

Harry and Meghan: The union of two great houses, the Windsors and the Celebrities, is complete

Patrick Freyne: After Harry and Meghan, the monarchy looks archaic and racist. Well duh

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Patrick Freyne

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Video

Images



Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle have hit out at the British monarchy and members of the royal family during their candid Oprah Winfrey interview. Video : ITV, courtesy Harpo Productions / CBS

Having a monarchy next door is a little like having a neighbour who's really into clowns and has daubed their house with clown murals, displays clown dolls in each window and has an insatiable desire to hear about and discuss clown-related news stories. More specifically, for the Irish, it's like having a neighbour who's really into clowns and, also, your grandfather was murdered by a clown.

Beyond this, it's the stuff of children's stories. Having a queen as head of state is like having a pirate or a mermaid or Ewok as head of state. What's the logic? Bees have queens, but the queen bee lays all of the eggs in the hive. The queen of the Britons has laid just four British eggs, and one of those is the sweatless creep Prince Andrew, so it's hardly deserving of applause.

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The contemporary royals have no real power. They serve entirely to enshrine classism in the British nonconstitution. They live in high luxury and low autonomy, cosplaying as their ancestors, and are the subject of constant psychosocial projection from people mourning the loss of empire. They're basically a Rorschach test that the tabloids hold up in order to gauge what level of hysterical batshitery their readers are capable of at any moment in time.

The most recent internecine struggle is between the royal family and a newly disentangled Prince Harry and his wife, the former actor [Meghan Markle](#).

Traditionally, us peasants would be nervously picking a side and retrieving our pikes from the thatch. Luckily, these days the pitched battles happen in television interviews.

In Oprah with Meghan & Harry, Oprah, her second name now obsolete, appears wearing roundy Harry Potter glasses and pastel colours radiating calm. She distantly air-hugs a pregnant Meghan, who is wearing a black dress with white patterns, and they both then sit between two pillars looking out on a Californian garden. This is clearly Oprah's temple. (It's actually, we are told, a "friend's" house.) The cameras drift smoothly around and, occasionally, above them, with the tact of well-trained servants. We cut sporadically to the couple's own property, where Oprah and the pair wander in hoodies, jeans and anoraks among rescue dogs and chickens, as if to say, "We're just regular rich folk, Oprah, no different from you or Tom Hanks or Jeff Bezos." Arch-royalists will of course, claim these dogs and chickens are crisis actors.

Oprah makes it clear from the start that the questions have not been vetted – though she reveals her cards when they start discussing the royal wedding: "Thanks for inviting me, by the way." Oprah describes their wedding as being akin to a fairy tale. Meghan says that it was an out-of-body experience and, in fact, that they had a small private ceremony a few days earlier.

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Meghan admits she was a bit naive about what being a royal would mean. She was unaware that she would have to, for example, curtsy to [Queen Elizabeth](#) even behind closed doors. She bats away tabloid accusations based on recent leaks.

Did she bully staff? Well, no. (Also, isn't bullying staff part of what being a royal has traditionally been about?)

Did Meghan make Kate Middleton cry about bridesmaids' dresses? She counters that Kate actually made her cry, though she adds, in case we were reaching for our pikes, "If you love me you don't have to hate her, and if you love her you don't need to hate me." If she's really worried about that she should have answered: "Who cares?" (I'm pretty sure I made lots of people cry in the run-up to my wedding.)

She does, however, go on to paint a dismal picture of being silenced and unsupported by the institution as racist commentators took aim at her. The royals never defended her. They allowed lies to go unchallenged and misled the press themselves when it suited them. She calls them by the old nickname of the Firm, which makes them sound like a gang of London gangsters, which I suppose they are. At her worst, she says, she felt suicidal. She rather movingly points to a photograph at a royal engagement when she was at her lowest, noting how tightly a worried Harry is holding her hand.

The reason this isn't a mere royal nonstory is because it's ultimately about race and gender and touches on a number of very real contemporary anxieties around fairness, equality and institutional bigotry. (If I were to pick a pike from the thatch I'd be lining up for Meghan here.) There was talk within the institution of downgrading the royal status of the couple's son. Most shockingly, if you can be shocked by that shower, Meghan reveals that an unnamed member of the royal family fretted about what colour their children's skin might be.



Oprah with Meghan and Harry: Meghan is pregnant, but the couple are also pregnant with a nascent media empire and lucrative Spotify and Netflix contracts. Photograph: Joe Pugliese/Harpo via AP

Harry turns up for the second half of the interview. He credits his wife with educating him about unconscious racial bias, institutional bigotry and how deeply weird the royal environs actually are. He likens it to a trap, one in which his father and brother are still caught. His relationships with both, as he depicts them here, are strained, though Meghan and Harry claim to still have a good relationship with the queen.

