

Business Post

# Magazine

January 16 2022

## Rosemary Mac Cabe

Why I love and loathe my body

## Winner takes it all

Is gaming set to be the buzz sport for 2022?

## Design for Life

How to cope with alopecia

# KENNETH BRANAGH

The Belfast writer-director on making art from the material of life

Interview: John Maguire

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Kenneth Branagh, interview page 8  
JOHAN PERSSON

## Features

- 8 COVER STORY**  
Kenneth Branagh meets John Maguire to talk life, art and Belfast
- 12 ZEITGEIST**  
Why esports is scoring big in 2022
- 14 INTERVIEW**  
Janis Ian tells Tony Clayton-Lea why now is the right time to retire
- 16 ESSAY**  
Rosemary Mac Cabe on the story of her body, pre and post-pregnancy

## Regulars

- 5 ANDREA CLEARY**  
Is Blue Monday nothing more than a marketing swizz?
- 26 ALBUM REVIEWS**  
Tony Clayton-Lea rounds up the latest releases
- 27 THEATRE**  
Sara Keating reviews The Chronicles of Oggle
- 30 DESIGN FOR LIFE**  
Mary Cate Smith on how to cope with alopecia

## Arts & Books

- 23 FICTION**  
Edel Coffey's debut novel tackles an uncomfortable subject with panache
- 24 NONFICTION**  
Paul McCartney's life of song
- 28 FILM AND TELEVISION**  
The Tragedy of Macbeth, Smother and Cyrano are in the spotlight

## Eat & drink

- 20 WINE**  
Cathal McBride on the possibilities of vegan wines
- 21 RESTAURANT REVIEW**  
Gillian Nelis reviews Hasu Izakaya in Greystones

# Nadine O'Regan

Why is it that, in 2022, we still cannot protect women from harm, and why are we still being told that it is women rather than the system that must change?



@NadineORegan

**T**wenty-three years old and a gifted traditional musician, Ashling Murphy was a primary school teacher who spent her days in the classroom in Durrow National School in Tullamore in Offaly. She was described last week by her principal as bubbly, with a bright smile and beloved by her students, the children of first class.

Last week, on a Wednesday afternoon at around 4pm, Ashling went for a jog on a canal bank in Tullamore, a popular walkway named Fiona's Way. Minutes later, she was dead, attacked by a man who was witnessed by two women joggers who ran to a nearby house to call gardai.

Today her friends, family and community are in mourning – and the rest of us are left wondering how it could be the case that in 2022, we still cannot protect ourselves and our loved ones from harm. We still cannot properly police the crimes of men, or even at times have the licence to speak freely about those crimes, without facing defensiveness, with hashtags like #NotAllMen wheeled out online as a way to change the subject and allow for some men to create distance rather than stand with female victims of horrific crimes.

It is haunting to discover that the walkway where Ashling Murphy was attacked is named Fiona's Way in memory of another woman, Fiona Pender, who vanished near there over 25 years ago, aged 25 and pregnant. One man was a suspect in the case, but he was never charged.

It is depressing and exhausting to see that once again – in the wake of this terrible crime – women are being told over the airwaves and online that it is they – these blameless souls! – who need to do more.

They need to avoid going anywhere by themselves, they must run only on gym treadmills, and they should not leave their homes in the dark. They are being told to live this way, so that perpetrators or would-be perpetrators of crimes can roam freely. They are being told that by nameless figures on Twitter and by government ministers on radio alike. The overriding impression is that it is somehow normal for us to regard men as predators incapable of acting within the law.

Smarter fixes – stronger laws, better education, more allyship from male leaders, educators and influencers, more pressure on those with power to develop systems of support – are less discussed, even though the statistics make it obvious that this is what we need.

According to Women's Aid, there have been 244 violent

deaths of women since 1996, with 87 per cent of resolved cases being perpetuated by a man known to the victim.

Countless examples have surfaced on social media during the week to highlight the personal experiences of women, young and old, who have described the worry, anger and fear they have felt at various times in their lives, perhaps when exiting a bus on a quiet country road; when walking home on a street with no lights; or even when arguing with men on Twitter about their right to speak their truth at all.

Here is Kate Cunningham's (@KateLCunningham) story. "Eleven years ago, a man dragged me off my bike as I was cycling home on a main road at 12.30pm. I got away with minor injuries. Police suspected two men followed me from town in a car. I still cycle at night but, 11 years later, if I see a man, I still think, 'I hope he won't hurt me'."

Here is what photographer Ruth Medjber (@ruthlessimagery) had to say, talking about her job photographing clients in her Dublin studio. "The reason I hired an assistant for the studio this week isn't just that I need the help, it's because I was afraid. It was mainly men who booked in for shots, men who found me on Twitter. Now I'm sure each person is going to be lovely and sound, but there's always a risk."

Here is Brianna Parkins (@parkinsbrea) summarising the surrealism of the situation in which women are being told to pipe down on Twitter and not make a fuss about other women dying. "Women are being murdered. Men are asking them to be less aggressive when they talk about it."

In a report published last week, it was revealed that children in

Durrow National School had been invited to write messages to Ashling Murphy, which would be put into a memory box for her. Cards were also placed on an altar at the top of the classroom. Many of the kids used their markers and crayons to draw a picture of their teacher and write, "I love you, Miss Murphy." A vigil took place on Friday outside Dáil Eireann with people lining the street, holding placards in her name.

Let's hope that these acts – this outpouring of grief, public questioning and physical presence outside Dáil Eireann – serve as a potent reminder to those in power that institutional change is needed. Let's hope that we – women and men – continue to speak about Ashling Murphy and victims like her, and to speak loudly and clearly, so that we can play our part in fighting for a system that protects women as they should be protected, and punishes those who seek to do harm.

It doesn't have to be like this. ■



Ashling Murphy was described by her principal as bubbly, with a bright smile and beloved by her students, the children of first class

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**Pottery** the return of Channel 4's Great Pottery Throwdown hasn't disappointed, with children's tea sets and wall-mounted clocks evoking tearful adjudication from master potter Keith Brymer Jones (*above right*). Officially the only show that is more wholesome than Bake Off

**Yellowjackets** the critically acclaimed series, renewed for a second run, has been making waves in the past few weeks as Irish audiences get caught up. Be warned: this is not a show for the faint-hearted

**Fat Liberation** fat activist and host of the Pure Filth podcast Michelle McCormick posted some brilliant and informative Insta-stories this week on dismantling fatphobia in the wake of the controversy surrounding Operation Transformation. Follow her stories @mschellemc on Instagram

## Culture Counter

**Novak Djokovic's prospects** The Australian government has cancelled Novak Djokovic's visa for a second time, with immigration minister Alex Hawke saying he "carefully considered" all the information presented to him before arriving at his decision.

**Queen Vic landlords** Danny Dyer, the latest landlord of the Queen Vic, is set to leave the BBC soap after nine years playing Mick Carter for a role in a Sky drama that is, he says, "an offer he couldn't refuse"

**Golden Globes** the winners of this year's Golden Globes, which took place in the early hours of Monday morning, were announced with little fanfare and no televised ceremony as the awards commit to "meaningful reform". The Hollywood Foreign Press Association's group of Golden Globe voters had no black members in 2021. Irish winners this year included Kenneth Branagh for his screenplay for Belfast

**Influencer culture** hot takes have been flying about influencer Molly Mae's comments that we all "have the same 24 hours in a day". The ex-Love Islander has been accused of lacking tact as she earns a seven-figure sum as creative director of fast-fashion brand Pretty Little Thing, while garment workers don't earn a



# Andrea Cleary

We don't have to buy into the crass commercialism of Blue Monday, but we could turn it into a day for putting into action some of those New Year's resolutions we so optimistically made a few long weeks ago



**I**magine the scene. It's a cold, dark, winter morning and your socks are wet from the commute to work in the rain. The Christmas tree is packed away under the stairs. You're broke, and payday feels as distant now as lambing season or the bright, fresh buds of spring. It's the third Monday of January and you open your inbox to another marketing email telling you to buy a mattress or book a holiday because today is Blue Monday.

"What's the harm?" you think. It is "the most depressing day of the year", after all, and you deserve to treat yourself.

But if we pause for a moment, and tear the mask off Blue Monday Scooby-Doo style, we'll find out that it was – gasp – capitalism all along! And they would have got away with it too.

Blue Monday started as a press release from Sky Travel back in 2005.

The company claimed to have developed an equation to work out when we're at our collective lowest point:  $C(P+B) N+D$ . Looks pretty good to me, someone who – and I'm not proud of this – got an NG in their Ordinary Level maths mock.

All those official-looking letters represent data points like weather, debt, time since Christmas, New Year's resolutions and motivation levels. If they seem like nebulous, unquantifiable terms to you, then you're right. Of course, it's impossible to calculate when we're all feeling sad because "sadness" is as unquantifiable as "motivation levels". Nonetheless, it has been decided that the third Monday of January – tomorrow – is that fateful day.

Scientists are sick to the back teeth of debunking Blue Monday. Many have noted that the equation "fails to make mathematical sense even on [its] own terms", calling it "pseudoscience" and "farcical".

Meanwhile, Blue Monday trends on Twitter every year – check in tomorrow and see for yourself – and marketing teams profit from framing their latest deal as a cure for the January blues, but with science!

Now, far be it from me to tell you what to do in January of all months. Maybe booking a holiday for late June will bring joy, or maybe you really do get a great deal on a mattress. But convincing ourselves that we're all in a collective state of depression for one day of the year, and further deciding that the answer to this unprecedented global event is to spend money, is a bigger issue than annoying marketing emails.

The Covid-19 lockdowns have been in place for almost two years, and we're midway through our second winter dealing with the virus. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), depression and anxiety are acutely

prevalent, and people who never experienced symptoms of these disorders may be dealing with them for the first time.

Mental health services are underfunded, dealing with immense pressure on the system, and we're all doing what we can to make it through winter. But opting into marketing tactics like Blue Monday just confirms to advertisers that your mental health is for sale.

If tomorrow rolls around and you find you do need a pick-me-up – who could blame you? – there are far better ways to boost your mood than falling prey to Blue Monday. Of course, if you are struggling with mental illness, cheer-up tactics are no replacement for seeking professional help, but for those of us who might be taken in by a well-timed deal, there are alternatives.

If you want the hit of adrenaline that comes with a purchase, why not place an order with a local independent book shop, buy an original print from an artist's Etsy store, or support an indie music label by buying music or merch on Bandcamp. You can look forward to a nice gift coming in the post while making an independent business owner's day.

Instead of planning an expensive holiday or booking flights halfway across the world, consider an experience at home. Have you always wanted to take a pottery class, learn the piano or take up surfing? Book some lessons to look forward to later in the year. Float the idea of a camping trip, cheap and cheerful, to your WhatsApp group, and start searching for beautiful, local hidden spots to discover.

Maybe your New Year's resolution was to use your time for good; search for local community initiatives, charities and organisations that need your help, and sign up. You can't put a price on the glowing feeling of good intentions, but putting them into action is even better.

If all else fails, call a friend or neighbour with a dog and go for a walk. The cold sting of a January night is always improved by a light-up collar disappearing after a tennis ball into the distance.

The best thing you can do, tomorrow or any other Monday, is to unsubscribe from every mailing list, marketing newsletter, deal, sale or friendly check-in that you've been meaning to rid yourself of since you first forgot to click "no, I don't want to hear from you, for the love of God please leave me alone".

Blue Monday is like that tree falling in the woods: if we're not around to hear it, does it make a sound?

Decide instead that Blue Monday is the day that we all listen to New Order, Joni Mitchell and Eiffel 65; watch Blue Velvet and eat blueberry pancakes and drink blue lagoon cocktails. The science works out just about the same anyway.



### ANDREA IS...

**Reading:** *Detransition Baby* by Torrey Peters, my book club's choice for this month

**Enjoying:** *Your Own Personal Beatles*, my favourite podcast on the Fab Four with great guests like Wendy Erskine and Adam Buxton

**Following:** @theselessproject on Instagram for great tips on sustainable shopping, minimising waste and making ricotta out of sour milk!

# This week you will love...

Compiled by  
Mary Cate Smith



## All-terrain running shoes

Planning on doing some road running this year? The one piece of kit well worth spending on is a purpose-built pair of runners. There's no such thing as the perfect shoe, but the Cloudflyer from **On Running**, €169.95, ticks the comfort, style and support boxes and then some. They may not be cheap, but they are the brand of choice for a slew of Olympic athletes, winning on all fronts including insole technology, lightweight feel and agility, on-running.com.



## Hands-free device holders

Anyone who has propped up their tablet with a tin of baked beans or experienced "tech neck" in order to view a movie will delight in the idea of a fit-for-purpose tablet holder. Ensure your future video-conferencing is done with ease with this houndstooth tablet holder from Irish start-up **the Crib**, thecribs.ie.



## Time-saving solutions

We've all been there. You're ready to leave the house and all of a sudden, your keys are nowhere to be found. If you're prone to having the odd "moment" or two, **Tile** is a nifty Bluetooth object tracker that locates your mislaid items. Starting at €19.99 for one, it can be attached to bags or keyrings for convenience, ie.tile.com.



## Supportive sports bras

It's always a good sign when you can come home after an intensive workout and not want to cut yourself out of your sports bra. If you plan on upping the ante in your training this year, it might be time to invest in a medium to high-impact bra. **Lululemon's** Wunder Train long-line bra, €68 is our go-to for breathable and full coverage support. Available at brownthomas.com.



## Après-ski chic

If you're going skiing or simply enjoy exercising outdoors, the current cold spell calls for a base layer in your workout wardrobe. Designed to wick away any moisture or sweat, it keeps your body warm without overheating. This Sweaty Betty top, €90 at **Zalando** acts like a second skin and is flexible enough to allow for movement. Now when your Mum asks if you're wearing a vest, you can say yes and actually mean it, zalando.ie.

## Ergonomic shelving

Accessibly priced furniture seldom wins awards, but **String** is the exception to that rule. The Swedish pocket shelf system, €147, is a favourite of interior designers everywhere. Combining two wall panels and three shelves, it's structurally sound and aesthetically pleasing. Available at [ambientedirect.com](http://ambientedirect.com)



## An at-home brew station

Trying to spend less money on takeaway coffee? The Kinto SCS-S04 Brewer set, (with two cups included) €165, relishes the ritual of slow coffee making. This pour-over coffee maker from **Kindfolk** can be used with paper or stainless steel filters, depending on how strong you like your brew, [kindfolkgalway.ie](http://kindfolkgalway.ie).

## A cosy quilt

The mercury is dropping and we're craving toasty nights in with a good book and a creamy hot chocolate. In lieu of your own personal turn-down service, drape your bed with The Eye bedspread, €274 for hotel bedding vibes. Designed by All the Way to Paris for Scandi brand **&Tradition**, you can buy this organic cotton quilt at [Nordic Elements](http://NordicElements.nordicelements.com). [nordicelements.com](http://nordicelements.com).



## An outdoor changing robe

It isn't just die-hard sea swimmers that testify to the benefits of cold water swimming; more and more people flocked to the Atlantic during the pandemic to reap the therapeutic rewards. Designed to make changing after watersports easier, the **Vico Robe**, currently on sale for €118, is an Irish-made, thermally insulated garment that keeps you warm and dry while changing. Did we mention it has pockets? [vicorobes.com](http://vicorobes.com)



## Self-care essentials

Have you reached peak relaxation this January? If so, we salute you. If not, it's never too late to kickstart your self-care regime. Schedule an at-home spa day with this new robe, €65 from Irish skincare expert **Monica Tolan**. Made from the softest bamboo, the material is both hypo-allergenic and temperature-regulating. Shop at [monicatolan.com](http://monicatolan.com).

# #Trending



### SYSTEM REFRESH

Being cocooned for extensive periods can weaken your immunity to diseases like the common cold. If your system needs a reboot, try **Kotanical's** new essential oil blend, Immune, €20 for 10ml. Add some to your diffuser to sterilise the air in your room and nudge your body's defences in the right direction. [kotanical.ie](http://kotanical.ie).

### MINT CONDITION

We love when a brand listens to its customers and steps things up accordingly, and **Nimue** has done exactly that by offering refills on some of its top-selling products. Inspired by Korean beauty trends, facial conditioners are sprayed on after a cleanser to refresh and restore the skin. Nimue conditioner, €46 or €28 for a refill, has added glycolic acid for gentle exfoliation. In selected salons nationwide and at [nimueskin.com](http://nimueskin.com).



### COMFORT ZONE

Struggling with wintry conditions, too much central heating and dry skin? We're fond of **Aveeno Skin Relief** moisturising lotion with shea butter at this time of year. A snip at €12.99 for 500ml, it's in pharmacies nationwide.



*‘The ground from beneath my feet had been taken away, and now I was walking on sand: if ever there was a living metaphor for instability, it was that’*

Cover Story





Kenneth Branagh on the set of *Belfast*: 'The force of the interruption of lockdown came as a great shock to me'

ROB YOUNGSON/  
FOCUS FEATURES

Kenneth Branagh's new film *Belfast*, which covers the start of the Troubles and the effect it had on the actor as a nine-year-old boy, has been met with rave reviews and could well put him in line for an Academy Award

Interview: **John Maguire**

**K**enneth Branagh is very good at Zoom. Perhaps that shouldn't come as a surprise for someone who has spent a lifetime in front of, and behind, the camera, but it's still notable how precisely he has framed himself in the centre of the screen. Sat upright in a straight-backed chair, an iPad propped between two books on a low table, the 61-year-old actor and director couldn't look more composed and relaxed. As he waves down the lens, his smile is wide, his face open and expressive beneath a prickle of rusty beard, eyebrows dancing below the spiky line of his Tintin quiff. After two years of isolation at home in Surrey, he admits he has been working on his videoconferencing technique. "We're all expert by now, right?"

Branagh looks thrilled to be out in company – virtually speaking at least, all dressed up (in a dapper steel-blue tweed jacket), and talking (enthusiastically and fluently) to people like me about his new film *Belfast*. He's been talking about it since it premiered to a rapturous reception at the Telluride Film Festival last September; the place, incidentally, where the American entertainment news industry starts their Oscar prognostications.

Striking a chord wherever it's been screened, reviews have been stellar, coverage has been extensive. Branagh has been on Zoom calls like this one for months, and the buzz is only getting buzzier. He's talking about the film and talking about himself, because the two are inextricably intertwined.

Beautifully crafted and bittersweet, *Belfast* is Branagh's semi-autobiographical paean to his home city, the place he and his family left for good in 1969 when the onset of the Troubles in the North brought sectarian riots to their mixed-faith, working class terraced street.

Told from the point of view of a nine-year-old boy named Buddy (played by newcomer Jude Hill, from Gilford in Co Down), the film details the lad's life at home with his Ma and Da (Caitriona Balfe and Jamie Dornan), protective older brother (Lewis McAskie), the care of his loving grandparents (Judi Dench and Ciarán Hinds), and his formative experiences, from his crush on a girl in his class at school to a disastrous attempt at shoplifting.

Photographed in lustrous black and white, with a jukebox soundtrack of Van Morrison songs, the film revolves around Buddy's father, a carpenter with debts to pay who keeps coming and going between England and Belfast as an economic migrant.

As the situation worsens in the North, and the growing sectarian unrest finds its inevitable way to their quiet street, the family are faced with a decision: to stay in Belfast and tough out the deteriorating situation, or to emigrate to Berkshire in England, where Da has been offered a permanent position and a house in a newly-built estate.

**B**ranagh says he had been considering making a film about his native city for years, but it was only during the eerie quiet of early 2020 as the world cocooned itself inside from the exponential threat of Covid-19 that he found the time and space to give the idea shape.

"When lockdown arrived in the UK, it was very swiftly decided. Overnight. The force of that interruption came as a great shock to me," he says, pointing at his stomach. "I felt something deep inside that I think a lot of people felt, which was this unexpected engagement with uncertainty. One lockdown sent me back to another, long distant lockdown, but back then it wasn't a virus but an actual barrier on either end of our street, which arrived just as suddenly and was just as impossible."

The 1969 Belfast riots turned the Branaghs' "ordinary little street, our world" into a fortress. "It was like the wooden stockades we'd see in the Western films in the cinema except it wasn't made by us kids playing, but by the grown-ups who had formed themselves into a gang and were stopping anyone coming in or out. The fellow who was our postman ➡



was now also walking up and down after dark with a makeshift truncheon, on patrol. There were soldiers and armoured cars.”

This was the start of the Troubles as a conflict, in August 1969. Peaceful neighbourhoods were being divided by sectarian hate. People were being burned out of their houses by roving gangs.

“On that first day, August 15, the first child died three streets away from us,” Branagh recalls. “A Catholic boy who was just nine years old, same as Buddy. Never mind feeling the grief of that awful event, you could literally hear it in the streets around you. It’s an unforgettable, unmistakable noise. I can hear it still. It was a frightening transformation of a place where previously I had felt very safe and secure.”

Branagh says an image formed in his head one morning while he was out walking his dog near his home in the Surrey countryside. The footpath outside his childhood home in Mountcollyer Street, off the Limestone Road, was dug up to prevent rioters from breaking the slabs and using

From left: Lewis McAskie, Caitriona Balfe, Judi Dench, Jamie Dornan and Jude Hill in Belfast



Jude Hill and Jamie Dornan play son and father in Belfast, which is based on Kenneth Branagh’s formative years

them as weapons. “I hadn’t thought of it in years, but it somehow got stuck in my head, this memory of coming out our front door and the pavement being gone,” he says.

“The ground from beneath my feet had been taken away and now I was walking on sand. I mean, if ever there was a living metaphor for instability, it was that. And once it returned to me, it wouldn’t go away. I had to write it down.”

Branagh had time on his hands. He’d finished editing his second all-star Agatha Christie adaptation, *Death On the Nile*, with his long-standing collaborator, ace Irish editor Úna Ní Dhonghaile (on release in cinemas next month), and the world was in stasis. He began wandering down to his garden shed every morning at nine o’clock with a cup of tea and his dog at his feet and turning on the laptop.

The process of crafting a story around his nagging recurring mental image “happened pretty quickly, for me”, attributing the free flow to the hush of lockdown. “No aeroplane noise, no traffic noise. I could hear the birdsong in quadraphonic sound. It really felt like I was staring into the silence. But I was only writing for myself at that stage. I had no firm determination to make it a film.”

Only when he was finishing the writing did he start making a plan to start filming as quickly as possible, the moment restrictions were lifted. “But I knew I couldn’t start that process without showing the screenplay to my brother and sister. Without me having to explain, they understood that going back into the past was me attempting to make sense of what we, as a family, had gone through. It was very important to me that I got their approval.”

Brotherly duty completed, Branagh began talking to key members of his long-established filmmaking team about his plans for Belfast, including Ní Dhonghaile, cinematographer Haris Zambarloukos, and production designer Jim Clay. One small positive to take from the pandemic, he says with a sharp laugh, was that everyone was available to work.

Cast<sup>C</sup>asting the actors who would play his family, and himself as a child, in this most personal of films, was a challenge for Branagh. He says he started with the easy one, his first choice for Granny, longtime friend and frequent co-star Judi Dench. She would play the materfamilias who looks after Buddy every afternoon after school, just as Branagh’s own grandmother had done.

He says he felt compelled to cast actors he greatly admired but hadn’t worked with before, including Hinds, Dornan and Balfe. The former pair being both Belfast actors, he notes, saying Dornan had “all the sturdiness I was looking for in an actor to play my father” and that Hinds was born and raised “about a half a mile from my house” (although Hinds is eight years older and they didn’t know each other growing up).

Branagh had seen Balfe in James Mangold’s real-life racing car drama *Ford vs Ferrari*, and was struck by a scene she shared with Christian Bale. “It was a short scene, but it revealed this primal side to Caitriona. He announces he’s going to go back to racing cars, and she hits the roof. I knew then she could play the kind of woman who could pick up a kid in the middle of a riot, lift a dustbin lid and use it as a shield, and run through a crowd. I had actually written a note for that scene in my screenplay, that Ma would be ‘like an urban Boudica’. Caitriona had that.”

As the grown-up ensemble came together, Branagh was still looking for someone to play himself, or his nine-year-old avatar at least. He whispers an admission that he believed the film probably wouldn’t have happened if he hadn’t found Jude Hill.

“We watched about 300 audition tapes that we gradually whittled down to one. Jude was at the stage where his mind was so open to learning that acting was almost second nature to him. If I’d given him a football or a musical instrument, I think he would have had the same instinctive grasp.”

There would be occasions, he says, when Buddy’s face would fill the frame and be asked to communicate complex emotions and he needed to be sure his choice was up to it. “Prepared, but not polished. Present, and able to listen. He had to be responsive. We got lucky with Jude. He could do everything, anything.”

Branagh says he drastically cut the amount of rehearsal time so he could preserve the young actor’s freshness, while better capturing the relationship developing between Hill and the entire cast, Judi Dench in particular. “Every day on set, Jude was getting a masterclass from one of the greatest actors of her generation, and I’d like to think Judi was learning from him too.”

He says he kept the camera rolling as much as possible when they were on set, to capture the bond. “You get lucky. I was looking for these beautiful, tiny moments that were happening. Not improvisations exactly, just them all being together in the same room. Sometimes that’s where the best bits happen, the smile, the funny remark, the daft comment. It’s the breath of life.”

The intimate daily life of an ordinary family is Branagh’s focus in Belfast.

“  
**Jude’s mind was so open to learning that acting was almost second nature to him**

Branagh with Jude Hill and Lewis McAskie on the set: the film was made under the demanding restrictions of the pandemic



It's not a potted history of the Troubles, but the filmmaker says he spent "hundreds of hours" listening and watching archive news footage to give a historical context to his story.

"I put a lot of time and energy into selecting those clips because that was as much of the politics as I was going to address directly. The inside of the film is the perspective of Buddy and his story. Outside of that was what that nine-year-old would have been exposed to from the adult world around him on the radio, on television. I knew that the dynamic of the film would be something like 'Boy plays with Matchbox cars on rug in foreground, while behind, television news tells us milk bottles are being made into petrol bombs'. I wanted those two realities to meet, because that's how I remember it."

**W**e're getting to that time of the year when the Academy Award nominations are announced. Belfast is the clear front-runner in the race, topping every Oscar pundit's poll. Nominated five times (the last in 2011 for Supporting Actor in *My Week With Marilyn*), Branagh has yet to win. I ask him what his reaction has been to the reaction the film has received and he smiles broadly. "It's been a thrill, honestly. From the moment we showed it for the first time at Telluride, people have connected their own stories to the story in the film. That has been a beautiful thing, a joy to have had happen." Broad smile or not, he's being cagey. Does he not want to jinx it?

"When it comes to being in the Oscar conversation at this point of the year, I would only say that I have now seen almost every other film that people are talking about and I think they are all absolutely fantastic," he says. "I'm an inveterate cinemagoer and I have loved seeing those films in cinemas, where they are supposed to be seen. Make no mistake, cinema is in an existential fight for its life. I genuinely do not care who wins what, just as long as we win an audience back into cinemas."

Branagh's film may be rooted in a specific place and time, but it carries universal themes – among them the quest to protect one's family and to learn to be stoic in the face of often tremendous suffering.

When he and his family left Belfast for good in 1969 to move to Berkshire, his parents never mentioned the move again for the rest of their lives, he says.

"It wasn't something either of them ever talked about with me, no. The reticence of Irish people of that generation is well known, but it's a trait particularly prevalent to people from the North to never indulge in their so-called suffering. There's always somebody worse off than you. You couldn't leave the table until you'd finished your food, because as my father would say [switches effortlessly to the crunchiest Belfast accent]: 'There's children in Africa who'd be glad of that!'"

Branagh says the family dynamic changed once they'd settled in England. He was bullied for being Irish, for his thick accent, and for the escalating horrors unfolding on the news every night. "We turned in on ourselves, as a family, I would say. We survived, we kept our heads down, we got on with things. We were safe and secure, in as much as we were out of the violence and there was a job for my father so we were economically secure, but in every other respect it was a very, very different kind of life. And I don't know if I ever got over that."

Making the film has taught him that his parents ultimately forced themselves to believe that the decision they made was the right one, and that their sacrifice was worth it.

"They didn't want to go. I know that. They gave up their lives, their family, their friends, their support network, the things they had grown up with. Belfast wasn't an idyll, of course not, but it was their home. I would always say to myself that the time I lived in Belfast was the time I best knew who I was. Which is a fancy way of saying that I was entirely and comfortably myself. And I feel that, if they could have allowed themselves, they would have said the same thing."

