

Let's talk about

Mental Illness

Mental Illness as a common and treatable condition. Talk. Ask. Listen.

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Debt Collectors Called in to Recover Outstanding Student Fees

Jenny Grace

UL has come under the spotlight as the first Irish university to make use of an external debt-collecting agency to recover outstanding student fees. Breaking news of a European tender worth €200,000 annually issued by UCD "seeking expressions of interest from interested parties to provide professional services relating to collection of outstanding monies within UCD" has called into question the current financial affairs of not only Irish universities, but also those of Irish students.

With news that the annual student contribution is set to rise to €2,500 from September with a further increase to €3,000 by 2015, students are under extreme pressure to find ways to meet the costs of university education. This is paired with cuts and delays in SUSI grant funding and decreases in family income over the past couple of years.

In their correspondence with former UL students, the debt collection agency used by UL has noted that the majority of students with outstanding fees did not complete their courses and left without a degree. It has also emerged that some student fee arrears date back to 2011. A UL spokesperson commented that the use of external mechanisms was "a last resort in recovering long outstanding debts." Professor Don Barry has highlighted that while the University tries to facilitate students for as long as possible, the University is "caught



between a rock and a hard place" in their obligation to collect this charge due to pressures from Government funding.

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) President John Logue has condemned the use of external debt collection agencies, maintaining that this move serves to intimidate families into paying money they do not have. He also highlighted the

dramatic increase in student fees over the past few years, pointing out that student "prospects have taken a hit from not graduating, yet these universities are demonstrating gross insensitivity by employing debt collectors when they should be working with the students to come to a more amicable arrangement." Logue also indicated that former students who did not complete their university

degrees yet are still in arrears and are not likely to be in a position to pay the outstanding amount.

The USI has called on the Minister of Education to condemn this practice and initiate a solution that will assist students in managing their outstanding fees. However, a spokesperson for the Department of Education indicated that the Department and higher education

institutions are 'autonomous bodies' with separate internal affairs.

In turn, NUI Galway has issued a statement announcing that they will not be pursuing students for unpaid fees, highlighting that the University is "sympathetic to cases of student hardship and operates a financial aid fund for students."

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Limerick Youth Service In Favour Of Voting At 16

Michelle Ryan

The Constitutional Convention recently took place in Dublin where 52% of 100 delegates in attendance voted in favour of lowering the voting age. A call has been made to reduce the age from 18 to 16 and Limerick Youth Service have shown their support. Dermot Troy, a spokesperson on behalf of the Youth Service, said that if the age was lowered it would encourage teenagers to "take control of their lives." Many arguments have been put against the motion such as the fact that 16 year olds may not know anything about politics. Mr. Troy addressed this by stating that even people in their 40's or 50's may not know about politics either. A solution he suggested to this would be to introduce politics into the classroom so teenagers can understand how it all works. By doing this, Dermot explained that it will "engage young people from an early age." The Limerick Youth Service, who are located on Lower Glentworth Street, are hoping that lowering the voting age will come to pass. Youth Work Ireland and the National Youth Council of Ireland are also on board.



New University Ranking System Introduced

Sarah O' Dwyer

Minister Ruairi Quinn recently announced the introduction of a new European-wide University ranking system. U-Multirank, the new system which is being rolled out across the EU, expects approximately 500 universities across Europe to partake in the new scheme.

The first results are expected to be published in early 2014. These results, however, are based on more than just research in third level institutions. Instead, it focuses on five main areas of a university: quality of teaching and learning, international orientation, success in knowledge transfer, reputation for research, and contribution to regional growth.

The new system, U-Multirank, will also rate universities on their strength in business studies, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and physics.

Six third-level institutions in Ireland, including University College Dublin, DIT, CIT, GMIT, IT Tallaght and IT Sligo, have all expressed interest in the new ranking system, with many more expected to follow suit.

European Commissioner for Education, Androulla Vassiliou, speaking at the launch, said young people would make more informed decisions with the new system about where to study. Previously, American



universities have dominated rankings internationally, and the new system is likely to be more favourable towards

universities outside of the States.

TD Phil Prendergast said the new system will help to quash the

“prejudices and snobbery that were inherent in the old system, which disproportionately favoured

historic universities as opposed to modern third-level institutes and universities”.

Pay It Forward Limerick

Cathal Ronan

The Pay It Forward Limerick initiative began when a few ordinary people got together with a vision to help the people of Limerick to be their very best. Everyone shared their skill and expertise and before long, a plan was in motion.

It started when Michael O'Mahony gathered a few friends together, Eugene Stephens, Dermot O'Mahony, and Justin Gearing, to start putting the plan into action. Since then Michael Fagan, Elaine Flynn, Jack Carter, Teresa O'Sullivan, Tom Hanly, Sean De Bhulbh, Dolours O'Mahony, Paul Williamson, Peter Nevin and many more have joined the campaign to spread the word and pay it forward. The team is made up of ordinary people who decided they wanted to be a part of something that inspired the best in people.

People-helping-people is the bond that holds communities together. While some may point out failures, what could happen if instead we turned our focus towards what is good in society, namely its people.

Imagine if 200 people were to randomly go out of their way to assist or aid in some way 3 other people. That is 600 people experiencing a good deed. In turn if those 600 people pay it forward by helping 3 new people 1800 more people experience a good deed. In matter



of weeks 2,600 people have been involved and imagine what could happen if the ripples continued! You get the idea.

Why stop there, and why wait to get involved. Any act of random kindness can make a difference. We hope these ideas help to get you thinking. When people ask you why, just tell them to “Pay it forward!”

- Give someone a lift.
- Visit someone in the hospital.
- Take the time to hear someone's story.
- Support your local voluntary organizations.

- Use your skill to benefit of the community. Musical or artistic gifts are great to share.
- Phone a friend, or drop someone a card or note to let them know you care.

Be one of the first 200 to bring out the best in Limerick. Go to www.piflimerick, hit reply and join up by leaving your name and commit yourself to do 3 random acts of kindness. Share this on Facebook, or simply pass on the news to some your closest friends or family. Help spread the word, and the kindness!

Unemployment Reduction Plans in Limerick



Michelle Ryan

Recruitment agency Cpl is offering free training courses to those who are unemployed in Limerick. Cpl are putting together a course for healthcare assistants that will begin in March. The government have a Momentum upskilling programme where €20 million has been put aside to facilitate courses like these across the country. The Momentum programme will provide those involved with the opportunity of attaining a new skill as well as gaining some work experience. This is a very welcome initiative to the county as the Central Statistics Office showed that unemployment

figures from the end of 2012 had risen to 14,313. As well as that, it is expected that Minister Michael Noonan will announce the creation of 400 jobs in the city where the Dell factory once conducted their business. This would be a major boost for the city who has faced some difficulty recently with the closure of both HMV stores in Cruises Street and the Crescent Shopping Centre.

Limerick will also rely on new business from the promotion it will receive as City of Culture in 2014. Preparations are already underway to make sure that the city gets the most out of their title with focus on promoting the long history the city has with the arts.

Six Garda Stations Close Around Limerick

Sarah O’ Dwyer

Six county Limerick Garda stations have been closed as part of the Minister for Justice’s plans to improve policing in Ireland.

Garda stations in Kilfinane, Galbally, Kilmeedy, Tournafulla, Castletown Conyers, and Mary Street have been closed, and the Gardaí relocated to other stations around the county.

The closure of the stations in Limerick, five of them being rural stations, will leave the elderly in rural communities “at the mercy of criminal gangs” according to Galbally based councillor, Eddie Ryan. Cllr. Ryan has also called for An Taoiseach Enda Kenny to sack the justice minister on foot of the closures.

“He does not give a damn. He is destroying the garda force and he is destroying good policing methodologies as well,” said Cllr Ryan.

“We have to stand up for the rural communities. The post offices, and banks and now rural garda stations have all been hit – we have nothing left out here.”

Senator James Heffernan also said the closures are “a blatant disregard for the needs of the people in rural communities”.

100 Garda stations are being closed across the State in the biggest restructuring of An Garda Síochána in its 90-year history.



ULSU Student Council News

Sarah O’ Dwyer

The first Class Reps Council of the new semester was held on February 5th in the Jonathan Swift Theatre. The meeting was not quorate.

CRC announced that the new Student Choice Awards will be sponsored by the Enablement Fund.

The Enablement Fund is sponsoring the Class Reps EU trip from the 18th-21st January.

The position of Equal Opportunities Chair is vacant. (Nominations open February 18th and close February 22nd. Election day is 28th February).

Charity Week charities were announced: Body Wise, Aware, Midwest Spinal Bifida and Adapt House.

Dates to remember for the coming semester:

- Council meetings Tuesday Week 2,4,6,8,10 & Cert presentation Week 12.
- KBS Ball - 7th February
- PSU Ball - 15th February
- SHAG Week - Week 4
- PSU Elections - 28th February
- Charity Week - Week 6
- Election Week - Week 7 – 14th March

- General Meeting – Week 8 – 20th March

Sabbatical positions were advertised on the SU Website. New Medical Centre charges were looked at.

Announcement of the CPR Course available to students.

A group is needed to establish the categories for Student Choice Awards Project. €1,000 of money is available for prizes.

It was noted that money was spent

on the Referendum.

A deputy Chair needs to be elected.

The possibility of merging the Lighting Policy with the UL Safety Policy and Transport Policy was discussed.

Email policy was discussed. Email priority was discussed.

The next meeting of the Class Reps Council will be held on 19th February.



Gardaí Ar Iarraidh

Evan O’Grady

I’ll put this out there immediately. I was born in the countryside and I have lived there for almost all of my life. Reducing the amount of Gardaí on duty at any time is the most reprehensible thing to inflict on people of any age, never mind the vulnerable, the elderly and the isolated who reside in the further reaches of Ireland. Not only is it morally wrong, it is hard to see the purpose of reducing security in the countryside. To those of you in urban areas who may not yet be convinced that the countryside needs as much of a Garda presence as towns and cities, allow me to illustrate the reality of living in the country. In the country, people live in areas of near total darkness for lack of street lamps and the like. Neighbours are much fewer and farther between. Shops, administrative buildings and many other facilities are sparse to non-existent. This comes with the territory; you choose living in the country either because you were born there or else because you wish to escape town life. Now let me suggest another type of person who may like to escape town life for a place that is dark and isolated; the common criminal for example.

Now no place is free from criminality nor is any place totally lawless. Every area has periods of unrest, worry and peace whether they are urban or rural. On that note why would you take away the presence of the upholders of the law from any place? Politicians may

suggest that with less people you have less crime, which is a complete fallacy. With less people, you have less people to witness a crime. Reducing the amount of Garda officers in the country serves the same effect as slashing the numbers of coastguard patrolling our border waters. Where does one think that gang members transport drugs, kill enemies and hide bodies? It’s not the M1 motorway, let me tell you that. This is ignoring the fact that the country is failing in its responsibility to protect its citizens.

I don’t wish to make this all sound like a political rant; that would blunt my argument for I could not care less for any government. However, the abhorrent nature of these security cuts sickens me to my core. The elderly feature heavily in this case and from media coverage alone it is hard to ignore the fact that those who cannot defend themselves against thugs and thieves will be targeted first. It is a given, and it stands to reason that one should give more protection to those who need it. Not so according to those in power. I actually had the displeasure of hearing a statement made by a member of the government on RTÉ news the other day. I did not catch his name but the words ring clear. He suggested to the news presenter that Gardaí were unable to cope with a “new breed” of criminality sweeping the nation, that had they been there they would not have been able to stop the brutal attacks that have taken place in rural areas of late.



For one, there is never a “new breed” of criminality. Last I checked, thugs knocking down doors in the middle of the night, while more common of late, is not unheard of in any country through history. Whatever new breed this minister was talking about were clearly nothing to do with the attacks in the country. Also, why on Earth would he suggest that the Gardaí

are unable to cope? Politicians need to encourage confidence in these officers working every day to keep the peace around the country. Taking away vital members and scorning the rest is not how you handle a situation as the one we are in now. I’d suggest that this minister at least was out of touch but I would doubt he was a man ever in touch, and this sentiment extends to others

of his ilk. Reducing Garda numbers is a tremendously stupid idea, and what’s more, taking away something from someone weaker than you, particularly the minority country population, smacks of bullying. It is saddening that I don’t know if that applies more to the criminals, or to the government.

More Than A Labelling Porky Exposed....

Aoife Coughlan

The recent beef burger scandals in Ireland have been a cause for widespread concern. It seems that every day a new development has heightened our fears for the mince and burger industry and the products we are buying. The idea of eating horsemeat has horrified most of the public; but should it really be the key issue? Historically the first burgers could be considered as the pony meat minced between the thighs of the Mongol warriors. They stored their meat in pouches, hung from bags at the side of the saddles, with the idea being that the pressure of their thighs would mince the meat and the body heat then partially cook the horse meat for consumption later on. Vaguely appalling on a gastronomic level indeed! But in today’s world are we getting too worked up about a problem that, when put in perspective, is not the only fear we should have regards our consumption of such items.

When the news first broke about high percentages of horse and pork meat in certain products it sparked a nationwide interest. The percentages published were indeed worrying.

However, I believe that they are more distressing from the point of view of labelling than contents. This is particularly true for the traces of non-Halal meat in products marketed as being to Halal specifications. There is nothing wrong with the pork or horse meat, either are perfectly fit for consumption but the consumer should not be misled. More worrying to me was the list of additives and preservatives in the tested products. Should this not be more of a concern for shoppers? I personally believe that if I buy meat I would be happier knowing it was 100% meat, whatever animal it comes from, rather than a concoction of chemicals. For me the whole debate has opened up the issue of our shopping habits. We seem to be content to purchase lesser quality goods solely for the purpose of convenience. A burger should not come pre-packed and frozen anyway. It just serves to highlight the growing reliance on ready prepared food and the lazy society we are becoming in regarding food preparation. Microwave meals and frozen goods are a trend in the last decades and the scandal has brought this to the fore. The simple solution to avoiding these ill-regulated products is to

make your own. Mince from a local butcher is not hard to shape into a burger patty, it’s quick, convenient and so much tastier than a shop bought alternative.

Also, it raises the issue that most of these products are made for large supermarket chains and labels. The days of shopping locally seem to be gone. In this economic climate we live in, never has it been more important to support local business, the butcher, the baker and the local grocer. Food consumption seems to be tied to survival of business in our micro economies. When an age of interest in Fair Trade initiatives seem to flourish as a better deal for producers abroad we seem to forget that a “fair trade” should be practiced in localities as well. If we pay a fair price for goods we ensure the future of jobs and traditions.

The real issue is not how we have been misled by labels, this can be enforced with better legislation and regulation, but how we have misled ourselves into believing that any form of good can come of a frozen package.



Israel Has A Right To Exist, And To Defend Itself Too

James Bradshaw
Co-Editor

Many have greeted the recent story of Israeli journalist Sarah Honig's trip to a school in Cahirciveen, and the anti-Semitic abuse she experienced from the schoolchildren and their teacher, with scepticism. Nevertheless, it's not all that unlikely that Irish kids would have those sorts of opinions.

There is scarcely a nation on the planet – outside of the Muslim world of course – where Israel is less popular than it is here. Yet there are many similarities between the two countries. Both Israel and Ireland are small nation-states with large diasporas scattered across the world, particularly in the United States. One of the foremost Israeli statesmen of the last half-century was Chaim Herzog, who was born and raised in Belfast. On a more macabre note, Israel's secret services have shown a certain partiality towards the use of Irish passports during their overseas trips. Yet in spite of the parallels between their story and ours, the pro-Israel stratum of Irish society is miniscule compared to the number of Irish citizens who profess sympathy with the Palestinians. During every military conflict in the region, Irish politicians will denounce Israel in the fiercest terms, and many attempted economic and cultural boycotts have been launched by Irish groups. When TV3 presenter Vincent Browne described Israel as "the cancer in foreign affairs" and claimed that they had stolen the country's "land from the Arabs", he was simply expressing the views held by most Irish citizens, albeit in a blunt manner.



However, it was not always like this. Many of my father's generation would remember a different time, and a different narrative in relation to the conflicts in the Middle East. When Israel achieved a spectacular victory over Egypt, Syria, Jordan and a number of other Arab countries in the Six-Day War in 1967, most outside observers regarded it as a heroic triumph of a tiny nation (with a population at the time of less than three million) surrounded and vastly outnumbered by its enemies. Yet the conquests Israel gained in 1967 (East Jerusalem, Gaza and the

West Bank) contained within them large Arab Muslim populations who would never be satisfied living with a Jewish state.

After making peace with Egypt and Jordan, and obtaining an uneasy stalemate with Syria, Israel had made itself secure against conventional threats. However, the terrorist tactics of the PLO, and later Hezbollah and Hamas, were not so easily contained. The inevitable retaliations by the Israeli Defence Forces not only hardened the will of Palestinian militants to continue to struggle, it has also

dramatically changed attitudes overseas. A generation or two ago, the Israelis were the courageous David, but they have since been transformed into the malevolent Goliath in the minds of many Irish citizens. Some of the criticisms levelled at the country are of course valid, but many are simply false, the product of anti-Israeli propaganda absorbed over many years. Israel is not the obstacle to peace in the Middle East: the country's leaders have repeatedly shown themselves willing to make concessions to achieve it. After winning the Sinai in

1967, they handed it back to Egypt in order to end the conflict between the two nations. A Palestinian state including Gaza and a large majority of the West Bank, with a capital in Jerusalem, has been on the table for more than a decade now since the then PM (and current Defence Minister) Ehud Barak offered such a deal to Yasser Arafat in 2000. Arafat refused this extraordinarily generous offer, and no Palestinian leader has been willing to accept it since. Israel's first leaders persevered through severe hardship to build homes for the Holocaust refugees, in direct contrast to the Palestinian and other Arab leaders who prefer exploiting the poverty of the Palestinian refugees to actually working to alleviate their conditions. When Israel withdrew from Gaza and handed it over to the Palestinian authorities in 2005, instead of developing a government to serve its impoverished people, Hamas turned the area into a launch-pad for rockets aimed at killing any Israeli civilian: man, woman or child. With such an example to draw on, is it any wonder the Israelis will not withdraw from the West Bank, let alone lift the blockade on Gaza which prevents more lethal weapons from reaching the terrorists?

