago to

*‘The cities that have a vibrant cycling culture are those with a really good cycling infrastructure, where there are dedicated cycle lanes that make people question why they would take their car on certain journeys’*



Clockwise from left: three boys take to the hills on their bikes in the Phoenix Park; the old days of traffic gridlock before the Covid-19 crisis; and cyclists navigating the new lane layout in the Phoenix Park. MAIN PHOTO BY STEVE HUMPHREYS



New skills: Susan Lannigan with twin daughters Isobel and Aoileann Grant (7) who learned to cycle with less traffic on the roads during lockdown. PHOTO BY GERRY MOONEY

stop cars going into certain streets. There was opposition initially but then it stopped when people saw how safe it was for their children to cycle there.”

Ginty welcomes the temporary measures put in place for cyclists as a result of the pandemic, but he feels that such initiatives should kick-start seismic, permanent change. “You’re always going to have vested interests who will be opposed to such measures, like the car park lobby, and I don’t think you’re ever going to convince them,” he says. “But there are other business, in the middle ground, that could be convinced if they see things like pedestrianisation working.”

Keith Gavin of the Irish Parking Association says he finds it frustrating that the conversation around cycling tends to degenerate into an Us against Them argument. “I think everyone would want to see the cycling infrastructure improved,” he says. “But not everyone is able to cycle or feels comfortable doing so, no matter how good the cycle lanes might be. “And, don’t forget, you have people travel-

ling long journeys to support retailers. What happens to those driving from the country into Dublin to shop in the city? Are they supposed to leave their car on the outskirts of the city and cycle in?”

Gavin is opposed to the new cycle route on the north quays of the Liffey because he feels it occupies too much of the road. “Was the option of running the cycle route alongside the Luas track considered? The problem with where the cycle lane is, is how the reduced space for cars will lead to awful tailbacks,” he says. “But then, it’s been the policy of Dublin City Council and of Owen Keegan [the council’s chief executive] to get as many cars off the road as possible. Ultimately, what they’re doing is pushing people to shop in the out of town centres.”

Richard Guiney, head of Dublin Town, which represents 2,500 retailers in the city centre, believes cyclists and motorists will have to coexist as best as possible in the immediate post-lockdown period. “With social distancing guidelines likely to be in place for a long time to come, the capacity

of public transport will be greatly reduced,” he says. “Before the pandemic, about two-thirds of the 300,000 people coming into Dublin city centre every day were doing so on public transport, so there is a huge number of people that will have to use an alternative means to get in. For some, that will be on bicycle, for other it will be by car.” Each ‘side’, he believes, has to cut the other a bit of slack.

Guiney says it is unlikely that motorists will have the run of the city as they once did. “In order for retailers and restaurants and other businesses to do social distancing properly, they will have to use the pavements outside and that will mean people walking on street. And that might mean that some of the multistorey car parks won’t be accessible.”

Martina Callanan, who runs the Galway Cycling Campaign, believes business and retail should not fear a rise in the number of cyclists. “We’re trying to get the idea across that cycling is an everyday pursuit and we’ve found that cyclists tend to shop local and are loyal,” she

says. She would like to see more options for practical, everyday bicycles — with baskets and mudguards as standard — for consumers. “Some bikes are more practical for others,” she says, “and can make everyday tasks very easy to do.”

Callanan is especially keen for more women to cycle regularly. “Research shows that women tend to benefit more from higher cycling levels,” she says. “Since women tend to take more care of children’s and older adults’ mobility in families, they gain more time if the children and older family members can take independent journeys by bike. Reducing the ‘mammy taxi service’ means women gain more time.”

Susan Lannigan, meanwhile, hopes that the Ireland her daughters grow up in will be friendlier towards cyclists. “I think one good thing about social distancing is that people are more aware of giving other people space, and that includes motorists when they see cyclists — especially children. I hope that respect won’t fade because if it stays, more people will feel comfortable going out on their bikes. And that can only be a good thing.”

*‘I think one good thing about social distancing is that people are more aware of giving other people space, and that includes motorists when they see cyclists’*

**New direction: how other cities are responding**



**London**

There are plans to make the city the biggest car-free capital in the world. Plans unveiled this week suggest that car-choked hotspots such as London Bridge and Waterloo Bridge would be among those given over entirely to cyclists and pedestrians.

“Many Londoners have rediscovered the joys of walking and cycling during lockdown and, by quickly and cheaply widening pavements, creating temporary cycle lanes and closing roads to through traffic, we will enable millions more people to change the way they get around our city,” London Mayor Sadiq Khan said.



**Paris**

The Rue de Rivoli, one of Europe’s most famous shopping streets, was closed to cars at the end of April and will continue to be pedestrian and cyclist-only for the summer.

To ease pressure on public transport routes, cycling lanes that follow the Paris Metro’s most popular lines are being considered. In total, about 600km of temporary cycle lanes are planned for post-lockdown Paris.

“It is out of the question that we allow ourselves to be invaded by cars and by pollution,” mayor Anne Hidalgo said.



**Milan**

Lombardy was hit especially hard by Covid-19 and the region’s capital has made the bicycle central to its plans to reopen. More than 30km of temporary cycle lanes will be open throughout the summer. Known as Strade Aperte — Open Roads — these feature new road designs with wider pavements.

Elsewhere, a 30kph speed limit will be imposed on many of the city’s roads and bridges. Residents have been encouraged to get around the city on foot or on bicycle and to use public transport sparingly.

# Will the pandemic property price drop be a blip or a tailspin?

*The ESRI predicted this week that house prices could fall by 12pc. Kim Bielenberg finds out who are likely to be the winners and losers as the Covid-19 crisis hits the market*

It was only a matter of time before the national conversation came back to property prices. As the immediate threat of Covid-19 recedes somewhat, attention has turned to whether we will have a soft landing, a term popularised in the Celtic Tiger era just before the crash. Will it be a V-shaped recession, or will the cost of the average Irish home keep on tumbling? There are two ways in which the coronavirus could have a deep impact on the property market. The first is that economic shock and soaring unemployment could prompt a sharp drop in prices.

That was the picture painted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) this week when the think-tank forecast that house prices are likely to drop by 12pc by the end of next year. On one hand, the fall should be positive news for buyers, as homes become more affordable. On the other, many hoping to get on to the property ladder may struggle because of falling incomes and banks' unwillingness to give them mortgages amid growing unemployment.

A more long-term effect of Covid-19, which is being pondered by real-estate soothsayers, is that a significant portion of the population will work from home at least part of the time. Opinion is divided on whether this crisis will prompt a shift away from cities. Twitter has told its employees that they will have the option of working at home "forever", while Google and Facebook say staff are likely to continue remote working until the end of the year.

Much has been made of the effect of this on the centralised office building as the default workplace for those engaged in non-manual labour.

But will it not also affect where employees live? If there is no need to be in an office five days a week, there may be a temptation to flee expensive suburbs and move out even beyond the commuter belt, where property is much cheaper.

After two months in lockdown, some city-dwellers may want to abandon apartment living, and show a renewed interest in semi-detached garden suburbia and rural bungalow bliss.

"Increasingly we are seeing that people don't want apartments, but will want to go back to traditional housing," says Damien Dillon, a property consultant. "Now that there is an increased trend towards home working, they need an extra room for an office. Why pay high rents in the city centre, when you could live in a house with extra space somewhere like Maynooth or Greystones?"

After two years in Dublin working in IT and renting apartments with his wife Tabata and daughter Stella, Leonardo dos Santos now wants to buy a house outside the city.

The Brazilian software engineer



Economist: Ronan Lyons of Trinity College says rents could drop by 10-20pc

has worked right through the Covid-19 lockdown, and has been able to save money. "Nothing really changed with my work in terms of stability," he says. "I am still doing the same work except that I am doing it from home."

He hopes to be able to save more money and buy a house in a commuter town in Kildare or Wicklow if prices come down. With the prospect of eventually working three days a week at home, he feels less need to be close to his workplace in Sandyford, on the southside of Dublin.

"What I really want is a house with a garden, so that my daughter has space to run around," says Dos Santos, who is paying €1,900 a month in rent for a two-bed flat in Rathfarnham.

Not all renters will be in a position to buy, however, and they will still face onerous conditions from banks if they want to get a home loan.

Aengus Hennessy, a tenant living with his family in Glasnevin, has had a hankering to buy his own place, but has found it impossible to get a mortgage.

#### FIRST-TIME BUYERS

"When you say you are self-employed, the banks don't want to know," says the cabinet maker, who is a member of the Dublin Tenants Association. "My landlord is decent enough, but as a tenant in Ireland, you have very little security. I spent 15 years living in New York and you had much more security there."

Workers in steady sectors such as IT and finance may have better opportunities to buy if prices drop, but other potential first-time buyers find themselves in a much more precarious position.

Colm Burke, the Fine Gael TD for Cork North Central, says he has dealt with a large number of couples who were hoping to buy a house, but fear that the deal will fall through because one of them is receiving a temporary wage subsidy from the Government during the pandemic.

"These are often people in safe secure jobs," he says. In typical cases, banks will not allow them to draw down loans at a late stage in the deal even if both are in steady jobs but one is receiving a state subsidy.

Trevor Grant, who works with Affinity Advisors and is chairman of the Association of Irish Mortgage Advisors, says: "Certain people whose jobs have been affected by Covid-19 are unable to close their mortgage transaction, because they can't satisfy the lender that they will return to the terms they were on when the loan was approved in the first place."

"That is the first bottleneck we are seeing — and it is deeply disturbing for everybody involved. The people involved are not there because of something silly they did, or something silly their employer did. It is something outside everybody's control," he says.

Hoping to buy: With more days working from home, Leonardo dos Santos, pictured with his wife Tabata and daughter Stella, is looking to move from Dublin to Kildare or Wicklow. PICTURE BY FRANK MCGRATH



So how has the property market been affected so far by the pandemic, and how will it affect rents, prices and the desirability of living in certain types of properties.

In one positive development, Focus Ireland reported this week that the number of families becoming homeless in April was down to 15, compared with a typical figure of about 100.

Professor Ronan Lyons, an economist at Trinity College Dublin, tracks rents closely through *Daft.ie* surveys.

He says they dropped by 2pc in April, the biggest monthly fall in 11 years, and he expects a further decline this year.

"I would not be surprised if we have a 10pc to 20pc drop in rents by the end of the year," he says. "Some of the sectors where renters are over-represented are the most affected by the pandemic in terms of employment: hospitality, catering and tourism."

Lyons says the trend in rents and sales prices will depend on the unemployment rate as we come out of lockdown.

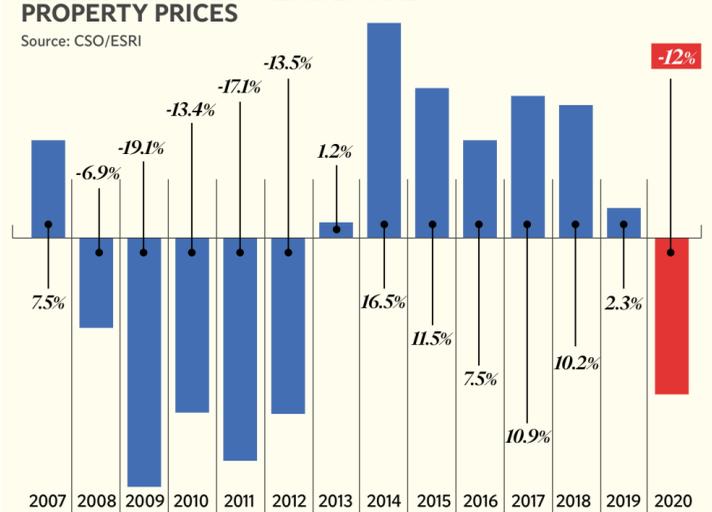
"There is uncertainty about what the true unemployment rate will be when things open up again, and how many people stay out of work. Will it be as high as 20pc?"

The trend in house prices will also be shaped by the drop in overall household income over the next year, he says. That, again, is likely to be affected heavily by the unemployment rate.

## YEARLY CHANGE IN RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY PRICES

Source: CSO/ESRI

GRAPHIC BY SHANE MCINTYRE



"If there is a 10pc fall in income, you would expect a 10pc to 15pc fall in sales prices. It may not just be incomes that affect this — you could also get a shock to confidence."

There may be forecasts of lower house prices and rents, but supply remains an issue.

"There is still an underlying shortage of housing that has built up for a couple of decades, but in the next few months the incomes may not be there to pay for it," says Lyons.

Faced with a housing shortage and financial instability, renters and buyers who simply cannot afford the prices will resort to moving in with friends, relatives or parents, he adds.

Initially, it was hoped that the recession caused by the Covid-19 pandemic would be V-shaped, with a sharp downturn followed by a swift recovery.

That was one of the scenarios outlined by the ESRI in this week's forecast. A more pessimistic scenario suggested by the think-tank forecasts a more sluggish recovery.

According to its report, a contraction in prices will be caused by the decline in household disposable income and the sharp fall-off in mortgage market activity.

Professor Kieran McQuinn, one of the authors of the report, told *Review* that a more sluggish recovery is now much more likely.

This is partly because the slow easing of the lockdown in the Government's five-point plan,

which will mean that social distancing will continue into the autumn.

"The fact that people's income will be reduced will make it more difficult for them to get mortgages. Financial institutions may not be as prepared to lend as they were before," he says. "If there is a second wave of the virus, there could be a more adverse outcome again."

While the ESRI forecasts a fall of 12pc by the end of next year, McQuinn believes that prices are likely to pick up again in the long term.

"Over the longer term what you see happening — and this is what happened after the financial crisis — is that the economy goes into a tailspin."

"Consequently, house prices fall because of falling income, but once the economy stabilises, demand for housing will pick up again quite quickly."

While the fall in prices may continue into next year, the temporary halt in construction will mean that there will still be a housing shortage. According to the ESRI professor, at the start of the year it was hoped that up to 24,000 homes would be built this year, but the total will now fall way short of that.

#### RIISING UNEMPLOYMENT

While rising unemployment may leave many families strapped for cash, others who have continued working will have saved money that otherwise would have been spent on holidays, eating out or shopping.