*Belfast (12A) is in cinemas nationwide from Friday*



Judi Dench and Ciarán Hinds play the grandparents of Buddy (Jude Hill) in *Belfast*. ALL PICTURES: ROB YOUNGSON/ FOCUS FEATURES



Players at a League of Legends competition: top athletes can earn huge sums of prize money

# It's all in the game

With traditional sports intermittently shutting down during the pandemic, the burgeoning genre of esports – playing video games competitively – has filled the gap for huge numbers of people, and its appeal shows no sign of diminishing. **Alanna MacNamee** reports

**E**ric Finn started to get into the video game FIFA competitively as a way to escape from reality. He was 20 years old, he'd just been through a break-up and he was stressed about college. Today, though, the 24-year-old esports athlete says: "It's completely gone the other way. Now reality is my escape from FIFA."

Finn is one of a number of players currently taking Ireland's burgeoning esports scene by storm. Thanks in part to a pivot online while traditional sports were shuttered during the pandemic, the industry has seen massive growth over the last number of years. While traditional, real-world sports industries have struggled, faced with restrictions and Covid-afflicted athletes, Ireland's esports scene has never been more exciting.

Sinead Hosey, co-founder of Epic Global esports and gaming agency, says the global gaming and esports industry was valued at around \$180 billion last year. In Ireland, gaming revenue is predicted to hit €112 million in 2024, and it's estimated that there are around one million regular gamers in Ireland. "Esports is now seen as bigger than the global movie and music industry," Hosey says.

But what exactly is it? As the name suggests, it's a form of competition using video games. Competitions can take the form of one-on-one contests, or teams against other teams. Esports usually take the form of a battle between human players, rather than one person

playing against a computer.

Pro esports players receive salaries and sponsorships, just like their peers in traditional sports. Some, like Finn, who's representing Ireland in the FIFA 22 Nation Series this year, even have the chance to play for their country. Top athletes can earn huge sums of prize money.

Stuart Dempsey of Legion Esports, a pioneering Irish esports tournament production company, points out that the winner of the inaugural 2019 Fortnite World Cup walked away with \$3 million, "which is more than the winner of the US Open Tournament, the Open Golf Championship and the Tour de France".

Making it to the top of esports takes all the hard work and dedication that a traditional sporting career demands. Finn remembers that back when he was starting to get competitive at FIFA, he would spend 12 to 14 hours a day playing the game.

Nowadays, he has scaled it back a bit: when a new FIFA game comes out each year, he sets himself a target

of playing for ten hours a day for the first two months. After that, he can ease off a bit, and when he has a break from tournaments, he makes sure to get some downtime away from the game.

This downtime is really important. As esports has experienced a meteoric rise, so too have the mental and physical injuries that can inevitably result from playing video games all day.

As both a player and a coach with Manchester United player Jesse Lingard's "JLINGZ" FIFA team, Finn says: "Like any sport, it can get really frustrating at times, and you can think the whole world is against you. You can easily do damage if you're not taking care of yourself, not only physically, but obviously mentally as well."

## Grind culture

Dr Kate O'Keeffe is a performance psychologist who works with esports athletes in Ireland and beyond. She is keenly attuned to the various challenges that esports athletes (who she describes as "cognitive athletes") can face.

"They have this culture called grind culture, where people are essentially playing games non-stop. It's a really unhealthy and toxic culture, and it may lead to players dropping out a lot earlier than they otherwise would," she says.

Among the main reasons for early retirement, O'Keeffe says, are "burn-out on a mental or physical level, and physical



Lisa Manley, one of a small but growing number of female esports stars breaking new ground in the industry

problems and injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome, tennis elbow or shoulder issues.” Although she is currently working with one 25-year-old, “that is quite rare”, as athletes often drop out at around 23 or 24.

Working with a psychologist is, O’Keeffe says, vital. “In the same way that you would want to develop your technical skills, you should want to work on your psychological performance or your mental requirements, just like in any other sport.”

Among the teams O’Keeffe has worked with is Munster Rugby Gaming, which has been involved in esports for around two years.

Munster currently play League of Legends, which is “the most popular esports in the world”, according to Enda Walsh, head of enterprise with the province. There are plans for the team to enter into two new titles in 2022.

Walsh sees branching out into esports as an opportunity to build on and develop what’s always been important to the Munster faithful: their sense of community. The long-term plan is to “work on building a community of people who really follow us by starting from the ground and working our way up,” he says.

“We want to run local online and in-person tournaments across a variety of titles. That way we can grow the audience that matters most to us, which is our community.”

Might we see young fans wearing a Munster Rugby Gaming jersey with their favourite player’s name on the back one day?

“Yes, absolutely.”

Munster’s current roster of League of Legends athletes, which includes two Irish stars, is currently spread out across Ireland and Europe. Resources and budgets permitting, Walsh says: “Our ambition post-pandemic is to migrate to a residential programme.”

Jordan ‘Jurd’ Crowley is a top Call of Duty player who has experience of residential programmes, having lived in two team houses in the United States. Thanks to the massive growth in esports over there, now the “organisations that sponsor teams actually have apartment buildings where players live in their own apartments, but aren’t with each other 24 hours a day. And then when they practise, they go to a facility.”

In addition to a fully paid-up apartment, most franchises or organisations have “analysts, team managers . . . a full staff, pretty much”, he says. At a professional level in the US, “they go above and beyond to accommodate their players”.

Of his job, Crowley says: “it’s given me some of the best experiences of my life so far. I’ve travelled



League of Legends World Championship

all across the world: I’ve been in America for many years, I’ve been all over Europe and Australia. And all the times I got to compete for thousands of dollars doing the thing I love.”

But how does a young gamer from Ireland make it to the top tier of Call of Duty in the US? For Crowley, it all started out as a hobby, something to do with friends. “Then I realised, hold on a minute, I’m actually better than the people that I’m playing with,” he says.

This led him to play competitively, first online and then at events all across Europe where players were competing at the time for hundreds if not thousands of dollars, which, “compared to nowadays isn’t a lot”.

As someone who’s spent time at the top of the US esports world, what are Crowley’s thoughts on the Call of Duty scene here in Ireland? “Honestly? It’s kind of non-existent. It’s such a shame that it’s not better known in Ireland and Britain as well.” But he does see potential for the untapped market. “This thing could grow,” he says.

The infrastructure for major growth is finally beginning to be put in place. In 2020, the first ever third-level esports scholarship was launched at Waterford Institute of Technology, while Stuart Dempsey’s Legion Esports and Media launched a competition for third-level gamers, Legion Collegiate Esports, in September 2021. “Today, we have registered over 650 players from 33 universities and colleges across the country,” Dempsey says.

But while the industry might be surging forward in terms of audiences and infrastructure, diversity remains an issue. An avid gamer



Kevin Kevaman Lalor (far right) plays Munster Rugby Gaming with the 2 Johnnies



Eric Finn, the No 1 ranked Fifa 21 Xbox player in Ireland, at the FAI Headquarters in Abbotstown, Dublin

SPORTSFILE

herself, Sinead Hosey of Epic Global points out that males do still dominate the audience for esports at 60 per cent. That said, esports offers great potential for equality between the sexes: as Lynch of Munster Rugby Gaming points out, esports “differs somewhat from traditional sports, in that you can have that mix of genders playing together”. Lisa Manley, one of Britain’s leading Fifa players and Eric Finn’s teammate at JLINGZ, is one of a small but growing number of female esports stars breaking new ground in the industry.

Pretty much everyone in esports in Ireland is adamant that there is huge potential here (as Hosey describes it: “the sky’s the limit for the industry”). But there’s still some way to go to combat the negative stereotypes that can attach to playing video games for hours on end, be it for work or for leisure.

Finn knows this all too well. He says growing up on a Dublin council estate “did have its merits, but it also had its downsides”. The judgments and slugging of his peers put him off playing for a number of years as a teenager.

Although that’s something he’s put in the past, even his parents sometimes struggle to really get what he does. “And I say: ‘Mam, it’s fine. If you don’t understand, just know that I’m happy and what I’m doing is right for me.’”

Hosey also stresses that gaming and esports are more than “just sitting in front of a screen”. There are, she says, “huge benefits to gaming, from teamwork to communication”. As well as cultivating belonging and community, she says: “It’s a potential career avenue for players to grow. In the same way people are becoming savvy about YouTubers and influencers, gaming is a credible career as well.”

Action shot of Munster Rugby Gaming playing League of Legends



# *‘With this album, I feel for the first time in my life that I’ve lived up to my talent’*

Veteran singer/songwriter Janis Ian’s new album, *The Light at the End of the Line*, will also be her last – the culmination of a singular and eventful musical career

Interview: **Tony Clayton-Lea**



## Interview

**S**ingers can often be ego-driven, spurred on as much by the attention they receive from their fans as the act of artistic endeavour. Many continue in this way for decades, some along a path of diminishing creative returns, some still delivering quality work.

Very few consider retreating or retiring while they’re still healthy. Then again, very few have the presence of mind of veteran singer/songwriter Janis Ian, who recently announced that her forthcoming album *The Light at the End of the Line* will also be her last.

For someone who has been working since she was 12, and “full time since 14”, such a decision seems eminently sensible. Not many artists of her vintage and prestige can say they’ve had a successful career from the very beginning, but there has always been something quite different about the woman born Janis Eddy Fink in New Jersey.

The granddaughter of eastern European immigrants, she wrote her first song at the age of 12 (*Hair of Spun Gold*). By 1964, having taken her

brother Eric’s middle Christian name and legally changed her surname, Ian had a hit single on her hands. *Society’s Child* (*Baby I’ve Been Thinking*) was not only her first taste of success, but of controversy too. A lyric about an interracial relationship was then considered taboo. Ian received death threats, some DJs refused to play it, and a radio station in Atlanta that did was burned down.

Nonetheless, the track struck a nerve, selling more than 600,000 copies and setting Ian on a path to greater success, which arrived in 1975 when she released *At Seventeen*, an affecting song of teenage anxiety that she’s been identified with ever since.

Ian’s subsequent career has been guided by both confrontation and a particularly strong survival instinct. In 1992, she formed a label (*Rude Girl Records*) and its publishing arm, the dual entities of which have seen her take control of her work. The following year she released her 14th album, *Breaking Silence* (which included songs about domestic abuse, the Holocaust and incest), and she came out as a lesbian.

Is it fair to say that Ian has always relished a challenge? “Yes, I think



Janis Ian: 'People always assume that if you're a performer, you'll miss being on stage. But I'm not a natural like Tina Turner'  
LLOYD BAGGS

Another trigger is her age. "I've had 58 years of doing what I do, and I'll be 71 in April," she says. "[For] two years now, I have had to postpone my tours, so I'm trying to fit three years of touring into one."

An additional factor is Ian's weary admission: "I'm constantly being overwhelmed. I run my publishing and my recording, my management, my social media, my PR and everything else. I have help [from] great people, but at the end of the day I run them all in addition to trying to be an artist. Ultimately, I want to be an artist because it's what I do best."

Leaving the trail that leads to the central ring of the circus, however, is something that performers rarely do. Of course they want to be artists, Ian admits, but the associated trappings of privacy loss and media commitments are difficult to emerge from unscathed. Will Ian miss any or all of that? No is the immediate answer.

"People always assume that if you're a performer, you'll miss being on stage, but I'll be honest. I have worked very hard to be a good performer, because I'm not a natural like Tina Turner, Elton John and Bette Midler. I also love being alone with my wife, reading and playing with the dog," she says.

"People think that in my profession, being active means you're performing. But for me being active could also mean I'm writing a haiku, working on a short story, taking the time to read someone else's work or record with them. I record for and with friends all of the time, and that includes Irish people [such as] Mary Black, Nuala Kennedy, Wyvern Lingo. So those things don't stop. But by making the decision I have made, the constant pressure does."

Unlike many other songwriters who continue to tease out familiar themes and motifs until they drop, Ian genuinely feels she doesn't have very much left to say.

“**I was born with talent. I take no credit for it, but I have spent my entire life trying to match it**”

"I've pretty much said what I want between this album and the rest of my career," she admits. "When you're young, you have so much to prove to other people – your parents, teachers, community. When you get older, you want to prove it to business people, and then you want to prove it to your peers. But then you reach a point where the only person you must prove anything to is yourself."

"I was born with talent. I take no credit for it, but I have spent my entire life trying to match it. With *The Light at the End of the Line*, I feel for the first time in my life that I have lived up to my talent."

Ian views the album more as a culmination of a lifetime's work than a reflection of what went right and wrong. The songs also tell her, she says with some pride, "that I have managed to keep my edge, and for me that's

huge. The trope is that creative people do their best work when they're young. But you look at a Picasso and you think, well, that isn't true."

She adds: "Keeping my edge has always been something I've thought about. A good friend of mine, the science fiction author Harlan Ellison, once said the trick is not becoming a writer but staying a writer. And so there will always be music, because that's part of writing."

"I'm one of those lucky people who always has something running through their heads, and it would genuinely be nice to have the time to just sit down and work on things. It isn't about getting wealthy, being famous [or] winning a contest, but rather joy. No matter what any songwriter and musician thinks they went into the industry for, for the larger part we entered it because it gave us joy. Once the joy has been sucked out, what's the point?"

Ian has experienced life to the full, I suggest, with stops and starts, shocks and successes, acclaim and censure. Without prompting, she proceeds to outline her three most important lessons.

The first was taught to her by renowned US acting teacher Stella Adler, who in the early 1980s coached her to feel more natural on stage. "Stella would say: trust your talent – your talent knows better than you do."

The second one? "It sounds like the exact opposite to the first, and it is to trust nobody because no one is going to have your interests at heart the way you will. If the manager or booking agent tells you that you matter to them more than their family, immediately run the other way, because that person is crazy."

The third, she concludes, is that truth rules all. "Authenticity is a much overused word – you know, be your authentic self, and so on. It's hard to get more authentic than a human voice sung naturally, and I firmly believe that the authenticity of a song like *At Seventeen* is what will out in the end. It did what it did back in the day, and it does what it does even now."

*The Light at the End of the Line* will be released via Rude Girl Records on January 21

so," Ian replies, quick as a flash. "I find as I get older, however, that some challenges are not really worth it. But in general, I guess I'd rather find out things by doing them than being told about them. If you're lucky, like me, you are born with a certain amount of talent. That talent often dictates what it wants and can guide you if you listen to it."

"Taking on a challenge is, I think, partly a second-generation immigrant attitude of can-do. If you think about it, it's very American, but it's also global in that everyone wants their children to do and be better. That's very much the attitude of a beleaguered people also, because you learn to be a scrapper, don't you?"

Right now, Ian adds, there are so many challenges she has to contend with. "The first is getting packed and ready for this upcoming tour, the second is getting through the tour, and the third is stopping."

Learning to say no is difficult, Ian admits, but stopping not so much. The long stretch of her career is one reason, she notes. Another is, all too inevitably, the pandemic. "Covid-19 has forced all of us to take a step back and ask ourselves what is really important."



# A body *of* WORK

## Essay

What's it like to love and hate your own body? In this essay for the Business Post Magazine, **Rosemary Mac Cabe** offers up her story of weight loss and gain, pregnancy and her ongoing battle to feel proud of her own body

**I** have never liked my body more than I did at 40 weeks pregnant. I was swollen, engorged, without an ankle in sight and yet, when I caught sight of myself in our bathroom mirror, placed directly opposite the bath (who decided this?! Not a woman), for the first time I was happy. I was proud.

It's a cliché, this idea that, when pregnant, women are at their most beautiful – and clearly it's highly subjective, before we even get into notions and definitions of beauty itself – but it's a cliché that is, in my experience, rooted in the fact that pregnancy finally assigns value to those of us whose bodies are, by society's standards, not worth a lot.

As a pregnant woman, weighing 250-odd pounds and measuring in at 5ft 6inches (and a half, on a day where I stand up straight and do my stretches, perhaps after an early morning yoga class – in other words, once every other year), my body was a wonderland. My body fat percentage ceased to matter to me; the rolls of flesh that delineated my torso became, instead of signs of failure, signs of achievement. My



MOTORTION

baby was growing, and I with him. For what felt like the first time ever, my body was doing exactly what it was supposed to.

I am not unique in my experience of being a thirtysomething woman who has never truly felt good about her body. The closest I have ever come to experiencing feelings of body positivity, or even body neutrality, came at a point in my 20s when, having lost 40 pounds or so, I was at my lightest adult weight. I was exercising up to ten times each week (often twice a day, just like Adele), eating only lean meat and vegetables and bringing a tiny Ziploc bag containing two of model-cum-wellness guru Rozanna Purcell's protein balls with me to the cinema.

I remember sending a photograph of my underwear-clad body to my then-personal trainer, and asking, "Do you think lipo would get rid of these rolls right under my boobs? They don't seem to be going anywhere with weight loss alone!"

The response was swift and to the point. "Let's focus on getting that body fat percentage down first, then we'll worry about lipo." (Reader, I never did get to worry about lipo.)

“

**What had, for a blissful few months, been something to worship, was now back to being something to get rid of**

It was inevitable that I would regain the weight I'd lost, once I stopped lifting weights twice daily and reintroduced complex carbs into my diet, but it still felt like another in a long line of the ways my body had failed me. Others ways include, but are not limited to: being a very slow runner; tripping over my feet more often than I'd like to discuss; never quite mastering the cartwheel and concluding, once I'd hit 30, that it was probably too late for my gymnastics career to truly take off.

Once I had returned to my previous weight, adding a few extra pounds for good measure – as do 97 per cent of dieters, within three years of losing weight, according to the Cleveland Clinic – I felt incredibly embarrassed that people would see me now and think, ah that's a pity she couldn't keep it off. They would know, just as I did, that I had failed to rid myself of my fat body. It had won back control and, what's worse, there was no way to conceal it.

I'm not sure I have ever truly come to accept my body as it is. I'm not sure I ever will. But in the time after losing, and then gaining, those three-odd stone, I started to feel what could be called hopelessness, but which I tried to paint as acceptance. I tried to exercise for fitness's sake. I bought clothes in the size I was, or even one size up, shopping for comfort rather than for the idea of the self I would be when I lost x number of pounds. I stopped actively dieting, stopped pretending that the "healthy choices" I occasionally made were driven by anything other than my deep-seated diet mentality.

All of my efforts were largely in vain. I tried not to talk – or think – about it, but I was still sure that I would one day lose the weight (again), fit into those jeans that I could never bring myself to donate to charity, get back to my diet of minced beef for breakfast (yes, really) and start to appreciate my body for what it would then be: thin.

In early January 2021, I signed up with a "health coach": a personal trainer who told me how many calories I should eat each day: how many carbohydrates, how much protein, how many grams of fat. I downloaded MyFitnessPal for the umpteenth time and I began to log each and every calorie that passed my lips.

And then, two weeks into my new "regimen", I discovered that I was pregnant. I had been told, in my mid-20s, that I had a "worryingly" low egg count and would undoubtedly have trouble conceiving. Moreover, I had been told, over and over again, that my high BMI (body mass index) – an arbitrary figure developed by a statistician to establish the mathematical mean of a population – would not only cause numerous health problems, but would undoubtedly hamper my efforts at reproduction.

As it happens, I got pregnant almost as soon as we began trying to get pregnant. (I say that not to gloat, but rather to establish that high body weight does not always result in the worst possible outcome, despite what we are conditioned to believe.)

For the first time in my life, I couldn't lie to myself that the diet would start on Monday. I was no longer living in hope of a drastic reduction in weight. Any drastic reduction in weight would, in fact, be cause for concern rather than celebration. I was suddenly living in the upside-down, expected to easily cast aside each of my deep-seated diet and body-related beliefs.

It's no surprise that, for the first few months of my pregnancy, I found it difficult to come to terms with my body. It was growing, sure, but I was not obviously pregnant. I felt at odds with everything I'd spent my life doing – either dieting, or telling myself I would imminently start dieting – and it didn't help that I felt nauseous all the time, a feeling that was eased only by the consumption of white carbs, all the better if they were doused in salt (McDonald's chips featured highly).

By the time my pregnancy hit the five-month mark, I was comforted by the appearance of a visible bump. Finally! People would see me and see a pregnant woman, the divine feminine, the very embodiment of life and vitality. They wouldn't simply see a fat woman who they assumed was lazy, gluttonous and less worthy of love, sex, well-fitted clothing and employment (various studies and surveys have shown that up to 50 per cent of employers are less likely to hire obese candidates, including a 2015 survey by Crossland Employment Solicitors).

I took photographs of myself in the aforementioned bathroom mirror, wrapping one arm around my breasts and noting, with a certain degree of relief, that my crotch was concealed by my growing, and drooping, bump. I posted them to Instagram and wrote captions about how my body was a wonderland (I would have argued, at the time, that it was slightly tongue in cheek but honestly? It was a wonderland!). My cousin, artist Blaise Smith, sent me a DM to ask if I would mind if he painted my nude figure. "Of course not!" I replied. "I would love that."

In all, I posted four nude selfies to my 43,000 Instagram followers. They received a combined 14,928 likes. I shared them in my Instagram Stories and sent them to my family WhatsApp group to show my parents, who were unable to fly from Ireland to my adopted home of the US due to the Covid-related travel ban. They wouldn't ever see me pregnant. When they finally flew to Indiana to meet their newest grandson, he was five weeks old and I was worried that my father would take one look at my body and think, she's really let herself go.

**M**y son, Atlas, was born on October 5, 2021, via C-section. I marvelled at how this nine-pound chunk of baby had fit inside me (looking back at the photographs now, it doesn't seem quite so incredible). I remember the day after he was born, looking down at my belly and thinking uh-oh.

What had, just 24 hours previously, been a beautiful, round globe was now . . . empty. The stomach that I had spoken to lovingly, night after night; the stomach I had spent hours rubbing, sometimes with wonder, other times with, I'll admit, slight revulsion (he was, after all, a big baby, and scenes from Ridley Scott's *Alien* frequently flashed before my eyes), was now simply a flabby, fat stomach, worthy of neither loving words nor loving rubs. What had, for a blissful few months, been something to worship, was now back to being something to get rid of.

I feel foolish admitting this, but I somehow thought that I would find myself immune to the pressures of the post-baby body rhetoric. I imagined myself becoming some sort of example for other women. I would carve out a route forward for us all. I thought that I had finally come to terms with my fat body, and that I would henceforth worship and appreciate it as something that had brought forth this incredible life. I made a baby, I would think. Amazing!

But I was naive to think that I would somehow be the exception – no sooner had I hobbled in the door with my baby, struggling with the emotional repercussions of an unplanned procedure that had left me wounded and heavily medicated, than I began to plot my physical "comeback".

Once my doctor gives me the all-clear to exercise, I thought, I will get back on that Peloton bike; I will start eating salads for lunch. (Diet starts on Monday, the Groundhog Day of weight loss.)

I once again took photographs of my naked body to post on Instagram. I wanted to show my followers – and myself – that I appreciated my body just as much now, having created this baby, as I did in the creation of said baby. But I couldn't.

The overhanging belly that once served to preserve my modesty seemed disgusting now, and somehow shameful. The stretch marks that I had looked at with fond wonder now appeared repugnant. I tried to crop the photographs to show less of the parts I was now embarrassed about. I added a filter. I brightened the image. It all felt incredibly disingenuous. I couldn't post this photograph and talk about how proud I was of my body, because I simply wasn't. I was repulsed by it, ashamed of how it looked after this ordeal it had been through.

What's more, the very act of taking the photograph, of documenting my body in its nude state, seemed ridiculous. Why would anyone want to see a photograph of me naked? A naked pregnant woman is a wonder, but a naked woman who is not pregnant is just . . . naked. If I was no longer documenting my pregnancy, I was simply documenting my fat body, which had no business being naked, on Instagram or otherwise.

I acknowledge that my feelings about my body are complicated. I had never before, at least not until I was pregnant, felt proud of it, or as though it were anything worth celebrating. I felt a certain degree of trauma at having had a C-section, at having "failed" to give birth "naturally". (All of these terms are problematic, which is why they are in inverted commas. Things are not better – births, skincare, desserts – because they are natural, and giving birth via C-section is not a failure.)

I do not know if I would feel better about my body, now, had Atlas been delivered in a birthing pool, with the aid of a hypnobirthing coach,



or by "breathing the baby out" (a very real concept I somehow managed to read far too much about). Maybe the achievement of a vaginal birth would somehow compensate for what I see now as the damaged parts of my body. I feel as though my body let me down, which makes it difficult to feel proud of, regardless of how it looks.

It doesn't help, of course, that the next goal we're told to aim for, after the safe and successful production of the baby itself, is the return to our pre-baby body. The best woman is one who can get pregnant easily; who sails through pregnancy and never complains; who breathes her baby out with as little intervention as possible; and who, then, shows no physical signs of ever having been pregnant within a number of weeks.

Perhaps this is the modern version of having it all – but rather than giving women the choice to have it all, it is instead imperative that they achieve it all. Get pregnant, give birth and lose the "baby weight" without a single scar or stretch mark or sign that any of it happened in the first place – except, of course, for the bonny baby, bouncing on your knee.

My body will never be the same, both literally and figuratively. I have undergone serious abdominal surgery: a doctor has sliced through layers of skin and tissue and moved organs in order to remove my child from my uterus, which has then been stitched up and shifted back into its rightful place. My stomach stretched to accommodate 9lbs 2oz of baby. My breasts swelled with colostrum, then milk. My skin is now decorated with red tracks that show how, and where, it expanded. The lines may fade to silver eventually, but they will never truly disappear.

The appropriate conclusion to all of this would be to say that it has been worth it. Sure, aren't I delighted with my baby? He's beautiful, and so good-natured! It has. I am. He is. But still: it has been difficult. I did, eventually, post a photograph of my "post-baby body" to Instagram. "What was, three months ago, a vision of beauty . . . now seems like evidence of some sort of destruction," I wrote. "But it's the same body. It has done great things." All of these things can be true at once.

Rosemary Mac Cabe taking a selfie while pregnant: 'My body was a wonderland'

These delicious desserts come from **Brian and Tara Beattie**, the couple behind catering company The Caterers, who are known for their passion for seasonal, local ingredients and dedication to restaurant-quality food. For more information, go to [thecaterers.ie](http://thecaterers.ie).



# A sweet start to the new year

## Afternoon pudding

It's hard to please everyone, but this comforting and homely dessert really fits the bill with its simple yet sublime flavours. This also works well as a decadent brunch dish.

### Ingredients, serves 4

#### For the cake

700g self-raising flour  
500g caster sugar  
500g soft butter  
8 eggs

#### For the batter

12 eggs  
200ml cream  
2 vanilla pods  
40g good vanilla extract  
200g icing sugar

#### For the fruit

60ml water  
30g caster sugar  
280g mixed berries, washed

#### To serve

Fresh mint  
360ml vanilla ice cream

### Method

- To make the cake, line a deep cake tin with a double layer of grease-proof paper. Preheat the oven to 150C.
- Sieve the flour into a bowl, add all the other ingredients and beat together using a mixer on a low setting. When combined, increase speed and beat for one minute.
- Spoon the mixture into the prepared baking tin and smooth the top. Cook in the centre of the oven for about an hour, then test the cake by lightly pressing the centre. If baked, it should spring back and the top should be golden brown. To be extra sure, insert a skewer or knife and if it comes out clean, the cake is cooked. Leave in the tin for about 15 minutes, then turn onto a wire tray to cool.
- To make the batter, whisk the eggs, cream, vanilla and icing sugar together. For the vanilla pods, slice your pod and scrape the seeds out into your bowl. As a chef, I love the specks of black you get from the vanilla seeds, which is why I use both pods and extract.
- When the cake has cooled, slice it, then dip into the batter like you would for French toast.
- Add the butter to a hot pan, then fry your cake until golden on both

- Place on a baking tray and into the oven at 150C.
- To prepare the fruit, add the water and caster sugar to a saucepan and heat until the sugar is dissolved, this is your stock syrup. Add half the berries to the syrup and blend. Push this liquid through a sieve and into a jug or squeeze bottle if you have one.
- To serve, drizzle the berry liquid on the plate, lay a couple of slices of cake on top followed by the berries, a sprig of mint and a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

**TIP: This cake can be frozen for use at a later date**

## Tarte tatin with apple crumble ice cream

This is a classic dessert that we keep going back to because it delivers. We make our own puff pastry, but you can save time by using shop-bought instead.