As westerners watch the Arab Spring unfold in the hope of seeing greater democracy in the region, it should be remembered that Israel has been unique in building a successful liberal democracy in the middle of that oasis of political and social repression. Few Irish people seem to be aware of that, and if the stories about the schoolchildren in Cahirciveen are true, the future isn't bright for Irish-Israeli relations.

King Richard III

Barbara Ross

Great Britain has had a gruesome and bloody past especially when it comes to their monarchy, and one of the country's biggest villains has been uncovered in a car park in Leicester. The skeletal remains of the former warrior King Richard III of England were unearthed during an archaeological dig by the University of Leicester. Experts say evidence including battle wounds, curvature of the spine and the more than four months of tests since, strongly support the DNA findings that this is the body of the king who has been missing for 500 years.

The skeleton was discovered buried among the remains of what was once the city's Greyfriars friary despite reports that the defeated monarch's body had been dug up and thrown into a nearby river. Archaeologists say their examination of the skeleton shows Richard met a violent death. They found evidence of eight head wounds and two wounds to the body as well as several 'humiliation

injuries' which fitted in accounts of the fatal battle.

Born in 1452, he grew up during the bitter and bloody Wars of the Roses. His brother Edward became King in 1461. He was succeeded by his 12-year-old son Edward V with Richard as his protector. Edward was declared illegitimate, and Richard was crowned King in his place. Edward and his brother were held in the Tower of London, and later disappeared. Richard has long been blamed for their murder, giving rise to the legend of the Princes in the Tower. Richard has often been cast as the villainous King, deformed and murderous but how much of that was Tudor propaganda?

During Richard's reign, the historian John Rous praised him as a "good lord" who punished "oppressors of the commons", adding that he had "a great heart". He reversed this position during Henry VII's reign, and portrayed Richard as a freakish individual who was born with teeth and shoulder-length hair after having been in

his mother's womb for two years. After his death, Richard's image was tarnished by propaganda fostered by his Tudor successors who sought to legitimise their claim to the throne. All these characteristics are repeated by Shakespeare, who portrays him as having a hunch, a limp and a withered arm. Richard's good qualities of cleverness and bravery were never reputed and he had a reputation as a promoter of legal fairness.

Richard endowed King's College and Queens' College at Cambridge University, and made grants to the church. He planned the establishment of a large chantry chapel in York Minster, with over one hundred priests. In December 1483, Richard instituted the Court of Requests, a court to which poor people who could not afford legal representation could apply for their grievances to be heard. He also introduced bail in January 1484, to protect suspected felons from imprisonment before trial and to protect their property from seizure



during that time. He founded the College of Arms, banned restrictions on the printing and sale of books, and he ordered the translation of the written Laws and Statutes from the traditional French into English.

Despite this, the image of Richard as a ruthless power-grabber remained dominant in the 18th and 19th centuries.

A Common & Treatable Illness

Imagine your friend breaks out in a rash. They go through feverish periods of restlessness and can't sleep, they lose their appetite and can't eat. They find it difficult to concentrate. They feel too ill to leave their bed or to complete the various tasks of everyday life.

Sounds like a bad illness right?

Take away the rash. Take away the external manifestation of their illness. Physically they look just fine, yet the effects are just the same.

Mental illness is something that we don't like to talk about, and yet it is a common and treatable condition which will affect all of us at some point in our lives, whether it is through experiencing it ourselves or knowing someone who is going through it. This is the part of an article on mental health issues where the usual one in four statistic is trotted out, but the fact of the matter is that mental health issues are more common than we think. We just maintain a silence and stigma around the issue or else we talk about it in a superficial way that lets us think that we're doing something about it, but we're not really.

So why do we find this highly common occurrence something that is so difficult to talk about? This is a question that is particularly important in the Irish context, because we have such a high suicide rate. Mental health issues are recognised as being a contributing factor to suicide, so it is important that we actually deal with the issue instead of hiding it away. Maybe if we treated mental illness as a real and concrete thing, like any other disease, we might actually be able to improve the lives of the people who live with it. If one in four people were to catch TB would the state stand idly by and ignore the problem? Of course not, there would be uproar, so why is mental illness so different? It can impair your ability to function, it contributes to fatalities. In the dark ages, diseases such as TB were actually treated as nebulous and terrifying things that wouldn't happen to you if you ignored them. This approach didn't help anyone and resulted in members of society being shunned. Those days are gone, so why does this archaic attitude pervade the discourse on Mental illness?

Let's look at the reasons for our attitudes to dealing with mental health issues. On a societal level historical treatment of mental illness still distorts how we view people with mental illnesses. We see reminders all around us. Many towns in Ireland still have derelict institutional buildings which used to house people with mental illnesses. Although perhaps 'imprison' is a better word for what

they did. At best this was done through ignorance mixed with good intentions, but I'm not sure how far society has progressed in terms of learning more and adopting a better attitude towards mental health. We tell ourselves that this otherisation of people suffering from mental illness is something far away and long ago, however, even as recently as the 70's there is footage of patients in an NHS institution being placed together in an outdoor, fenced enclosure to get exercise. Much like a prison. Even today, the imposing Victorian buildings, which are unfit for purpose, are still being used by our underfunded health service to treat people with mental illnesses. We continue to treat mental illness with ignorance and fear. Which brings me to the personal level. How do you talk to a friend about mental illness? You want to help them but you just don't know what to say. Relying on tired old clichés such as 'things will get better' and 'keep busy' just ring hollow and are patronising in some cases. But I can see why we say them, because our societal attitudes towards mental illness mean that on an individual level I will see mental illness as a scary thing that's hard to talk about. I'm just as guilty as anyone of saying something vaguely comforting but ultimately meaningless because there isn't anything I can say. And I feel bad about that but I don't know what another person is going through, or how they're feeling. If I haven't actually experienced it I don't know what the right thing to say is and I'm scared of saying the wrong thing, if indeed the mythical 'wrong thing' actually exists. Even though, being a third level student, I'd be expected to have a certain level of education, fear still prevents me from saying anything. This stigma is dangerous, it means that the problem of mental illness goes untreated and like any other illness, if left untreated it can get worse.

I'm looking at a computer screen. It's a website telling people how to actually go about killing themselves. The methods are ranked in terms of lethality and pain. I want to turn away but I keep looking, because I want to understand the level that someone has to get to to reach this point of no return. In the media, in books, films, TV and art suicide is romanticised. It's something that is used move along a narrative or add drama. A literary device. It's not portrayed realistically. The curtains come down after the play or the TV show finishes. In reality the people who surround you will keep living. Knowing someone isn't just about seeing them right now in the present, it's also about sharing your past experiences and continuing to know

them in the future. You want them to keep living because someday you'll meet them again. Someday you'll meet the person they become. They may not like the person that they are right now but their judgement is being clouded by something that shouldn't and doesn't define them. Things will get better, they should keep living not in order to attain perfection but precisely because of the imperfections that they dislike about themselves, because they make them who they are. This wonderful person who can't be contained in a statistic, a memorial, a book or a film, no matter how detailed. A person who can change and grow, who can be great someday. Someone who can get better and will be stronger because of it. Somebody, who like everybody has so much potential. Suicide is no option. It takes options away. It's hard to convey to someone the loss that you will feel without them. It's hard to say, 'please keep living' but ultimately it's something worth saying. The figures on fatalities in Ireland caused by suicide are stark. In 2011 there were 525 suicides registered, this is an increase of 7% from last year. These aren't just black and white figures sitting on a page, they're people. All of them are other human beings who got to the point where they felt like they couldn't continue to exist. Look at the numbers that aren't recorded. Each of those 525 represents a huge circle of people. Bigger than we realise in our day to day lives. Each is perhaps a wife waking up to an empty bed. A parent without a child. A brother without a sister. A friend.

I'm looking at a page that is telling me how to die. It's insidious in its portrayal of the ease of death. It doesn't care. Not for you, not for your friends, not for your family.

Which brings me on to the point of this editorial. How do you talk about mental illness? Talk about it like it's any other illness. It's ok for you not to understand, ask them to explain. If your friend does break out in a rash, and is telling you about it you'd ask pretty basic but normal questions. What is it? What are the symptoms? How does it make you feel? Mental illness is no different. Like any other illness point them to a medical professional for treatment. You wouldn't shun them for having any other illness, so why treat someone with mental illness in this way. If you think that their symptoms are getting worse and they might be thinking of suicide ask them if they are. It's better to know than to not know. Ask. Talk. Listen.

~ Lorna Bouge
Co-Editor

AF Shag Week 2013

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SHAG WEEK 2013

Cathal Ronan
ULSU Deputy President &
Welfare Officer

Your Union wants you to be yourself at UL. That means having sex if you want to or abstaining if you wish, or just going with the flow... or not being bothered one way or the other! Each is perfectly okay. Many UL students will graduate having had multiple partners, many having had just one, many having met a long term partner, many having chosen to abstain and many not having had sex at all for no particular reason. Either way, if you chose to have sex,

chose to do it safely. ALWAYS use a condom, ALWAYS (available from the Welfare Officer). Whether you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or straight, you take the same risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI) if you don't use a condom. Whatever embarrassment you might think messing with a condom causes, think of the consequences to your health that arise from not using one and it puts embarrassment in the shade.

This year's SHAG week will see the Rape Crisis Centre in the UL courtyard all week. Boots will be on site on Thursday giving out information leaflets and telling

people about the services they offer. The Welfare Officer will be around all week making sure you have condoms available. Remember Keep Calm and Carry One (or two, you might get lucky in the morning).

Tuesday night will see the launch of the UL weekly student night "Shifters" in association with Signature to help launch SHAG week. There will be lots of free condoms on the night, information leaflets and promotions! Keep an eye on the Welfare Officer's Facebook Page for even more things that will be happening.



Types Of Contraceptive

Condoms

Condoms are the only form of contraception that protect against sexually transmitted infections. Besides abstinence, the best way to protect yourself from STIs is by using condoms. Condoms are readily available in most shops, chemists and also from the ULSU Welfare Office. Condoms are 95% effective when used with spermicide at protecting against AIDS and other STIs as well as preventing pregnancy. When it comes to having sex, always, always wear a condom is the same as never, ever drink and drive when it comes to driving.

The Combined Pill

The Pill is a common contraceptive among women that is 99.7% effective in preventing pregnancy. It can help women with irregular, heavy or painful periods and can also be used to reduce acne. However, it must be taken at the same time every day as it is not effective if taken more than 12 hours late. It must be prescribed by a doctor and may cause side effects such as headaches and nausea. The Pill offers no protection against AIDS, STIs and other infections.

Emergency Contraception (Morning After Pill)

Treatment must begin within 72 hours of unprotected sex, but is more effective if taken within the first 12 hours. Two pills are taken initially and two more pills 12 hours later. The morning after pill is available on prescription from your doctor, the medical centre or family planning clinics. The morning after pill can be 95% effective however, its effectiveness diminishes to 58% after 72 hours. It is also important to note that in some cases the pills can make you sick so if you vomit within two hours of taking them you will need to take them again

Pregnancy

The easiest way to know if you are actually pregnant is to get a home pregnancy test. If your test results are positive then it is necessary to have them confirmed with your GP or a pregnancy agency or the UL Medical Centre. If you are pregnant, it is a good idea to talk to somebody about your options. It is NOT the end of the world. The best resources



are:

- Students' Union Welfare Officer (suwelfare@ul.ie or 061-202519)
- UL Counselling (CM-072 drop in 11-12 and 3-4 daily or call 061-202327 anytime)
- Irish Family Planning Association 1850-495051
- Limerick Family Planning Clinic 061-312026
- Crisis Pregnancy Services (www.positiveoptions.ie) freetext LIST to 50444

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Unfortunately, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are on the rise. The latest figures show a 6.5% increase in infections, particularly with Chlamydia and genital warts. This highlights the importance of wearing a condom for sex.

Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is a bacterial infection sometimes called 'the clap'. It can infect the genitals, urethra, rectum and throat. More rarely, it can affect the blood, skin, joints and eyes. Symptoms in men can include a thick discharge from the penis,

inflammation of the testicles, pain when urinating and irritation or discharge from the anus. Symptoms in women include strong smelling vaginal discharge, pain when passing urine, irritation or discharge from the anus, low abdominal or pelvic tenderness. Gonorrhoea in the early stages can be easily treated with antibiotics. However, untreated Gonorrhoea can lead to blocked fallopian tubes, long-term pelvic pain and ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy outside the womb) in women and painful and inflamed testicles, inflammation of the prostate gland and infertility in men.

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is a bacterial infection. It is the most common sexually transmitted disease. While Chlamydia can be easily cured with antibiotics, it can have severe consequences, particularly for women, if left untreated. Untreated Chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), ectopic pregnancies and infertility. Chlamydia generally has NO symptoms. If symptoms are present, they may include vaginal/penal discharge, pain or burning during urination, lower abdominal pain, spotting between periods and

swelling or pain in the testicles.

Genital Warts

Warts are a common infection and a considerable nuisance. Treatment is long and slow and they may reoccur several times. Warts are associated with cancer of the neck of the womb; so annual smear tests should be taken. Treatment is usually with lotion.

Pubic Lice / Crabs

"Crabs" can be caught by bodily contact with an infectious person or bedding/clothing used by that person. The lice mainly infect the pubic area and the bites can cause severe itching. The eggs, which stick to the pubic hair, take 5 days to hatch. Normal washing or lotions will not cure them, but there are special lotions and shampoos that kill both adult louse and egg.

Herpes

This is a common viral disease, which appears as sores. These sores may be inside the vagina, on external genitals, thighs or in or near the anus or on the buttocks. The sores can rupture to form open sores or ulcers, which can often be very painful. They usually appear within a few weeks, but they should be treated to

ensure they are not the symptoms of another disease. There is no known cure for herpes but treatment can prevent further consequences. New eruptions can occur at any time and it often appears to relate to stress.

HIV/AIDS

While the latest figures show a 10.8% decrease in new infections of HIV, 356 new cases were diagnosed in 2004. Forget what you think you know about AIDS and HIV; 3 times more heterosexual cases than homosexual cases of HIV were diagnosed last year. HIV/AIDS has become a young, heterosexual disease and universities are prime breeding ground for it. Promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse and unsafe sex are contributing to the rise of HIV and AIDS in this country. THERE IS NO CURE FOR HIV/AIDS. If you are sexually active, proper use of condoms is the only way to keep yourself safe. The only way to know if you have contracted HIV is by being tested. If you are sexually active, make it a habit to have regular HIV/STI tests. Testing is available from the Limerick Regional Hospital and the UL Medical Centre.

Syphilis

Fortunately, syphilis is rare. One to twelve weeks after infection, a small painless, pimple like sore appears on the man's penis or the woman's external genitals. It may also appear in or around the mouth after oral sex or on the anus after anal intercourse. Unfortunately, as with gonorrhoea, the woman's symptoms may be internal and unnoticed. If the sore is untreated, it heals and the primary stage begins. The secondary stage develops two to six months later and various symptoms may occur, the most common being a reddish rash on the skin, headaches, sickness, loss of hair and feverishness. Painless warts may develop around the vulva, scrotum, anus or mouth. These symptoms may last for up to a year, and are obviously not easy to ignore. The third stage may not occur until years later. It can involve intense pain, tumours, heart and brain damage, harm to unborn children and death. We urge you not to risk this happening, especially since treatment is easy to obtain.

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.

- Sonnet of Awakening -

The wind blew wild all through the night that passed
Shrill sounds that made them stall in lovemaking
The bare branch rattling on the window's glass
Then deep down inside he felt a stirring.
The thrash of the trees, so wild was the wind,
so alive the night, when all nature should rest
The chilled moon shone bright without chagrin
Wary of one upon his lover's breast.
But what good winds don't bring them any ill?
Joy awoke in the light of that pale moon
the throe of passion and their carnal will
Gushing water was a romantic croon.
How bright yet grey, the next morn of their lives
And naught remains, just memory survives.