"Some people will have a significant increase in their savings. So when the economy stabilises, you could see those savings being used in the housing market," says McQuinn. "So, demand could pick up quickly."

Not all property commentators are as pessimistic about property prices as the ESRI, and some believe the housing shortage will mean that prices will bounce back quickly.

Marian Finnegan, chief economist for Sherry FitzGerald, the estate agent, says: "So far we have not seen any downward pressure on prices of any note."

"This is a very unusual shock, and it is clear that some people are staying at home and not spending money. There will be a stack of money in savings accounts."

"There are as many factors that could drive prices up as down. There may be some risk to prices in the short term, but that will be overturned provided we return to economic activity," she says.

It is too early during this unstable period to detect a trend in prices. Seasoned observers of the property scene have noted that in the last crash, it took six months before the first vendors cut their asking prices in response to prevailing conditions.

However, discounts are being quietly negotiated, particularly for second-hand homes, and the bigger the house, the bigger the percentage discount, according to some property sources.

Breffnie O'Kelly, a Dublin property agent who advises buyers, told *Review*: "Most of the buyers, who plan to be owner-occupiers and have had a sale agreed pre-Covid, are not walking away."

"In most cases the price where we had agreed to buy has been renegotiated downwards by about 5pc."

There may have been speculation that the pandemic will reduce the appeal of capital cities such as Dublin, as cash-strapped buyers seek a rural idyll where they can work in their home office, looking out over fields of lambs and bluebells.

But it may be too soon to write an obituary for the grand metropolis.

Lyons says the attraction of big cities will be weakened somewhat if the pandemic is not easily solved and looks like repeating itself. However, the economist believes our preference for clustering together is unlikely to go away. Cities have had a gravitational pull over centuries across the western world despite pestilence, disease and pollution, and managed to adapt to changing conditions.

"If there is a vaccine and then the coronavirus is gone, there will be a blip for a year or two," says Lyons, "and we will go back to the trend of the last 150 years where more people move to cities."



Feeling the pinch: Sinéad Gillespie and Laura McNally during Daffodil Day last year. This year's fundraiser was moved online due to Covid-19, but only raised half the normal amount. PHOTO BY DAVID CONACHY

# Charities in crisis: 'We are emptying the tank right now'

*Covid-19 has forced the cancellation of vital fundraisers, and many charities are now facing the perfect storm as donations drop off and more people seek help. Kathy Donaghy reports*

**D**affodil Day, the Dublin Marathon, coffee mornings: events like these are the lifeblood of our charities, and they have all been halted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the sector is facing a sharp drop-off in donations.

From housing to health, education to cancer care, charities are a fundamental part of our society. The latest figures show that the amount raised in the not-for-profit sector reached €1.1bn in 2017, an increase of 9pc on the previous year. Our kindness as a nation is something of a badge of honour internationally. The Charities Aid Foundation's World Giving Index ranks Ireland as the most generous country in Europe and the fifth worldwide.

The notion that Ireland is a particularly giving and charitable nation goes back decades — at least to Live Aid in 1985, when we donated more than any other nation on a person-by-person basis (£7m) to famine relief in Ethiopia.

But this week came the first official indication that many charities here are in trouble and the well is running dry. In a survey by the Charities Regulator, more than half of the 2,223 charities that responded said their finances were uncertain or in difficulty as a result of Covid-19. Of the 71pc of respondents that fundraise, some 90pc said they have had to cancel or postpone at least some aspects of their fundraising for 2020.

Helen Martin, the Charities Regulator chief executive, says that at a time when more and more people are going to be turning to them for help, charities are struggling.

While there is no way of estimating how much money they may lose out on, her office plans to do another survey in a few months.

Pieta House, which signalled that it was facing a massive funding shortfall with the cancellation of the annual Darkness into Light appeal, had moved to cut its therapists' hours. Following an influx of donations totalling €4m for its 'Sunrise Appeal', the suicide and self-harm prevention charity, said these proposed cuts will now form part of a review and will not be taken further at this point.

## LENTEN CAMPAIGN

Trócaire's traditional Lenten campaign, when thousands of boxes are filled with donations, is one of the charity's biggest earners. Every year, the boxes bring in €5m, with a further €3m being made in separate donations during the campaign. Because the lockdown was imposed in the middle of Lent this year, the charity says its much-needed funds are lying in boxes in people's homes.

On Monday, Trócaire is launching a campaign to let it collect the money and is calling on the public to count out what they have collected and either hand it into a parish centre — if it is safe to do so — or to make a donation online or over the phone to the value of the amount in

the box. Caoimhe de Barra, the charity's chief executive, says it would love people to turn in that money between now and the end of May. "It's core to our work of supporting 2.9 million people in 19 of the poorest countries in the world," she says.

At Focus Ireland, which helped 550 people to secure a home in March, fundraisers have shifted their efforts to raise money online. Amy Carr, its head of fundraising, says this year will be challenging. While it had hoped to raise €11.5m this year, it is now looking at €9m instead. "It's been a steep learning curve," she says. "When you're coming into the summer the fundraising is community- and activity-based. We had to look at all our events and see if we could continue with them and ask if we needed to adapt them or postpone them. We looked at everything through that lens."

The next challenge will be in seeing how long restrictions on movement and social distancing will stay in place. "It has forced us to be innovative," says Carr. "We've thought about how we can adapt, and we're doing that. We've been doing things like running a virtual marathon, where people can do 26 miles over the course of a month, called The Next Step. It fitted in really nicely

with people getting their exercise in and raising money."

People have remained generous, despite the economic impact of Covid-19, Carr suggests.

"They still want to be there for people less fortunate than themselves," she says. "The families we work with, who are living in hotel rooms, are not able to go out or social distance. There's a huge amount of empathy for them," she says.

For the Hope Foundation, which works with street children and slum communities in Kolkata, Covid-19 has been devastating. The Cork-based charity had to close most of its services in the Indian city, keeping only its 11 homes for 261 street children and its own hospital open.

The charity is still delivering meals to thousands of families in slum communities.

Charlotte Kavanagh, a spokeswoman for the charity, says its fundraising plans have been obliterated and it has had to pare back its work to the minimum. Instead of marking its 21st year, staff and volunteers are looking anxiously at the future.

"We raise €2.6m a year. That's what we need to do all the work. This year we'll be lucky to raise 40pc of that. It's dire. The tap has turned off so



Call to arms: Barry Jones, who completed the Press Up Challenge for LauraLynn in April, with his wife Mairéad and their daughters Cara (6), Molly (9) and Elsie (5). PHOTO BY STEVE HUMPHREYS

## Run for your money: The fundraisers boosting coffers

**T**hey're running marathons, shaving their heads and doing hundreds of press-ups. They're holding socially distanced bingo and online quizzes. People all over the country are embracing virtual and solo challenges to raise money for charity.

At his home in Shankill, Co Dublin, Barry Jones is gearing up to walk or run 100km in June for the LauraLynn Children's Hospice.

His nine-year-old daughter Molly has been receiving respite care at LauraLynn for the past five years. Living with a rare chromosome disorder, she has many medical issues and the hospice's services provide a lifeline for Barry and his wife Mairéad, who have two younger daughters, Cara (6) and Elsie (5).

Barry, who works with adults with intellectual disabilities, regularly fundraises for the charity. He just completed a 3,000 press-ups challenge for the hospice last month, raising €3,000.

Mark Mooney is hoping for a reboot of the ice bucket challenge that soaked the world four years ago. The nine-year-old from Walterstown, Co Meath, did his own ice bucket challenge and wants more people to follow suit to raise money for the Irish Cancer Society. All his efforts are in honour of his father, John, who was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in January and is undergoing treatment.

Mark's mum Naomi Connell says he has raised €5,000 so far. With so much stress and disappointment in her son's life, she says, Mark wanted to do something positive.

Eugene O'Leary (77), from Howth, Co Dublin, is over halfway through his 10km a day for May. Every day he leaves his home and walks to Baldoyle or Kilbarrack and back, tracking and posting his progress online for his social media followers.

Over the course of the past two decades, the father-of-seven, has raised more than €100,000 for Children's Health Ireland at Crumlin. The hospital holds a special place in his heart. When his second youngest daughter, Helen, was born, she spent a long time in the care of doctors and nurses at the hospital as she had heart treatment. She died in 2002 at the age of 19 but her father never forgot the care she received. He has raised €5,550 so far with his 10km challenge.

In Dublin, wedding photographer Katie Kavanagh took pictures of her neighbours and residents of Dublin 8 on their doorsteps. Her subjects donated money to Purple House Cancer Support in return for copies of the 'doorraits'.

*'We've done the accounts and we're €600,000 short for next year and the following year we could be €900,000 short'*

quickly," says Kavanagh, who is asking people to remember that for only €20, they can feed a family of five for two weeks.

The work of Alone, the charity that supports older people at home, has come to the fore in the pandemic. Seán Moynihan, its chief executive, says the big fear is that it is eating into their reserves.

"We're emptying the tank to do all this right now. There's a pinch now when everyone is doing everything they can. What happens next? The explosion in the workload is huge and all those people we're helping will need to be resourced on an ongoing basis. We've done the accounts and we're €600,000 short for next year and the following year we could be €900,000 short."

The Irish Cancer Society's annual Daffodil Day — which brings in 20pc of the charity's annual income — could not go ahead in March.

The charity pivoted to move fundraising efforts online, however, creating a "digital daffodil" that people could download and share on their social media accounts. This raised €2m, but it was still only half of what the charity normally takes in on Daffodil Day.

A total of 98pc of the charity's income — €22m a year — comes from public donations. Mark Mellett, the society's head of fundraising, estimates that this could be down anywhere between 30pc and 40pc this year.

With a number of virtual events planned in the coming months including a "marathon in a month" in June, Mellett is hopeful that

people will continue to support the society. With all its events cancelled, LauraLynn Children's Hospice is nervously looking at the year ahead. The country's only children's hospice, which also provides respite care to children with complex care needs, relies on donations for 89pc of its funding.

Sarah Meagher, its head of fundraising, says while it has moved a lot of its efforts online, the impact of Covid-19 may not be felt until later into the year. She remains hopeful that people will be generous. Already, she says, a number have handed over the money they would have spent on their annual holiday.

The Government has launched a €40m support package for charities, social enterprises and community organisations. The money is being drawn from the Dormant Accounts Fund. Deirdre Garvey, chief executive of the Wheel, the representative body for the sector, says this funding injection will keep organisations stable while they prepare for the future.

What she hopes will emerge from the pandemic is a greater understanding of the scale of the work that an army of community and charity workers do every day.

More than ever it's important to support the work of charities, says Martin of the Charities Regulator. At a time when their workload is increasing and more people will be turning to them, the message is that now more than ever we need to live up to our reputation as the most generous people in the world.



10km a day for May: Eugene O'Leary (77) from Howth. PHOTO BY MARK CONDREN



Campaign: Trócaire chief executive Caoimhe de Barra

# Banking apps upset the balance

*Revolut has quickly won a million customers here, but how much of a threat do such start-ups pose to traditional banks, asks Regina Lavelle*

**T**hey're the start-ups that promise to replace the fusty old bank account. You can sign up for an account online and within minutes be using a smartphone app to transfer or spend money and order a banking card that you can load with whatever amount you chose. Most transactions, such as withdrawals and contactless transactions, are free.

In a time where it can feel like your bank is not just minding your money but putting its hand in your pocket, interest in alternatives is perhaps unsurprising. Still, there can be little doubt that reaching one million Irish customers within five years of its launch is a stunning achievement for Revolut.

The \$5.5bn London-based financial start-up founded by Nikolay Storonsky and Vlad Yatsenko says its number of Irish customers has doubled in the past six months.

The start-up is one of a wave of "challenger banks", mobile-first ventures that have pioneered features such as putting your "spare change" in savings pots, splitting bills with contacts and freezing and unfreezing debit cards. Revolut also offers highly competitive exchange rates.

Users sign up online and have their identity verified by uploading a selfie and a picture of a government-issued ID. They have the option of basic accounts, which are free, or upgrading to premium tiers.

"Revolut and N26 [a German rival] have helped revolutionise banking," says Daragh Cassidy, head of communications at Bonkers.ie, the comparison website. "There is a younger cohort growing up who maybe never had a bank account. They'll get used to Revolut and get used to N26. They'll demand really high standards of service and a really focused online journey."

Part of that journey has been simplifying previously onerous tasks such as dealing with lost bank cards.

## REPLACING THE WALLET

"Revolut and challenger banks have removed a lot of the danger of losing cards, because you can put small amounts of money on your card and if it's lost, it can be locked immediately [by the user]," says Padraic Kissane, financial adviser and member of the Irish Banking Culture Board. This alone does not explain their popularity. Earlier this week, it emerged that AIB planned to push ahead with ATM withdrawal fees of 35c and over-the-counter transaction charges of 39c for some account holders in autumn.

"The cost of tapping with Revolut is nothing. Yet the banks are now talking about increasing the fees for tapping. That's where Revolut will increase its customer base even further," says Kissane. "They've replaced the wallet and the purse."

So, these upstarts are about replacing cash rather than replacing your bank. In the current climate, this first aspiration is clearly an advantage. Irish cash payments were down 57pc year-on-year to April, according to figures from GlobalData, a data analytics company. As Revolut reaches one million customers and N26 150,000, what are the consequences for the banking landscape?

There is speculation that, despite impressive



Entrepreneur:  
Nikolay Storonsky  
started up Revolut  
in 2015

user numbers, the challengers have yet to make a dent in bank revenues. Last June's Consumer Protection Bulletin shows low numbers of people switching current accounts.

Cassidy says most customers are not yet leaving the traditional ecosystem.

"Irish people have become a lot more attuned to bank fees and charges even though there's still a lot of inertia when it comes to actually switching," he says.

It is a mistake, Kissane believes, to think that it is just younger users who are put off by charges.

"For years, there may never have been complaints about bank charges because customers had access to a person inside the branch, or they could meet the branch manager or they could talk to a person that knew their affairs historically," he says. "It became an issue when banks took away that facility. And people were

left asking, 'Why are you still charging me the same price? I don't have access to this guy.' There are practical barriers to move all your banking affairs to the challenger start-ups.