### Ingredients, serves 8

#### For the pastry

250g plain flour  
5g fine salt  
250g butter, very cold  
150ml cold water

#### For the custard and ice cream

600ml cream  
2 vanilla pods, seeds scraped out  
5 egg yolks  
120g caster sugar  
1 Golden Delicious apple  
20g butter  
25g golden caster sugar

#### For the crumble

40g plain flour  
1 pinch salt  
25g butter, chilled and chopped  
25g caster sugar

#### For the tarte filling

250g butter  
250g caster sugar  
5 Granny Smith apples, peeled and halved

### Method

- To make the pastry, sift the flour and salt into a large bowl. Roughly chop the butter, add it to the bowl and rub it in loosely, leaving some larger bits of butter.
- Make a well in the centre and pour in about two-thirds of the cold water, mixing until you have a firm, rough dough, adding extra water if needed. Cover with clingfilm and put in the fridge for 20 minutes.
- Turn out onto a lightly floured board, knead gently and form into a smooth rectangle. Roll the dough in one direction only, until the length is three times the width, about 20cm x 50cm. Keep the edges straight and even. Don't overwork the butter streaks; you should have a marbled effect.
- Fold the top third of the pastry down to the centre, then the bottom third up and over that. Give the dough a quarter turn (to the left or right) and roll out again to three times the length. Fold as before, cover with clingfilm and chill for at least 20 minutes before rolling to use.
- To make the custard and the ice cream base, pour the cream and vanilla seeds into a small pan and bring just to the boil. Whisk the egg yolks and caster sugar together in another bowl until pale and creamy.
- Gradually stir the hot cream mixture into the yolk mixture. Return to the pan over a gentle heat and cook while stirring until it's thick enough to lightly coat the back of a wooden spoon, then set aside to cool. Split the mix into two – keep one to use as custard for your tarte and the other to use as your base for the ice cream.
- Peel and core the Golden Delicious apple and cut into chunks. Melt the butter in a pan, add the sugar and cook over a medium heat until it resembles a toffee-coloured sauce. Add the chopped apple and cook for five to seven minutes or until the fruit



- is tender but not falling apart. Check the sweetness: it needs to be a little tart, but add more sugar if needed. Set aside to cool.
- For the crumble, sift the plain flour and a pinch of salt into a bowl, add the chilled butter and rub in until it resembles bread-crumbs. Add the sugar and bring the mixture together slightly. Spread over a large baking tray and bake in the oven at 190C for 10 minutes until the crumble is biscuit-coloured. Set aside to cool.
- To make the ice cream, churn

- the custard in an ice cream maker until nearly firm. Add the cooked apple mixture and baked crumble pieces, churn to lightly mix through, then serve straight away. If you don't have an ice cream maker, mix it all together in a plastic container and put it in the freezer, stirring the mix every hour until frozen.
- For the tarte filling, heat a 20cm ovenproof frying pan and add butter and sugar until lightly golden, place in apples flat side up and cook for five minutes until lightly caramelised. Shake the pan a little and then re-arrange apples evenly when done.
- Roll out your pastry to about 3mm thick and cover your pan right down the edges. Put in a preheated oven at 200C for 15 minutes then turn down to 180C for a further 15 minutes.
- Leave to cool a little and then turn out onto a plate. Reheat your custard and put in a jug. Serve tarte with the apple crumble ice cream and a jug of custard.

**TIP: Good shop-bought ice cream will also work well, and you can also mix in your own crumble into vanilla ice cream as a half-cheat.**

Photography by Harry Weir, assisted by Brian Clarke; compiled by Jordan Mooney

## Wine ratings

This is the international marking system for wine ratings. The 100-point scale works on a percentile, not a percentage scale, which is based on the US educational grading system.

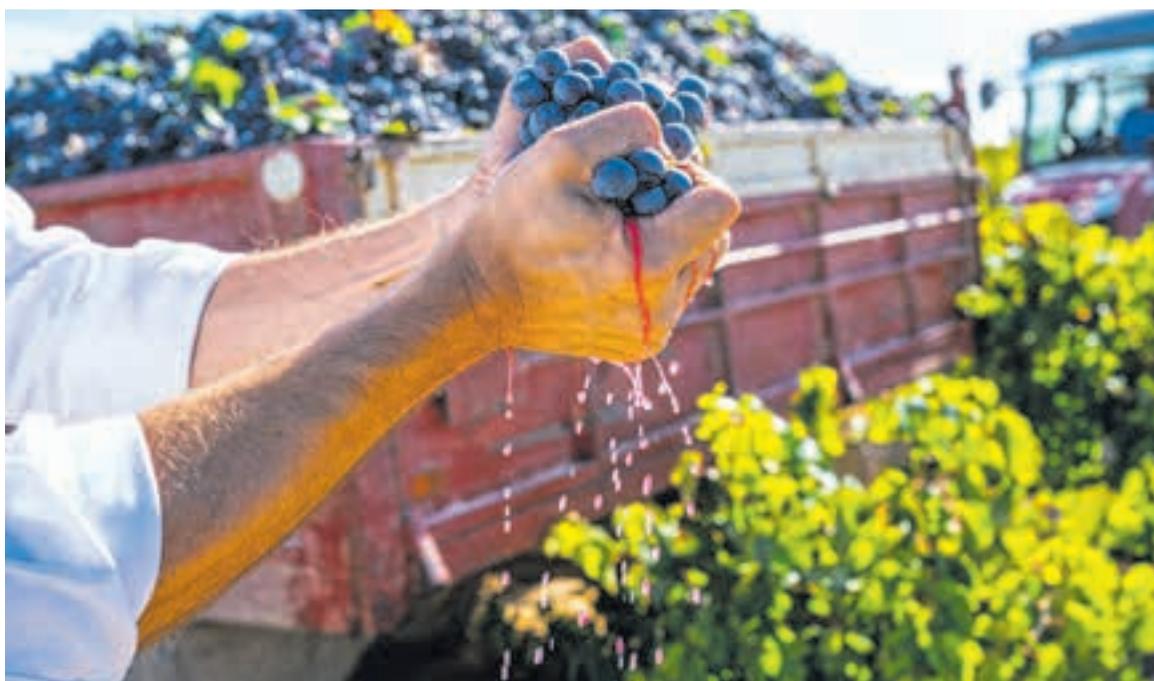
95-100: exceptional, of world-class quality  
90-94: very good quality  
88-89: average but lacks greatness  
85-87: average to modest  
80-84: below average  
70-79: poor  
Below 70: unacceptable quality

# Some fine examples of vegan wines

Clarifying, or fining, wines can involve animal products. We looked at some of the wines that have adjusted this process to be suitable for vegan consumption



Cathal McBride



Wine can be clouded by naturally existing particles, molecules and sediment from whole-bunch grapes and their seeds GETTY

It may come as a surprise to some that wine is not automatically vegan, seeing that it's made from, well, grapes. The reason? Well, here comes the science.

Some wines go through a filtration process called fining. This involves clarifying young wine which is clouded by naturally existing particles, molecules and sediment from whole-bunch grapes and their seeds. It can tweak possible imperfections in taste or appearance and remove any astringency caused by overly harsh tannins. Often, the most commonly used agents in fining include animal, fish, milk and egg white proteins.

Although they do not end up in the finished wine, they may cause concern around the possibility of trace elements remaining.

Vegans follow a diet that refrains

from the use or consumption of any animal products. So how do you know if a wine is vegan-friendly?

This is where the waters become a touch murky (pardon the pun). Some winemakers avoid any filtration process at all, allowing the liquid to self-fine. These wines are classified as "unfiltered" and, by extension, are vegan-friendly. More modern approaches see the use of clay-based and activated charcoal agents, which means the resulting products can also be defined this way.

Producers who follow biodynamic and organic practices are not required by law to follow a vegan-friendly approach, although many do. Even more surprisingly, some wines fall into this category, but do not state it on the label. One such example is the Il Palagio, La Duchessa Chianti Reserva DOCG 2018, featured below.

Excellent-value vegan-friendly

wines include the Burro Loco Organic Tempranillo 2020 (available at Mitchell & Son, €11.95 down from €14.95). This has rich, dark concentrated fruits such as stewed plums and blackberries on the nose, with a touch of peppercorn spice. The palate is rich and full-bodied, with present tannins and appropriate acidity plus a hint of liquorice at the tail end.

Another good economical choice is the Neleman Garnacha-Marselan 2020 (available from Wines Direct, €15.60). I mentioned the 2019 vintage last year and this one from Dutchman Derrick Neleman, who produces vegan and organic wines in Valencia, has a really interesting and complex nose. Floral, even herby aromas abound, accompanied by earthy and rich cherry fruit. This is plummy and fruity, balanced and structured with soft, smooth tannins and a fruity finish.

If you're thinking about a food pairing, the Cullen 'Red Moon' Mangán Vineyard Wilyabrup Malbec/Petit Verdot 2018 (available from Grapevine Dalkey, Clontarf Wines, the Corkscrew and Wineonline.ie, €34.99) would be fantastic with vegetarian/vegan chilli or spicy Asian soy-based dishes. There's an interesting nose here of blackberries, blueberries, green pepper, pomegranate molasses and soy. A silky smooth mouthfeel of plum and sour cherry is present in an excellently balanced wine with an elongated finish.

In terms of white wines, the Finca Viña Ribeiro Blanco 2019 (available at Mitchell & Son, €18.95 down from €22.95) represents exceptional value. A beautifully floral nose typifies summer peach and pear. This is texturally smooth, yet decidedly fresh and dynamically acidic from citrus – a wonderfully balanced marriage.

## TO TRY, BUY AND PUT BY

### To try

**Il Palagio, La Duchessa Chianti Reserva DOCG 2018, Italy (ABV 14 per cent), 93**

Made using the biodynamic method from organic sangiovese, this has winter baking spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg on the nose, plus cherries and some bramble fruit with underlying fresh raspberry. The midpalate is immediately voluptuous before broadening into a fresh balance with lively and tart acidity. Enjoy it with tomato-based pasta dishes, ratatouille or pizza.

Available from Boutique Wines ([boutiquewines.ie](http://boutiquewines.ie)), Provender Bread & Wine ([provenderandfamily.com](http://provenderandfamily.com)), The Wine Pair ([thewinepairdublin.com](http://thewinepairdublin.com)), Nectar Wines ([nectarwines.com](http://nectarwines.com)) and Bradley's Off-Licence in Cork ([bradleysofflicence.ie](http://bradleysofflicence.ie)), €39



### To buy

**Dreissigacker Organic Riesling Trocken, Rheinhessen, Germany 2020 (ABV 12 per cent), 93**

This is stunningly aromatic with crisp green apple, stone fruits such as apricots, a distinctive minerality and an undercurrent of lemon zest. There's a delicious mouthfeel, viscous, but with an underlying balanced acidity to create a harmonious wine. Notes of peaches, pears, lemon and grapefruit are forthcoming, making it a good pair for fresh salads.

Available from Redmonds of Ranelagh ([redmonds.ie](http://redmonds.ie)), Jus de Vine ([jusdevine.ie](http://jusdevine.ie)), 64 Wine ([64wine.ie](http://64wine.ie)), the Wine Centre ([thewinecentre.ie](http://thewinecentre.ie)), Martins Off-Licence ([martinsofflicence.ie](http://martinsofflicence.ie)), Pinto Wines ([pintowines.ie](http://pintowines.ie)), Fallon & Byrne Wine Cellar ([fallonandbyrne.com](http://fallonandbyrne.com)) and the Corkscrew ([thecorkscrew.ie](http://thecorkscrew.ie)),



### To put by

**Wieninger Wiener Pinot Noir Select, Vienna, Austria 2018 (ABV 13 per cent), 94**

Certified organic, biodynamic, vegetarian and vegan, this has an intoxicating nose of cassis, black cherries, plums, subtle spice and mild undergrowth. The palate is excitingly fresh with vibrant acidity plus tantalising tannins in an elegant structure and expressive finish. There's exceptional ageing potential too. Think mushroom dishes with this, whole baked cauliflower or legumes. It's also perfect with duck, other games meats or a salmon dish.

Available from Blackrock Cellar ([blackrockcellar.com](http://blackrockcellar.com)), the Corkscrew ([thecorkscrew.ie](http://thecorkscrew.ie)) and Wineonline.ie, €40.99



Wine

## WATCHING THE PENNIES

**Starter:** chilli edamame beans, €5

**Main course:** yasai yakimeshi, fried rice with tofu, cashew nuts, seasonal vegetables, fried egg and veggie miso soup, €14.95

**Wine:** Reyuela Reserva Chardonnay, Chile, €25.95

**Dinner for two:** €60.85

## BREAKING THE BANK

**Starter:** house mixed tempura, €8.50

**Main course:** seafood miso ramen, €16.95

**Wine:** Circe Verdejo, Spain, €33.95

**Dinner for two:** €76.35



Hasu Izakaya Restaurant in Greystones, Co Wicklow: an izakaya is 'a sort of hybrid' between a pub and a restaurant, 'like a gastropub'

FERGAL PHILLIPS

# A very Japanese welcome in the north of Wicklow



Gillian Nelis

@gnelis

**Hasu Izakaya**  
Church Road, Greystones, Co Wicklow  
01-2533483, [hasuisakaya.ie](http://hasuisakaya.ie)

**T**he Japanophile in the house is cock-a-hoop: one of his favourite types of eatery has opened in the town where we live. It's an izakaya, which he says we don't really have in Ireland. It's "a sort of hybrid" between a pub and a restaurant, and "like a gastropub", he tells me.

"Izakayas tend to be super-casual, the kind of place workers go to relax, have a few drinks, eat some tasty food and unwind," he continues. "They're typically loud, raucous places, filled with smoke, where the staff shout 'irashimasu' – which means welcome – at the top of their voices when someone comes in."

There's no pall of smoke in Hasu Izakaya – thank you, Micheál Martin – and while the greeting upon entry isn't loud, it is welcoming. This is only their second night open, the lovely staff tell us, and while there are a couple of teething issues during the

evening, overall they manage very well indeed.

Hazu is on the first floor of the Burnaby, the pub just across the road from the Dart station in Greystones, and is a light, airy space with a mix of booths and regular tables.

Himself spots some ikakaya classics on the menu straight away, but also stuff like ramen that you wouldn't find in a Japanese version, but that will certainly broaden the place's appeal.

The ebi tempura (€8.95) are a tasty start, the rice flour batter encasing the prawns as crispy as it should be. We eat them alongside edamame (€5), steamed and salted soy beans that you pop out of the pod before eating. They're a staple of every izakaya in Japan, and are also easy to find in Asian food stores if you're in the market for a healthy TV snack.

Four varieties of gyoza, or dump-

lings, are on offer, ranging in price from €6.50 for the veggie option to €7.95 for pork. We go for the prawn variety (€7.50), which have good flavour even if they don't have the crispy bottom that gyoza get when fried in a heavy-bottomed pan.

Up next are takoyaki, a common izakaya dish of fried octopus batter balls (€8.50). I realise that description may put some of you off, but don't bypass them – they are gorgeous, chewy morsels of fishy goodness. The takoyaki sauce will remind you of the brown sauce of your childhood, with its tanginess and fruitiness, while the dusting of shaved bonito flakes on top adds a great salty element.

I'd also urge you not to bypss the unagi donburi (€16.95). Donburi means bowl in Japanese, and refers to any kind of meal in a bowl typically featuring a base of seasoned rice

and a selection of toppings that have been simmered together.

Hazu are doing beef, duck and tofu varieties, but if you're prepared to be a little adventurous and order the unagi (eel), you won't be disappointed. It's been cooked very well in a sweet soy sauce, then served with rice alongside shelled edamames, a boiled egg, tenderstem broccoli and seaweed.

It's an umami bomb that would fill you up on its own, but it also comes with two pieces of sashimi, which brings us to one of the downsides of the evening. I'd presumed that izakaya didn't serve sushi or sashimi, but Himself tells me they do.

"They're not where you'd go for really good sushi, though," he says, and the same is true here.

We opt for the deluxe assorted sashimi set (€28.95 for 24 pieces), and while it includes some decent salmon and tuna, there is also chewy squid, an unpleasant variety of clam called akagai and fairly tasteless oysters.

The best that can be said about it is that it's fine, but it's certainly not a high point. It won't put us off going back, though – the donburi and takoyaki alone will have us back in the door soon.

Our bill, including two glasses of wine, one beer, a soft drink and a chicken katsu curry (€16.95) that was declared "brilliant" by the 11-year-old, came to just over €120.

As we left, we passed a group of friends laughing loudly over beers and a table groaning with plates of gyoza, tempura and noodles. Channeling your inner izakaya customer seems to be just the thing for the January blues.



## The wine list

The list at Hasu Izakaya employs a minimalist approach that seems to focus on providing value. There are five whites (€25.95 to €35.95) with two offerings by the glass at €6.50, and five reds (€25.95 to €34.95), again with two by the glass at €6.50, a pro-secco (€30.95 or a snipe at €7.95)

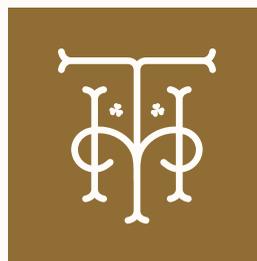
and a rosé (€25.95/€6.50).

For my white choice, the Circe verdejo from Rueda (€35.95) would possess both the acidity and body structure to pair well with deep-fried tempura and sushi dishes.

It would be fantastic to see the red selection broadened out to include some lighter options, as there is nothing too exciting there at the moment. Because of that, I'm going with a rosé, the El Coto Rosado tempranillo (€25.95/€6.50), as my second wine choice.

★★★  
Cathal McBride

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# TRINITY TOWNHOUSE

HOTEL  DUBLIN



Edel Coffey has written a compulsive debut that keeps you turning its pages even when the subject matter is deeply distressing  
BRÍD O'DONOVAN

## A gripping and incisively written debut that confronts every parent's worst nightmare



JOHN  
WALSHE

**S**usannah Rice is one of the United States' best-known children's doctors. Not only is she Professor of Paediatrics at a top Manhattan hospital, she's also a regular talk show guest who's written a slew of bestselling books on parenting. She's married to a successful engineer and has two beautiful daughters.

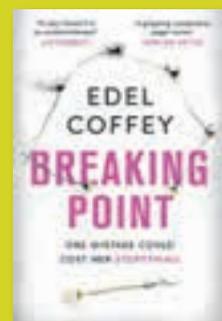
When Susannah's morning begins with the minor irritation of a non-starting car and a call about a medical emergency, her routine is knocked out of sync. As a result, she forgets to drop her six-month-old daughter Louise off at day care. Sleep deprived, overstressed and distracted, she doesn't realise the baby is still in the back of the car during a New York heatwave – until it is too late to save her.

Edel Coffey's first novel takes every parent's ultimate nightmare and makes it real. So real, in fact, that *Breaking Point* is a particularly tough, uncomfortable read for anyone who has to keep little humans safe. It's also hugely compelling – I devoured it in a day.

Coffey recounts the aftermath of this tragic event through two viewpoints. Susannah's is one and the other belongs to Adelaide Gold, a CNN journalist cov-

### FICTION

**Breaking Point**  
By Edel Coffey  
Sphere, €18.90



ering Louise's death, whose own history makes her particularly sympathetic to the paediatrician's woes.

While it moves with the pace of a thriller, *Breaking Point* is also an indictment of modern life's always-on culture. Pressure to be the perfect parent (particularly true for mothers) while maintaining peak performance levels at work is all-pervasive, with society piling stress upon stress on us until we crack.

Particularly telling is a scathing scene where Susannah and her fellow female doctors discuss how quickly they will return to the daily grind after giving birth.

Coffey understands the way that having or not having children can affect relationships with people outside your family. For Adelaide, becoming a mother brought "a new, unwelcome dynamic" into her group of footloose friends. Susannah realised that the older she became, "the more I felt the lack of family had started to stack against me, like a black mark".

Coffey doesn't hold back from the all-consuming, coruscating grief that follows the death of a child, this "loss on a cellular level". The surviving parents careen through blame and recrimination, taking aim at both themselves and their partners.

Coffey's characters feel well drawn and believable,

particularly the damaged Adelaide, "a fugitive from her own life" still reeling from events a decade before, and the overachieving Susannah.

The author isn't afraid to make Susannah somewhat unlikeable either. Condescending and judgmental, she avows that "most of the children she saw in outpatients were actually there because of their parents' bad decisions." As Adelaide notes, Susannah "came across as someone who thought moms who were failing were just not trying hard enough".

Minor protagonists don't outstay their welcome, adding just enough to propel the plot onwards. Adelaide's friend Julie Connerty is a wonderful parody of right-wing moralising, however, a Fox News reporter who "loved a cautionary tale the way some people loved the Old Testament".

A respected journalist and broadcaster, Coffey takes aim at how the media Hoover up every grim news story with little empathy for anyone who gets mown down in the process. Even worse is the phenomenon of trial by media, with rival outlets vying for exclusives and retweets.

Susannah's lawyer warns her that "our society thinks almost exclusively in terms of entertainment now", and even court cases turn into reality shows where "you don't want to get voted off."

*Breaking Point's* rather abrupt conclusion feels a little undercooked after all the drama that has preceded it. This is a minor issue, however, with a compulsive debut that keeps you turning its pages even when the subject matter is deeply distressing.

# Books

## In his own words: a Beatle reflects on a rich life in song



ANDREW LYNCH

Paul McCartney considered himself eminently qualified to write a song called Give Ireland Back to the Irish. “Our household represented in microcosm the Irish political and religious divide,” the former Beatle writes in this mammoth collection of his lyrics with added commentaries. He explains his outrage over Bloody Sunday in 1972, but fails to mention that many republicans regarded the track itself as naive.

This gives you a fairly good idea of what to expect from McCartney’s landmark publication. In many ways it’s a treasure trove, stuffed with genuine insights into what makes him such a gifted songwriter whose best work will surely endure for centuries. It also suggests that he’s something of a control freak whose instinctive response to criticism is to casually brush it away.

The Lyrics, it should be said straight away, does an awful lot more than it says on the tin. In fact, the song texts themselves are often not all that interesting, since McCartney is primarily a tunesmith rather than a wordsmith like Bob Dylan or Elvis Costello. What you’re really paying for is the 154 accompanying mini-essays, lavishly illustrated by photos, letters, posters, scribbled first drafts and other memorabilia, spread over 900 pages and two volumes sheathed in a sturdy slipcase (picking it up, you’ll wish he really was a paperback writer).

### MUSIC

#### The Lyrics

By Paul McCartney  
(edited by Paul Muldoon)  
Allen Lane, €75



So The Lyrics is an absolute pleasure to browse. The problems arise when you actually read through it. McCartney has suggested that this is effectively his autobiography, but it doesn’t feel like one because the songs are presented in alphabetical rather than chronological order. That allows him to dodge awkward subjects, most notably his brief and acrimonious relationship with second wife Heather Mills, who doesn’t receive a single mention.

To be fair, McCartney is much more forthcoming about other key people in his life. He admits to being permanently scarred by the early death of his mother Mary, “a pain you can’t quite describe” which inspired possibly his first ever composition I Lost My Little Girl at the age of 14 and later the rather more sophisticated ballad Let It Be.

He pays several heartfelt tributes to John Lennon (“We could see things in each other that the other needed to be complete”), while acknowledging the hurt caused when his creative partner turned on him. “I certainly thought John was being a complete idiot . . . I don’t know what he hoped to gain, other than punching me in the face.”



Paul McCartney: The Lyrics is a treasure trove of mini-essays, photos, letters, posters, scribbled first drafts and other memorabilia  
MARY MCCARTNEY/MPL

McCartney must be one of the most interviewed people in history, so it’s hardly a surprise that his anecdotes can sound a little familiar. Still, he adds some polish to well-worn stories such as Blackbird being influenced by the US civil rights movement or hearing the tune for Yesterday in a dream and giving it dummy lyrics: “Scrambled eggs, oh my baby how I love your legs.”

“It was like finding a ten-pound note on the street,” he breezily concludes about the most covered song of all time, which has actually earned at least £20 million in royalties.

There’s another intriguing Irish connection here. McCartney’s editor is Paul Muldoon, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet from Armagh who assembled The Lyrics from 24 long conversations they had between 2015 and 2020. In general, Muldoon has done a fine job of getting his subject to open up, although

## Poetry that teaches us how to set the world off



JAMES CONOR PATTERSON

Padraig Regan’s debut collection of poetry, Some Integrity, is a fresh and vital work, full of pieces which open to the reader like a beautifully designed lacquer cabinet, or a Fabergé egg embossed with an intricate diorama from objects in the poet’s life.

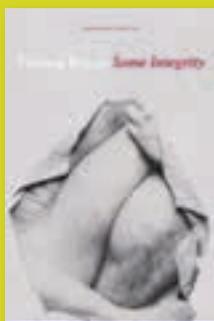
The author of two poetry pamphlets, Delicious (Lifeboat, 2016) and Who Seemed Alive & Altogether Real (Emma Press, 2017), in 2015, Regan was the recipient of an Eric Gregory Award.

In 2020, they were awarded the

### POETRY

#### Some Integrity

By Padraig Regan  
Carcenet, €14.38



Ireland Chair of Poetry Bursary Prize.

Regan’s work suggests that in order to live well, one must radically recondition how to view the world around us – to set the world off-kilter so that new sensations can be experienced and new realisations about the human condition apprehended.

This is poetry which seeks to redefine the Irish lyric through the prism of a queer sensibility.

Bodies are provisional, we are reminded. In A Machine for Harvesting Olives, Regan writes: “The olives fall onto a tarp/like fat, soft hailstones,/each one its own insistent fact,/a symbol meaning ‘olive’.”



By choosing to exist in a sensuous, attentive relationship with objects and the human body – in writing of sex, art, food and wine – these poems pull off the high-wire act of recalibrating everyday experience while still remaining beautiful.

Regan is interested in what happens once we start to pay proper attention and heighten our senses. We are invited to interrogate our relationship with poetry and our pre-conceptions about value in poems that discuss the merits of forgery (Vermeer’s

Padraig Regan: inviting us to interrogate our relationship with poetry



# Short stories step gracefully through hidden inner lives



ANDREA CLEARY

The world of Wendy Erskine's characters is much like the one we inhabit, repetitive and mundane. From the beauty parlours and gravesides of her debut short story collection *Sweet Home* to the Iceland supermarket car parks and house gatherings of this follow-up, she enlivens unremarkable places with remarkable people.

Erskine hails from East Belfast, the setting for her first book and a "suburban, leafy, orderly" environment. Ordinary people's racing inner thoughts make for some of her most engaging writing, however, as the tale *Golem* from *Dance Move* shows.

A married couple are attending a birthday party at the home of the wife's wealthy sister and her husband. "Could you imagine those two on an inflatable mattress on the living room floor?" Rhonda asks Marty when he wonders why they're staying at a hotel even though the hosts have "rooms galore".

Rhonda's sister Eloise, while getting ready for the celebration, ponders whether or not calligraphy would be a worthwhile pastime to take up. "Was it considered art? Probably not. Oh well."

Musings from these four characters boil over into one another, barely separated by paragraphs. The sisters' strife, the death of their mother and their subsequent inheritance all unfurl, wonderfully observed examples of what is said and unsaid within families.

In *Mathematics*, a woman called Roberta employed by an agency to clean short-term rental properties finds a little girl abandoned in one of the rooms. With no sign of the parents, she takes her home for the night and drops her off at school the next morning in the hope that her mother will find her there. The girl reminds Roberta of her own childhood struggles, when "they lifted her out to the little room with the plant and box of tissues", before attending "the other school with the buses". She attempt the child's homework with her, but has to give up.

*Mathematics* is just 25 pages long, but captures what is so profoundly brilliant about Erskine's writing. She takes note of the small injustices that eat away over time and lays them bare for us to consider: inadequate educational supports for those who struggle, the signs missed when schoolchildren have difficult home lives, the instant conclusions we leap to if somebody acts out of the ordinary in public. Erskine shows us what can happen by pulling at the



Wendy Erskine: the short story writer is hitting her stride CHARA PRINGLE

McCartney does tend to go off on tangents and is often understandably vague about events that took place many decades ago.

Muldoon's presence can be most strongly felt in the literary references that McCartney constantly cites as inspirations. According to the book, *A Hard Day's Night* got its title from Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, which was in London's West End at the time, and *Penny Lane* was envisaged as a Harold Pinter play.

This is particularly interesting, given that its creator reportedly said around the same time, "The only thing I get from the theatre is a sore arse"?

The *Lyrics* is a classy production, and every serious Paul McCartney fan will need to own a copy. As with so much of his post-Beatles output, however, there's a nagging feeling that he could have pushed himself just a little harder.

## kilter

Supper at Emmaus), the beauty of flux (*The Barberini Faun*) and the possibility of escape inherent within the accidental (*Glitch City*).