By Stephen Griffin

SU President's Update



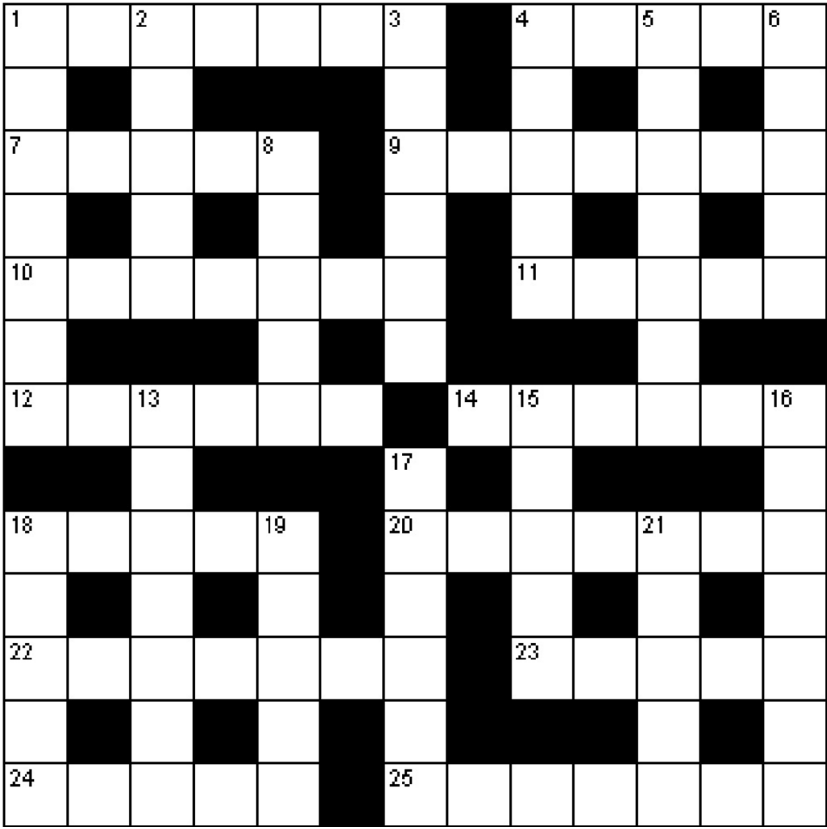
Adam Moursy
ULSU President

How are ye now? Welcome to week 4, this semester is progressing at a rate of knots! We are entering an absolute mental few weeks for the Students' Union. First up we have SHAG Week in week 4, which aims at encouraging sexual health and awareness. Cathal, our Welfare Officer, has put a huge amount of work into this along with help from external groups, who will be coming on campus to talk to you and maybe even give out some goodies. Then week 5 will see a few of our pre charity week events before it all kicks

off properly in week 6. For those of you who have yet to experience a Charity Week here in UL, it is like nothing else in the country and this year looks like it will be bigger and better than ever!!
Moving on from there, we will be having our Student Elections in Week 7. Any student that is considering running, I would recommend calling into the current officer and discussing the roles and responsibilities of the job so that you can make an informed decision. It really is an extremely worthwhile role and your chance to make a difference!

Apologies

In the last edition of An Focal Volume XXI issue 7 two articles appeared under incorrect names. The Articles, 'NHL season not lost after all' and 'Hoop dreams: NBA season halfway point' were in fact written by Garry Irwin and not the names that appeared in the last edition. The Editorial team would like to apologise to Garry Irwin unreservedly for this error.



CLUES

Across

- 1. Seafarer (7)
- 4. Attain (5)
- 7. Catlike mammal (5)
- 9. Type of rock (7)
- 10. Respire (7)
- 11. Gaze (5)
- 12. Resembling a horse (6)
- 14. Unit of time (6)
- 18. Pandemonium (5)
- 20. Melodious (7)
- 22. Elusive (7)
- 23. Fibbing (5)
- 24. Foe (5)
- 25. Distinguished (7)

Down

- 1. Gruesome (7)
- 2. Variety show (5)
- 3. Elevated (6)
- 4. Parts of a ladder (5)
- 5. Fruit (7)
- 6. Precipitance (5)
- 8. Colossus (5)
- 13. Unwitting (7)
- 15. Tripod (5)
- 16. Joy (7)
- 17. Hinder (6)
- 18. Pancake (5)
- 19. Glossy (5)
- 21. Percussion instrument (5)



Beer Making Genius Required!

Do you know your pressed from your fluid yeast? Your alpha from your beta acids? Your ale from your lager malt? If so you might be the person were looking for. The Limerick Lady Brewing Co. aren't just looking for good staff, but good people. See, although what is on your CV matters, it is what is on your soul that matters most. To be honest we care less about what you've done and more about what you're going to do. Although previous commercial brewing experience is an advantage, home-brewers are encouraged to apply. Training can be provided in industrial brewing equipment but the talent to brew some of the best beers in the world can be a little harder to find.

Requirements;

- A passion for Limerick.
- A passion for and a knowledge of the science of brewing.
- A previously demonstrated work-ethic.
- Dedication, tenacity and a commitment to the long term future of the Limerick Lady Brewing Co.
- Willingness to work within a start-up company environment.

For further information please contact Michael Quinn on (085) 1474890
limericklady.com / facebook.com/limericklady / twitter.com/lmkladybrewing

Confidence Is Key

Emma Norris

IT'S general consensus among Westerners that less is more when it comes to make-up. Us girls with some foundation know-how know that boys prefer a natural look on their prospective sexual conquests. Male UL students confirm this - fourth year Kennedy isn't a fan of too much make-up and reckons that girls can end up looking worse when they pile on it on. He says, "Personally, I don't care what a girl wears...society dictates that girls should dress up, which is wrong because guys can jump out of bed and throw on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt and off they go, ready for whatever."

Miss Gay Limerick says, "On a day-to-day basis, I wear make-up because it makes me feel ready for the day. It's like having a shower, or putting on clothes that aren't pyjamas or fat-mans. It just makes you feel like you're gonna get up and be productive. I think it adds to my confidence as well. I've never really used it to attract people because in the gay scene I don't think it's such a big deal unless you're ultra-femme."

Lesbian graphic designer Holly is attracted to confidence rather than a made-up face. "I prefer someone who wears make-up for their own personal reasons: I like the less is more thing, maybe because I'm into people who don't give a shit. I feel sorry for people who can't go out the house without their face on. You don't have to. You really don't have to."

Girls wear make-up for a number of different reasons, usually to impress



other girls. We want compliments from our friends and we want a clear complexion so that we can stride around Icon feeling flawless. I adore a nice drag queen eyebrow from time to time, something I know most boys don't like. Maybe that makes me an idiot or maybe it means I

simply don't care what boys think of my face. I'm not alone in that. Every girl I spoke to said that she wears her make-up for herself, and those girls who are also attracted to girls look for that same self-assurance in their sexual conquests. As do boys!

Cosmopolitan ran an article last

year focusing on what guys really notice about a girl's looks. The truth is, not much. Lipstick, eyeliner, it's all irrelevant as long as you look healthy. Boys are attracted to girls who look like they'd be a good mate - they wanna spread their seed in the most productive way. Bloodshot

eyes and dry, damaged hair need not apply. Instead of focusing on the bronzer and the perfect cat eye flick, invest in a leave-in conditioner and make sure you're getting your beauty sleep. Other than that, confidence is your best accessory.

Award Season: The Iffy IFTAs And The Gammy Grammys

Claire McDermott

AWARD season - where the creatures of Hollywood become more camouflaged with an extra layer of fabric, sparkles and spandex. From the Emmys to the IFTAs there are so many ball gowns to breakdown and critique and yet so little time. Or really, so little word space. Here is a quick look at the best and worst outfits from the awards season so far.

First, there was the Golden Globes where everyone's globes seemed to be hanging out. Yes, it seemed that the trend was 'Icon on a Saturday Night'. Eva Longoria, Kate Hudson and Jessica Chastain all opted to expose their ribs. It really should be cleavage but please - this is Hollywood! I think the world breathed a collective sigh of relief that it was not the other ginger goddess Christina Hendricks who donned the trend. No one wants to see those puppies unleashed. If you do decide to try this trend, just ask yourself one question; Are you a member of the itty bitty titty committee? If not, put on your boulder holder and maybe wear a turtle neck!

However, Chastain made a complete

turnaround at the SAG awards channelling the other red headed Jessica - Jessica Rabbit. Though tight and red does sound pretty stereotypically tartastic, Jessica did it well by leaving the Sally Hansen on the shelf and donning the pale and interesting look. Maybe Anne Hathaway should have tried to vamp it up a little because her dress was as awful as the Peter Parker haircut she is rocking these days. The mesh top over the beaded bustier was bad. And then you looked below the waist. There was netting everywhere and anywhere yet not enough to cover the toes so that the gown could pretend to be floor length. Sadly, just like Anne Hathaway, it did not measure up.

Not to be outdone by anyone, the home-grown girls also came out in their finery for the IFTAs. However, the women of Irish television should know if you want to impress then don't invite number one British soap babe Michelle Keegan! That's like inviting Beyonce to your talent show! Michelle Keegan wore a plain enough dress with simple hair and makeup. It was simple and the dress fit her well. Which cannot be said for some of the Irish starlets -



yes you, Jennifer Maguire. You're one of the only funny female Irish TV presenters, but you don't have to be a laughing stock with your choice of fashion. Though she was not the best, alas she was not the worst either. From the woman who

decided to wear her cheap specs with her old debs dress to Brendan O'Carroll's wife who decided to wear Mary Queen of Scots' burial robe, it was a real mixed bag.

If award seasons teach us anything it is that no hair can be too high,

no slit can be too deep and most importantly no starlet can always get it right. Now, time to watch the Grammys in my bun and velour jammies - they think Hollywood has it tough!

Diet Pills: Not What They Say On The Tin

Sophie McDermott

WITH Christmas out of the way, we're all focused on the next big event of the year, the summer holidays. Whether you're jetting off on a working holiday in Spain or a J1 in San Francisco, one thing is for certain, you're eager to lose those extra pounds before you go!

But as with all weight loss plans and goals, we all want that extra help to get the job done quicker and easier - with minimal fuss. Slimming pills are the world's favourite alternative to spending three hours a day in the gym. However, as with all of life's quick fixes, there are certain dangers that come with slimming pills. If a pill sounds too good to be true, then it most probably is.

Side effects of slimming pills vary from bad headaches to death, and currently there are very few slimming pills allowed on the market in Ireland and the UK. Despite this ban on slimming pills, more and more people are resorting to ordering them online and ignoring the warnings that come along with it. When being offered an easy solution to being thin, we tend not to ask the important questions like what are the side effects of taking this 'miracle' pill.

One of the most widely reported effects is insomnia. Many weight loss pills contain traces of amphetamines that are meant to keep your energy



levels up. However, they have been shown to cause sleeplessness which affects the person's mental health as well as their physical well-being. Insomnia will leave you feeling irritable and emotional as the longer you continue to take the pills, the less you sleep which can turn even the happiest person in the world into an

emotional mess. Many users have also suffered severe stomach irritation that can inhibit their day to day life. Severe cramping and constipation have been known to occur which can lead to disorders such as IBS. Perhaps the most dangerous side effect is heart irregularities. The levels of amphetamines in the pills can cause

a rise in blood pressure and heart rate which can eventually lead to heart failure or a stroke.

Herbal slimming tablets may seem like a better, healthier option to the prescription slimming pills but be warned, experts have stated that these pills are nothing more than a gimmick. If you really want to lose

weight in time for your summer holidays, stick to a healthy natural diet, cut down on alcohol and hit the streets running. There are no quick and easy solutions and any company or method that offers you one, will come with long term consequences or will not work at all.

Galliano Invited To Return To Fashion

Sheba Gray

After being convicted of racial abuse in Paris two years ago, Christian Dior's creative director, John Galliano, has been given the opportunity to launch a new collection with help from Oscar de la Renta in New York. John Galliano is widely regarded as one of the most exciting and innovative designers of our time but should he be welcomed back after his disgraceful racist behaviour?

Galliano spouted anti-Semitic abuse to customers at a popular Parisian café in a series of drunken episodes, which forced him to retreat from his high-profile libertine position to review his alcohol and substance problems, on which he blamed his behaviour. After being convicted, sacked from Christian Dior and spending the last two years in rehab, Galliano has finally taken off his hair shirt to stand by Oscar de la Renta's side at the prestigious Spring/Summer 2013 New York Fashion Week (NYFW).

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), an organisation active in ending anti-Semitic abuse and behaviour, welcomed de la Renta's

decision to work with Galliano. Abraham Foxman, the ADL director, said, "Mr Galliano has worked arduously in changing his worldview." He added, "He has accepted full responsibility for his previous remarks and understands that hurtful comments have no place in our society."

Oscar de la Renta, the Dominican designer adopted by American political women such as Hilary Clinton and Anne Romney, has given Galliano residency in his New York atelier where the repentant designer is expected to launch his collection for NYFW. De la Renta told WWD that, "I am happy to give him the opportunity to re-immense himself in the world of fashion." Galliano has voiced his gratitude to de la Renta and is 'humbled' by the faith he has shown in him. It is fair to say that this man has done everything he can to make amends and if an organisation like the ADL can forgive and endorse Galliano's return then so should the rest of us.

John Terry, although stripped of the England captaincy remains captain of Premier League club Chelsea, after his racist attack against Anton Ferdinand in front of fans. Prince



Harry is still Prince Harry after donning a Nazi uniform to go to a party.

There should be no place for racism in our society but we live in a world that sets us against each other, to

fear the unknown. Should we then be surprised that society creates racism? Should we then punish them for the rest of their lives for the ignorance bestowed on them by our own system? I believe not. Let's hope

this British libertine has learned his lesson and continues to wow the fashionistas for a long time to come. But one word of warning John, we'll be watching you!

Spring into Style with Born



Stylist: Emily Maree
Photographer: Ricky Llamas

Make Up: Rachel Armstrong
Assistant: Robyn Gleeson

Models: Catriona Coyne, Tina Nsubuga
and Rebecca Daly

All Clothes available in Born Clothing
Parkway Shopping Centre.
Shoes: Stylist's own

First name on the teamsheet: Michael Carrick

Wayne O'Connor

SINCE his transfer to Manchester United seven years ago, Michael Carrick became a name associated with groans and complaints and was often seen as the typical overpriced and overpaid English footballer. Frequently viewed as a player who failed to live up to expectation and as a figure that shied away in the big games, Carrick has now apparently turned the table around. To many he is now viewed as an integral cog in Alex Ferguson's machine as his side chase down a twentieth Premier League title. As a result, he has been on the end of some unfamiliar plaudits of late.

In the build up to the Champions League first leg tie with Real Madrid, Ferguson said: "I know people say we are not as good as Manchester United teams in the past, but sometimes we get foggy recollections about the past." No player suffered at the hands of such reminisces more than Carrick.

Brought in to bolster United's numbers in midfield following Roy

Keane's departure, Carrick was handed Keane's number 16 shirt. Straight away he was in line for a firing squad to compare him to past greats. Often seen as the player who never showed the battling qualities or ambition of United players past, he became a figure representing United's decline in quality, despite winning one and appearing in two more Champions League finals and winning four Premier League titles.

This season many commentators have remarked that should United win the league this season, it would be their worst team to do so. On Wednesday night, Eamon Dunphy said on RTE that Ferguson's comments of foggy memories should be dismissed as he stated that "the Roy Keane and Bryan Robsons" of the past would easily walk in to the current United side ahead of Carrick. However, it would be more difficult to argue that Carrick has not contributed sufficiently to United's cause this season.

Carrick has become more ambitious and workman like this season,

benefitting from an increased work load placed on him this season after the departure of Park Ji Sung to QPR and Darren Fletcher and Phil Jones' absences this season due to respective illness and injuries. Carrick has featured in all but one of United's league games this season, completing 90 minutes 22 times so far. He has already played more minutes this season than in three of the last four campaigns despite the fact there are still 12 games left to play. On the ball he has yet to contribute to United's tally in front of goal but he has laid on four assists this season and has had a pass success rate of 90 percent.

Off the ball is where Carrick's work rate is still questioned, especially considering the porous nature of their defence this season. United have looked vulnerable without the ball and the midfield often look lost or over worked. This may well be due to the injuries mentioned above, the decreasing mobility of the aging Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs, Anderson's persistent failure to live up to his own potential and Tom Cleverley's



inexperience. The midfield burden is thus heaped on Carrick as the only real ever-present in Ferguson's side.

Carrick's plaudits may well be deserved but may only be coming his way due to a lack of resources. Essentially he is being praised for

his ability to remain available for selection and due to a need numbers in midfield. Had it not been for a want of depth in this area, this may well have turned out to be another ordinary season for him.

Who is really running away from racism in football? (#2)

Josh Prenderville

In December, the Serbian FA were fined just €80,000. Worse still, two English players – Steven Caulker and Thomas Ince – were banned for two games and one game respectively for essentially coming to a teammate's aid.

Mr Blatter, do you and your FIFA colleagues honestly believe that monkey chanting towards black players and general racist abuse are four fifths of the crime that displaying a company slogan on your underwear is?

Judging by your punishments, you do. "I don't think you can run away, because eventually you can run away if you lose a match."

Mr Blatter, do you honestly believe that abusing somebody as a result of their colour, creed, race or religion is, in any way shape or form, akin to a football game?

Do you honestly believe that walking off the pitch after being racially abused and walking off the pitch because you have a lost a match are the same thing, Mr Blatter?

"The only solution is to be very harsh with the sanctions – and the sanctions must be a deduction of points or something similar."

Indeed. I agree 100%, Mr Blatter. You have the power. Do it.

The reality is though that, unfortunately, this will not happen at any stage in the near future, Mr Blatter. Why? Because you and your FIFA workmates lack consistency. Even further than that, you lack any sense of reality.

The sane solutions – throwing out the minority of fans giving the abuse, banning them – have been exhausted. It is up to FIFA, as governing body of world football, to come up with a way of cutting this disease out of what is, on this occasion, the not-so-beautiful



The ever controversial Sepp Blatter. game.

Racism is a criminal offence. Let's not dress it up any other way. If you or I went out on the street and uttered a racist remark, we would be charged with a racially aggravated public order offence. Rightly so, may I add.

When a criminal offence is committed, the punishment must appropriately do just that to the offender – punish them. It must also, in some way, serve a sense of justice to the victim. No matter how many thousands of euro you fine various different football associations, Mr Blatter, they will find more money. They are very rich people – like yourself. Besides, it is not the football associations committing these crimes – and therefore it is akin to putting an innocent man into jail if the money isn't coming out of the back pockets of these racists.

Furthermore, what sense of justice does it give Kevin-Prince Boateng to find out that these racist bigots simply cannot attend one game. They can go to the next one. And the one after. And the one after that. The punishment is no different to a fan being sick or ill on one

given Saturday.

So let's take points off them, Mr Blatter. Take points off of the fans of these offending teams. Teams are given automatic point deductions for entering administration, aren't they? Administration isn't the fans' fault, but it still happens. Administration is also not a criminal offence, unlike racism.

