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Daniel O'Donnell, our main export outside of sadness and alcoholism, has been nationalised – about time



Daniel and Majella's B&B Road Trip has moved from the defunct UTV Ireland to the national broadcaster, RTÉ. This basically means that Daniel O'Donnell, our main export outside of sadness and alcoholism, has been nationalised.

And not before time. Aided by his consort, Majella, he is a national treasure of country airs, slow-speaking charm and colloquial common sense. He is an ethereal, honky-tonk space-pixie. The duo tour the country sampling B&Bs and giving country music fans the vapours, all the time soundtracked by a pedal steel guitar of the kind our forefathers twanged at the British.

Since the last series, Daniel and Majella have been off foreign, where they've undoubtedly caught notions. The series begins with them coming off an Aer Lingus plane, pronouncing that it's good to be home, and, in a moment of modern madness, squeezing each other's arses.

This is nearly too much for us. "That carry-on might go down well in 'America' or wherever you've been gallivanting, Daniel," we all shout at the telly. "But we'll have none of it here."

Thankfully, they take our advice and dial it down for the rest of the programme. We get a montage of things to come in the series: Daniel skiing. Daniel with a hawk on his arm. Daniel and Majella on a pedal boat. Daniel falling off a log.

This is more like it. I'm already riveted. What will Daniel do next? Let's find out.

So they bomb along beautiful Irish valleys, Daniel munching on Starbursts or donning a

Chewbacca mask for a lark. When Majella worries about getting points for speeding, Daniel references the points he got on *Strictly Come Dancing*. Majella always drives the car. Daniel's people (the Tuatha de Danann, probably) rarely touch modern technology or iron or the ground, so while Majella drives, he contents himself with reading files on the B&B owners aloud in his sweet, ironic drawl. He presumably has files on you too. He is the King of Country, after all, with all the constitutional power that that implies (he can dissolve government, pressgang vagrants into service and veto plots on *Fair City*).

"Nancy always has the kettle on and slices of her famous pies ready," he reads. "Nancy is a massive fan of a singer and she's been to see him in concerts too."

"I wonder who that could be," says Majella through gritted teeth.

Frankly, Majella has the patience of a saint.

Stay cool, Nancy

At the first B&B, Nancy is already going out of her mind. She spends hours choosing her outfit, laughing hysterically, teasing friends and generally losing the run of herself. "Stay cool, Nancy," we shout, as Daniel and Majella pull into the driveway. Nancy does not stay cool. Nancy loses her shit. "I wasn't going to give you a key because they were asking me what side of the bed you sleep on and I was going to creep in tonight," she tells them. Daniel is charmed by this, but Majella looks like she might sleep with a knife under the pillow. "That lady has

notions," she says darkly.

Moments later they're in the back of a vintage car with Nancy sitting between them, quaffing champagne and singing *The Rose of Tralee*. Neither Daniel nor Majella look like they know how they got there. There may have been a sedative in one of Nancy's "famous pies".

They go to a local dance, where Daniel sings a few tunes, and then they all do a dance called the "slosh" that everyone outside the D4 Dublin media apparently knows all about. Daniel, Majella, Nancy and the locals begin discussing regional varieties of the "slosh" and then Daniel demonstrates a Donegal iteration of the "slosh".

"Putting the legs up and down took a bit of getting used to, but whatever," says Nancy, slightly disapprovingly.

I feel like the fact I have no strong opinions on the "slosh" goes some way towards explaining why *The Ticket* will never truly be in tune with middle Ireland.

Later Daniel and Majella "test

the bed", which basically involves them lying down side by side and having a chat. This is what passes for erotica for a lot of people, and who am I to judge them? This was a bleak country before broadband. Nancy's B&B doesn't have broadband to this day. "Good on you, Nancy," says Daniel, while Majella no doubt checks that the phone lines, and indeed, the brakes on her car, haven't been cut.

The fun doesn't stop there. Many B&Bs have a "youngster" as part of the household and the next morning Nancy's "youngster", her grandson David, takes Daniel and Majella zorbing on a lake. Watching Daniel O'Donnell in a sort of wetsuit, helplessly flailing around a plastic bubble is probably also what passes for erotica for a lot of people. Each to their own, I say. I'm very broadminded.

Later, they return to Nancy's kitchen for breakfast. "Daniel is a funny man to feed," says Nancy, which arouses my curiosity. What does the silver-throated zorber-enthusiast demand for sustenance? Flower petals floating in a bowl of swan's tears? This year's potato crop? One in 10 of the region's young?

It turns out that Daniel's chosen breakfast is a big feed of rashers with beans, which isn't as madly non-conformist as Nancy thinks it is, and is probably the secret behind his lovely complexion and twinkly eyes. I'm presuming she didn't feed Majella at all (she did feed

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Daniel and Majella move on to the B&B of Lorna and Noel. The B&Bs that feature on this programme are generally so charming, I assume they're decommissioned fairy forts built on ley lines, and Lorna and Noel's place is no exception. They not only have an ancient standing stone in the garden but, more impressively still, a fancy banister that once belonged to Annie Lennox. The banister of Annie Lennox is presented as a wonder for the ages and Daniel and Majella are certainly impressed by it. "Sweet dreams are made of this," they sing to Annie Lennox's banister.

Then Lorna and Noel dress them up in beekeeper outfits and make them fetch honey from a hive, which Daniel and Majella just accept as the sort of thing that happens to them. Soon they're lying in an open air hot tub, their faces covered in honey-extract, while a crowd of singing locals advance on them from the trees. Having watched a lot of Hammer horror films, I initially assume that this is where their journey will end, but then we see preview footage from next week's episode. It's of Daniel grappling with a cow's teat in a milking parlour.

"Now don't be shy, I'm only a boy from home," he says to the cow. If that's your thing, you'll get no judgment from me. As I've said, I'm a man of the world. Suffice it to say, Daniel and Majella's *B&B Road Trip* is very enjoyable and also pure filth.



King and consort: Daniel and Majella's B&B Road Trip

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