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Gray matter and gas craic

AS if more proof was needed of Galway's irresistible pull at this time of year, American performer **Spalding Gray**, who played at the annual arts festival three years ago, rang the event's outgoing director **Patricia Forde** some months ago and begged to be included on the bill again.

Mr Gray is yet another well-known foreigner professing undying passion for Ireland — at this rate, quotas will have to be introduced to control their numbers. A week ago, he arrived accompanied by his partner, New York artists' agent **Kathleen Russo** and their two-year-old son **Forrest**. Before turning up in Galway, they spent four days at **Clifden's Abbey Glen Hotel**.

"Ireland has the same kind of absurd precariousness as New York," says Mr Gray, by way of explanation for his devotion. Even so, he almost didn't make it over here because of work commitments; along with **Sharon Stone** and **Isabelle Adjani**, he's due to act in a remake of the French 1950s thriller *Les Diaboliques*, playing the role of "one of the nerdy professors".

Inevitably, with the Film Fleadh also running in Galway this week, there was plenty of cinematic talk at Wednesday night's arts festival opening. The ever-energetic head of the Film Board, **Lelia Doolan**, was busy canvassing support for her campaign to save the **Claddagh Palace** from closure.

Last week, she and her co-director of the fleadh **Miriam Allen** organised a fund-raising dinner for 200 in support of the cause, but they say it's hard to stir up sufficient interest just now.

So far, the only Galwegian to make a substantial contribution is art director **Tom Conroy**, who pledged £200. The two women estimate that £1 million will be needed to buy and refurbish the cinema but, as of Wednesday evening, they had

as on Wednesday evening, they had raised £1,552.72. Not that Ms Allen, or her film-maker husband Bob Quinn, is going to be too much pre-occupied with this — early on Thursday morning, she gave birth to their second son.

Festive folk way out west: Trish Forde, artistic director of the festival (above left); American writer and actor Spalding Gray, his partner Kathie Russo and their two-year-old son Forrest at the opening (above); actress Kate O'Toole at the launch (left); and Macnas manger and founder Padraic Breathnach uses pedal power to leave other Macnas members standing (far left)
Photographs: Joe O'Shaughnessy

Alt right there!

THERE was a mini-crisis at Galway's arts festival on Thursday when ex-Hot House Flowers frontman **Liam O Maonlai** — now a member of cult three-piece Alt — announced that he would not, after all, be able to perform his lunchtime solo gig. The reason for this unexpected no-show wasn't an outbreak of artistic temperament but simply due to a consultation with Mr O Maonlai's diary.

It turns out that the 32-year-old singer is planning to marry his 19-year-old girlfriend **Aoife Tunney** but hadn't time to make the necessary arrangements. The couple agreed to put aside Thursday to discuss their pre-nuptial plans, hence the cancellation of the concert. They have since organised a wedding ceremony to take place in a week's time — in Costa Rica.

Beckett under the hammer

THE most important piece of Beckett memorabilia still in private hands comes on the market

next Monday, when Sothebys' London office auctions a manuscript which 30 years ago the author gave "with love from Sam" to **Tara MacGowran**, daughter of the late actor Jack MacGowran. Now an actress in New York, Ms MacGowran left the manuscript — it contains, among other items, a working draft in French of *Endgame* and an extract from *Waiting for Godot* — in the care of her godfather, **Gareth Browne**.

This week her mother, **Gloria MacGowran** (née Nugent), who also lives in the US, was Mr Browne's guest at Luggala.

Sister of Tattersall's agent **Sir Peter Nugent**, who lives at Blackhall Stud in Clane, Co Kildare, Mrs MacGowran was first married to Captain **Michael Carvill** of the Irish Guards, by whom she had two daughters. Then she met Jack MacGowran — appropriately enough, after a performance of *Endgame*, to which she'd been taken by **Peter O'Toole**. "We went backstage because I thought Jack had been doing it all wrong, and I wanted to tell him so."

Not necessarily the best start for a relationship but, nonetheless, the couple were together until his sudden death in January 1973. Over the years, they were given many signed copies of Beckett's work by the writer, who greatly admired Jack MacGowran's acting skills. The manuscript being sold on Monday, however, is unique — not least because it is the first major Beckett manuscript ever to appear at auction. Presumably that's why it carries the modest estimate of £120,000-£150,000.

