

Rape Culture and the Student Experience



An Focal investigates Rape Culture in the University of Limerick.

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1,485 Students Graduate From UL

Sarah O’Dwyer

January 21st saw the start of the Conferring Ceremonies in UL. There were 1,485 students conferring, including 70 PhD students.

President of the University of Limerick, Don Barry, said that “UL’s Graduate Employment figures now consistently trend well above the national average”. He went on to speak about the challenging environment that graduates are presented with currently and, that despite this, UL’s graduate employment rate has continued to rise.

UL’s 2011 figure for primary degree-holders is, at present, 16% higher than the HEA’s national figure of 46% for 2010. A recent survey of the graduates of 2011 states that 88% are either pursuing further study or are employed.

“The news is good for the 70 PhD graduates who will be conferred this week as 86% of last year’s PhD graduates are currently in employment,” Don Barry went on to say. He also continued by praising the ever-evolving programmes available in UL, saying that the educational and research experience for the students prepares them very well for their careers.

He complimented the talented students and graduates of UL, and maintains that this is why we are seeing a” growing number of employers actively recruiting UL graduates through our Careers



Fair”. He believes that “UL graduates have shown themselves to be ready for the workplace, highly-skilled and more employable than their peers from other Irish universities.”

Don Barry urged the staff and students to work together to attempt to continue exceeding international benchmarks in every aspect of the University.

The percentage of UL graduates who found employment in Ireland has, in

the past year, increased from 45% to 50%. There are still 13% of graduates employed abroad, similar to last years’ figure. The number of graduates opting to continue study or research decreased from 27% to 25%. Only 10% of those who completed a Postgraduate Diploma in 2011 are employed abroad, with over 79% employed in Ireland. The highest employment rate was recorded by PhD graduates with 86% employed.

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HEA Call For College Mergers



Michelle Ryan

The Higher Education Authority (H.E.A) has recently published a document in which they state that the number of third-level colleges in Ireland should be considerably reduced.

Many colleges would have to merge in order to achieve this with the focus on Institutes of Technologies (I.T’s). Their reasoning behind the proposal is that mergers would improve the quality of third level education and may make better use of college spaces during a time when demand for further education is higher than ever.

The H.E.A has since come under criticism for their suggestions. The Teachers Union of Ireland (T.U.I) released a statement in which the T.U.I Deputy General Secretary, Annette Dolan called the proposal “...nothing more than a kite flying exercise.” The T.U.I represents almost 4,000 I.T lecturers and Dolan claims “...the significant changes proposed in the document, in terms of mergers, would

have a more negative impact on the Institute of Technology sector while Universities appear to escape largely unscathed.”

It is not suggested that I.T’s will close but rather that they should be brought together either with each other or with Universities under the one administrative structure.

The H.E.A’s document includes recommendations in regards to which colleges should form alliances. The University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College have been encouraged to “...form one integrated centre for teaching education.” Limerick Institute of Technology has also been called on to join forces with the two colleges along with Tralee I.T to form what the H.E.A see as a ‘regional cluster’ for the Mid West.

These proposals put forward by the H.E.A will undergo a series of discussions by colleges during the coming weeks before Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, will give his final say on the matter in March.

The Gathering Ireland Comes To Limerick

Mary McLoughlin

The Gathering Ireland is a tourism-led initiative that is inviting people from around the world, who have connections to Ireland or just a love for the country, to visit Ireland throughout the year. It is the biggest tourism initiative that has ever been undertaken by the state. With the government hoping to attract an additional 300,000 tourists to Ireland this year, it is hoped the initiative will generate millions of euro in revenue for the country.

The gatherings, divided into key county flagship events and community gatherings are funded because of a one million euro philanthropic donation by IPB Insurance that was matched by the Gathering Ireland in response to the enormous interest expressed nationwide in the tourism initiative. The overall total of €110,000 funded events in Limerick is made up of €50,000 in flagship events and €60,000 in local community events.

Events will take place all around the country ranging from small family reunions to huge festivals and everything in between. The people of Ireland are being encouraged to actively get involved and start their own events. Over 2,600 events have already been registered nationwide with over 61 events being announced for the Limerick area. Details of the Gatherings were unveiled by Michael Ring, TD, Minister of State for Tourism and Sport at a launch in Castletown House, Co Kildare this week. Flagship events include; Limerick International Fashion and Design Week (October 2013), Limerick City Weekend of Welcomes (October 2013) and, An International Gathering of Horse Racing Clubs and Enthusiasts (November 2013)

Limerick Local Authorities Manager, Conn Murray said: “The key objective of The Gathering Ireland Local Community Fund is to provide financial support to local and community Gathering event organisers and activities which will attract overseas visitors to Limerick during 2013. I was delighted at the huge response received to the request for funding applications and am now happy to be able to provide financial assistance to many of the local



Gathering events taking place. I’m also particularly excited at the flagship events taking place in Limerick for the Gathering this year.”

The University of Limerick is also getting involved with two events in the pipeline. The UL Emerald Cup is a soccer tournament aimed at both female and male teams in the U12 – U14 categories. It will take place from the 26th to the 28th of July. Teams from Ireland, the UK, Europe and the US will be invited to make use of the University’s state of the art sporting facilities with participants being given on campus accommodation throughout their stay. Teams will also be given the opportunity to avail of day trips to local places of interest such as the Cliffs of Moher. FAI and GAA coaching clinics are also being planned for the young participants.

U.L. will also play host to the Limerick Gathering Festival – Tailteann Nua which takes place from the 1st to the 5th of August. This event will offer people the chance to holiday at the University’s spectacular campus whilst also giving them the opportunity to participate in the performing arts, play a team sport or avail of the workshops and events on offer in language, music dance and storytelling. Top Irish artists are being lined up to provide entertainment for the event while many well-known writers, historians and commentators will participate in a debate involving the relationship between Irish Diaspora and contemporary Ireland. A full children’s programme is also being planned. The event hosted by the events team at U.L. is set to be one of the leading events of the year.

Hon. Mr Justice John Murray Appointed UL Chancellor

Sarah O’ Dwyer

The University of Limerick’s governing authority unanimously decided on the 29th of January to appoint former Chief Justice the Hon. Mr Justice John Murray as Chancellor of the University and Chairman of UL’s Governing Authority.

The Hon. Mr Justice John Murray, now Senior Ordinary Judge of the Supreme Court, will take up office immediately. The Office of UL Chancellor is honorary and Justice Murray’s term will continue to 30 November 2017.

Speaking about the appointment announcement President of the University of Limerick, Professor Don Barry, said: “I welcome the decision of the Governing Authority and know that the appointment of Mr Justice John Murray as our Chancellor will allow us to draw on his extensive experience as an eminent public figure in Ireland and internationally. I look forward to working with him and I



know that his input and guidance will augment the University’s advancement as a pioneering and progressive force in Irish education.”

Changes to Charges in the Student Health Centre

Sarah O’ Dwyer

It has been announced that there have been alterations in regards to charges for use of the student health centre. The changes, which came into place last Thursday, 31 January 2013 are as follows:

A single visit to the doctor was €25, this stays the same, but any follow-up or callback appointments have been reduced to €5. Similarly, charges for medical card holders visiting the doctor are €25, with €5 being charged for follow-ups also.

A consultation with the nurse was €10, and this also stays the same, with any follow-up appointments being reduced to €5 also.

Visiting the psychiatrist has been cut from €25 to being free of charge, which will be a huge aid for students here in UL. A consultation with the physiotherapist has been reduced from €30 to €25, with any follow-up appointments being reduced to just €5 per session.

Visiting the STI clinic remains at €30, with any follow-up appointments lowered to €5. Also, an appointment regarding contraceptive is being reduced from €20 to €10.

Any emergency doctors call is remaining at €25, with follow-up appointments €5. All medical certs are either €5 or €10. Getting an I-Grade recommendation from a Student Health Centre doctor is €25 with €5 for follow-



ups, and to get an I-Grade with an external doctors cert is being reduced from €25 to €5.

The Student Health Centre provides a service for University of Limerick

registered students only. The Health Service is an excellent asset to the students of UL, and these changes will certainly ease financial pressure on those who have to visit the doctor more

frequently, especially for follow-up appointments.

Opening hours for the Student Health Centre are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 1.30pm and Monday to Friday 2.00pm

to 4.30pm. The Student Health Centre can be contacted during these times on 061 - 202534 or alternatively you can email Rachel.Goodison@ul.ie.

Ireland Take Over EU Presidency

Michael Ramsay

Since January 1st, Ireland has taken over presidency of the European Union. The presidency will last for six months during which Ireland will get the chance to promote itself as a powerful and desirable country as well as dealing with some of Europe’s major issues.

Each member state of the E.U has the chance to hold this position and because it changes around so much Ireland will not have this chance again until 2028, which means they intend on making the most of it. Many responsibilities are given to the country that holds presidency, including chairing meetings and playing host to visiting delegates. This means that for the next six months Europe’s focus will be on Ireland. Plans are in place to use this time to focus on promoting Ireland as a desirable destination for tourism and trade as well as making sure that Europe stays on the road to economic recovery.

To do this, many issues need be tackled. A case will be made to improve Europe’s trade relationship with America and another area that will be looked at will be digital economy. Unfortunately, Europe is playing catch-up when it comes to the topic of digital economy. During Ireland’s term, it is hoped that Europe will advance in this area to ensure that online cross-border trade becomes easier. This means that in the future Ireland could make an online trade with France or Spain for example.





Throughout the next six months, it has been estimated that of the 1,600 meetings that will take place, 180 of them will be held in Ireland. In addition, approximately 15,000 delegates will be welcomed onto our shores. Holding these meeting provides a great opportunity for our country but concerns are still being raised as to how much it will cost us.

In response to these concerns, the government have declared to carry out the presidential term in the most cost-effective way possible. Ireland last held presidency in 2004 where it cost close to €110 million. This time around, the estimated cost is just €60 million. Although this figure is expected to rise

due to security costs measures have been put in place to make sure there is no unnecessary spending. For example, the venues in which meetings will take place are state owned meaning that set-up and transport costs will be reduced. In addition, buses will provide the main transport to cut down on fuel costs. Other cost-effective methods include securing sponsorship for parts of the programme and using tap water instead of bottled water for meetings.

Holding the E.U presidency carries with it many opportunities for Ireland. It will be interesting to see how the country uses them over the coming six months.





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President's Volunteer Award offers chance to make a difference

James Bradshaw
Co-Editor

Since its establishment in 2010, over 200 University of Limerick students have received the President's Volunteer Award with the initiative going from strength to strength. The award was set up to harness the abilities of UL students by encouraging them to make a contribution to society, be it close to home or further afield.

Volunteer activities range from tutoring in study clubs throughout Limerick city, to assisting people with physical or intellectual disabilities or becoming involved in charitable organisations outside of Ireland. Although the University has built up an impressive range of existing volunteer opportunities, students can also come up with new ones by reaching out to a charity or community group of their choice and offering their services.

Community and charitable organisations gain from having the skills and talents of such students at their disposal, and the students also benefit enormously, according to UL's Community Liaison Officer Gabriella Hanrahan.

"Students love to feel good about themselves and there is a very good feel-good factor in helping other people," she said.

Aside from the philanthropic element, Gabriella is quick to highlight the other significant advantage of volunteering: increased job prospects.

"As a volunteer, you're in a very safe environment to develop work-related skills which can be communicative, administrative, creative, all that. Volunteering helps to develop all those attributes."

With economic prospects looking

bleak for the near future and students facing into a highly competitive job market, volunteering can help give prospective graduates the edge in getting the job they want.

"In terms of employability, graduate volunteers are the most employable so it is really a no-brainer to go and do volunteering work during your four years in college. There is no way you'll make the same gain elsewhere because everywhere you go that will be on your CV. Every employer will want to know 'oh, what did you do in your volunteering?'"

The PVA is awarded to students after they have filled out an application form and have succeeded in completing the amount of volunteering hours required in each category which will be verified by their supervisor. There are three main categories: the bronze award for at least 20 hours of volunteering during the academic year, the silver award for at least 40 hours and the gold award for 60 hours and over.

In order to encourage students to volunteer their efforts over a long period, the maximum number of hours volunteered per week is set at three for the PVA, though applicants are allowed to do more than that if they so choose. A special 'Plassey Award' has also been introduced for international students who have volunteered for at least 12 hours during their time at UL, and a large number of them have become involved.

An annual award ceremony is held in the autumn, during which the President of the University presents all PVA recipients with their awards. Last October's ceremony saw 130 UL students receiving awards, an increase of over 50% on last year's figure. In addition, each year the President recognises exceptional



commitment to volunteering by awarding a select few award winners with the 'Outstanding Achievement Award'; three of which were awarded during October's ceremony.

"One of them was a young man who went to St. Vincent De Paul and started up an art program for homeless people," Gabriella explained. "Himself and his friend put €50 in, and got all the equipment to do the art program. He not only did that, he also held an exhibition featuring the art of these homeless

men and some of the paintings sold to different people."

For many students, their arrival at college marks the beginning of their adulthood and is a time of enhanced social freedom and mobility. By choosing to volunteer, young people can use that freedom and initiative to contribute enormously to society, while at the same time growing both personally and professionally. The PVA is already on track to surpass last year's number of award winners and it is clear that more and more

students are actively seeking to make their communities and countries better places to live in.

Gabriella says that helping UL's volunteers to develop their skills while helping others is the best part of her job, and that she is inspired by what they do. "I love unveiling the secret of young people in Ireland. For me, that's the greatest pleasure: unveiling that secret to everybody in the institution and in society in general," she said.

Governing Group Named for Limerick National City of Culture 2014

Sarah O'Dwyer

Former European Parliament President, Pat Cox, has been announced as the Chair of the governing group for the Limerick City of Culture 2014. He will be joined by Riverdance composer, Bill Whelan, and rugby international Paul O'Connell. As each of them have very unique skills, it is quite clear that every aspect of Limerick culture and sport will be covered. It has been confirmed that Director of the Arts Council, Orlaith McBride, has also accepted a place on the driving group.

Paul O'Connell has said: "I've always been a very proud Limerick man and I'm particularly proud of the unique culture of sport in the city; it's our heartbeat, our passion and what makes us tick. I'm looking forward to a vibrant programme of events for 2014 and helping to build on the long and distinguished history of the arts in Limerick and creating a legacy that

we can all benefit from".

Jimmy Deenihan, Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, last year announced the new culture initiative for Ireland. This culture initiative entitled the 'National City of Culture' awards one city in Ireland this title every two years, for the duration of one year.

The initiative is eager to bring all types of organisations together in an attempt to design a calendar of events that showcases everything the city has to offer as regards cultural expression, and Limerick has been given the honour of becoming Ireland's first National City of Culture for the year of 2014.

Minister for Finance Michael Noonan has said "This is a new and welcome development which will bring the cultural offerings of Limerick to a wider, national audience. I am confident that Limerick will set a high standard as the inaugural National City of



Culture, and will provide an excellent example for the cities that follow."

Minister Deenihan has also said that the year-long program of events

will provide "a longer-term positive impact" for the city.

The first draft of the official programme for Limerick City of

Culture will be officially launched in June of this year.

With Or Without Britain, Change Is Necessary For The European Union To Survive

James Bradshaw
Co-Editor

Ireland's European Union Presidency comes at a good time for the Government. Instead of focusing on difficult domestic issues, the coming months will be taken up with a series of prestigious engagements. Yet nothing can disguise the problems which exist within the EU, and the vastly different visions of how it should develop in the coming years. The Nobel Peace Prize the Union received in December for transforming Europe "from a continent of wars to a continent of peace" was scarcely more deserved than the one President Obama got in 2009. The EU we know today did not exist until 1993, by which time NATO had already succeeded in warding off the threat of Communism. After that, it was American-led NATO operations which stemmed the slaughter in Bosnia and Kosovo, while the EU lay impotent. That aside however, the EU does deserve a great deal of credit for fostering a spirit of co-operation among nations who had previously regarded each other as enemies, with the settling of the Franco-German rivalry perhaps being its greatest single achievement. Close economic ties have made military conflicts unthinkable, and generations of younger Europeans have lived their entire lives in a region where it is remarkably easy to travel, work and study across national borders, often without even having to change currency before departure.

The effects of 'Europeanisation' have added a richer diversity to life right across the 27 (soon to be 28, with Croatia's accession) member countries, with Ireland being no exception. Upon joining in 1973, we were an inward-looking and impoverished nation, on the periphery of regional and world affairs. Whatever our current problems, there can be no dismissing the progress we have made over the last four decades. But a sentimental reflection on how far we've come can't allow us to forget for a moment the massive difficulties facing the European Union, not just in terms of the Eurozone crisis but in how two conflicting visions of how the Union should develop in future have emerged. To save the monetary union, a fiscal union has been created, but not before a more comprehensive proposal had been vetoed by British PM David Cameron. Now the Tory leader is focusing on negotiating a new relationship which will allow Britain to opt-out of a large portion of the Union's current areas of responsibility, thus repatriating powers to Westminster. Upon completion of these negotiations, an 'in-out' referendum on the new arrangements is promised sometime after the next general election in 2015. In truth a re-alignment on the part of Britain has been coming for some time. The British public have long been among the most sceptical of all European publics when it came to ever closer integration, and had, for example, the Lisbon Treaty been put to them in a referendum



it would likely have been rejected by a landslide. Britain, having ruled the greatest empire in world history until relatively recently, is not geared psychologically towards being just another component of a federal Europe. It was inevitable that they would seek to move away from Brussels, and with a referendum on membership promised after the next general election the prospect of a full exit is not all that unlikely either. Some may pour scorn over British Euroscepticism as being a mere product of the xenophobes within the right-wing press, but the problems of unaccountable bureaucracy do not only exist within the minds of the average Daily Mail reader. The Single European Market has greatly

expanded consumer choice and market competition, but it has also brought with it excessive regulation and red-tape. An obsessive drive towards standardisation produces farcical disputes such as that relating to the use of imperial measurements rather than metric ones. When foolish laws and regulations are introduced by a national government, voters can make their feelings known at the next election. With the EU however, all legislation originates in the unelected Commission, with the Parliament merely serving as a talking-shop. Thus, the immensely powerful commissioners are beyond public reproach. This 'democratic deficit' has never been resolved, nor is it likely to be in the years to come,

regardless of what measures are introduced to preserve the Eurozone and allow for a change in Britain's relationship with the partner nations. All this makes closer integration even more difficult to establish, with or without Cameron's veto looming on the horizon. Though free trade and close political co-operation between nation states is almost unbreakable, there simply is little public appetite for the federalist dream of a 'United States of Europe'. The EU will change significantly in the coming years, and if the Irish Government can help steer the union through these choppy waters then our presidency will have been a real success.

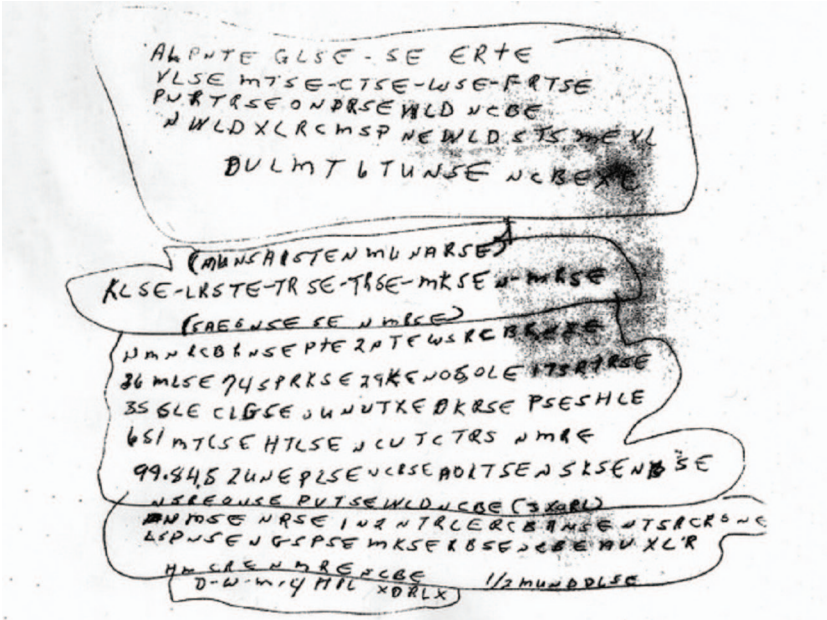
Modern Mystery: The Cryptic Notes Of Ricky McCormick

David O'Donoghue

We are, in many ways, an unlucky generation. We were born too late to experience the age of exploration, discovering vast new continents and exotic peoples and born too early to explore the galaxy in all its vastness. Thus there's a certain lack of mystery and intrigue in our world, a world of exhaustive scientific research where even the depths of the ocean floor are mapped. But, if one looks hard enough mystery is never too far out of sight. In 1999, such a mystery reared its head in the American Midwest. On June 30 the body of a man was found in a cornfield in St. Charles County, Missouri. He was identified as Ricky McCormick, an unemployed 41-year-old who held various residences around the area. His identity was gleaned from fingerprint analysis as his body was already well into the process of decomposition. The

mystery began as police were forced to question how the victim, who didn't drive, had gotten to a cornfield 15 miles from his home. Had his killer transported him? McCormick had last been sighted five days previous at a local hospital. Since then no missing persons report had been filed. There is little information available about the manner of the man's death as the county police were tight-lipped about many of the details regarding the case. What they did report, however, was the detail that made the case the modern mystery that it is: The discovery of two notes written in a complex cryptographic code in the victim's pocket. While at first this was considered odd there was little worry that the code wouldn't be cracked. Modern computing technologies ensure that most cryptographic codes are broken relatively quickly. This one, however, would not be. The code resisted the best efforts of the FBI's Cryptanalysis and Racketeering

Records Unit (CRRU) and puzzled even top American cryptographers. To understand how major a mystery this was, one has to understand how difficult it is to stump these Cryptographers. Two other notable examples of mysterious uncrackable codes, those of the Zodiac Killer and the Jim Stanborn's Kryptos sculpture which resides outside the CIA's headquarters, were produced by people considered to be exceptionally intelligent and skilled at cryptography. How, then, did a high school dropout with little interest in formal education produce a code that draws out the same perplexed response from top cryptographers. And, what could this mysterious code have to do with his equally mysterious death? Eventually, at a loss for where to go next with the strange code, the FBI made the codes accessible to the public and asked for the help of ordinary civilians in cracking it. A site was set up at <https://forms.fbi.gov/code>, presenting the public with the material and outlining the details of the case. As of yet no one has come forward with a solution of any kind. Perhaps you, dear reader may solve it. The code could be anything from complete nonsense to detailed plans for the construction of a landing strip for extra-terrestrials invaders. Until someone cracks it the code remains an oddity and mystery in a world with so few of those left.