Neither Revolut nor N26 has an Irish 'IE' IBAN, or international banking number. This can make switching your account difficult.

"The one issue is that some suppliers and utility providers don't recognise the Revolut or N26 IBANs so if you're looking to change your account for your gas, electricity, your insurance, you may get a little bit of pushback," says Cassidy.

"Sometimes payroll systems only accept IE IBANs. I've been in touch with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission on this because I think it's a barrier to competition."

There are other differences with traditional banks. Revolut is based in the UK and it also holds a Lithuanian banking licence. The com-

pany is authorised by the British Financial Conduct Authority and operates in Ireland under a "services passport". There have been reports that it has applied for a full banking licence in the UK. A spokesperson told *Review* that this is not the case. Revolut's deposits are covered by European money regulations and secured at top-tier banks. N26 has a full European banking licence. Experts point out that other financial institutions offer better savings products.

"N26 and Revolut offer no interest on savings whatsoever in Ireland so in this case they're really not the best place to squirrel away your spare change, even if Revolut's ingenious Vaults feature makes it a really easy way to save," says Cassidy. Kissane suggests that although interest rates are also low with traditional banks, it can pay to stick with them longer-term. "One of the key reasons the mainstream banks are important now is to build your relationship if you want to borrow, and that will come back into play again," he says.

The question remains why traditional banks have been so slow to react to the upstarts. Part of the answer is that legacy banking technology is cumbersome and difficult and expensive to upgrade. Most banking apps have incorporated challenger-bank features at some cost.

Kissane believes there are other dysfunctional legacies in traditional institutions.

"There is still that banking attitude — and I won't call it the same arrogance any more — but it still exists. There is a continual need to improve this within banking in Ireland and how it is viewed by the consumer."

Challengers may not offer the full selection of banking services, but they are helping to end the era of the bank customer for life.

"Gone are the days where you get all of your banking services with the one provider," says Cassidy. "There'll be people who are now 16, 17 whose first accounts will be Revolut accounts and when they get to 25, 26 and start wanting credit, they'll be open to far more options. So I think we're going to see a fragmentation within the banking sector that has been immune to change for a long time."

The 1975 *Matty Healy* on finding solace in the studio p14

# Culture

Film,  
theatre,  
music, art  
& more

Ibiza crime drama:  
Barry Ward with Nuno  
Lopes in *White Lines*



## 'It has the ingredients to be a massive hit... and people have no choice but to watch it'

*Barry Ward talks to Tanya Sweeney about the Netflix series 'White Lines', improvising with Sharon Horgan in the forthcoming film 'Dating Amber' and how his acting career helped him prepare for lockdown*

**T**iming is everything in acting — and for Barry Ward, his two latest projects have landed at a strangely opportune moment. The Netflix series *White Lines* — a blackly funny crime drama based in Ibiza — has, thanks to the lockdown, something close to a captive audience. *Dating Amber*, a comedy film due out next month, is a story about two teenagers' unorthodox relationship and is perfectly poised to capitalise on the success of *Normal People*. It even features one of that show's stars, Fionn O'Shea, Marianne's sadistic and patronising boyfriend Jamie.

Ward's latest roles follow a star turn in last year's paranormal comedy film *Extra Ordinary*, but ask him about the variety of parts he has played in recent times, and he will not waffle on about fine-tuning his craft. A dyed-in-the-wool career actor, the Dubliner is more inclined to refer to each project as a 'job', making casual note of how fun or interesting the work was, or how sound the crew were.

The *White Lines* shoot took him over and back to Spain and "wasn't the most taxing job", he says. The series was the most-watched Netflix show in Ireland and the UK last weekend. Ward knows that, in the current climate, the streaming service's offerings might draw a bigger audience than usual.

"I mean, I thought it would be a popular show given that it's Alex Pina [the showrunner,

also behind *Money Heist*, the most-watched non-English language series on Netflix]," he says. "It's about sex, drugs and music, which means it has the ingredients to be a massive hit show, but nowadays, I suppose people have no choice in a way but to watch it."

Ward plays Mike, the husband of Zoe, who decides to head to Ibiza to find out what happened to her brother, a superstar DJ who disappeared two decades earlier. Mike has a sensible head on his shoulders, until he and Zoe get sucked into the dark underbelly of the island's nightlife.

In interviews, Pina has been enthusiastic about Ward's performance.

"The truth is, he added very important facets to the character," Pina has said. "On one hand, he had to be a husband in an ordinary family, but on the other hand, his emotions had to be very strong and he had to go through a power-

ful transformation arc when he goes to Ibiza." Ward juggled his *White Lines* work with a Curragh-based shoot on David Freyne's *Dating Amber*. The film stars Fionn O'Shea and Lola Petticrew (*A Bump Along the Way*) as Eddie and Amber, two teenagers who decide to stage a fake relationship to stop others speculating about their sexuality. Ward plays Eddie's father, opposite Sharon Horgan.

"There was a huge attraction in playing the parent of the lead," he says. "Working with Sharon, you're just thinking, 'I can definitely do something with this.'"

As to how his improv comic skills measured up against Horgan's: "Ah, I wiped the floor with her," he laughs. "Really though, she was so generous. It wasn't about hogging the limelight; it was about getting the best take, and Sharon gladly and willingly gave the floor on many occasions."

When Ward landed the coveted lead role in Ken Loach's *Jimmy's Hall* in 2014, his fortunes could easily have gone either way. Leading man status was very much there for the taking. As is customary for young actors who have their image on the poster for a critically acclaimed film, he signed with a Los Angeles-based agent and was flown out for a week of pressing the flesh with Hollywood directors and producers.

"A job with that kind of profile definitely opened doors," he says. "I spent some time out there introducing myself, and I've found it's not about who you know, but who knows you. [In LA], there's a bigger pool of people doing the same thing as you, and there seems to be a limited number of jobs."

He has come a long way since being the class 'messenger' in St Declan's College, Cabra, landed him his first TV role.

As a 13-year-old, Ward worked with director Michael Winterbottom and Roddy Doyle on the BBC drama *Family* in 1994. He got the part entirely by chance.

"I was in school in Deco's and BBC casting directors were going around the schools and streets of Dublin looking for someone to play the character [of John Paul]," Ward recalls. "I remember a teacher popping his head around the door and calling a few of us out, the real

# Cinema on the brink: why we should care

*The memories, the feelings of joy, fear and awe and the communal experience are just a few of the reasons we must support cinemas when they emerge from this crisis*

**Film**

**Paul Whittington**



Cinemas, it seems, are on the endangered list. Undercut in recent years by online streamers such as Netflix, they have been dealt a heavy body blow by Covid-19, which has closed multiplexes across the globe and may yet prove their undoing. This week, the World Health Organisation said that the coronavirus may be with us for good, and even if social distancing only lasts another year or two, that might be enough to fatally undermine the basic cinema distribution model. Playing films in quarter-full auditoriums doesn't make economic sense.

So what, you might say. TVs are getting bigger and bigger, and if we're still getting to see new films, does it matter how we do it? Well, think back to your earliest experiences in a cinema, the joy, fear and awe the five- or six-year-old you felt the first time the lights went down and technicolour images flickered to life on the screen. Watching TV is nothing compared to the communal power of experiencing a film in a cinema, where seeing the right movie at the right time can overwhelm you and change your life.

Most people vividly recall their first visit to the cinema: the first film I can remember seeing was *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, one of the big kids' films of 1969. Dick Van Dyke played Caractacus Potts, a crackpot English inventor who ends up in a chocolate box middle-European kingdom presided over by a portly, tyrannical king. In one famous scene, the Child Catcher — a sinister, black-clad man played by the dancer Robert Helpmann — entices children into

cages. I was very young, and had nightmares. More memorable still was the moment when Potts and his kids drove off a cliff and were plummeting towards the English Channel when the film stopped, the lights went up and the tinny strains of an anodyne jingle filled the auditorium. It was intermission time. Would they die in a ball of fire, I wondered, as we filed out to get those little tubs of ice cream you ate with a tiny wooden spoon.

It turned out that Potts's car could fly. The idea of an intermission might seem hopelessly arcane at this remove, but for me, the pause added to the drama: if this was cinema, I was hooked.

In the 1970s, I felt very grown-up when my dad began taking me and my big brother to Bond films: I did not yet understand why 007 was constantly distracted by passing beauties, and wished he would leave the girls alone and get on with the fighting.

Then, in the spring of 1976, things got serious: a friend and I went into town on the bus when we ought to have been at a retreat and bluffed our way into a screening of *Jaws*.

We were probably too young to see it, and peered curiously into the gloom as the naked woman ran down the beach to take cinema's most epically ill-advised skinny dip. She bought the farm of course (spoilers), and I shifted uneasily in my Adelphi seat as Chief Brody found bits of her scattered on the sands.

OK, that shark, when it finally appeared, always looked a bit rubbery, but the jump scare when Ben Gardner's disconnected head floats out of a hole in his submerged fishing boat had me leaping about like a beached salmon. I wonder if I would have been quite so impressed by that film if I had seen it first on TV.

A cinema can be anywhere. In the school hall they would put out folding chairs and show old



Jump-out-your-seat moments: Chief Brody in his battle with *Jaws*

Norman Wisdom films and *Where Eagles Dare*. Christian Brothers patrolled the aisles packing heat and ready to quash any messing, but when Richard Burton boomed out "Broadsword calling Danny Boy" on the school Tannoy, he had our full and undivided attention.

By the late 1970s, Dublin had lost most of the impressive network of local cinemas that covered the city centre in the 1940s and 50s. Oddities remained though, like the Green, on St Stephen's Green, which had double seats for the amorously inclined, and the Stella in Rathmines, which boasted a worrying array of

wildlife. (It has, of course, since been gloriously refurbished). Cinemas like that showed Woody Allen films as well as *Rocky* and *Star Wars*.

Foreign movies, though, were harder to find. There was no IFI in those days, of course, but there was the IFT (Irish Film Theatre), an Arts Council-funded cinema on Earlscourt Terrace that ran for seven years and showed European arthouse movies. My elder sister and her boyfriend took me to see Bertolucci's *1900* there, and a beguiling French film called *Une Semaine de Vacances*. The old Curzon on Abbey Street sometimes showed foreign films, too — they ran Jean-Jacques Beineix's stylish Parisian thriller *Divya* there for about six months.

In London, there were a lot more cinemas, some odd, others magnificent. The ICA on The Mall was a lovely theatre: I remember admiring its surrounds while sitting through Jack Nicholson's long and tedious Chinatown sequel, *The Two Jakes*. The Ritzy in Brixton used to put on late-night screenings of *The Blues Brothers* and *Animal House*: half-cut punters would turn up in black suits, dark glasses, and togas and dance in the aisles at appropriate moments. A classier clientele frequented The Everyman in Hampstead, which put on Ealing comedies, Orson Welles films and David Lean seasons. I saw the restored *Lawrence of Arabia* there, and a magnificent sight it was too.



Nightmares: the Child Catcher in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*

It's largely to do with Cillian that I pursued acting and stuck at it

messers. I was thinking, 'Oh God, what have I done now?' But we did a meet-and-greet with these BBC producers, and over the course of a few months, we got called to auditions, and a few improv sessions. They just kept whittling it down and down, and eventually they said, 'We want you to do this job.'

At the behest of his parents, Ward went to NUI Maynooth to study English and philosophy. Around this time, he was cast opposite Cillian Murphy in his first film role, 2001's *Watchmen*.

"He was a bit older than me and he very much knew that this is what he wanted to do," Ward says of Murphy. "He was brilliant and so enthusiastic and I guess I got caught up in that and thought, 'Okay, so maybe this is a viable thing,'

It's largely to do with him that I pursued [acting] and stuck at it."

Minor successes on stage and screen followed — a stint on *The Bill* here, a role on *Silent Witness* there — but as a young actor, Ward often had to juggle his dreams of acting with day jobs. He worked in retail, in teaching and as a bike courier. He was working as a lifeguard when he met Loach. That was when his fortunes had an upswing.

When he landed the lead role, Ward made sure to call his old boss, a fellow Loach obsessive with whom he had lost contact.

"I had worked as the manager of a bookshop and I'd say to my boss, 'I'm really sorry, I'll need to leave early as I have an audition in town', and

Mike would say, 'Don't worry. Don't ever forget me when you get your first lead in a Ken Loach film,'" Ward says. "He must have said it a hundred times. Four or five years later I got to ring him up and say, 'Ask no questions, wear a nice suit, and meet me at this cinema in London on this date'. When he got there he was like, 'Lovely to see you, what's all this about?' and I told him I'd see him in 90 minutes and to enjoy himself. It didn't dawn on him until Ken Loach walked out on stage, and then I walked out beside him. He was gobsmacked."

In 2015, he won the role of Dr Spencer in *The Fall* opposite Jamie Dornan and Gillian Anderson. A part in *Maze* with Tom Vaughan-Lawlor, followed, as did parts in *The End Of The*



Family affair: Lola Petticrew and Fionn O'Shea in *Dating Amber*. Barry Ward plays Fionn's dad

I wonder if I would have been quite so impressed by that film if I had seen it on TV

Cinemas were more integral to the heartbeat of Paris, home of one of the world's most splendid movie theatres, Le Grand Rex, a marvellous art deco folly built in the 1930s on the Boulevard Poissonnière. It's breathtaking inside, but for some reason I only ever seemed to see bad films there, like the ghastly *Batman & Robin*.

More luck in the Quartier latin, where small arthouse cinemas such as Le Champ and the Reflet Médicus would play French classics by everyone from Renoir to Rohmer, but also Hollywood classics, film noirs and Marx Brothers movies. I used to sneak into screenings in the afternoon, and emerge into the evening feeling like one of those glamorous artsy types in Woody Allen films.

Cinema follows you everywhere. I remember seeing an outdoor screening of *Braveheart* in the Canadian Rockies, wondering as I watched if the black bear I'd seen investigating a car park bin earlier might decide to sit in. In New York's fabled Paris Theater (now the flagship of Netflix's movie production business), a Central Park rat loose in the aisles almost succeeded in upstaging Daniel Day-Lewis at the windy climax of *There Will Be Blood*.