"All it takes is to tilt our gaze at a certain angle," Regan writes in *Our Personal Papers*. "Our belief in what we see snaps like a cracker."

In this, Regan reminds the reader of American poet John Ashbery, whose 1975 poetry collection *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* redefined what could be achieved within the bounds of Queer writing, autobiography, ekphrasis and art.

That swirling, all-encompassing authorial gaze, which spirals out from a single fixed point or object; that sense of uncertainty, and the feasibility of the idea that we truly are the self-assured authors of our own lives, all these elements are

present in Regan's work, as they are in Ashbery's. Take for instance *Minty*, in which Regan tells us:

*Whatever grid of bricks & wood makes up the room we happen to be sitting in*

*is dilated & wrapped around a single focal-point; whatever portion of the sky that happens to be visible through the window becomes a convex bowl. The weather also happens,*

*as it always does, & passes on, & brings those other places where it falls into the orbit of the glass.*

These stylistic reference points are cleverly hinted at rather than all-consuming.

Some *Integrity* stands on its own two feet as a playful, original and philosophically complex debut, as joyful as it is thought-provoking.

### FICTION

#### Dance Move

By Wendy Erskine

The Stinging Fly, €15



Cell traces the past and present of Caro, a young student from Belfast who falls under the influence of supposed revolutionaries in London. She makes weekly visits to their flat where there are "speakers, demos, papers, house resolutions, discussions, debate and at times anger". Caro's middle-class family, revealed when she goes home during a college break, play golf and tennis and show little interest in her newfound radical politics.

Luis and Bridget, leaders of the leftist group, challenge Caro's will to attend a protest. "Strange you've never been in council housing all these years, but council housing is your new big thing, huh?" Her world shrinks until she is so wrapped up in idealism that the real one where she can make an impact slips away.

Fans of *Sweet Home* and Erskine's other work will find a lot to love in these 11 stories, each told with her signature understated tone. Sentiment comes not in what is described to us, but from her characters' small, almost imperceptible gestures of kindness, fear and self-effacement. Balancing the right amount of darkness and light, the ordinary and extraordinary, Erskine is hitting her stride.

threads of these inequalities.

Her talent lies in the small details too. In the title story, the yellow vertical line on a pop star poster tells Kate that it was made on the home printer. There's a funny, clinical description of her teenage daughter and a friend performing the infamous Cardi B WAP dance: "doing splits in the air and pretending to have sex with the decking. That decking had been put down by Kate's Dad."

# Appetite for Distraction



Our selection of this week's best home entertainment

## TV PICKS OF THE WEEK

**The Style Counsellors**  
Tuesday, 8.30pm, RTÉ One

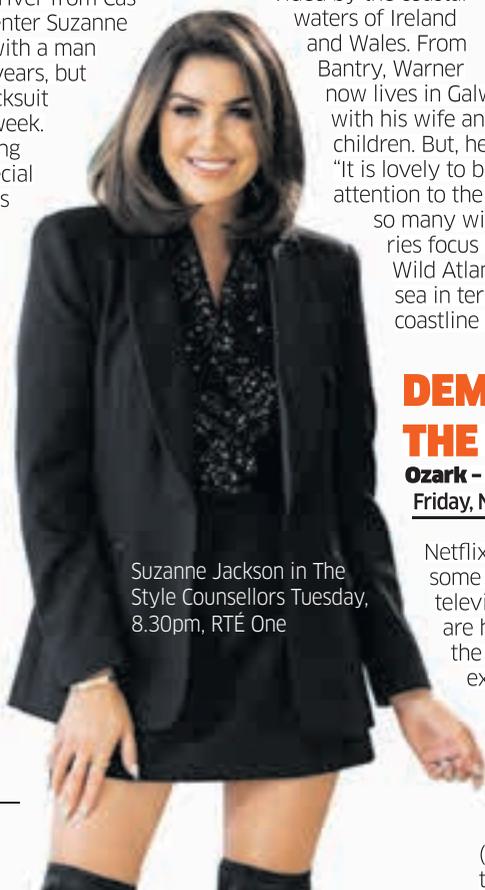
The first ever male participant in the makeover show is Mike Shyne, an ambulance driver from Castleconnell in Co Limerick. Presenter Suzanne Jackson finds herself dealing with a man who hasn't worn jeans for 20 years, but who has a different pair of tracksuit bottoms for every day of the week. He doesn't own a suit, borrowing his 85-year-old father's for special occasions. Mike's wife Liz wants him to dress up, rather than down. *EK*

**How to Be Good With Money**  
Thursday, 8.30pm, RTÉ One

With house prices climbing, it's easy to forget that there are lots of people still in negative equity. Here, Eoin McGee meets Melissa Moroney from Nenagh, Co Tipperary who is in that situation and wondering if she should simply walk away from her home. Can money maestro McGee help her to put her financial house in order? *EK*

**Iontais na bhFarraigi Ceilteacha**  
Wednesday, 9.30pm, TG4

In this co-production with the BBC, wildlife presenter and



Suzanne Jackson in *The Style Counsellors* Tuesday, 8.30pm, RTÉ One

documentary maker Eoin Warner explores the lives of marine creatures that live in the rich but sometimes precarious habitat provided by the coastal waters of Ireland and Wales. From Bantry, Warner now lives in Galway with his wife and two children. But, he says: "It is lovely to bring some attention to the Celtic Sea - so many wildlife documentaries focus on the west coast and the Wild Atlantic Way. It is an incredible sea in terms of biodiversity and the coastline is stunning." *EK*

## DEMAND PICK OF THE WEEK

**Ozark - season four**  
Friday, Netflix

Netflix series *Ozark* has produced some of the most captivating television in recent years, and fans are hoping this season will answer the burning questions left by the explosive finale of series three.

In the new season, the Byrde family find themselves descending further into the depths of the criminal underworld, as Marty (Jason Bateman) and Wendy (Laura Linney) are shown in the aftermath of a shocking

*Servant*, season three: Friday, January 21, Apple TV+



murder, washing the blood off their clothes. Where to from here? Jason Bateman has promised fans that *Ozark* will go out with a bang. *JMB*

**After Life - season three**  
Available now, Netflix

Ricky Gervais returns for the final season of the hit



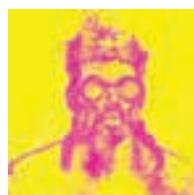
Ricky Gervais in *After Life*: season three now available on Netflix



# Albums

## ROCK/POP

**Eels**  
*Extreme Witchcraft* (PIAS/E Works)



Rarely allowing an idiosyncratic concept to escape his grasp, American songwriter Mark Everett continues his search for something different. There are tracks on Eels' 14th album that match his ambitions - top-notch examples include *Grandfather Clock Strikes Twelve*, which fuses Prince-like funk with Everett's awkward demeanour, and the minor key *Stumbling Bee* which sees him take on the guise of a fading post-summer insect. More in line with Everett's usual emotionally drained style are *Learning While I Lose* and *I Know You're Right*. The blend suits him, however, and augurs well for future work. ★★★

## ROCK

**Elvis Costello**  
*The Boy Named If* (EMI)



It's a long time since Elvis Costello revisited his early period as the headstrong creator of articulate pop-punk, but *The Boy Named If* does exactly that. The taut, lean songs here don't replicate that period (the polycultural songwriter is too smart for such a tactic), but they jump with the same potency. For fans who have often enjoyed (and, let's be honest, sometimes endured) Costello's forays into many different musical forms, the album is often a thrilling throwback to a time when cleverly worded, pithily-delivered three-minute pop songs were the man's speciality. ★★★



Jason Bateman and Laura Linney in *Ozark*: season four, from Friday, January 21 on Netflix

drama, which charts the story of Tony (Gervais), a writer for the local newspaper in the fictional town of Tambury in England, whose life is changed utterly when his wife dies from cancer. While friends and colleagues do their best to help him, Tony retreats from everyone – even when a potential new love interest emerges. Sincere, slowly paced and affecting, this is quality work from Gervais, who also wrote the series. *NO'R*

**Servant – season three**  
Friday, Apple TV+

If you're all caught up with *Servant*, then you'll know that the previous season ended on a dramatic note – with housewife Dorothy (Lauren Ambrose) tormenting nanny Leanne (Nell Tiger Free) and Dorothy's younger brother Julian (Rupert Grint) relapsing on cocaine.

Directed by M Night Shyamalan, *Servant* has won plaudits from critics for its rich atmospherics – the series follows the story of a Philadelphia couple, Dorothy and Sean Turner, who suffer a terrible tragedy in their lives. Season three promises more of the same – with a harmonious atmosphere quickly devolving into something more sinister. *JMB*

Reviews and previews by Emmanuel Kehoe, Nadine O'Regan and Jenny Murphy Byrne

**Reviews by Tony Clayton-Lea**

**POST-PUNK**

**Yard Act**  
The Overlord (Zen FC/Island)



"The overlord of discontent, the constant burden of making sense, it won't relent, it won't repent," sings Yard Act's James Smith. The Leeds-based band's lyricist draws on his northern English heritage as previously essayed by the likes of John Cooper Clarke, Jarvis Cocker,

Mark E Smith and (somewhat more contemporaneously) Sleaford Mods' Jason Williamson. In effect, this involves cutting observations urged on by music that could occasionally benefit from a few weeks on a sunbed. That said, there is stamina in abundance here from an outfit whom we'll be hearing much more of this year. ★★½

# Sara Keating



The annually-staged First Fortnight, which reflects on mental health issues through the prism of the arts, has Peter Gowen's impressive one-man show *The Chronicles of Oggle* as its centrepiece

## Resilience is the watchword for an innovative festival

**The Chronicles of Oggle**

By Peter Gowen, directed by Donal Gallagher  
Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin; finishes today

"Resilience" is a word that has become increasingly popular in the lexicon of self-help and wellness culture. Bad experiences, uncomfortable feelings, we rationalise, make us stronger human beings, enabling us to greater endure what life throws at us.

Art, too, can help us develop emotional survival skills. This is the thinking behind First Fortnight, the annual festival that coincides with the most challenging time of the year: January, the month when most suicides occur in Ireland. First Fortnight offers a forum for both passive and participative reflection on mental health across the spectrum of the arts.

Peter Gowen's one-man show *The Chronicles of Oggle* is a terrific centrepiece for the festival, raising mental health issues through theatrical fiction. Gowen plays Pakie, a grown man with a tragic past. Orphaned at eight, he is sent to an institution run by the Christian Brothers where sexual abuse is normalised. Pakie escapes physical harm by "acting the eejit"; if you are noisy, he realises, they leave you alone.

Despite his early misfortunes, Pakie is lucky too. He is adopted by a loving family who give him a stable home, although school – where corporal punishment is an accepted part of the culture – proves challenging. After assaulting a teacher in self-defence, Pakie leaves school early, but with the support of encouraging members of his community he finds his way to a happy, semi-stable life. This is the point at which we meet him.

Under Donal Gallagher's direction, Gowen plays Pakie with a childlike guilelessness. In striped shirt and braces, he pulls faces and makes jokes to entertain us. He is a schoolboy in a man's clothing, an embodiment that speaks to the themes of historical legacy: his emotional development has been arrested by his experience.

The play debuted in 2013, but its historical resonance seems even more pertinent now,

in the wake of the reports into the Mother and Baby Homes published since its premiere. Designer Medb Lambert offers a simple seaside set, which Eoin Winning's light washes gently over in the more meditative scenes that are set at the local beach, where Pakie retreats to find solace. Inner peace can be found in the most simple of settings.

Pakie's story is undoubtedly one of resilience.

However, Gowen doesn't sugarcoat the dark places that childhood cruelty takes him to. Crucially, we also have his best friend's fate against which to weigh his survival. As the spectre of real historical events hangs over us, the audience is more than aware that for every Pakie there is a child whose life has not turned out so well.

The First Fortnight Festival runs until the end of January, with a variety of digital and in-person events, including a series of weekly Friday Forums, which allow theatre

artists to reflect upon how difficult their own experiences have been during the pandemic, while offering strategies for fostering greater resilience. See [firstfortnight.ie](http://firstfortnight.ie).

### A heartwarming spectacle at the Abbey

Every Brilliant Thing at the Abbey Theatre also offers coping strategies for people dealing with mental ill health. In Duncan Macmillan's autobiographical play, we encounter a young child dealing with the aftermath of their parent's suicide attempt. The curated list that the narrator writes, however, is as much about the value she sees in things, but the joy is infectious, asking the audience directly what brilliant things they have in their life to give them a lift of happiness.

Andrea Ainsworth's production is performed by Amy Conroy with the audience on three sides, creating a heartwarming, inclusive atmosphere, perfect for the necessary interaction and improvisation. It runs at the Abbey, on the Peacock Stage, until January 22, before embarking on a six-venue national tour. See [abbeytheatre.ie](http://abbeytheatre.ie) for details.



Peter Gowen in *The Chronicles of Oggle*

# Theatre

## Reviewed this week

### The Tragedy of Macbeth

Directed by Joel Coen

Apple TV+, 15

Rating: ★★★★★

### Cyrano

Directed by Joe Wright

Nationwide, 12A

Rating: ★★★



Denzel Washington in The Tragedy of Macbeth

# Coen's minimalist Macbeth explores terror and tyranny



John Maguire

In his first solo venture without brother Ethan, Joel Coen has adapted William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as an austere, modernist parable about the short lifespan of tyrants.

**The Tragedy of Macbeth** is shot in luminous black and white on startlingly minimalist sets that provide all the more space for a series of powerhouse performances from an exceptional cast. A gripping, utterly contemporary take on a 400-year-old text, stripped down to its narrative and visual essentials, this spooky, slippery film is a triumph of acting, stage design, photography and interpretation.

In a mist-blown, haunted patch of Scotland, army general Macbeth (Denzel Washington) and his comrade Banquo (Bertie Carvel) are returning victorious from a war of suppression waged on behalf of their king Duncan (Brendan Gleeson) when they meet three witches (all played by Kathryn Hunter) standing by a shallow pool. The crow-like crones growl a prophecy: Duncan will fall. Macbeth will be king.

Returning to his castle, Macbeth tells his wife what the witches have seen. When Duncan announces a visit, the power-hungry Lady Macbeth (Frances McDormand) convinces her husband that their time has come. They must kill Duncan in his sleep and seize the kingdom. He hesitates, but does what he is asked to do.

The bloodshed does not stop there. Duncan's servants are murdered, as is

Macbeth's loyal friend Banquo. Duncan's heir Malcolm (Harry Melling) flees to England and rallies support while a paranoid Macbeth assumes the throne. How long can he hold that which was never rightly his?

Coen's urgent retelling conjures up an appropriately desolate world of inky shadows and stark negative spaces, where desperate people stalk stony battlements and deserted moors, alienated from each other and themselves. This *Macbeth* is as dark and scary as any horror movie, less about the splashes of blood and cackling of witches than the inversion of moral order. "Fair is foul and foul is fair," we are told. Trust becomes treachery, mercy becomes murder, love becomes a power play.

Washington's *Macbeth*, like so many of the Coen Brothers' characters, is trapped in a labyrinth of his own construction. His natural authority slips almost imperceptibly with every imagined alarm, every hallucinated footstep, every pointing ghost. McDormand schemes and plots beside him, admonishing her husband in his moments of weakness. They are childless and middle-aged, unloved and unworthy.

Listen carefully to Shakespeare's brilliantly delivered verse for how often the concept of time is mentioned. The *Macbeths'* time will be brief. The price they paid for their temporary ascent is multiplied by the vengeance they both know is coming. The dreadful weight of that inevitability hangs over the film, even as Washington flinches in anticipation of it falling.

I didn't know Joe Wright's lavish adaptation of Edmond Rostand's much-staged play *Cyrano de Bergerac* was a musical before I sat down to watch it and will admit to being a little startled when everyone started singing. Wright's soaring sopranos and clockwork choreography prove to be

a close-enough match for Rostand's eternal romance, retold and remixed dozens of times over the last century of cinema – but the show tunes derived from classical verse struggle to add anything to the story.

That sense of there being a lot of effort for little reward could well be the theme of **Cyrano**, which swaps the lead character's famously large nose for Peter Dinklage's short stature. Reprising the role he played on Broadway in a production directed by his wife Erica Schmidt (the screenwriter here), Dinklage is a poet and soldier who's madly in love with his lifelong friend Roxanne (Haley Bennett). Oblivious to his suit, she in turn has fallen in love with dashing young recruit Christian (Kelvin Harrison jr), and he with her.

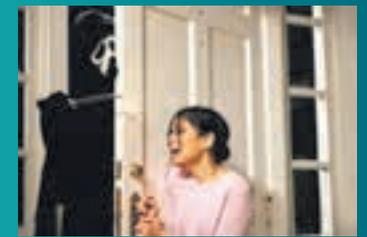
There's a problem: Roxanne desires wooing with flowery love letters, but Christian can't string two words together. *Cyrano*, not wanting his beloved to suffer another man's shortcomings, becomes Christian's secret scribe, composing swooning billets-doux on demand with no expectation of requited passion.

This rickety triangle is strengthened considerably by the arrival of aristocratic De Guiche, played by an almost-unrecognisable Ben Mendelsohn. De Guiche's eye is caught by the beautiful Roxanne and his extraordinary wealth would secure her future.

This familiar set-up plays out through a series of melancholy ballads (and one incongruous rock number) that typically perform the same function: exploring an emotional moment for a character indistinguishable from emotions excavated by another character, through another song, moments before.

Beautifully staged and finely acted, this version of *Cyrano* is constantly tripped up by the form Wright has chosen to give it, sacrificing character and momentum in the service of mostly forgettable songs.

## Also On



### Scream (nationwide, 16)

The fifth instalment of this self-referential slasher franchise, and the first not directed by the late Wes Craven. It follows a new gang of teenagers as they investigate the blood-splattered history of their supposedly quiet town and are picked off by a masked, knife-wielding maniac.



### The Lost Daughter (Netflix, 15)

The dependably brilliant Olivia Colman stars in Maggie Gyllenhaal's directorial debut, playing an English professor whose obsession with a woman (Dakota Johnson) and her young daughter while on holiday in Greece sparks painful memories of her own damaged past (where she's played by Jessie Buckley).



### Memoria (selected, PG)

The new film from Thai auteur Apichatpong Weerasethakul (whose Uncle Boonmee won the Palme d'Or a decade ago) stars Tilda Swinton as a tourist in Colombia struck down by a mysterious illness and haunted by a sound apparently only she can hear. She attempts to discover the origin of this eerie noise and heal herself.

### Cow (selected, 12A)

The acclaimed director Andrea Arnold's first documentary (which took four years to make) is an unflinching observation of a typical day in the lives of cows on a large dairy farm, from birthing calves, grazing and milking to being prepared for slaughter.

### Licorice Pizza (nationwide, 15A)

Paul Thomas Anderson's 1970s-set soaring, sweet-hearted comedy drama follows disaffected twentysomething Alana (Alana Haim) and teenage entrepreneur Gary (Cooper Hoffman) as they grow up, run around California's San Fernando Valley and fall in platonic love. A must-see.

# Slaughter on the Wild Atlantic Way as buried secrets resurface



**Emmanuel Kehoe**

**T**he return of Kate O’Riordan’s **Smother** (RTÉ One) and its Russian novel-sized cast of characters could have done with a decent recap. Instead, we were dropped into a flash-forward with blood on the carpet, a revolver on the floor and someone poking a hunting rifle round the corner of a door. Great stuff. Gore everywhere. Slaughter on the Wild Atlantic Way.

Maybe O’Riordan was following the great Raymond Chandler’s advice from *The Simple Art of Murder*, way back in 1950: “When in doubt, have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand.”

Perhaps that’s what you need to do when the plot still revolves around matriarch Val Ahern (Dervla Kirwan) attempting to (s)mother her family. This hyper-protective impulse on Val’s part reflects the show’s title. But possibly all she wants is a little solidarity among her squabbling bunch of malcontents.

So far, so refined middle-class soap. Now we’ve another character to contend with, a long-lost son of the late and unlamented shyster developer Denis (Stuart Graham). He, you may remember, was encouraged off a cliff by Elaine (Justine Mitchell), the recovering alcoholic ex-wife of the now deceased Rory (Lochlann Ó Mearáin). Rory, suffering from an inoperable brain tumour, took the rap on her behalf. He confessed to killing his father-in-law, because by this stage he was married to Ahern’s daughter Anna (Gemma-Leah Devereux).

Sloping down the road comes Denis’s son Finn (Dean Fagan), who isn’t so much long-lost as long-hushed up. Denis’s brother Frank (Conor Mullen) knows about him, as does Val herself. But not her daughters. Resentment bubbles. Finn filches a couple of fifties from his late father’s cash box – and there was I thinking Dirty Denis was all washed up. Where we go from here is anyone’s guess but, from the introduction, there will be blood.

● The 1970s were a bloody time in Ireland. The most lethal year of the entire Troubles was 1972, when 500 people were killed and Bloody Sunday took place in Derry.

Violence seeped from the North into the Republic. In 1970, a bank theft on Arran Quay in Dublin ended with Saor Éire shooting Garda Richard Fallon,



Seána Kerslake, Dervla Kirwan and Niamh Walsh in *Smother* (RTÉ One)

the first of at least ten Southern police officers killed by republican groups. There were armed robberies, prison escapes (including one in a helicopter from Mountjoy), lethal bombings and sensational kidnappings of prominent people.

During that decade, talk emerged of a Garda ‘Heavy Gang’ – a group of officers who forced confessions from suspects using violent tactics. An Garda Síochána has always denied the existence of such a group.

**Crimes and Confessions: Who Killed Una Lynskey?** (RTÉ One) is the first of an intriguing new three-part series about miscarriages of justice in the 1970s and 1980s, drawing links between them. The second part will deal with the 1976 Sallins train robbery, and the third the 1984 Kerry Babies case.

Produced and directed by John Downes, the series opened with the disappearance of 19-year-old Una Lynskey near her home in Porterstown Lane, Ratoath, Co Meath. She was on her way home from work on the evening of October 12, 1971. Hers was one of a number of families from

Co Mayo that had been given property by the Land Commission and settled in the area (coincidentally, Una worked for the Commission herself). It was two months before her remains were dis-

Ann Donnelly in *Crimes and Confessions* (RTÉ One)



covered in the Wicklow Mountains by a farmer.

When detectives came on the scene, they quickly concluded that 20-year-old Martin Conmey, 21-year-old Dick Donnelly (who died recently) and 19-year-old Marty Kerrigan were involved in Una’s disappearance, having allegedly picked her up in Donnelly’s battered old car.

Donnelly, in an archived voice recording, claimed that one officer stuck a hot poker into his side. He still refused to confess. Conmey said that, having been punched to the floor and dragged up by the hair, he eventually told detectives what they wanted to hear. “After three days, that place destroyed me,” he recalled.

Marty Kerrigan, the youngest of the three, signed a confession that claimed Dick Donnelly had put Una Lynskey into a nearby pond. Nothing was found there, so the men couldn’t be charged with murder. Six witnesses said they saw a quite different, dark-coloured car in the lane being driven by an older man at about the time Una went missing – sightings that were never followed up on.

When Una’s body was found two months later, another tragic and savage event took place. Marty Kerrigan was abducted and killed by Una’s two brothers Sean and James and their cousin, John Gaughan. They were found guilty of manslaughter even before Donnelly and Conmey came to trial. Kerrigan was dumped near the place where Una Lynskey’s remains had lain.

Dick Donnelly had his manslaughter conviction overturned on appeal in 1973. Martin Conmey, found guilty of the same offence in 1972, served three years in prison. This was successfully appealed in 2010. The Court of Appeal ruled in 2014 that Conmey’s conviction was a miscarriage of justice and he received a state apology two years later, along with “appropriate compensation”.

Garda Commissioner Drew Harris recently wrote to Conmey with a formal apology “in relation to the miscarriage of justice that [he] suffered”. He has ordered the Garda’s Serious Crime Review Team to examine the original investigation. Ann Donnelly, Dick’s widow and a sister of Marty Kerrigan, told the programme: “They didn’t look for the right person, so Una didn’t get justice. Her killer is at large.”

The Lynskey affair also featured in the TG4 series *Finné* some years ago. It will be interesting to see how Downes links all three historic cases as his project continues.

# Design for life

## How do I come to terms with serious hair loss?

This week, **Mary Cate Smith** advises a reader who is suffering from low self-esteem, which has been exacerbated by the onset of alopecia



**Dear Expert,**  
I'm a 25-year-old office worker who has never been very confident as a person or about my looks. Last year, I began suffering from alopecia, which has given me huge anxiety. I would like to get some advice about how to go forward practically and also how to deal with the topic when it comes up in company. I'm at the point where I can't hide it much longer with bandanas, etc.

**Dear Reader,**

I know exactly how you feel. Hair loss is often shrugged off as a crisis of vanity, but it's so much more than that. While hair certainly doesn't define us, it's reductive to think that it isn't intertwined with our identity. I, too, suffered from low self-esteem during my teenage years, often feeling that I was neither accomplished nor attractive enough. Adding alopecia to the mix can exacerbate those insecurities.

The first thing I would say is that acknowledging what's happening and how it's causing you anxiety is a huge step. Hair isn't just an element of personal expression, it's an intrinsic part of our self-image. Hair is rooted in power relations, gender construction, political movements and social norms.

My own hair loss journey began in my teens when I lost most of my eyebrows. This put me in the line of fire for cruel comments and flippant jokes. It wasn't until my 30s that I began losing the hair on my head. At first, I used a variety of root touch-ups and sprays. They worked to an extent. I was able to hide the patchiness with products, scarves and bandanas, but it became increasingly hard.

When my elaborate comb-over was taking more than 20 minutes in the morning, I realised that this wasn't sustainable and decided to get a wig. There are so many options, should you go down this route. Human hair wigs are usually more expensive as they're created from real hair. That means you can wash, style, blow-dry, colour and curl this hair as you would your own. They often have a thicker density and tend to last longer, depending on the level of care you give them.

Synthetic wigs have man-made fibres and often feel lighter than a human hair wig of similar length. A good-quality one can be washed, but will retain its style. Make sure to check if your wig is heat-resistant, as some synthetic examples will disintegrate when the hair comes into contact with tongs, wands or straighteners.

Depending on what feels comfortable, you can choose a wig with or without a lace front. While the lace can take a bit of getting used to, it projects a more realistic hairline and makes the hair look like it's growing from the scalp. If you're worried about your hairline moving at all, you can either tape the wig or glue it to your scalp. Some glues last a few weeks, but I prefer one that can be washed off. Schwarzkopf Got2b Glued spray or gel holds your wig in place without feeling too fixed.

If you don't like the feel of a full wig, there's an option to wear a

topper. This is a partial hairpiece that sits on top of or around your head, suitable for wearing underneath a hat. Roches.ie does a great selection of toppers and bamboo hats, which are ideal if you shave your head.

I wore my wig for a while with some hair underneath, but every time a new piece fell out it felt like I was reliving the trauma. I made the decision to shave my head and wrest back control over my hair loss unpredictability. I just used my normal razor and shaving foam, but if there's a lot of hair, you might want to go with an electric razor. For me, this was an empowering experience, but I completely understand that it's not for everyone.

Learning to accept your hair loss is one thing. Coming to terms with it is something else. In my experience, going to see a certified dermatologist with a special interest in hair loss assuaged my anxiety. Once the doctor diagnoses which type of alopecia you have, you can then weigh up your options.

It may be that the hair loss is not completely irreversible – you won't know until you consult a medical professional.

You mention that you would like to bring this up with friends. What I found helpful was addressing it straight on rather than waiting for a comment. I let friends and family know that I didn't need them to provide a solution, I just wanted the subject to be out in the open. The more people I spoke with, the easier it was and I discovered that so many others had suffered some kind of hair loss themselves.

I wasted years worrying about what people thought of me. It wasn't until I went to a therapist that it clicked. I was stuck in an all-consuming cycle of negative self-talk that perpetuated what I thought others were thinking.

Speaking to people who were going through the same thing was equally important. I joined the voluntary organisation Alopecia Ireland (alopeciaireland.ie). I connected with

people in Britain and the US through social media. I started following @hairfreelife on Instagram, a safe space run by advocate Amber Jean Rowan. She gives tips on applying lashes, drawing 3-D eyebrows, wearing wigs and embracing your baldness.

It's important to be gentle with yourself. Challenge judgmental thoughts and immerse yourself in things you enjoy doing so you have a bank of good memories to draw on when you're not feeling great. And remember, it's entirely natural to grieve your hair loss – this is a process that everyone experiences differently.