Time For A Positive Spin On Social Media

Michelle O'Shea

Over half of Ireland's population has a Facebook account. Is this a good thing or can social media be dangerous?

People in general are bored of being lectured about the seemingly endless list of reasons why social media is such a bad thing. We are bombarded with the opinions of parents, teachers and journalists insisting that Facebook invades our privacy, Twitter is self-indulgent, Instagram promotes vanity etc. but honestly what difference will it make? We will still log on to check our notifications or to see what is happening in the world of Kim Kardashian and we enjoy it! From the point of view of a student, social media is far from dangerous but instead an integral part of our daily lives.

Being asked if Social Media is a good thing is a bit like being asked whether electricity, the telephone or the computer are good things: each has its own advantages and disadvantages but we depend on them all the same. I'd like to break the usual pattern of criticising these websites and instead choose to praise them for their contribution to our lives.

Perhaps the most obvious benefit of social media and Facebook in particular, is that they enable us to be constantly connected with other people. It is easier than ever to stay in contact with people. You can speak to a friend in Australia as much as you want without the cost of a long-

distance phone call or track down friends from primary school who you haven't seen in years. When our friends go on a co-op to a foreign land or we ourselves set off for a semester somewhere far removed from Limerick, there is no need to lose contact with those closest to us. A solitary tweet from your friend every few days can provide a source of comfort and by scrolling through your Facebook news feed you won't feel so far away from home.

Another often overlooked advantage of social media sites is the fact that communication barriers are reduced, allowing everyone to voice their opinions and potentially be heard by thousands of people. For some people, being granted this type of power is invaluable and receiving "likes" or "re-tweets" can improve their self-esteem. Not only that but, people can establish or join a group filled with like-minded people and broaden their social circle as a result. On the subject of sharing information via social media, Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook said:

"When you give everyone a voice and give people power, the system usually ends up in a really good place. So what we view our role as is giving people that power. People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds but more openly and with more people, and that social norm is just something that has evolved over time."

I'm sure many will agree that another



positive quality of social media is that you are exposed to news and current affairs. Twitter is usually overrun with tweets from celebrities about any major event around the globe and by simply following the Breaking News feed you can receive the most up to date news available. For those

who can't watch the evening news broadcast and for cash-strapped college students like myself who couldn't afford a Saorview box, this is the perfect way to stay informed about the goings-on in the world.

Where there is innovation there will always be sceptics but with clever

usage these social media sites can certainly enrich and improve our lives. It has become fashionable for people to criticise social media but they refuse to even acknowledge the attributes that make these sites such a crucial part of our lives.

Symbolism And What It Means Today

Aoife Coughlan

Following the riots in Northern Ireland I became a small bit perturbed by the effect a flag could have on a large group of people. The reduction of flying days for the Union Jack above City Hall in Belfast to just 18 days caused an unprecedented amount of unrest within the unionist community.

What's clearly obvious is that the Troubles in Northern Ireland today are often an excuse for thug action rather than bigot-led violence. However, it is still hard to eliminate the idea that a slur on the unionist community was seen in the use of the Union Jack. It was purely a symbolic gesture and not a political threat or legislative undermining. Symbolism is very much a charged factor in our society be it in Northern Ireland or elsewhere, but should it really be the case? Does symbolism outweigh a sense of logic or is it the principled values that form identity?

There are those who feel that draping oneself in the flag of their country during a sporting occasion is an improper use of a nation's colours. I feel that nowhere does it show disrespect to a nation but what annoys me more is how something so insignificant can ignite opposition in the first place. Wearing a flag around your shoulders does not immediately



mark a person out for being a threat to national safety or portraying some kind of anti-state sentiment. Generally these decisions are made on the spur of the moment and not with any political intent behind them. Another thing that bothers me

about symbolism is that it is usually a useless and unproductive action. The visit of the British Queen to Irish shores was seen as a symbol of how far our two countries had come politically. Indeed the gesture of Martin McGuinness and Her Royal

Highness shaking hands on her visit to Belfast in the summer was also seen as a major symbolic moment. Yet how much weight do these symbols carry if we still see rioting and violence in Northern Ireland? In reality they are closer to being media-driven

paparazzi moments than they are to anything long-lasting or suggestive of progress.

Controversially, Sinéad O'Connor once ripped up a picture of Pope John Paul II while on stage. As disrespectful as this may have been, could it also not be considered as the sad antics of an attention-seeking woman? In which case the offence is much less catastrophic. The photo is a symbol of the church but whether one openly critiques the institution or tears up its symbols it is still the same thing, just an opinion that does not have any lasting effect.

State symbols are all very well for forming the basis of national pride but when we regard them as something that should be a prelude to action, or the outcome of an action we are fooling ourselves. If logic would prevail then unionists would see the reduction of flag flying days as a lesser evil than something deconstructive to their society such as a reworked gerrymandering situation or those anti-flag drapers would concentrate their energy on seeing that our national pride was upheld by making the state a better place to live economically and socially. There is a time for symbols and a time for logic and reason.

An Focal

James Bradshaw

It’s a new semester, and it’s a new An Focal. For the duration of this semester, Lorna Bogue and myself shall serve as the co-editors of An Focal, with the very able Sarah O’Dwyer and Michelle Ryan working full-time for their coop. With Sarah, Michelle and their team handling the news section, An Focal is guaranteed to keep fulfilling its main purpose by informing readers of exactly what’s going on in the University of Limerick: from the academic scene to the social one.

An Focal is the paper you look to when you want to know what’s going to happen during Charity Week, or what happened at the ULSU AGM you couldn’t make it to. It’s where you find out what’s going on with Clubs & Societies, and where you see who’s been photographed legless drunk at the last concert in the Courtyard. If there’s something important happening at the University of Limerick, then it should appear in the pages of An Focal.

But An Focal has another purpose, and one which perhaps has been neglected in the last few months. There are 10,000 or so students in the college. Each one of them has a unique range of interests and talents. Many love to write, whether it is creative writing, opinion pieces, or articles about sport, music, film or travel. A huge number of UL students maintain their own blogs, which shows that not only do they have an interest in writing, they also have an interest in making that writing available to the public and having it read by others.

A student paper is a medium for students to have their say and to make their voices heard. If there is any section that you would like to contribute articles to, then we want

to hear from you. That’s why over the last few weeks I’ve been sending class emails to thousands of students via their course directors, to make sure they know that An Focal belongs to them and that those of us who are involved in it want them to become involved too.

Have a look at the list of sub-editors on page 2, and if there’s a section you’re particularly interested in, drop that sub-ed an email to let them know. Even better, apply to be a member of the 2012/2013 An Focal contributors page on Facebook, and you’ll be added today.

If you’re reading this, you’re part of the audience. If you start writing for us, you’ll be part of the team.

Lorna Bogue: Jumping On The Bantwagon

Welcome back to a new semester of An Focal, and the seventh edition of An Focal XXI. As Editor I’ve made a few changes to the layout of the paper; however the content remains at its usual very high standard. I’d like to take this opportunity to welcome and thank the new co-op students who have been working overtime to make sure that this edition of An Focal remains at the same high standard as last semester’s. Personally I think that Michelle Ryan and Sarah O’Dwyer have done excellent work both as co- news editors, co-online editors and in the office as well. This brings me on to the Editorial team, who have also done excellent work for this edition. I’ve decided to bring back full contributors credits in An Focal so that every contributor and sub-editor gets the full recognition for the stellar work that they do. A paper without articles would be a bit

moot!

The last week has been an interesting week all around for student media in UL. Recently Thomond Student Times had an editorial which pointed out (not in the most tactful way) an incident in which a marketing page aimed at UL students wrote an inappropriate comment on an individual’s wall. The comment itself while being generally unprofessional and in poor taste also had, as the editorial pointed out, a connotation of being violent towards women. This one incident, while being the most highlighted one in recent times, is unfortunately only one example of a pervasive attitude that women are things that are there to be used, usually for sex. I was happy to defend TST in lifting the lid on that particular viewpoint which they attributed quite correctly to the Irish drinking culture. However, and this is where I would disagree with TST, it is not something that is limited to certain groups. Personally I’ve found that objectification happens all the time and can come from unexpected sources, one of the worst incidences of essentialism I’ve experienced wasn’t carried out by a ‘Lad’, but by self-proclaimed feminist. The idea that women can be essentialised, that is, reduced down to one particular trait or function is of course not a new idea. The comments reacting to the editorial on TST were very revealing in terms of how women are generally essentialised down to their sexual function. A prevalent attitude that women are there for sex, the occasional cup of tea or sandwich and not much else. It seems that quite a large proportion of those who walk among us (presumably as they chose to retain their anonymity) hold views that it’s ok to demean women. As the only identifiable woman commenting I attracted a lot of



A typical example of ‘slut-shaming’ on the Facebook page Confessions of UL Student.

personal attacks from other posters. All for pointing out that a culture of violence towards us, which has existed throughout history and will continue to exist if we do nothing about it. That it shouldn’t be swept under the carpet as ‘banter’ or ‘craic’. For this I was dismissed as one of those ‘man-hating feminists’ and was told that I should calm down and stop ‘over-reacting’. Firstly, the mischaracterisation of feminists as man hater showed a deep level of ignorance as to what feminism is. To be feminist, and I mean really and truly feminist, is to want equality regardless of gender. So to say that feminists hate men doesn’t make sense at all. Is equality for some a thing? Secondly, I found out that the perceptions that we have of women do affect all of us in some shape or form.

This week I decided to talk to people about what they think general attitudes towards sexuality are and it’s amazing how revealing the simplest questions have been. Everyone I talked to has experienced

objectification before, has been used, has been made to do things they didn’t want to do, knows what it feels like to wake up and feel like the most useless, worthless and humiliated ‘thing’ that has ever existed. It isn’t just limited to women, by the way, before I’m accused once more of saying all men are monsters and ‘deserve’ to be treated badly. It just seems like our culture condones and encourages men to use women for sex. What I heard a lot was that, ‘guys talk’, they gain respect when they sleep around. Women who act in the same way are talked about as well, but not in the same terms, we (men and women are guilty of this) often shame them for their actions, a difference between the genders which has become particularly obvious on pages such as Confessions of a UL Student.

Of course you’re free to disagree with me, but maybe it’s time to question the double standard that exists. Punishing those who ask the question in the first place isn’t the way forward.

The War Is Over So Says...

Evan O’Grady

Kathryn Bigelow’s Zero Dark Thirty soon hits Irish cinemas: a dramatised version of the events leading up to the US assassination of Osama Bin Laden. I’m not sure if the operation was officially down as one of “assassination” but not many would be surprised if it was.

It is not too often that one individual can attract so much antagonism and become a symbol of so much hate that one of the largest countries in the world wants him dead. The ethics of it all are so mired in emotion and history that it is hard to think of anyone speaking of it in more objective terms. Even here in Ireland, we can hardly cry out against America (at least as a country rather than individuals) for this act and those acts that came before it. Our participation and the participation of so many other countries puts us squarely in the US camp. Back in 2001 who could have thought the “War on Terror” would involve so many and continue for so long?

Bigelow’s story is intriguing in

its sense of timing. It was being developed well before the successful attack on Bin Laden took place. It was more focused on the hunt itself and what was currently (at the time) going on in the background of US politics. It was due to end on quite an ambiguous and downtrodden note, for how could you be hopeful about an operation that had lasted for ten years with no tangible results barring a widening gap between people of different faiths across the world?

One would think Bigelow would have to flip-flop on her original vision of the movie with the current status quo, but thankfully she has kept her head better than most would. She opted instead to retain the same tone of voice in the movie’s ending, the idea that after all of this blood, after all of this war and dubious tactics, was it all worth it? An age old question of the ends justifying the means, Bigelow does not shy away from the fact that US citizens had to stoop lower than the “enemy.” Lies, force, torture: these were all used to attain a goal that really has no proper end. You can’t really “defeat” the concept

of fundamentalist terrorism.

Bin Laden’s was the hunt of a symbol of terrorism, a man who may have masterminded some of the most prolific attacks on America, but by no means did he mastermind all of them. ZDT retains an air of insecurity, less in the film itself but more among the people it portrays. It doesn’t really need to have the higher moral ground because the moment those planes hit those towers so many years ago now, no one in America and in its allied countries could really say they were the better person. The psychopaths who kill had to be killed, that was the mentality, and who could argue? Celebrations rocked parts of America at the news of Bin Laden’s death, but what the news surely didn’t show as much was the amount of people who probably shrugged and went about their lives: those who stopped and thought about what was needed for a whole country to strive for a singular goal of ending one man’s life.

What can be gathered from all of this is that really, the War on Terror is not won, it was a nebulous goal to begin with for one, but war is a time



where all people become something monstrous in order to survive. Had America been unresponsive to the attacks in all probability the country would have torn itself apart as those who wanted revenge (quite a lot of people) would not have been vindicated and would have sought retribution for themselves. Members of the government trumpeted the moral superiority of their cause, they fooled many really, but the movie itself reminds us of those who saw the

War on Terror as something that just had to be done rather than a calling.

These soldiers, spies, investigators and even desk clerks were given the role of hunters. “Go find this man, make him dead for us. Forget morals, this is your job.” Maybe one can argue what they did was necessary; ugly but necessary. But when you begin to speak of human lives and what is “the necessary”, don’t be too surprised if the world becomes that much darker a place to live in.

ULSU President's Update

Adam Moursy
ULSU President

On behalf of your Students' Union, I'd like to welcome you all back from your Christmas holidays. I hope those of you that received your results were happy with them and if not, then this semester is the perfect time to improve on them. Semester two is shaping up to be absolutely mental with events on every week, ranging from the KBS Ball, to the Law ball and then Charity Week in Week 6. We'll hopefully be announcing the line-up for Charity Week in the coming week or so!

We've been busy working in the Students' Union throughout the holidays and only last week, we announced several changes in the prices charged by the Student Health Centre. The introduction of

severely reduced charges for follow up appointments, the reduction in the cost for students requesting an I-Grade, who possess an external medical cert and the removal of the charge for the Psychiatrist are the main changes that we fought for. These, we feel, will protect the most vulnerable of our students. Of course, we will continue to monitor the Health Centre and will lobby the University for more reductions where it is appropriate.

We have also got clarification from the University regarding the rumours around the potential closure of the Language Resource Area, which is a vital service for many of our students who study languages. The University have said that these rumours are just that, rumours. We have been assured that the LRA will not be closing down.

We here in the Students' Union are

conducting our annual survey and I would really recommend that each of you take the time to complete it. By providing your opinion and viewpoint on the Students' Union, it will enable us to provide the service, which each of you expects from us. It is also a fantastic opportunity for you, the students, to criticise or compliment any aspect of the Students' Union, which is your right as a member of this Union.

Hope you all had a great Week 1 and are ready for an unbelievable Semester 2!



ULSU Deputy President & Welfare Officer Update

Cathal Ronan
ULSU Deputy President & Welfare Officer

WELL!

How's things, how you doing? You're doing great? Good stuff. How were the holidays? Excellent! Welcome back to UL and a big shout out to all of you, our new students. My name is Cathal as you know and I'm the welfare officer. What do I do you say? (other than give out free, yes that's right FREE condoms) well here it is!

As your Welfare Officer for this year, I am responsible for a number of different aspects of college life such as accommodation issues, financial aid, sexual health and mental health. As well as being responsible for those

duties I also sit on various committees representing you the student! But seriously though, they are free, the condoms that is, so if you need one please call in to the office or ask for one behind reception. Oh, and I have free lube (I know right?)

While you're here in UL, regardless if you have an issue or not, feel free to pop in for a chat. I've a big reclining couch in my office that students use to chill out on. So any issue, no matter how big or small, is still an issue and I'm here to help. If I can't figure it out I'll know someone that can.

This semester we will be having a number of campaigns, including SHAG week (it's not what you think!) SHAG week is sexual health and guidance week and we have big plans

for it. We will have loads of other stuff going on so if you want to help out please let me know, the more volunteers the better.

Big news from a welfare point of view and a union view is that the medical charges have changed (cheaper!) – I believe there is an article written here about it so go give it a look. It's important stuff!

So any way I better wrap this up. I'm here for you. I'm here to help and support you during your time in UL. So don't be afraid to ring me (061-202519), email (suwelfare@ul.ie) or call in to the office. I'm looking forward to meeting you!



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A black and white photograph of a vintage-style radio. The radio has a large, circular dial with numbers from 60 to 140. Below the dial is a volume knob and a tuning knob. The radio is sitting on a wooden surface. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular logo with the letters 'UL' and 'FM' inside.

Rape Culture and the Student Experience

There's a culture that surrounds us every day of our lives. This culture is difficult to pin down and this ethereal quality makes it even more difficult to stop. The events of last week have shown us all that it has particular links to drinking culture and student Culture. This culture is rape culture and it has pervaded most of our social lives.

First of all, what is rape culture? Rape culture is any culture that fails to condemn rape, and in some cases tolerates and condones it. The means by which a rape culture is perpetuated are through victim blaming, trivialising rape and objectification. These are all practices which are shared by drinking culture and by student culture. Every day we are surrounded by examples of rape culture. In our social media we are constantly subjected to the objectification of people. At its core to objectify someone is to strip them of their humanity. Every day we are surrounded by media outlets that encourage us to look at other people, not as human beings capable of thoughts and feelings but as things which are to be used for gratification. Whether that is by condemning or enjoying their image. From the glossy magazine pointing out cellulite on a celebrity body to pornographic images, objectification is normalised by society.

However this objectification leads to very real harms. UL students will perhaps be familiar with the Spotted UL pages. While they may seem pretty innocuous at first glance, comments on the Spotted UL gym page have had a real impact on students. An Focal has heard from several sources that this page has been a disincentive to use the UL Gym, 'You're in a vulnerable position there, you're there for your physical health, it should be private. The fact that you're being scrutinised is demeaning'. The anonymous founder of the page released a statement on the page saying that they were happy about their effect on people with the added comment, 'But on da up side UL women should become easier.... might even end up being as easy as LIT women.' This idea, not only that people are there to be looked at but that they are also 'easy' is an idea which feeds into rape culture, which relies on objectification and also on victim blaming. While we may say that this is ultimately harmless, because it happens on the internet, it isn't really. Because these ideas and attitudes leak into general society and do in fact influence our actions. While investigating rape culture in UL I came across many stories which had the same theme. People actually do get raped because it is assumed, because of how they act, or how they dress, that they are 'up for it'. One particular incident that was related to me was explained with, 'the fact that I had a reputation as a "slut", he probably thought I'd be ok with it'. Reputation and perception it seems plays a huge role in how people are treated by sexual partners. If the person involved is seen in a certain way it is easier for people to use them for their own ends and the rape culture which surrounds us feeds into this mentality of how we perceive others. The tendency is to blame the victim, we deny that they have been raped and instead say that they asked for it. How often have we heard, 'people would just say that if she hadn't been sleeping around it wouldn't have happened.' Or that even though, 'drink is involved in anything of that nature that I've heard about' rape culture tells us that they did consent and that to say otherwise is to overreact. Our culture doesn't particularly care for people who have been raped. Instead of getting the support that someone who has been raped deserves to get, they are instead told that they are somehow to blame for their rape, if it happened at all. The easiest way to avoid shame they are implicitly told is to be silent.

So how do we fight rape culture? How do we prevent rape? Is it by telling the vulnerable in society to protect themselves and not do anything provocative? Or is it by looking at ourselves and assessing our actions. The rapist generally isn't the scary person at the end of a dark street, generally it's someone who's known to the person they rape. The blame for rape shouldn't be the burden of the 'victim' it should be the burden of the person who commits the act itself. Rape culture allows us to deny what we do to each other, but don't let it. Most people are rational human beings capable of asking themselves if the person they are having sex with is consenting. If you have to buy more drink to turn that sober No into a drunken Yes, that's not consent. If you have to lie to them to get them into bed and their consent is based on a false premise, that's not consent. If you have to shame and guilt them into sleeping with you by using words such as 'frigid' or 'slut' or 'tease', guess what, that's not consent either. Rape Culture exists; to trivialise and ignore it is to make it worse.

~ Lorna Bogue

Stella’s Year Of Success

Barbara Ross

STELLA McCartney rang in the New Year on a high after a fantastic 2012 and 2013 might be even better for the British designer.