A lady bird told me . . .

AMONG the less high-profile tourists this summer has been **Lady Bird Johnson**, widow of the former US president Lyndon Johnson who died in January 1973.

Mrs Johnson, who flew back to the US yesterday, has spent the past week viewing some of the finest private gardens in the south east, such as Mount Congreve and Killeagh. Her host on this occasion has been Dallas millionaire **Margaret McDermott**, a regular visitor to this country where her friends include **Sean O Criadain**. While in Ireland, Mrs McDermott rents Lismore Castle, Irish home of the **Duke and Duchess of Devonshire**.

What with President **Bill Clinton** and his wife **Hillary** due later in the autumn, this is becoming quite a year for American leaders to call by, particularly since **Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter** are also paying a visit next month. Mrs Carter will be speaking at one of the summer's many conferences, and then the couple are planning to join the throngs holidaying in West Cork.

Connemara lights

IT may have ended a year ago, but the memory of last summer's World Cup lingers on with the screening yesterday afternoon in Galway of *Who Needs Pelé?* This video diary of the occasion, which focuses on the fans who stayed behind in Ireland, was co-produced

ON THE TOWN

Robert O'Byrne



**Chas Smith and Lee Thompson of Madness in Dublin this week.
Photograph: Eric Luke**

**Paul and Fiona Foley (above), and Minister Ruairi Quinn and his
wife Liz (below) at Brubecks' opening. Photographs: David Sleator**

and directed by old friends **Julian Lloyd** — otherwise known for his association with racing circles — and photographer **Perry Ogden**.

Until now a relatively low-key presence in this country, English-born Mr Ogden is set to become more visible now that he has taken a studio in Dublin. Originally he arrived here scouting locations for a fashion shoot, and while visiting Leixlip, coincidentally where **Julian Lloyd** and his wife **Victoria** live, he met **Marina Guinness**, with whom he has a daughter **Violet**.

Over the past decade, **Perry Ogden** has regularly worked in Ireland. Last year, for example, he shot **Ralph Lauren's** autumn/winter advertising campaign here, as well as photographing **Helena Christiansen** for *Elle* magazine.

Acting as stylist on these jobs has been **Lady Isabella Stanhope**, daughter of the **Earl of Harrington**.

"I want to make more films and centre my operations here now," Mr

Ogden says, although for the time being, he's retaining his place in Paris. As a sign of his commitment to Ireland, he has also acquired a home in Connemara and that's where he intends to hold his first exhibition — a mixture of fashion shots and portraits — next May. "I'll be bringing it all back to Connemara, because that's what has inspired me over the years."

Who is Eddie?

WHATEVER about the name, there wasn't a hint of an identity crisis on Wednesday evening when Dundalk act Who's Eddie launched their latest dance single, impatiently entitled *Right Now* at Tommy Hayden's new System nightclub.

A veritable who's who in broadcasting arrived to celebrate the group's first Irish release on Polygram, including 2FM DJs Lorcan Murray, Gareth

O'Callaghan, Bob Conway and Jim O'Neill. Also there to watch the band in action was another Eddie: unlikely to inspire the question "Who's he?" — the racing driver **Eddie Irvine** who, together with **Damon Hill**, was on his way to the **Plant and Page** concert in the Point.

So Who's Eddie anyway? They're three sisters and a brother (and no, his name's not Eddie either), and their music is dominated by the belting vocals of **Dara Molloy**. "We're still essentially a covers band, that's our bread and butter," she says. "But we want to be successful, we want to get into the charts, and the kind of music we do best is dance music."

The Molloyes have been singing together since early childhood, encouraged by their musician father, and Dara sang her first solo at the age of four. The song in question was *I'm Nobody's Child*.

Who's Eddie is managed by **Louis Walsh**, and if he can repeat the success enjoyed of late with Boyzone, then his latest enterprise ought to be on *Top of the Pops* any day now. At Wednesday's launch, the perennially youthful-looking Mr Walsh was given a birthday surprise: a cake bearing the legend, "Where's Louis?" As for that final question, what age is he? The answer is 42.