Harry also evokes the experience of his own mother and says he's wary of history repeating itself. And this reminds me that the only time I've ever been moved by anything to do with the British royals was seeing him as a small boy walking in his mother's funeral procession. He talks about the unspoken deal the royals have struck with the tabloids to give them access in return for favourable coverage. As it is for soap operas and reality television, benign tabloid coverage is an existential issue for the royals. He suggests, ultimately, that he and Meghan were in the crossfire of that.

He also reveals that they didn't so much abandon their royal duties as be edged out by lack of support. They were told they wouldn't be afforded state security, which is what led to their need to do media deals. "Did you blindsided the queen?" asks Oprah, conjuring up an image of Harry sucker-punching her with a karate chop. As if that would be possible. I picture the wily nonagenarian counterpunching with the royal dagger between her teeth. They did not, for the record, blindsided the queen.

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Meghan and Harry's critics accuse them of being money-hungry careerists, but that's hilarious coming from sycophants to hereditary tax-suckling grifters

Over the course of the interview Harry and Meghan, who are charming, clever and good at being celebrities, make the monarchy look like an archaic and endemically racist institution that has no place in the modern world. Well duh. And despite all the outrage you might read in the UK tabloids right now, they also did something else that renders everything else irrelevant: they officially launched themselves in the United States.

Harry revealed their next child's gender – it's a girl – in this interview, but Harry and Meghan are also pregnant with a nascent media empire and lucrative [Spotify](#) and [Netflix](#) contracts. Of course, their critics accuse them of being money-hungry careerists for this, but that's hilarious coming from sycophants to hereditary tax-suckling grifters. Arranging a Netflix deal that the couple actually have to work for is pretty benign royal behaviour when you compare it with conquest and general parasitism.

Harry and Meghan are ultimately going to win. Despite the tabloid frenzy, this was never the story of an ungrateful pauper being elevated by the monarchy. This was about the potential union of two great houses, the Windsors and Californian Celebrity.

Only one of those things has a future, and it's the one with the Netflix deal.

10 Friday Life

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Patrick Freyne



Emily in Paris is ludicrous, but that's because we're all doing it wrong



The only thing I am sure of in life is that we are all watching Emily in Paris (Netflix) wrong. All of us. The people taking it seriously. The people watching it sidely. The people watching it for escapist reasons. The people who are watching it as a documentary about France. The people who are watching it as a documentary about Emilys. The people who aren't watching it at all and are scoffing at this opening paragraph. Phil Collins fans who are watching it for a glimpse of his genetic material (Emily is played by the Collins-spawn, Lily Collins). Babies who don't know it exists but can feel that their parents are agitated. Insects whose range of vision is so different to mankind's they couldn't watch it if they tried. People who glimpse at it on a screen through a house window as they pass by and are later troubled by uneasy dreams.

We're all doing it wrong. I have no idea what type of show it is even - comedy, drama, game show, "the news", opera? I've heard that no one knows how it was assembled, that the writers each wrote individual pages in isolation without communicating and then mysteriously disappeared. Darren Star's impenetrable grand plan is so far above us that I suspect it will only be on evolving a new gland, aeons from now, that our ancestors will truly get what he's at. Then they'll look at this column on irishtimes.com (in the far future we'll still have subscribers) and they'll laugh. "Oh Darren," they'll say. "You wag."

All I know is that it's pretty hard to stop watching Emily in Paris. I have now watched all 10 episodes and before sitting

down and watching it again I feel the need to explain what my limited human mind perceived.

Emily in Paris is about an Emily who is in Paris. She is American and she is dispatched to Paris, a make-up place like Hobbiton or Endor or Naas, to work at a branding firm and inculcate sexy Frenchmen and lady Frenchmen with American values of libertarian can-do-it-ive-ness and union busting (for readers in the future, America was a big country that ended shortly after the show first aired). Emily cannot speak French but luckily for her, French is really just shouting words slowly in English. Well, it's this or she's surrounded by the reality distortion field that comes with being a white American that means that wherever they go everyone is soon shouting in English

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Emily is in awe of Paris. It's unclear why, though she is very aware of French cinema. Ratatouille and Moulin Rouge are mentioned while the filmography of Pepé Le Pew is implied

and exasperation.

I largely don't understand what's going on but I'm not sure it matters. I don't understand the clothes, for example. I've not really moved on clotheswise from when God chastised Adam and Eve for hiding their nudity in the Book of Genesis so I'm not sure if Emily's clothes are being played for laughs or not. Much of them would, if they were Halloween costumes, be called things like sexy bagpiper or golf lady or flamboyant hobo. If I was to guess at her ethnicity based on her clothes, I'd have to say "clown person". And this tracks with being Phil Collins' daughter.