The British designer created the uniforms for Team GB at the 2012 Olympics after Adidas appointed her Creative Director for the team. It was the first time in the history of the games that a leading fashion designer has designed the apparel for a country’s team across all competitions for both the Olympic and the Paralympic Games.

In November, she was given the British Fashion Award (BFA) for Fashion Designer of the Year and also picked up the Designer Brand award on behalf of her eponymous label set up in 2001. McCartney opened this year with news that she was to be named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to fashion, an honour bestowed by none other than Queen Elizabeth.

The second child of Sir Paul has been knocking our style socks off for 15 years now, beginning as the creative director at Chloé where her signature style was established.

Sharp tailoring, natural confidence and sexy femininity were immediate traits apparent in her collections, which include women’s ready-to-wear, accessories, lingerie, eyewear, fragrance

and kids.

In addition to the main line collection, a long-term partnership with Adidas was introduced in September 2004. The critically acclaimed sports performance collection ‘Adidas by Stella McCartney’ has since successfully grown to include several athletic disciplines including running, gym, yoga, tennis, swimming, winter sports and cycling.

The working mother of four has many celebrity fans and who can blame them? Her clothes are sexy, sophisticated and eco-friendly to boot (McCartney is a famous animal-rights supporter and uses no leather or fur in her designs). McCartney’s work also includes her signature ‘Falabella’ bag and the ‘Miracle Dress’ that was spotted on red carpets on actresses like Kate Winslet, Jane Fonda and Kate Moss.

Born and raised in London and the English countryside, she graduated from Central St Martins in 1995. McCartney now operates 21 freestanding stores in locations including Manhattan’s SoHo, London’s Mayfair, Milan and Tokyo. Her collections are now distributed in over 50 countries as well as shipping to 100 countries online.

In 2003, Stella McCartney launched her first perfume ‘Stella’ and ‘L.I.L.Y’, her latest fragrance was launched in 2012. In celebration of London in 2012, Stella McCartney presented a one-



off capsule evening collection during London Fashion Week.

In November 2005, the hugely successful one-off collection “Stella McCartney for H&M” sold out worldwide in record time. In 2008, a new lingerie line was launched and in

November 2010 Stella McCartney Kids was launched, a collection catering for new-borns and children up to the age of 14.

In September 2011 Stella McCartney’s costume designs for the New York City Ballet’s Ocean’s Kingdom premiered in

New York.

So far Stella McCartney’s sparkling career has had many successes and there is no sign of her talent slowing down.

Trends To Put A Spring In Your Step

Dearbhaile Houston

ALTHOUGH it may not feel like it now, as you get up bleary-eyed for your first lecture of the semester and see that it is still dark outside, springtime is almost upon us. And with the changing of the seasons come new trends from the Spring/Summer 2013 collections to decipher. Here is a little look at what to expect fashion-wise in the next coming months.

Floral has been a recurring trend for just about every Spring/Summer collection since the beginning of time and 2013 is no different. This year, many designers have gone for graphic Warhol-inspired floral prints on a large scale. Both Moschino Cheap & Chic and Holly Fulton showed simple skirts and dresses covered with Perspex 3D flowers. Prada also got into this trend with over-sized appliquéd daisies. The monochromatic palate of the collection in black, white and red seems to be the perfect way to take on this trend as to not look too childish or like you have just fallen into a flower bed.

Lace and mesh fabrics appeared in full force. Sarah Burton of Alexander McQueen took the usual beautiful-but-sinister route with a collection featuring lots of black mesh, as did Nina Ricci. For something a bit more wearable, Giambattista Valli, with his first couture collection, had sheer shift dresses with white vine-like appliqué and black chiffon blouses. Erdem featured dresses with lace inserts in pastel colours. This seems to be a trend that has been building for some time now and is the perfect way to add interest to otherwise boring wardrobe staples like blouses and blazers.

Fashion’s love affair with 90’s nostalgia



is still as strong as ever. There are two directions to go with the 90’s trend-grunge or minimalism. Celine and Jil Sander took the latter by presenting simple shapes in white, which harked back to the collections of Calvin Klein from that decade. However, you should still hold on to your flannel shirts and Doc Martens from last season as they were seen at 3.1 Phillip Lim, Rodarte and Christopher Kane.

You could also travel further back in your fashion time machine, as the influence of the early 1960’s was a huge trend seen on the catwalks this season. Louis Vuitton had collar-less jackets and pencil skirts with modish checkerboard squares. Moschino’s main collection also went down this route, topping it all off with bug-eyed glasses, framed handbags and riding helmets. The retro-futurism of the decade was also

taken into account by this collection, as in Mark Lupfer with a lot of mirrored dresses and metallic fabrics that made the models look like extras from Barbarella. If you’d rather not look like you have stepped off the set of a bad sci-fi film, then this trend is best handled with accessories, such as over-sized earrings or a cuff.

Although spring and summer can be hard to differentiate from the rest of our seasons here in Ireland, thanks to the propensity of rain, you might be able to get into that summery feeling with all the bright colours that will be around. Pastel shades featured at Bottega Veneta, Givenchy and Dior. Citrus and neon shades will be popular, as well as potentially mood boosting - hopefully enough to distract us from the dreary weather for a while.

Things That Dominated Fashion In 2012

Emily Maree
Life & Style Editor

2012 WAS a fantastic year in terms of fashion. We saw many styles come and go throughout the year and unfortunately had to put up with the staying power of others (yes, fake Barbour jackets, I’m talking about you!). The Irish have clung to these styles like a dog to a bone and as soon as you have read this, you’ll notice these items appearing around college like an unofficial uniform!

Lita’s: Jeffrey Campbell brought these gorgeous beauties into our lives and now we can’t get rid of them. At first, they look clumpy but these incredible boots are everywhere now and are the most comfortable heels that anyone can ever buy! If you don’t own a pair of these bad boys, scoot out to the shops for yourself and pick up a pair.

Leather leggings: The leggings trend is one that can be a bit hit and miss. There was the dreaded floral leggings phase that people insisted on doing and of course you still see the odd woman thinking that she can wear those leggings with a very short top. But the leather leggings trend is one that we could get on board with! Half leather trouser, half leggings, how could this combination go wrong?

Dip-Dye: Stemming from someone growing out his or her hair dye, this new ombré trend is now available in a box and is on every fashionista around the world at the moment. For only a few euros, well about 15, you can look like Drew Barrymore or Sophia Bush... providing you want to, of course!

Military: 2012 was the year that every person looked like they had joined the army but with a twist. Military print is everywhere, mixed with leather, floral and sequins in an urban, modern twist. Best worn in jacket form with a gorgeous pair of shorts or the aforementioned



leather leggings and litas.

Peplum: What self-respecting woman doesn’t have peplum these days? Whether it’s a skirt, a dress, or a top, this style is gorgeous and flattering on just about everyone. A huge style in 2012 whether you’re going out or just mooching around during the day, it’s certainly a trend to watch going into the Spring/Summer season in 2013.

Statement Necklaces: Statement necklaces have always been associated with an older generation but in 2012, bloggers went crazy over the statement necklace trend. Best with a plain dress or nice top, these statement necklaces are huge and can be bought anywhere from Penneys to Topshop depending on what you want to spend.

Make sure you keep a look out for these trends; they’ll be sticking around long into the New Year and your spring wardrobe won’t be complete without these!

Cookery Corner: Potato And Leek Soup

Amy Grimes

IMMERSION blenders, also known as stick or handheld blenders, are an underappreciated tool when it comes to cheap, nutritional cooking in a small space (such as, say, a student kitchen!). Easily picked up for under €10, an immersion blender enables you to make healthy soups and smoothies for a fraction of what you would pay in a restaurant or shop. You can also use an immersion blender to make fresh sauces for pasta or, on the more decadent side of things, perfectly smooth pancake batter and sinful milkshakes. A flavourful soup is one of the best uses for a compact blender as you can tailor the ingredients to your taste and the leftovers freeze splendidly. It's possible to make a large batch in under an hour and the effort is well worth the reward. One of the easiest soups to master is potato and leek soup. This particular recipe is adapted from the inimitable Julia Child's cookery bible, Mastering The Art of French Cooking.

Potato and Leek Soup, makes 6 servings.

- Ingredients:**
- 2 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil
 - 450g potatoes (any variety), diced
 - 450g leeks, chopped

- 1.5l vegetable stock
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 120ml low fat milk (can be switched with heavy cream, if you're feeling fancy)

Directions:

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat.

Cook leeks and potatoes for approximately ten minutes, until leeks have softened slightly.

Pour over the vegetable stock and bring to the boil.

Reduce heat to a simmer and cook for 25-35 minutes, until vegetables are tender. Remove the pot from the heat.

Carefully blend to a smooth consistency using an immersion blender, ensuring the blender is fully submerged before you begin.

Blend the soup in short pulses, this is the best method to ensure you don't end up with a face – or ceiling – full of hot soup.

Place the soup back on the heat and stir in the milk/cream.

Serve with fresh brown bread, and enjoy!

If freezing, allow to cool completely, divide into servings and store in Ziploc bags. Recipe source: <http://www.yumsugar.com/Julia-Childs-Potato-Leek-Soup-Recipe-24339863>



Get Back To Study This Semester

Emily Maree
Life & Style Editor

SO IT'S been a lazy 6 weeks for all of us and now we have to study. We all said we were going to study over Christmas, get all that pesky FYP research done and be organised for the second semester. Did that happen? No! Now the lecturers are telling us it's crunch time and we have to write 100 essays, 10 million assignments and the FYP on top. Damn! So how do we get back to study for the semester to get the grades but not overdo it? Here are some helpful tips of what you can do to ease the pain of studying a little bit!

Give yourself plenty of time:

I know the temptation is always there but if you have an assignment due in a few weeks, try and get it started. Even if its not due for ages, the time will fly and you will be up the creek without a paddle fairly quickly and get stressed which never helps.

Exercise:

Boring, I know, but the key to studying is not to study too much. You'll need to get out and do some regular exercise and give your brain some well-needed rest. You wouldn't run for way too long if you were training for a marathon so why do that to your brain? Even going for a walk for fresh air, having sex or doing some stretches will help and will stop you from crashing! Make sure you also get your 8 hours sleep every night.

Brain Food:

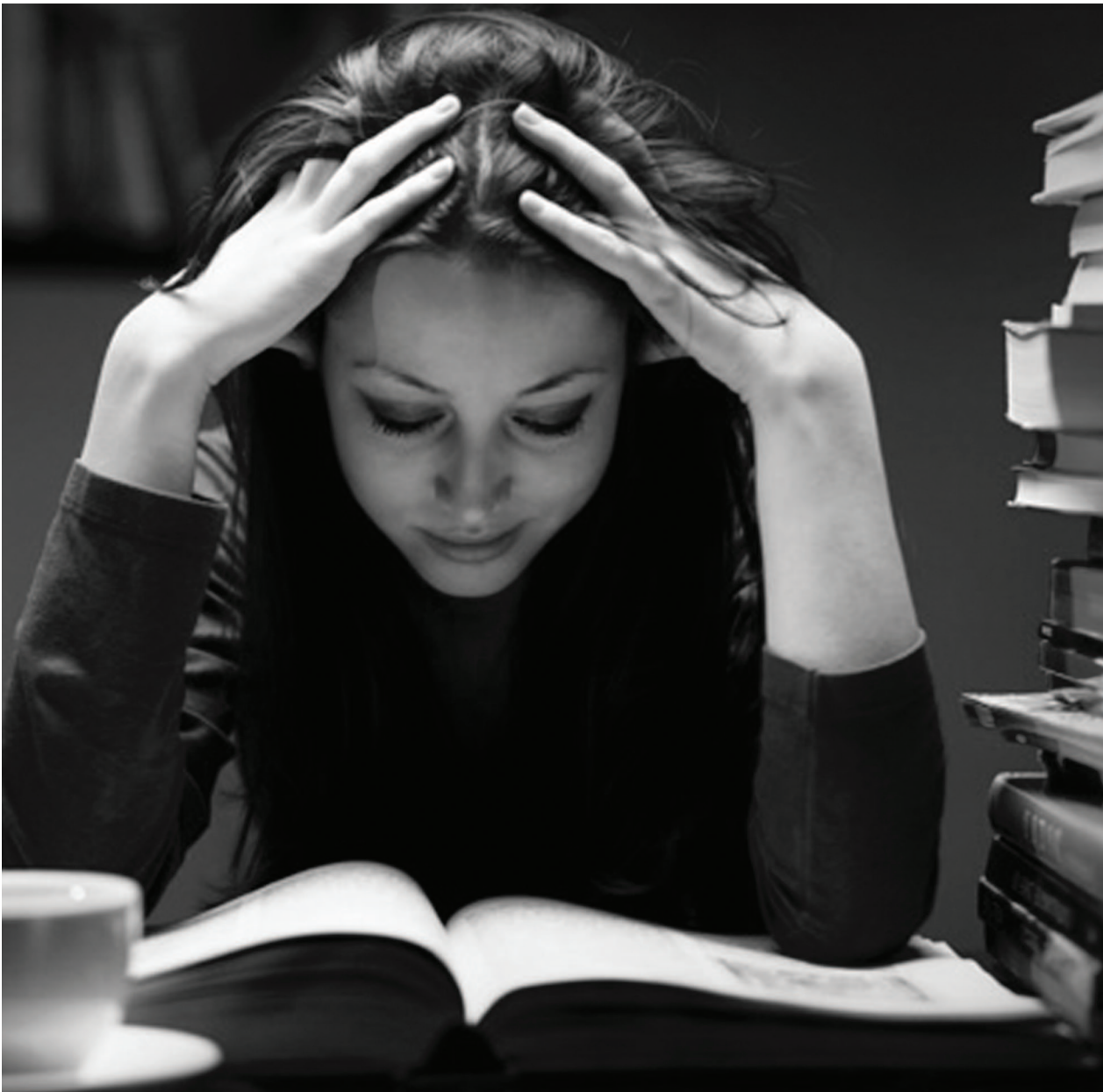
It's easy to sit down and eat a load of junk food when you're preparing for assignments and exams, quick as a flash, the crisps are gone and not only do you feel sluggish but heavier too. To maximise your brainpower, eat things like blueberries in yoghurt with your breakfast, or a piece of fish for your dinner. Even snacking on some nuts (cue the dirty jokes) will help your brain to work better. Of course, don't cut out all junk food as you will still need to keep your blood sugar up.

Less Caffeine:

I'm a serial coffee drinker like so many other people, especially when it comes to exams! But caffeine is a short fix and can drop your mood quickly, leaving you in a slump all jittery and not studying. Red Bull and other energy drinks are ten times as bad and should be left as far away from possible during exams as it can be very easy to overdose on caffeine and do damage to your heart while not helping the situation!

Socialising:

Make sure you do it! This doesn't mean going out four times a week is still acceptable but it's perfectly ok to go on a night out with your friends as long as you're not suffering for three days after. Even taking a break for the evening and having your mates around for dinner can have a positive effect on your study and therefore your grades!



Sexercising & Feminism?

Emma Norris

THE FACT that popular discount site Groupon regularly offer deals on pole-dancing and burlesque lessons should give you an idea about how far we’ve come from the guilt-ridden, taboo-centric, Catholic country of forty or fifty years ago. Now it’s acceptable to pole-dance provided it’s for the good of your health. Maybe it’s ironic but it’s certainly a way to beat the flab and up the feel-good endorphins. Whether that’s a sexy feeling or a healthy feeling probably depends on your motivation in the first place.

The pole-dancing phenonemen has recentlty lost its seedy and sleazy connotations but it still raises a couple of questions about women’s sexuality. Is this new sexercise a way for women to demean themselves or empower themselves?

Burlesque is another thread of sexual performance that has come into vogue in Ireland in recent years. Burlesque is a form of dance made popular in the glamorous theatre and music halls of the 19th century. The Irish Burlesque School in Dublin run by dancer Lisa Byrne is a legit stop



for all your burlesque needs. You can hire burlesque dancers for your event, drag your hen party along for something a bit different, or take a class yourself to boost your heart

rate and your confidence, according to Irish Independent journalist, Erin McCafferty.

She took a class in 2010 with Dublin’s ‘Queen of Burlesque’, Miss Bella-a-

Go-Go, and found the experience liberating. In an era where we criticise women for dressing and behaving in a certain way to attract men, it’s an interesting flip of the coin that shows

us the exhibitionist in all of us – the modern gal who wants to feel sexy, empowered and ladylike – for her own sake.

Burlesque star and ex-wife of Marilyn Manson, Dita von Teese, is an inspiration to many women, and perhaps a thorn in the side to many an extreme feminist. Dita herself claims to be a feminist, despite, or maybe because of, her risque career. She told The Guardian in 2007, “Having your own choices, having equal rights – how is [that] not being feminist?”

Good question, Dita. Can you be a high-class stripper and a feminist at the same time? Can you want equal rights for women and men and still get a kick out of taking your kit off? Of course you can. Feminism is about choice. Chloe Emmot of theword.org.uk said of her experience at a burlesque class, “We were not taught to please men, we were taught to enjoy ourselves, to revel in our bodies, to enjoy our sexuality, the thrill of the tease and the sensation of being in the spotlight.”

Sexerise, anyone?

How To Rehydrate Your Skin This January

Barbara Ross

WINTER has ended, the Christmas decorations have been returned to the attic for another year, and the New Year’s resolutions are still going strong...right?

Winter can be a hard time for your skin as the dry and cold weather affects the moisture level in your skin. To get your skin feeling better after a long cold season, you can put into practice a few simple skin routines.

With the changing of the season there should also be changing of soap and moisturiser. During the winter your skin needed something that helped retain or add moisture, but it’s time to invest in new products for the warmer (it will get warmer eventually) spring weather. Since washing hands can dry out the skin, use a moisturizing oil or cream-based bar soap. Also use a hand cream after every wash to promote hydration.

Look for moisturisers containing natural humectants, which are ingredients that promote the retention of water in the skin. Hyaluronic acid, honey, and royal jelly are popularly used in skincare, as they not only hydrate but also attract moisture from the air and form a protective barrier so water can’t escape.

Increase your SPF! Don’t be fooled by cloudy weather; the suns rays can still get through all that rain and damage your skin. Choose a moisturiser or makeup with SPF protection to make it easy to add it to your routine.

To refresh from the winter, regularly exfoliate to peel away at the top layers of derma and create an environment for them to regenerate. Your body will not only create new, healthy skin but it can also reduce the look of aging.

Look for hydrating body crèmes that draw on plant-based oils such as avocado oil, primrose oil, sesame oil, borage oil, or almond oil. These therapeutic oils are comprised of lighter, smaller molecules



that sink into skin and hydrate longer than mineral oils.

Hydrate from within by drinking water throughout the day. Drinking water helps keep the body’s digestive system functioning properly, expelling toxins, which can help keep skin looking clear and glowing. Slice up a grapefruit or orange, to put in the water. A fruit-infused water will add some extra

flavour as well as added nutrients.

Make sure you keep to a simple skincare routine to rehydrate your skin this New Year to get your skin back on the right track! Just exfoliating and moisturising once a day can get rid of that heavy, raw feeling your skin gets in the cold weather, and gets your visage ready and beautiful for the summer!

Healthy Detox Tips For A New You



Sophie McDermott

AFTER the Christmas period, we tend to jump up a couple of dress sizes, seem to be constantly battling with increasing amounts of spots and generally feel sluggish and rundown. The most important step you have to take when trying to stick to any New Years resolutions you may have swore you were going to keep this year is, to ensure that your body is in the best health it can be. How can you achieve this?

A simple detox diet is guaranteed to shed those excess pounds, allow your body to start taking in vitamins again, and get you feeling confident and self-assured again. While detox dieting may be confusing and seem to be a bit of a hassle, the following is a list of ‘super foods’ that will ensure your detox does the job properly, and doesn’t dent the budget or require subjecting your taste buds to boring or downright weird food.

Lemons are the best and simplest detox food you’re going to come across. Slipping a slice of lemon into a glass of cold water first thing in the morning will help to balance out the acidity of food you have eaten in the past day. It also helps to get rid of toxins out of your body in a healthy and yummy manner.

Flaxseeds are the most powerful super-food as it serves many a purpose

when it comes to cleaning out your body’s system. Ground flaxseeds are an important source of fiber that ensures that toxins are excreted out of your body fast and completely. Try including crushed or grounded flaxseeds to your breakfast cereal in the morning for optimum cleansing.

Apples are a great source of vitamins and healthy things you were told about but never fully understood. An apple a day will most certainly keep the doctor away, however, it’s important to ensure that the apples are organic (not processed) in order to have the most health benefits from this super healthy snack.

Brazil nuts may not be to everyone’s taste but if you’ve never tried them, now is as good a time as any. As well as being a source of Vitamin E, there are loads of other vitamins and minerals that give you glossy hair and soft, clear skin within days. Brazil nuts also increase the number of infection-fighting white blood cells, which definitely can’t hurt.

Red and green onions are packed with amino acids that converts toxins into water soluble substances that can be excreted out of the body fast and thoroughly. They also contain a liquid, vital for detoxifying your liver who has probably seen better days after the Christmas period!

Who is really running away from racism in football? (#1)

Josh Prenderville

“Walk off? No. I don’t think that is the solution.” Then what is, Mr Blatter?

AC Milan midfielder Kevin-Prince Boateng divided the footballing world when he walked off the field after being subjected to racist abuse. Although the abuse took place in a meaningless friendly against fourth division side Pro Patria, the aftermath has been felt around world football. Players such as Rio Ferdinand and Vincent Kompany have publicly backed Boateng’s actions, and his own AC Milan teammates followed him off the pitch in an act of solidarity, causing the game to be abandoned.