I saw Claude Chabrol's gripping revenge thriller *Que la bete meure (The Beast Must Die)* for the first time in a dodgy flea pit in Kyoto, Japan: the projector went on the fritz halfway through but they got it running again: as with *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, the unexpected break only added to the tension.

My point is this: I can often remember the cinema where I saw something for the first time, as well as who I saw it with, enhancing the experience and turning a movie into a memory. I'm sure you can too. I liked videos and DVDs of course, and I enjoy streaming films, but I don't remember a damn thing about when and where I saw them. The darkness of a cinema, the size of the screen and the general hush — popcorn and smartphones notwithstanding allow you to fully enter into a movie's world, its story and atmosphere, and while not all films deserve that reverent setting, some demand it as their birthright.

I don't blame companies like Universal for stream-opening *Smurfs 2* and other films during the shutdown: they've pumped big money into those movies and need a return now rather than in August or September. But I do hope that cinema distribution rebounds as fast as it reasonably can in the coming months. It's true that film would survive without it, but only as a diminished, compartmentalised, desperately lonely experience.

F\*\*\*ing World and Sky's *Save Me and Britannia*. Ward has spent lockdown in London with his partner Laura Kavanagh, a production manager at Focus Features. The time has largely been spent "keeping this little guy amused and entertained", he says in reference to the couple's five-year-old son, Tom.

"I suppose people are finding that they've loads of time on their hands," he adds. "But for most actors, our lives are like that normally — there's a lot of time hanging about the house, pretty much doing what we want."

• *'White Lines'* is now streaming on Netflix. *'Dating Amber'* premieres on Amazon Prime Video on June 4

**Scene & Heard**

## Who's Zoomin' who: theatre and tech through the ages

*Theatre has always embraced innovation, just as a new play on a video chat platform shows, writes Katy Hayes*

Cameron Mackintosh, producer of big musical hits such as *Cats* and *Les Misérables*, says he cannot see the West End opening up until 2021, once social distancing has been abolished. Venue managers here are considering how they might operate with a reduced, separated out audience. The Abbey Theatre responded to the Covid crisis with 50 playlets on YouTube in a project entitled *Dear Ireland*. London's National Theatre has provided streaming access to its archive, with a different play free-to-view each week.

Richard Nelson, the American playwright best known in Ireland for his Broadway musical adaptation of James Joyce's *The Dead* with Shaun Davey, has tackled the pandemic challenge head-on. He is the author of a quartet of family plays about the Apple siblings, produced at the Public Theater in New York. Nelson rapidly put together a new instalment of this

their trace. Might Zoom plays become a thing in the future?

The theatre has always responded to technology with dynamism, from the spread of chandeliers out of Europe to Britain and Ireland during the Restoration period, through to the development of limelight (incandescent quicklime) in the 1830s and 40s. The Irish playwright Dion Boucicault was a 19th-century innovator in stage technology, creating a dramatic house fire as the highpoint of one show, and a convincing simulacrum of the Killarney lakes in another. Recent decades have witnessed an explosion of visual technology on stage, including lasers, scrolling text and complex video projections of all sorts.

Live music has always had its place in large-scale operas and musicals; music or audio was frequently used to cover clunky scene changes in plays. But in recent decades, audio design has become a whole new element, with



Worth a look: *What Do We Need to Talk About?* from the Public Theater in New York

family saga: *What Do We Need to Talk About?* Here the family gets together on the videocall platform Zoom in the aftermath of one sister's near-fatal encounter with Covid-19.

It was performed in lockdown and premiered live on Zoom on April 29. One brother and sister are temporarily living together and appear in the same frame; they are played by a husband and wife acting duo who cohabit in real life. One sister and her live-in boyfriend appear on Zoom in different rooms; he is self-isolating because he has symptoms. It is all social-distance compliant. It runs to 65 minutes and the Zoom format is surprisingly effective. It is well worth a look.

For many theatre-lovers, these technological responses to the lockdown are deeply unsatisfactory. Producers find these events awkward to monetise; generally, the pandemic-response offerings are free to view, accompanied by prompts to donate to the venues or production companies. Mostly they are an attempt to keep the spirit alive, albeit on an artificial life support. However, these innovations will leave

shows frequently scored like movies. This explosion in tech reached a high-point here with the Enda Walsh/Donnacha Dennehy opera collaboration *The Second Violinist* in 2017. This used filmed excerpts, scrolling text, projected images as well as chorus singing, ensemble musicians, soloists and mime; it was a smorgasbord of the oldest and newest theatrical tricks.

There are many one-off technical spectacles, such as the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *The Tempest* from 2016, made in collaboration with Intel and Imaginarium Studios. The sprite-like character of Ariel was performed by an actor wearing an electronic motion-capture suit. Thus, the Ariel appearing on stage is simultaneously projected as a digital avatar floating above.

The stage is in a constant state of self-reinvention, and every age leaves its mark. While theatre is currently suffering a grievous wound, something interesting may emerge from the scar.

• *'What Do We Need to Talk About?'* is on at [publictheater.org](http://publictheater.org) until June 28

**ListenUp**  
with John Meagher



**ALBUM OF THE WEEK**  
**Perfume Genius**  
**Set My Heart on Fire Immediately**  
**Matador**

Seattle's Mike Hadreas emerged with a wonderfully sparse debut in 2010. A decade on and with a cast of crack musicians, including one of the planet's most in-demand drummers in Matt

Chamberlain, he has delivered a career-best album that explores love, regret and gay identity. There's a muscularity to many of the songs — in keeping with the toned figure of the singer on the cover art — and the giddy 'On the Floor' is a gloriously unashamed pop belter. Long-term admirers will be glad he hasn't abandoned his esoteric roots: listen to the sublime 'Moonbend'.



**SINGER-SONGWRITER**  
**Ultan Conlon**  
**There's a Waltz**  
**DarkSideOut Records**

The latest album from the Galway troubadour finds him in fine fettle and in distinguished company. It was recorded in LA by Grammy-winning producer Sean Watkins alongside some of the city's foremost session players, including

multi-instrumentalist Tyler Chester. The results are carefully calibrated songs featuring sumptuous arrangements, not least on the gentle, woozy 'Don't Let Love Slip Away'. Elsewhere, Gabe Witcher's evocative fiddle on 'In the Blink of an Eye' — apparently inspired by the death of a loved one — bewitches. Conlon's vocals may not be the most characterful, but on his best songs it doesn't matter.



**ELECTRONICA**  
**Moby**  
**All Visible Objects**  
**Mute Records**

This is the prolific artist's 17th album but, like much of his recent fare, it's unlikely to connect in the way that his work did for a few years either side of 2000. In a return to his 'rave meets chilled electronica' days, Moby himself

sings on just two tracks, neither of which is especially memorable. The Dead Kennedys' DH Peligro is on hand with a spoken-word delivery on the urgent, propulsive 'Power Is Taken' — although his words are both banal and platitudinous. But there are impressive moments, not least 'Refuge', featuring the celebrated Jamaican poet Linton Kwesi Johnson.

# 'When I'm on stage, the showman in me takes over'

The 1975 are a must-see live act — and frontman Matty Healy was thrilled to be taking the band's new album on tour. With the gigs now cancelled, he reveals how he is finding some solace in returning to the studio

**Music**  
**John Meagher**



**M**atty Healy is so direct it's disconcerting. The first time I interviewed The 1975 frontman — just before the release of the band's third album, the UK chart-topping *A Brief Inquiry into Online Relationships* — I tentatively broached the subject of his former drug addiction. He discussed his dependency on heroin with the sort of frankness that is completely at odds with big-name pop stars who try to reveal as little of their weaknesses as possible.

This time, when I ask the Cheshire-raised frontman about how he is coping with lockdown imposed to contain Covid-19, he doesn't sugar-coat it. "I'm struggling, mate." Healy has locked himself away in the studio in rural Northamptonshire where the band have recorded most of their music. He's there with bandmate George Daniel — drummer and co-producer — and a handful of unnamed musicians. He says he is trying to find positives "in this really shitty time".

When he speaks to *Review*, he is still coming to terms with the disappointment of the cancellation of a world tour in support of The 1975's latest album, *Notes on a Conditional Form*. "We were so looking forward to getting out there and playing these songs." He sighs. "In the scheme of things, it's not a huge thing — I'm not asking for people's sympathy. It's just... who saw this coming? And when does it end?"

Those desperately missing the pleasure of going to gigs can relate, especially as The 1975 in concert is a superlative live experience. The band attracted rapturous reviews for their headline set at Electric Picnic last September, while their gig at the 3Arena in Dublin in January last year was one of the best gigs this writer has ever seen at that venue.

"I don't know if I'm a confident person," Healy says, picking his words carefully. "But



**Frustration:** Matty Healy says the lockdown has made it into his lyrics.  
**PHOTO BY ED BLOW**

when I'm on stage, the showman in me takes over. And who knows when any of us will be able to that again?"

But, he insists, some good has to come out of the pandemic. "Here in the UK, no government will ever take our NHS for granted again, or to try to dismantle it whether it's through privatisation or withholding funding. Not even a Tory government — their most die-hard supporters wouldn't want that, surely. You just hope there will be respect for people working on the front-line and there's a true understanding of what's important in society."

Healy says he and Daniel are trying to use the imposed downtime to work on new material. "I want to stay positive," he says, "and the best way for me to do that is to try to work on new songs. So when you're in a studio like I am now, there's no excuse not to do that." He says the lockdown is making its way into some of the lyrics, but he quips that the next 1975 album won't be Covid-obsessed.

He says he is a restless figure, and you believe him. He admits to being more interested in talking about forthcoming work than discussing an album that has only just been released. This is a frontman who makes albums featuring the kitchen sink and everything else, although it is a testament to his smarts as a musician that his work can feel thrilling — sometimes essential — rather than messy and overly self-indulgent. Yet even the most avowed 1975 aficionado would have to concede that there is some self-indulgence there.

But being holed up in a studio and away from family and friends is not how he saw 2020 panning out. Right now, The 1975 would be in the midst of the American leg of their world tour. Tonight, they would have been playing The Anthem arena in Washington DC.

He consoles himself that the band managed to play some shows before lockdown came into effect, including a well-received March 3 gig in Dublin. "Don't feel sorry for us," he says. "It's the people in this industry who've lost their livelihoods [who deserve sympathy]." When The 1975 play live, there may be four people on stage, but he says there are countless others who make the experience happen.

The 1975 occupy something of a unique place in British music today. Ostensibly, they are a pop-rock band who appeal to screaming teenagers and chin-stroking critics alike. It's true that they polarise opinion, but those who love their music tend to be evangelical. In 2018, before the release of *A Brief Inquiry...*, the former MTV presenter Eddy Temple-Morris declared that he was so enamoured with the album that he was "practically in tears".

The group have lofty ambitions and set high targets for themselves, and Healy says they were determined that their latest album would be a "truly significant" piece of work. At 80 minutes and 22 tracks, the austere titled *Notes on a Conditional Form* is about as lengthy as a conventional CD can be and would constitute most people's ideas of a double album. But Healy doesn't see it that way.

"This album and *A Brief Inquiry...* are part of something I call 'Music for Cars,'" he says, before adding, somewhat confusingly, "it is a real-time expression."

Eliciting an explanation is no easy task. Healy may be smart and engaging, but he has a tendency towards the verbose. On occasion, he

has difficulty articulating the ideas circulating in his head, something he cheerfully admits. "Let me put it this way," he says of the 'Music for Cars' concept. "I was a huge fan of Brian Eno in my formative years and the title is a nod to him [Eno's albums include *Music for Airports* and *Music for Films*]. I'd remember being in the car listening to Eno for hours on end and getting stoned." What he's driving at, I think, is the idea that The 1975 listener will be similarly transported.

Like every 1975 album to date and especially since the breakthrough second offering, *I Like It When You Sleep, For You Are So Beautiful Yet So Unaware of It*, there's a dazzling array of styles and influences on this latest one. There are several contributors too, including the increasingly in-demand American singer-songwriter Phoebe Bridgers, who was set to support the band in the US, and the English alt-pop star FKA Twigs, whom Healy is rumoured to be dating. He split with his model girlfriend Gabriella Brooks last summer.

Healy insists that he and his band are free to do whatever they want when it comes to making albums. He says he feels no pressure to deliver hits, despite the fact that the most striking 1975 songs, such as 'Somebody Else' are wonderfully catchy anthems for the mass market.

The band are on the Dirty Hit independent label, which was formed a decade ago by Jamie Osborne, Brian Smith and — curiously — former England footballer Ugo Ehiogu, and their albums are distributed by the heavy-weight Polydor group.

Healy is keen to put me straight when I wonder if Polydor has any say in singles selection or length of albums. "They don't even have my number! Not that I'm not friends with them, but our relationship with Polydor is purely about the commercial side of things, not the creative." He pauses. "Sorry, I sounded like a pompous wanker when I said that. I just wanted to explain to you that the only creative people are the four of us in the band and our manager, Jamie [Osborne]."

The singer has a disarmingly sweet way of tying himself up in knots before going back to explain himself. He even does it in song. 'Nothing Revealed/Everything Denied' from the new album finds him admitting that a declaration about sexual adventures in one of his most totemic tunes, 'Love It If We Made It' was false. It's a different level of self-deprecation.

Healy (31) grew up in showbiz. Both his parents are actors. His father, Tim Healy, was in the 1980s comedy-drama series *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*, while his mother, Denise Welch, became well-known among soap lovers thanks to her portrayal of the brassy barmaid Natalie in *Coronation Street*.

Healy started making music in his teens and was 23 when people began to take notice of The 1975. His fame has long eclipsed that of both his parents, but he says he is ambivalent about his celebrity. "Don't get me wrong, I want people to hear our music. I want them to come to our gigs — whenever that happens. But I don't crave fame. I'm happiest when I'm in the studio, making music."

And with that, he's gone. Another lockdown shift with George Daniel beckons and an opportunity to work on the next 1975 album.

● *Notes on a Conditional Form* is out now

## ClassicTalk with George Hamilton



### The drama of Beethoven's 'problem child'

**T**he *New Penguin Opera Guide* runs to well over 1,100 pages, and yet only four of them concern Beethoven. Of all the music the grand master wrote — some 240 works in total — he only ever composed one musical drama. A drama, with variations, as it turned out, for the opera we know as *Fidelio* was 10 years in the making. There had been several false starts before it was eventually presented at the Royal Court Theatre in Vienna, on Monday May 23, 1814.