Mr Blatter, please don't issue hot air statements any longer. If you're going to criticise Kevin-Prince Boateng for walking off the field, at least come up with a better solution first. And if you're going to come up with a solution, make it an appropriate one, and please implement it properly and consistently. You have the power to eliminate this ignorance from a game that is considered an international language unto itself.

Perhaps it isn't Kevin-Prince Boateng that's running away, Mr Blatter. Perhaps you are.

Part 1 is available to read in issue 7 of An Focal at issuu.com

The Super Mario Pendulum

Darren Mulryan

Football is full of superlatives and some age old adages. But we need to look further afield to search for a fitting definition to illustrate the unstable pendulum that is Mario Balotelli. Many talented players go through a career at the highest level with a certain amount of baggage or limitations. Think of big egotistical personalities such as Paulo Di Canio or even Paul Gascoigne. People can be fickle when judging players merely based on the negative aspects. These players can be forgiven for their flaws because of the immense contribution they give to the beautiful game. So the burning question remains. Is Mario Balotelli a pretender? Or will the Italian flourish into what many believe a talented young man with the world at his feet.

Let's dip into Arsene Wenger's book of philosophical interpretations of life. "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts". Indeed this is fitting to the large scale problem of having massive egos in quite a small dressing room. Teamwork and unity is based on trust and sometimes egos can get in the way. The problem with Mario is that he has fallen into a trap door of arrogance and somehow dropped the key behind him. Training ground bust ups with colleagues and managers alike has not helped the Palermo born striker solidify roots in Manchester. A certain level of confidence is always good to carry your teammates on their shoulders when times get tough, but when do you draw the line.

A simple act of petulism shown during Inter Milan's champion's league semi-final against Barcelona in 2010 caused eruptions in the Mourinho camp when Mario ripped his shirt off and tossed it to the ground after a lack

lustre performance. This subsequently led to his transfer to Manchester City shortly after. It would be expected that a professional earning a gargantuan wage would learn from prior mistakes, but it's as frustrating as toilet training a puppy with an attitude problem. It's not easy.

Mancini summed this up perfectly just weeks after Mario joined up from Inter Milan after being caught up in altercations with Aleksander Kolarov and Jerome Boateng just to name a few. "The problem is because of his age, he can make some mistakes. He's Mario. He's crazy – but I love him because he's a good guy".

There is no doubt there is a Jekyll and Hyde persona lodged deep inside Mario's brain. For all the trouble and strife he brings to a club there is also a silver lining to that cloud. In his time in the Premier League, Balotelli has shown absolutely fantastic ability both in attacking movement and in the instinctive nature of his finishing. But does the Italian have the ability to step up and behave in a dignified manner just like the Milanese that has stood before him.

He now has a massive pendulum on his shoulders following his move to his childhood dream club AC Milan. Unlike Dorothy and Toto in Kansas, Mario can choose to take the correct path for his future without fear of repercussions. Massimiliano Allegri will persuade him to follow the red bricked road all the way to the San Siro to prove what it takes to emulate past iconic greats such as Clarence Seedorf and Paulo Maldini. These are players that are written in the history books for their commitment to the cause. For the beautiful games sake, let's hope Mario tips the scales in the right direction. Then we will see Italy's next big superstar.

Jonny Sexton going to Racing Metro

Conor Finnerty

Could Sexton's move cause an exodus?

With contract renewals always being a touchy subject, they seem to be left until the last moment before the conversation about signing on the dotted line is brought up. It has been a big criticism of the IRFU of late, who refuse to begin negotiations until the New Year instead of after the Autumn series.

With the majority of Irish stars more than willing to stay within the boundaries of Ireland provinces Johnny Sexton's move to French club Racing Metro made the headlines. No one can blame Sexton for leaving. For a player in the prime of his life he is entitled to go to where he can make the most money and play at the highest level.

Racing Metro more than doubled his salary and the temptation of the Top 14 was more than the IRFU could offer. The national setup has no need to fear the loss of Sexton as he will be present at all of Ireland's training camps and games.

Has Sexton's move abroad to be viewed as a negative though?

Ireland is admired worldwide for keeping its big names playing with the home provinces. With Sexton gone Leinster need to find a replacement out-half. But maybe now is the time to let Ian Madigan have a fair crack at taking over the hotseat at Leinster.

After all he has been impressive when Sexton has been absent through injury. But I believe that Sexton's move is a positive one on both sides of the coin. Playing against top opposition week in week out can only make him a better player. Nobody can argue that the prospect of playing the likes of Toulouse, Montpellier and Clermont Auvergne on a regular basis can be rivalled by the Rabo Direct.

With Sexton gone Madigan now has the chance to blossom. This now creates competition for places in the national set-up and may cause headaches for management but delight for fans. My theory however begs the question what if more of our stars went abroad?

Can you imagine sending the likes of Sean O'Brien to New Zealand to ply his trade or Tommy Bowe to South Africa to enjoy the all-out attacking rugby there? The idea is mouth-watering. Now maybe the notion of sending them to the other side other side of the globe is a bit far-fetched but France and the Top 14 league is a distinct possibility.

After all Wales has done this to some effect with the likes of Jamie Roberts and Mike Philips playing in France. Their club teams have faltered a bit in their absence with Wales having no team to represent them in the knockout stages of the Heineken Cup. But I believe that



Jonny Sexton in the blue of Leinster will soon be a thing of the past.

is down to a lack of form and the improvement of other teams in the competition this year.

Irish teams have an unbelievable well of talent in their underage academies. That in itself is quite evident with both Ulster and Leinster to represent us in the Heineken Cup. There is the distinct possibility that, for the second year in a row, there

could be an all-Ireland affair in the final in the Aviva stadium in May. However, the idea of stars must be handled carefully to ensure the participation of the players leaving in the national team setup.

With the money being thrown around in the Top 14 other national teams have suffered after their players were forced to miss out

on games and training camps. If the proposed move of players is managed properly it could benefit all the parties involved but a balance is still needed.

We will just have to see is Sexton's move going to be a flash in the pan or a regular occurrence. Time will tell.

Ups and downs in Six Nations rugby

Conor Finnerty

With Six Nations rugby back for the past two weekends we have been treated to some outstanding performances. But with the first weekend getting off to a bang with plenty of excitement the second weekend failed to live up to expectations.

Italy came out of the blocks with all guns blazing, intent on beating France for a second time in three seasons. Their physicality bullied the French into submission and people were optimistic about their fortunes for the following week. For once Italy had an out-half who was able to control the game and compliment the rest of the team, something which has been missing for some time now.

But against the Scottish, Italy lacked hunger and forced the game to much with Stuart Hogg punishing them after an intercepted pass and a length of the pitch run to finish up with a try. It was as if Italy were satisfied with their win against France or maybe the physical exertions the previous week had taken their toll.

Scotland, on the other hand, had tasted defeat in the first weekend after England came to Murrayfield and ran riot. But the Scottish fought back and put a respectable look on

the scoreboard. With a win under their belts and a bit of confidence built up could they be a banana skin for Ireland next week?

But the highlight of the tournament so far came from the feet of an Irish man. Tensions were high facing into the Irish and Wales game but Simon Zebo had the audacity to try some tricky footwork to light up the Millennium stadium. With Ireland's mixture of youth and experience and their heroic performance in the first game there was already talk of a Grand Slam decider against the English.

But things did not go to plan. Before the game even began Ireland's attention may not have been focused totally on the game.

With the news of Brian O'Driscoll becoming a father for the first time floating around the ground prior to the game one might have forgiven him for taking his eye off the ball. But credit to him he was consistent and once again put his body on the line against the old enemy.

Injuries sustained to Simon Zebo and Johnny Sexton blighted Ireland's chances. The game offered little in open play but praise must go to Owen Farrell and the way he handled the pressure for such a young man.

The conditions at the Aviva prevented the teams from playing

the kind of rugby which we saw on the first weekend. The game became tedious to watch with countless scrums with Ireland equal to the test on the day. But Ireland gave away penalties in the wrong areas of the pitch which were duly punished. With Ireland's hopes of a Grand Slam and Triple Crown crushed the championship is now England's to lose.

With injury doubts to Sexton, McCarthy, Donnacha Ryan and O'Driscoll and the possibility of Cian Healy missing the rest of the championship added to Zebo's broken foot Ireland's fairy tale start to the Six Nations has turned into a potential nightmare.

However, England looked far from world beaters and showed some signs of weakness. Wales are now the only feasible team that can deny England glory of a Grand Slam. After their dismal first half performance against Ireland they came to life in the second half only for Ireland to shut up shop and hold out for the win. Wales went some way to redeeming themselves in Paris after defeating France 16 points to 6 thanks to a George North try.

The biggest talking point of the night was how France were booed off the field by a capacity crowd on home soil. Their reluctance to



Ireland just couldn't get going against the English. Is it the death knell for Declan Kidney's stewardship?

spread the ball wide frustrated the crowd and they made their anger heard every time the ball was kicked. Being the most talked up team prior to the competition starting everyone is disappointed at their opening two performances.

The first two weekends of Six Nations rugby was a Jekyll and Hyde affair. The first weekend set tongues a wagging and people yearning for

more whereas the second was bland and unconvincing. Can England be stopped and will France finally start to play with their pride now on the line are the two questions that hopefully be answered in the up-coming games? But for now Ireland must pick up the pieces of their broken dreams and prepare themselves for the clash against the Scottish.

QPR playing a dangerous game

Josh Prenderville

QPR fans must have thought at the beginning of the season that they would be living the dream - but it's quickly becoming a nightmare.

Throughout the summer, an influx of players who, on paper, appeared a class above what they already had, combined with an ambitious owner, appeared to be the tonic they needed after narrowly avoiding relegation last season.

In contrast, QPR have won just twice in the league this campaign - and hadn't registered a single victory until Harry Redknapp replaced Mark Hughes as manager in late November. They've been cut adrift at the bottom of the league since the early part of the season.

This begs the question: why did they decide to spend more than any other Premier League club in the January transfer window?

With UEFA set to introduce Financial Fair Play regulations in the coming months, should QPR get relegated to the Championship, they will find themselves in big, big trouble - Redknapp's former club Portsmouth's plight springs to mind.

UEFA's new regulations require all clubs to break even and stand on their own two feet. QPR owner Tony Fernandes can no longer simply pump money into the club to keep it afloat.

In other words, what will keep QPR, and indeed all other clubs, in business are merchandise revenue and, perhaps more tellingly, ticket sales.

QPR hold the lowest average

attendance in the Premiership at 17,830. In fact, only themselves and Wigan fail to reach the 20,000 mark.

There are clubs in the Championship - Wolves, Leicester, Leeds and more - who hold higher average attendances than this.

Yet, Fernandes and Redknapp chose to gamble in January - knowing of UEFA's proposals - and the potential consequences on losing this game of Russian roulette could prove disastrous.

Last month, Chris Samba, Jermaine Jenas, Andros Townsend, Tal-Ben Haim and the much sought after French forward Loic Remy all appeared to strengthen the squad.

Yet, astoundingly, the poor results have continued - the most recent of which a 4-1 drubbing by Swansea, coupled with a humiliating 4-2 defeat to League One side MK Dons in the FA Cup.

Take Remy, for example - he was offered the chance to join Newcastle United, and even Tottenham last summer, but refused the move. Both of these teams, despite Newcastle's poor season, are in Europe. QPR are knocking on the door of the Championship. Unfortunately, there can only be one reason for Remy's decision: his wages.

The same can be said for the rest of the squad. Summer signings who have proved to be flops, such as Jose Bosingwa, are happy to sit in the stands with the six figure sums rolling into their bank account each week.

The problem with this kind of business model is simple - it starts a vicious circle. Players refuse to play

for clubs who don't pay high wages. Clubs then pay the high wages, but then it's simply about money to the players. It's a Catch 22, with chairmen like Tony Fernandes caught between a rock and a hard place.

Shrewd investment with a solid scouting system in place - such as Newcastle's one in France - look to be the way forward, particularly as we enter a new era of clubs haing to live within their means.

Fernandes and Redknapp appear to have panicked and are now doing anything they can to justify what, in time, will prove to be a mistake.

"The club's invested, but they will get their money back on those players," stated Redknapp recently.

Let's take Chris Samba. Samba is 28 years old and has signed a four and a half year contract. By the summer, he will be 29, if QPR do indeed sell him on - and also a member of a relegated team. In fact, one could even suggest he has been relegated twice, having been with Blackburn until February last year before they plunged into the Championship.

At the end of the day, players are assets. As an asset, Samba will have depreciated tremendously in value due to age and the team he is with. Furthermore, a relegated team is in no bargaining position when it comes to getting players off their wage bill.

Tony Fernandes has been quoted as saying: "It's not always about money. QPR are the bottom club and you don't come to the bottom club for the dollar sign."

Then, why do you go to a team that's only won twice all season? It's



Christopher Samba is raking in 100k a week from a team that look certain to be relegated.

hardly to win more games. And in the case of Remy, Samba et al, it's not to play at a higher level either.

Ultimately, nobody wants to see a football club go the way of Portsmouth. However, QPR are treading a very fine line between

speculating to accumulate and downright financial carelessness.

Fernandes and Redknapp have gambled. For the sake of QPR, hopefully they have a trick up their sleeve.

Ravens Outlast '49ers to Lift SuperBowl Trophy

Garry Irwin

If you managed to stay up late on the Sunday night/Monday morning of the Super Bowl, and also not fall asleep during the half hour stadium blackout that delayed the game just after halftime, you were treated to one of the best bowl games in recent memory. Up until the lights came back on and play restarted, you would have been forgiven if you wanted to get an early night. The Ravens were twenty two points up and cruising. The San Francisco quarterback Colin Kaepernick could barely complete a pass, except when it was intercepted, the first such pick in '49ers Super Bowl history. Things certainly were not looking good for the team from the west coast, but after the lights returned they attempted the biggest comeback since Destiny's Child.

The biggest deficient to be overturned during a Super Bowl game was only ten points, which was done twice; and then when teams were trailing at the start of the second quarter. Here there was just over twenty eight minutes left and facing a defence they had not managed to score double figures against in their three previous encounters, it looked

all but impossible for the '49ers. But Kaepernick started to get his game together and moved his team down the field. Two Touchdowns quickly followed, while David Akers kicked his third field goal of the game, to bring San Francisco within five points of Baltimore at the start of the fourth quarter.

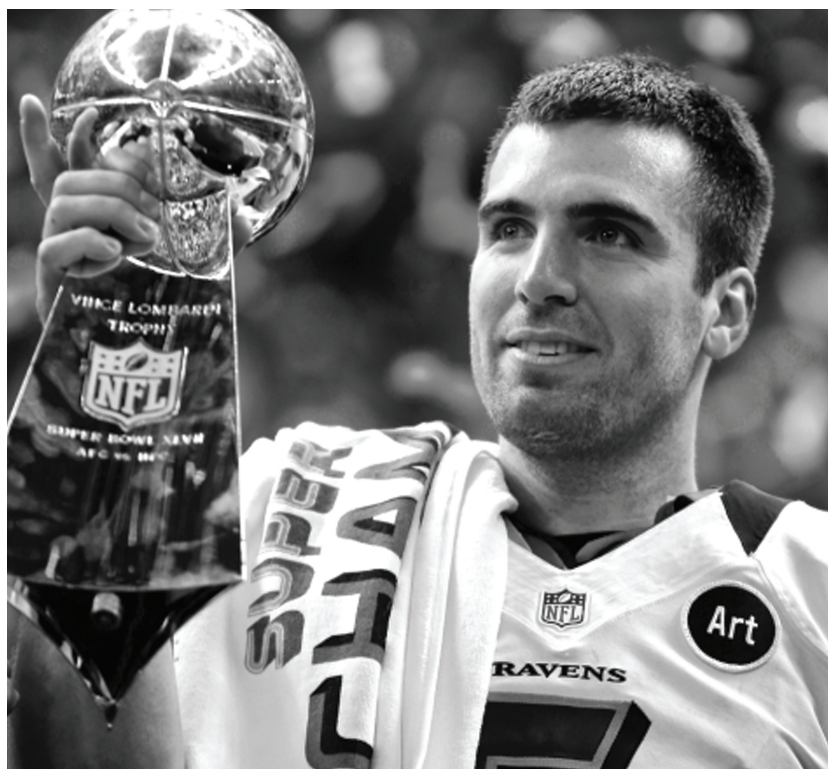
The Ravens finally responded with a Justin Tucker field goal of their own to push the gap to eight. Less than three minutes later Kaepernick had driven the '49ers back into the Ravens redzone, running in the finishing play himself from fifteen yards for a touchdown. His rushing yardage was a franchise record for a Super Bowl game, making up somewhat for the unwanted records he had posted in the first half. The comeback stalled there though, as the Ravens defence stopped the two-point conversion which would have tied the game. The crowd were on the edge of their seats, there was still ten minutes left in the game.

Baltimore quarterback Joe Flacco, who posted most of his numbers in the first half, finally got some momentum going and gained his team enough yardage so Tucker could kick another field goal and move the gap back out to five points.

With four minutes left Kaepernick put on one final push to get San Francisco the lead, but he could not find anyone open in the end zone. With time ticking away the Ravens just kept running the ball up the middle hoping the clock would be their saviour. Camped by their own goal line they were playing a dangerous game, and on fourth down had to give up a Safety with time still on the clock. So it was now a three point game; but this was immaterial as the '49ers would get one last chance to return the ball to the end zone and win the game. There were four seconds left when Sam Koch punted the ball down field for Ted Ginn Jr. to return. Ginn managed to get to the fifty yard line before being brought down by the Ravens. The game was over and Baltimore were World Champs for only the second time.

We may have not seen the biggest comeback in Super Bowl history but it was definitely one of the more exciting end of season contests there has ever been.