Got a problem or something you'd like advice on? Email anonymously by contacting us via [tinyurl.com/designforlifebusinesspost](https://tinyurl.com/designforlifebusinesspost) and we'll match your query with the best expert we can find on the subject. You can also drop an email in confidence to [nadine@businesspost.ie](mailto:nadine@businesspost.ie)



**Mary Cate Smith**

Mary Cate Smith is a freelance journalist and *Business Post Magazine* contributor with a diploma in education and a degree in English and philosophy. Having trained in drama and physical therapy for children on the autism spectrum, she worked in the sector for 12 years. Mary Cate has experienced a form of alopecia since the age of 16 and is currently attending a dermatologist with a special interest in hair loss.

## MY HOPE FOR 2022

That we start having some frank conversations about the meaning of real beauty. In a world that profits from our insecurities, we need to make sure we're not body shaming others or setting aesthetic standards based on Eurocentric ideals of beauty.



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Business Post

# Magazine

May 22 2022

## **Paul Brady at 75**

The veteran songwriter on a life in music

## **Marriage story**

Cristín Leach's powerful memoir

## **Chef's Table**

Rory O'Connell's delightful summer dishes

# Brave new world

More and more corporate lawyers are abandoning high-flying careers to begin again in new professions - but why?

Report: Catherine Sanz



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Dede Gold pictured for the cover story, pages 10-13  
DANIEL LYNCH

## Features

- 5 KATHLEEN MacMAHON**  
We all need editors – if only someone would tell Boris Johnson
- 8 INTERVIEW**  
Paul Brady looks back on a life and career in music at 75
- 10 COVER STORY**  
Is a career in law worth pursuing at all costs? Catherine Sanz meets the lawyers who downed tools and found career inspiration elsewhere
- 14 BOOK EXTRACT**  
In a powerful extract from her new memoir *Negative Space*, Cristin Leach writes about her marriage breakdown and how the personal became public

## Regulars

- 21 TASTE MAKER**  
Bookseller and author Bob Johnston's take on life
- 26 APPETITE FOR DISTRACTION**  
The best of the coming week's entertainment
- 30 DESIGN FOR LIFE**  
Louise Campbell advises on the best tactics to ask for a raise

## Arts & Books

- 22 NON-FICTION**  
With his new non-fiction book *The Stream of Everything*, has John Connell run out of steam?
- 28 TELEVISION AND FILM**  
John Maguire reviews *Conversations with Friends* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

## Eat & drink

- 16 CHEF'S TABLE**  
Rory O'Connell's delightful summer dishes
- 19 RESTAURANT REVIEW**  
Gillian Nelis reviews Liath in Blackrock

# Nadine O'Regan

Harry Styles is so popular that Twitter has unveiled a 'Styles' report to record his every move. We can also list the reasons why the pop star is deserving of our affection



@NadineORegan

**T**here are times when people say that Twitter has become redundant and pointless, a place where people go to shout at each other, make vile threats and generally act like the worst of humanity.

All of those things are true. But equally, there is another life out there on Twitter, and in that life, the Twitterati use their time on the service to tweet and post about all the people and things they most love. K-pop, Ariana Grande, *Normal People* and Paul Mescal's shorts: it's all there.

And lately, chief among those loves? Harry Styles: a man who has lived through being in one of the most successful boy bands of all time – and has somehow emerged more buoyant and irrepensible for that fact, wise beyond his years and utterly committed to living in the moment.

In response to his extraordinary popularity, this week, Twitter unveiled its first ever 'Styles' report, harnessing the data to show the former One Directioner's reach.

Since the announcement of Styles's latest album, which dropped on Friday, there have been more than ten million tweets about Styles on Twitter. Styles is the most popular Harry on Twitter, with more tweets about him this decade than either Prince Harry or Harry Potter. His fans call themselves Harries – and yes, I am a bit of a Harrie, because I love everything Styles is about and represents.

What does Harry Styles do right? Oh, let me count the ways. I adore how Styles, 28, uses his clothing – cardigan chic, pearls and platform shoes – to signal, perhaps more vibrantly than anyone since Bowie, a playfulness around gender and identity.

In a time when more and more people are questioning gender constructs, Styles bounces effervescently though whatever fashion trope he's feeling on the day. He happily carries a purse with him – yes, a purse. And he'll do that wherever he is – whether on the cover of *Vogue* or heading to the beach in Los Angeles.

The whole world might be looking at him, but Harry has the same free-wheeling energy you did when you were 14 and going to your first teen disco and experimenting with purple eye-liner, hot pants and a bolero jacket, just because it's fun, and why not?

It's true that you might wake up in 2022 after a night on the tiles with Styles to find out he'd taken your cashmere cardigan, but you'd forgive him because later that evening he would entertain your mates with a rendition of Lizzo's *Truth Hurts* or Fleetwood Mac's *Dreams* or whatever was floating his boat at the time.

Harry is the guy who would always be nice to your mum

– and to your granny. If someone in your extended family passed away, Harry would be there with you in the kitchen after the funeral, talking to your relatives and sharing a pot of tea and the neighbours' sandwiches, while finding out about the tunes they listened to in the 1970s, and if they still had their corduroy bell bottoms in a wardrobe somewhere.

Admittedly, his charisma – off the charts – might overwhelm the gathering, but everyone would be fine with it because look it, it was Harry, and it wound up being a surprisingly beautiful night.

If Styles were your boyfriend, you can guarantee there'd be no nonsense about you ever feeling let down because you were older than him. Styles, 28, is currently in a relationship with Olivia Wilde, the director, who is a decade older, and – while he's not one to go on about his relationships (of course not: too respectful) – the loved-up

pictures of the couple tell their own story, and help dispel the tired old Hollywood trope that says only older men get to date younger women. Sample lines from the deeply melodic new album, which reveal a little Harry vulnerability? "I just think you're cool/I dig your cinema./Do you think I'm cool too? Or am I too into you?"

There's also his worship of his musical forebears. If you want a musical treat, watch him perform *Sledgehammer*, the Peter Gabriel classic, on YouTube. Styles has also gushed about his love for Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac. One of his most tweeted-about performances was a duet with her in 2019, performing *Landslide*. It's also nice to see how well he gets on with his exes – he did a food-eating contest with his ex Kendell Jenner on a chat show a while back, and the pair looked ridiculously relaxed together.

Taylor Swift, meanwhile, who dated Styles, called one of her songs *Style*, in apparent reference to him, and it's one of her best tracks, without a hint of spite about it ("We never go out of style," she sings, to a synth 80s backdrop).

How, after all, could you hate Harry even if you guys broke up? He's got a similar vibe to a young Paul McCartney of the Beatles. He's having fun – but he's doing it on his terms. Yes, you might argue this is simple stuff. But the thing is, in today's troll-filled world, it's not. The man literally released a song about being nice to people, which in the context of Twitter, is a revolutionary concept.

"Treat people with kindness!" Harry sings and like most people who've had the experience of being trolled on the platform, I find myself nodding and agreeing.

In the music industry, there's a famous line roadies use when rising stars are assholes to them: "See you on the way down." You can't imagine anyone needing to wheel that out with Harry Styles. The world is a better place with pop stars like him around. ■



Harry Styles: The world is a better place with pop stars like him around

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**Harry's House** the third solo record from Harry Styles (*above*), Harry's House, was released on Friday to great acclaim. Check out his performance with Shania Twain at Coachella this year for the perfect weekend pick-me-up

**Great Irish soundtracks** the best thing about Conversations With Friends? The soundtrack. Featuring a host of Irish artists like CMAT, Pillow Queens, Wyvern Lingo and Soda Blonde, it's a true who's-who of great Irish tunes

**Skates on** at the first sign of sunshine, parks across the country fill with rollerskaters of all ages and levels. Want to shake up your exercise routine for the summer? Get your skates on and join a local group

**The King of Cannes** Baz Luhrmann's latest flick looks to be the talk of the town at the annual Cannes film festival. Starring Austin Butler, Elvis spans over 20 years of the King's life and career and will be released in theatres from June 22

**Podcasting** it's attracting more new listeners than ever, according to new research. Over 50 per cent of daily podcast listeners began listening in the last two years, says Nielsen's Podcasting Today Report, with the number of listeners in the States having grown by 40 per cent in the past three years

## Culture Counter

**Dodgy accounts** why are Turkish Twitter bots retweeting government ministers' pro-National Maternity Hospital tweets? Who knows, but it isn't a good look for those in authority positions. Sharp-eyed Twitter users have been quick to post memes...

**Baggy trousers** yes, yes, we know they're in vogue, but they also look ridiculous flapping in the summer wind. Half the cast of Stranger Things wore them to the premiere of season 4 recently, and very few made them look more than passable



**Glee reboot** the all-singing all-dancing mid-aughts show is set for a reboot, with James Corden (*below*) cast in the role of Will Schuester. Frankly, the prospect terrifies us



# Kathleen MacMahon

We all need our own personal copy editor to point out when we are wrong, delusional or even deceitful



@KathleenMacM

**T**here's nothing like a copy edit to make you feel like a complete idiot. I've spent the last few weeks cleaning up my new novel with the help of an editor hired by my publishers to save me from myself. This person of infinite patience worked her way through my book line by line, inserting missing commas and removing superfluous ones, pointing out where the past perfect should be used instead of the past simple and where I've inadvertently repeated words, which is pretty much everywhere. She also identified numerous instances where I'd written something that's just plain wrong.

One thing you learn from a copy editor is the importance of paying attention to the literal meaning of language. Writers of fiction are all fur coats and no knickers – we're in love with our own linguistic swagger. We consider ourselves skilled at arranging words into beautiful sentences, but we don't always pay enough attention to what they actually mean. Here's an example from my novel: "She had surprised herself by telling him this, the way a magician surprises himself by pulling a rope of knotted handkerchiefs from his mouth."

My copy editor pointed out that the magician is not actually surprised by the rope of knotted handkerchiefs he pulls from his mouth, because he knew they were there all along. I was forced to admit she was right. I was fond of the flourish, but it was undermining my work, so it had to go.

This practice is known in the publishing trade as killing your darlings. It's a painful but necessary part of the process of preparing a novel for publication and one that's all too often overlooked in public discourse.

We live in the age of the showman, so it should be no surprise that the world abounds with con artists who are constantly pulling ropes of knotted handkerchiefs from their mouths and pretending to be surprised. There are vast swathes of the internet devoted to cataloguing Donald Trump's many preposterous statements – there's even a Little Book of Trumpisms. But even in this era of blustering, bombastic leaders, there's nobody who compares to Boris Johnson for talking up his darlings instead of killing them off.

"I really don't see how the Ukrainians can easily sit down and come to some kind of accommodation (with Russia)," he recently

told reporters on a plane bound for India. "How can you negotiate with a crocodile when it's got your leg in its jaws?"

This was a typically Johnsonian bout of word juggling. The problem is that it doesn't hold true – every war ends in a negotiated peace. Volodymyr Zelensky, the Ukrainian president, has repeatedly said he's open to negotiation, even while the crocodile has his leg in its jaws. Johnson's words are no more than colourful nonsense, which would be fine if he were a court jester, but he's not. He's the prime minister of a major European nation and someone with the potential to influence the course of history, not least on this island.

This is the man who several years ago shrugged off the potential for problems with the Irish border as a result of Brexit by comparing it to the line between Islington and Camden. "Wait," I hear my copy editor say, "is that quite correct?" "Too late," I say. "It's already out there." The scripted opinions of politicians are turned around in a matter of hours. Their off-the-cuff remarks don't even get within a whiff of an editor's nose. The more colourful the language, the further it flies on social media. Snappy soundbites are widely shared, whether they're accurate or not. The long-form analysis and fact-checking that inevitably follows is read by relatively few.

That's the problem with the truth – it can be a bit boring. I remember learning this lesson early and hard when, as a member of my school debating team, I was forced to argue the case for homework against a raucous team of boys arguing against it. You can imagine how that went.

Hillary Clinton faced the same difficulty running for election against Donald Trump – she was trading in plain old sanity and decency while he was selling a colourful brew of poison and lies.

The same problem applies to EU membership – the benefits of it are so sensible they can come across as a bit dull. The finer detail of the Northern Ireland protocol is hard work to read, let alone debate, so it's easy pickings for a joker with a penchant for playing word games, regardless of the truth.

Everybody enjoys a pretty display of words, but if the words don't tell the truth and advance the narrative, they can corrupt the page, just as nonsensical statements dressed up in colourful speech corrupt the body politic. Sorry, darlings, but there's no place for you in my world. ■



One thing you learn from a copy editor is the importance of paying attention to the literal meaning of language

### KATHLEEN IS...

**Going to see:** An Cailín Ciúin, the feature film based on Claire Keegan's novella, Foster.

**Reading:** This year's Women's Prize shortlist, ahead of the announcement of the winner on June 15

**Watching:** The Great British Sewing Bee on the BBC – the skills!

# This week you will love...

Compiled by  
Mary Cate Smith



## PRETTY PATIO SETS

For anyone who wants to invest in some affordable garden furniture, the Stockholm two-seater lounge set, €350 from **Next**, is an excellent choice. Ideal for smaller spaces, this bistro set is a practical way to create an al fresco dining area. See next.ie.



## Luxury silk scarves

Pastoral scenes in vivid colours populate My Granny's Garden, **Georgina O'Hanlon's** inaugural collection of silk scarves named after a family matriarch. The Darling Peach Josephine, €130, from O'Hanlon's eponymous label is made using eco-friendly printing and dyeing methods and produced in small, exclusive runs. Order at [georginaohanlonillustration.com](http://georginaohanlonillustration.com).

## A SUMMER SOIRÉE

One of Dublin 8's most storied buildings, Richmond Barracks, is hosting a sustainable summer fair on May 28/29. Part of the Dublin City Council initiative **Culture Connects**, this two-day event will showcase local makers selling upcycled clothes, repurposed accessories and eclectic bric-a-brac. In addition to the markets, there will be eco-crafting workshops in activities such as knitting, biodiversity and collage-making for children. To view the full programme, visit [richmond Barracks.ie](http://richmond Barracks.ie).



## Meaningful marriage material

**Brides Do Good**, a London-based charity, sells a diverse selection of pre-loved bridalwear and custom collections at heavily discounted prices. One-third of the profits goes towards supporting women and girls who have been forced into unwanted marriages. Currently a pop-up shop at Kildare Village from now until June 26, its stock includes names such as Jenny Packham, Pronovias and Temperley London in sizes 6-16. Visits by appointment only.



## Bags of style

Match your baby-changing bag to your pram or stroller with one of **Bow & Rattle's** stylish totes, holdalls or backpacks, all designed with the needs of a new parent in mind. The Jenny TWIN backpack, €170, has seven sizeable pockets, is made from wipe-clean material and comes with a foldable changing mat. Shop at [bowandrattle.com](http://bowandrattle.com).

## POETRY IN MOTION

**Pillars of a City** is part of the International Literature Festival Dublin, celebrating Thomas Kinsella (right) and Eavan Boland's poetry through archival recordings, music and performances by acting greats such as Stephen Rea and Jane Brennan. It takes place at Merrion Square Park on May 29 and tickets are on sale via [ilfdublin.com](http://ilfdublin.com).





## Suiting up

While Covid put a temporary hiatus on trouser-wearing, we're relaxing our way back into office attire with **Pangaia's** new tailoring capsule. This peppermint oil-infused gender-neutral suit is replete with a digital passport that allows you to trace the garments' life cycle. Made entirely from sustainable and regenerated materials, the Sakura blazer, €315, and trousers, €165, will form part of your business-casual everyday attire without compromising on comfort, ethics or aesthetics. See [pangaia.com](https://pangaia.com).

## NATURAL LIGHTING

**Eilís Galbraith's** hand-drawn homeware accessories tastefully bring a natural world aesthetic into indoor spaces. The playful Wilderness in Bloom floor lamp, €150, illustrated with bees, butterflies and foliage, transports you to an idyll where winding country lanes and wildflowers reign. Available at [giftedfromireland.com](https://giftedfromireland.com).



## Staying dry

The **Aimee beach towel**, €38, is made from a cotton/velour mix, so it's fluffy enough to double up as a headrest or picnic blanket. It's also suitable for anyone with sensitive skin, being free of the toxins, irritants and chemicals that usually appear in garments of this nature. Available at [anthropologie.com](https://anthropologie.com).

# #Trending

### SELLING SUNSET

Fake tan veterans will know that applying lotion designed for your body on your face instead can result in blotchy coverage and potential breakouts. Experts recommend using a targeted facial tanner that harnesses active skincare ingredients while adding a layer of colour. **Bare by Vogue's** new Face Tanning Serum, €29 for 30ml, comes in three different shades and contains hyaluronic acid to specifically target any dehydrated patches. Available at [barebyvogue.com](https://barebyvogue.com).



### BRIGHT YOUNG THING

Dull, lacklustre skin will benefit from a vitamin C product. **The Body Shop's** new range has a high concentration of the active ingredient that reduces pigmentation and brightens the complexion. The new Vitamin C Overnight Glow Revealing Mask, €35 for 100ml, works while you sleep so you wake up with a sheen to your skin. If you've never used vitamin C products before, the slight tingling you may feel is completely normal. Available at [thebodyshop.com](https://thebodyshop.com).



### MAKING WAVES

Think of any hairstyle and it's achievable with the new Spectrum 3-in-1 Waver from **Voduz**, €149. This professional-quality hair tool comes with an inbuilt adjustable thermostat that goes from 80 to 230 degrees Celsius, so you can use it to tong almost all human hair wigs or extensions, even some heat-resistant synthetic ones. The ceramic barrels come in detachable parts and different sizes, resulting in a smooth, frizz-free curl or wave. Available at [voduzhair.com](https://voduzhair.com) and stockists nationwide.



## AN OPEN-AIR MUSEUM

This summer, the **Irish Museum of Modern Art**, Imma, is bringing a series of events outdoors for widespread consumption. Sound installations, murals, workshops, dancing, readings and live music will fill the 18th-century garden and its surrounding spaces. One event we're really looking forward to is an evening of jazz and folk from Ukrainian singer/pianist Olesya Zdorovetska and saxophonist Nick Roth on May 26 as part of the Imma Nights programme. See [imma.ie](https://imma.ie).

# *‘I didn’t discover trad until I was 20, and when the ballad boom started I was into soul music and rhythm and blues. Pop, folk, rock, I was all of it, and I’m still all of it’*

Paul Brady may have turned three quarters of a century this week, but with his new album *Maybe So* out, gigs booked and an autobiography to come in September, he’s showing no signs of slowing down

Interview: **Nadine O’Regan**

**P**aul Brady is experiencing something of a purple patch creatively at the moment. Not only does he have a new album out, the enjoyably absorbing *Maybe So*, but he’s also, as he describes it, “in the death throes” of completing his autobiography, which is due out in September. And that’s not even counting the live gigs, in Ireland and abroad. For a man who this week turned 75, it’s a prolific work rate – but for Brady, it’s all part of the process, and a necessary way for him to live.

“I mostly do stuff like that to try to explain myself to myself,” he says, speaking of the book, as he perches on a stool in his recording studio. “I don’t know who I am. So just writing stuff, it tells you who you are a little more. I worked with a freelance editor for a year and a half, just putting it into shape, but it’s my writing, nobody else’s.”

Paul Brady’s history might be relayed in his forthcoming autobiography, but it’s also all around us, on the cream walls of his studio, a comfortable slant-roof space built in the early 1990s that sits adjacent to his home in suburban Dublin and is a haven of Lowden guitars, speakers, keyboards, music stands and everything that goes with making music for a living.

On one wall, there’s a decades-old poster of Andy Irvine and Paul Brady, announcing their gig (for £1) at Liberty Hall in Dublin. There’s a black and white photograph of him playing with Phil Lynott on another wall, and a framed poster of the Lisdoonvarna Folk Festival on another.

One of the most striking images is a framed black and white photograph of Tina Turner on stage with a hirsute Brady back in the 1980s, in Dublin’s RDS. With her signature punk ‘do’, Turner has her head

tilted back and she’s smiling as she roars into the mic. Brady, next to her, is singing as loudly and vibrantly as she is, utterly immersed in the music. “Being on stage with your woman? That was a real high point,” Brady says, smiling, noting that he has a colour version of the picture in the house.

Brady is so unassuming in person – affable and perhaps even a little shy – that it’s easy to forget he’s one of Ireland’s most successful songwriters. While hits like *The Island* remain classics in his own name, Tina Turner, Bonnie Raitt, Santana and Eric Clapton have all covered his tracks over his years, and Bob Dylan counts himself as a fan, having recorded three tracks that Brady first brought to the world: *Arthur McBride*, *Mary and the Soldier*, and *The Lakes of Pontchartrain*.

It’s no surprise that Brady’s music has appealed to such a wide variety of artists. He operates in a hybrid genre, blending roots, pop, trad and classic songwriting: it’s a smorgasbord of influences, which reflects his varied background.

Born into a musical family in Belfast and raised in Strabane in Co Tyrone, Brady began learning the piano at the age of six and later added guitar to his repertoire, with Jerry Lee Lewis and Fats Domino as early heroes. “I got a guitar for my 11th Christmas,” he says. “I wasn’t allowed to bring the guitar to school where I was a boarder. Music wasn’t taken all that seriously by the school, so I didn’t get much encouragement while I was there.”

Still, he persevered and it was quickly apparent that he had talent. When he was 13, the young Brady went with his parents to a hotel in Bundoran. There, on a summer’s evening, he played his guitar for the guests. Recently, Brady received an email about that night, from a woman who had happened to be at the hotel.

“You won’t know me,” she wrote. “But I want to

wish you a very happy 75th birthday. I’m a bit older than you are, and I have a memory I want to share with you. Bundoran. It was 1960. A bunch of us went there from Limerick for a holiday. There was music most evenings in the hotel and I remember a very elegant couple with a golden-haired son. One evening, things were very quiet and the lady told her son to go get your guitar. And you did. What was a boring time became magic because of you. I am a writer. And that night I wrote a short story set in that hotel. That particular time is saved in my memory forever.”

“Isn’t that gorgeous?” Brady says.

He obviously had great ability even as a youngster, I say. He demurs. “Well, I had a very good ear. I taught myself the piano basically and I taught myself the guitar as well.”

Brady’s first band was the Johnstons, a folk group that added him to their line-up in 1967. He recorded seven albums with them between 1967 and 1973, basing himself in the United States. “I was lucky,” Brady says. “Several times I’ve been plucked from obscurity to be thrown into the very top.” In 1974, he returned to Dublin to join the folk outfit Planxty, playing with them until they disbanded in late 1975.

After fruitful collaborations on record with Andy Irvine from Planxty, Brady began releasing his own solo albums in 1981.

What was he like as a musician at that time? “I wasn’t sure what I was. I didn’t discover trad until I was





20, and when the ballad boom started I was into soul music and rhythm and blues, you know? Pop, folk, rock, I was all of it, and I'm still all of it."

To Brady it's all just music. "I never played to trends," he says, laughing. "Somebody once said I never fell out of fashion because I was never in fashion."

Sometimes, he admits, he has felt that his enduring love of pop music has made him something of an oddity in the world of trad. "It was very difficult in the 1980s to marry my influences because you were either one thing or the other. I went through a period where I felt I had to make a certain kind of music because people wouldn't accept me being too pop. That's why the track *The Long Goodbye* hung around me for three years before [being released]. I thought it was too pop."

Brady signed major deals in the 1980s and 1990s, but operated in an unusual space in Ireland, having more in common at times with US recording artists than anyone from Ireland or Britain.

"I struggled through the 1980s and 90s with major record labels," he says. "I was a singer-songwriter in an era of haircuts, Kajagoogoo, Bananarama, Culture Club. I wasn't getting daytime radio because my records didn't sound the way they wanted, so it was a struggle, but it was softened a lot by the fact that my songs were successful."

"My lucky thing was that people started to cut my songs, people who were far better known than me."

Cover artists and supporters such as Eric Clapton,

Paul Brady: 'I was lucky. Several times I've been plucked from obscurity to be thrown into the very top'

FERGAL PHILLIPS

Bob Dylan, Tina Turner and Bonnie Raitt helped secure Brady's international reputation as well as – through royalty cheques – bringing him a financial independence and sturdiness that is rare in the singer-songwriting world. "That's what I like about my situation now," he says. "I can do whatever I want on a record."

**F**or *Maybe So*, Brady found inspiration not so much in lockdown, but in the records he accidentally uncovered during that period. "In the early lockdown where you couldn't move more than two kilometres in the house, we walked around this garden all the time," he says. "I had my iTunes on shuffle, you know. And I've 40,000 tunes in iTunes and I kept being surprised by stuff that I'd totally forgotten I'd done."

One surprise was a track called *The Tower of Gone*, which he had never released. "I fell in love with it again," he says. "As I got back into developing it, I thought I'd send it to Theo Katzman and Lee Pardini. They both loved the feel and between them covered drums, guitars and keyboards. Richard Nelson on pedal steel and my old bandmate Jennifer Maidman on bass finished the stew."

Brady also revamped well-known tracks from older albums – *Love Goes On*, originally from the *Trick or Treat* album and *To Be The One* from *Back to the Centre*. Between old songs in new suits of clothes and fresh material, the result is an album that's both comfort-

ing and likeable, perfect fodder for people gradually emerging from pandemic times.

While it's obvious from his demeanour that he doesn't like to dwell on it, those times hit Brady and his wife Mary hard. Their son lives with his young family in New Zealand, and it's been a long wait to see them in person.

"We haven't seen him in three years," he says. "They're coming back for the month of July. Himself, his wife Danielle, and three children. The last time we were there was in 2019. We came back on January 17, 2020 through Hong Kong, and there was nobody talking about Covid at all. A week later, the shit hit the fan, and New Zealand closed up."

"Facetime is okay, but you can't smell the hair."

When we meet, it's still a week or two before he turns 75: how is Brady feeling about it? "It's not about being 75, it's knowing that you're going to be 80 in five years," he laughs.

In truth, Brady seems to be in good nick. My favourite track on his new album is a song called *The Shape That I'm In*, which has strident guitar lines and chirpy lyrics that run: "Though I may not be great/I'm in pretty good shape/For the shape that I'm in."

Brady smiles. "It's a little self-pat on the back for having managed to survive the many pitfalls I've stumbled into over the years." He's looking well on it. ■

*Maybe So* is on release now

# LAYING



Coverstory

# DOWN THE LAW

A recent survey revealed that about 20 per cent of young lawyers were considering leaving the legal profession. **Catherine Sanz** investigates the reasons why and looks at the alternative careers that some ex-lawyers have gone on to pursue

**A**t 2am on a morning in April 1998, Dede Gold rang her dad in Waterford from her desk at a corporate law firm in London.

Gold, who had worked at the firm for two years, was coming off a six-week stretch of long days and her third late night in a row when she said into the phone: "Dad, I can't do this anymore."

While Gold loved the buzz of working in London and alongside talented colleagues, she often felt like a "cog in the wheel" which led to a sense of being unfulfilled and exhausted.

After a pep talk in which her dad told her that he didn't raise his daughter to be sitting in an office when she "should be out dancing", Gold went home, came back the next day, and handed in her notice.

"I was tired of cold pizza at my desk," she told the *Business Post*, reflecting on the night that changed the course of her career forever.

"It was a classic case of not knowing oneself early on . . . Cognitively I convinced myself it was a 'brilliant job', but intuitively I knew it just wasn't me."

Gold left the firm, worked in PR for a while before getting married, taking time off, and discovering her love of painting.

When her marriage eventually ended in 2005, Gold honed her painting skills in artist studios and developed a talent for portraits of what would become her favourite subject: dogs.

She now has painted dogs belonging to a long list of well-known clients, including the Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton and Julie Andrews. She has also held three solo exhibitions of her work and featured in art shows in London and New York.

Her path from the high-stress world of corporate law to a creative job is not the most well-worn one, but it is a route that a number of ex-lawyers interviewed by the *Business Post* have taken.

They all cite a high-pressure work culture as a reason for making the change, but many also note how they chose to study law as teenagers and felt like different people by the time their careers began.

While the so-called Great Resignation, or people quitting their jobs in large numbers, has been connected to a post-pandemic feeling of endless opportunity, many ex-lawyers said the specific demands of corporate law jobs helped spur their exodus.

Is the Irish legal profession in for a reckoning in order to retain talent, or are radical job changes par for the course in the corporate world? ►

Dede Gold, who left a career in corporate law to become a painter; pet dogs are her speciality subject  
DANIEL LYNCH

The term “ex-lawyer” is one which may soon become more common if job-market indications come to pass.