However, FIFA president Sepp Blatter, while stating the obvious – that racism in football needs to be eradicated – said that the act of walking off a football field will not in itself stop racist chanting. While this in itself is probably true, it seems to be a statement full of hot air. Blatter and his FIFA associates simply don’t have a solution – yet, they

shoot down someone who does.

The debate on whether Boateng’s walkout will solve racism in football is one thing – the debate on FIFA’s punishments for racism is another. Pro Patria were subsequently ordered to play one game behind closed doors as punishment for racially abusing a man - a criminal offence.

One game, Mr Blatter? Just days after Blatter’s dismissal of Boateng’s methods, FIFA ordered the Hungarian national team to play one game behind closed doors for anti-Semitic chanting during a friendly with Israel.

One game, Mr Blatter? In the same hearing, Bulgaria were ordered to play one game behind closed doors after being found guilty of racially abusing Danish defender Patrick Mtiliga “each time he touched the ball” in a World Cup qualifier in October of last year.

I ask you again, Mr Blatter. One game? For those who believe that Sepp Blatter does not have the authority to change FIFA regulations, or to make punishments more severe, think again.

It is the equivalent of saying that Barack Obama does not have the power to change laws in America.

In 2008, the Croatian FA were fined just over €18,000 when a section of Croatian fans racially abused English striker Emile Heskey. For anyone who knows anything about footballing economics, this would not even dent the wallets of the bigwigs in Zagreb.

Admittedly, that was nearly five years ago and yes, FIFA punishments have become more severe. FIFA have in some aspects realised that their previous punishments were not enough. They relented.

Indeed, they relented so much so, that Nicklas Bendtner was fined €100,000 at Euro 2012 after revealing the logo of a leading bookmaker on his underwear. He had breached advertising and marketing regulations of football’s governing body. This was one of the largest fines to have ever been handed out by FIFA.

However, in October of 2012, in a



match involving England and Serbia Under 21s, English defender Danny Rose was racially abused by sections of the Serbian crowd. After the match had ended, he responded by kicking the ball into the crowd and sarcastically clapping them. Serbian players intervened, and Rose’s English teammates came to his aid. Soon even the coaches were brawling.

Read part 2 in the next edition of An Focal.

UL beat Galway, finish joint top of Premier League group

Jamie Flynn

UL entered their last game of the Premier League mid-west group against NUIG knowing a draw would guarantee qualification, but a win would more than likely be needed to top the group and guarantee a home quarter-final.

In the first half, UL elected to play into a strong wind that swirled around the north campus astroturf. The first half was unexpectedly quiet, possibly due to the conditions. UL looked much the better of the two sides with NUIG never coming close to threatening the UL goal. Kevin Tattan was immense on the left wing with all of UL’s chances seemingly involving him. UL came close several times, but were not reaping reward for their pressure. NUIG were playing a high line and the offside trap caught the UL forwards several times in the first half.

The breakthrough came at a crucial time; five minutes before half time, Kevin Tattan played a well worked one-two with Barry Ryan. Tattan cut inside the NUIG box and played a cross across the six yard line. The cross was met by the head of Garbhan Coughlan and UL came in at half-time 1-0 up.

UL got off to the best possible start in the second half. Eoghan Burke played the ball from centre midfield out wide. Greg Barrett and John O’Leary connected on the right hand side and Barrett sent a cross into the box. The inspirational Burke, who continued his run from midfield, was on hand to meet the cross and put UL 2-0 in front.

NUIG, who had to win to have qualify, now needed three goals. They threw the kitchen sink at UL and got one back in 62nd minute. A dangerous ball was played in from a NUIG free-kick and after a knock down, it was an Galway player who put the ball into the back of

the net.

UL who had been comfortable all game but now had some slight cause for concern. Having let a lead slip against Athlone in their previous league match, however, UL were determined not to let that happen again. Garbhan Coughlan struck in the 72nd minute after an Eoin Walsh shot rebounded. This gave UL some breathing room and it seemed to be the nail in NUIG’s coffin. UL were comfortable for the remainder of the game and came close to scoring a fourth numerous times. The best chance came from a ball that appeared to be played square across the box from Greg Barrett and was hit home by Garbhan Coughlan. However, the linesman ruled that Coughlan had strayed offside.

The game finished 3-1 to UL putting them on top of the table with 11 points and a plus seven goal difference. Athlone IT who played IT Sligo with the games kicking off simultaneously, would need a four goal win or better to prevent UL from finishing top. With UL leading 3-1 with ten minutes to go, news filtered through that Athlone IT were leading 2-1. UL looked assured of first place and following the final whistle, UL management and players celebrated assuming they had done just that. It was not until after the game that UL became aware that Athlone pulled off a late brace and scored three in the final ten minutes for a 5-1 final score. With UL and Athlone finishing level on points in CUFL Mid-West Premier Division, a draw was made for home advantage.

Unfortunately, Athlone came out first, meaning UL got drawn with an away quarter-final, against South Champions Carlow IT. Find out the result of that game in the next edition of An Focal.

2013 to punch above its weight

Conor Finnerty

The sport of boxing had a great year in 2012, and 2013 has the potential to be just as big.

Last year was filled with great fights, shocking upsets and brutal knockouts, culminating in Manny Pacquiao’s destruction thanks to a well-timed punch delivered by Juan Manuel Marquez. In 2013, there will be no Olympics, no major football tournaments and no rugby World Cup. This is prize-fighting’s huge opportunity to seize centre stage.

Last year was one to forget for Manny Pacquiao. He lost to Timothy Bradley in June. Six months later, he got knocked out by arch-rival Marquez in the sixth round. It gave Marquez his first victory in the four fights between the two great boxers. Pacquiao will return to the ring in 2013. Look for him to have at least two bouts. If he can win them both, he will set himself up for a huge showdown in early 2014 with Floyd Mayweather. Bradley remains undefeated at 29-0-0 and is the WBO welterweight champion. His fight with Pacquiao is widely regarded as one of the worst judging fiascos in memory, as it was the view of many observers that Pacquiao got the best of Bradley. His undefeated status should assure that he gets a headline-type fight this year but it may well prove to be the end of his succesful run.

There has not been an undisputed and unified heavyweight champion since Lennox Lewis ruled the heavyweight division. That will change in 2013 when Vladimir Klitschko fulfils that role. His older brother Vitali Klitschko is the WBC heavyweight champion, but he will almost certainly retire in 2013. That will leave the WBC belt there for his Wladimir to take. David Price could also emerge as a solid heavyweight



Mayweather will be looking for a big fight this year.

contender by the end of the year. He would welcome a battle of Britain with Tyson Fury before taking on the younger of the dominant Ukrainian brothers but it is more likely that the two of them will pursue separate paths to the top. Fury is likely to get to one of the Klitschko’s first but it is not inconceivable that he and Price could each receive a mega-Euros invitation to Germany before the year is out.

Khan, having eased his career back on track with his December stoppage of Carlos Molina in Los Angeles, is preparing for a stiffer test in April, perhaps against Josesito Lopez. That will lead to a world light-welterweight title rematch with American Danny Garcia who knocked him out – and off his championship pedestal – earlier last year.

Long-time Welsh campaigner Gavin Rees goes to the fabled Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City for a February 16 to face WBC world lightweight champion Adrien Broner. Broner is the rising star

of American boxing and Rees, even with only one loss on his record, is regarded over there as an interim challenger.

Carl Froch, otherwise known as The Nottingham Cobra, has been aching for a re-match with Mikkell Kessler since his close points defeat in Denmark and it looks like coming by way of a title unification bout at London’s O2 Arena in late May or early June. Having achieved vengeance, there would still be plenty of time in the year for a second tilt at Andre Ward, the only other man to beat Froch.

Since he fought Ricky Hatton in December 2007, Floyd Mayweather has fought four times in the ensuing five years. Mayweather is scheduled to have a fight at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas against an undetermined opponent in May.

With those mouth-watering clashes in store, 2013 promises to be a memorable year for boxing and one which boxing fans can’t wait to see get underway.

Messi comes to the four



Eoghan Wallace

ANOTHER year, yet another award; earlier this month Lionel Messi collected his fourth successive Ballon d’Or award. Despite all the hopes that this could finally be the year a member of Spain’s national team could win the accolade, Messi brushed aside the competition winning 41.6% of the vote. His rival, Cristiano Ronaldo came trailing in second place with 23.68%; while Spain’s best hope Andrés Iniesta could only muster 10.91%. For a man that made a lot of history during the past twelve months his fourth Ballon d’Or is one record whose legitimacy cannot be questioned, sorry Zambia. Messi, who is only 25 years old, has now overtaken Johan Cruyff, Michel Platini and Marco van Basten, all of whom won three ‘Golden Balls’ during their illustrious careers. However did Messi, for all his exploits last year, deserve to win the title of the world’s best player in 2012? Some didn’t agree with the selection. After all Barcelona’s only triumph last year came in the form of the Copa del Rey. Surely a member of Spain’s all-conquering national team would have made a more deserving winner?

The answer to this question is of course he did! Messi made more history in the past year than many make in an entire career. Back in March, against

Leverkusen, he became the first player in Champions League history to score five goals in one game. He finished the European campaign with 14 goals, matching the previous record. He also completed the 2011/12 domestic season having scored 50 goals. That said, impressive as all the above sounds, the record that garnered the greatest media attention was his astonishing haul of 91 goals in one calendar year, smashing Gerd Müller’s thirty year-old record of 85. Attempting to list this man’s achievements is an exhausting exercise; what do you include, and what the hell do you omit?

Messi undoubtedly deserved to win the Ballon d’Or. He does the extraordinary on such a regular basis that watching the Argentinian weave his magic becomes an everyday routine. Take Cristiano Ronaldo for example, 2012 was the finest year of his career so far. While 60 goals in all competition is a staggering achievement, it pales in comparison with Messi’s figures. When 50+ goals a season is a realistic expectation of a player, the rest of the field should know they don’t stand a chance. It seemed the only obstacle that could have prevented Messi from winning was that Argentina could not participate in the European Championships.

There were a lot of calls among football writers that this year a member of the

Spanish national team should receive the accolade. After sweeping to victory with their repetitive tiki-taka style of football many felt that Andrés Iniesta, who was voted the best player at the Euros, represented Spain’s best chance of winning the Ballon d’Or. Alas, as was the case two years ago there would be no Spaniard holding the famous trophy aloft. It should not have come as a surprise as the Euros have never held much sway as the World Cup in determining the award’s recipient, as well as the fact that Iniesta’s statistics seem mediocre compared with Messi’s. Since 1960 only five recipients have won the Ballon d’Or and the Euros in the same year. On the other hand six previous winners won the award and the World Cup in the same year, and the award has only been open to non-Europeans since 1995.

Messi is such an astonishing talent that, regardless of whether there is an international tournament during the year or not, if he’s playing half as brilliantly as he can nobody else stands a hope in hell of assuming the mantle of the world’s best player. When a lack of form consists of a two game goal drought you know you’re dealing with an exceptional talent. Don’t be surprised to read about a sixth or seventh successive Ballon d’Or a few years from now.

Heineken Cup quarter-finals preview



Munster will be looking to advance in the Heineken Cup after going through at the expense of Leinster.

Conor Finnerty

Heineken Cup quarter-final dates and kick-off times have been announced. One of the most anticipated weekends in the rugby calendar will get underway with the all-French clash of ASM Clermont Auvergne and Montpellier at Stade Marcel Michelin on Saturday, April 6th.

Saracens will be up against last season’s beaten finalists, Ulster, in the second of the Saturday fixtures in a venue yet to be announced. While Sunday’s matches on April 7th will kick off with the meeting of pool stage top seeds Harlequins, and two-time former Heineken Cup champions, Munster, at Twickenham.

With all matches broadcast live, and with capacity crowds expected at every venue, the curtain will come down on the weekend when French heavyweights, Toulon, take on Leicester Tigers.

Five of the clubs in the last eight of the world’s most competitive club rugby tournament – Clermont, Harlequins, Leicester, Munster and Ulster – have European titles to their names, while Montpellier will be appearing in the knockout stage for the first time.

ASM Clermont Auvergne and Montpellier will face each other for the first time in a European tournament at the Stade Marcel Michelin. Clermont have now gone 54 matches unbeaten at home and last year’s beaten semi-finalists will be looking to go one step further having lost to eventual champions Leinster in 2012. With Morgan Parra, their talisman, being the leading scorer from the pool stage with 90 points they are favourites in this clash to clinch a home semi-final.

Last year’s beaten finalists Ulster will also be battling it out for a home semi-final with Saracens. Ulster bucked a tournament trend last season with an away quarter-final victory over Munster at Thomond Park and they will hope to

repeat that feat this year. Interestingly Saracens’ Director of Rugby, Mark McCall, was Ulster captain in the club’s Heineken Cup winning season of 1999 but missed the final through injury.

Harlequins came through the pool stage as No 1 seeds for the first time in the club’s history and with a 100 percent record so far they will be hard to stop. Munster got one over on Leinster by reaching the quarter finals at their expense and have reached the knockout stage of the tournament 14 times in the past 15 seasons. The last time Munster and Harlequins met in European competition, Harlequins pulled off a famous 2011 Amin Challenge Cup semi-final victory at Thomond Park. Munster have played in 13 Heineken Cup quarter-finals winning nine, and three of those wins were away from home.

Toulon’s only appearance to date in the last eight was in 2011 when they were defeated by Perpignan in front of a record quarter-final crowd of 55,000 at the Olympic Stadium in Barcelona. Leicester on the other hand have played in 10 Heineken Cup quarter-finals, winning six and losing four. Geordan Murphy is the only remaining squad member of the Tigers winning Heineken Cup teams of 2001 and 2002.

With four magnificent games rugby fans will wait with baited breath to see who reaches the semi-final stage and who ultimately claims the crown of the best in Europe. But the first weekend in April is a long way off and there is a lot of rugby to be played yet with the Six Nations yet to get underway and key fixtures to be played in both the Rabodirect and Top 14.

The knockout stages of the Heineken Cup always promise to be top class entertainment and these quarter finals are sure to be edge of the seat encounters. Dare we dream of two Irish provinces in the Aviva Stadium on Saturday, May 18th? We can hope.



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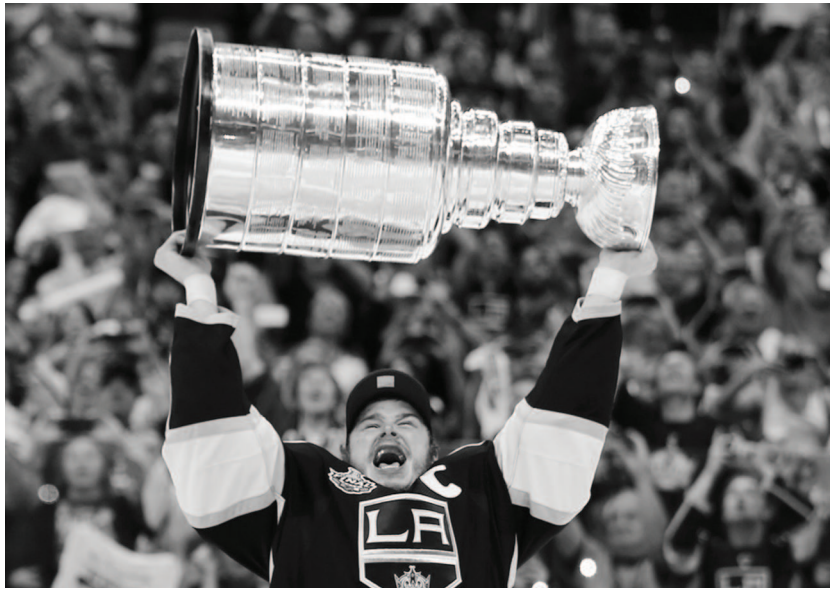
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NHL season not lost after all



NHL is back and the LA Kings will be gunning for glory in the short-season ahead.

Jamie Flynn

This January we finally see the puck drop on a new Ice Hockey season. A season we once assumed was lost, as the months rolled on and no agreement seemed in sight between the owners and the players. But a few weeks into the New Year the NHL and the NHLPA put pen to paper on a new ten-year Collective Bargaining Agreement, although there is an opt-out after eight years if things are not going to plan. So we will meet all these problems down the road again at some stage, but for now, let's just be happy to have the teams hitting the ice again this season.

The main point that saved the season was the new salary cap. The NHL were sticking to a \$60m cap, and after five months and the loss of over 600 games the players got the league to move all the way up to a revised cap of \$64.3m per team! Teams better use that extra cash wisely, but remember no single player can earn more than \$12m per year on their contracts, if you have a couple of big stars on your roster, you better hope they can carry the other twenty odd players in the squad.

The season will run for a total of 48 regular season games. Each team playing eighteen games against teams in their division, the remaining thirty games will be against teams in the same conference. No inter-conference games

will be played; they were a casualty along with the All-Star Game and the 2013 Winter Classic. The Winter Classic was due to be played between the Red Wings and the Maple Leafs at the one hundred and ten thousand capacity Michigan Stadium, home of the University of Michigan Wolverines. The loss of such money generating games was a huge blow to the NHL.

So this year there is no proper preseason; where teams could plan player trades and gear their rosters for the long haul. Now the playoffs will be upon them before they would get a chance to turn a poor season around. A run of form for a team could very well see them lift the Stanley Cup in a few months' time. During the last strike shortened season in 1994-95, the New Jersey Devils got to and won their first ever cup, after sweeping aside Detroit in the final in four games.

Any team can realistically make the playoffs. In '94 three teams with losing records made the postseason. No one can afford a long losing streak in 2013, and in a couple of weeks we could see some surprising teams filling the top eight seeding spots for each conference. The L.A. Kings getting to raise the championship banner was a shock from last season, but perhaps this year we could be in for an even bigger surprise?

Hoop Dreams: NBA Season Halfway Point

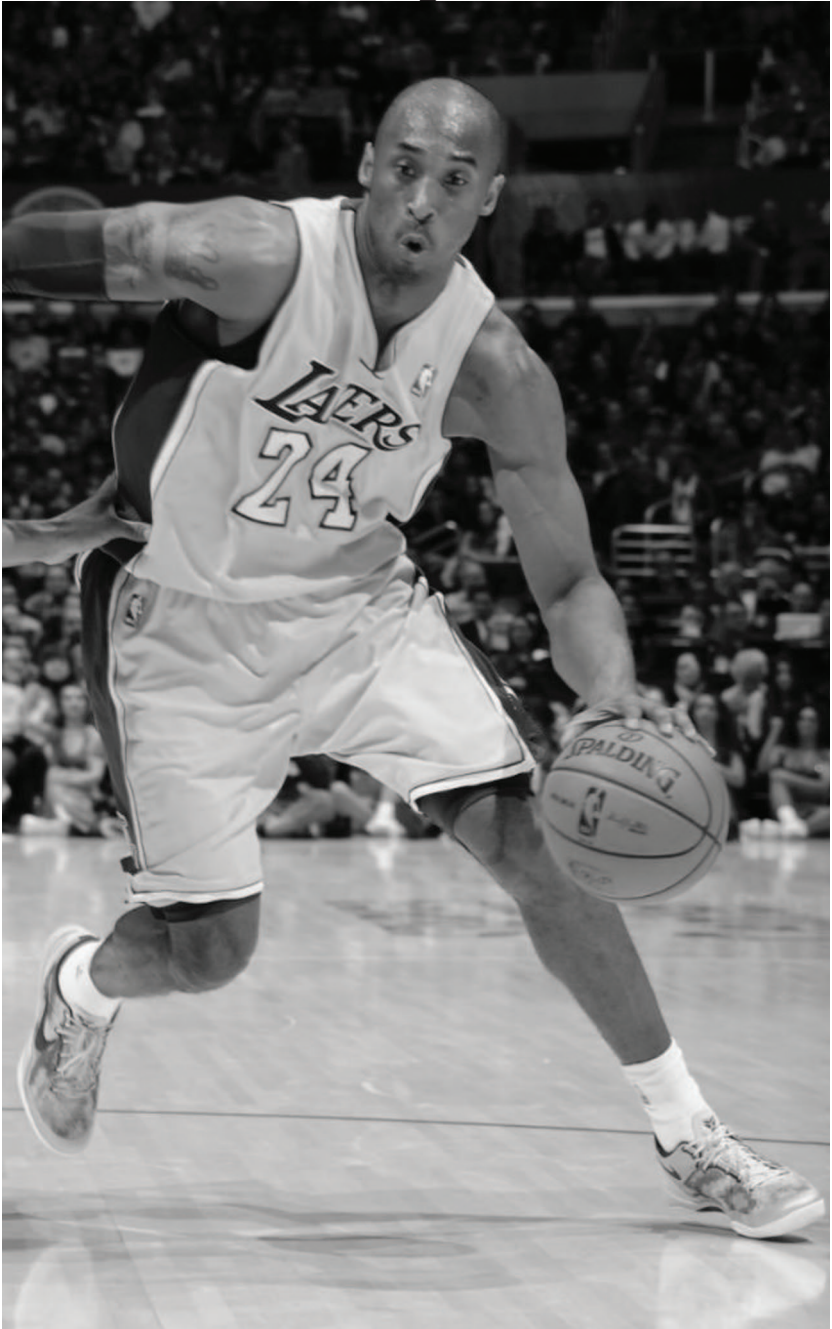
Conor Finnerty

You may have noticed an upsurge in people taking an interest in the goings on of the NBA since the New Year. That's because Sky Sports are now showing live games at the weekends. This coincides with the NBA playing to a sell-out crowd in the O2 Arena in London for a matchup of the regular season between the Detroit Pistons and the New York Knicks, a game the Knicks won easily by a fifteen point margin. Sky will also cover the playoffs and every game of the Finals in June. They have also added basketball to the list of sports that gets covered on Sky Sports News, just like their sudden interest in cycling and formula one.

