

# PATRICK FREYNE

From Bosco to TK to farmer's tan, from Country n' Irish music to 'The Brits': here are the true touchstones of Irish culture



On Saturday afternoon at the Body & Soul Festival, I'm hosting an *Irish Times* panel all about Irish culture with comedian Alison Spittle, writer Emer McLysaght and DJ Sally Cinnamon on the Wonderlust stage. And no, we're not talking about Beckett or Joyce or Sinéad O'Connor or *Love/Hate*. We're talking about *real* Irish culture: the artefacts and practices that get to the heart of who we are as a people. You know, things like . . .

## The Late Late Show

The longest-running talk show in the world cleaves to an old model of chat in which a representative of the people – Gay Byrne/Pat Kenny/Ryan Tubridy – educates us: “Behold: a Protestant! An American! Non-procreative sex! A harlot! An aubergine! Marty Morrissey!” Its popularity has never waned, proving, I think, that fewer people have access to the internet than previously thought.

## Country n' Irish music

Confused city-dwellers think that our national music is the tasteful folksy trad that's found at pub sessions. This was, in fact, invented in the 1980s by Protestant cheesemakers as a means of entrapping tourists. Drive 20 miles outside Dublin and you will find the real sound of Ireland pouring from your radio. What is that sound? Why it's the beating heart of our people: an accordion, a pedal steel guitar, the sedated vocal delivery of a mindfulness app and pathological levels of localism. Yes, the best place in Ireland is, lest you think otherwise, a small field two miles outside Drumshambo and the best thing there is “a pretty little girl” who may or may not be your cousin. Let's be honest, she's probably your cousin.

## TK Red Lemonade

I went to a wine tasting in my home town once. All of the townsfolk sat in a circle swirling wine around their mouths until finally, a precocious small child put down his glass (it was the 1980s) and said: “This is just red lemonade.” “And good enough for you too,” shrieked the parish priest, ripping off his fake beard and polo-neck, “You pack of degenerate West Brits.” Lesson learned.

I haven't drunk wine, worn a cravat or taken the *Guardian* since. TK Red Lemonade is the drink of our nation. In the history books, it has many names: mead, ambrosia, Patrick Pearse's



Dáithí Ó Sé, a type of man that lives in the Kerry hills with Rose of Tralee competitors

Patriotic Go Juice, Vodka's Friend, Psychedelic Nom-Nom. Irish babies are weaned on it, making them stronger and angrier than other babies. Yes, Red Lemonade: it stains our lips and adds fire to our blood.

## Calling people 'West Brits'

Irish identity is a fragile thing. Here are some things that could get you called a West Brit when I was growing up: drinking wine, having two pairs of shoes, reading an English newspaper like the *Observer* or *The Irish Times*, reading, exporting your tenants' grain during a potato famine, Pilates, supporting teams other than Man United, dancing in contravention of your town's *Footloose* laws, getting a job in Dublin, wearing sunscreen, insufficiently memorising the Hucklebuck, making jam, being ambivalent about transubstantiation, beatboxing.

## Bosco

The Dermot Bannon of his day, this box-dwelling ginger hysteric incubated a generation into an obsession with home-ownership and complaining. Yes, having purchased my own box in suburbia from where I do my own moaning, occasionally in *uafásach* pigeon Irish, I can conclude with confidence that we are all Bosco now. (Top fact: Hector on TG4 is Bosco's son.)

## Singing 'The Fields of Athenry' correctly

A plaintive song written by Pete St John about the potato famine and enforced transportation, it is, of course, not complete without a lot of drunk people shrieking “Hey baby, let the free birds fly!” over the chorus. Why?

Some historians say the trauma of the potato famine turned us into idiots, which makes the song all the more poignant, really. See also: “Alice, Alice who the f\*ck is Alice?” shouted over a song about separation anxiety that ironically completely explains who Alice is, if the shouting people could be bothered to listen. (See also: The craic.)

## The craic

We are renowned for this. As a people we are completely defined by “the craic” though few foreigners truly grasp what “the craic” actually is. (It's “alcoholism.” But that's just between us.)

## Farmers' tans

The Maori have tribal tattoos; the Indians have henna skin dye. Here in Ireland we prefer to adorn ourselves with sun damage from neck to ears and fingertip to bicep. Do not judge. We are just as God made us. (See also: “The big Irish head on him.”)

## Mark McCabe's 'Maniac 2000'

The fifth best-selling Irish single of all time, it involves a DJ having a dissociative episode over a badly recorded techno track while a crowd at Clontarf Cricket Club cheer. It's now the national anthem, because that's what happens when you pick a thirtysomething for Taoiseach.

## Saying “What's that eejit on about now?” whenever someone “with notions” appears on television

When I was growing up, this sentence often came from older male relatives and the most

common trigger was an on-screen appearance from Bono. It's a rite of passage. When someone finds themselves watching television and saying the words “What's that eejit on about now?”, they have finally transformed into their father.

## The Rose of Tralee

Each year, the town of Tralee picks the best woman from a selection of women sent from surrounding townlands in the hope of a good harvest. This woman must then marry Dáithí Ó Sé, which is a type of man that lives in the Kerry hills. Sadly, the festival is under threat from protesting environmentalists due to the way the Roses' cabbage-headed escorts are destroyed after the ceremony.

## Carrolls Irish Gifts

So few of us practise the old ways. Luckily every summer, Spanish and Italian students arrive and purchase large green leprechaun hats and red beards at Carrolls Irish Gifts. Unlike less respectful stag-parties from the UK, these visitors don our native garb with a surprising degree of solemnity, before congregating at my bus stop. It reminds me a bit of western tourists wearing head scarves in Middle Eastern countries and I am humbled by this outward gesture of respect for our culture. “Bejusus and begorrah,” I say to these young people, which is Irish for “the blessings of my people be upon you”.

## 'The Brits'

Your back is a bit sore? Your bus is late? Your nation has been subjugated for 800 years? You've been fired for embezzle-

**Sadly, the Rose of Tralee is under threat from protesters due to the way the cabbage-headed escorts are destroyed after the ceremony**

ment? Your spouse is leaving you for your dashing friend Dennis, whose eyes, even you have to admit, are quite dreamy? You have gout? Yeah, you know who to blame. Make a fist, narrow your eyes, and mutter under your breath, “The Brits!” It feels right, doesn't it?

## The saga of Twink, Linda Martin and Teddy the dog

Deathless celebrities Twink and Linda Martin were once at war. The reason for their animosity is lost in the mist of time but, if I know anything about feuding Celtic queens, it probably had something to do with cattle rustling.

Then one fateful day, Twink's dog, Teddy Bear, was dognapped by bastards. Twink was distraught. She made appeals in newspapers and television. Whither Teddy Bear!? The people wept and ripped their garments. The whole country came to a standstill. A national day of mourning was announced. And, at that point, something beautiful happened.

Linda Martin, “a very powerful woman in the dog world” (Twink's actual words), reached out to her erstwhile enemy and with the help of her dog-world networks, Teddy Bear was located and brought safely home. A nation rejoiced and after the kidnapers were executed, Twink and Linda Martin were friends once more.

This is a Goddamned true f\*\*king story and it's the greatest story ever told. It has everything: Twink, Linda Martin, a dog. How it hasn't yet been made into a six-part television mini-series is beyond me, but I think I know who to blame (see: “The Brits”).

█ The Hack of Ireland, with Patrick Freyne, Alison Spittle, Sally Cinnamon and Emer McLysaght, is on the Wonderlust stage on Saturday, June 24th at 3.45pm at the Body & Soul Festival. [bodyandsoul.ie](http://bodyandsoul.ie)