According to a recent survey of 3,000 young lawyers by the International Bar Association, a global membership body, around 20 per cent were considering leaving the profession entirely in the next five years. A third said they wanted to switch to a different area of the legal sector, the report also found.

Lawyers surveyed cited a lack of a work/life balance, barriers to career progression, and the problems of toxic workplace cultures as their main reasons for wanting a change.

For those currently working in the profession, it’s unsurprising that a client-focused service industry is demanding.

Michelle Ní Longáin, a partner in ByrneWallace and president of the Law Society of Ireland, spoke about the issue last year on Law on Trial, the Business Post’s legal affairs podcast.

She said there were many features inherent in the solicitor profession which made it a challenge to provide a good work life balance.

“[Some] clients usually want advice on the Friday afternoon of a bank holiday and it’s usually urgent,” Ní Longáin said.

“That’s a challenge, but that’s what the clients are demanding . . . so that’s not necessarily firms imposing that, that’s clients saying very clearly, that’s when we want you.”

Her comments reflect an increasingly hectic work culture, the stresses of which have been compounded in recent decades by an increasingly globalised world, and one where clients may be on different continents and working in different time zones.

For some former lawyers, these demands influenced the quality of their output and made them feel unmotivated.

Audrey Keogan worked as a corporate lawyer in two large Dublin firms before changing direction completely in 2021. She now works with the Irish National Opera, a charity which aims to make opera more accessible.

Keogan says the unpredictable nature of the corporate work made it difficult to maintain the stamina needed.

“I could do the work, [but] it was the volume of work that I just found a bit much,” Keogan told the Business Post. “When you’re feeling tired and burnt out, it’s very difficult to motivate yourself and for somebody like me who didn’t find it fulfilling, I just couldn’t find the motivation.”

Keogan says her decision to leave came after months of consideration and reading about other ex-lawyers who had also made the leap. Despite feeling confident in her decision, she says she was extremely nervous to hand in her notice because of how it would be perceived by her colleagues.

“What was interesting was that the more senior the person, the more they were like, ‘That’s a great decision’. I think they’ve seen people who want to leave but don’t, and I think it spoke volumes to hear that coming from people who have dedicated their whole lives to this sector,” she says.

“I was so nervous doing it, but actually completely relieved when I did it. I had the sense of calm that was like, ‘Oh, this is 100 per cent the right thing to do,’” she added.

Keogan also says her departure had a “ripple effect” and she has been contacted by many people in the industry looking for details on how she made her decision.

“It is funny how you probably don’t know the impact you’re having,” she says. “As soon as you start saying, ‘Oh, I did this thing. I actually changed careers’, people are very interested. Covid has made people

Audrey Keogan, development assistant at the Irish National Opera  
FERGAL PHILLIPS



rethink things.”

In the wake of the pandemic, law firms, along with many corporate companies, have implemented a number of measures to accommodate an improved work/life balance for employees.

Central to these measures is a hybrid working model where employees have more flexibility on the number of days they spend in the office, but some companies have also provided “wellness” benefits such as mindfulness and stress management workshops.

Some former corporate lawyers have turned a passion for mindfulness and yoga into full-time careers, and often frequent corporate firms to help employees find ways to rest.

Barry Lee worked for a decade in various small corporate firms in Ireland before starting Mindfulness for Law, a company which provides a range of workshops and in-office courses to law firms.

He described his journey away from law as “subtle”, saying it wasn’t a straight road to burnout, but rather a slow process. He compared it to a pot of water on a hob where “the pot is too full and the heat is turned up too high for too long”.

“It’s all bubbling away and then it’s a moment of everything just bubbles over,” he says. “It can creep up on you.”

Lee says he was introduced to mindfulness, started training and eventually teaching part-time before he took a sabbatical for a year followed by a “leap of faith” in making the professional switch.

He says the financial risks that come with leaving a well-paid corporate law job were daunting.

“I didn’t know if it would work out,” Lee says.

“I’m really glad I did take the risk, and it seemed like a bigger risk actually, in hindsight. I think there’s all kinds of things that are possible, and maybe a fear of failure is ingrained in a lot of people. It was in me.”

While he is a big advocate for believing in yourself and your abilities in the face of fear, Lee says he also thinks people considering leaving the legal profession should not be rash.

He says a career coach or therapist can help people with doubts about their career to tease out what kind of changes or tweaks can be made ahead of quitting.

In his new role, Lee often visits corporate law firms to conduct mindfulness workshops and regularly interacts with practising lawyers.

While many law firms now encourage employees to look after themselves physically and mentally, Lee says he takes issue with those who used it as a tool to get people to work harder.

He says there needed to be a recognition that people need rest in order to perform well and be happy.

“If you’re taking a person’s lunch break away so that they can do mindfulness, or if they’re forced to do it, I don’t agree with that,” he says. “For me, I was drawn to it, and it helped me, but it’s not the only show in town.”

Barry Lee, founder of Mindfulness for Law, which provides workshops and in-office courses to law firms  
FERGAL PHILLIPS



as a corporate associate after years of successful studying and a good salary, and now I'm down to no salary and handing out flyers. When I think of that, Jesus... but I'm so glad I did it," Shannon says.

While her journey towards yoga teaching happened quite suddenly, Shannon says it was connected to a "lightbulb moment" she had on holiday in India the Christmas before she handed in her notice.

She says she was sitting on the floor taking notes on yoga and meditation books she had been reading, when a woman expressed surprise at her studiousness and asked what she did for a living.

"I says, 'I'm a corporate lawyer', and the woman just looked at me," Shannon says, noting that in that moment she knew "the jig was up".

"I felt like a clown in a suit, it just didn't match. Obviously I've had to say the words 'corporate lawyer' out loud a lot in my career, but in that setting, surrounded by things I felt interested in, saying it there felt weird."

Despite the different paths they decided to take, all the ex-corporate lawyers interviewed for this piece credited their study of law and their experience working in the sector with giving them the confidence they needed to know when to leave.

For Dede Gold, her law background also gave her the courage to handle challenging moments in life, including her dramatic career change and her divorce, which she says would have otherwise felt daunting.

She says having a legal background is something she cherishes but she is grateful that she left when she did.

"It was a gift, even though I left in the night from that desk in London," she says. "I knew I could look after myself and even if you don't stay on that path, law gives you great confidence to know you can handle things in life." ■

## The law by numbers

# 20%

**are considering leaving the profession entirely in the next five years, according to one survey\***

# 33%

**want to switch to a different area of the legal sector, according to the same survey**

# 60%

**say a lack of work-life balance is a concern for them**

*\* This survey, published in January 2022, was conducted by the International Bar Association, a global membership body, and surveyed 3,000 lawyers under the age of 40*

**T**he importance of taking time to consider all available options before making a career change is also expressed by Brendan Kelly, a professor of psychiatry at Trinity College Dublin and a consultant psychiatrist.

Kelly says he often has stressed out lawyers as patients who are dealing with "cognitive constriction", or having "tunnel vision" and being unable to see the available options. He says those people often need a reset which can be achieved by taking a significant break and spending time with people who are not lawyers.

"There is a tribalism in most professions, including law, which is unhelpful," Kelly says.

"We think our way into traps and we believe we're in those traps, but usually we're not as trapped as we feel," he added.

Kelly says corporate lawyers are particularly vulnerable to burnout for a number of reasons, including an industry built around "billable hours", or time that you can invoice a client for. He says this is very problematic on a personal level because it produces "relaxation remorse".

"It means that when you do relax, there is a part of your brain that says, 'this is an hour I could have billed for'," he says.

"People are then less likely to take relaxation time and when they do there is a chance they will have remorse for having done so. When we start to assign monetary value on time, that is a real problem in the world of corporate law."

Kelly also says that corporate law firms often reward people for being busy, with late nights and early mornings described as a "badge of honour" among staff. He says people in those situations need to regulate their time and energy to avoid being taken advantage of.

"Lawyers are hugely intelligent and hugely focused on achievement, that's often why they became lawyers, but the corporate structures ruthlessly exploit these traits almost unknowingly," Kelly adds.

**W**hile many lawyers who leave the profession have a clear idea of what they're going to do next, others just knew that they wanted out of corporate law.

This was the case for Sarah Shannon, who runs Wild & Free, a yoga retreat company in the Algarve in Portugal.

Prior to starting up the business during the pandemic, Shannon worked as a corporate lawyer for over six years before quitting in July 2018.

"When I left I had no idea what I was going to do," Shannon says. "I just left."

After a yoga teacher training course abroad and a walk along the Camino in Spain, she was offered the chance by a friend to teach yoga at a café in Rathmines, where she set up her own yoga company and hustled to advertise the business.

"I made flyers and walked around Rathmines putting them under doors," she says.

"It was such a surreal thing to do because one moment I'm working



Sarah Shannon, who runs Wild & Free, a yoga retreat company in the Algarve in Portugal

# When I got married, someone repeated to me a phrase I'd never heard before: 'What happens in a marriage stays in a marriage.' Really?

A new memoir by **Cristín Leach** offers a raw and compelling account of the Irish writer and art critic's life, taking in the disintegration of her marriage and the possibilities of art as a salve and means of creative escape. In this extract, she writes of what happens when the personal becomes public.

**P**eople say strange things to you when your marriage ends. Lots of them want to tell you how theirs nearly did too, but not actually tell you because if anyone knows, then it's over. That's the first rule of a marriage in crisis, apparently. Don't talk.

At the school gate one of the mums comes up to me, six months later. I only just heard, she says. I only heard at the lunch in the hotel after the communion. I just wanted to say, and not not say it, you know. I did know. I was glad really that she had. I didn't know at the church, she said. I had no idea. But then at lunch they said did you hear and I said no. No, I said. No way. I waited. Sunglasses on.

Anyway I wanted straight away to drive up to you, she said. I have this bottle of Champagne in the fridge and I wanted to drive up to you some evening and we'd drink it. I don't know what we'd be celebrating, but I thought of you and I thought I'll drive up to her with that Champagne. I said yes, do.

Although she never did. And I'm not surprised. I was like a woman with barriers up. I was not at the Champagne-drinking stage. And she started to talk about marriage. Cooking a steak and leaving it in the kitchen, eating pasta alone on the bed. The things that go on behind closed doors. Marriage, I said. You just never know.

**W**hen nobody knows your marriage is broken, peripheral people tell you you look amazing. They compliment you on your sudden weight-loss and mistake dark glasses for glamour. Afterwards, when they know, the same voices tell you you're looking very skinny, and seek out your eyes for signs of tears. The secret is to fix it or end it before it goes too far. To end it or fix it before the weight loss gets out of control, before people start saying to each other, "Is she eating properly, I wonder?" No one says, "Are you eating properly?"

directly to you. The people who know you better, who are slightly worried about you, but not sure whether to trust their instincts, because you're hiding it so well, don't know what to say, so they say nothing. You find out later that these are the people who love you.

For two years, I weigh myself every day. I am not hungry, so I am observing the fall in my weight with a kind of distanced curiosity, but it is also pleasing. I go on dates and I know I am sexy because I am thin. We have separated, but we take one last family holiday. This is a mistake, but I lie in a bikini and know that I am sexy even though my husband does not want me, because I am thin.

But there is something else too, something more powerful than that thin message about worth and value which really comes from outside. Inside, I am trying to disappear. I know the smaller I am the less space I will take up. The less of me there is to feel pain. The less visible I will be. I am sick of the size and volume of the feelings inside myself. I am trying to shrink them, trying to shut them down. They are too much. What I want is to slowly cease to exist.

It is so very odd and so very ordinary for me to have looked for role models. It is so very surprising how my perception of these women and how they apparently fixed their marriages has changed, now that I have not fixed mine. Posh and Becks,





Cristin Leach:  
‘When nobody knows your marriage is broken, people tell you you look amazing. They compliment you on your sudden weight-loss and mistake dark glasses for glamour’  
CONOR HORGAN

I said to myself, their relationship survived infidelity. They made it work. They had more kids.

But in waiting rooms, I look at paparazzi shots of Victoria in old magazines trying to cheer myself up and I remember that she never smiles in public. Does she laugh in private? I turn a page to find a story about how she is removing her tattoo, slowly lasering one inch at a time, in a vertical line up the top of her spine: I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine, it says in Chinese lettering, apparently. The magazine speculates with gleeful dread about a rift.

Nobody knows what goes on in a marriage except the two people in it. Various people repeat this to me now that they know. It occurs to me that if someone else does know what exactly is going on in a marriage then the marriage is probably in trouble. Because the one thing I knew was that the fewer people who knew about what had gone wrong, the easier it would be to stay if it turned out we could fix it.

I am looking for role models, for women who can show me how it was done, how they held their families together. I am realising I don’t know any women like this because no one talks about this, no one tells anyone about this, about staying in a marriage that is broken. Family is something worth saving, but there is also a time to walk away.

I can feel the weight of the mistakes of past generations pressing on me, in a wordless, inexplicable way. I can feel layers of people in my past, with stories of their own.

When your marriage is suddenly shattered, you need four things and each of them is a friend: one who will offer you a bed and a key to her house saying arrive any time, any day, any night, and call it home; one who will cry with you at the kitchen table and hold your hand at the shock of it all; one who will deliver homemade soul food when you are alone and not eating; and one who will take you shopping for the biggest pair of sunglasses you’ve ever owned.

You’re going to need them at the school gate, even in November. “Nice sunglasses,” they will say. “Thanks,” I will nod, not taking them off. I will wait until the last minute to exit the car and look for the kids, bundle them into their seats. I used to have casual friends at the school gate, but there is no room in me now for flippant friendliness. If it wasn’t for the

school run, there are many days I might not get out of bed.

“At least you’re not Cheryl Cole!” laughs a friend. You need friends to make you laugh too. Poor Cheryl. She got very skinny. Cole isn’t even her name. It’s her second last married name. We talk about women and marriage and surnames, and changing them back. Hey, there’s Beyoncé. She’s got a surname, but she hardly needs it. She also made the odd move to reaffirm her husband’s status by calling her post-marriage concert series the Mrs Carter tour. That tells you a lot about male insecurity and female pandering. But did you know, Beyoncé is a surname. It’s her mum’s surname.

**I** think I’m only looking around at celebrity stories as a distraction from my pain, but it’s also because no one in Ireland talks about infidelity unless it’s a public story and that only happens with celebrities, and mostly they are stories from far away, stories that are far removed from our lives. Marriage in Ireland is so sacrosanct, what happens inside it so secret, no one else’s business.

When I first got married, someone repeated to me a phrase I’d never heard before. She said her mum told her on her wedding day, “What happens in a marriage stays in a marriage.” Really?

Celebrity stories are safe because, in Ireland, divorces are failures that happen to other people. And not least because of the insatiable, ingrained misogyny the Irish state was founded on. The woman is meant to hold it together, regardless. The woman is meant to make herself better, to change her shape to keep him. The woman is meant to keep the marriage afloat.

My experience has coloured my perception of all relationships. Everywhere I look I see what feels like a power play, everywhere I look, every relationship, every marriage, feels fake. And then Beyoncé releases her Lemonade album in 2016 and I don’t admire her for sticking with her cheating man, but I do admire the way in which she makes a statement that the best bid for survival is to create, to be loud, to express pain, to look to your ancestors and the wisdom of women who came before, because they’ve been there too. ■

*Negative Space* by Cristin Leach is out now, published by Merrion Press



**Inside, I am trying to disappear. I know the smaller I am the less space I will take up. The less of me there is to feel pain**

# A summer in Bloom

Bloom 2022 will take place in the Phoenix Park from June 1-6. Here, chef **Rory O'Connell** shares a selection of his favourite recipes for summer, as a taster for his demonstration at the festival



## Chilled cucumber and grape soup with elderflower, pomegranate and mint

This is a light and refreshing chilled soup full of delicious flavours and textures. It looks really pretty with the final garnish of pomegranate, radishes and flower petals. I leave the skin on the cucumber, as I like the flavour and I use an old-fashioned coarse grater to achieve a somewhat robust texture.

### Ingredients, serves 6

**350g (12oz) cucumber unpeeled and coarsely grated**  
**150g (5oz) seedless grapes sliced or seeded grapes halved and seeds removed**

**250ml (9fl oz) natural yogurt**  
**100ml (3 1/2fl oz) apple juice**  
**2-3 tablespoons elderflower cordial**  
**Pinch of Maldon salt**  
**Black pepper**  
**2 tablespoons finely chopped mint**  
**6 tablespoons pomegranate seeds**  
**6 radishes thinly sliced**  
**Flower petals such as rose, marigold, viola or chive**

### Method

1. Mix the cucumber, grapes,



yogurt, apple juice, elderflower cordial, mint and salt and black pepper together. Taste and correct seasoning.

Chill for one hour.  
 2. To serve, divide the soup between bowls and garnish each serving with a generous

sprinkling of pomegranate seeds, sliced radishes and flower petals if using.  
 3. Serve immediately.

## Mayonnaise

Mayonnaise is what we call a 'mother sauce' in culinary jargon. In fact it is the 'mother' of all the cold emulsion sauces, so once you can make a mayonnaise you can make any of the daughter sauces by just adding some extra ingredients.

I know it is very tempting to reach for the jar of 'well-known brand', but most people don't seem to be aware that mayonnaise can be made even with a hand whisk, in under five minutes, and if you use a food processor the technique is still the same, but it is made in just a couple of minutes.

The great secret is to have all your ingredients at room temperature and to drip the oil very slowly into the egg yolks at the beginning.

The quality of your mayonnaise will depend totally on the quality of your egg yolks, oil and vinegar and it's perfectly



possible to make a bland mayonnaise if you use poor quality ingredients.

### Ingredients

**2 egg yolks, preferably free range**  
**1/4 teaspoon salt**  
**Pinch of English mustard or 1/4**

**teaspoon French mustard**  
**1 dessertspoon white wine vinegar**  
**225ml (8fl oz) oil (sunflower or olive oil or a mixture) - we use**  
**175ml (6fl oz) sunflower oil and 50ml (2fl oz) olive oil, alternatively use 7/1**

### Method

1. Put the egg yolks into a bowl with the mustard, salt and the white wine vinegar (keep the whites to make meringues). Put the oil into a measure. Take a whisk in one hand and the oil in the other and drip the oil onto

the egg yolks, drop by drop whisking at the same time.  
 2. Within a minute you will notice that the mixture is beginning to thicken. When this happens you can add the oil a little faster, but don't get too cheeky or it will suddenly curdle because the egg yolks can only absorb the oil at a certain pace. Taste and add a little more seasoning and vinegar if necessary.  
 3. If the mayonnaise curdles it will suddenly become quite thin, and if left sitting the oil will start to float to the top of the sauce. If this happens you can quite easily rectify the situation by putting another egg yolk or 1-2 tablespoons of boiling water into a clean bowl, then whisk in the curdled mayonnaise, a half teaspoon at a time until it emulsifies again.  
 4. Serve with cold cooked meats, fowl, fish, eggs and vegetables.

## Smoked mackerel 'tonnato' with heritage tomatoes, basil and a hen's egg

The classic tonnato sauce is of course made with tuna, but here I have used smoked mackerel and I think it is just as good. The sweet vine-ripened summer tomatoes and fragrant basil complement the smoked fish brilliantly.

### Ingredients, serves 6

6 eggs
6 tinned anchovy fillets, chopped
1 tablespoon of capers
6 ripe heritage tomatoes, sliced
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
6 large basil leaves plus extra for garnish
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Pinch of caster sugar
120g (scant 4 1/2oz) smoked mackerel, skin removed
Smoked Mackerel 'tonnato'
150g (5oz) mayonnaise (see recipe)
25g (1oz) smoked mackerel, skin removed
A few drops of lemon juice

### Method

1. Hard-boil the eggs by lowering them into a saucepan of boiling salted water and cooking them

at a boil for exactly 10 minutes. If you don't want the yolk to be completely hard, cook for 9 minutes. Remove from the saucepan immediately and cool under a cold running tap. Remove the shells and cut in halves or quarters.

2. To make the 'tonnato', place the mayonnaise and smoked mackerel in a food processor and blend to a purée. Add enough water to achieve a soft spreadable consistency. Taste and add a few drops of lemon juice to brighten up the flavour.
3. To assemble, spread 1 tablespoon of the 'tonnato' in a wide circle on flat plates. Scatter each circle with 1 teaspoon of capers and an equal portion of chopped anchovy.
4. Place the sliced tomatoes in a single layer on another flat plate and season with salt and pepper. Tear over the basil leaves and dress immediately with the olive oil. Tease the dressing and basil through the tomatoes with your fingers. Taste one piece of tomato - if it is underwhelming, add a pinch of sugar and perhaps a little more salt to lift the flavour.
5. Divide the tomatoes and any oily juices between the plates. Tear the mackerel into pieces and scatter through the tomatoes. Add the halved or quartered eggs to each plate. Garnish each plate with a few more basil leaves and serve.



## Roast aubergines with ricotta, honey, mint, fennel and chilli

This makes a light, delicious and refreshing starter or indeed a lunch or supper dish. All of the elements of this dish can be prepared in advance and assembled later.

### Ingredients, serves 4

1 aubergine (about 300g/10oz) cut crossways into 12 round slices

Roasting Oil
1 teaspoon honey
4 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon roasted and coarsely ground fennel seeds
1 pinch of chilli flakes
salt and pepper

### Dressing

3 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon honey
1 teaspoon of roasted and coarsely ground fennel seeds
1 pinch of chilli flakes
1 tablespoon anchovy, finely chopped
1 tablespoon mint leaves finely chopped
salt and pepper

### To finish

200g (7oz) ricotta
20 fresh mint leaves

### Method

1. Preheat an oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6.
2. Line a baking tray with parchment paper.
3. Mix the ingredients for the roasting oil in a bowl until well combined. The honey may fall to the bottom of the mix, so stir it well. Paint both sides of the aubergine slices with the roasting oil and place on the lined tray. The oil may seem a bit scant, but it will be enough. Roast in the oven for about 30 minutes, until slightly coloured and tender to touch. I usually turn them halfway through the cooking to ensure a good and even colour.
4. Mix all of the dressing ingredients and correct the seasoning.
5. To assemble, divide the aubergine slices between four plates, allowing three per serving, or assemble on one large serving dish to be served family style. Divide the ricotta between the aubergines, placing it neatly on top of each slice and spoon the well-mixed dressing over the cheese. Sprinkle with the fresh mint leaves and serve.

Recipes/photos taken from *Cook Well Eat Well* by Rory O'Connell, published by Gill Books. Photos by Joanne Murphy for Gill Books. Compiled by Nadine O'Regan. For more details about Bord Bia Bloom, see <https://www.bordbiabloom.com/> ■



## Wine ratings

This is the international marking system for wine ratings. The 100-point scale works on a percentile, not a percentage scale, which is based on the US educational grading system.

95-100: exceptional, of world-class quality  
 90-94: very good quality  
 88-89: average but lacks greatness  
 85-87: average to modest  
 80-84: below average  
 70-79: poor  
 Below 70: unacceptable quality

# Prosecco: a sparkling family favourite

Bursting with youth and eliciting enthusiasm, Prosecco has endeared itself to Irish drinkers as a reasonably priced alternative to Champagne



Cathal McBride

If the world of sparkling wines was a family of brother and sisters, then Champagne would be the eldest – complex and interesting. They might well write poetry and go to Trinity College Dublin. Cava is next in line, enthralled by its older sibling but also trying to find its own identity. Then comes Pet Nat, a free spirit full of playful idiosyncrasies and always great fun at a party. Finally we have the youngest, Prosecco. Assured of itself, it is bright and carefree, not beholden to the path lain down by its elders.

Ireland's love affair with Prosecco is partly down to the reasonable cost. There's also a nuanced simplicity to this Italian fizz that underpins its appeal. First and foremost, Prosecco is not Champagne – it should be judged on its own considerable merits.

From the Veneto region in north-east Italy, all Prosecco must use at least 85 per cent of the grape glera. This



Prosecco is not Champagne – it should be judged on its own considerable merits

GETTY

was also called prosecco until 2009, when legal protection was sought for the name of the wine. From then on there has been a separation between the grape and the place that produces it, hence the moniker Prosecco as a protected winemaking region.

Unlike Champagne, the vast majority of Prosecco does not ferment in the bottle. Instead, the second fermentation tends to take place in large tanks and it is chilled upon the appropriate level of bar pressure.

Like Moscato d'Asti, which I wrote about here recently, this results in some residual sugar while retaining the lively freshness synonymous with Prosecco.

There are two styles, spumante and frizzante. They relate to the strength of the bubbles, with the former offering a full effervescence and the latter a gentle fizz. Sweetness levels are, like

Champagne, also categorised. Brut is the driest, followed by extra dry and dry with demi-sec as the sweetest.

Prosecco has both DOC and DOCG varieties. Treviso and Trieste are slightly smaller regions that make the best DOC, while Asolo and Conegliano Valdobbiadene are sub-regions creating what's considered the best-quality Prosecco.

From Treviso, the extra dry San Giuseppe Spumante DOC (available at the Wine Buff, €25.99) has a muted nose of pears plus a nice minerality with pollen and marzipan. Its sugar content after re-fermentation is 17 grams per litre, but the palate is clean and fresh with Gala apples in abundance. If you want something easy-going with a mild, balanced structure and appropriate acidity, this is it.

The Colutta Brut Spumante Prosecco

DOC (available from Wines Direct, €24.75) is in a similar vein. Conference pear aromas are prominent, light and breezy with a modicum of minerality and cashews. The palate presents orchard notes and grapefruit acidity with crisp apple sweetness in a tangy, dry finish.

For the best of frizzante, try the Borgo Antico Nisà DOCG (available from Blackrock Cellar and Clontarf Wines, €17). This has a semblance of minerality spun around a core of acacia honey, almond and pear. The palate is sweet, but has a good balance between acidity, apple and pear fruit plus fizz. A touch of marzipan on the finish adds to its complexity. Try this in a Bellini or Mimosa cocktail.

Nobody likes to be compared with their siblings. Just as we are all individuals, so too are wines – so enjoy Prosecco for what it is. ■

## TO TRY, BUY AND PUT BY

### To try

**Bortolomiol Miel Rosé Prosecco, DOC, Veneto, Italy, 2020 (ABV 11.5 per cent), 91**

Made from 90 per cent glera and 10 per cent pinot nero, this has residual sugars of approximately 8g/l. There are inflections of summer strawberry, cherry and watermelon on the nose, plus an undercurrent of orange blossom and mint. With a persistent foam, the palate is feisty and fresh while delicate berry fruit and a racy pink grapefruit acidity combine to lead into a dry finish. This is a delightful summer aperitif, or serve it with charcuterie, sushi and sashimi.

Available at Mitchell & Son ([mitchellandson.com](http://mitchellandson.com)), €19.95 (reduced from €24.95)



### To buy

**Pale Fox Superiore Prosecco, DOCG, Asolo, Italy, NV (ABV 11 per cent), 92**

Mildly scented but by no means lacking in complexity, this has floral aromas of apple blossom, summer honey and attractive yeast notes. A strong mousse leads into fine bubbles that are strong and persistent. Undergoing a longer than typical 100-day slow fermentation for added complexity, it presents with notes of crisp apple, lively citrus and a compelling pastry finish. Pair this with shellfish, appetisers or grilled vegetables.

Available from O'Briens Off Licence stores nationwide ([obrienswine.ie](http://obrienswine.ie)), €35



### To put by

**Marchiori Rocciamadre Brut, DOCG, Valdobbiadene, Italy, 2020 (ABV 11.5 per cent), 93**

This comes from a blend with 85 per cent glera, the other 15 per cent made up of glera lungo (a spicier version), perera, bianchetta and verdiso. Sweet juicy pears hit the nose in a soft and delicate bouquet with undertones of herbs and honey. Mild creamy bubbles coat the palate, cleansed by crisp apple, rounded by a touch of nougat and refreshed by a grapefruit citrus finish in a refined balance. Dry with sugars of just 6g/l, this is zippy, mineral and exuberantly fresh. Serve it with seafood and light salads.

Available from Wine Spark ([wine.spark.com](http://wine.spark.com)), €18.87 with a monthly subscription (traditional price €30)



Wine

## WATCHING THE PENNIES

Preview menu: €65 per person

Wine pairing: €54 per person

Dinner for two: €238

## BREAKING THE BANK

Tasting menu: €160 per person

Wine pairing: €110 per person

Dinner for two: €540



Liath Restaurant, Blackrock Market: the food will challenge, excite and intrigue you in equal measure

FERGAL PHILLIPS

# Fun flavours turn into plates of pure joy at Blackrock's Liath



Gillian Nelis

@gnelis

**Liath, Blackrock Market,**  
19a Main Street,  
Blackrock, Co Dublin  
01-2123676, [liathrestaurant.com](http://liathrestaurant.com)  
**Chef: Damien Grey**

“**F**artoomuchfun.” The message from a friend, on hearing I’d been to Liath, summed up the experience way better than I suspect I’ll manage here. But since you’re reading this anyway, why not stick around to see how I do?