With more exposure to the sport, countless celebrities hanging out at the O2, sales of jerseys and endorsed sneakers on the rise, as well as the official game NBA2K13 making a fresh jump up the charts despite being released last October, it is a good time to admit that you were a b-ball fan all along. The pain of the strike shortened season last year, taking the shine off the Miami Heat's victory, is long behind us. If your only returning because of Sky's new found love of the sport, you may be wondering where the Seattle Supersonics are? Hint: they are now five states over in Oklahoma. So now is a perfect time for a quick run-down of the movers and shakers of the 2013 season as we pass the halfway point.

Speaking of Oklahoma, they are well poised to return to the Finals, and avenge their defeat at the hands of the Heat, as they hold the best record in the Western Conference. Hot on their heels are the ever present San Antonio Spurs, who are never more than a game or two away from top spot. Over in the East it is once again Miami who lead the way. But that division is tighter to call, with the usual suspects of the Bulls, Celtics and Knicks only a few games back. The new Brooklyn Nets are also on course to reach the playoffs in their first season at their new home.

Some big names in the West are trying their best to keep pace with the Thunder and the Spurs. The Houston



Bryant's been part of a lacklustre Lakers side thus far in the NBA.

Rockets and the Utah Jazz are just about keeping their win percentage above the magic .500. But some teams are finding it more difficult. Dallas, winners in the Final not so long ago, are a few spots outside the top eight seeds. And even below them are the L.A. Lakers.

The Lakers were champs as recently as 2010, their fifth championship in eleven seasons. They have big stars such as Kobe Bryant and Dwight Howard, backed up by Steve Nash and Pau Gasol. They also have been out and out terrible this season. Winning half the games of the Spurs and the Thunder, as well as going on awful runs of defeats to weaker teams, they will struggle to pick it up in the second half of the year. The remainder of their games are mostly away from the Staples Center, though that may be a bonus? And it will be a minor miracle if thirty four year old Kobe can drag them out of this one.

Best Signing of the Transfer Window

Michael Ramsay

May 13, 2012. Arguably the most dramatic and tension-filled day in Premier League history. Yet amongst the fervour of Argentinians plundering last-gasp title winners, and insane Scousers attacking half the Man City team, one significant tidbit slipped under the carpet. A defiant QPR manager, having witnessed his side scrape survival by the skin of their teeth, looked straight down the Sky camera, declaring that "we'll never be in this position again while I am manager."

Well, Mark Hughes was half right, at least. Within six months of that steely promise, Hughes was handed his P45, having failed to win any of their Premier League fixtures since early May.

Their problems have well been documented. The squad is overloaded

with midfielders – ten to be precise, and their array of strikers include the likes of prolifically unprolific Messrs. Bobby Zamora, DJ Campbell and Jay Bothroyd. It's no wonder why Loftus Road have only witnessed eight home goals since the dawn of the new season – a 5-0 reverse to Swansea City.

Which brings us to the latest marquee signing – where Harry Redknapp has forked out a record fee of 8 million to bring in Marseille's Loic Remy, a striker blessed with technique, pace and an instinctive eye for goal. Having hijacked Newcastle United's move for the French international at the 13th hour, Remy decided that London was the destination for him.

His decision was questionable, to say the least. At the time of writing, Bradford City have beaten more top-flight opposition than QPR this season. They are the bookies' favourite for slipping through the cracks of the

Premier League trapdoor. They have a simply ludicrous squad, with multiple Champions League winners lining up alongside Jamie Mackie and Clint Hill every weekend.

BBC reported that QPR's financial offer was "understood to be more than 70,000 pounds per week", leading to allegations that Remy was simply a mercenary who went where the cash was.

However, the signs look good. Within 15 minutes of his debut, Remy showed the ice-cool composure and finishing ability that has been severely lacking among the QPR ranks in recent years, with a first-time finish under West Ham's Jussi Jaaskelainen. With the mercurial playmaker Adel Taarabt threading balls through for the pacy Frenchman, Remy might just be the saviour, to rescue the Londoners from the clutches of relegation.

The Premier League gods sometimes



Loic Remy turned down Newcastle's french revolution for Harry Redknapp's lowly QPR.

have a cruel sense of humour, as Alan Pardew will be taking his relegation-threatened Tyneside club to Loftus Road for the penultimate game of the season. That might just be the game where Remy writes himself into QPR folklore, whilst making sure the Newcastle hierarchy regret their penny-pinching.

Bizarre Glove Triangle

Robert McNamara
Sports Editor

If you want to insult a goalkeeper, tell them they're a good shot-stopper. It's like telling a musician they're a good rhythm-guitarist. It's an empty compliment, as much of an insult as calling a journalist a hack or a builder a cowboy.

David de Gea is so much more than the shot-stopper the media make him out to be. He's as adept at making saves from close-range as he is in dealing with free kicks. Sometimes he seems to make stops that defy logic while you sit there thinking your eyes have tricked you.

However, the Spaniard lacks one fundamental quality. Maturity. Right at the death against Spurs at White Hart Lane, his limp-wristed attempt at a fisted clearance fell to Aaron Lennon, who swept the ball across to Clint Dempsey and so ended what should have been the perfect away performance on a bum-note.

De Gea stood there with his head down, hands on hips, disconsolate, taking the flack from his teammates who were quick to assign blame.

As Gary Neville said in his post-match analysis, "he knows".

Had it been Peter Schmeichel, he would have lambasted his defence for being too deep. He would have caught Nemanja Vidic by the shoulders and shook him in anger. He would have shoved Patrice Evra in the back and told him to get on with it, that there was still time left to get a winner.

Edwin van der Sar would have ensured the clearance went high and away from immediate danger, before remonstrating with the back-line for not dealing with the cross.

De Gea didn't even try to argue. Indeed, as Gary Neville said, he knew. It was his fault. Instead of being seven points clear, United were now just five ahead of city. The former Athleticco Madrid keeper is just 22 and Manchester United's first choice goalkeeper. All young people make mistakes, but he's doing it in goal for the most famous team in the world.

Schmeichel was 28 when he signed for United. Van der Sar was 34. Both were professionals with hundreds of games behind them and were, physically, fully developed men. It didn't render them immune to making mistakes though. Both went through periods of uncertainty but had the relevant experience to know they would come good again.

Football writers have moved in on De Gea like a pack of hungry wolves, faintly praising him when he does well and salivating when he performs anything less than perfectly. Go back to when those journalists where 22. Were they without fault in their profession? I very much doubt it.

It's believed United are exploring the possibility of bringing in another keeper and have been linked with



a few. Reports are emanating from Spain that Barcelona's Victor Valdes has tired of the pressure of life as the Catalunyan team's number one. He wants to enjoy the rest of his career, not endure it. Old Trafford is no place for a holiday and the way United defend these days means he would be involved in the game way too often for his liking.

Pepe Reina has been mentioned by some as the kind of keeper United need. Eschewing the obvious complications any deal between United and Liverpool would cause, Reina is not good enough. He suffers from lapses in confidence and concentration. He's got form for making errors in big games.

As good as De Gea is, United is not the kind of club where a goalkeeper can develop naturally and perform to the highest level every week. The position is the last line of accountability, it's too pressurised, too exposed.

If De Gea were a full-back, or a striker, then he would be given time. He would be allowed to make mistakes because, often, his errors would be covered up by other players.

What he needs is a mentor, someone to shadow him through the rough patches, while keeping him competitive for his place; someone who has been around the block and doesn't mind playing second fiddle.

Any keeper who comes in should be given that task because De Gea has the potential to be the best in the world. Sir Alex knows that and won't lose patience with the Spaniard just yet.

Huskies claim second national title in a row



Robert McNamara
Sports Editor

UL just missed out on a double-double in the Superleague Cup at the National Basketball Arena in Tallaght, Dublin.

The Huskies retained their ladies title with a hard fought 65-59 victory over Team Montenotte Hotel Cork, but Bord Gais Neptune produced a masterclass to deny the Eagles their second title in a row in the men's final.

Gary Walsh's six three-pointers had a huge bearing on the men's result, which was never really in doubt when Neptune finished the first period 23-11 ahead.

Rachel Vanderwal holds the cup aloft for UL Huskies.

A Rob Taylor inspired UL came back into the game in the second quarter but they still headed into half-time facing a 13 point deficit.

Neptune's Michael McGinn and Ian McLoughlin helped put the cup beyond the reach of the Limerick team with their industrious play in the third and the Cork side were comfortable right until the final buzzer. Despite the Eagle's best efforts, Neptune were able to celebrate their first cup success in 21 years.

In the ladies final Rachel Vanderwal was again at the forefront of everything the Huskies did, in what was a superb

team display. UL's height advantage was evident from the first minute but Montenotte rallied to stay in the contest and were just two points behind at half-time.

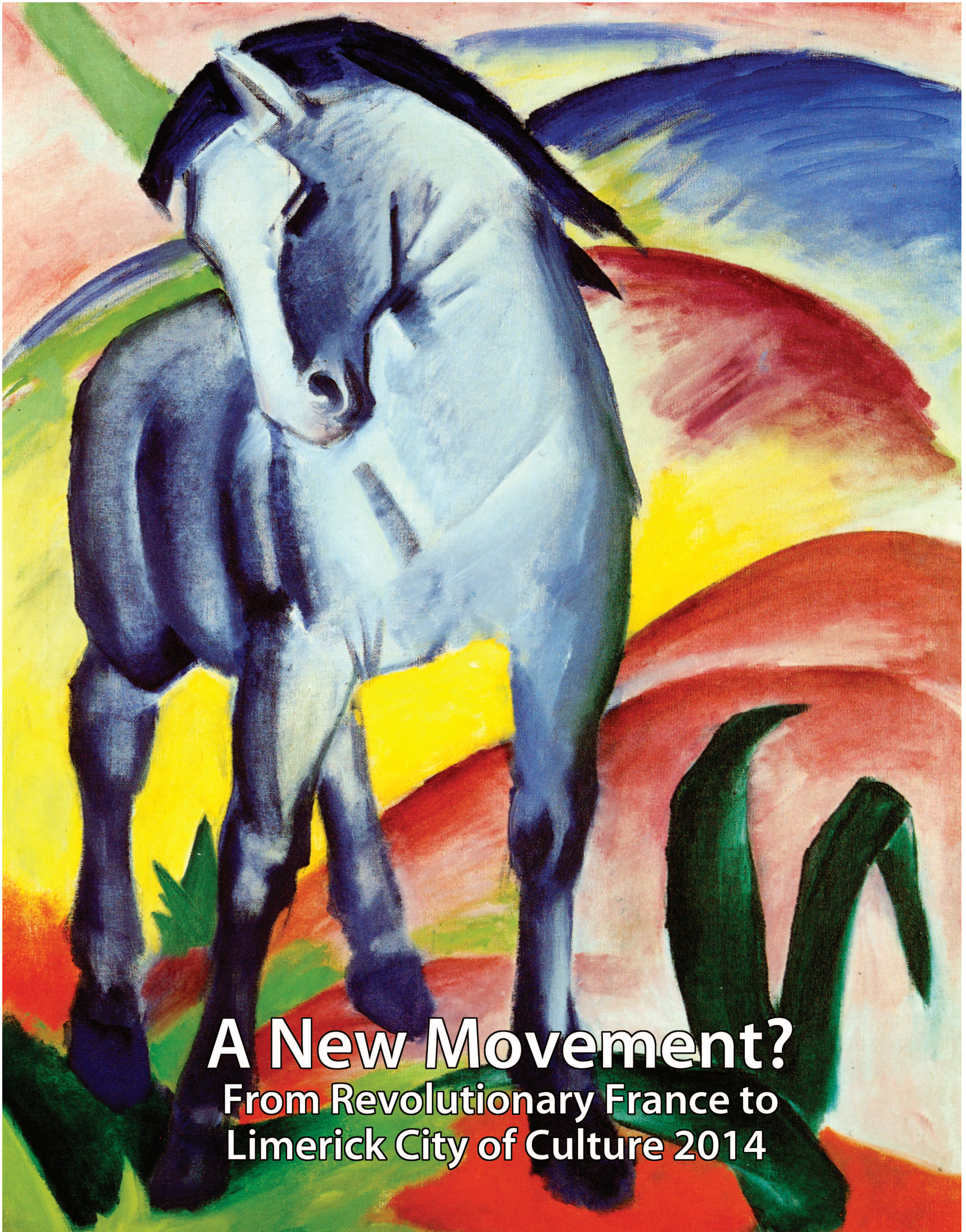
With the Cork side threatening, Huskies' Michelle Fahy found her way into the game and ensured UL were comfortable with a seven point lead heading into the final quarter.

Both sides traded blows in the final 10 minutes, but the Huskies kept their composure to bring the trophy back to Limerick for a second year in a row.

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A New Movement?
From Revolutionary France to
Limerick City of Culture 2014

Old Music Picks

Fintan Walsh

Prince – Baby I’m A Star (Warner Bros., 1984)

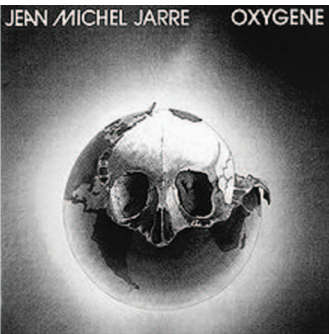
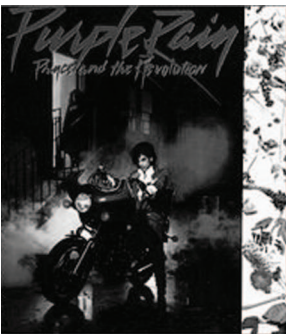
If Prince Rogers Nelson had to decide which of his talents was more appreciated by pop culture, he would have been a bit deluded to say acting, as opposed to music. When Purple Rain (the film) was released in ’84 it made almost ten times’ the amount in revenue, but it was considered to be one of the worst musicals ever made (next to Xanadu). What really bought the film was its unanimously astonishing soundtrack, composed by the man himself. More publically prominent tracks, such as ‘Purple Rain’ and ‘Let’s Go Crazy’ have often overlooked hard-pop beauties, like ‘I Would Die 4 U’ and, this week’s favourite, ‘Baby I’m A Star’. Fast-paced and thumping in its post-disco madness, the song also depicts what goes through hardcore pop icons. Mix his whole score with his young age at the time (26) and you had a new-age Mozart of pop music.

Jean Michel-Jarre – Oxygene II (Disques Dreyfus, 1976)

Without a doubt, the six movements of Oxygène appear one of the most referable platforms for modern neo-classical music. Michel-Jarre found it difficult, however, to push this album to any A&R, as it didn’t have exciting track titles and singers. Back in ’76, French pop music was bland and proud; sticking to French traditions in musical culture. Electronic music in France, moreover, was frowned upon, seeing as it was fallaciously described as “artificial music”. ‘Oxegène II’ disproves that. Convert the synths into strings, brass and piano and you have a beautifully constructed chamber-like orchestra.

Huey Lewis and the News – Trouble in Paradise (Chrysalis, 1980)

This is an exemplary band in the history of music, where they were good at being two totally different things. Their first epoch was moving to the UK in ’77, supporting Elvis Costello as a session band, resulted in them actually becoming a recording artist. When it came to them recording their eponymous debut, nothing really came about it.



No singles became chart-toppers. And even though they are known for their cheesy singles such as ‘Stuck With You’ and ‘If This Is It’, ‘Trouble in Paradise’ is awesomely disparate to anything in their discography. It’s a soft, jazzy, blue-eyed soul version of Thin Lizzy’s ‘The Boys Are Back In Town’.

Steve Reich, Kronos Quartet and Pat Metheny – III: Fast (Nonesuch, 1987)

The idea of Different Trains came about when Reich reminisced of his time as a youth, travelling to and from his mother and father during World War II. He remembered saying to himself, since he was a Jew: “If I was in Europe, I would be on a train to a Holocaust camp”.

With his much-loved Kronos Quartet and jazz guitar virtuoso, Pat Metheny, ‘III: Fast’ profusely showed what a musically focused mind can do without a loop pedal, seeing that there was no such thing back then. Overlaps and loops in one giant ambient flurry, the three segments of Different Trains is a must-grab for a chill-out session.

Quasimoto – MHBs (Stones Throw Records, 2000)

One of the most underrated albums of experimental hip-hop history, The Unseen by Quasimoto (Madlib) discerns the complexity of concocting a spicy recipe that consists of simple vocal samples, pitch turns and casual

beats. But take the bane and antidote of one song and look at the LP as a whole and you have thematic brilliance in terms of understanding the mental philosophy of an underground artist. ‘MHBs’, which samples Kool & The Gang’s ‘Little Children’, is a simple, easy-follow, head-bopping jam that ridicules money-hungry women who go for any guy with a bit of dosh and diamonds.

Nat ‘King’ Cole – Route 66 (Capitol, 1956)

One of the finest of jazz vocalists, Nat’s smooth, cigar-baritone encapsulates every inch of every song in his entire catalogue with a fresh, bluesy feel that can peregrinate from every spectrum of the emotions. ‘Route 66’ captures the cynosure of his bebop era, as well as the musical balance he has given to his session members. With his swaying piano, Edison’s flowery trumpet and Collins’ softly drifting guitar, this is one of the Capitol King’s best.

Con Funk Shun – Spirit of Love (Mercury Records, 1980)

These guys never had ample opportunity to send out their potential from the beginning. Albeit their 1980 single ‘Too Tight’ reaching popular acclaim, their other material didn’t seem to catch the eye of critics or charts. Unfortunately, it took these guys some 20 years for funk and soul experts to appreciate the authenticity and multitudinously originality

of this band. In a time when The Commodores, Kool & The Gang and Earth Wind & Fire were topping the R&B charts, Con Funk Shun were sending out equally standardised records such as Spirit of Love and Too Tight, two fantastic records that were loaded with sweetly orchestrated funk and swimmingly smooth soul sounds, and were both charted in 1980. The self-titled ‘Spirit of Love’ is a magnificent uncharted single that proves not all African-American culture was appreciated during a climactically musical era.

Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell – What You Gave Me (Motown, 1969)

Easy was Gaye’s most poorly marketed LP, seeing that his close acquaintance Terrell was suffering from health problems at the time. Most of the tracks on the album were done by Ashford & Simpson, feigning Terrell’s refined and mature vocals. ‘What You Gave Me’, though appears to be a typical love song, is actually a beautifully worded piece on the compactness of age-old friendships. A few months after its release, Terrell passed away and this piece was left engrained in Gaye’s career as the last successful single they had together. It’s a heart-warming and strenuously sentimental song that echoes the truest of words, “What you gave me is more than enough to last.”

ULFM Manager To Perform At LIT Music Fest



Fintan Walsh

ULFM Station Manager Kevin O’Brien is to perform at the LIT Music Festival this week with his band Sparkle Motion.

The MMPT student said, via Facebook, that he was delighted with the news and that the band has never had an opportunity like this before.

“It feels great. We’ve never been picked for something like this before and we’re really looking forward to it,” he said.

Sparkle Motion performed at the DIE music event and released their single ‘Hope’ in December, which has been given national attention.

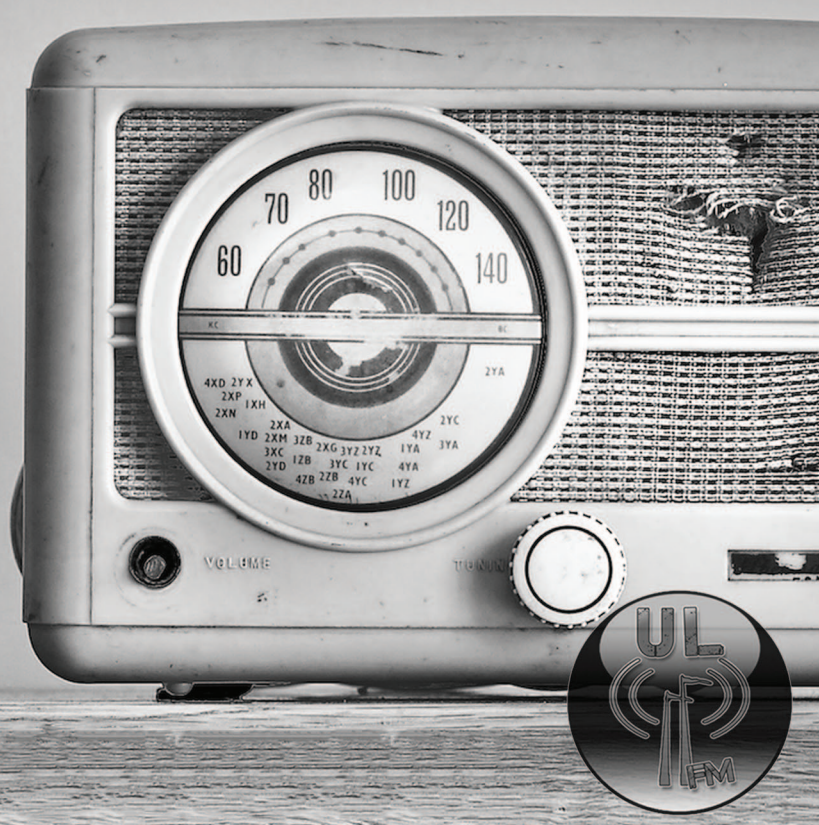
Mr O’Brien said he has big plans for the year and that he wants to perform more in Limerick and Cork.