Emily is in awe of Paris. It's unclear why, though she is very aware of French cinema. Ratatouille and Moulin Rouge are mentioned while the filmography of Pepé Le Pew is implied. She is undisturbed by the fact the Paris she visits is an Escher-like horror where you can see the Eiffel Tower from every window in contravention of the laws of physics. In this Paris, Parisians love nothing more than hanging around at those tourist cafes with the red chairs and smoking while standing in dogshit.

If Emily was in Dublin, this programme would largely take place in the Leprechaun Museum and Tayto Park and she would be dribbling boxty and shifting Colm Meaney. Frenchies are generally depicted as smelly, sex-obsessed, work-shy and occasionally nude for no reason. One half of Emily's French friends lives in a chateau. The other makes steak tartare for a living. In the next series I expect to meet a mime, a can-can dancer and a resistance fighter. Thus far, my favourite character is Emily's weary



eye-rolling boss Sylvie (Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu) who is not charmed by her incessantly chirpy bullshit.

Clueless privilege

I am *slightly* charmed by her incessantly chirpy bullshit. This may be a form of Stockholm syndrome I've developed after years of watching American TV or it may just be the likability that sometimes comes with clueless privilege. I mean, despite having the cultural knowledge and language skills of a baby, she is somehow very good at her branding job. This is because it's illegal in America to write television leads who are bad at their jobs. Americans live in a dying culture which is competing itself to death and watching fictional people succeed is their pornography. Well, apart from their

actual pornography which Emily apparently never watches given how shocked she is by affairs, nudity and references to sex. French people on this show regularly say things like, "I find this very sexual" about things which aren't particularly sexual.

Luckily, being a prudishly upbeat ignoramus is seen as hugely desirable by many sexy French stereotypes over the course of the series: a chef, a philosopher, a perfumier, a guillotine operator, Inspector Clouseau, René from Allo Allo and those guys from the Kerrygold advert. Over the course of the series she also kisses a wealthy client, has sex with a 17-year-old and lusts after her friend's rectangular-headed boyfriend and yet is somehow not fired, jailed or ostracised. Here are some other things that happen

■ Above: Emily (Lily Collins) with some random French person on an average street in Paris. Left: Emily down the pub after work with her no-nonsense boss Sylvie (Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu). PHOTOGRAPHS: CAROLE BETHUEL/NETFLIX

which I enjoyed:

A depressed fashion designer breaks successive portions of crème brûlée with a spoon.

A winery owner quizzes Emily on her son's sexual technique.

Emily, who can't speak French, becomes upset by the rules of French grammar and sets out to reform them.

With Emily in Paris, Star has transcended genre. It has all the knowing beats of comic satire, but I'm unclear what it's satirising - clueless Americans? Sexy French people? Reviewers who write things like "transcended genre"? It's not particularly comic but it's not really drama either because there's nothing at stake. You can tell from the start that nothing bad is going to happen to Emily, ever. This is because nothing bad ever happens to Americans when Americans go abroad or else they have a war about it. If it were a different sort of show I'd think maybe that was the point.

And yet, it's still unaccountably watchable. I suppose the success of this knowingly frictionless show at a time when we're all down to our last nerve is explicable but I have no idea what Star is trying to do. That said, I've six weeks now in which to watch it over and over again. I'll figure out what's happening eventually and I'll report back.

New Releases Music



■ In the studio, Colts Neck, New Jersey, November 2019. PHOTOGRAPH: DANNY CLINCH/APPLE

Back to all the familiar things



BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
Letter to You ★★★★★
Columbia

Your first guitar. Your first band. Your first songs. Your first record. When you are young, every first is an unforgettable thrill. And when the arc of time has shifted to the other side, those memories are ripe to revisit through the prism of age and experience, of loss and love. It helps if there is a trigger.

Bruce Springsteen says he was prompted to chase down the past when, with the 2019 death of his friend George Theiss, Springsteen became the last man standing from his first band, The Castiles: "Faded pictures in an old scrapbook/ Faded pictures that somebody took/ When you were hard and young and proud/ Back against the wall running raw and loud" (Last Man Standing).

Letter to You, both the title track and the riveting album, is Springsteen's meditation on a life lived in what he terms a "45-year conversation" with his audience: "In my letter to you I took all my fears and doubts/ In my letter to you all the hard things I found out" (Letter to You).

The album is also about coming home, both literally and meta-

phorically. Recording last November in Springsteen's home studio in New Jersey, the E-Street Band - reunited with their leader for the first time since 2016 - impress with a performance redolent of past glories.

They play "live" in that each track is recorded as a band with minimal overdubs. This creates a real pulsating energy, driven by Max Weinberg's dramatic propulsive drumming and the guitars of Steve Van Zandt, Nils Lofgren and Springsteen himself.