Madness takes to Ireland

MADNESS arrived in Dublin last Tuesday night. No, not insanity induced by rising humidity (although that would be understandable) but members of the 1980s band who flew from London to see Anto Nolan's play *Too Much Too Young* that celebrates their former glories. Not that Chas Smash and Lee Thompson believe in resting on their laurels.

The good news for fans of the group is that, even after all this time, the band is still on the road and planning a series of concerts next December, with Dublin, Belfast and possibly Cork on the agenda.

Although seeming quintessentially cockney, neither musician is unfamiliar with this country. Both Chas Smash's parents are Irish — from Mayo and Kilkenny respectively — and he inherited a house near Swinford from a great-aunt back in 1983; this is visited on a regular basis.

While Lee Thompson has no Irish blood, he joins the seemingly-endless list of familiar faces who now want to own property here. In his case, however, there's no desire to move into the Dalkey/Killiney strip. Instead, he recently travelled to the Dingle peninsula with his 11-year-old son to inspect a house for sale there.

In the week in which Take That appeared on the verge of disintegration (cue inconsolable grief from all pre-pubescent girls), both men say they and their fellow Madness members have stuck together for more than 15 years for two reasons. "Firstly, we all have something in common; absentee fathers. And then, we were a gang before we became a band. That happened just to keep us out of trouble."

Accidental hero

NICE to see that for some plucky troopers, the show must go on regardless of what's happening be-

hind the scenes. Actress/writer **Jeananne Crowley**, who is currently presenting RTE's *Sunday Show* in place of **Andy O'Mahony**, had a nasty car crash on the Wicklow/Wexford road last Monday afternoon. But despite spending time in Loughlinstown's St Colmcille hospital, she has decided to marshal her forces before the microphone as usual tomorrow morning.

Ms Crowley reckons that following the crash, in which no vehicle other than her own trusty but now late-lamented Mini was involved, she must have been unconscious for at least three-quarters of an hour.

"Some good Samaritan must have found me, got me out of the car, called an ambulance and staunched my head wound," she says. It's well-known, of course, that Jeananne Crowley brings out gallantry in many quarters. Now she'd like to know the identity of her rescuer on Monday so that she can deliver a personal thank-you.

Shiny happy people

EVERYONE else may be taking a holiday at this time of year, but promoter **Denis Desmond** couldn't be busier, what with two nights of Page and Plant in the Point last week, R.E.M. at Slane today and then Féile two weeks away. Still, he took a few hours off on Thursday evening when his wife **Caroline Downey** organised a 42nd birthday party in the River Club, complete with cake made in the shape of a giant chocolate bar.

Among those gathering to wish Mr Desmond joy was **Michael Stipe** of R.E.M., who last night threw another party at the band's Irish headquarters, Luttrellstown castle. The excuse for yesterday's bash was yet another birthday; that of R.E.M. manager **Jefferson Holt**.

While Mr Desmond's friends gathered on the club's mezzanine last Thursday, downstairs Scottish band Big Country played what had been billed as an unplugged performance; given the level of noise, however, more than just the atmosphere was electric. Expect an equally charged occasion today at Slane where the VIP guest-list includes long-time R.E.M. fan **Johnny Depp**, as well as **Stephen Rea**, **Aidan Quinn**, **Van Morrison** and **Michelle Rocca**, **Adam Clayton**, **Neil Jordan** and **Paul McGuinness**.

Expresso bongos

JUST a few months after his former wife Anne Marie Nohl opened her Expresso Bar on Shelbourne Road, on Thursday restaurateur Peter Stokes (of the Coopers chain) unveiled his latest enterprise, Brubeck's, around the corner in the Sweepstakes Centre. Could there be a hint of rivalry here? Certainly not, insisted Mr Stokes, who wishes Ms Nohl every success — although he has not, as yet, been into her premises.

Nor was she visible at Thursday's party, where talk among the culinary cognoscenti was of the striking similarities between Brubeck's and Quaglino's in London. That's really not too surprising; the former general manager of Terence Conran's eaterie, Galway-born Gary Coyne, moved over here a couple of months ago to take responsibility for Ballsbridge's newest restaurant.