“We are planning some serious gigs this year, doing our best to send some tracks absolutely everywhere. Hopefully I’d like to get some gigs sorted for Limerick and Cork – love those cities.”

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Arts & Ents Editorial

Fintan Walsh
Arts & Ents Editor

While we eagerly wait for the efforts of the Director of the City of Culture 2014 project, would it be right to leave it all hang for over a year to solidly prove that Limerick isn't as dead as what locals, entrepreneurs and international journalists say?

Would it be correct to think that one person could just exhume all the artistic talent from the circumference of this tiny place and then bring it to the heart of the city? If the newly appointed chief is to work solely from easy-get resources then 2014 is not going to be as culturally flashy as we might expect.

If you are an avid music fanatic, the least likely place to find your new favourites would be the IRMA website. It's always the grandiose sites, such as Spotify, Bandcamp, Soundcloud and the likes. New artists are emerging, day by day, and it's the element of authenticity that magnetises us towards newer sounds, so we can share with our friends online and at social gatherings.

The least likely place to find your daily art favourites would be your local gallery. Unless there is a new exhibition on every day, visiting the same images every day could become bothersome and dismal. Not wholly advocating the use of the digital sphere, but the internet has been a great source for finding new images from a historical past.

But not all art is out there lurking around the hyperlinks of cyberspace.



Leaving Cert students and art college trainees are stuck between four walls, aspiring to be the next Munch, Turner, Botticelli or Degas. Very few of these students publish their work, or hold group exhibitions due to the revised traditions that you must learn the art before you release the art. Which is logical, as a premature artist could spoil their career by exhibiting utter crap. The same goes for anything in

the arts. Nonetheless, some talented artists never unfold and, thus, become unknown due to these notions.

So, if the person trying to make Limerick look culturally intellectual is going to use the banal resources such as the City Arts Office; local museums; send an e-mail here and there; hold a few gigs in popular venues; invite internationals to showcase their own culture, it will

seem like a half-ass job.

This is a cooperative challenge. This is the sweetest opportunity to produce titanic art, in large batches, constantly circulating on an all-year-round conveyor belt. It is not a time to showcase what we already have; it's a time to implore the smallest of artists to publicise their work.

Between 1911 and 1914, in Munich, an art movement of 13 underground

artists (including Expressionist composer Arnold Schoenberg) came together to make the Expressionist Art movement Der Blaue Reiter. Though only 1,100 copies of their annual magazine were sold, it still made the history books.

Can we not have our own movement, where a small group of people come together, share their political and philosophical ideologies and engender a new, polychromatic subculture in the arts?

We have a city that has a great reputation for electronic music, thanks to the organisers and goers of D.I.E., Macronite and Distraction. Though hard work was put into these projects, the main ingredient that created the catalytic explosion was love for the arts and plain determination.

Clare Council, our neighbours, funded our Irish version of DJ Shadow – mynameisJohn – for his recent album, which has grabbed the attention of nationwide critics and even the The Guardian. Where is this kind of support in Limerick?

The Director's job begins in 2013, not 2014. This is the year to make everyone aware that we have some of the greatest unknown resources in the whole Republic. The new person in charge has the ice-pick and it's up to him or her to chisel away at the iceberg. Once the ice is broken, culture will peregrinate from all directions of the city.

Ed Sheeran: Gig Review

Alana Walsh

Ed Sheeran has an allegiance of Irish fans; he successfully sold out three nights in Dublin's O2 Arena, declaring that its 12,000 people capacity is the largest crowd he has played to date. As a redhead with Irish connections Sheeran is almost considered as one of our own. He has been influenced by Irish artists, such as Damien Rice and The Frames to name but a few, and he has had huge commercial success in Ireland.

Ed opened his performance by running onto the stage wearing an Irish jersey and carrying a giant Irish flag. Needless to say this had the crowd eating out of the palm of his hand from the get go! When Sheeran requested a quiet setting for his slower numbers, he got an arena that was as quiet as it could be. He opened the show by belting out his current single 'Give Me Love' and his set list for the night included many other tracks off his debut album +, such as 'Drunk', 'Small Bump', 'Kiss me' and 'Lego House'. Memorably Sheeran performed a fantastic cover of Nina Simone's 'Be My Husband', during which he enlisted the help of his audience, whom he dubbed the 'Dublin Gospel Choir', to join with him in singing the chorus. During the show he also covered Jamie Woon's 'Wayfaring Stranger', the traditional

folk song 'The Parting Glass' and a cover of Passenger's 'Heart's on Fire', whom he brought out on stage for the performance as he was supporting him on the night. Ed, sheepishly grinning, even indulged in a chorus of 'Olé Olé Olé' with his chanting crowd.

What is perhaps most amazing about watching Sheeran live is not only his sheer energy but that he is literally a one man show. On stage it is just his voice, his guitar, a loop pedal and two microphones yet he succeeds in sounding even better live than on his album recordings. It is so refreshing to watch an act perform without a band behind them or to a backing track; Sheeran really is in a league of his own. He kicked off his encore with an extended version of 'You Need Me' and noticeably threw himself into jumping around the stage while still creating the beat and backing vocals for the song. Sheeran was enjoying himself and this was reflected in his incredible performance. He concluded an almost two hour show with his first single, 'The A Team', which originally featured on his Loose Change EP.



Got A Ticket To Ride – Kodakid And Their Rapid Rise

Robert McNamara

Some new bands never develop because their dynamic isn't right. They might be talented musicians but chemistry is always key. They toil through practice, playing gigs and recording - but soon they lose momentum, wither and disappear.

Others, who persevere and make it big, have their initial formations eulogised in the half-truths and half-fictions of band biographies filled with sacked bass players, combustible drummers and songwriter spats.

Waterford's Kodakid are a rarity. They formed in late 2010 and released their first single 'Pray' in March the following year. They gained a foothold in the local music scene and within 12 months appeared on national TV, before being chosen as one of the top bands in the country by Hot Press. They also released a second single; the funk/rock hybrid 'Low 7'.

The reason for their brisk ascendancy is easily deciphered. The weighty blend of Alex Soikan's vintage guitar licks, Kevin Power's gravely delivered vocals and the high-powered rhythm section of John Duignan on bass and Tony Browne on drums is revealing.

Their music swaggers like The Stone Roses, rocks like Zeppelin, summons the white-boy rhythm and blues of Free and beckons at The Black Keys – nodding respectfully to the past but with an impatient eye on the future.

Their sound is marked by the individualism of playing, as guitarist Alex attests to when describing the creative process.

"Songwriting is a collaborative effort and we all work to our strengths. Most material will come from jamming an initial riff and sometimes the tunes can write themselves. I think they're

the ones we get the buzz off, as they come very natural."

The bands rapid rise was cemented in 2012 with the release of two new singles, the Auerbach/Carney-esque 'Shake Skin' and 'Portis', a distinctive blend of moody acoustics and skillful songwriting craft – it won best single at the Music Review Unsigned awards.

Hard work is at the core of Kodakid's quick success.

"We keep pushing ourselves creatively and getting the name out there, which is crucial to get an audience into your music. We were dealt some lucky deals in 2011 with appearances on TV3's The Apprentice, Ireland AM and later that year supporting The Noisettes in the UK. These type of events are great for the CV but we try to gig anywhere we can and spent most of 2012 reaching parts of the country we hadn't played before," says Alex.

Kodakid may already be prolific in their studio output but it's playing live where they really feel comfortable – in front of the people who have been following them from the beginning.

"There's nothing like the adrenaline of playing before a proper crowd of music heads who are all out to enjoy the music," says drummer Tony.

"I think it's the closest to a true audience as it gets. If your live set is in any way weak, you'll soon find out about it at the festivals," adds bassist John.

Despite the plaudits, the column inches, the gushing praise from the music cognoscenti, Kodakid willfully give their music away for free.

Says Tony; "There's more important things in life than money. For us, getting our music out there and writing the best possible songs we



can is more important than monetary gain. I still have faith in people. The cream rises to the top – we know where we want to go with this thing and we enjoy doing it, that's what really matters."

An album is planned for 2013 but the band is certainly not going to get complacent or let the standards drop.

"We're never satisfied to be honest. We're always looking to play the bigger stage or make a better sound,"

says lead-singer Kevin. "I think some bands get into a comfort zone and get complacent but we're always thinking about the future, what we'll be doing a month from now, or a year from now."

John echoes that.

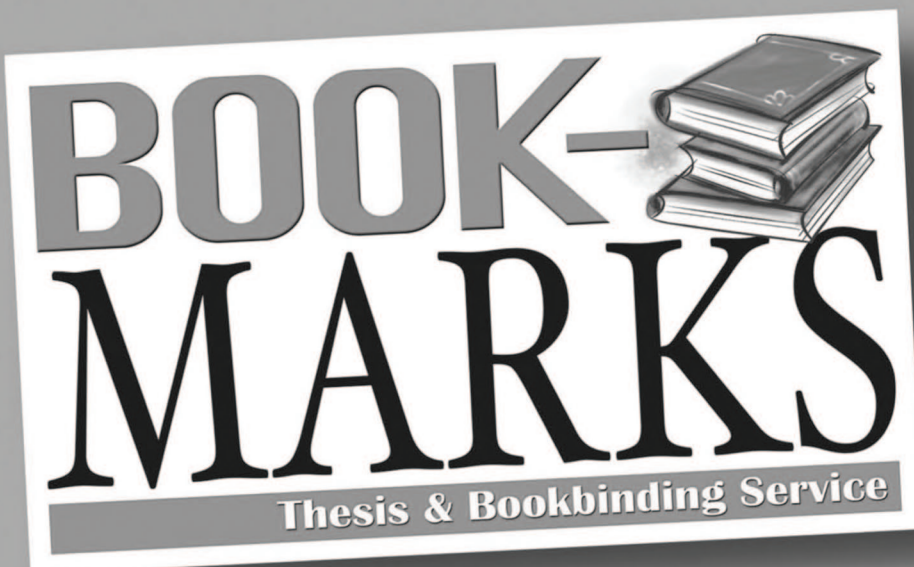
"I think our music is no-nonsense – we don't believe in filler. Each song has to be as good as it can possibly be. We have written maybe 40 or 50 tunes but only the best gets through our critiquing. I think people lock in on

that and can really soak up the live, feel-good vibe our music portrays."

In time, writing this band's biography may be troublesome for the first few chapters. There's little back-story or controversy, just great tunes and a four really driven, adroit band members.

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Cinema 1 – 0 January Blues

Eoin Lyons

Let’s not beat around the bush, we all know that January is a dreadful month. It’s the month that feels like one massive Monday. There’s a wealth of college work we could have done in January and I’m sure a few of us promised to go to the gym 25 times in January too, but realistically, it is the month that provides us with as much ‘get up and go’ as the fat kid in our primary school class had just before sports day every year. Therefore, we all seek to do something with maximum enjoyment for minimal effort. We want to become detached from the monotony of our least favourite month, and to regain some of that fun we had over Christmas. So, what better way to do that than to go spend €78 on a medium sized popcorn and sit back and relax in front of the big screen.

Over the years, many in the film industry have slated January for keeping true to its stigma, and producing very few movies worth making the trip to the cinema for. This of course, can arguably be true. In comparison to June for instance, where the big summer smashes are released, movies have always grossed much higher than those released in the first month of the year. However, these critics who are solely focused on their big premieres and their tips for the Oscars forget that we don’t all travel to the red carpet for premiere day. It is the days and weeks following the big releases that we all get the chance to see for ourselves what the hype is all about, and finally get the



opportunity to escape from reality in front of the big screen even if only for a couple of hours.

All we have to do is look back at the best fantasy and feel-good films over the years to see that January may not be so bad after all. For our escape from reality to be best achieved, the films that draw us in to another world are those we most greatly desire. It is the films in which the story and the experience run so deep, that for that two hours or however long it may be, we almost believe that we are there with the characters and

all our everyday worries no longer exist. On a personal level (but I feel I might not be the only one), I believe that The Lord of The Rings Trilogy for example, was possibly the best trilogy of films in my lifetime for such a purpose. Of course, these were perfectly timed, all released in the final week of December of their respective years, right in time for the January blues. These films however do not stand alone in the ranks of January’s finest. Even looking back to the timeless feel-good classics such as Casablanca which was released

on the 23rd January 1943, and It’s a Wonderful Life which was released in the USA on the 7th of January 1947, those who were lucky enough to go to the old cinemas were treated with possibly the greatest films of all time for escapism and the finest in producing cinematic joy.

This trend of course, continued through the years ensuring that the summer months did not get all of the fun. To mention but a few, some of the most popular films in the 80s and 90s such as E.T, Beverly Hills Cop, Home Alone, and Babe were all released in

late December to ensure they would be available for the begging public come January. Or for those of you who may have been too young to feel the magic of these films in the 90s, arguably two of the best feel-good films of the last decade, Monsters Inc and The Pursuit Of Happyness, were both released in January. This gave those of us who were lucky enough to watch them a breath of fresh air amidst the lack lustre goings-on of the less than magical month. Even more recently, we were treated with both critically acclaimed films War Horse and The Artist last January. Of course, this month has also been rich in opportunities to beat the blues with The Impossible, Life of Pi, and The Hobbit all still in cinemas, with Les Miserables, Django Unchained, and Lincoln arriving to our screens just in time. Not forgetting the 3D release of the already mentioned Monsters Inc, which as a 22 year-old man, I have no qualms in saying is my pick of the month for putting a smile on your face.

While January may be the month we all detest for a variety of reasons, all is not lost. It seems the cinema has been, and always will be, there to get us through the slow monotony of our least favourite month. So keep an eye out for what may be available to us next January. With the next instalment of The Hobbit amongst the predictions for the January 2014 ‘much watch’ list already, it seems we may be in for a treat yet again. So relax, and leave January alone, it’s not actually that bad.

Les Miserablés: Film Review

AJ O’Mhordha

It’s all in the title folks. Les (Pronounced Lay- people who did French will quietly smirk and feel superior if you, like me, insist on saying it like Lez) Miserablé is not the feel-good movie of the year. What it is, is a beautiful tapestry of interlocking characters, the majority of whom are given excellent development, motivations and a beautiful background and scenery which is criminally underused in several scenes.

Before it was a movie, it was a musical and before it was that, it was a book. Written in 1862, Les Miserablé is the story of the poor and underprivileged in Paris over the course of 17 (thankfully abridged) years. Set against a backdrop of anger and disillusionment at the failure of the French revolution to enact any meaningful change, with poverty and plague filling the streets, the people are seething at the nobles, led by the 19th century’s version of the Occupy movement, naive, rich students who sympathise with the poor.

Our protagonist is Jean Val Jean (Hugh Jackman), a criminal who just can’t catch a break. After stealing bread to save his nephew from starvation, he’s given 5 years of hard labour, and a further 14 years for escape attempts. Consumed with a bitter anger at his jailers and a

hatred of a world, his crime reflects society at the time; the hunger the poor faced, the desperation to provide, and the harsh punishments inflicted on the poor in the name of justice. Looking down on him is the imposing figure of Inspector Javert ▯, the rigorous police officer who dogs our hero, condemning him to eternal damnation for his minor misdemeanour. The conflict between these two is the focus of the movie, with Javert’s determination to uphold the letter of the law despite the fact that throughout the movie that there is a growing difference between the law and justice. Val Jean, inspired by an act of mercy from a priest who takes his side in an altercation with the law, tears up the papers bearing details of his crimes and escapes, finding a new life, a daughter to care for after the haunting demise of her mother, (Anne Hathaway), one of Val Jeans employee’s. Chased by Javert “across the years”, Val Jean becomes accustomed to subterfuge and disguises, while his adopted daughter, Cosette grows up, cut off from the company of peers. That is, until we reach the main act of the story, with unease stirring in Paris. Poverty is abundant, and students hold public rallies to encourage rebellion. A chance glance between Cosette and the young patrician Marius, who’s abandoned his family’s riches to fight on the side of the poor, sets

both hearts racing but tortures poor Eponine, a girl in love with Marius. With Paris on the brink of war, and Val Jean preparing to flee to England, our star-crossed lovers are to be torn apart as soon as they’ve found each other.

A lot of the music itself is inherently beautiful. Hathaway delivers a striking, emotional rendition of ‘I Dreamed a Dream’, and the same can be said for the entire cast. With perhaps the exception of Russell Crowe as Javert, who’s gotten a bad rap for his performance. His voice isn’t the gargled mush others make it out to be, but he doesn’t sing with emotion like the rest of the cast do. This might be a conscious decision- Jackman’s fury at a world that’s wronged him, Hathaway’s despair at losing the life she had, Marius’s heartbreak and sadness- all of these contribute to emotional, full range singing, whereas Javert’s cold, dispassionate adherence to the law makes it hard to connect with him emotionally. It’s watching his gradual realisation that perhaps justice and the law are not the same that lends itself to several heart breaking scenes towards the finale. One character who fails to elicit any emotional response is Cosette, who comes across as bland and passive. However, both of these are minor details in an epically scaled work of art, with stellar performances from the torn Marius, and the



lovelorn Eponine. ‘Empty Chairs at Empty Tables’ remains haunting and ethereal, and there’s beautiful use of the scenery during several of the great acts. No review would be complete without mentioning the Thenardiers, with Sacha Baron Cohen and Helena Bonham Carter providing some much-needed comic relief. Not every song reaches the crescendo it was supposed to, some fall flat but overall, this is definitely a good movie, and a promising indication of the viability of the musical genre.

Final Opinion? Definitely go see it yourself. Take your own impression from it. There’ll be at least one

character you identify with, one epic song that resonates inside you. Whether it’s the student who’s trying to become his own person or the best friend who’s hopelessly in love with someone who treats them like a sibling. The person constantly troubled by something they could have prevented or someone trying to interpret the universe by their own strict set of rules. Wonder whether or not you could rise up in your own estate, if you could muster the spirit of revolution that these children of the barricade have and if you were, who’d stand with you?

Gangster Squad: Film Review

Alana Walsh

Set in the late 1940s, early 1950s L.A., Gangster Squad tells a story of the good guys taking on the bad guys to make their hometown a better place. All-round bad guy Mickey Cohen (Sean Penn) is tearing up L.A. with his criminal activity and Irish Sergeant John O'Mara (Josh Brolin) is recruited to find himself a squad of men that can tear down Cohen's empire, sooner rather than later. Brolin is fantastic as the tough, salt of the earth honest cop that wants to make a difference. His squad, handpicked by his wife, comprises of Sergeant Wooters (Ryan Gosling) and Detectives; Ramirez (Michael Peña), Washington (Anthony Mackie), Kennard (Robert Patrick) and Keeler (Giovanni Ribisi). Together, this eclectic group of men attempt to save L.A., their intentions reminiscent of Batman saving Gotham City...except they use guns! Their plans are not always the most carefully thought out but everywhere Cohen turns the squad are messing things up for him in some shape or form.

The characters of the squad are endearing and quirky making for a narrative that is more humorous than the trailers let on. The film also has its sad moments but no quest for good proceeds without a few losses along the way. What is true of the trailers are the action fuelled scenes, many of which are not for the faint hearted. The opening scene alone sets the tone for a film that will have its fair share of bloodshed. Much of the violence can be attributed to Cohen and his thugs. Penn convincingly



shines as the ruthless criminal on the warpath for control with the beautiful Grace Faraday (Emma Stone) by his side. However, Faraday falls for the pretty boy of the squad, Wooter (Gosling). The onscreen chemistry

between Stone and Gosling is credible and it adds to the films ever growing tension as Cohen will wreak havoc if he finds out he is sharing his missus with a cop. Gosling is effortless in his role and successfully brings his

unique charm to yet another movie. For girls, Gangster Squad has some eye candy, action, cover your eyes because of the blood moments and a bit of love story. For guys, Gangster Squad is a take on the gangster action

genre that you won't rave about for a week but that you can enjoy watching and can take your girlfriend to see – sort of a win, win!

My Neighbor Totoro (1988)

Fintan Walsh

So you're in the mood for a film that requires only face-value, passive thinking but, at the same time, something that you would want to bookmark for an astounding watch. Hayao Miyazaki's career-turner My Neighbor Totoro fills these needs while forcing a lazy – maybe hungover – audience to open their eyes a bit and start actively watching with utter childish enjoyment.

This beautiful 1988 anime portrays the compact relationship between two easily-amused sisters and an ideal, patient and loving father, who have moved out to the countryside to take care of an ailing mother. Although everything around the vicinity is pastoral, verdant and green, their newly bought home is in a wreck and is haunted, according to the sisters.