It wasn't that Beethoven wasn't interested in the form. His unsurpassed expertise in the creation of large-scale instrumental music leant itself perfectly to the theatre.

There are the overtures — *Coriolanus*, *Egmont* (part of a complete suite of music to accompany Goethe's play) — and then there's a ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*.

Circumstances, and Beethoven's legendary attention to detail — he was well-known as a perfectionist — both contributed to *Fidelio*'s long gestation.

The opera is based on a true story from the period of the French Revolution known as the Terror. Leonore is the wife of a political prisoner. She dresses up as a boy and risks her life to get a job as a prison guard so that she can get her husband, Florestan, out of jail. *Fidelio* is the name she adopts in disguise.

Under the composer's preferred title, *Leonore*, the opera premiered in unpropitious circumstances in 1805. Napoleon's army had just occupied the city, and the opera-going public had taken to the hills. Just a few bemused French officers were in the audience. The opera bombed.

Beethoven wasn't happy with it, anyway. He took on board criticism

that it was too long. He tightened up the action. Three acts became two. He wrote a new overture. He staged it again the following year.

The reception was no better. "It is impossible to understand," wrote one reviewer, "how the composer ever decided to smarten up this second-rate story with his beautiful music." It lasted just two nights.

Beethoven described *Leonore* as his "problem child", but he wasn't going to give up on it.

So when a revival was proposed some years later, he was prepared to give it another go, but not before there was a further extensive makeover.

The work would now be known as *Fidelio*. Once again, there would be a new overture, this one unlike any other. Rather than following the conventional path of presenting the various musical themes that will develop over the course of the show, the overture to *Fidelio* stands alone as a symphonic introduction.

The opera displays its roots in the German *Singspiel* tradition, where the drama is driven by dialogue as well as the music.

At the core of the story is the heroism of Leonore, unwilling to accept circumstances, driven by the love of her man to put herself in harm's way. She's out to get what's right and just, to set this prisoner free.

The struggle of light against darkness, the victory of courage against the odds, coupled with music that only Beethoven could have written made it third time lucky for *Fidelio*.

Its climax is a stirring chorus based on two verses from a poem by the playwright Friedrich Schiller.

Those same two verses would be heard again some 10 years later in a concert in the same Viennese Theatre, when Beethoven presented what would become his signature tune — the *Symphony No 9*, his 'Ode to Joy'.

● George Hamilton presents *The Hamilton Scores* on RTE lyric fm from 10am each Saturday and Sunday.



All that jazz: Amandla Stenberg and André Holland in *The Eddy*

## Pub prospects may be a downer, but the jazz club is a great hang-out

### Television

John Boland



**O**n Claire Byrne Live (RTÉ1), journalist Billy Keane was serving drinks in the *Fair City* bar in order to show what life in pubs might be like when they're allowed to reopen in August. It was all very depressing.

I love pubs and, down through the years, I've spent many happy hours inside their doors, including Billy's own most convivial of premises in Listowel. Conviviality was entirely absent in the *Fair City* bar as *Liveline* presenter Joe Duffy nursed a pint at one end of a banquet, weather woman Nuala Carey sipped her tiple the requisite distance from him and Billy hovered behind the counter.

"This is worse than I thought it would be," Joe declared in dismay. "You can't really have a conversation unless you bellow". And what would they do if two of them needed to use the loo at the same time — all that passing on the stairs, for starters?

Still, to look on the bright side, they hadn't lost their shirts on overseas properties, as the second episode of *Burnt by the Sun* (RTÉ1) reminded us. I reviewed the first instalment of this two-parter at the beginning of April and I had assumed the second episode had been deferred for Covid-related reasons, but no — its delayed transmission, a voiceover declared, had been due to "unexpected technical issues", whatever they might have been.

Anyway, here once more were tales of Celtic Tiger "madness", with "unbridled spending on overseas properties" by people "getting off the plane at Malaga and leaving their brains at home".

That was a good line, but the best soundtrack came from the developer Harry Crosbie: "Flats in Bulgaria? I wouldn't buy somewhere in Don-

nybrook because I don't know Donnybrook." Yet thousands did just that, and so we heard the sorry stories of unfortunates who were duped or downright ruined in their quest for financial profit.

Meanwhile, it was a good week for Johnny Logan. Fresh from his media spat with Dickie Rock (oh, just Google it), the three-time Eurovision Song Contest winner was given pride of place in *Eurovision: Europe Shine a Light* (RTÉ1/BBC1), with the Rotterdam hosts of this year's virtual show deeming him at the outset to be Eurovision royalty and getting him to sing 'What's Another Year' for the zillionth time.

The show itself was a curious and somewhat eerie celebration, with Marty Whelan pointing out to RTÉ viewers that, with no voting for this year's contest and thus no overall victor, "we can't win and we also can't lose" — Marty's *Mastermind* subject being the bleeding obvious.

But he was in good form when hosting the same evening's **Marty's Magical Eurovision Moments** (RTÉ1), a nostalgic wallow through the decades.

There was footage of Dana's 1970 win and Dana International's triumph in 1998, with Gay Byrne asking the Israeli singer on *The Late Late Show*: "Did you ever think you'd see the day when a transsexual would win the Eurovision Song Contest?"

Our own Dana popped up on **Pointless Celebrities** (BBC1), indeed seeing off Eurovision rival Niamh Kavanagh to grab the Pointless trophy — the second time she's won it, according to host Alexander Armstrong, who then got her to sing 'All Kinds of Everything', which she did with the sweetness of 50 years ago.

A different kind of music suffuses **The Eddy** (Netflix), the opening episode of which I enthused about in last week's column. I've now

*Here once more were tales of Celtic Tiger 'madness' by people 'getting off the plane at Malaga and leaving their brains at home'*

watched five more episodes and am delaying watching the last two because I don't want it to end.

Quentin Tarantino hoped that *Jackie Brown* — his best movie by a long mile — would be viewed as a "hang-out" film, just as he himself loved hanging out with the main characters in the great *Rio Bravo*. By the same token, *The Eddy* is a hang-out series, with the viewer eager to know more about the various characters as they struggle to make a living and fend off gangsters in a Parisian backstreet jazz club.

The plotting, such as it is, comes from noted screenwriter Jack Thorne and is so loose as to be almost desultory, as if he and director Damien Chazelle (*Whiplash*, *La La Land*) felt obliged to pay only a passing acknowledgment to conventional expectations.

Yet the plotting doesn't really matter. Instead, you become absorbed in the efforts of moody and driven Elliot (André Holland) to keep the club alive and in his relationships with troubled singer Maja (Joanna Kulig), similarly troubled daughter Julie (Amandla Stenberg) and various band members.

A vibrantly unfamiliar Paris is also vividly evoked, while the jazz that's being played throughout (an original score by Randy Kerber and Glen Ballard) is thrilling. *The Eddy* has got mixed reviews, but I don't know why. Please watch it because, even if the last two episodes turn out to be a let-down, it's been tremendously good so far.

I've sampled only the first instalment of **White Lines** (Netflix), which was far from tremendous. This 10-episode saga of drug-dealing and death in Ibiza alienated me from the start, with Laura Haddock more a fashion plate than a character as she attempted to find out what happened to her older brother on this sun-drenched island.

There was reliably good playing from Daniel Mays as the brother's dodgy friend, but the villains came from Eurotrash central casting, while a climactic orgy that presumably was meant to be both debauched and sexy just looked tacky and silly. But maybe it gets better.

### Radio

## Seán broadens the palate with tyrants' tea-time favourites

Darragh McManus

**Seán Moncrieff** (Newstalk, Mon-Fri 2pm) or his researchers, or both, have an unerring knack for ferreting out quirky, bizarre and just plain interesting stories from around the world. On a talk-radio menu dominated, across most stations, by the news, this show serves up little "amuse-bouches" to tantalise the taste buds and, most importantly, refresh the palate after a stodgy diet of news and current affairs.

This week, for instance, he spoke to Witold Szablowski, a Polish journalist who has written a book about what despots liked to eat. For *How to Feed a Dictator*, he interviewed the personal chefs of some of the most notorious tyrants of our time — Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin and others — about the culinary favourites of these exceedingly strange and thoroughly horrible men.

It was full of fascinating facts and beyond-fiction weirdness, in classic Moncrieff fashion. Perhaps weirdest of all was Szablowski's revelation that, after a few years in power and indulging themselves with epicurean

*After indulging themselves with epicurean excess, dictators tend to revert to 'the sort of food their mothers cooked for them'*

excess, dictators tend to revert to "the sort of food their mothers cooked for them". Even monsters, it seems, need the comfort of nostalgia.

Not that there's anything wrong with that: for those of us absolutely glutted with Covid-19 and other doomy issues of state, nostalgia has become more than a sweet treat: it's now something close to a full-on drug, desired and needed in equal enormous measure.

**Ed's Songs of Praise** (Today FM, Sun 7pm) proved the point with an *MT-USA* special. The presenter had put out a call for listener memories of the pioneering 1980s TV music show, hosted by the late Vincent Hanley, and was inundated with responses.

The memories were affectionate and heart-warming — and the tunes, needless to say, were great. Who says the 1980s were a terrible time for pop music? There's even a Spotify playlist, for anyone needing a follow-on fix. Go on, nobody will be watching you bob around the kitchen to Pat Benatar.

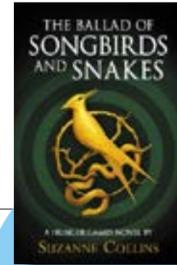
**Sunday Miscellany** (Radio 1, Sun 9.10am) is also doing its bit to lift the spirits of the nation, with that patented blend of fine writing, well-chosen soundtrack and general air of calm, lightness, contemplation and, yes, nostalgia.

Whether the essays are dealing with the past, as in recent pieces on Tiede Herrema and Johnny Logan, or the present — or, in the case of Maggie Armstrong's tribute to Bewley's café, both at the same time — the tone is familiar and comfortable, and I mean that in the best possible way.

The show long ago hit on some form of radio magic: a formula that just works, possibly because it's so simple. It's ideally tailored to Sunday mornings, and more so than ever during these difficult times.

# Books

**Hunger Games**  
Prequel explores the early years of tyrant Coriolanus Snow **p19**



Crime, thrillers, history & more

**+** Cultural shift *A new opportunity for repressed writers* **p20**

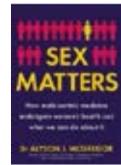
## The dangers to women in a man's world of medicine

*A US doctor's manifesto for medical reform shows the systematic and shocking ways that women's health needs have been ignored — and what they can do to redress the balance, writes Ellen Coyne*

### NON-FICTION

**Sex Matters**  
Dr Alyson J McGregor

Quercus, 272 pages, hardback €21; e-book €9.99



**I**n the cesspits of the internet, men's rights activists and white supremacists have been ranting for years about their "red pill moment". Initially a reference from *The Matrix*, this has been warped to mean the instance when misogynists realise the world is apparently biased in favour of women.

Well, prepare for your pink pill moment. *Sex Matters: How Male-Centric Medicine Endangers Women's Health and What We Can Do About It* by Dr Alyson J McGregor is a timely book on a popular subject. Any woman who has ever struggled to get a diagnosis that didn't dismiss her pain as being either PMS or diet-related could talk the ear off you about male-centric medicine. Still, picking up the hardback book, one could be tempted to ask: "How bad could it really be?"

Within a chapter, the answer is clear: much worse than you have ever imagined. Based on Dr McGregor's analysis, it seems that medicine can consign women to the same stereotypical roles we were only just managing to shake off: as boob-holders and babymakers. "Women's health" is often presumed to relate to obstetrics, gynaecology or breast cancer.

Dr McGregor's manifesto for medical reform starts with a jaw-dropping story about a medical school that just put blonde wigs on male simulation models as a substitute for women. She tells a chilling story about a woman called Julie suffering from a heart attack who was almost sent home from the emergency department. While men may experience the "stereotypical" symptoms of a heart attack, such as shooting pain down their left arm, women experience only "mild pain and discomfort".

"Sometimes, I wonder how many other women

like her walk out the doors of other emergency departments every day without receiving the life-saving treatment they need and deserve," writes Dr McGregor, an US-based international expert on sex and gender medicine.

The same can apply to a stroke. Many of us believe that the symptoms are universal, but women may not satisfy the typical checklist that looks for numbness on one side of the body, slurred speech and a drooping face. A stroke in women can look completely different, which means it can often go undiagnosed.

We even process drugs differently, but many pharmaceuticals were only tested on men in what Dr McGregor describes as the "wild west" of medicine 50 years ago. It was much cheaper than having to account for and track the different stages of a woman's menstrual cycle. She points out the Thalidomide scandal as one of the catastrophic consequences of this.

Dr McGregor's core point throughout is that medicine has assumed that men and women are biologically identical, when they are not, and that this is putting women in danger. Talking about the natural biological differences between men and women can make feminists uncomfortable. But Dr McGregor explains that having women exist in a world of male-centric medicine makes it easier to dismiss us as weaker, because our symptoms are not the same as men's.

"One of the biggest and most flawed assumptions in medicine is this: if it makes sense in a male body, it must make sense in a female one," writes Dr McGregor.

On the issue of gender, there are carefully written sections on transgender healthcare which explain the health risks associated with transgender men and transgender women. Dr McGregor is explicit that "this isn't meant to instil any fear around gender transition or to discourage people from affirming their gender".

Many of us will savour the chapters that vindicate what many women have suspected for a long time: women are more likely



Clarion call: Dr Alyson J McGregor's book is designed to be useful in real-life situations. PHOTO BY ANGELA C BROWN

to have their medical pain disbelieved. Or, of course, dismissed as "just PMS", an umbrella term for female pain that appears to cover anything from chronic migraines to endometriosis.

There seems to be no end to the serious medical conditions that can be dismissed as "anxiety" in women. It appears that the stereotypes about female "hysteria" have not been totally eradicated just yet.