So we put another NFL season to bed, but before we get time to settle we should ask 'Who will be crowned champs next year?' The Ravens and the '49ers lost ten games between



Joe Flacco gets his hands on the Superbowl trophy.

them during the season, so they can be beaten. Baltimore are an aging team but will be given hope by the fact that eight teams have managed to win back to back Super Bowls before them. San Francisco on the other hand really do have to fight history, the losing team has not

managed to get back to contest a Super Bowl since the Buffalo Bills twenty years ago. But you don't want to be like them, they lost four in a row. Whatever happens in 2013/14, I'm sure old records will be broken and new achievements set. It's one of the reasons we watch football.

Drogba and Co. Fail Once Again

Eoghan Wallace

So it is Nigeria who emerges victorious from this year's African Cup of Nations. This is the third time that the continent's most populous country has won the tournament. It could be argued that it is the first time in eleven years that one of Africa's big footballing nations has triumphed.

Since 2004 the winners have been Tunisia, Egypt, and Zambia, hardly world-beaters. A notable absentee from this list of previous winners is the Ivory Coast. Once again the 'Elephants' will not be getting their hands on African football's biggest prize. Perhaps they were unfortunate in having to face the eventual winners as early as the quarter-finals, but this year's edition was the fourth tournament to be held since 2006 and they have entered each tournament since then as heavy favourites. Despite having a pool of talent that most European nations would be envious of, the Ivoirians have failed on each occasion to win their country's first title in 21 years.

If any player deserves an African Nations medal more than anyone it's Didier Drogba. After ending his Chelsea career on the highest note imaginable last May, surely it seemed the big man would end his African Nations career with a winner's medal



Down and out: Didier Drogba and Ivory Coast.

too? At 34 it's fair to say that his best chances are sadly now behind him.

You could forgive their failure to win in 2006. They were playing the hosts Egypt in the final but they had a golden opportunity to win without having to go through the heartbreak

of losing on penalties. Ten minutes from time Drogba missed a sitter from six yards out and was one of two Ivoirians to have their penalties saved in the shoot-out. Egypt went on to win what would be the first of three consecutive African titles. Since

that defeat in the 2006 final they have been favourites for each subsequent tournament.

In 2008 they were beaten by Egypt once again, getting thumped 4-1 in the semi-finals. Two years later they were merely a minute away from the

semi-finals before Algeria scored a last minute equaliser to bring the game into extra time, where they prevailed 3-2. Last year saw yet another agonising defeat in the final. The game was to finish goalless but Drogba, once again, had a chance to break the deadlock twenty minutes from time when the Ivory Coast were awarded a penalty. Alas, his big-game reputation deserted him and he skied the ball over the bar. Buoyed by an overwhelming sense of destiny, Zambia went on to beat the Ivoirians 8-7 in the shoot-out.

As such their "golden generation" which includes such prodigious talent as Didier Drogba, Salomon Kalou, Yaya and Kolo Touré, Emmanuel Eboué and Didier Zokora will more than likely finish their international careers without a medal. Their Ghanaian counterparts may not have won the African Nations either but their run to the quarter-finals of the 2010 World Cup will be their lasting legacy. It seems once more the tag of "golden generation" has come back to haunt yet another team. Morocco 2015 may only be two years away but for many of this Ivorian generation 2015 is more than likely one tournament too far.

UL Out After Quarter Final Loss To IT Carlow

Jamie Flynn

UL men's senior team travelled to the defending champions, IT Carlow, for their CUFL quarter-final clash. IT Carlow proved too strong for UL and came away 5-1 winners.

IT Carlow looked the better team in the opening few minutes and opened the scoring with a goal from a corner on the 23 minute mark. UL regrouped and responded well with a wonder strike from playmaker Eoin Walsh. In the 28th minute, Walsh received the ball 35 yards out from goal and having spotted the Carlow keeper off his line, unleashed a wicked strike which the IT Carlow keeper was unable to deal with. UL's hard work was undone five minutes later when Carlow scored again, this time from a well worked free-kick.

Having gone 2-1 down, the UL fightback was seriously hampered when they lost two key players to

injury either side of half time. Walsh was involved in a heavy impact challenge and was forced to go off just before half time with a knee injury. Just after the restart, centre-midfielder Eoghan Burke suffered a similar injury and also was forced off.

UL conceded a third goal with Carlow centre-midfielder Barry O'Mahony completing his hat-trick. At 3-1 down, UL threw the kitchen sink but unfortunately it was Carlow who went on to score again. The final whistle blew and UL's unbeaten record this season ended as the match finished 5-1.

The men's senior team preparations will now turn to the Collingwood Cup which takes place in Belfast from 25th February.

In other soccer club news, the UL women's team travelled to Sligo to compete in the intervarsity competition. UL were drawn in a

group with Athlone IT and NUIG. The ladies made easy work of their group with a 7-1 win against AIT and a 2-0 win against NUIG. Jenny Brennan put four past Athlone with Laura Carroll, Vicky McMahon and Karen Duggan also getting on the scoresheet. Brennan was on the scoresheet again with a converted penalty against NUIG. Ireland international Julie-Ann Russell scored the other goal.

UL faced UCC in the semi-final. Despite dominating the game, it was UCC who struck first with a first half penalty. UL couldn't break the Cork side down and the final score finished 2-0. UCC went on to win the tournament after beating IT Sligo on penalties in the final.

The UL Freshers team travelled to Coleraine to take part in the Harding Cup. Having lost some key players to injury in the build-up to the tournament and also getting one



UL get ready to face IT Carlow.

of the hardest draws imaginable, luck didn't appear to be on UL's side. UL didn't have much luck in their quarter-final encounter either as they lost 5-1 to eventual winners,

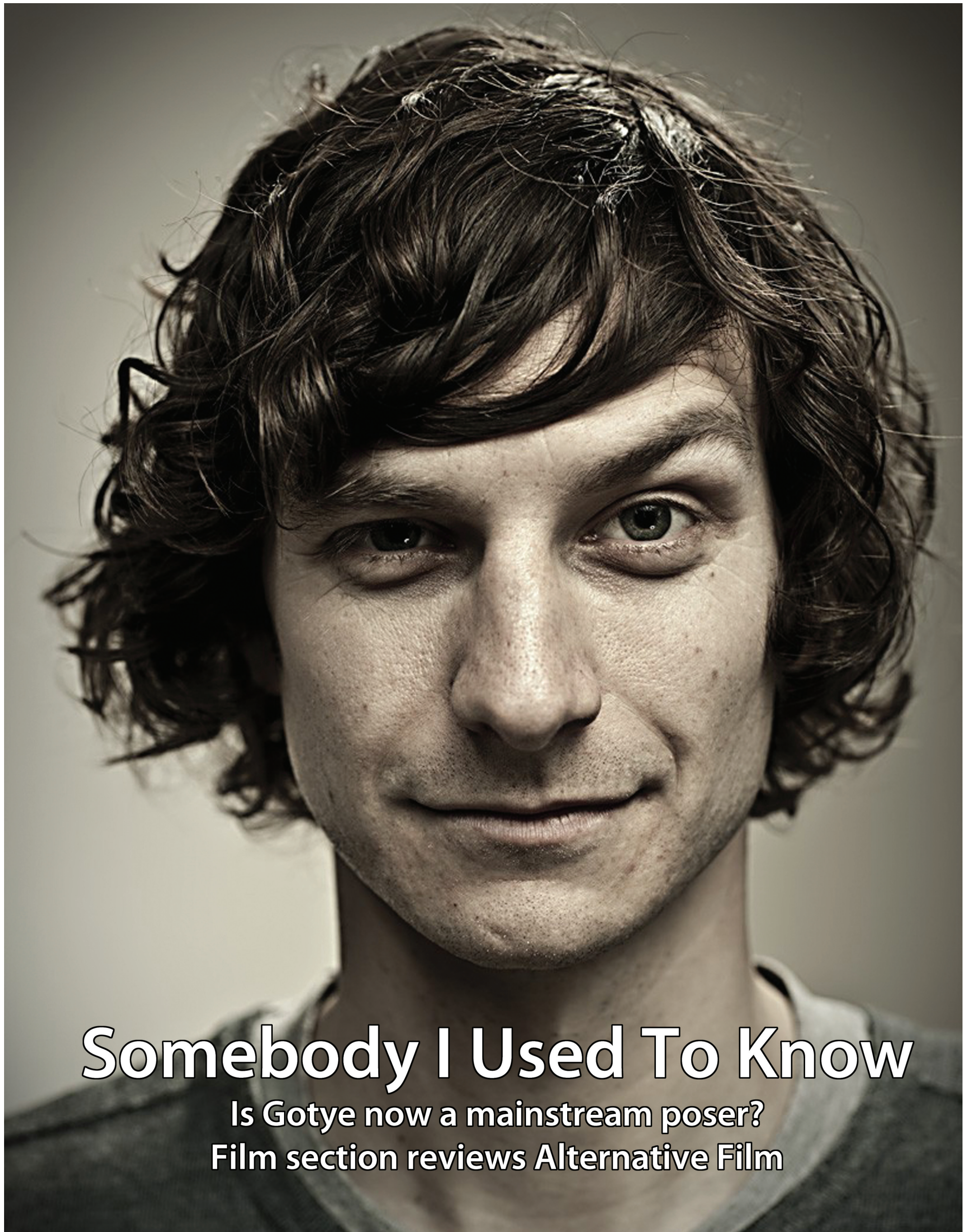
UCD. Adam Collins from the penalty spot was UL's only scorer. UCD went on to defeat Trinity College 3-0 to capture another Harding Cup.

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Somebody I Used To Know

Is Gotye now a mainstream poser?
Film section reviews Alternative Film

Arts & Ents Editorial

Fintan Walsh
Arts & Ents Editor

Around a week ago, I ensured that all my blogging, writing, editing and publishing was finito, just in time for the fifty-fifth Grammy Awards. It was late and there were no drunken stupors about the estate to distract me from listening to the award ceremonies – thank Vishnu, Allah, Mother of God, etc, etc. The setting was sensual; the other residents in the house were fast asleep, or by themselves watching Ted.com or crappy rom-coms. Not even a muffled conversation could be heard from beyond the thinly-concreted partition of the next-door neighbours. My Twitter fingers were ready to tap-tap-tap for nearly every mumble, fumble and mutter that was to be seen live at the prestigious awards. However, like last year – and the year before – the Grammy Awards proved to be one of the biggest disappointments of the 2013 music industry, thus far.

Gotye received – what – three Grammys? Why? How? What are the merits that drive the judges to electing semi-standard acts like the wailing Gotye? Take a look at some of the world's leading music websites, such as The Quietus or Pitchfork Media, or even music streamers like Soundcloud and Bandcamp. Best Alternative Music Album? Did they mean: Best Alternative Music Album That Was In The Charts And Nowhere Else, So We Can Go Home And Get Paid For This Menial Job? And what did they mean by “alternative”? Not



trying to be finicky, but if a song reaches unanimous popularity on mainstream radio, theoretically it no longer becomes “alternative”; it becomes plain, regular, here-we-go-again pop music. Ergo, when the judges decided on what was the best Alternative Music Album award, they actually meant: Best Pop Album That Sounds Less Poppy Than The Other Pop But Teeny-Boppers Happen To Like It, Too.

The Grammys got some things right. Chick Corea, a mastodon of a jazz musician won two; Frank Ocean rightfully won three. But the real winners were The Black Keys. The band itself won three, while Dan Auerbach – the forerunner – snatched an astonishing four. Though The Black Keys is probably the most influential and incredulously outstanding duo in the history of rock music, they certainly don't deserve to

monopolise the industry.

The anger displacement, however, isn't wholly aimed at the ruddily lazy judges who chose the Grammys; it's pointed towards the public and every radio station out there that relentlessly overplays the predictable. If ‘Gangnam Style’ came without a quirky video and was left as a normal South Korean pop song, do you sincerely believe that us Westerners would love it to so much as to garner

Psy with over a billion Youtube hits? It wouldn't have been likely, but that's pop culture for you. What about the Django Unchained OST – if that was randomly played on 2fm or Spin South-West, do you think you would have liked it straight away, or do you think you would be cursing the DJ and screaming for your favourite pop song to be played? More than likely, it would have been the latter. Why? Because people who rely on mainstream radio for new music don't have enough trust – or motivation – to find new music themselves. Literally, millions upon millions of potential culture-changing tracks are ignored every day, due to the monopoly of commercial media.

Test yourself for an hour and go onto Bandcamp, a site that is clustered with new tracks from all over the world, and listen to every track on the first page of new albums. If you cannot find a single song that is somewhat endearing to you, you have proved that mainstream media has worked its musical propaganda efficiently, furthermore gluing you to this musically monochromatic world. On the other hand, if you can scoop at least one track that diffuses into your tastes, then you will have proved that you're just after swimming past the shallow waters of an endless ocean of new and exciting music. The Grammy Awards and your local commercial radio station are probably just afraid of what's beneath the water.

Rest going against the grain

Fintan Walsh
Arts & Ents Editor

“Wake up and get out of the 70s, kiiid,” were Colm O'Shea's words when he was asked to reflect on the glut of people who think that the Irish music industry is a ghetto in comparison to the UK scene. He didn't mean to say, “Our latest album is going to blow everyone's minds and we are the best in the land.”

As much as he praised other bands from around the country, very little critical appraisal was aimed towards Rest's latest album I Hold The Wolf, weirdly enough. And unlike other bands that have been on the road to success for years, the Cork prog-rockers were gently modest about everything Rest represented.

Though clear success has yet to be achieved, the unanimous acclaim their latest eight-track venture has been garnering is a certain indicator of how far 2013 is going to take them.

Tracks like ‘Babylon – Constructing The Cosmos’ have been audio-candy for international ears since they launched the LP three weeks ago. Mathematically neat, symmetrical and cleanly driven for its five-something minutes, the first impressions of this album were too kind for the prospective fans of the Cork-based metal quartet.

The style didn't just ejaculate from their instruments the moment they said to one another, “Let's work on a

new album” in the first practise session. O'Shea said, with age came different styles and tastes for the band and that was what concocted this new sound, which they had not been particularly aiming for.

“It wasn't a specific sound we were aiming for; rather a sound that evolved over a period of time. Because it has been so long since Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame and Operation: Impending Doom we've all grown up a bit and our tastes have changed. The sound of I Hold the Wolf is the battle of each of our musical preferences vying for supremacy.”

Even after three releases, their main aim was to simply release an album, with the “dream” to get it pressed on vinyl. There's nothing stern about how Rest have planned their 2013 career; there doesn't seem to be the immense suspense or sweaty anticipation to surpass rock counterparts, get millions of Soundcloud plays, or even get a dime from royalties. In fact, it all seems fidgety, free and flippantly taken at face-value. That's not a bad thing, simply due to the merit that they have anchored down in rich soil.

They are, nonetheless, a laborious act. Not a lot of acts that physically release material pay firm attention to a broad online presence like these guys. Not even online electronic musicians fully utilise social networking as much as these guys and they have that trait evidently ingrained in them.

“We put an effort into our online

presence – album stream available on Soundcloud and Bandcamp – and are getting hits from all over the world. We'd love to keep building on that and get our music out to as many people as possible,” O'Shea said.

They may be casual rockers but they do play their image like businessmen. When you're representing Limerick netlabel Out On A Limb, you can't help being professional about the necessities of self-promotion. One of these, which the foursome has superbly amplified, is their choice of support acts. When they gigged at Dolan's on the first night of February, they kept it local and classy, forcing a crowd of diehard fans to ogle at metal acts Shardborne and Three Hour Ceasefire. In Whelan's – the Dublin Dolan's – Refraction, Ilenkus and Wizards of Firetop Mountain were their warm-up performances. Conveniently, O'Shea gave each of those acts the accolade of bands to look out for this year.

“We put a lot of time into choosing the acts that we play with and as such would highly recommend our tour buddies for this tour – some newer than others – we're talking, The Great Balloon Race, Hope is Noise, Shardborne, Three Hour Ceasefire, Refraction, Ilenkus as well as the Wizards of Firetop Mountain. Add to that our label mates on Out On A Limb Records, who have always been very handy at picking good bands.”

Though they find their current prosperity “aspiring”, the Cork man did



not shed any light regarding the band's long-term plans, albeit mentioning, in a cliff-hanging way, a few unconfirmed events for autumn. No festivals, no career-turning dates, no exclusive TV shout-outs. Alongside a few “slush fund riffs and ideas”, O'Shea and the group's relentlessly optimistic hope is what's driving the band towards newer material and newer opportunities.

They are a cultured bunch, even if O'Shea is tied to his new baby all day. While Johnny Lynch is having withdrawal symptoms from one-week dedication to the whole eight seasons of It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia, Steve Barry has been glued to Chicago's High Spirits' Another Night album and, according to O'Shea, Graham Lynch doesn't know what the new Rest record sounds like.

“Graham doesn't own a TV or a stereo. He hasn't even heard our album,” he jollily added.

Rest is a collective of fun-loving prog-rockers, who all defy the usual trends of the modern music business. They have no desire to win a popularity contest, though their names are being rustled and raked around all forms of social media. They had no aim for a specific sound and they ended up with one of the most unique styles of the year, thus far. And they work incredulously hard, though they appear to be one of the most lax and fun-loving groups in current independent Irish music. If these guys start to adapt to music on a full-time basis, the industry's bandwagon is going to be knocked on its side.

Interview – Hearts Under Fire



Declan Mills

Hearts Under Fire – Mary O'Regan (bass, lead vocals), Kat Upton (guitar, backing vocals), Nicky Day (guitar, backing vocals) and Lexi Clark (drums, backing vocals) are an alternative rock band from Guildford in Surrey. Having spent several years touring non-stop since the release of their critically-praised Letters EP in 2009, they recently released a new single, 'We've Come Too Far To Live In The Past', and are preparing to enter the studio again this year. An Focal interviewed them by email as they geared up for the next round of gigs on their never-ending touring cycle.