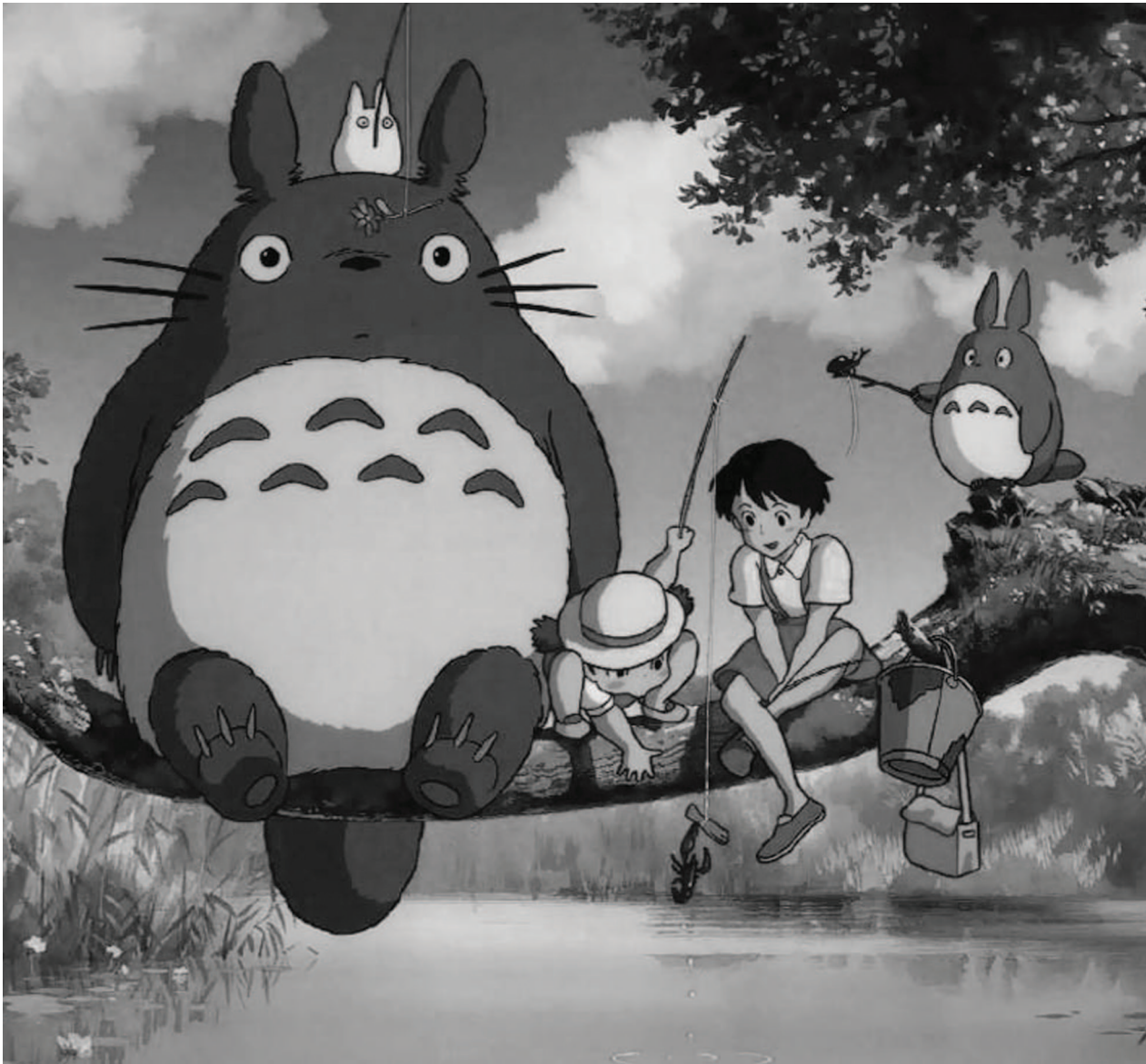
Younger sister Mei spots some little, furry, cute things called "black soots" that inhabit abandoned homes. In Miyazaki's magnus Spirited Away (2001), these guys play a quirky part in it, too. She also spots two small totoros – rabbit-looking creatures – and follows them, only to find the anime protagonist Totoro; a giant, cuddly gerbil-like beast.

From a story that starts off eerie and loaded with childish naivety about ghosts and evil creatures, it gently

transforms into a movie that causes the watcher to become as childish as the characters. Mei and her older sister Satsuki discover a world more bizarre than the surrounding quaint countryside, thanks to Totoro's preternatural adventures, such as floating through the air on something that looks like a dreidel.

If you take Pixar and some famous Walt Disney productions, you will find they are eye candy for kids, while being able to touch off mature, adult topics and themes that children may not be able to follow. My Neighbor Totoro is an aesthetically adventurous tale for children that can be viewed in the exact same light as an adult. It's a movie that transports the child into their usual fantasy world, while putting the adult in the children's seat, but in a more sentimental way. This is an atmospheric film, neatly constructed by simple illustrations and even simpler dialogue. But its complete cinematic experience is furnished by an epic score from renowned composer Joe Hisaishi, who has been used for most of Miyazaki's anime works.

Though not as psychedelically imaginative as Princess Mononoke (1997), Howl's Moving Castle (2004), or Spirited Away, this is still one of the most influentially superb animated movies in the twentieth century.



RTE's Programming: Do we Love it or Hate it?

Keira Maher

Long gone are the days when the height of Irish TV drama was keeping up with the goings-on in a rural village. Many of us, when we look back on our childhood, will remember when waiting to see the next scandal committed by Biddy and Miley was a legitimate excuse for not finishing homework. The Riordans, Bracken and Glenroe were dramas aired by RTE in an attempt to reflect a rural Irish life. However, life suddenly changed as Ireland was becoming more urbanised in the rise of the Celtic Tiger success. Now, as the boom years have died down, the image of Irish drama in the RTE studios has changed. It has brought a new age of Irish drama with offerings such as Love/Hate and Raw bursting onto our screens in the last 3 years.

For years RTE drama has been trying to compete with its UK and US counterparts and has been failing miserably. Why Fair City is still airing, I will never understand. However, in the last 2-3 years the national broadcaster has redeemed itself with the productions of Raw and Love/Hate. The drama series Raw first aired in 2008 and focuses on the lives of the staff at a Dublin restaurant. This type of drama hitting our television was fairly new to viewers, presenting an image of an urban Ireland. The advent of Raw showed the nation that RTE was capable of making a decent drama series that was relevant to the lives we live today. Raw presents Dublin in a sassy light, one that had not been seen before. Main character Jojo Harte (Charlene McKenna) is the cornerstone of this production.



Her acting skills along with Aisling O Sullivan, who plays restaurant owner Fiona, are a huge part of the show's success. The show is in its 5th series which is a credit RTE.

However Raw has not been the only show controversially lighting up our TV screens. The addition of Love/Hate marked a turning point for RTE too. So far, three series have aired and have the nation talking. At the beginning, Love/Hate, like most

shows, was doomed by critics. The Irish Times claimed it to be "More Westlife then Westies". This was in relation to the characters being "too good looking to be scumbags" i.e. Robert Sheehan and Killian Scott. Nevertheless, its popularity picked up in the second and third series with the recent announcement that it has been nominated for 11 accolades at the IFTAS. Initially I started to watch Love/Hate to see what the fuss was

about and I have undeniably been hooked since the first episode. I watched it religiously every Sunday, ready for the discussions that took place Monday morning. The main success of the show was due to the fact that it was drama TV reflecting on reality which some people were able to relate to. With more twists and turns than a Disney World rollercoaster, Love/Hate is heading for a fourth and fifth series.

RTE has finally raised the standard of Irish drama from the mediocre dramas that they used to air. After the third series, the hit Love/Hate has been hailed as the Irish answer to Breaking Bad and The Wire. Hopefully the broadcaster can build on this new found success and bring Irish television drama to an international stage.

Seven Psychopaths: Film Review

Evan O'Grady

Seven Psychopaths is a difficult one for me. Like Martin McDonagh's In Bruges before it, the film is dark, gritty and sombre. It plays with themes and ideas that are not the most uplifting or hopeful to put on screen. In Bruges spoke of guilt, murder, depression and suicide. And this offering? Well it looks like a lot more of that really!

The plot centres around Marty (Colin Farrell) a screenwriter trying to come up with a screenplay for an upcoming movie called Seven Psychopaths, giving this film its title. "Helping" him is his friend Billy (Sam Rockwell) a deranged professional dog-napper who pulls off confidence scams with his mentor Hans (Christopher Walken). In the opening stages of the film Billy and Hans are involved in the kidnapping of a violent mobster's pet shitzu, unaware that the mobster in question (Woody Harrelson) has no qualms with finding and murdering them in revenge for the deed. The eponymous psychopaths are the nuts and killers that they encounter in some shape or form along the way. That is as much

as I will say plotwise, because a lot of Seven Psychopaths depends on its element of surprise.

Seven Psychopaths is by no means the film you are expecting it to be. The marketing team, in a stroke of absolute genius, have pitched McDonagh's film as more of a comedy which will surely draw in a bigger audience. By all means this film has some brilliantly dark comic moments in its latter half, but it is very slow to start off. We get to know the characters, but in such a way that we don't see their real motivations until much later on. Though this may be deliberate I found it problematic, as none of the characters begin with any traits that one could call "likeable" and are hard to sympathise with. Marty is an obnoxious alcoholic in a constant state of antipathy with the world, while Billy is an absurd caricature; dim-witted, misogynistic. I actually struggled to tell whether Rockwell was playing him as a mentally ill person, if he did it was a poorly handled turn from him playing the insane and flimsy Joker-like character.

Seven Psychopaths will probably



divide audiences with its bitter look on life and death in the world as well as its brutal violence and themes. Personally, I actually enjoyed it for reasons that I won't spoil but not without some minor reservations that McDonagh addresses later on.

It's a great movie, flawed but worth a look, and with quite a few fun, fourth wall-breaking moments. Farrell and Rockwell's performances didn't appeal to me, but as I expected Walken and Harrelson shone brightest throughout. I would have

liked to see them interact with each other a bit more. There are many more layers to speak of in this movie but I recommend you see for yourself to properly understand them all, one for the DVD list when it is released.

New tech for a New Semester

Seán Duggan

Back for a new semester and more determined than ever to get the most out of university? Then you should be getting the most out of your technology. Here's some of the latest tools you should be using to help you in your task.

Google Drive www.drive.google.com Free

There comes a time in every student's life – a time when he or she must set aside the limitless opportunities on campus for socialising and shenanigans, to spend hours, perhaps days, slaving over a hot Word document, Excel Spreadsheet or PowerPoint presentation. For most students, this means firing up Microsoft Office.

However the days of that slow, buggy and incredibly expensive suite of software are finally numbered, thanks to Google. Google Drive is a free browser-based alternative to Microsoft Office, allowing you to create, view, edit and share documents from Firefox, Chrome, Safari, Internet Explorer, or even a smartphone or tablet. Drive replaced Google Docs earlier this year, adding online storage and Offline editing so it'll work even when UL Wi-Fi is on the fritz again.

Like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel, Drive will handle all the main file formats you might need, but unlike those it runs well even on older computers and it saves continuously to ensure you don't lose anything if your computer does crash. Google Drive provides 5 GB of free

online storage space for documents, but this storage isn't restricted to what you create within Drive. You can also upload whatever documents, pictures, music or anything else you want from your PC to Drive and access them anywhere.

What does this mean? It means you don't have to carry around a USB drive if you need to work on a friend's computer or in the Library; just sign into Google and work away. That's right, Google Drive has eliminated not one but two of the worst nightmares a student with a deadline could have – Microsoft Office not working, or losing a USB key with the only copy of your assignment on it. And did I mention it's free?

Sleep Cycle iOS €0.89

Students are sleepy creatures. Yet for some reason, UL has continuously ignored this important aspect of our culture and heritage in demanding we be present and alert in lectures as early as 9am. Nobody knows for certain why these unreasonable demands are imposed on us – some say the Student Academic Administration is merely a puppet of the notorious coffee industry, others believe University President Don Barry to be the secret heir to a global empire of alarm clock manufacturers. The only thing we know for certain, is that groggy mornings are a fact of college life. But once again, technology provides a solution!

Sleep Cycle is a bizarre alarm app for iOS devices that does the impossible – manages to turn anyone (even me) into an early bird. Tell the app what



time you need to wake up by, plug in the charger, slide your iPhone or iPod Touch under your sheets next to your pillow and relax. Sleep Cycle uses your iDevice's built-in accelerometer sensors to keep an eye on how much you toss and turn during the night, and decides from that how much of a deep sleep you are in. When the morning comes around, Sleep Cycle will wake you with a gentle alarm – but only when it knows you are in

a light phase of sleep. That means you'll wake up early feeling refreshed, relaxed and ready for the world (Just resist the urge to hit that snooze button when you realise it's woken you up earlier than you're used to, or you'll wake up 15 minutes later just as groggy as you usually are!)

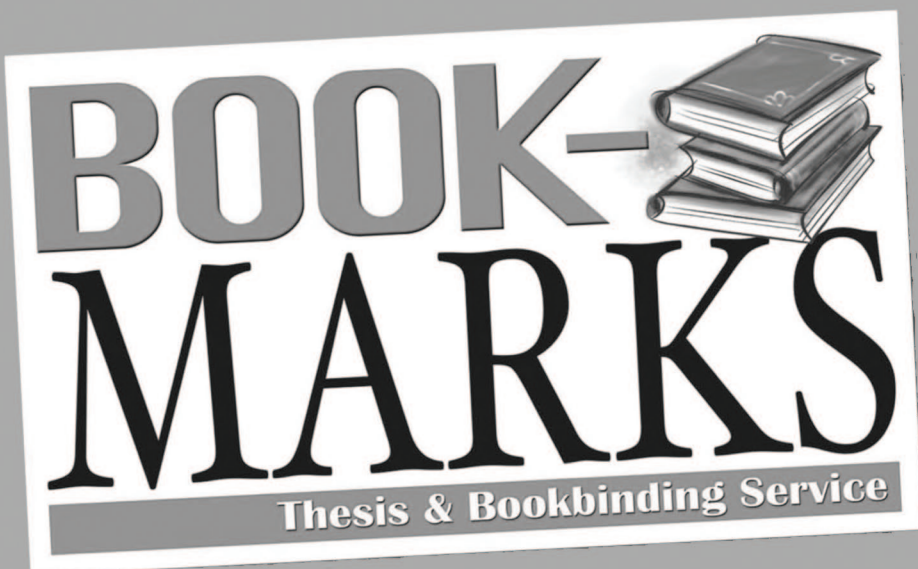
It's hard to convey just how well this works. I'm definitely not a morning person (I usually need 4 separate alarms to have any chance of being

awake by 7.30), but this app turns me into one of those bizarre creatures of myth that wakes up feeling naturally refreshed after only a few hours of shut-eye. At less than a euro from the iTunes App Store, definitely give Sleep Cycle a shot. If you prefer Android devices over Apple gadgets, you can find a similar app called "Sleep as Android" in Google's Play store.

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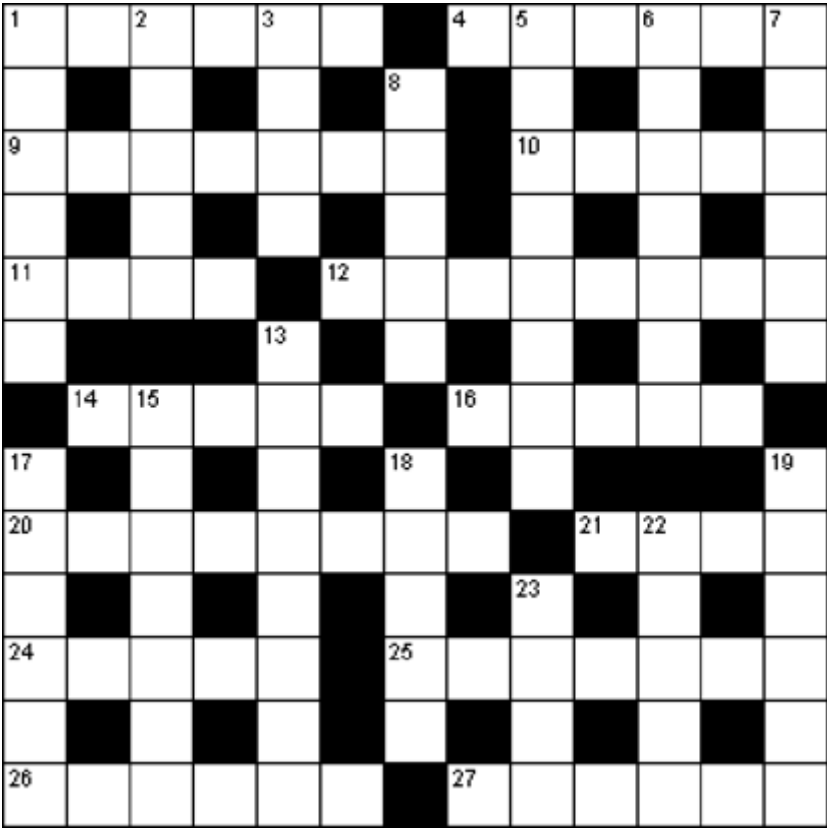
AN FOCAL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor, UL Students’ Union, Castletroy, Limerick. E: lorna.bogue@ul.ie. W: www.anfocal.ie.
An Focal endeavours to accommodate all letters as far as legally possible. All parties have the right of reply to letters printed herein.

- The Errant’s Return -

Oh northern woods so green and fair
but bitter chill’d your morning air,
where flowers grow so pale and gleam
with scents that grace an autumn queen
But in the springtime I set forth
to cease my errantry in the north,
and o’er sundering seas I’ll sail
farewell cold hills and shady dale.
Until at last I come to thee
that shining city by the sea,
where bronzed towers rising tall,
turn silver with the autumn’s fall,
where swooping martlets chirp their greetings,
heralding friends and lovers meetings.
And to this haven I will ride
to look once more on yon’ hillside.
To a house in that Sicilian quarter
gifts I’ll bring for you - their daughter,
Clothes I’ll bring from distant lands
woven by soft fairy hands
A harp of gold and silver drum;
to give the small ones joy and fun.
Perfumes and scents of Araby
I hope will grant the ladies glee.
With cloths of rich and gentle touch

for in the east they can make such.
And to the men and household lords,
I’ll deliver gifts from long lost hoards.
Fur lined cloaks, with belts of gold
passed down by folk from times of old.
A household banner bid them take
the craft of ladies from the lake.
And last of all to you I’ll bring
what truly is a beauteous thing.
A jewel designed by elven smiths
to mirror rays of twilight’s pith.
It matches well your eyes that glow
and shadowy locks that loosely flow.
When you lay sad upon your bower
this jewel will shine in darkest hour.
But if all these you will forsake
errant wandering again I’ll take.
Away to the west where stars shine bright
I’ll seek the princess of the night.
A ship of timber I’ll build there
with sails of blue and silver fair.
To sea once more I’ll sail awhile
until I’ve found the happy isles.
Then northern air shall chill my breath,
there then at last I’ll welcome death.



- CLUES
- Across

1. Ploy (6)
4. Requiring secret knowledge (6)
9. Disapproves (7)
10. Angry (5)
11. Land measure (4)
12. Perplexing (8)
14. Disney cartoon character (5)
16. Mournful poem (5)
20. Scorn (8)
21. Fencing sword (4)
24. Female relative (5)
25. Pills (7)
26. Unmarried (6)
27. Precious stones (6)
- Down

1. Worldwide (6)
2. US military officer (5)
3. Unit of length (4)
5. Precipitation (8)
6. Astounding (7)
7. Come out into view (6)
8. Ordinary (5)
13. Celestial (8)
15. Lamp (7)
17. Parts of a play (6)
18. Catches sight of (5)
19. Creatures (6)
22. Fragment (5)
23. Woodwind instrument (4)

Want to write for

AN FOCAL?

E-mail sarah.odwyer@ul.ie
OR michelle.ryan@ul.ie

UL Fan Forum Society: The Place Where Everyone Knows Your Name

Sarah Dowd
PRO

When I sat down to write this article I looked to our online community of over 100 members for inspiration about how to relay what we do to those of you who we can tempt into joining. Straight away I see a fashion trend of t-shirts purchased from qwertee.com, excitement about who will be directing the new Star Wars movie as well as a parody video of Gandalf and Gollum singing Bohemian Rhapsody.

Fan Forum Society is the only society of its kind in Ireland which caters for such a broad range of interests. We provide our members with a forum for discourse and appreciation for all things like TV Shows (Dr Who, Firefly, Game of Thrones, and The Big Bang Theory), Movies (Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Star Trek, and The Hunger Games) Sci-Fi, Graphic Novels as well as all the cool random stuff on the internet! Trust us, if it's out there, you can be sure our members will find it!

So far this year we hosted UL's First Harry Potter Week which included Wizard Chess (Yes, life size!) in the Student's Union Courtyard, a Tri-Wizard Tournament style Treasure Hunt held in various locations all around Campus as well as a Quidditch tournament on the pitches. The week was rounded off with a Yule Ball hosted by the Society in UL's Sports Bar.

Several Movie Trips were made in large



numbers to see Skyfall, The Hobbit and Total Recall. In conjunction with the release of the Hobbit the Society hosted a 'Second Breakfast' in honour of Bilbo Baggins.

We hold regular quizzes in conjunction with other societies which provide the chance for laughs, winning some great prizes (past prizes have included a Wii, Vouchers and other lovely prizes!) as well as an excuse to be extremely

competitive! In December of 2012 the 'Nerd Ball' was held for the members of Fan Forum, Anime & Manga, Chess, Games and Literary Society. A Wonderful night was had by all and plans are already in motion for 2013.

A jewel in the Fan Forum crown in the annual charity Zombie Walk held on campus. Inspired by Limericks Outbreak 2011 Festival this walk has become a tradition for the society and

in the process has enabled us to support two great charities (The Cliona Ring Foundation and the Mid-Western Rape Crisis Centre) with funds donated by our members and passers-by. In October 2012 we were assisted by Dance, Drama and Music Socs in raising over €100 for charity. Free food was provided by the Sports Bar.