You’ll probably know by now that this tiny place in Blackrock in south Co Dublin became Ireland’s newest two Michelin-starred restaurant in February, joining Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud in Dublin city centre, and Aimsir in Kildare.

The video of chef Damien Grey and his team getting the award would gladden the heart of an ogre, but it’s nothing compared to the joy triggered by actually eating there.

If Grey ever decides to get out of

the cooking game, I suspect he’d walk into some kind of corporate consultancy job that involved teaching people how to do boundary-pushing work without losing their sense of humour or turning into a raging egomaniac.

His kitchen is a tiny, meticulously organised space where he and his small team produce little plates of joy accompanied by plenty of craic: if you’re expecting a hushed, solemn experience this isn’t the place for you, though the food will challenge, excite and intrigue you in equal measure.

There is richness, in the form of an utterly gorgeous piece of herring wrapped in pork fat, charred on

the hibachi grill, then served with slivers of pickled onion, an onion purée and burnt onion powder. A single carrot becomes a thing of beauty – I could imagine an Alice in Wonderland-esque bride carrying it down the aisle – thanks to a chicken liver crumble, dots of ginger vinegar gel and wild pea tips.

Freshness abounds too, in a palette cleanser of Gariguetto strawberries with a strawberry and black pepper jelly on a bed of glorious mint ice, and a cheese course of frozen Young Buck blue with poached apples, a brioche crumb and burnt butter ice cream. The latter helped Jack Lenards, one of Grey’s team, to win the Euro-Toques Young Chef of

the Year competition in 2018, and it is sensational.

So too is the suckling pig: the saddle, cooked to perfection and featuring the crackling of your dreams; the stuffed morel garnish; the accompanying spinach and three-corner leek purée; and the tiny ribs, glazed and served on a separate plate for your gnawing pleasure.

There was more – much more – but before I run out of space, we need to talk about Mothú, the tribute to the five tastes that rounds things off. There’s a bitter espresso brûlée, a sour lime meringue, a salted caramel with pine, an umami chocolate tart and a sweet pâte de fruits. The stand out? Undoubtedly that little chocolate tart, for the brain-twisting experience of biting into what looks like a dessert, then tasting fresh truffle.

Our bill, including two full tasting menus at €160 per head, came to €430. That menu is served Wednesday to Saturday at 8.30pm, with a ‘preview menu experience’ on offer at 5.30pm for €65 a head. Saturday lunch is €100 a head, and there’s a range of wine pairing options, as well as a quirky and innovative non-alcoholic drinks pairing devised by sommelier Niall O’Connor.

We went home giddy, and not from the wine – it was a school night – but at the thought of what Grey and his crew might do next. “We’ve got the rest of this year’s menus nailed down,” he tells us as we leave. “And next year we’ll go gangbusters.”

You wouldn’t bet against him. ■



## The wine list

In a symbiosis with the seasonally focused food menu at Liath, the wine list is an ever evolving joy, showcasing both heavy hitters and some less familiar treasures. With an emphasis on terroir and individual winemaking style, Niall O’Connor, the restaurant’s general manager and wine list custodian, has a clear preference for textured white wines and lighter styles of reds.

The only slight criticism I would

have is that the cheapest bottles of red and white are €64 and €66 respectively, but given the nature of the food offering, I suspect the vast majority of diners will opt for a wine pairing option.

If I had to pick two bottles, the Bret Brothers ‘Le Crays’ Macon Chardonnay 2019 from Burgundy (€74) has a full-bodied, mineral rich and ripe fruit complexity that would be a compelling pairing with many of the dishes.

For red, the German Andreas Bender Pinot Noir 2019 (€64) is an elegantly fresh and refined pinot with undercurrents of spice that would be very drinkable, and an ideal companion with meat courses.

★★★★1/2  
**Cathal McBride**

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# The Guide

- The best of this week's **Books, Arts & Culture** in review
- **Entertainment** previews and John Maguire's **TV and Film Reviews**
- Sara Keating's take on the latest **Theatre**



IVANA PATARCIC

**Taste maker** Bob Johnston  
Bookseller and author

**‘What’s my motto for life? Try to embrace every opportunity with a yes if you can. It opens up a world of possibilities’**

**B**ob Johnston is the owner of the Gutter Bookshop in Cow’s Lane in Temple Bar and Dalkey in Dublin. He has recently published his first book for children, *Our Big Day*, a picture book that celebrates love, family and weddings and introduces kids to the idea of same-sex partnerships and marriage equality.

**What was your earliest ambition?**

To be a writer, I think! My love of books has been a lifetime’s work, but when I left college I applied to be a copywriter for advertising agencies and took a job in a local bookshop while I waited for my big break. I’m still selling books.

**What’s a scent that you associate with your childhood?**

Cigarettes. Dad was a big smoker and the smell of cigarettes always reminds me of him driving us back to our Mum’s house after a weekend at his, the driver’s window down, a Silk Cut on the go, Genesis on the stereo. He died of cancer six years ago and I still miss him a lot.

**Are you an introvert or an extrovert?**

Someone once described me as “an introvert pretending to be an extrovert”, which is very true. I can put on the show when needed, but I’m happiest when it’s just me and a book.

**What’s your motto for life?**

“Yes”. That’s it. It’s important to say no when you have to, but try to embrace every opportunity with a yes if you can. It opens up a world of possibilities and new experiences.

**Where was the best meal you ever had out?**

I have the fondest memory of an afternoon in La Paloma restaurant in Temple Bar (now sadly gone) for a friend’s 30th back in 1999. It was a Dublin monsoon day, so all other tables had cancelled due to weather and we had the place to ourselves all afternoon. Plenty of gorgeous food, jugs of Sangria, love and laughter while the heavens opened outside. That friend is dead now sadly, which adds to the “precious moment” feeling that I get when I think of it.

**Which five famous guests would you love to have at your dinner party?**

I’d much rather have five good friends than famous guests to be honest, but for the sake of the question: do authors count as famous? I’ve been lucky enough to sit down to eat with some amazing writers and had the best conversations, and with that in mind I choose Alan Bennett, Maggie O’Farrell, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Hanya Yanagihara and Colm Tóibín. I have a feeling I’d be way out of my brain depth, but I’d love to listen!

**What’s a personality trait that you admire in others?**

Consideration for others. It’s good to care.

**What’s your comfort food?**

Pasta. Honestly I could eat bowl after bowl of plain pasta with just a little butter and cheese (vegan versions) stirred through.

**What’s more important: ambition or talent?**

Ambition. Sadly.

**What’s your favourite show currently?**

I’m rubbish at committing to ongoing series as I hate the extraneous “padding” episodes that so many of them have. But I thought *Midnight Mass* on Netflix was brilliantly written throughout and I adore *The Great Pottery Throwdown* for its simple joy and creativity, and I continue to laud *Schitt’s Creek* for its development of a beautiful loving gay relationship in its sitcom heart.

**What’s humanity’s most useless invention?**

It’s either those stitched string fasteners on the top of cat litter bags or the Revenue website, I find it hard to decide.

**What do you wish you could be better at?**

Sport. The sight of a ball heading in my direction still fills me with fear.

**You’re buying a new item for your home - assuming money is no object, what are you getting?**

We live in an old cottage that seems to be disintegrating faster than we can repair it, so I’ll take a new roof if that counts as an item? If not, I’ll have some purpose-built bookshelves please because I have a major book hoarding issue.

**Can you remember a line of poetry?**

“Come live with me and be my love, And we will all the pleasures prove” from *The Passionate Shepherd* to his *Love* by Christopher Marlowe is always in my head. I can also recite “Ooey Gooley was a worm” from my childhood, which is slightly more prosaic.

**Your home is burning down - what item would you rescue before fleeing the building?**

Assuming my husband and pets are safe I’d grab my passport. I’m very practical. Otherwise it’d have to be a packet of ginger nuts to eat while I wait for the fire brigade.

**Are you a dog or cat person?**

We have both: Molly the cat and Jessie the dog, but I’d say that I’m more cat - lots of snoozing and low maintenance works well for me.

**What’s your party piece?**

Aged 18 it was to take my underpants off while still wearing my trousers, but I’m a lot less bendy now so I’m going to say my *Butterscotch Angel Delight* story. But I’m afraid I only tell that one at parties.

**What’s your most unappealing habit?**

There’s so many, but I’m going to say my ability to be right about absolutely everything.

**What’s a good piece of advice?**

Apart from never eat yellow snow I’d say, try to live like that famous character from Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* - Mrs Doasyouwould-bedoneby.

**What do you wish you’d known at an earlier point in your career?**

That it won’t always move forwards. Sometimes it’ll move sideways or even backwards but that’s okay. The most important thing is that you enjoy what you’re doing and if you’re not, find something else as quickly as you can.

**What has been your favourite achievement to date?**

Opening my independent bookshop, the Gutter Bookshop, during the 2009 recession was the bravest thing I’ve ever done and I’m so glad it’s been a success. It has opened so many doors for me, allowed me to meet so many amazing people and given me some incredible experiences.

**What is something you’re proud of?**

I’m immensely proud of *Our Big Day* written by me, illustrated by Michael Emberley and published by the O’Brien Press a few weeks ago. It was hugely outside my comfort zone and I found it really challenging, but I feel that we’ve created a joyous, fun and beautiful children’s book that just happens to include a loving same-sex relationship at its centre. To put that love out into the world is a privilege and incredibly rewarding.

**What’s your favourite day of the week and why?**

Sunday, the most loathed day of my childhood is now my favourite day of the week for exactly the same reason - it’s very quiet and nothing much happens.

**Is there an afterlife?**

No, we live, we die, that’s enough.

**What’s your idea of happiness?**

Reading in bed with a mug of tea and a ginger biscuit (or two).

*Our Big Day* by Bob Johnston and illustrated by Michael Emberley is out now, published by O’Brien Press

# Books

## The dangerous business of digging for facts about a still-contested ambush



ANDREW LYNCH

Writing about the 1920 Kilmichael ambush can be a dangerous business. While researching this book, Eve Morrison warns, she was “verbally threatened, actively misled more than once, shouted at in the streets by strangers and shadowed when visiting the site. One individual I spoke to asked if I was wearing a wire.”

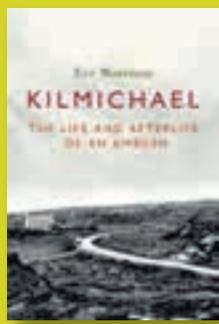
Why does the War of Independence episode that cost more lives than any other arouse such strong feelings today? Partly because historians still can't agree over exactly what happened; partly because it symbolises different things for different people. Some see it as proof that the Old IRA were brave and resourceful freedom fighters, others that this guerrilla army had its fair share of tribal savages too.

The basic facts are clear enough. On November 28, at a lonely stretch of road between Macroom and Dunmanway in West Cork, Tom Barry's flying column lay waiting for two lorries carrying 18 men from the Royal Irish Constabulary's Auxiliary Division. With surprise on their side, the 36 or so republicans managed to kill every British soldier bar two (one escaped but was caught and executed a day later, another survived

### HISTORY

**Kilmichael: The Life and Afterlife of an Ambush**

By Eve Morrison  
Irish Academic Press,  
€19.95



with life-altering brain injuries). Only three IRA Volunteers died in this spectacularly brutal affair, with some wounded Auxiliaries finished off by bayonets and rifle butts.

Apart from being Britain's biggest military disaster of the war, Kilmichael had huge propaganda value. Within weeks, a rousing ballad about it was being sung at nationalist meetings. It made a mockery of prime minister David Lloyd George's boast that he had “murder by the throat” and helped persuade him

to offer peace talks a few months later.

Then in 1948, Tom Barry's bestselling memoir *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* made a provocative new claim. He alleged that the Auxiliaries had tried to trick him with a “false surrender”, throwing down their rifles before firing again with revolvers. That, Barry explained, was why he ordered his troops to show no pity and keep



Above, a newspaper's reporting of the 1920 Kilmichael ambush

Inset: Tom Barry

shooting “until the last of them was dead”.

Unfortunately for Barry, some of his comrades remembered Kilmichael quite differently. In 1998, the Canadian historian Peter Hart published a new analysis based on interviews with survivors carried out by himself and local priest Father John Chisholm almost 30 years previously. Not only did Hart accuse Barry of lying, he made an even more serious charge – the IRA had run a viciously sectarian campaign that dramatically reduced Cork's Protestant population.

As Morrison explains in meticulous detail, this unleashed “a ferocious, unprecedented conspiracy-laden deluge of vitriolic disputation that continues to this day”. Because Hart gave his sources anonymity,

## Connell's river stories search for profundity but



NIAMH DONNELLY

John Connell's breakout work *The Cow Book* was an eloquent memoir of the Longford author's return to his farming roots after a challenging time in Australia and Canada. He followed it up with *The Running Book*, a reflection on the meaning that could be derived from running (in the literal sense) around his home county.

*The Stream of Everything* continues in a similar vein, searching for profundity in familiar yet hitherto unexplored territory – namely the Camlin River, a tributary of the Shannon that flows through Longford.

In May 2020, with the pandemic in full flight and travel limits in place, Connell decided to make

### MEMOIR

**The Stream of Everything**

By John Connell  
Gill, €17.99



a “water pilgrimage”. He would embark on a two-day trip with his friend, the journalist Peter Geoghegan who, like many people, had

returned home during lockdown.

“In the collective experience of stopping, I sought movement,” Connell writes. “I sought to experience life differently, to be back in the nature that had made me. In the waters that had known my boyhood.”

Many of the qualities present in Connell's previous work repeat themselves here. The narrative unfolds through short, discrete paragraphs with an easy style. As we follow Connell's journey down the river and his coming to terms with past regrets, we are fed side-helpings of history, mythology, philosophy and ecology. We learn about forgotten Irish explorers, Vietnam's boat people, “peak water” (the concept that that we are taking more fresh water from the earth than is readily replaceable), ancient belief systems and more. These various strands come together to tell a story of release, self-reflection and renewal.



John Connell on his parents' farm in Co Longford

BRIAN FARRELL

There is a meditative, spiritual bent to the book. The river acts as a means of reconnecting with serenity, prompting musings such as this one: “So much of our thinking

in this world is not novel but repetitive and wasteful. We worry about things that have either already happened that we can no longer change or things that have

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Found in a Newspaper! **ONE PESSY.**  
**OM ASSASSINS**



some critics accused him of inventing them. Others thought he was duped. In 2015, a Fianna Fáil senator urged him to apologise for writing “a tissue of lies” – which would have been tricky since Hart had died five years earlier aged just 46.

Can the full truth about Kilmichael ever be entangled? Morrison’s book takes an impressive stab at it, cross-referencing the various reports to see which are most convincing. She reviews the political rows created by annual commemorations there, with Sinn Féin’s Martin McGuinness once saying he would “crawl from Derry to Cork” for the privilege of speaking. She also provides an impeccably balanced summary of the “revisionist” debate that has been dividing Irish historians for almost half a century.

Morrison’s conclusions will disappoint the extremists on both sides. While noting that Hart’s arrogant tone did him no favour, she has thoroughly checked his research work and finds it entirely above board. This doesn’t prove anything, of course, since eye-witness testimony is notoriously unreliable.

In a way, however, that is Morrison’s central point. Common sense always suggested that Barry’s “fake surrender” story was dubious, since the British had little time to devise such a plan and it would have been suicidal anyway. Amid all the chaos of men shooting, screaming and dying while darkness fell, it seems far more likely that some troops tried to beg for mercy and some didn’t.

But nobody will ever know for certain and using this incident to draw sweeping conclusions about the Old IRA is simply bad history. Morrison’s experience proves that passions over the Kilmichael ambush still run high – but her sober and clear-sighted book shows there are much more important controversies from Ireland’s revolutionary period worth arguing about.

## veer off course

yet to come to pass. If we were to remove those thoughts, what then would we think of? How much of our mind would truly be free?”

Many readers will find these ponderous passages soothing, but they can also be indulgent. There is a tendency to over-sentimentalise and generalise. Barely 20 pages in, for example, we get this description of what Geoghegan means to Connell: “I am the richer for his friendship, the wiser for his company.” Since Geoghegan’s character hasn’t yet been built up, it comes across as cheesy instead of heart-warming. Similarly, statements like “The canoe above all other inventions changed the course of human migration” feel insufficiently explained and quite possibly not correct.

The Stream of Everything’s main problem, though, is that it seems to have made its mind up about its final lesson before it has begun (the idea that a book should have a final

lesson is in itself dicey).

The narrator presents a journey and by hook or by crook, you think, he will have had an epiphany by the end. Memoirs are tricky things, of course, because by the time one sits down to write, one may well have changed or grown. But the skill is in keeping this secret for as long as the text warrants.

There is much to be said for what Connell has attempted with this “Longford Trilogy”, namely to put this ordinary world into the annals of literature. He has also made an ecological case for caring about it.

What appealed about *The Cow Book*, however, gets lost in translation here. The sentimental sections don’t feel earned. The pace is wrong, and because of that the tone ends up sounding pious and grandiose. On the whole, *The Stream of Everything* has noble aspirations and there are shades of merit – but it ultimately falls short of what it tries to achieve.



Dolen Perkins-Valdez’s novel is based on a landmark court case in Montgomery, Alabama during the Jim Crow era

## A timely tale of misogyny and racism in women’s healthcare



**ANDREA  
 CLEARY**

**T**here was a troubling edge to reading Dolen Perkins-Valdez’s novel *Take My Hand* this week. Women’s healthcare has dominated headlines on both sides of the Atlantic recently, with the disturbing news that *Roe v Wade* looks set to be overturned in the United States and the ongoing concerns over the Catholic Church’s role in our own National Maternity Hospital.

It’s especially frustrating to encounter the same arguments for female autonomy in a story set in the American South almost half a century ago. As Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel said: “The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.”

Based on a landmark case in Montgomery, Alabama, *Take My Hand* is the true story of India and Erica (real names Minnie Lee and Mary Alice Relf), two sisters who were involuntarily sterilised by a family planning clinic. Told from the viewpoint of newly qualified nurse Civil Townsend, with chapters alternating between 1973 and 2016, it explores Jim Crow-era America and the horrors of eugenic experiments disguised as healthcare.

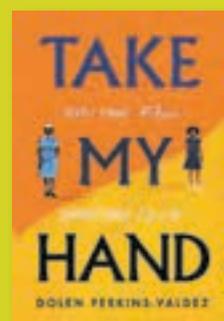
During her first week in her job at the family planning clinic, where staff are tasked to “make sure babies don’t have babies”, Civil discovers that two of her patients are children, aged just 11 and 13. Visiting their home, no more than a shack on a white

### FICTION

#### **Take My Hand**

By Dolen Perkins-Valdez

Phoenix, €15.99



man’s land where they live in return for manual labour, she also learns that the younger sister India is non-verbal and hasn’t started menstruating yet.

“The best thing we can do is make sure the girls don’t get pregnant,” Civil’s friend and colleague Alicia advises. “Think of how they live, and try to keep them from bringing a baby into that.”

Civil’s plan is to get India, Erica, their father and grandmother into public housing. Second, she must enrol the children in school. Third, she will prevent them from conceiving, even though she struggles with the moral implications of injections or prescribing birth control pills.

Just as Civil is making progress, however, India and Erica are taken to hospital by another nurse and forced to have a tubal ligation. Their grandmother, who

can neither read nor write, signs a consent form with an X.

“When I say to you that what happened to those girls was the greatest hurt of my life,” Civil says, “I am speaking the God’s honest truth.” The daughter of a doctor and an artist, it was always assumed that she would attend medical school and eventually work at her father’s surgery. Their family did not know poverty and they “lived dignified in undignified times”. Nonetheless, Civil pursued contraception education for black women in the county, partly due to her own experience of abortion.

This truly abhorrent story is not allowed to settle for a moment, with Civil constantly declaring how horrified she is by the state’s actions. Sometimes, unfortunately, this leads to too much repetition between her inner monologue and the dialogue. The suspected dangers of birth control shots, for example, are explained over and over again by various different characters to one another.

There is also an issue with Civil regularly telling us about her shock, dismay and heartbreak. Instead, we might have been shown such emotions through her actions.

Sometimes the direct line to her inner state works well, especially given how much time she’s had to consider the events between 1973 and 2016, but often it leaves the reader with less sense of her character within the world.

*Take My Hand* does an otherwise wonderful job of detailing this scandal, from its harsh beginnings through to a trial that would bring widespread forced sterilisation to the national spotlight.

# Books

## Restlessly inventive fragments that add up to a very satisfying whole



JOHN WALSH

**D**anny Denton's second novel is a whirring, constantly moving thing, never settling for too long in one place, as he veers from character to character, changing viewpoints, styles and perspectives on a restlessly inventive journey towards what could be nuclear oblivion, or may just be another humdrum weekend in Cork city.

Tony Cooney is a local radio presenter with a popular daytime phone-in show, Cork's answer to Joe Duffy, regularly fielding callers from the rebel county on topics ranging from how the Mahon Point shopping centre is "the peak of our work on God's earth" to the proliferation of Irish people returning to our shores to escape a spate of terrorist attacks in London.

In fact, an enterprising car dealer decides to offer up a brand new car to help one of these returning emigrants get on their feet, and so Tony and his younger producer Lou Fitzpatrick set off on a series of Friday road trips, as the competition runs across a network of Irish radio stations, which take them to Waterford, Dublin and Galway.

Meanwhile, Jada is living in one room in a guesthouse with her parents and younger sister, having lost their house, sneaking out at night to graffiti her name-tag on the walls and buildings of Cork, in a silent scream

### FICTION

**All Along the Echo**  
By Danny Denton  
Atlantic Books, €18.20



of frustration at the universe.

We also hear from two unknown voices, communicating over AM radio, who may or may not be survivors of a post-apocalyptic Ireland, "two souls out here in the void . . . in self-isolation", reaching out to each other across radio waves, frequently commenting on the absurdities of Tony's show.

Denton flits between Tony's internal life and his radio show, with snippets of dialogue from his on-air phone-ins

often displaying the blackest of humour, as he turns a mirror on modern Irish society, so we can see just how self-serving, opinionated and judgmental we frequently are.

The format allows him to have fun with all manner of outrageous callers, but there are serious topics under discussion too, from the collective shame of direct provision to homelessness, as we bear witness to "a multitude of disembodied voices telling their stories, finding at different times tragedy or warmth or comedy or fury in the play".



Danny Denton, whose second novel 'flits about like an attention deficit wasp', but whose characters are still imbued with 'warmth and humanity'

JOHN ALLEN

The relationship between Tony and Lou presents Denton with the opportunity to mine for material the generation gap between them, allowing him to make them rub each other up the wrong way from time to time. In one memorable exchange about today's cancel culture, Tony bemoans how Lou's generation are "climbing over each other to be seen to be tolerant. Whereas my generation just voice their paranoias and get on with it".

Lou refuses to let him off the hook, though, firing back that "people should be challenged if they express drastic views that might get other people hurt, or stir up fear in the community". It's the kind of heated yet reasoned debate that's rarely seen on social media.

These two are brilliantly drawn. Tony is the archetypal everyman, "a man with the ability to be all citizens across any one morning" whose voice broadcasts at "the very frequency of sincerity". But there's more to him than his cartoonish on-air persona, as he struggles to connect with his teenage daughters, grieves for the baby son who died after just a few short days, and

## Novelist and critic brings warmth and humanity to



ESTELLE BIRDY

**B**etter known to the general public as a novelist, Kevin Power is also a prolific non-fiction writer. His incisive and humour-filled book reviews have appeared in many newspapers, his longer-form literary criticism in the finest literary journals. This collection gathers together the very best of his work, gleaned from the Stinging Fly, the Dublin Review of Books and the *Business Post* among others.

The *Written World*'s opener, *The Lost Decade* (first published in the *Irish Times*), is the only piece entirely focused on Power himself. He recalls that the instant success of his 2008 debut novel *Bad Day* in Blackrock catapulted him to fame and fortune. Great things were expected, not least by the author

### NON-FICTION

**The Written World**  
By Kevin Power  
Lilliput Press, €15



himself. But it took more than ten years for his follow-up, also critically acclaimed, to be published. Here he explains why, with great insight and frankness.

"Now, of course, I can see what all of these unfinished projects had in common, which is that they were impersonal, written not out of an honest attempt to understand my own experiences and to communicate that understanding to others, but out of ambition, undiluted: the ambition to be a writer."

The following sections contain essays on criticism itself, authors and their work, society and crises. All are delivered in beautifully wrought sentences, along with a healthy dose of Power's own personal thoughts and experiences. Even crusty old literary theory, as discussed by Power in the dense and often hilarious *Pretentiously Opaque*, can be made enjoyable with an injection of unpretentious honesty and heart.

In *Perishable Art*, Power considers the role of reviews. The lonely work of a lowly critic is treated with warmth and he concludes that writing reviews is an art in itself. "Most of the time, you have 800



Kevin Power argues that book reviewing is an art form

FERGAL PHILLIPS



## Rhythm Nation



### Fiachra Treacy

“There were pros and cons to writing our new album during the pandemic,” says Fiachra Treacy (above, middle), lead singer of the Wicklow electro-pop band Columbia Mills.

“I rewrote the lyrics to all of the songs at least three times until I had washed them clean of any lockdown anxiety. I was always mindful that the album would be released when the pandemic was over. The last thing anyone would want to listen to then was me singing about family Zoom quizzes and 5km walks. For a lot of the tracks, I’ve put myself in other people’s shoes and tried to tie their experiences in with mine.”

Treacy’s approach can be heard on Columbia Mills’ new single *Addiction*, while their third album, *Heart of a Nation*, will come out next September. In the meantime, here is a playlist of songs that have inspired Treacy over the years along with his reasons why.

#### 1. Gorillaz: Aries

Peter Hook with Gorillaz is just the perfect combination. The bassline here is New Order at their best, while Damon Albarn’s ability to write tragic lyrics over upbeat music always inspires me.

#### 2. Fever Ray: Keep the Streets Empty for Me

Keep the Streets Empty for Me is like meditation. It creates a space that you can drift into for five minutes and soothe your soul. That’s what music should do.

#### 3. The Cure: A Letter to Elise

We love how the Cure use intros to create the feeling of a song. Sometimes the music and guitars can tell more of a story than the lyrics. Listen to the solo in A Letter to Elise and tell me I’m wrong.

#### 4. Glasvegas: My Body Is a Glasshouse (A Thousand Stones Ago)

Glasvegas have always impressed us with their sound, but most importantly with their social commentary too. Here they do it in the most heartbreaking fashion. The lyrics are immense – pure poetry.

#### 5. Joan Armatrading: Love and Affection

I found this record in my parents’ house over lockdown and immediately stole it from them (they don’t have a vinyl player any more). I cherish it more than anything. Joan Armatrading taught me to write from the soul and Love and Affection always does it for me – it’s a snapshot of the music I listened to as a child.

#### 6. Cigarettes After Sex: Nothing’s Gonna Hurt You Baby

My wife makes the most amazing playlists. This song was on one and we just danced together without thinking. We need more music that does that to two people.

#### 7. The Beatles: Across the Universe

Ste [Ward from Columbia Mills] would kill me if I didn’t include a Beatles song. This one puts everything into perspective and helps to relieve any stress. It’s as if the camera zooms out when Across the Universe is on and our problems seem insignificant.

#### 8. Arcade Fire: Neighbourhood #1 (Tunnels)

This was always one of my favourite songs and being in a lockdown made it even more relatable. Its apocalyptic nature, with the digging tunnels image, reminds me of sneaking to a friend’s house for a drink and some human contact.

#### 9. Fionn Regan: Dogwood Blossom

Fionn Regan is a master songwriter. I was enthralled by the television series *This is England* and Dogwood Blossom is played in its very last scene. I recognised Fionn’s voice immediately, although I had never heard the song. I now listen to it regularly for inspiration from my fellow Bray native.

#### 10. Preoccupations: Memory

While writing our new album, we’ve explored different song structures and how we can tie two ideas into one. Memory is a fine example, containing two standalone compositions that the band have merged together. It’s a unique piece of music and sounds great when played really loud.