One thing you cannot fault Hearts Under Fire for is their ability to define their sound. Kat Upton says that they play "Fast catchy rock music. We've been described as 'a punk rock band with killer melodies, a dark edge and a Brit twist', so we tend to roll with that."

When asked what artists influence the band, she offers a wide range of styles, saying: "We all listen to a whole host of different music, whether it's Bruce Springsteen, Swedish House Mafia, Beach Boys, Paul Simon, or Motörhead."

However, when the four women describe their individual tastes a more rock-based list emerges. Kat leans towards pop-punk with Sum41, Blink-182 and AFI, while Mary goes for post-hardcore, selecting Osker, I Am The Avalanche and La Dispute.

Nicky proffers a rather eclectic selection; Green Day, Bon Jovi and Alkaline Trio, which must make for a pretty schizophrenic iPod. Meanwhile Lexi ties together all the different members' influences by listing Alkaline Trio, The Gaslight Anthem, Brand New and Underoath.

When asked about the many personnel changes that Hearts Under Fire have undergone over the years, the band are reticent, saying only that everyone will "have to wait and see" whether the current line-up works out, although they do proffer the information that their name comes from a drawing done by original vocalist Sian Sanderson, who now has her own band.

They are similarly diplomatic about the British media's stance on rock music (a quick recap: in late 2011 the Guardian declared guitar music dead and buried; within a week two English bands – Surrey metalcore group Bring Me The Horizon and HUF's neighbours, pop-punkers You Me At Six – had released multi-platinum-selling albums.

Eventually, after over a year of sticking to their guns, the Guardian's sister paper the Observer announced on 27 January 2013 that British heavy metal was undergoing a revival, citing a number of long-established bands as if they were new discoveries, including both BMTH and for some reason YMAS).

Kat says simply: "I guess because we've been [busy] touring, recording and being involved in music that we don't really know what non-musicians think about rock music. Most of our friends are in bands and we go out and support the local scene, so we're constantly immersed in it."

She becomes more talkative, however, when asked about what life is like for a young band. I mention the generation of bands HUF were a part of coming up through the closing years of the last decade and the means of exposure available to those artists, including the Rock Sound Exposure Tour, the Red Bull Bedroom Jam and Slam Dunk festival. When I ask whether they can see a similar scene developing in their wake, Kat waxes eloquent about the difficulties – and opportunities – facing musicians today.

"The industry is changing constantly. Although there are so many free platforms for helping promote your band on the internet, there are pros and cons to it. Last year we played with a band called Anavae, and they're a great example of what hard work from social media and gigging everywhere can do. More people can access your videos and share music, but that also means that the market of bands is growing at a phenomenal rate. It means more competition, so existing bands have got to work harder than ever before.

"I think things have to change in order for bands to succeed in the future. I know 10 years ago when I was playing in my first band, there weren't age restrictions at venues, so more kids could come and watch bands.

"They're the people with disposable income. They are going to be the ones who pay to see the band and buy a CD or Tee shirt. Now people are deciding if they want to spend their last £5 on feeding themselves this week, rather than going to their local venue. Music Promoters have change too. A great deal of them leave it up to the band to promote the show, and have no problem in asking the bands to play for free."

When asked whether being a female in a predominantly male scene changes how people perceive the band, Kats replied that it isn't as

big an issue as one might think: "It's pretty irrelevant music-wise. People either like the music or they don't. About 98% of the time we're treated like any other band. There is still a lot of work to be done before bands (who happen to be all women) are not seen as a novelty.

"Sometimes we get condescending comments, for example people asking us if we need help setting up our amps or the hecklers asking us to reveal certain parts of anatomy on stage. The upside is that other bands we play with are very chivalrous and offer to carry our extremely heavy equipment up several flights of stairs to and from the van! Carry on sir!"

The very fact that some gig-goers might see an all-woman band as a novelty becomes all the more ridiculous when you consider how multi-talented the members of Hearts Under Fire are. Lexi divides her time between drumming in Hearts Under Fire and hardcore mob Try Me/Love Me and working as a Foley artist, while Kat – the band's most recent addition – has played in "about six" other bands. All four also have musical abilities beyond the instruments they play in the band. Lexi programmes music in Logic, Mary plays guitar and ukulele and can apparently play the Rugrats theme on a glockenspiel and Nicky can play the keyboard and is learning the harmonica. Kat's musical CV is even more spectacular: she can play "Bass, bit of keys, harmonica, bugle (long story), any instrument you can throw at me! I have a Grade 1 in clarinet, but I gave that up at school because it was boring, not to mention that the teacher was a bigot. At 11 I took an old classical guitar from my grandparents' loft, and I've never looked back."

The band's achievements become even more impressive when one considers that they're also working in 'regular' day jobs because being in a punk band doesn't pay the bills.

As the interview draws to a close, I ask about the coming year. Lexi enthusiastically promotes Mallory Knox, whose latest single 'Lighthouse' has just been released, as ones to watch in 2013. As for Hearts Under Fire, they plan to "Record, tour, [and] spread the love". When I enquire as to whether they might get as far as Ireland this time around, Kat is unequivocal. "Book us the flights and we'll come running! Or ferry!"

As it is, Hearts Under Fire will doubtless continue their ceaseless grind around the UK, and hopefully 2013 will be their year.

ULFM Features New Playback System

University of Limerick's student radio ULFM released its new "Listen Back" system this week as its fourth semester launches.

The new feature will allow listeners to tune into the show if they have missed a programme throughout the 12-hour broadcast.

According to the Development Board, the system works by the hour.

This means if presenters finish their show a few minutes overdue, parts of their show will be incorporated into

the next slot's playback.

Broadcasting commences at 11am every morning and ends at 11pm with specialist music programmes. Friday broadcasting ends at 4pm.

All slots for ULFM broadcasts have been filled. If you would like to get in touch with the Station Manager Kevin O'Brien, contact him at Kevin.j.O'Brien@ul.ie.

Irish World Academy of Dance and Music publish annual journal

The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance has published an online publication aimed at performance practises of music and dance in Ireland.

Inbhear, the online journal published by the University of Limerick department, says it aims to capture a variety of academic disciplines from all around the country.

According to the website, it will publish articles in relation to "ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology, popular music and dance studies, historical musicology, Irish studies,

cultural studies, performance studies and ritual studies among many others".

The website states that it is open to all for submissions and that there will be five invited submissions for every issue.

The journal will be written in both Irish and English, preferably in Irish.

The publication hope, after a few issues, a publisher will be sought to publish the journal both online and in hard copy.

Women and Rock Music symposium to be held in April

The Department of Sociology will host a series of talks under the theme of "Women and Rock Music" in mid April.

It is mainly focused on the Riot Grrrl phenomenon, a mid-90s, feminist punk-rock group.

It will feature papers, panel discussions and a documentary on the Riot Grrrl experience.

The Department of Sociology at University of Limerick are calling for

prospective speakers who work in the area. Applications close on March 1, 2013.

In October 2012, the same Department hosted the first ever conference on the culture surrounding David Bowie.

The organisers are Dr Eoin Devereux, Dr Martin Power and Dr Aileen Dillane.

New UL group Intock release EP

Two students at University of Limerick released their debut EP on Soundcloud last week.

Intock, which is comprised of students Alex McGovern and Ivan McCaffrey, entitled their three-track release Moonlit Pit.

The three songs, 'Mes Amis', 'MoonPit' and 'Foreclusion' consist of instrumentally minimalist styles, lo-fi-esque vocals, with a clean synthpop character.

Music, Media and Performance Technology student McGovern

has been a familiar face to the Limerick underground scene and has performed at the monthly indie showcase DIE.

Moonlit Pit EP can be listened to via the UL duo's Soundcloud page at www.soundcloud.com/intock.

Ormston House hotspot for City's culture

Jack Brolly

You would be forgiven for not noticing Ormston House at first glance. Its subtly grandiose exterior—palazzo style architecture—is lined with tall windows, and inside is high-ceilinged with whitewashed walls. To a passer-by, there's nothing remarkable about it, except Ormston House is remarkable.

"When I was in 3rd year in the art college we looked for spaces to hold exhibitions, one of the girls found the space and we decided to use it," explains Niamh Brown, curatorial assistant of Ormston House and recipient of the Contact Studios bursary.

It's a small operation which is headed by Mary Conlon, who completed a curatorial M.A. before it was opened.

"We asked Mary to curate our 3rd year show. Then she took over the space that summer. It runs as part of the Creative Limerick initiative." The Creative Limerick initiative allows disused buildings to be used for creative endeavours rent-free. "We just pay the utilities," Niamh says. "It means that the building doesn't fall into disrepair."

"We have 13 volunteers, all of whom are art college graduates," Eilish Tuite mentions. They've another member of the team too: Mary's dog, Nelly, is in every day. Eilish, whose series of short plays, *The Misadventures of a Good Citizen*, opens in Ormston House on 28th of February, is using her time at volunteering to gain some valuable experience.

"A lot of us are looking to develop out knowledge here and move on. You get to meet artists in a completely different context than you would otherwise," she explains.



Ormston House is a vital hub for those interested in art in the city and those looking for experience in the field.

"Even though we're considered an art gallery, we're really a cultural resource centre. We've put on gigs, theatre performances and our next event is a book fair.

"There's a strong arts community in Limerick so we get a lot of regulars,"

Niamh asserts.

This year, they were lucky enough to receive a grant from the arts council but it can only stretch so far.

"We're completely voluntary and all of our shows are free, so we rely on donations. We run a membership programme which lasts from September to September every year. It's €10 for student to become a member," Niamh states.

There are benefits to becoming a member: you can propose a show or an event, and they hold two member's shows a year.

"You can come in and have a chat or a cup of tea. We could discuss art with people for hours and I think between us we've a pretty good understanding of it," she laughs.

"If you're interested in art at all, I'd recommend you drop in or come

to one of our events. Over the next few weeks we've Eilish's show; an exhibition of Paraic Leahy's work; and the play, *Freud's Last Session*. Like us on Facebook and Twitter to get updates on what's coming up."

LIPS opens in Ormston House on Thursday 21st of February. Entry is free.

DIE – where love and music collide

Jack Brolly

Love was in the air at DIE this month. At 10.30pm, it was rather surprising to see that Dolan's Warehouse was reasonably empty. I bought a pint and watched as an enthusiastic but presumably lonely man tried to get lucky. One girl took a shining to him but she lost interest after he spun around and thrust at her for the twenty-fourth time. The night's main acts were Girl Unit, Le Galaxie, Macronite DJ Greaney, Olivia Chau, nubus, Elemental Music, Adam Sixs and Maedbh O'Connor.

"Are ye the Hot Sprockets?" one girl asked Le Galaxie as they set up their gear. By the end of their set everyone would know their name. Even the most jaded, disinterested person got up and danced to their high-energy set: a combination of songs off their *Laserdisc Nights 2* album and most, if not all, of their recent *Love System* EP. It's impossible not to get caught up in their infectious sound. By the end of the set, the crowd had their hands to air to the theme of *Jurassic Park*.



Shortly afterward Girl Unit took to the stage, blasting his unique brand of UK bass to the mesmerised punters in the warehouse. It was buzzing despite

not being as full as you'd expect for that point of the night—the terrace was the most popular area from what I could see. I could feel it all winding

down so I decided to make my way out of Dolan's, in search of food. On my way out I saw the young man from earlier with a young lady who

is, presumably, now the love of his life. He certainly seemed fond of her. Godspeed, sir.

Amélie (Film Review)

Jane O’Faherty

Valentine’s Day has just passed, and with it an onslaught of all things overly sentimental. Not that I’m complaining, of course. This time of year, it’s easy to become a hopeless romantic and give into cheesier cinematic offerings. Maybe it’s because they reassure us. Maybe it’s because they’re ridiculous. Yet, among the usual Hollywood fare, there are a few real gems of the rom-com genre.

Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s modern fairytale Amélie is one such example. An unconventional love story set in nineties Paris, the film has achieved a cult status all over the world for its quirky and vivid storytelling.

It’s an understatement to say that Amélie Poulain is different. Raised and schooled by her reserved and often neurotic parents, Amélie relied on her imagination to help her cope with a solitary childhood. When she does leave home and find work, she seeks solace in a dream world of her creation, shunning real life and social interactions.

When Amélie finds the belongings of a young boy hidden in her flat since the fifties, everything changes. She resolves to return them to the now middle-aged man, and his reaction inspires her to become a regular do-gooder. She immerses herself in the lives of others. She sets up romances, she cheers up a housebound neighbour and plots revenge against a bullying greengrocer, all with increasingly complex schemes.



However, when Amélie falls in love, is there anyone to help her? Can she even help herself?

What makes Amélie stand out among other romantic comedies is its almost boundless creativity. The film flows between banal everyday events to the gloriously surreal, without appearing to try too hard. Tiny details and major plot twists are given equal attention, which adds to the film’s charm. It presents a flawless and idyllic image of Paris, where even

fleeting moments are magical.

The heroine herself is mostly responsible for the film’s enduring appeal. Audrey Tautou brings the title character to life, with an understated yet captivating performance. Amélie’s oddball persona may seem a little far-fetched for the more serious among us, but it’s impossible not to warm to her.

Themes that we can all relate to are evident and part of the appeal. One particular scene perfectly

encapsulates that fear of saying how you feel. When she anonymously invites Nino, her soul mate, to the café where she works, she cannot bring herself to even approach him. When he leaves, Amélie literally melts and falls to the ground. If you’ve ever experienced unrequited love, you’ll understand.

Perhaps you want to avoid boy-meets-girl storylines for another year, but make Amélie an exception. It’s not often that you find a film where

the absurd and the universal are woven together so seamlessly. It’s often argued that its vision of Paris is over-idealistic, but it’s not afraid to address dark and negative themes. Despite this, its message is inspiring – that sadness can be overcome with kindness, and that sometimes it’s better to abandon the forward planned future and embrace the here and now.

Violence and the Tarantino Universe

Joe O’Brien

“Violence is just one of many things you can do in movies. If you ask me how I feel about violence in real life, well, I have a lot of feelings about it. It’s one of the worst aspects of America. In movies, violence is cool. I like it.” Are these the words of a mad man? According to many, yes.

Ever since his stylish, blood-soaked, indie hit, “Reservoir Dogs” hit cinemas in 1991, Quentin Tarantino has become, albeit debatably one of the most important, influential and indeed talented film makers of the last twenty years. He has never been shy about expressing his opinion on violence in film. He is all for it. The more of the red stuff the merrier, is his motto, so it seems. If you’ve seen his back catalogue, you’ll know that themes of violence, torture and particularly revenge play massive parts in virtually all of his features. To him, violence is merely a cinematic storytelling tool. A tool used to make us laugh, and make us scream and to enhance our entertainment. What Tarantino (and many others, including myself on occasion) has always stressed is that what goes on the screen is merely a film. It’s fake. It’s fiction. And so he has every right to show what he wants on that screen.

Is this the right attitude to adopt? Many argue that it is most definitely not. Tarantino is no stranger to criticism in this domain. He has been attacked by the media on countless occasions, with his films

often specifically being cited as contributions to violent crimes and behaviour in the real world. Is this blaming justifiable? It’s hard to say.

People must first understand that Tarantino didn’t invent violence in cinema. I’ve heard people talk about the man as if he invented blood itself. This is naive and horribly inaccurate. Tarantino himself is the biggest film geek you’re ever likely to meet, and gets a considerable amount of inspiration from his favourite films. He even unashamedly steals direct ideas from these films. All you have to do is a quick Google search to see just how many incredibly violent films have been knocking about for decades. The likes of 60’s Spaghetti Westerns and the rise of the Grindhouse horror genre in the 70’s, a prime example being 1972’s “The Last House on the Left” by Wes Craven. Even God-like director Stanley Kubrick portrayed violence on screen in a fun, entertaining way as far back as 1971, with the ultra-violent cult classic “A Clockwork Orange”. These were the films Tarantino grew up with, many of which are considerably more violent and more morally wrong than his own work. Yet they don’t seem to get half as much blame as he does.

We also need to look at the fact that it’s often near-impossible to understand the direct relationship between someone watching a film and carrying out actions because of the influence of the particular film. Studies have been done on the



subject, sure, and in a small number of cases, admittedly, it is clear that a particular film was the inspiration for violent behaviour. But in the vast majority of cases, it’s very difficult to say exactly why a crime was committed. The reasoning behind it could be anything at all, and the films will often unfairly get the blame, being the easiest scapegoat. It is down to each individual how they will act after seeing a film. Tarantino and his peers make a film with the understanding that their audience knows the difference between right and wrong, and between a fictional film and real life. When you distinguish between the two and go to the movies with the mindset that

it was made for your entertainment, then you can really enjoy it for what it is and not feel guilty. And if someone should view the likes of “Django Unchained,” or “Inglorious Basterds” (Tarantino’s most violent film to date in my opinion) and act in a negative way because of it. Then the blame should be put on them. Not on the filmmakers.

I’m not trying to defend Tarantino as a person. Obviously I don’t know him personally, and I have no idea what he is truly like. From interviews I think it’s obvious that he seems eccentric, odd and a little wacky. But then, most geniuses are, right?

What I am defending is his right to express his creativity and make

whatever film he damn well likes, because at the end of the day, the man is an undeniable talent and his films give me an unfathomable amount of pleasure.

Cinema violence sells. It’s not going anywhere and censorship is not going to solve anything. If people don’t get their fix of blood on-screen then perhaps they’ll search for it in more sinister places. I, for one, as a film lover am going to continue re-watching some of my favourite moments in cinema (“Aww man, I shot Marvin in the face!”) and eagerly look forward to my next fix of the Tarantino universe.