The book is not one that you will curl up with and lose hours to. It may not even be one that you read in consecutive order. Dr McGregor is exactly that: a doctor, and not a writer. Even while railing against modern medicine's outrageous ingrained bias against women, her writing feels clinical. But in fairness, the book is not for entertainment or escapism. Each chapter is divided into headings and ends with a summary of the key points in bullet points. Reading it, you sometimes feel like you are studying.

The appendix includes suggested questions for your doctor which you are instructed to tear out and bring with you to your appointment. This part is useful, though a little bit... American. I do wonder how my harassed and incredi-

bly busy GP would respond to the question: "Are you aware of the latest research on sex and gender in your field?"

The book does not have a clear narrative but it does have a moral: women will often need to be advocates for themselves when navigating the "male-centric" world of medicine. This book seeks to be your own little advocate, and the style of writing is intentionally designed to make it as useful as possible in real world situations. Think of it as medically responsible self-help. However, at times the book seems to overstate its own importance. Certain passages feel as though it is just trumpeting its own existence as a kind of mini-revolution in medicine.

The breadth of the conditions and diseases covered here is very impressive, and with the benefit of a clear and thorough index it is an asset for women — particularly those of us suffering from chronic or as-yet undiagnosed conditions.

There is certainly no harm in having it by your side. After all, it's always good to have a second opinion.

# Infidelity thriller feels divorced from the truth

Stephanie Scott's debut novel, based on the Japanese marriage break-up industry, might have worked better as a true crime story, writes **Darragh McManus**

**W**hat's *Left of Me is Yours* is one of those books that should come marked with some sort of disclaimer: "Warning: product may not quite live up to the extravagant promises made for it."

And they are extravagant — even in a publishing industry not exactly shy about hyping the bejeesus out of its merchandise, the promotional bumf for Stephanie Scott's debut novel feels excessive. The back cover is festooned with breathless praise, mostly from other authors, and there are a further three full pages inside. Words such as brilliant, luminous, virtuosic, exquisite, stunning — even masterpiece, which is a fairly bold assertion to make — are flung about with abandon.

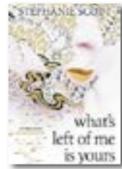
Well, as the scientist Carl Sagan once said in another context, extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof — so does *What's Left of Me is Yours* offer that proof? Not in my opinion, no; I can certainly appreciate why others may really like the book, but this rapturous acclaim is still baffling to me.

None of this is Scott's fault, in fairness, and she has produced a pretty decent piece of fiction, a more-than-solid first effort for a young writer. It's not a masterpiece, though, and daffily exaggerated claims like that do her and the book few favours. They set the bar of your expectations too high; disappointment is inevitably greater.

Anyway: *What's Left of Me is Yours* is based on a true story and involves a "wakaresaseya",

**FICTION**  
**What's Left of Me is Yours**  
Stephanie Scott

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 331 pages, hardback €19; e-book €4.99



one of those stranger-than-fiction aspects of Japanese life and culture that are endlessly fascinating to us because they feel so alien.

The word translates literally as "breaker-upper": people are hired to seduce someone so their spouse can then sue for divorce on the grounds of infidelity. It's right up there with pachinko parlours, Tamagotchi and vacuum-packed items of intimate apparel in the pantheon of intriguing Japanese wackiness — and it is a full-on industry in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Kaitarō, a wakaresaseya agent, is hired by Satō to do the needful with his wife Rina. Satō is a boorish weasel of a man, who married Rina for her father's money and now wants the freedom to pursue his old sweetheart. He's contemptuous of his wife, seeing her as a timid little frump who is boring him to death.

When Kaitarō begins his seduction, however, he quickly realises there's much more to Rina than this two-dimensional caricature. She's



Accolades for a decade of research: author Stephanie Scott

good-hearted and thoughtful, she's passionate when the relationship turns physical. She once had dreams of being a photographer — as did Kaitarō. Inexorably, they fall in love; the wakaresaseya agent's fake feelings become real.

The story actually begins with testimony from Sumiko, the daughter of Rina and Satō. We learn that, in the 1990s, Kaitarō was convicted of murdering Rina, but the full truth of her mother's death had been kept from Sumiko. Now a young woman, newly qualified as a lawyer, she starts to delve into this past, to better understand Rina, the man who killed her — and her own self.

The narrative then skips backwards and forwards, from Kaitarō and Rina's affair — and its tragically deadly consequences — to Sumiko's present-day investigations and distant memories of her childhood, much of it spent with Yoshida, her grandfather. This time-hopping is adroitly done, Scott intertwining different narratives with skill and clarity.

*What's Left of Me is Yours* makes some interesting observations on Japanese society too, especially their legal system — unsurprisingly, it's quite different to ours in some fundamental ways — but also the everyday details that are so important in constructing an immersive reading experience: the food, the apartments, how people interact, their habits and traditions, the way they navigate the unspoken rules and strictures inherent in any culture.

Where the novel badly falters is in the romance itself. This is the centre of the story, the molten emotional core at the heart of our fictional world. It should be something grand and immense and operatic, this *amour fou* that profoundly alters the course of several lives.

Instead it felt melodramatic — and not in the good sense of an entertaining soap opera or Jackie Collins-style bonkbuster — clichéd, implausible, unreal. I liked Rina and Kaitarō as people, I wished them well, but I never believed in them as a couple.

Interestingly, Scott — a writer of Singaporean and British ancestry — has received accolades and honours for the 10 years of research she put into this book, including being made a member of the British-Japanese Law Association. As mentioned, it is based on real-life events; I can't help wondering if the story wouldn't have been better served as a work of non-fiction.

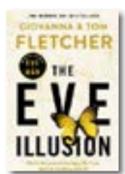
As a novel, *What's Left of Me is Yours* left me a little cold: it's fine, no more than that. Then again, reading is a very subjective thing; the 20 or so authors who raved about this book clearly felt different to me, and you may well too.

● **Darragh McManus' books include** *Shiver the Whole Night Through* and *The Polka Dot Girl*

# Distressed damsel turns rebel as Eve trilogy takes a darker turn

**YOUNG ADULT**  
**The Eve Illusion**  
Giovanna and Tom Fletcher

Michael Joseph, 400 pages, hardback €15.99; e-book €6.99



**Meadhbh McGrath**

**H**ilary Mantel's *The Mirror and the Light* was set to be the big British release of the summer — until it was knocked off the top spot of the *Sunday Times* bestseller list last month by *The Eve Illusion*, the second instalment in a young adult fantasy series from Tom Fletcher. of the pop band McFly, and his wife, Giovanna, author and host of the *Happy Mum, Happy Baby* podcast.

*The Eve of Man* trilogy may be a lesser-known one, but it's quietly become a hit, thanks to its intriguing premise, star-crossed lovers and gripping cliffhangers.

In a post-*Hunger Games*, post-*Handmaid's Tale* literary landscape, it can be difficult to produce a dystopian novel that feels fresh and exciting, yet the Fletchers managed to do just that. Eve is the first girl born in 50 years to a world ravaged by the climate crisis and is heralded "the saviour of humanity". Raised by a group of elderly women known as the "Mothers", she grows up in the highest

room of the tallest tower in London, a highly sheltered upbringing that keeps her cloistered away from the masses of "Freevers" who protest for her freedom.

At the end of the first novel, the 16-year-old Eve escaped from the Tower with Bram, a "hologram pilot" with whom she had fallen in love.

Arriving two years after the first title in the series, *The Eve Illusion* opens with a handy recap, taking readers back to the moments before Eve's flight, and introducing a third narrator, Michael, the security guard who had previously cornered her in a lift — a menacing encounter that makes his redemption arc rather a lot to ask of the reader.

The addition of his perspective helps to connect the action taking place in and outside the Tower, though he never rises above a cardboard character, serving mainly to relay the brutal violence that is such a feature of this much darker sequel.

For all its torture sequences and high-octane action, *The Eve Illusion* is more sluggish than its predecessor, and it lags in the middle as Eve plots her next move and Michael's bosses



Exploration of chaos: Giovanna and Tom Fletcher

interrogate her allies. It doesn't help that the supporting players are largely forgettable.

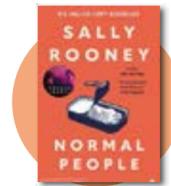
While the Fletchers deliver some immersive world-building, the writing suffers from an over-reliance on clumsy exposition and cheap tricks such as rhetorical questions and strings of one-sentence paragraphs. It also suffers from a bizarrely rigid framework for gender

roles and sexuality — a holdover from *Eve of Man*, which cast Eve as the damsel in distress and Bram her valiant knight. Despite Bram appearing as a female hologram, Holly, the writers never entertained the prospect of same-sex attraction, and queer characters were wholly absent from the novel.

This time around, Eve rebels against the stereotype of the "pathetic fairytale princess" ("did you ever hear me say I needed rescuing?" she demands), and quickly assumes Bram's position as leader of the resistance, placing him second in command. Yet again, there are no gay men, trans women or non-binary characters who might have helped to enrich this otherwise stifflingly heterosexual world of men.

*The Eve Illusion's* exploration of the chaos wrought by the climate emergency is sure to resonate with anxious teens and adults, just as Eve and Bram's struggles with family, love, loss, betrayal, and death will generate readers' sympathies. A predictable yet enthralling cliffhanger will have fans hankering for the final instalment, but so far, the *Eve of Man* trilogy doesn't live up to its promise.

**Top 10**  
**Bestselling books of the week**



1 **Normal People (PB)**  
Sally Rooney, Faber & Faber

2 **The Daily Dish (NF)**  
Gina and Karol Daly, Gill Books

3 **Conversations With Friends (PB)**  
Sally Rooney, Faber & Faber

4 **Where the Crawdads Sing (PB)**  
Delia Owens, Hachette

5 **Slime (CH)**  
David Williams, HarperCollins Children's Books

6 **Our Little Cruelties (OF)**  
Liz Nugent, Penguin Random House

7 **Grown Ups (OF)**  
Marian Keyes, Random House

8 **American Dirt (OF)**  
Jeanine Cummins, Hachette

9 **The Arms Crisis of 1970 (NF)**  
Michael Heney, Head of Zeus

10 **The Silent Patient (PB)**  
Alex Michaelides, Hachette

The bestseller list covering books in all formats both paperback and hardback, is compiled by Eason, Ireland's leading wholesale and retail bookseller, and is based on online sales figures (easons.com) for the week ending Sunday, May 17

**OF** Original Fiction;  
**NF** Non-Fiction;  
**PB** Paperback;  
**CH** Children's



Anger games: Suzanne Collins' decision to focus the prequel on Snow met with criticism from some fans

# Collins pulls off a clever trick with Hunger Games prequel

**FICTION**  
**The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes**  
Suzanne Collins  
Scholastic, 624 pages, hardback €18.99; e-book €8.99



line that you just know Collins, also a writer for TV, relished). Coriolanus's stroke of genius is to introduce betting and sponsorship, in effect turning the games into something more interactive.

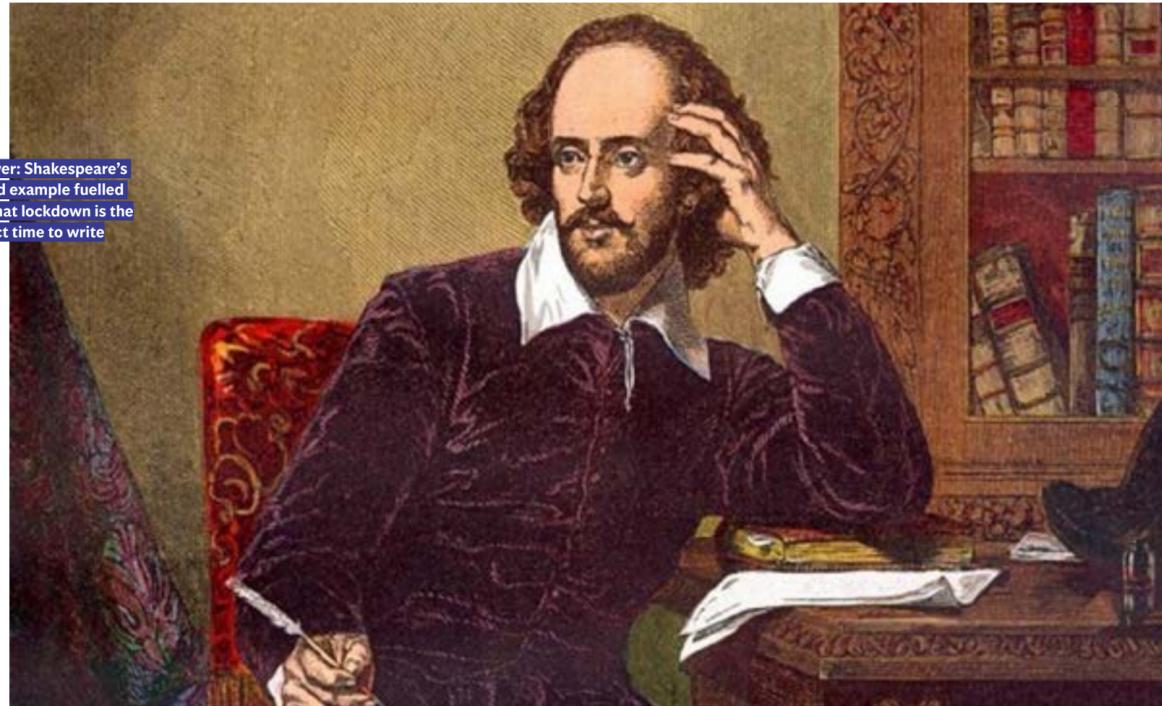
Collins' decision to focus the prequel on Snow met with criticism as soon as it was announced. Many felt that it was a *Joker*-esque dive into Snow's backstory that could only encourage us to feel misplaced sympathy for the man he became. Actually, Collins handles this quite well.

Though he is established as a more sympathetic character due to his grief for his mother and his poverty, we're invited to be more critical as the novel progresses. He constantly convinces himself out of doing the right thing, sometimes over the course of a single paragraph. He complains to his tribute, Lucy Gray, about a demerit in school which might affect his chances at the scholarship, while she sits in the rat-infested cage at the zoo awaiting the start of the games. He's clearly not meant to be a character we root for, or even particularly empathise with.