*Columbia Mills’ new single Addiction is available now, taken from their upcoming album Heart of a Nation due for release in September. They will perform live at the Academy in Dublin on November 25. To hear Fiachra Treacy’s playlist, visit the Business Post page on Spotify*



dreams of a long-lost London lover, who has just got back in touch after more than two decades.

Lou, too, is conflicted, wishing that she and her partner, Marta, could start a family, but terrified about the prospect, wondering “what kind of dying world was it to be a parent in”, while still grieving her own mother and enduring a difficult relationship with her hard-drinking father.

The minor characters are well drawn, from the story-telling ESB meter reader they meet in a pub on a Carlow roundabout, to Ann, who is battling cancer and frequently provides updates to their show from her hospital bed, missives delivered in a pure Cork brogue.

Despite flitting about like an attention-deficient wasp, revealing someone’s deepest internal thoughts one minute, clips of radio ads the next, Denton holds our attention rapt and manages to imbue his characters with real warmth and humanity. The entire novel feels like constantly tuning a radio dial right along the frequency band, the sound fragments somehow fitting together into a satisfying whole.

## gamut of cultural topics

words or less in which to say what, if anything, you think. For some books, 800 words is far too little. For most books, 800 words is far too much.”

An analysis of the Ross O’Carroll-Kelly phenomenon follows, with well-observed thoughts on class and culture. As a young student in UCD, Power was confused by questions about what school he had attended.

He later found out that the answer was only of interest if one had been to a prestigious fee-paying institution. “Your parents paid money for you to go to Gonzaga. Ergo, if you went there, your parents were rich.”

Further on, some writers get the Power treatment – Susan Sontag, Martin Amis, Norman Mailer, Zadie Smith, Jordan Peterson. Stories about Sontag’s character and behaviour enrich the essay on her, while Power also posits some intriguing notions. “To state the obvious: a writer is ‘important’ not

because of who she is, but because of what she writes.” Sontag was a longtime inspiration to him and he points out that she put all of herself into her work, leaving little for her emotional side. “Hypertrophy of intellect – necessary to keep you in the top spot – can cause starvation of the heart.”

Cultural phenomena such as Greta Thunberg, apocalyptic politics and some people’s dislike of Jonathan Franzen’s work are also put under Power’s lens. He winds up with a series of short pieces that prove his theory: book reviewing is an art form.

While vehemently disagreeing with some of Power’s arguments, I found *The Written World* a joy to read. His warmth, humour, humanity and intellectual rigour should ensure that this collection finds its place not just on the dusty bookshelves of Trinity College’s English Department – but also in the hands of ordinary readers on the 46A bus. ■

# Appetite for Distraction



Our selection of this week's best home entertainment

## TV PICKS OF THE WEEK

### Ardal O'Hanlon: Tomb Raider Thursday, 10.15pm, RTÉ One

Ardal O'Hanlon is keeping himself busy, what with regular guest appearances on television, a new book about to be published and now this: a special which sees the comedian embark on a fact-finding mission, via a 1930s archaeologist quest, to find the origins of the earliest Irish men and women on the island of Ireland. As part of his investigation, O'Hanlon receives insight from experts including Professor Diarmaid Ferriter, Dr Mairéad Carew and Dr Lara Cassidy. *NO'R*

### The Change: Ireland's Menopause Story Monday, 9.35pm, RTÉ One

Women have spent generations not talking about the menopause, curtailed by societal and religious expectations. Now, though, the 'unmentionable' – as it was once known – has become the directly talked about, as women in Ireland and abroad speak loudly, on the airwaves and elsewhere, about a condition that can dramatically affect their lives. In this one-hour special, which follows on from a Liveline programme on the same subject last year, women offer their experience of the menopause and share their stories. *NO'R*

### Big Boys Thursday, 10pm, Channel 4

This new comedy is narrated by comedian Jack Rooke and based on his award-winning live Edinburgh Fringe shows. In the first episode, we're introduced to the shy, closeted teen Jack, who is leaving home for a journalism degree at Brent University. The series stars Jon Pointing, Katy Wix, Camille Coduri and Derry Girls' boy Dylan Llewellyn. *NO'R*

## STREAMING PICKS OF THE WEEK

### The G Word with Adam Conover Netflix

Based on the book *The Fifth Risk: Undoing Democracy* by bestselling author Michael Lewis (*Moneyball*, *The Big Short*) this hybrid comedy-documentary series shows the surprising ways the US government impacts on the lives of everyday Americans. *NO'R*

### Night Sky Prime Video

A sci-fi drama starring Sissy Spacek and JK Simmons, this eight-episode series sees Spacek and Simmons playing a married couple whose seemingly everyday rural life conceals a secret: they are galactic travellers, who can use a magical device in their backyard to



Ardal O'Hanlon:  
Tomb Raider,  
Thursday,  
10.15pm,  
RTÉ One

escape their earthbound reality. *NO'R*

### Prehistoric Planet Apple TV+, from Monday

Narrated by David Attenborough, this new five-episode natural history event series will transport viewers 66 million years into the past to discover the world that existed then, complete with dinosaurs roaming the land. Set to an original score by Hans Zimmer, this is a tasty proposition for natural history buffs. *NO'R*

### Stranger Things Netflix, from Friday

The first season of *Stranger Things* was the stuff of genius, but the next couple? Well, not so much. But there's still a watchable cast to be reckoned with in the sci-fi drama – and this time around, in season four, the action in Hawkins, Indiana, picks up when the gang are dealing with being separated from each other. However a new threat soon emerges to bring them back together. *NO'R*



## PODCAST PICKS OF THE WEEK

### Friends Will Be Friends with Cat & Edith available on BBC Sounds

DJ Edith Bowman has been firm friends with fellow presenter Cat Deeley for over 20 years, with their relationship surviving everything from working together, tabloid 'ladette' hell, moving to different countries and starting families. Strong friendships evolve and adapt over the years

The G Word with Adam Conover on Netflix

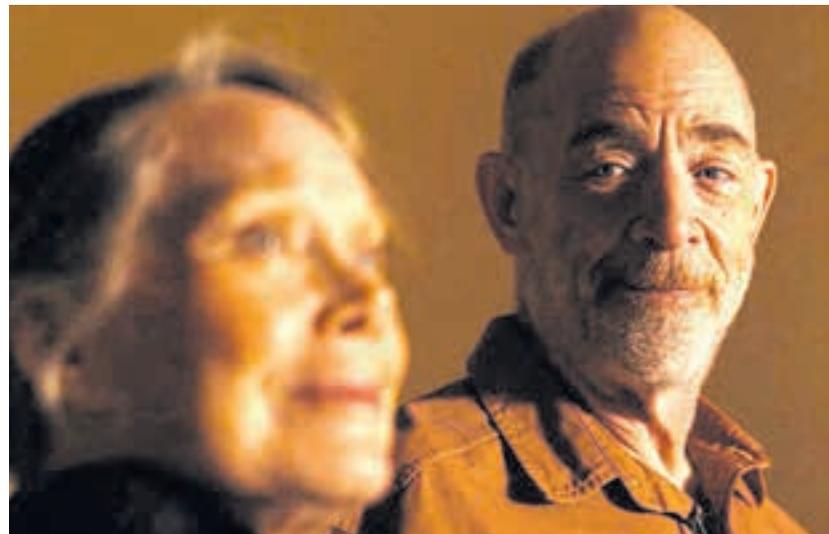
Sissy Spacek and JK Simmons in *Night Sky* on Prime Video



and this cosy podcast presented by the pair is an acknowledgement of these unique partnerships that are often overlooked. *Friends Will Be Friends* is a warm-hearted celebration of the importance of platonic love with the two interviewing a celebrity and their best pal, chatting about their history, the challenges they've faced and what they admire about each other. From actress Vicky McClure and her hairdresser bestie Louis Byrne to Sophie Ellis-Bextor and her Mam Janet Ellis and the feisty, intense pairing of actress Minnie Driver and writer Emma Forrest, it's a lively and breezy listen about the bonds we form and just how life changing they can be. *JG*

### Housewives & Me available on podcast networks

The Real Housewives franchise is unavoidable.





Dylan Llewellyn and Jon Pointing in *Big Boys* on Thursday, 10pm, Channel 4

It has dominated reality TV and the pop culture conversation for the past decade. The *Housewives* have insidiously infiltrated people's lives even if they don't watch the show. Thankfully, there is *Housewives & Me*, a fun, informative and incisive podcast that explains the appeal of this endless conveyor belt of screaming, rich women. Each week, DJ, writer and *Housewives* aficionado Conor Behan guides listeners through the world of the franchise with a special guest discussing the latest gossip, the big issues exposed through the various series from racism to drug addiction and what the show means to them personally. *JG*

## GAME PICK OF THE WEEK

### Turnip Boy Commits Tax Evasion Xbox Series X/S, PC and Switch

You know you're onto a winner when the name of the game alone elicits a chuckle – *Turnip Boy Commits Tax Evasion* is a fun, playful, top-down adventure game where you play as a trouble-making turnip who battles beasts, solves puzzles and, of course, avoids paying taxes. With a similar look and gameplay style to the old *Zelda* games, *Turnip Boy* combines a dark sense of humour with fun gameplay and a surprisingly involving plot to create one of the most distinctive experiences of the year. Its story can be completed in about three hours, so it's the perfect choice to while away a lazy afternoon. *JMB*

**Reviews and previews by Nadine O'Regan, Jennifer Gannon and Jenny Murphy Byrne**



# Albums

Reviews by Tony Clayton-Lea



## ALTERNATIVE

### The Smile

*A Light for Attracting Attention* (XL Recordings)



The genre heading is "alternative" because that's exactly what you'd expect from two moonlighting members of Radiohead (Thom Yorke, Jonny Greenwood) and the drummer of Sons of Kemet (Tom Skinner). As any observant fan will tell you, Radiohead's music floats whichever way the stream goes and so it is with the Smile's debut album. While it's true you can take people out of Radiohead but not Radiohead out of the people, anyone expecting to hear similarities with that

band's most recent album, 2016's *A Moon Shaped Pool*, will be disappointed. That said, the mix of styles and attention to sonic detail is all you would expect from such intuitive and inquiring minds. *A Light for Attracting Attention* won't be to everyone's taste: for every surging, almost conventional rock song (*We Don't Know What Tomorrow Brings*, *You'll Never Work in Television Again*) that brings to mind The Bends-era Radiohead, there's a counterpart of intricate post-rock (*Thin Thing*, *The Opposite*) that could have you shaking your head for all the wrong reasons. And yet throughout it all is a trio of forward-thinking musicians, which is never a bad thing. ★★½

## POST-ROCK

### Just Mustard

*Heart Under* (Partisan)



Signing to British indie label Partisan has certainly upped the ante for Dundalk band Just Mustard – a run of European and North American tour dates with label mates and fellow Irish group Fontaines DC will further progress their commercial reach. As should this second album, which continues their intriguing search for new sonic areas. *Heart Under* makes no concessions to the listener, so if you're not into under-ether vocals, guitars that approximate groaning machinery and drums

clattering like hammers on metal, then perhaps this isn't for you. If you are, dive in – you'll love it. ★★★

## ROCK

### Def Leppard

*Diamond Star Halos* (Universal/Bludgeon Riffola)



As one of the very few hard rock bands who don't take themselves too seriously (lead singer Joe Elliott has freely admitted they "aren't Bob Dylan, and sometimes we're barely even Bob the Builder"), you know what to expect from Def Leppard. *Diamond Star Halos* channels their usual genre, glam pop and a smidgen of country/roots (two tracks feature guest singer Alison Krauss), and across guitar solo-heavy songs such as *Take What You Want*, *Fire it Up*, *Unbreakable*, *Lifeless*

and *Angels* they deliver the goods like the dependable, efficient outfit they are. ★★★

Reviewed  
this week

Conversations  
with Friends

Directed by  
Lenny  
Abrahamson

RTÉ One,  
Wednesday,  
9.35pm

Rating: ★★

Everything  
Everywhere  
All at Once

Directed by  
Daniel Scheinert  
and Daniel Kwan

Nationwide, 16

Rating: ★★★★★

The Innocents

Directed by  
Eskil Vogt

Selected, 15A

Rating: ★★★★★

# Film & Television

## Familiar themes are mulled over in sharply observed Conversations



John  
Maguire

A gorgeous, smart but self-conscious young woman from down the country, studying at Trinity College Dublin, falls in love with a good-looking young man whose perfect jawline sits just below an equally active mind and above a guarded heart. From different worlds, the pair are drawn to one another by forces they struggle to process. They meet for sex in secret, but circumstances force them apart. While their bond allows them to share innermost feelings, there are ambiguities and complications that intrude on all the brooding – including a summer sojourn to continental Europe.

This, of course, is the new television adaptation of Sally Rooney's debut novel **Conversations with Friends**. You cannot fail to notice, however, that it could also broadly describe the events of *Normal People*. The two shows are of a type, carefully paced millennial dramas about beautiful young people tying themselves into anguished knots, the painstaking naturalism allowing for sly commentary on class and culture.

Over 12 half-hour episodes (a hefty enough commitment), that sense of watching a mirrored anthology extends to the returning creative team, including director Lenny Abrahamson, cinematographer Suzie Lavelle and editor Nathan Nugent.

Twenty-one-year-old Frances (played by newcomer Alison Oliver) is the aforementioned Trinity student, the sardonic half of a performance poetry duo with her effervescent best friend and ex-lover Bobbi (Sasha Lane). One night after a show, they meet the older, more successful English writer Melissa (Jemima Kirke) and her actor husband Nick (Joe Alwyn, the jaw).

They're invited to a birthday party at their new friends' enviably chic Monkstown home, where sparks fly between Frances and Nick. We subsequently discover that a similar tremor has passed between Bobbi and Melissa. "I don't want to be a homewrecker," Frances whispers later, an honourable sentiment undermined by the fact that she's standing in Nick's kitchen while Melissa is away.

The early episodes' slow-burning pace is tempered by a sharp writing team (including the returning Alice Birch and Abrahamson's long-time collaborator Mark O'Halloran). They find interesting ways to depict the squirming horrors of young adult-



Sasha Lane and Alison Oliver in *Conversations with friends*, RTÉ One, Wednesdays

hood, a time when the gap between how you see yourself and who you actually are is never wider.

Like *Normal People*, the show introduces some superb young actors and gives them rounded roles that allow them to explore their generation's feelings on all sorts of issues: politics and art, sex and love, money and power. Even if we are hearing them for the second time, these conversationalists know what they're talking about.

Rooney's novels are ultimately stories about growth and maturity, describing those painful knocks around which hard calluses form so they might not bruise so deeply again. You have to wonder if the same applies to television audiences.

● Even more expansive and ambitious than its title suggests, the brain-scrambling, dimension-hopping, sci-fi kung fu comedy **Everything Everywhere All at Once** is written and directed by Daniel Scheinert and Daniel



Michelle Yeoh  
in *Everything  
Everywhere All  
At Once*

Kwan, collectively known as the "Daniels" who previously gave us Daniel Radcliffe as a farting corpse turned into a jet ski in *Swiss Army Man*.

A fondly crafted homage to Asian cinema, it also provides veteran Hong Kong star Michelle Yeoh with the role of a lifetime. Several lifetimes, as it turns out.

Yeoh plays Evelyn, a dowdy Asian-American woman with a failing marriage, an unsuccessful laundrette and a problem with her taxes. She discovers that she can commune with infinite realities through the multiverse, a popular place in cinema these days, but here designed without the Marvel iteration's number-crunching digital effects.

She is aided by a version of the same husband, Waymond (Ke Huy Quan), who wants to divorce her in this reality, and a pair of what look suspiciously like Bluetooth mobile phone headsets. And why would these ordinary people need to skip between parallel planes of existence in such a desperate hurry?

Because their daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu), an eye-rolling young woman exasperated by her mother's failure to come to terms with her being a lesbian, is in fact an omnipotent god in the multiverse – and not the benign kind. As she gathers an army of murderous acolytes (including an exceptional Jamie Lee Curtis as a swivel-eyed tax inspector), it falls on Evelyn to save the world, her business and her family relationships.

Further explanation of

all this will be for those who see the film to fill in for themselves. *Everything Everywhere* is best enjoyed as a sensory experience. You'll barely be able to keep up with it, but you will keep up with it, as the Daniels land every increasingly manic moment with unerring confidence, turning every gag into a tiny masterpiece of comic timing, and nimbly explaining the magical physics at play. Destined for cult status, it is frantic entertainment of a high order.

● Writer and director Eskil Vogt, Oscar-nominated for his screenplay to regular collaborator Joaquin Trier's *The Worst Person in the World*, follows his 2014 fantasy debut *Blind* with **The Innocents**. It's an intelligent and electrifying thriller set on a Norwegian housing estate, about a group of children who discover they have psychic powers. If the title echoes Jack Clayton's 1961 adaptation of Henry James's novella *The Turn of the Screw*, that's no accident: both stories concern innocent youngsters who can access uncanny powers at an atavistic level.

As the film opens, nine-year-old Ida (Rakel Lenora Fløttum) and her non-verbal, autistic sister Anna (Alva Ramstad) are moving to an apartment because their father has a new job. Ida soon makes friends with a lonely boy her own age (Sam Ashraf), who is either a trainee magician or can move objects with his mind. There's no mistaking the supernatural abilities of sweet-natured Aisha (Mina Asheim), who enters into Anna's mind and allows her to speak.

Having established his premise, Vogt deliberately turns the screw in subtle, unexpected ways, resisting any urge to use special effects tricks. As we burrow deeper into the power games being played between this unusual assembly of pint-sized psychics, the tension ratchets up disturbingly and a terrifying climax is brilliantly staged. ■



Sarah Morris and Brian Gleeson in *Constellations* by Nick Payne: at the Gate Theatre until June 2 ROS KAVANAGH

## Multi-layered stories reflect the chance and chaos in all our lives



Sara Keating

**Constellations**  
By Nick Payne  
Gate Theatre, Dublin 1  
Until June 2

In Nick Payne's 2012 drama *Constellations* the opening lines are played in a loop. During the first ten minutes of the sharp, intense, tricky play, the first scene starts and restarts, over and over, each version bringing us a tiny bit deeper into the story, which shifts subtly as it is replayed.

Plot, as Payne makes clear through both the form and the dialogue of *Constellations*, is not really the point.

Life, as we live it, is full of chance and chaos. *Constellations* may not seem like a typically realist play but, in its attempt to mimic the random laws of physics that govern both the universe and our encounters with it, realism appears to be the most appropriate word.

We meet the protagonists Marianne (Sarah Morris), a quantum physicist, and beekeeper Roland

(Brian Gleeson) at a mutual friend's barbecue, where they are meeting for the first time. As the scene plays out in its shifting circumstances, the chemistry between them is awkward/instant/electrically charged.

Over the next 75 minutes, we watch as they decide to part after small talk/go on a date/move in together/break up. The permutations of their chance meeting are brought to a logical endpoint in each scenario, their relationship deepening as the accumulation of scenes goes on.

Initially, this makes for entertaining, edge of seat viewing, as the repeated conversational gambits bring comic repetitions and ironic counterpoints to bear upon the alternative scenarios. However, despite the fresh energy and nuance that the actors bring to every restarted encounter, the structural formula starts to get tiresome.

Thankfully, Payne is too clever a writer to rely on just the Sliding Doors technique to develop the drama. His interests are more than romantic, and the question *Constellations* is asking of the couple is more than: will they/won't they stay together?

Dropped into the evolving study of Marianne and Roland's relationship are scenes taken from the endpoint of one potential scenario. In these scenes, which defy any semblance of linear structure, we learn that Marianne is suffering from some kind of cognitive impairment. She is losing her capacity to speak, and this further

heightens the audience's sense of estrangement from the action.

These endpoint scenes, however, are also end-of-life scenes, as Payne refines them over and over until we realise that the ultimate choice at stake in the play is the life or death choice. What makes a life worth living?, Marianne asks Roland. Who should get to decide that for you? Despite the romantic fizz of the play's opening gambit, then, *Constellations* is really a play about euthanasia.

Marc Atkinson Borrull's production brings local flavour to the text, which is peppered with reference to familiar Dublin landmarks and nearby areas.

This helps to pull us further into the drama and also to reinforce the 'everyman' nature of Payne's philosophical and existential concerns, which the fragmentary form of the play constantly unsettles and disrupts.

Empathetic performances from a vivacious, expressive Morris and a restrained, wry Gleeson help too, their contrasting energies adding to the sparkiness and chemistry of the will they/won't they storyline. Molly O'Cathain's celestial set offers shiny reflective surfaces, textured like the moon, while Paul Keogan's lights are hung in a casing of glittering chandeliers to complement the cosmic atmosphere.

*Constellations* is an intellectually exciting proposition that grips the engaged, curious viewer, even as it flouts and frustrates our expectations. It runs at the Gate Theatre until June 2.

## Classical notes

### Iconic houses festival changes its focus to Dublin



Dick O'Riordan

The first Great Music in Irish Houses concert took place at Castletown House in 1970, a time when drumming up financial support for such events was a real struggle. Getting superb musicians from home and abroad to play the festival, however, has never been an issue. That record was maintained under the admirable stewardship of people such as Hugh Tinney and Judy Woodworth, while discerning duo Ciara Higgins and Laurie Cearr are its current directors.

Thanks to Covid, Great Music in Irish Houses sadly had to abandon its 50th anniversary celebrations for two years. Like many other classical companies, however, it held its nerve with a much-lauded series of online performances. Now it is back with a new image as the Dublin International Chamber Music Festival.

"This move was something we had been thinking about for quite some time," Cearr says. "Over the years, the number of historic mansions available to us nationally shrank for various reasons, not least that many had been turned into hotels, golf clubs and tourism attractions. Concentrating on the Dublin region provided a more focused view of our operation. We believe we are returning in style to wonderful historic venues such as our birth home at Castletown House, Rathfarnham Castle, Killruddery House and Dublin Castle.

"It has been a long separation

from our loyal audiences and we will not let them down. To kick off with, Hugh Tinney and the Carducci Quartet playing Schubert and Brahms at Killruddery will be a divine evening on June 7. We also join the Irish Chamber Orchestra to celebrate a parallel anniversary – it too is 50 years old. Its Castletown concert will include a new work by David Fennessy, performed by the blistering Scottish guitarist Sean Shibe, who can play everything from Haydn to Hendrix," Cearr says.

The line-up also features a special tribute concert to Covid frontline workers, with piano pieces chosen by (among others) Professor Luke O'Neill and Professor Teresa Lambe – co-developer of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

For full details, see dicmf.com.

### A busy summertime for the NSO

The National Symphony Orchestra turns to the worlds of opera, movies and musicals for a splendidly diverse series of Friday evening and Tuesday lunchtime concerts in June and July at the NCH. It begins on June 10, with soprano Celine Byrne, and all ticket sales go to the Ukraine Fund in collaboration with the Community Foundation for Ireland. Byrne's repertoire will include pieces by Puccini, Gounod, Verdi and Lehar.

Another highlight is *Lurline* on June 17, a newly reconstructed full score of the romantic grand opera by Waterford-born William Vincent Wallace (of *Maritana* fame). First staged in 1860, this three-act work was an obvious attempt to create a pre-Wagner scenario – Wallace composed it on a trip to Germany after hearing the legend of Loreley, siren of the Rhine. A really interesting cast has been assembled for the NCH performance, with star soprano Rachel Kelly as the perilous water sprite. ■



Brazilian violinist Nathan Amaral, who will perform in the Dublin International Chamber Music Festival RODRIGO ROSENTHAL

# Design for life

## My colleagues are earning more than I am, how do I rectify this?

This week, recruitment expert **Louise Campbell** advises a reader on how to negotiate a pay rise



**Dear Expert,**  
I've been in my job for 11 years and to say I'm being taken for granted is putting it mildly. A lot of new people have recently arrived and I've found out that one - who wouldn't have half my experience - is earning more than me (I'm on 40 grand, they're on 55). We don't have a review policy - it's a small company - and I'm unsure of how to go about asking for an improvement in my salary. The last time I tried, my boss took me for an expensive lunch and then said he was glad we had sorted everything out. I was mortified - it felt like I was a little woman who just needed a pat on the head. I'm 35 and maybe I should just move? Or should I ask for the raise first and then see? The job is fine, but it's not a vocation or anything.

**Dear Reader,**

It sounds like you may be among the 45 per cent of women we surveyed in 2022 who have never attempted to negotiate their pay. Last year, it was a whopping 57 per cent! Our research also told us that of those women, 26 per cent received no increase compared to 20 per cent of men. This figure rose even further for LGBTQI+ women and black women. Let's look at the main reasons why women don't negotiate their salary.

**1. Lack of confidence.** Twenty four per cent fear that their employer will not offer them a raise, while twice as many women as men are "too embarrassed" to have the conversation.

**2. Poor relationships with managers.** More than a third of females think their manager has not taken the time to understand them personally. Many feel that they are not viewed as the main "breadwinner" or provider. In addition, female professionals have stated that their male counterparts have a naturally better way of showcasing their successes - with some suggesting this would look "needy" or "trying too hard" coming from a woman.

**3. Low self-worth.** Seventy per cent of heterosexual men earn above the average Irish salary, compared to 51 per cent of women. The long-running pay gap has done nothing to aid women's belief that they should be paid more. Instead, the fact that pay equality continues to be discussed rather than fixed is a big blow to women's confidence.

So, how do we tackle the above? You simply have to have the conversation with your manager. Here is how you can prepare.

In order to present the facts in an objective, non-emotional way, you must take time and look at a range of factors:

**1. Previous appraisal documents.** Have you achieved your objectives? When have you gone above and beyond what was expected of you?

**2. Results.** Are the results of your efforts having a direct impact on the business? If so, document and have them ready

**3. Management/general responsibility.** Are you training any of those new people? Has your remit expanded informally? Think outside the box - you may have trained upwards for new senior starters or mentored someone in another team.

**4. Workload.** Your job spec says ABC, yet you are also working on XYZ. It's time to take this into consideration. Outline how you transformed ABC efficiently in order to accommodate XYZ.

I would normally recommend leaving comparisons with your peers out of the conversation. It is generally not wise to say, "Mary is getting 20 per cent more than me," as this will only irritate your boss. In this instance, however, it seems glaringly obvious that new starters are being paid a premium and you have a right to ask why.

Make sure you ask for the meeting verbally or by email. If asked, say it is about your salary and you would like to share some thoughts. If your boss refuses, then it's time to insist you want a meeting. Politely but firmly state you would like to discuss your responsibilities as they are not an accurate reflection of your wages.

Before the meeting, practise your opening lines - the less small talk, the better. If you do get a rise, be gracious but respect that fact that you deserve this. If you don't, express your true feelings in a professional manner: "I am extremely disappointed to hear this, but thank you for letting me know. If that is your final answer I will need time to consider my options. Can I suggest we meet again next week?"

Think about what you would accept. If you want €10,000, would you stay for €8,000? Go through the scenarios beforehand rather than waiting to see how you feel on the spot. Would you be happy with the promise of a raise in January? If so, get it in writing.

Go in with some counter-suggestions. Have a three to six-month plan of things you will achieve that warrant a pay rise at the end of that period. This will also make management realise that you have a cut-off point.

Be cordial, professional and prepared for the worst. Take emotion and subjectivity out of the conversation. Start the meeting, control the agenda, state the facts and allow your boss to respond. Own any uncomfortable silences.

Don't link a salary increase to a rise in your personal costs

such as travel, childcare or mortgage. Don't threaten to walk unless you are prepared to do so. Don't allow the meeting to digress - have a short agenda in front of you to remind yourself why you are there.

Just remember, negotiating salary is a very common scenario for managers. Do not feel like you are asking too much - it is up to ourselves to place a value on our time and skills. Whether you have the desired outcome or not, practice is important, as even in another role you may find yourself discussing your pay.

Good luck! ■

Got a problem or something you'd like advice on? Email anonymously by contacting us via [businesspost.ie/ask-an-expert](mailto:businesspost.ie/ask-an-expert) and we'll match your query with the best expert we can find on the subject. You can also drop an email in confidence to [nadine@businesspost.ie](mailto:nadine@businesspost.ie)



**Louise Campbell**

Louise Campbell is head of learning and development across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas at the international recruitment company Robert Walters. Her role focuses on ensuring that every employee, from starter to senior manager, is given the best possible training and development opportunities. She has been voted as one of the Top 100 Women in Global Staffing by Staffing Industry Analysts three times over the last decade. She is a board trustee of the international charity Global Angels. For more information on her work, see [robertwalters.ie](http://robertwalters.ie).

## MY FAVOURITE PLACE IN IRELAND WHEN IT'S SUNNY

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