A Quirky Post-Valentines Romance : Lars and the Real Girl

Anthony O'Brien

Lars and the Real Girl is a film whose premise can give the impression of a lewd comedy of embarrassment. Ryan Gosling plays Lars, a recluse living in a small, frostbitten American town who works quietly in his office cubicle, and is recognized by his fellow townsfolk in church as helpful and sweet, if meek and quiet. Lars appears to be extremely sensitive and shies away from offers to help him find a romantic partner, or the affections of his co-worker Margo. He lives in the garage of the house of his brother (Paul Schneider, Brendanawicz of Parks and Recreation fame) and his pregnant wife, who cares about Lars' apparent loneliness and wants to try and help him out, inviting him to live with them, which Lars declines.

Lars, seeing his co-worker droll on about a website featuring mail order sex dolls, eventually orders one himself and enters into a delusion she is a real human woman named Bianca he met online. This is played for awkward laughs as you'd expect, but the film is deeply sensitive to Lars' struggles. We are shown how he and his friends try to deal with the

situation as they agree to his therapist's suggestion to go along with the delusion until Lars resolves whatever psychological issue that has created this delusion. The most notable thing in the film is that it does not portray Lars' delusion as sad or depraved: he concocts a long backstory for Bianca, involving her speaking little English and being religiously opposed to sex before marriage. This helps to move the film away from a gag style film where initial shock and wonder is at the center. It invests a lot of insight into Lars' elaborate delusion.

It is a much gentler and heart-warming comedy than it could have been. Its dubious nature though makes it strange viewing as is it actually realistic that the whole town would eventually go along with the fantasy of Lars. However, it is charming to see them come to terms with their crazy circumstances. Ryan Gosling gives an excellent and engrossing performance as Lars, and conveys much about a very insular character. The movie is very sincere about its characters and examines why Lars behaves so distantly to others and why he succumbed to creating this dream like fallacy and



what it will take to get him out of it. If you're looking for a movie that's a

little more offbeat than your average romantic comedy, you should check it out.

More than a Biopic for your Buck A House United

Paul Saunders

With the release of the Hitchcock biopic many people have taken a renewed interest in the work of one of the greatest directors of all time. Today Hitchcock isn't a name that a lot of people would recognise, or, perhaps they'd know the name but would have never seen any of his films. Hitchcock worked non-stop for roughly 50 years or more in the film industry. He began making films during the silent era with his most loved being 'The 39 Steps', and found major international recognition when he emerged in Hollywood with films such as 'Rope', 'Dial M for Murder' and 'Rear Window'. Such is his cult status you can find homages and allusions to all his work ranging from 'The Sopranos' to 'The Simpsons'.

The newly released biopic details the difficulties that Hitchcock faced in getting the film 'Psycho' made. Today you could make any type of gore fest you want but back in the 1960s Hollywood was a different kind of place. The biopic focuses on his struggles with the film's studio, cast, the Hays Production Code and his wife. We get glimpses of a few great scenes of Hitchcock directing 'Psycho' which are fantastic. One especially is the infamous shower scene that everybody is familiar with. As Hitchcock, (Anthony Hopkins) frustrated as he thinks his wife is having an affair, pretends to stab Janet Leigh (Scarlett Johansson), Ed Gein the real-life inspiration for Norman Bates, whispers in his ear and eggs him on. However if you are looking for a detailed behind-the-scenes look on one of the most infamous films of all time you won't get it, as the film deals



primarily with the strange obsessive-like enigma that is Hitchcock and the turbulent relationship with his wife and muse Alma, played brilliantly by Helen Mirren.

With 'Psycho' Hitchcock brought the horror genre to mainstream media and critical attention as in previous years it was thought to be a camp and B movie-esque. Hitchcock also started what would be the stable of the horror genre, that is the 'slasher' film, as every year another hundred films or so come out with a knife-wielding manic at the helm. Psycho also introduced the concept of the split personality in films that has been seen in many films, most famously in 'Fight Club'.

Hitchcock's work will definitely stand the test of time and anywhere you look you can see references: 'Modern Family' recreated the plot of 'Strangers on a Train' in one episode and so too did 'Horrible Bosses', the 'Psycho' shower scene and its accompanying Bernard Herrmann score which has been recreated too many times to count, long

take-shots from 'Rope' in 'Pulp Fiction' and 'GoodFellas', killer crows from 'The Birds', Crop Duster and Mount Rushmore scenes from 'North by Northwest' parodied recently in 'Family Guy', and creeping on your neighbours with a telescope in 'Rear Window' which spawned the film 'Paranoia' with Shia LaBeouf and one of the best episodes of 'The Simpsons'.

The Hitchcock biopic, heavily captures the man that is Hitchcock, a man who hated actors and became obsessed with all of his leading ladies, most famously Tippi Hedren. Hitchcock's work will continue to be adored, and hopefully with the release of the new biopic many new people will be drawn to love his work... you can't help but be entertained by the "Master of Suspense", as he draws you in with voyeuristic camerawork, strict attention to detail, borderline psychotic characters and constant twist and turns.

Hopefully a trip to see this biopic will open up a whole new world of films for you.

Evan O'Grady

Lincoln is a very difficult film to be critical of. This biopic centres on the legal and political wrangling of one of America's most noteworthy presidents against slavery in the USA. A film directed by Stephen Spielberg, scored by John Williams and starring talents such as Sally Field, Joseph Gordon-Levitt Jackie Earle Haley, Jared Harris and some little known actor by the name of Daniel Day Lewis? This film was MADE to succeed. And just before I go on with my review I see no point in not saying, 'Just go see it, Case Closed.'

In all honesty Oscar season has been kind to the general movie populace. Lincoln's place at the top of the awards is well deserved even after you consider the amount of competition it had when it was first released earlier this year. The reason Lincoln made it above all the others may be somewhat dull and predictable given how the Oscars function, but also a film needs to justify itself and it does not need a little gold man to do that.

Even when they are talking about the President of the United States, Spielberg and Lewis see an imperfect but relatable man. For many years I never understood it when people tell me of character flaws being something that add depth to a portrayal. After watching Lincoln I finally understand. For all his brilliant manipulations, his astounding charisma and the power he had, Lincoln had his own problems to contend with. I am sad to say my knowledge of American history at this point only covers the broader strokes, but what I have seen has showed me the fallibility and struggles present in a man of Lincoln's reputation.

One thing that absolutely works in the films favour is it's sense of humour. We are given a window to people who now only reside in historical documents,



but without focusing completely on their finest moments. Their awkward exchanges, buffoonery, or rambling stories are also regaled. The feeling that it is a total or whole picture is really something to experience. The mix of drama and humour means that even the non history loving audience will enjoy it too.

As I said, it is quite a difficult film to criticise. One negative is that predictability may detract on occasion, as Spielberg does have his particular style and Lewis' long speeches seem to occur a bit too much. That said, he was playing Abraham Lincoln, so rhetoric would have to feature quite a bit. Some of the Civil War plotlines have also been visited umpteenth times, such as families divided and sons wanting to 'go out there and do something'.

It gets a bit dewy eyed over its subject matter at times, but only to whip the rug from our feet and remind us of the moral skewing and dirty politicking that made up America at the time. It's a pleasure to watch the intricacies of politics and I doubt many other political themed films have given me the chance to say those very words ever before.

Game Changer - Will 2013 Be The Year Of The Console?

Seán Duggan

With the recent release of Nintendo's new flagship console the Wii U, and Sony and Microsoft both expected to unveil their latest and greatest machines in the coming weeks, 2013 is shaping up to be the year that will show us where the gaming industry is really headed for in the next decade. But with a score of new and interesting challengers trying to break into the market, how long will the Big Three still be ruling the living room?

Playstation 4

It seems like we'll be getting our first real look at Sony's next generation console, reportedly codenamed 'Orbis', as soon as February 20th. The news of a Playstation-related announcement so early in the year came as a surprise to many who expected Sony to follow the same tactic they tried when the last generation of consoles was hitting the shelves - wait for Microsoft and Nintendo to show their hands first, and follow up with a more powerful machine.

Sony have so far been pretty tight lipped about what features are in store for their next home console, but some sources indicate that the future may not be all good news. The most persistent rumour is that the 'Orbis' won't tolerate any sharing or reselling of games - by mandating all games to be locked to players' online PSN accounts. You won't be able to rent, buy or sell used titles. While this is worrisome to bargain-bin diving gamers like myself, it could have even worse consequences. High street chains Game and HMV both shut their doors in the past few months, and a move like this would be disastrous for remaining retailers like Gamestop and Xtravision, whose already dwindling margins rely largely on rentals and used game



sales.

On the brighter side, we'll almost certainly see some considerable improvements over the aging obsidian behemoth that is the PS3. A current-gen AMD CPU and graphics chip will hopefully improve performance dramatically; while reports of a redesigned controller featuring a touchpad similar to the PS Vita could be an interesting step away from the traditional Dualshock we've had for the past 15 years. Whether it actually ends up being incorporated into gameplay or becomes another forgettable novelty (I'm looking at you, Sixaxis) is something we'll just have to wait and see.

Xbox 720

Rumours and alleged details of the Xbox 720 (or whatever it ends up being called) have been popping up so fast this past week that keeping up with the latest gaming gossip is like playing a big speculative game of Whack-a-mole. We do know some things are a given - The console is getting a massive power bump to keep up with the competition, and new-and-improved Kinect

technology will be a central feature rather than a peripheral.

Kinect 2.0 is likely to have greatly improved Siri-like voice commands and support at least four players at once, while greatly improving the capabilities of the original Kinect. Developers with access to prototype models have even commented on the new model's ability to potentially recognise individual players based on their faces. Whatever features make it into the final products, the deluge of details coming out of Redmond suggest that we'll be seeing the new Xbox before the year is out.

Valve's "Steam Box"

PC Gamers have come to love (some might even say worship) Valve in recent years, and they've got plenty of reasons why. The software company responsible for several highly popular franchises (such as Half Life and Portal) is also responsible for Steam, the digital game distribution platform that's given gamers what iTunes gave to music lovers - massive choice at fair prices, and a convenient way to purchase content. Whispers that Valve could be

venturing into hardware have been around for a while, but it wasn't until the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas this year that it was finally confirmed. It's a bold move, and is something Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo are sure to keep an eye on.

There's a lot of reasons why it's an exciting prospect. Valve have a great history of encouraging homemade content to their games and nurturing indie games from smaller developers, giving players access to thousands of original titles while console players were getting stuck with barely distinguishable shoot-em-ups with increasingly larger numbers on the end. They've also proven themselves capable of getting these games into living rooms with the recent addition of controller support and Big Picture mode on Steam.

They'll have to develop a number of partnerships just to get the hardware itself produced (Nvidia and Intel are likely bedmates), and any 'Steam Box' will likely have to eschew competitor Microsoft's Windows OS in favour of a custom Linux based system. This means they won't be breaking into the mainstream console market

particularly soon, but it's a sign of interesting times ahead. Hopefully involving Half Life 3.

Oculus Rift

At the end of the day, there's only so much entertainment you can glean from a television screen. Be honest, even these newfangled 4K OLED 3DTVs are a shallow excuse for what you really want - full, immersive, virtual reality. Thankfully, at least one company out there seems to be making an attempt to move us in the right direction. The Oculus Rift is a 3D Head Mounted Display that looks a little bit like a bulky pair of ski goggles. It's not a gaming device itself, but rather a new way to experience the games you already have. The lucky few who managed to get a demo at CES in Vegas described it as the difference between looking at a game through a window and being actually inside the game itself, Matrix-style.

Head mounted displays have been around for some time now (Sony's HMZ-T1 has been on sale since 2011) but the Rift stole the show at CES this year with low latency and accurate head tracking sensors, allowing wearers to look around and see the virtual world as normal. The Rift is still early in it's development stage but it's already gathered huge support from some of the biggest names in the gaming industry and raised a tidy \$2.4 million on Kickstarter.

Of course, it's not a fully-fledged Holodeck; players currently still control the virtual world with a traditional controller while sitting in a chair. However, just looking at the strides Microsoft and others are making in motion-control technology, it's hard not to be excited at what the near future has in store. Only one question remains, will you take the red pill, or the blue pill?

Technology Corner: Samsung Galaxy Y

Sarah Guerin

Having lost the only phone I ever loved, my HTC Wildfire, at a recent ill-conceived venture to Trinity College Dublin, I found myself in a sparsely stocked Vodafone store in Limerick searching for a new technological fling. My limited student budget denied me access to iPhones and Xperias alike, so eventually I accepted my fate and purchased a bright pink Samsung Galaxy Y for a recession-busting €79.99. The reason it first caught my eye was because it ticked the boxes of small and light- I cannot abide phones that don't fit into pockets. The touchscreen was also an attraction as my previous HTC had hooked me on buttonless devices.

I'll admit, I wasn't expecting much. Maybe that's why I was so shocked at how satisfactory the phone was. The camera quality for example far exceeds that of my former phone, which had been €200 more

expensive. The message layout is clearer- the familiar iPhone kind which lays out conversations simply and coherently. The Home screen widgets are a delight- both practical and imaginative. Right now my four interchangeable screens display my Hotmail, AccuWeather, Power analysis, Angry Birds and various shortcuts. Google Play Store is also there to fulfil my app needs, though I hate having to use a debit card to purchase things for 89c- take it out of my credit Google! The phone is also available in black for anyone seeking a slicker look than I. Shockingly I haven't dropped it yet but it does appear sturdy. A gel cover wouldn't be the worst investment to protect the screen.

The main flaw I've found so far is in the alert tones. On the day of purchase I downloaded some music to serve as my ringtone and message tone, only to find that I wasn't allowed

to assign them to such a role. Even today my message tone is an agitating whistling noise and my options for a ringtone are ten generic Samsung concoctions. Not a happy bunny. I had the same issue with my alarm, but I have to admit I hit snooze a lot less with a generic alert! As for the screen, it is the smallest I have ever personally used. Even with my small hands and texting addiction it took me a few days to master spelling words correctly the first time around. Practice makes perfect I'm afraid.

Overall however I highly recommend the phone. For the price it really is a joy, perfect for anyone in my situation who finds themselves suddenly devoid of a mobile. It's visually appealing, lightweight and durable and exceeds in functionality and fun. Four Stars!



A Day in the Life of... Applied Physics

Sarah Guerin

How do I describe Applied Physics? My course is...a family of only nine people and an exhausting twenty eight hours a week. It is tough, competitive and challenging, but it is also rewarding and teaches us things at the forefront of science and technology. Physics is exciting and new and ever-changing which means you always have to be eager to learn and adapt.

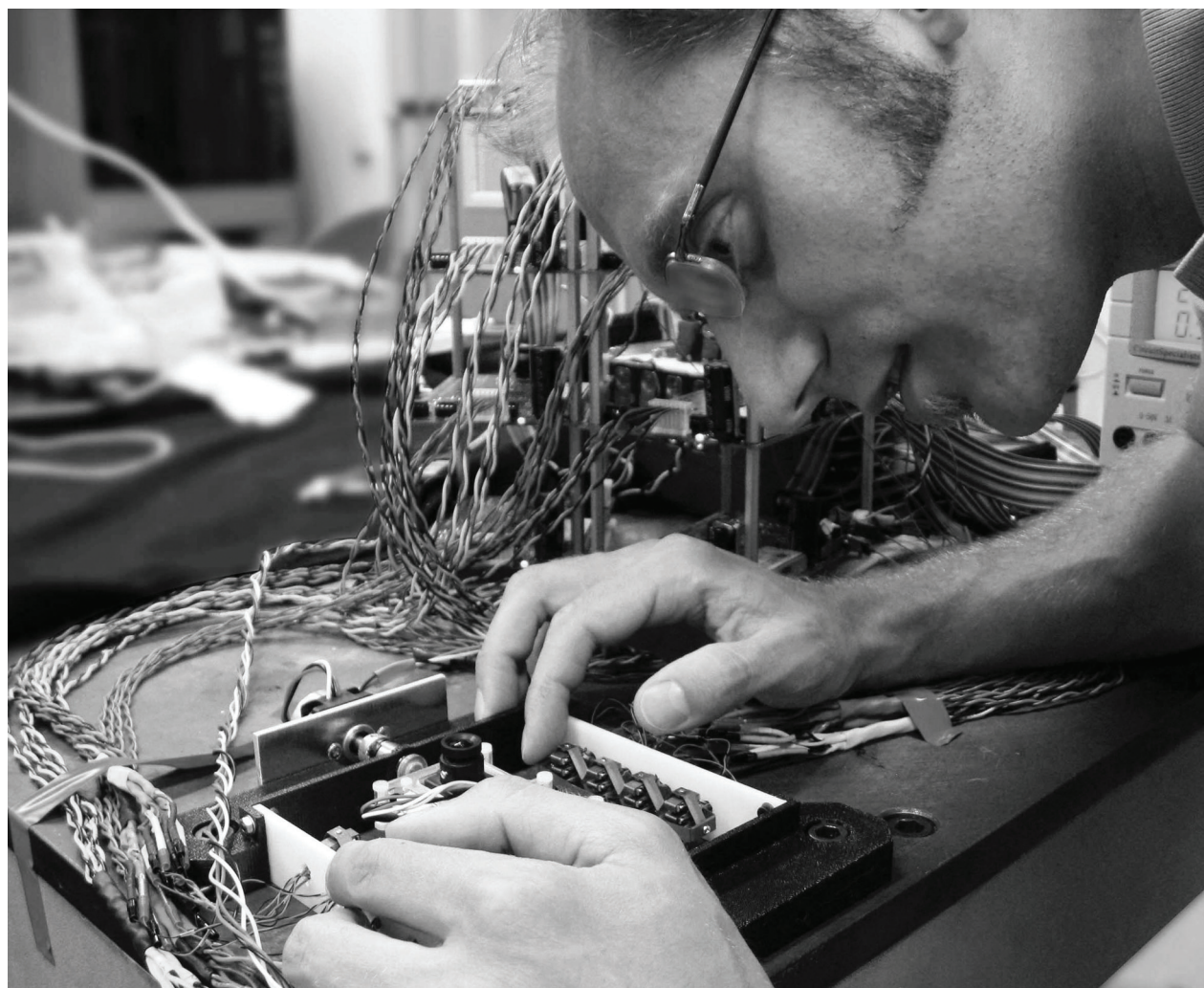
This semester my Friday is seven hours straight from nine until two-fun! We start off with a two hour lab and one hour lecture in Thermal Physics, taught by Ian Clancy. Ian is the course leader and general idol to the guys on my course. Our first semester with him was a disastrous failure, as Ian teaches the most difficult modules at a fast pace and relies on us as independent learners to keep on top of everything. We didn't, so at this point in the semester we aim for organisation and keeping on top of each lecture as it comes. We sit back in lectures and watch the new chemists, engineers and energy students deal with their first semester of Ian. The fifty six minute lectures and high standards come naturally to us now, as does performing experiments independently with minimal instruction. It is beginning to dawn on us that we are becoming respected and trusted as scientists... we who play Lord of the Rings

drinking games!