The last third of the book, dealing with the aftermath of the games, unfortunately does not live up to the promise of what came before. Moving away from the Capitol setting is a shame, because the portrait of the post-war city is one of the book's strongest elements. Far from being the epitome of decadence that we saw in the original series, the Capitol here is a bombed-out husk that still hasn't recovered from the war a decade earlier. Most importantly, however, the central romance didn't work, and in order for the ending to pack a punch, we needed to feel more invested in it.

Perhaps this was because Lucy Gray, as a character, feels two-dimensional, seen only through Snow's eyes. Collins might have been better off ditching the romance subplot, and focusing instead on Snow's more interesting friendship with Sejanus Plinth, the new-money boy whose family made their fortune at the same time as the Snows lost theirs.

Prequels are difficult to get right, and for all the valid criticisms — the length, the romance, the endless musical numbers — Collins pulls off a clever trick in this novel. You can't help comparing the stripped-back early games, which seem nothing more than brute force and barbarism, with the slick presentation of the games in the original series. Is it better or worse to miss the grotesque spectacle of the later games, the lengthy TV interviews and outrageous fashion statements? Which is more palatable, less horrific? Collins is likely to have more time to explore this. Something about the partially unresolved ending makes me think that we haven't seen the last of Coriolanus and friends...



Quill power: Shakespeare's supposed example fuelled the idea that lockdown is the perfect time to write

# Custodial sentences: the coming wave of lockdown literature

With thousands signing up for online writing courses and publishers inundated with manuscripts, the Covid-19 pandemic might allow new voices to be heard, writes **Henrietta McKervey**

**B**y week two I was heartily sick of reading that Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* while in quarantine. His quill must have been worn down to its last scrappy feather, as he supposedly also used the time to come up with both *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

His supposed burst of plague-avoiding creativity was referenced repeatedly in articles proclaiming lockdown the 'perfect time' to finally write the novel burning away inside you all these years. People went for it in droves: the Curtis Brown Creative's free writing programme alone received 3,500 sign-ups in just 24 hours. I have no issue at all with people using lockdown to try their hand at writing; constraints can help creativity, but a national lockdown is a very hefty constraint.

Skip to week four, and I began to notice comments on social media (full disclosure — some tweets were mine) from writers bemoaning the situation: unable to work from home because home was also now a school and/or office, or simply unable to think clearly, permanently distracted by the disturbing sensation that a piano on a wire was dangling overhead.

"Writers are experienced cocooners," says author Susan Stairs, yet even she has found discipline and concentration hard to come by recently. As she worked on her fourth novel, lockdown didn't make much difference to her daily routine, yet she felt the atmosphere had changed. "I'm finding it more difficult to translate the thoughts in my head into words on the

screen. I know what I want to say but it seems harder than it previously was to find a way to say it," she says.

Anne Griffin whose bestselling debut *When All Is Said* won Newcomer of the Year at the Irish Book Awards last year, had just begun a total rewrite of her second novel in February. She needs total silence to work. "When the schools were closed all the other occupants of my house, husband and son, teacher and student, brought home their voices and overloaded bags and deposited them in the kitchen and hallway and sitting room and bedroom. I cried inside. As much as I love them, this was going to be the hardest bit of writing I had ever done," she says.

So, if those already familiar with the rhythm and process of writing were struggling, how were those new to it getting on? Author Neil Hegarty was scheduled to teach a three-week course on the art of biography in the Irish Writers Centre (IWC) from April 21. 'Writing Lives' went ahead on Zoom with seven participants, one of whom was in the US, which Hegarty says, "underscores the real value of such remote courses: it allows participation from anywhere in the world". Interestingly, at least one participant signed up "in order to direct this otherwise very difficult experience into useful and creative channels". The IWC's agility in moving online made all the difference, Hegarty believes.

Hilary Copeland, its acting director, confirmed there has been a definite national and international increase in the numbers signing up for courses. "Literature is one of Ireland's

greatest cultural exports, so you can see why attending an online writing course with an Irish writer might have an appeal for students around the globe," he says.

Finding regular work for artists and freelance practitioners is always challenging, so moving online also meant the IWC could continue to provide vital employment. So what next for anyone emerging from lockdown with a manuscript? Books usually take at least a year from signing the contract to arriving in stores, so agents and publishers are already considering what the new cultural shift might be.

Submissions (the 'slush pile' of unsolicited manuscripts) to London-based Pew Literary are up 30-40pc on this time last year, and submissions manager Charlotte Van Wijk has already received her first Covid-themed novel.

While the lockdown element gave the story a sense of urgency, it wasn't enough: "We're all living through these experiences, so we don't really need anyone to tell us what they're like, unless they can be particularly profound, funny or remarkable ... There will be plenty of authors and readers who would prefer to imagine

an alternate world, where none of this ever happened," she says.

Sallyanne Sweeney, a literary agent at Mulcahy Associates whose clients include Sarah Davis-Goff and Darach Ó Séaghdha, has also noticed a rise in submissions, and says that quality is more important than ever. She is interested in fiction that explores the positive things the lockdown has shown us, however indirectly: "the importance of family, connection, kindness to ourselves and others, the healing effects of nature, and how we can all take things a little slower".

Writing and publishing can be a narrow-focused, trend-driven world, where fresh ideas can easily go unheard, and she finds it exciting that the lockdown might allow repressed writers to find their voice.

With such a possibility in mind, Penguin's WriteNow programme has extended its deadline to May 31 and is open to applicants from the Republic for the first time. WriteNow nurtures and publishes under-represented authors, including those from minority groups, the LGBTQ community, writers who have a disability and those from a socioeconomically marginalised background.

For everyone who took to writing recently, wouldn't it be amazing if the confines of lockdown succeeded in breaking barriers and opening up a whole new world of opportunity?

● *Henrietta McKervey is the author of 'A Talented Man', published by Hachette, and out now*

## + The Book Brief

### Master storyteller's riposte to tsunami of fake news

**THRILLER**  
**Fair Warning**  
Michael Connelly  
Orion, 416 pages, hardback €16.99; e-book €9.99



Pick of the week

Once the author of two bestselling true crime books, investigative journalist Jack McEvoy now works for a consumer protection website called Fair Warning. Out of the blue, two LA homicide detectives arrive at his door and inform him that he is a suspect in a murder investigation.

The victim is a woman called Christina Portrero, whom Jack had met a year before in a bar and spent the night with in his home. Suspected of a crime he didn't commit, Jack determines to find out what really happened, and uses all his journalistic skills to open doors closed to the police. He soon discovers something chilling.

Tina had died from a broken neck, an unusual break called atlanto-occipital dislocation, or internal decapitation. Such a break suggested specialist knowledge and great strength. She had also told a close friend that she felt she was being digitally stalked, that a man she had met knew more about her than he should.

Jack's digging turns up another four, perhaps

five, similar recent deaths of women in towns near Los Angeles and the distinct possibility that a serial killer is at work. Researching the background of the victims, and speaking to their friends and relatives, he finds that each of them had, for different reasons, used the services of a DNA genetic analysis firm called GT23, one of the most successful in the industry.

He is shocked to find out that genetic analysis is a self-regulating industry, a technique so new that the government has not yet decided

which federal agency should exercise control over it. He suspects that GT23 is, quite legally, selling on the DNA sent to it for analysis to other firms to use for other purposes. This leads him to a firm called Orange Nano, run by a disgraced former senior employee of GT23.

By now, Jack's investigations have reached the ears of the killer known as The Shrike, and he begins to target anyone who might be able to lead the police to him, including Jack and his colleagues.

*Fair Warning* is Harry Bosch creator Michael Connelly's riposte to the current tsunami of 'fake news' which he believes is threatening our traditional media and the integrity of journalism.

It is a tribute to his masterly skills as a storyteller that he can turn reporting into an edge-of-the-seat page-riffling thriller.

Myles McWeeny

**NON-FICTION**

**Heaven and Hell**  
Bart D Ehrman

Oneworld, hardback, 352 pages, €28; e-book €9.99



What happens when we die? Of course, no one truly knows, but American New Testament scholar Bart D Ehrman tackles two of the big theological questions here: where did the ideas of heaven and hell come from, and why have they endured? Neither heaven nor hell is to be found in the Old Testament. So, where did they come from? In this provocative history, Ehrman delves into the history of the afterlife and traces the differing views held by Greeks, Jews and Christians and shows that many of our ideas about heaven and hell emerged long after Jesus's time. Ehrman, as always, writes in a very accessible way, and gives the reader plenty to think about.

Gareth Murray

**FICTION**

**After the End**  
Clare Mackintosh

Sphere, paperback, 384 pages, €13; e-book €4.99



Max and Pip have a seemingly perfect relationship. A husband and wife, they are best friends and can't-keep-their-hands-off-each-other lovers. Their union looks unshakable. But then their world is turned upside down with their adored son becomes seriously ill and the doctors put the question of survival in their hands. For the first time, this couple cannot agree. They each want a different future for their son and their difficulty in coming to a joint decision doesn't just threaten their child's future, but theirs too. *New York Times* bestselling author Mackintosh has written a deep exploration of love, marriage and parenthood that has been likened to the work of Jodi Picoult.

John Meagher

**FICTION**

**How to Feed a Dictator**  
Witold Szablowski

Penguin, 272 pages, paperback €14; e-book €9.49



A great deal has been written about the untold damage caused by the most notorious dictators over the past half-century, but sometimes it's in the banal minutiae of their lives that one learns something of the human lurking beneath the monstrous exterior. Here, the Polish journalist Witold Szablowski has tracked down the personal chefs of five dictators known for the oppression and massacre of their own citizens. He learns that Fidel Castro was obsessed with one particular cow and uncovers the truth about the hideous rumour that Idi Amin was fond of eating human flesh. He also uncovers just what Pol Pot was feasting on while two million Cambodians were dying of hunger.

John Meagher

WriteSide  
**Martin Dyar**



**How do people react when you say you are a poet?**

We are lucky in Ireland that socially, being a poet is given validity and you are usually given encouragement. However, now and again you will meet people who say: "When will you get a real job?"

**Why are people drawn to poetry during the Covid-19 crisis?**

It is something to do with uncertainty. With all the anxiety, the deep questions and sense of loss, there is an appetite for a language that reflects that. Because all our routines are interrupted, we are also in a place of enforced reflection.

**You are currently editing an anthology, Vital Signs: Poems about Illness and Healing. Had you planned this before Covid-19 came along?**

No, it was a pure coincidence. Back in March, I wondered whether it would seem opportunistic. But these poems have something to say that is universal. We have become attuned to our own physical vulnerabilities.

**You are finishing your term as John Broderick writer-in-residence at the Aidan Heavey Library in Athlone. What does that involve?**

I have been doing it since September and concluding it remotely. In the spirit of Broderick's work, I have been trying to promote and encourage creative writing. One of the special projects was a series of classes on poetry and biodiversity in an Irish language primary school. That was great fun.

**You previously lectured in the School of Medicine at Trinity College. How did that come about?**

I was a lecturer in medical ethics and humanities. Many people don't realise that there is a lot of non-science in training to be a doctor. Part of it is about assisting young people in tuning into the experience of patients and not just treating them as cases.

● *Applications are open to writers for the 2020/21 John Broderick residency: westmeathccco.ie/johnbroderickresidency*

Kim Bielenberg

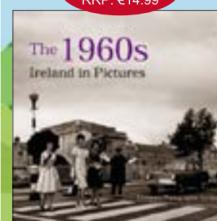
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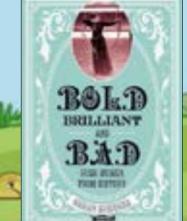
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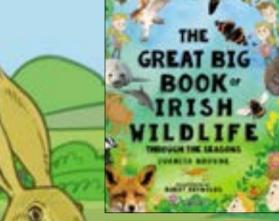
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"A fun, accessible guide to Irish animals, with a focus on the different seasons. Browne is an accomplished naturalist and her carefully researched text is complimented by photographs and brightly coloured illustrations"  
*Irish Independent*

Background image from The Great Big Book of Irish Wildlife

**Ahead of the Game**

with Ronan Price



Fair range: the new electric Corsa from Opel

# Back to the future: electric Corsa is made for the city

*The new Opel is spritely, sturdy and roomy, but outshone by its first cousin*

**Cars**

**Eddie Cunningham**

It's a relief to be writing about cars that you can physically go out and buy for a change. For the past few months, as you know, you could read but not touch as the lockdown closed dealer doors. How many of us will bother with a new motor this year is anyone's guess but at least, to quote Barack Obama, we can: is féidir linn.

So the distinction of being the first new car to be reviewed here as the lockdown begins to ease, appropriately enough, an electric vehicle.

Appropriate? Well yes, given that the Government is committed to an outright sales ban of new fossil-fuel cars by the end of the decade. That's what they say anyway, but there is a long road ahead.

So step up the Opel Corsa-e, the first electric car from the marque now part of the French PSA group. Outwardly, it differs little from its fossil-fuel Corsa siblings apart from a few little e-badges on the side windows and boot. But it gets a fair old dollop of extra equipment compared with the diesel and petrols.

That helps, considering the opening price is €27,000 or thereabouts, while my higher-trim version costs nearly €31,000. It is a lot of money for an admittedly roomy supermini, but the main reason for the cost is the simple fact it is electric. We should never forget that it would be €10,000 more again, only that we taxpayers are subsidising it so significantly.

To be fair, the price/package is competitive as it is for perceived rivals such as the Peugeot e-208, Renault Zoe, Mini electric, Hyundai Ioniq and Nissan Leaf.

Technically, the Opel is a match for any of them. There is 100kW (136hp) of power and it felt spritely when I pushed for pickup. It can nip from a standing start to 100kmh in 8.1 secs. The 50kWh battery pack (216 cells arranged in 18 modules) can manage a range of up to 337km between charges. Fast charging will get you 80pc of that in 30 minutes. I'm pessimistic about the 337km claim; based on my driving, I'd say you'll do well to get into the late 200kms even with careful use of the pedal and a limited number of longer higher-speed drives.

It was grand in urban driving at low speeds, especially where I could capture deceleration and braking energy. But, predictably, anything approaching motorway velocity burnt up range rapidly. I stuck with Normal driving mode but dabbled with Eco and Sport occasionally.