Weekly Meetings are held in Red Rains at 6PM on Thursdays as well as

additional events.

AGM to be held Thursday Week 2 (for those of you reading this at the recruitment drive, tomorrow!!).

With membership only €4, Why Wouldn't You Be Interested In What We Do?

Contact Us: ulforumsoc@gmail.com or search Facebook for UL Fan Forum Soc.

Inline Hockey: Exciting New Club Looking To Start Up In UL!

Sinead Jennings

What is inline hockey?

Inline hockey, sometimes referred to as roller hockey, is a sport similar to ice hockey but played with inline skates. Like ice hockey, skaters on two teams use hockey sticks to direct a disk-shaped puck into the opponent's goal; however, various details of the game, such as the playing surface and puck design, have been adjusted to allow the use of inline skates at above-freezing temperatures.

Is it for guys or girls?

The teams and leagues are mixed and are based on ability, not gender.

I've never played before, can I join?

We're looking for players of ALL abilities, so whether you were a superstar back home in Canada or fresh meat from Fermoy, we want to hear from you!

I don't have any gear, can I come?

There is certain mandatory equipment required to play

competitively, but you can acquire this over time. First of all, we want to know if you want to play!

Is it rough?

Inline hockey is a non-checking sport, so you WON'T be seeing big hits like you do in the NHL! Contact is allowed, but only when aiming to play the puck. Fighting is forbidden! Look up <https://www.facebook.com/inlinehockeyireland> for photos of games and play!

What kind of skates do I need?

If you have any inline skates, they will be fine to start off with. If you are going to buy inline skates, please get in contact for advice as inline hockey skates are designed somewhat differently to your typical recreational skates.

If you are interested, please get in touch with sinead.inlinehockey@gmail.com or contact us via our Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/ULInlineHockey>

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UL Shotokan Karate Club

Eimear O’Sullivan

Semester one was definitely a great start to the 2012/13 academic year. We kicked off as per usual with an influx of new members to the club after a successful recruitment drive. It’s great to see such enthusiasm from the beginner grades at the bi-weekly training sessions, which are held in the PESS Building on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. It is fair to say they picked up a few skills.

The club also had an active part to play in the Open Day for the UL40 celebrations, demonstrating some of our techniques. However, we were not alone as half of Castletroy’s national school ninjas were out in force on the day, all of whom joined in and were eager to show off their skills too. Then, despite the fact that we were twice their height, they proceeded to ‘spar’ with us, which caught the attention of Live 95FM; after which, the number of ninjas doubled!

Another top training session was held when Tae Kwan Do and Karate joined forces to kick and punch their students into sweaty messes. It definitely worked, and acted to solve the age old question: “Who’d win in a fight: Karate or Tae Kwan Do?” The answer was simply: “enough of this training stuff... to the pub!” On



November the 22nd, we welcomed Sensei Seamus O Dowd, 5th Dan, who is a brother to our own sensei, Brendan O Dowd 3rd Dan. We had a private seminar with the renowned instructor; we also invited a local club, Cratloe Shotokan Karate to join us. White belts and black belts alike lined up to take part in this training session, which was both

gruelling and enjoyable, and ended with a brief introduction to karate techniques using the Bo staff, or for most of us, broom handle!

This year promises to be very exciting, kicking off with the Intervarsity Competition which UL are delighted to host on February 9th. The event itself will take place in the UL Arena and the competition will

comprise of four events: Individual and Team Kumite (sparring) and Individual and Team Kata (forms) which will run on a knock-out basis. Colleges and clubs from all over Ireland will be coming to Limerick for the event and we are expecting over 150 competitors.

The Karate Club is looking forward to this chance to demonstrate their

abilities, while some of the newer members are just hoping that they will remember the correct way to tie their belt on the day of the event. Spectators are welcome, so come on down and cheer on the home crowd.

It was a Dark, Stormy Night...

Clodagh Corry

Now that we’ve got your attention with that Dramatic Opening Drama Soc has a bunch of productions in store for this semester! Whether it be Stephen King’s ‘Misery’, ‘The Last Days of Judas Iscariot’, ‘Robin Hood: Men in Tights’ and the highly successful ‘One Act Festival’ which was held last year to bring the semester to a close. These are some of the reasons you might want to join Drama Soc this semester. Another reason for joining, which is perhaps less artistic but more economically practical in these recession stricken times is that Members get concessions into shows, so if you’re not already a member,

and want to tread the boards, or get into a great show for a super cheap price sign up on Wednesday at the recruitment drive, or come to any of our comedy workshops, which are held on Wednesdays at 7pm in the Jonathan Swift theatre (behind Red Raisins). Bring 5 euro, and we can sign you up there!



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ulfm.ie for full schedule and info

UL to host this year's Kayak Intervarsities

Oisín Bates

Almost 600 students will travel to UL between the 8th and 10th of February to take part in this year's Kayak Intervarsities. The event, which is the largest student competition on the Irish kayaking calendar, will feature four competitions over the course of the weekend.

The first event of the weekend – canoe polo – will take place on the Friday evening: each college will field teams of ten to compete in the event.

The next event will take place on the Catleconnell river; it will consist of individual time-trial races with four kayakers racing for each college. After this there will be a long-distance race on campus, starting from UL's boathouse and racing a 6kilometre circuit to Corbally Bridge and back.

The last event of the weekend is a freestyle kayaking competition in Limerick City at Curragower falls beside King John's Castle. UL have one the last three kayak intervarsities and are aiming to win the event for the fourth consecutive year.



UL Kayak Club: Nine out of Ten Students say they'd recommend it to a friend.



Five euro doesn't get you much these days; if you're lucky it'll just about get you into the Lodge Nightclub. Another alternative for your money is joining the Kayak Club. As one of UL's most active clubs, your kayaking journey will be full of opportunity from the very beginning and unlike a trip to the Lodge probably won't end at 3am outside Superdine. You're most likely won over already by this staggering value, but wait, there's more! Your money doesn't get you just one kayak-discipline but four! That works out at just over one euro per-discipline; with value like that you'd almost be losing money not to join.

So what are these disciplines and what exactly do they entail? Arguably, the club's most active discipline is White-water Kayaking. This usually involves paddling kayaks in environments ranging from simple, carefree, gently moving water, to more demanding and challenging white-water. Equally popular is Freestyle Kayaking. Like an energetic, younger brother of White-water Kayaking, Freestyle focuses not on running entire stretches of river, but instead on using particular features to make you and your boat perform tricks. Think surfing is only for boardriders? Kayak surfing is great craic; with UL situated just over an hour's drive from Lahinch and some of Clare's best surf spots, there is plenty of opportunity to get stuck into surfing. Chances are you've played or watched water basketball at some point in your life. Well, Kayak Polo is similar enough but with boats, paddles, and goals suspended two metres above the

water. Of course, the above four are only our most popular disciplines. The club accommodates others as personal-interest and demand dictates. We own a number of long-distance boats as well two plastic slalom boats and an open canoe. If you're interested in trying long-distance racing, slalom, or canoeing, there will be opportunity to try all of these over the course of the coming semester.

Looking for a less average College Experience? With the Kayak Club you can quite literally see the world. Along with annual trips to Wales, France, Italy and Slovenia; the club –in the past few years- has also gone as far as Uganda's White Nile River and the World's second-deepest canyon in Montenegro. Looking for adventure closer to home? Starting with the now legendary Fresher's Weekend in Lahinch, we run a number of weekend trips over the course of the year.

As you can see, there's a lot in store for the coming year. All you need now is to get out paddling. Fresher Pool Sessions run every Tuesday in the UL Arena Pool from 9:45 to 10:45; we'll also run a number of afternoon river-sessions on the River Shannon which conveniently flows directly through the campus and past our boathouse. For more up to date information, be sure to stay in touch. Our Facebook group can be found by searching "University of Limerick Kayak Club"; you can also contact us at ulkayak@gmail.com. Be sure to check out our website: <http://kayak.csn.ul.ie/>. See you on the water.

Debating, for fun and profit

Seán Duggan

Clubs and societies are the undoubtedly best way to experience everything college social life has to offer, while enhancing your CV with awesome new skills that'll put you streets ahead of potential employers. But with so many choices available in UL, it's so hard to pick which one is really worth your time, right? Wrong – because Debating Union is the way to go, and I'm going to tell you why.

Skills that pay the bills.

I initially joined the Debating Union to get over my disdain for public speaking, and it's awesome even for that reason alone. Most students at some point will have a big part of their grades riding on a class presentation or something similarly daunting, and people with confident public speaking skills are always in huge demand. Debating Union has Speaker Development nights in room 3 of the Student Union every Monday night at 7 that'll help you get rid of the butterflies of being under the spotlight and turn you into a champion orator.

Once you've mastered the art of commanding the room with your charismatic ways, we'll teach you the competitive side of debating. UL has been extremely successful in competitions the past few years, so you'll have some highly experienced speakers to give you feedback and help you improve. Knowing how to argue your way out of (or into) any situation is a critical skill for students studying Law, Politics, Journalism and similar subjects, but you can't go wrong with being able to debate no matter what direction you want to take your career in.

Here's how most of our debates work: people are split into four teams of two, given a motion to support or oppose, and 15 minutes to prepare a few points to argue in a 7 minute speech. The motion itself could be about literally anything - legalising the death penalty, disbanding the

EU, or arresting Batman. Having Debating competitions on your CV is the most concrete way to show prospective employers you can think outside the box and on your feet.

See the world, on a student budget.

UL is good, but getting to visit other universities around the world from time to time is even better. Getting to visit other universities around the world on a shoestring budget? The best. Universities all over Ireland, the EU and further abroad host debating intervarsities and competitions pretty much every weekend throughout the year, and participants have most of their accomodation, travel and food costs covered by ULdebU and the host university.

As a Debating Union member, you could be speaking in UCC one weekend, Cambridge University the next, and jetting off to New Zealand the week after that. In the past year alone, UL has sent debaters to Germany, the Philippines, and almost every corner of Ireland and the UK, and there are even more awesome competitions coming up. We'll be competing in NUI Galway in week 3, Manchester the following weekend and Leeds the weekend after that, just to name a few. All of these competitions are open to novice debaters and more experienced debaters will get to take part in the prestigious World Universities Debating Championships in India next year or Kuala Lumpur the year after that. With free food, accomodation and even travel, debaters regularly get amazing weekends away for less than most people will spend in Angel Lane on an average Thursday night.

Meet awesome people.

Although it sounds cheesy, the best part about being a part of the Debating world is the people. Honestly, debating intervarsities are



Auditor Michelle Coyle and Lorna Bogue at the World Debating Championships in The Philippines.



Clodagh Corry takes in the sights at a competition in Durham.

just excuses to go socialise with really interesting people in new interesting places. What more can you ask for? New members are always welcome, so don't worry about joining us halfway

through the year or the semester. Feel free to stop by one of our public debates to see what we're all about - there will be one on abortion and one on nuclear energy during week 2 and

you can check our facebook page for information on upcoming events.

Word Wars and Going Off Topic

Helen Carroll

Every Wednesday we put to our members a theme or genre of literature to discuss. For example, we would discuss our favourite writer or books we would recommend to each other. But it's not all serious! We hardly sit around in heavy discussion of classic literature wearing top-hats going "tosh-tosh!" – well, not for very long anyway! Book club is essentially the place where book-lovers hang out and share their love for the written word – as well as going completely off topic about everything!

Those who love to write are engrossed every Thursday in rushing to finish writing prompts, some of which can range from hilarious to heartbreaking.

During the month of November, a few of us had the crazy idea of participating in the international writing event: National Novel Writing Month, where our goal was to write 50,000 words in 30 days! To help us in our task – and to just have a bit of craic – we had a lock-in in the Common Room, where we wrote, read, played Scrabble and had lots of fun!

This semester we have plans in the works to make Lit Soc ever more awesome! You'll find us going off topic on Wednesdays at 7pm in KBG14 and afterwards we head into the White House for Poetry Readings. You can drop in for a prompt or two on Thursdays from 6-9 in the same place! May the Word Wars commence!



A Look at the Work of Gaza Action Ireland

Zoe Lawlor

THIS January nine members of Gaza Action Ireland (GAI) travelled to Gaza, Palestine. GAI was formed by activists who were centrally involved in the Irish Ship to Gaza Campaign, both on board the MV Saoirse and as a shore team. The aim of the group is to highlight and help undermine the illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza.

It was my fifth time trying to get to Gaza, having been stopped in the past by Israeli siege, detention by Mubarak's police in Egypt, sabotage of our ship in Turkey and most recently, kidnapping in international waters and one week's imprisonment by Israel!

The six-hour drive across the Sinai desert, much of it under armed guard, from Cairo to the Rafah crossing into Palestine was both exciting and nerve wracking. At Rafah, there was some issue over the paperwork for three of us and we spent a few hours on tenterhooks wondering if we would get in. Finally, we got into Gaza and it was very emotional for me. I love Palestine and, as I now have a ten year ban from the rest of the country; it is great to be able to visit any part of it.

Gaza runs along the Mediterranean and is one of the most densely populated places on earth, home to 1.7 million people, about half of them under 18. Were it not for the sieges and regular military attacks from Israel, Gaza would be very beautiful. As it is, there are many bombed out buildings, the effects of

the siege are visible everywhere and it is de-developed, often described as the biggest open-air prison in the world. The evidence of the November assault where 160 people were killed is everywhere.

However, there is also a vibrant, historical side to Gaza rarely related in our media, which seems to report only when it is being bombed and people are being killed. Gaza city is bustling and full of life, with old mosques, churches and a lovely museum. The people are really friendly, warm and eager to talk to visitors.

While there, we met with representatives of civil society and were hosted by the award-winning Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR). We visited Shifa Hospital and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society Ambulance and Emergency Department where we heard how the siege has devastated the health of the population and how medical supplies and instruments are in chronically short supply.

We also met Al-Helal football club whose kids' team presented us with jerseys. The importance of sport as an outlet for the traumatised youth of Gaza cannot be understated. GAI intends to bring youth teams out of Gaza to play in Ireland, to meet other children and share their stories. The sports strand, including myself and Trevor Hogan met with the Palestinian Olympic Committee and Olympians past and present.

We spoke to fishermen at Gaza Seaport, they come from long, proud

traditions of fishing and are subject to constant terrorism by apartheid Israel. Their boats are routinely thrashed, they are beaten, detained and shot and they have seen their livelihoods decimated. We met a man who had been shot by the Israeli navy, detained and then dumped on the road two days later, left to crawl back to his home from Erez untreated. These men just want to fish safely, freely and with dignity. For me that meeting was extremely powerful, and made the setting of Gaza Seaport especially emotional as it is where the MV Saoirse would have sailed into had we not been attacked. Fintan Lane, GAI co-ordinator, had been sailing alongside the Mavi Marmara when Israel murdered nine of its crew in 2010. The harbour has a monument to those men.

My main impression from visiting Gaza is of how strong the people are in the face of the blockade and isolation from the rest of their country and from the world, and of how important solidarity and connections are for them. The hospitality and warmth that people showed was incredible, their courage and dignity is admirable – the Arabic word 'sumoud', steadfastness, says everything you need to know about the Palestinians – they are not going anywhere.

For more information contact me at: zoe.lawlor@ul.ie or see: Gaza Action Ireland on Facebook



A Gaza fishermen shows the scars left behind after he was shot by Israeli forces while fishing in Palestinian waters. (Image credit: Hugh Lewis)

Finance Masters in UL - The Kemmy Business School Trading Floor is Core

Postgraduate programmes in finance are widely available ... so why choose UL? Well, there are a number of reasons: exceptional graduate employment rates, award-winning programmes, credited professional development modules, the opportunity to gain Bloomberg certification, an international field trip, exposure to lecturers with international trading experience, etc. But the real selling point is the distinctive Trading Floor facility which is strategically located in the Kemmy Business School (KBS) building.

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also give you an advantage when entering the financial work force.

The Bloomberg terminals allow you access to real-time market data such as news, prices, trading strategies, economic data and forecasts by the top analysts across the globe. The information that you will see to is the same information that, for example, traders in major exchanges, global financial institutions, hedge fund managers or risk analysts use on a daily basis. This means that you could be looking at the exact same data as a Wall Street trader simultaneously! Bloomberg is a hugely powerful, hands-on tool which is why the KBS encourages our postgraduates to take full advantage of its availability on campus. This is achieved by offering a credited module which upon completion means you will be certified by Bloomberg in four market sectors; FX Markets, Commodity Markets, Fixed Income and Equities.

Our experienced faculty also incorporate Bloomberg into the instruction of other modules to show how it is used in the financial world. Through carefully designed projects you will have the opportunity to create and follow portfolios, build and

test options, research news and events which affect the market and monitor economic information across the globe. As a postgraduate student you will also have the opportunity to form a group and create trading strategies in Bloomberg to compete with students from other universities nationally.

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Living in a Winter Wonderland

Úna Ní Shúilleabháin

“HOPE you like snow” giggled my employer during my interview back in October. “I LOVE the snow” I gushed, trying so hard not to screw up my only interview and to end the misery that was searching for a job for Co-Op. I knew the snow in France would not be like the snow in Ireland. See, the weather in France does this funny thing - it’s actually predictable. Winter = Cold. Summer = Warm. End of. I knew the snow in France would not be like the “snow” in Ireland. Queue scenic images - a blanket of white covering the rooftops of small houses. All the while small birds flutter off the ground, and perch themselves high on leafless branches. Initially the snow was just that. Fluffy white snow engulfed the area, and even the most *cough* non-aesthetically pleasing of buildings and houses, looked so picturesque. And then it kept snowing. And snowing. The birds were gone. Probably frozen under a vat of snow. Or eaten alive by mountain lions...I don’t know. Then it started to rain. And rain. And the rain fell onto the snow. In Ireland this would just lead to the demise of the snow, as young children attempt to throw balls of smush at one another. In France, where the snow is mighty, the rain and the snow join forces. They become a natural lethal transformer - Optimus Frosty or something. One night, while walking through torrential



“I knew the snow in France would not be like the “snow” in Ireland. Queue scenic images - a blanket of white covering the rooftops of small houses.”

rain, I returned home only to find that the raindrops on my coat had frozen. Snow had engulfed my hair, my hands, my boots - everything. I looked like a ginger yeti. As I was literally defrosting, I wondered how the people of Belfort could live in this weather. I wondered how they could

WALK in this weather, risk slipping and breaking their necks on the ice - at night. And then I realized it. The French aren’t idiots. During my 40 minute trek from town, I did not meet one French person walking. I did, however, pass a lot of cars. Cars full of people. People whom, it would

be safe to say judging by my location, were full of French people. People whom, it could also be taken for granted judging by the way I looked, were wetting themselves laughing. So what has the snow in France taught me?! Yes, it can be just like Disney; but the White Witch should

have stocked up on the ole’ Penny’s thermal vests, before she goes off gallivanting...

Erasmus in Stockholm: Just a Name and a Nation

Tom Horan

NEARLY all toilets here have two settings: a small flush for light visits, and a bigger one for more demanding jobs. These are the things I notice. I’m not feeling any seismic changes following my first week attending Södertörns högskola, just the little details. Like how red cheddar isn’t Sweden’s most common cheese. The first few days in the city were filled by bus and train journeys, form-signing, and grocery shopping, so there was no time to sit back and take it all in. The one problem with going to a country with excellent public transport is that you feel you have no excuse but to use this wonderful resource all the time, and so spend a quarter of your day standing on train platforms. One of the larger details I had no choice but to notice immediately was how cold it is here, with the weather each day ranging between cold and very cold. At least the weather’s consistent. Despite my accommodation, Bjornkulla, only being a fifteen minute walk from the university, it’s in the middle of a snow-covered pine forest. The accommodation and university are on the southern outskirts of Stockholm, only a twenty-minute train drive from the city centre. I went to my first class on Friday,

having missed the actual first class on Monday because we were too busy getting settled in. It was a two-hour lecture on seventeenth century Scandinavia and surprisingly, was rather interesting. Swedish students attend fewer classes per week, but do more work outside of class. Next week, I have only three classes but will be given several hours’ worth of reading and writing work to have done by the next class. Although I only have it once a week, my Media and Storytelling class is four hours long. That’s longer than the last Lord of the Rings film, and even that had pacing issues. From what I hear, Erasmus isn’t about academia anyway. Going with three UL students I’ve already known for two years, I’m at a social head-start. While other exchange students are motivated by the fear of crippling loneliness to talk to one another, we Irish can just stick together. In the long run this may be a disadvantage, since we would leave Sweden with no more friends than we came in with, but at least I haven’t had to go to the overpriced supermarket alone yet. At this point in the exchange, our identities have been boiled down to our names and nation. I’m simply Tom from Ireland, and I know nothing about Charles from Atlanta, Georgia other than that his name is Charles, and he’s from Atlanta, Georgia. Fortunately, I have until June to learn



Student accommodation Bjornkulla, near Södertörns University in Stockholm.

Laura from Canada’s favourite bands, or whether Sena from Germany has ever watched Knight Rider. Sweden is one of the few countries more expensive than Ireland, but the Krona makes it difficult to understand whether I’m being ripped

off or not. On Thursday, I had no idea whether fourteen Krone for a Kit-Kat was reasonable. I feel uncomfortable walking around with five-hundred Krona notes, even though in reality they’re worth only about sixty Euro. Since it’s still early days, my opinion

of Stockholm has likely further changed as you’re reading this. I will have been to more than one class, met more people, and been on seventeen more trains.

UL VS St. Pat's

University of Limerick 2-19 St Patrick's 0-7

Photography by Ricky Llamas