Most of these songs were written with the band in mind, both in terms of suitability and spirit. Ghosts recalls those that have gone but crucially celebrates with those still here: "I shoulder your Les Paul and finger the fretboard/ I make my vows to

those who've come before/ I turn up the volume, let the brothers be my guide/ Meet you, brother and sister, on the other side".

This harking back to the past sees Springsteen revisit, with elan, three songs from the early 1970s. If I Was a Priest, Song for Orphans and Janey Needs a Shooter connect us to the unbridled Dylanish voice of a young man, while House of a Thousand Guitars is a mission statement loud and proud.

The album is bookended by companion pieces, One Minute You're Here and I'll See You in My Dreams, aptly riffing on the mysteries of life and death.

Letter to You directly engages with that last big question. Expect more - we're in that space now. **JOEBREEN**



EVE BELLE
In Between Moments ★★★★★
Rubyworks

Ireland has been awaiting the arrival of a world-class pop star for the millennial generation - could Eve Belle Murtagh be it? The Donegal native's debut album certainly fizzles with energy, enthusiasm and clever songwriting that belies her tender years.

Murtagh has described herself as a proponent of "sad bop"; others have called her a "chronicler of sorrows". But this is no hackneyed collection of dejected love anthems. The songs, admittedly saddled with the kind of lovelorn sentiment

typical of any 23-year-old, are glazed with both a wry humour (as heard on standout Bluff: "I'm scared of falling, I'll jump instead/ You wrecked my night, so I'll wreck your head") and an obstinate sense of resilience.

Framed by snappy electropop beats, ice-cool production and an eloquent vocal style, it's only a matter of time before songs such as Blood Sports, Begging for Rain and the brash strut of Smitherens are soundtracking big emotional climaxes in films and TV shows.

On the regret-laced Please Don't Check Your Messages and Homesick, the pop tempo is turned down for a folksy, stripped-back approach. Though less engaging than the upbeat numbers, Murtagh's voice adapts to both styles with panache.

It's an imperfect yet accomplished debut - and if she's this good at 22, there could be great things in Eve Belle's not-too-distant future. **LAUREN MURPHY**



JOHN PRINE
Crooked Piece of Time: The Atlantic and Asylum Albums 1971-1980 ★★★★★
Rhino Records/Warner Music

One of the peripheral misfortunes of the death of someone such as John Prine - who died aged 73 on April 7th from Covid-19 complications - is how people extol the virtues of only his best-known material. The early work is often left to languish as a lesser entity.

Some six months after Prine's death, the first seven albums of his career have been repackaged to include mini posters and authoritative sleeve notes by US music writer David Fricke. The albums, each remastered to compensate for varying quality of the original recordings, range in worth.

Prine's 1971's self-titled debut is deceptively simple yet utterly distinctive. One year later, Diamonds in the Rough delivered on the blues' promise with added shades of bluegrass and country. Sweet Revenge, 1973's offering, supplants reflection with hard cynicism and acute observations. Matters soured slightly with 1975's tame Common Sense but picked up considerably with 1978's Bruised Orange, which is rightly regarded as Prine's strongest, most intimate album of this period.

The smart-looking, Christmas present-baiting box set for the avid fan, whose original records are either worn out or lost, also features 1979's Pink Cadillac (a misfiring rock 'n' roll/rockabilly collection of covers and originals) and 1980's back-on-track Storm Windows.

In other words, for often enlightening glimpses into the young soul of "the Mark Twain of songwriting", you won't go far wrong. **TONY CLAYTON-LEA**



KEATON HENSON
Monument ★★★★★
Play It Again Sam

Keaton Henson's new album is an exploration of the "monument" that was his father, and his father's illness (he passed away two days before the completion of the record). It is a sobering and raw record, full of songs that Henson felt weren't "necessarily for anyone else to hear", but as he moved through the process, enlisting Radiohead's Philip Selway on drums and percussion, Leo Abrahams for guitars, and Charlotte Harding for saxophones, his confidence grew.

His confiding voice yearns across the album, mirroring the vulnerability present on each song. From the intricate guitar on Self-Portrait - a "prayer uttered into the ground" - to the warm, understated organ on Ontario. This is a quiet piece of work, without much divergence, yet While I Can is possibly as directly anthemic as Henson gets, and Husk is the opposite of its title in its richness; however, it is really through the understated, two-part Prayer, with its mournful chords and soaring orchestral section, that Henson's sensibility is distilled. Sufjan Stevens' Carrie & Lowell and Perfume Genius's Learning are surely reference points, or at least in touching distance, at times. Lo-fi electronics and wonky home-video audio clips weave throughout, bringing a sense of nostalgia, childhood and biography to the work - and through seeking to capture his loss and consequent grief, he memorialises someone and something completely fundamental. **SIÓBHÁN KANE**