The Corsa is a sturdy little number but, after driving its Peugeot first cousin (they belong in

the same group), it has to be said it doesn't have its exterior design or interior flair. Whatever about the former, I think the latter will become an increasingly distinguishing priority.

That said, the Peugeot has a stand-out cabin that outshines the others too. But the contrast with the Corsa was all the more marked because I got out of one and into the other.

Nonetheless, it was nicely set up to drive; there was an excellent feel to it on the road and it was easy to get around in general thanks to excellent steering and feedback.

Within the PSA Group, Opel is emphasising its German-build quality as a distinguishing feature. That is reflected in the more straightforward, direct design lines and comes across in the sturdy looking dash/central console. This is easy to use and key driving information and infotainment are presented clearly. It's an area that can be overlooked. Some can be really fussy and poorly positioned, which can force you to peer for much longer than should be the case.

After initial reservations about looks and dash, I have to say the Corsa grew on me as I tipped about on the sort of nip-around urban journeys for which it was made. It was grand on longer drives, too but, understandably, like all the others in that respect, could not escape the physical reality: the faster you go, the more power you use more rapidly in an EV.

Would I buy one? I could make a good, strong case for it — as I could for most of the rivals, each with their own pros and cons. But I, and thousands of rural dwellers, want something to get us at 600km/700km without having to refill — be it petrol, diesel or electricity.

We are at the starting gate of the electric journey but the more I drive EVs, the more I see an urban-rural divide for some time to come.

**1 Disco Elysium**

(PC/Mac) \*\*\*\*\*  
Age: 18+



For reasons too tedious to explore, *Disco Elysium* passed me by on its debut last October. This eccentric RPG went on to be anointed many critics' game of the year for its meticulous world-building, oddball characters and a swaggering deconstruction of role-playing tropes.

Now getting a Mac release and inching towards a console version pegged for later this year, *Elysium* reveals itself almost worthy of the hype. It's frequently quite brilliant, yet utterly convinced of its own greatness. With origins in the tabletop gaming of *Dungeons & Dragons* (creator Robert Kurvitz pitches it as "D&D meets 1970s cop show"), *Elysium* sketches a noirish city at the fulcrum of a tussle between communists and capitalists.

The opening slips into cliché — an alcoholic detective waking from a bad night with no memory — but it soon wrong-foots the player with a cavalcade of internal monologues in which you shape the character.

There's murder, mystery, devilment and self-destruction. There's a plaintive soundtrack by alt-rockers British Sea Power. There's a painterly wash to the isometric visuals. Most of all, there's a sense of a man wrestling his demons to a stalemate.

With a million-word script and a sizeable team of writers, the result isn't always cohesive or enlightening. Yet *Disco Elysium* provides a grimly captivating portrait of a descent into and out of madness.

**2 Moving Out**

(XO/PS4/Sw/PC) \*\*\*  
Age: 3+



Supposedly one of the most stressful tasks in life, moving house seems an ideal choice for the latest entry in the couch co-op genre.

*Moving Out* certainly has clocked the ingredients that made the raucous chef sim *Overcooked* a success. You've got up to four players co-ordinating/fighting to load a movers' truck with the contents of suburban homes. Add in time pressure, slapstick humour (there's literally a slap button) plus cartoony graphics and the recipe appears derivative but tasty.

But the home layouts just aren't inventive enough (with one or two exceptions), the missions drag on too long and the controls feel just fussy enough to be annoying.

Obviously, there's zero craic to be had as a solo player and online multiplayer is not an option. The most fun comes from shouting abuse at your team on the couch beside you — which might be awkward during lockdown given they're likely to be family.

**Ask Adrian**



*Our technology editor ADRIAN WECKLER tackles your trickiest tech problems*

**Question**  
I'm thinking of buying a new laptop. I have a HP Probook 4540S laptop, bought in 2012. What advice would you give me, please? I use Microsoft 365, browse the internet and do email. That's it. I don't game or use Netflix.

— James Bennett, via email

**Answer**  
I'd go for a mid-range home laptop. There's a HP model (15s-eq0507, €599) in Currys PC World that sounds just about right for what you need. It's a modernised, faster version of what you have that should last at least four or five years.

**Question**  
Our family is all stuck at home and I have to work as normal. I'm finding the noise to be very distracting. Would headphones help? If so, could you recommend a good pair?

— Breffni H, via social media

**Answer**  
I'm a long-time advocate of noise-cancelling headphones as an essential work aid. I use them in the office and at home, equally, when I want to concentrate. The reason noise-cancelling headphones are so good is that they use microphones to 'invert' the frequency of the noise they hear, to the



Benchmark: Sony's 1000XM3

effect that they 'cancel' your ability to hear it. There are lots to choose from. Sony's 1000XM3 (€269) is still the benchmark (and my personal favourite), although I've tested some great alternatives lately, including Microsoft Surface Headphones (€266) and AKG N700 (€299).

**Question**  
I am a student who is looking to buy a new laptop for about €700. I'm not very tech-savvy and don't really know what to look for in a laptop. In September, I'll be starting a master's in translation and I will heavily rely on my laptop for most of my college work, so I think I'll need one with good memory. Could you give me some recommendations, please?

— Shannon Hyland, Cavan

**Answer**  
You're going to need to lean on this for at least three years. I'm guessing that you'll need to take it around with you from time to time, so I'm going to recommend one that is relatively light while still having decent power and specifications. You'll need at least 256GB of storage. If you can stretch to €799, Lenovo's 14-inch Ideapad S340 (available from Harvey Norman and other retailers) is a good all-rounder for what you're likely to need.

**Question**  
I want to permanently shut down my old Eircom email address, but have had no success to date. I have managed to put an automated response on my Eircom email saying that the email address is no longer in use and to use my new iCloud email address instead. I have also managed to have any emails from my Eircom email address automatically sent to my iCloud one. How can I permanently close down my old Eircom email account, which is never going to be used again?

— AM O'Donnell

**Answer**  
According to Eir, the quickest way to do it is to email wmsupport@eir.ie and request the permanent deletion of the account. Alternatively, if you wait for Eir

Student option: Lenovo Ideapad S340, which is €799, is a good all-rounder



to start charging €5.99 a month for the webmail service — a move it has temporarily shelved due to Covid-19 — all you have to do is not pay and Eir will automatically delete your webmail account after 60 days.

**Question**  
I would like to transfer old camcorder mini tapes (I have about 20) to a CD or DVD in order to view them. I'm just wondering what the most economical way to do this is.

— Elaine Goulding

**Answer**  
A professional service will cost between €10 and €20 a tape, although sometimes you can ask for a volume discount. The advantage to this is that it is hassle-free, you avoid the need for any equipment yourself and you get it neatly on a USB stick or DVD, from which you can then make copies for next to nothing.

Alternatively, you can do it yourself. One thing is crucial: you need the original type of player for the tape you are transferring from. In your case, this is the mini tape player or camcorder. If you have this, the most common way of transferring it is to make a digital file on your laptop using a digital converter gadget. Amazon sells a gadget called Video-2-PC (about €60 including delivery from a third-party seller) that does this reasonably well. But you'll need to be unfazed by plugging things in between your camcorder and your PC (it also only works with Windows laptops and PCs, not MacBooks or iPads or phones).

Email your questions to [aweckler@independent.ie](mailto:aweckler@independent.ie)

**Tech Two**



Nokia 2.3  
€150 from Littlewoods

The benefits to this budget smartphone are its lovely design, good battery life and the best version of Android you can get.

The disadvantage is that it feels a little slow and underpowered. It's still a reasonable buy as a basic smartphone, but I'd worry about it being too slow in future.



Surface Go 2  
From €469 from retailers

Microsoft's Surface range of '2-in-1' tablet-laptops are generally great. Its entry level model now has a bigger screen (10.5 inches) than before. However, the €469 model has very basic power. And you'll pay €130 for the keyboard. So it's really €600 (or €860 for a decent-powered one).

## Who is Mary Lou McDonald?

In an in-depth interview, the Sinn Fein leader talks about her rise to power in Ireland's most controversial party

**EXCLUSIVELY IN TOMORROW'S**

# Sunday Independent

*Real stories worth paying for.*

# Forget the busybodies — now is the perfect time to indulge

## Last Call

Ian O'Doherty

It was the AA Roadwatch announcement that caught my attention: "It's busy on the Kylemore Road, especially southbound from before the canal bridge to the Naas Road junction."

Had there been a pile-up? After all, one of the few advantages of the lockdown is that with less traffic there have been fewer accidents.

But nope, thankfully, it wasn't an accident and nobody was hurt. Instead, the reason for the delays was rather more prosaic — McDonald's reopened this week and people were desperate to get their first Big Mac in months.

In scenes not witnessed since the madness outside Krispy Kreme when the doughnut chain first opened in Dublin in 2018, peckish punters were happy to queue for more than an hour to get their fix of beef patties and that weird gloopy substance they call a milkshake.

Almost as soon as you could say 'I'm lovin' it', the busybodies were out in force, wagging their fingers at the Mac-munchers and warning us all about the dangers of obesity and the inherent problems presented by eating fast food.

To which most people said — so what? You can take our burgers from our cold, dead, greasy, ketchup-sticky fingers.

The eternal-health fantasists of the public health lobby have been having a gay old time of it of late. Nothing we do will ever be good enough for them and they will always find some new way of scolding us. When they weren't giving out about McDonald's, they were warning people against eating snacks. When they weren't giving out about snacks, they were lecturing women that they shouldn't be drinking so much.

Then we were informed that we should use Phase 1 of the lockdown exit to take more exercise.

That more people chose to take advantage of the greater freedom of movement to go off and buy a burger rather than do yoga in their local park is a reminder of one thing — people are sick of being told what to do by unelected officials and they're not prepared to be chided by strangers.

Don't get me wrong, I'm no fan of McDonald's. I haven't eaten any of



Lovin' it: Shannon Knowles, Caitlin Attoe and Emma Flood, all from Lucan, at the reopening of McDonald's on Kylemore Road, Dublin. PHOTO BY COLIN KEEGAN

their stuff for at least 20 years and I don't see myself changing that habit any time soon. But I understand why so many people were prepared to waste a glorious sunny afternoon queuing at a drive-thru for the kind of meal that normally wouldn't cross their minds.

It was about taking back a bit of control. It was about trying to bring a semblance of normality back into their lives. After all, what could be more simple and normal than picking up a burger and fries?

There was a lot of bunkum during the introduction of the lockdown back in March about how we were all going to use this unexpected free time to improve ourselves.

We would be able to finally learn that language we always wanted to pick up. We'd have plenty of opportunities to master the guitar, or take up origami. How long did that last?

By my admittedly unscientific reckoning, these lofty plans for self-improvement lasted about a week before people realised the reason why they had never bothered to learn these skills before was because it was too boring.

Who wants boring when you can have chocolate for breakfast, spend the day in your pyjamas and break open a bottle of wine in the afternoon? We've become a nation of couch potatoes, and that is precisely the way we should be at the moment.

In times of great stress — and we still sure haven't fully processed just how stressful the last few months have been — there is a very human desire to reassure ourselves with the things we know and trust. There have been several talking

heads popping up on radio and TV to warn us against the evils of comfort eating, but what else is there to do with our time? It seems that everyone I know has put on a stone in the last few months and for all the hectoring from the sidelines, few of us even seem to care.

That's because we all have more important things on our mind — the health of loved ones, worries about our jobs, the knowledge that the next bill from Revenue is going to arrive like a Howler letter in *Harry Potter*.

So is it any wonder that so many of us are taking temporary refuge in that extra slice of cake, or opening a can of beer earlier than normal?

But what is really interesting is how so many of us aren't just comfort eating and comfort drinking. We also all seem to be going down a heavy nostalgia route.

In last week's column, I mentioned my burgeoning addiction to old shows on YouTube, such as the 1970s sci-fi classic *Blake's 7*.

That prompted a surprisingly large response from readers who all find themselves in the same boat — rewatching the programmes they loved as kids, the albums that provided the soundtrack to their teenage years and the books that helped to mould them.

It's hardly rocket science — we know that matters are now utterly out of our hands, so we go back to the things that remind us of when we were safe and happy.

So eat that burger, open that bottle of wine, finish off that bar of chocolate. Let's face it, the whole nation is going to be joining the likes of Slimming World and Weight Watchers when this is over, so give yourself permission to overdo it while you have the chance.

And if that annoys the public health busybodies? Well then, that's just an added bonus.



While we fret about the pandemic, the cranks are having a blast

One of the great misconceptions that sprouted up at the start of the lockdown was that it would, somehow, bring us all together. In fact, it has done the opposite.

Granted, most normal people have responded to the situation with impeccable calm. For instance, I haven't seen one person trying to jump the queue in my local shop and people are more inclined to nod at each other as they pass on the street.

But the activists on all sides of the political aisle have been doing their level best to sow as much discord as they can.

The idea of turning a virus that is killing people and destroying the global economy for potentially a generation into a political opportunity seems quite grotesque, yet we have seen it happen here and all across the western world.

Basically, anyone with an axe to grind and an angle to promote has been busier than ever.

On the nuttier fringes of the far-right, we see activists and lunatics seizing the opportunity to promote their pathetic conspiracies.

On the left, we see activists and lunatics trying to use this moment to blame capitalism for all the world's ills.

The space cadets of Extinction Rebellion have seized the day to promote their insane 'decarbonisation' plans, which would reduce Western society to the levels of the 19th century — which is exactly what they want.

In fact, there has been something rather depressing about the way so many activists have responded so gleefully to Covid-19.

But no matter how far apart all these cranks may be politically, they all have one thing in common — a deep and abiding misanthropy.

Neither far left nor far right actually care about their fellow man; they are only concerned with scoring points off those they see as their ideological opponents.

How do you spot such a crank? Well, the next time you're talking to someone who says "one of the good things about the crisis..." or who claims that "at least the planet will be healthier" because nobody has left their house in three months, then you know you're dealing with someone who is more interested in their own agenda than they are in their fellow citizen.

There is no lasting good to come from this pandemic — merely misery, poverty and fear.

Don't let anyone try to convince you otherwise.

Let's face it, the whole nation is going to be joining the likes of Slimming World and Weight Watchers when this is over, so give yourself permission to overdo it