Midday brings me into a Robotics lecture. My first college elective in UL glaringly highlights the gender imbalances that are rampant in Science and Engineering: in a class of sixty myself and three other girls stick out like sore thumbs. Apart from this the lecture is standard electronics theory to prepare ourselves for upcoming labs. Like most male dominated electronics modules a heavy weighting is placed on the practical aspect of the course, with a 25% lab exam taunting me at the end of this semester. My day will finish with a two hour lab in robotics, fiddling with circuit boards and trying to mentally photograph working circuitry in the hope of reproducing it at aforementioned lab exam.

Next is engineering maths- for the record there are approximately twelve girls in a module of a hundred and fifty! This is our fourth and last engineering maths module, which of course centres on my pet peeve of probability and statistics. This is one of those modules which many find difficult, but in fact if you make it to every tutorial you have a very high chance of getting an A. Maths is maths, there are only certain questions you can be asked and study week always consists of doing the same questions with different numbers over and over again. Simples.

Normally we have gaps in our day, and we spend these in Eden on



the comfiest couches in the main building. We have so many hours that we don't get a lot of assignments, mainly lab reports every fortnight. It's not a bad life, though those who have attempted golden semesters have slept

through the holidays! It's no wonder so many scientists are gamers, after such serious days the escape to be found in Azeroth or Middle Earth is a welcome contrast! The small numbers are the best, with three of us living

together group study is a blessing and any problem can always be solved by sending out a text. Long may these LM065 traditions continue.

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Pain is not a Karate Word!

Eimear O’ Sullivan

UL has had a long tradition of competing in the Irish Karate Intervarsities but this year, for the first time ever, they were held in our very own University Arena. The competition itself was comprised of four different events: team and individual sparring, and team and individual kata (Patterns). For all events except the team kata the events are split between Ladies’ and Men’s. Categories were decided based on the grade of the competitor: Students competed based on their grades of Beginner (white to yellow belts), Intermediate (Green to Purple), and Advanced (Brown and Black Belts) who mercifully had a category all to themselves.

The one hundred competitors came from about fifteen different colleges all over Ireland, including WIT, DCU, UCC and NUIG to name but a few. The day kicked off to a start with the male Beginners Kata, in which UL’s Eoghan McDermot and Kevin Moloney both placed receiving a silver and bronze medal respectively. The other Kata events followed, in which Shauna Downing, Rachel Buckley and Eimear O’ Sullivan all placed second in their categories. Fionán Houston also received a bronze medal in the Intermediate Individual Kata. By twelve o’clock all of the competitors were kitted out in mitts and gum shields ready to take to the arena for kumite – sparring. Once again, UL performed admirably, with Rory King getting gold for the Beginners individual sparring and Kevin Moloney placing third in the same event. Conor Feeney, Eoghan McDermot and Rory King also joined forces for both the team sparring and team kata events, placing first and third in these events. Inter-college rivalries were momentarily set aside when Rachael Buckley joined



forces with DIT to place second in the Intermediate Team Kumite and Eimear O’ Sullivan joined the WIT team to place first in the same event. Opposition on the arena was brushed aside after the award

ceremony as all the participants joined each other for a celebratory dinner in the Sports Bar. Plans of hitting the town were dismissed in favour of a chat in The Stables – but only after being assured that the

interesting assortment of Pokémon wandering UL was the result of a fancy dress party and not any karate related injuries! The day truly was one to be proud of in Karate circles and in UL

itself. Since many of our students were beginners in their first ever competition, it was a joy to see them doing so well and something for us to be very proud of.



UL Win Fourth Consecutive Kayak Intervarsities on Home Turf

Oisín Bates

The Irish Kayaking Intervarsities – widely accepted as the greatest sporting extravaganza on earth – rolled into Limerick this past weekend. Like the Superbowl, the new year was bringing the competition to a new venue; unlike the Superbowl, it stretched out over three days and featured far fewer ad breaks.

The first event of the competition – canoe polo – kicked off on Friday night. Each of the fifteen competing colleges fielded teams of ten for the tournament while a handful of canoe-polo's die-hard college-going fans packed into the pool's spectating area; battling it out to see which college's spectators could shout their respective institution's acronym the loudest. UL were unlucky to lose two off their three group-stage matches, failing to make the knockout stages. NUI Maynooth went on to win the event but the real winner was the sport of canoe polo.

That night, the competitors and supporters headed to the Lodge nightclub in search of the classic 'Lodge Experience'. No one was left disappointed; the DJ played everyone's favourite Lodge hits, even managing to squeeze in 'Rock the Boat' before the end of the night. The next event of the weekend – whitewater racing – took place on Saturday morning on the Castleconnell river. Teams of four from each college competed time trials along a compact circuit. UL's team were on solid form and came away with a respectable third place finish. Later that day, the weekend's third event – long-distance racing – took place on campus. Starting from UL's boathouse and racing a 5.5 kilometre circuit to Corbally Bridge and back; a number of students competed across a number of various disciplines. UL's competitors fared well and were rewarded with second place in the long-distance event. On Saturday evening, the 500+ paddlers converged on the



Michael Shaw

Stables in fancy dress for the biggest party of the weekend. Banterstar Galactifunk - UL's resident doctors of Funkanomics – beamed out two hours of funkadelic grooves before a DJ kept the crowd of hilariously dressed paddlers dancing and/or fist-pumping late into the night.

The final event of the weekend was

the freestyle kayaking competition which took place in at Curragower falls in Limerick City. UL secured a first place finish in this event, securing UL the overall intervarsities title for 2013 and for the fourth consecutive year. A big thanks goes to all the lads and lasses who organised the event and volunteered their time

(many of whom simultaneously played crucial roles as athletes for UL) and to the many sponsors who made the weekend possible. On the back of this victory, UL Kayak Club has retained its reputation as the strongest university kayak club in Ireland. If you are interested in trying any discipline of kayaking

for yourself, drop down to the UL Arena Pool from 9:45-10:45 on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; or contact us at ulkayak@gmail.com. All skill levels catered for from complete beginner to advanced.

UL Drama Society Notes

Tighearnan Noonan

One Act Festival - Hello to you all dramatic people and entertainment lovers. UL Drama Society is now accepting submissions for its 3rd Biannual One Act Festival, which will be held on the 15th of April. This is a great chance for aspiring directors to get experience in directing a play. It also gives the actors amongst you a chance to shine. And if you are a bit shy and want to slowly get involved Drama Soc always welcomes tech and stagehands (the true people behind the show). Submissions must be emailed to president@uldrama.ie by the Friday of week 5, the 1st of March. If anyone has any questions please don't hesitate in asking them.

The requirements for the One Acts are that each play must be between 5-15 minutes long and have a cast no larger than 7.



Cookery Corner: Spaghetti Carbonara

Barbara Ross

WHEN most of us think of carbonara we think of a creamy sauce with oodles of bacon and mushrooms poured over steaming tagliatelle, served with a generous hunk of garlic bread. But while your mouth is watering at this image, Italians the world over are turning their backs in disgust.

A traditional carbonara recipe does not include cream, mushrooms or garlic bread and usually comprises of spaghetti, not tagliatelle but it is still a delicious creamy dish that is surprisingly easy to make.

Ingredients (Serves 4-6)

- 1 pound of spaghetti
- 4 large eggs
- 8 ounces of pancetta (you can buy cubed bacon in most supermarkets, that will do the trick)
- 1/2 cup of grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 1/2 cup of grated Pecorino (Grated parmesan will work for this recipe instead of these two cheeses)
- Black pepper
- Salt



Method

- Add spaghetti to salted water and cook as per packet instructions. Cook until it is al dente (just cooked) rather than soft.
- While the pasta is cooking, heat a frying pan and sauté the bacon until golden.

- In a small bowl whisk the eggs and cheese until well combined.
- Drain the pasta, keeping half a cup of the cooking water. Add half of this water to the bacon and toss in the spaghetti, stirring over the heat until the bubbles subside. Most of the water will evaporate.

- Remove the pan from the heat and add the egg mixture, stirring quickly until the eggs thicken. The heat from the already cooked food will cook the eggs and prevent them from scrambling. If the sauce is too thick add the rest of the reserved pasta water.

- Season with pepper and salt if needed and serve immediately.
- Cooking just like an Italian has never been easier and this recipe is the perfect way to impress your housemates and fool your parents into thinking you are finally a grown up.

Wallet-Friendly Beauty Treatments

Karen O' Connor Desmond

FOR centuries women have been finding ways to enhance their natural beauty. From the Ancient Egyptians who used kohl to frame their eyes and red ochre to colour their lips and cheeks to our Celtic ancestors who darkened their eyebrows using berries. It's safe to say that us ladies know a thing or two about the power of beauty and using the correct products to achieve that 'flawless look' is not something that we're willing to give up.

With moisturisers now going for anything between €5 to €40 and foundations costing the same as a week's worth of grocery shopping (at least), beauty is fast becoming a very expensive part of our lives. Beauty products can burn a big hole in your pocket and at the end of the day you have to ask yourself – is it really worth it? What's so special about certain beauty products and are they actually doing as much good as we think? Or did the Ancient Egyptians and Celts have the right idea when they searched in their back gardens whenever they wanted to beautify themselves? Is it possible that nature holds the (inexpensive) key to enhancing our natural beauty?

According to mybeautyrecipes.com, making a facial cleanser is as simple as reaching for a kiwi! Simply add two tablespoons of plain yoghurt, one tablespoon of almond oil, one tablespoon of honey and one

teaspoon of finely ground almonds to a peeled and pureed kiwi and you're good to go! Just remember as with all facial cleansers to wash it off after application with lots of warm water.

Website mindbodygreen.com has some fantastic alternative beauty treatment ideas, all organic, that you can concoct in the comfort of your own kitchen. One simple and inexpensive recipe is for a facial mask using only manuka honey! It's suggested that you apply the honey to your face and neck once a week and leave for 15 minutes. It's no wonder really as manuka honey is famed for its antibacterial properties – a sure fire way to cleanse the skin thoroughly.

Looking for a moisturiser? Then why not reach for some virgin coconut oil! Mindbodygreen writer Melissa Rousseau suggests simply applying the oil whilst still damp post shower. If needed, once the first coating is dry, you can apply extra coconut oil to very dry areas of skin. Not only is this moisturizer inexpensive but it's also 100 percent natural. What's not to love about this amazing beauty find?

So the next time you find yourself strapped for cash and don't know what to do, why not try making your own beauty products? It's healthy and it's cheap. I don't know how you could get much better than that.



Seachtain na Gaeilge and Me

Siobhán Duffy

Seachtain na Gaeilge is an important event in the Emerald Isle and indeed overseas (let's be honest, the Americans are probably all over it!). It's a fortnight (ironic eh?!) dedicated to all things 'as Gaeilge,' where the language, culture and traditions of our nation are promoted and celebrated from North to South, East to West and even in Leitrim. There are hundreds of events taking place around the country, from coffee mornings to 'Céilís at the Crossroads.' This year, Seachtain na Gaeilge runs from March 4th to 17th which incorporates the annual St. Patrick's Day festivities (roaring the ear off someone at 3am in whatever twisted Irish you think your talking doesn't count!). Of course, Limerick city and county are following the nationwide trend and organising various events which will bring the Irish experience to your doorstep. On top of this, Aonad na Gaeilge, the Irish body in the University of Limerick have a program of events that will run throughout the weeks in question.

Seachtain na Gaeilge, although heavily reliant on the numerous events that are organised around the country, is about something more. The festivities are run to help and encourage people to use their native tongue as often as possible regardless of the misuse of the modh cionniolach or forgetting a vital conjunction here and there. Everyone makes mistakes but that shouldn't hinder your conversion to Irish. Seachtain na Gaeilge is about supporting and promoting the continued growth of



our language and this sentiment can easily be encouraged by the typical U.L. student.

So when you're enjoying the odd alcoholic beverage (or ten!) in the Stables say 'sláinte' with your friends rather than cheers. How about a simple 'Dia dhuit' to acquaintances instead of the usual U.L. greeting of

'well.' Another easy way to introduce Irish to your Seachtain na Gaeilge is by counting the leftover pennies from Angel Lane on Tuesday in Irish (we can all go as far as deich, and somehow I'd say that'll be enough eh?!). Or maybe you can thank the pizza delivery man in Irish; the look of shock/confusion and probably

incomprehension on his face should put a smile on your face!

It's easy to take part in the annual festivities even if you can't make the organised events because of a date with a Jaegermeister in the Sinbin or because there's an offer on in Four Seasons Pizza that you can't bear to miss. Most of us have the 'cúpla

focal' but if you're stuck, a chuckle is guaranteed from the random shouting of 'madra rua' or 'tabhair dom an cáca milis' courtesy of that infamous Carlsberg advertisement!

Seachtain na Gaeilge runs from March 4th- 17th.

UL International Week

Muireann Murtagh

I had been looking forward to International Week (my first as a student and a committee member!) ever since September and I was not disappointed! It was an exhausting but brilliant few days. The week started off with a bang on Monday 11th February with our EGM. We also elected several new officers to the committee: Alex Hartl (2nd Erasmus Rep.), Maggie Dees and Lauren Noel (Study Abroad). Carol Hennessey (Health and Safety), Caoimhe Roche (Treasurer promoted to Vice President), Caitlin Woods (Co-Events), Lucy Dawson (Vice-Events), and Kevin Daly and Ardiane Jarizze Tabuena (Floating Members). Afterwards we watched the film L'Auberge Espagnol.

On Tuesday there was a demonstration of GAA at the Pavillion for the International Students. This was followed in the evening by dancing lessons in the Sports Bar. Jinn taught us how to dance Malaysian/Chinese dances and Maria taught Sevillanas from Spain.

Even though Wednesday's Food Fair in the Stables had a massive queue, the food was totally worth the wait! Among the cuisines cooked by our members were Norweigan, Brazilian, French, Austrian, Irish, Bulgarian, American and Swiss

food. Everything was delicious! I'd never had the chance to try so many dishes from around the world before and I've been looking up recipes ever since! (And, of course, making other people jealous/hungry with my endless descriptions of the various kinds of cake!) Afterwards, we headed to the Sports Bar for our Pub Quiz. Nine rounds of tough questions and several plates of cocktail sausages and chips later, we had our winners: 'Chipmunks' in third place, 'Frenchies #18' in second place and the overall winners were 'OPC Wankers'.

On Thursday night, we headed out to the Orchard in Limerick City. For many of the International students it was their first night out there and everyone had a fantastic time! We rounded out the week's shenanigans in the usual way: by heading to the Stables for a Valentines-themed TGIF!

The first trip of the semester was Saturday. Members travelled to the beautiful Co. Limerick village of Adare and also got to visit historic Bunratty Castle. They had a brilliant time and we're all looking forward to the next few trips to come!

Our clubs started off this week too. Every Tuesday, Amanda hosts Book Club in the PSA from 18.00-19.00. If you like chats, tea (or coffee!), biscuits and books then come along! For the musically-minded, every



Thursday Caoimhe and the Music Club take charge of the Jonathan Swift lecture hall (B1023) from 18.00-19.00. Sports Club runs from 16.00-18.00 with Zak and Chris, playing all kinds of sports from

hockey to GAA! Our radio show (International Power Hour) is on every Friday from 15.00-16.00, so tune in to hear Ewerton and Ras Mikey play the best tunes from all over the world. Thanks to The

Stables Club, the Sports Bar, the Pavillion, the Orchard and IED and most of all you guys! We hope that you enjoyed it as much as we did!

Travel Can Change Your Life

Meggan Gould

I MADE a rash decision almost a year ago to pack up my things and head over to Ireland for a year. Despite leaving my friends and family, and the intense jetlag – it was the best decision of my life.

I was told that I would change a lot while travelling, and I don't think I took that too closely to heart. I think that everyone who has travelled can relate. Whether it is on an Erasmus year, if you are an International student like me, or if you have just gone somewhere new, you will know what I am talking about. Grabbing your things and hopping on a plane to go to a foreign country changes you. The people change you. The culture changes you. It makes you more independent. Travelling allows you to look at something completely new to you and let it take your breath away. It is easy to appreciate how small you really are when you are looking down from Mount Tibidabo in Barcelona, while you climb a castle in Scotland, when you freeze at the top of the Eiffel Tower at midnight, when you get blessed by the Pope in Rome, and when you are hanging your feet off the side of The Cliffs of Moher. I have never felt more free and alive then when I have danced in the Irish rain, and when I dipped my feet in the ocean. It is the small things that a lot of people may not think are that important that can really change a life.

However, for everything I gained, the most important thing is my appreciation for the things I left



“This country is beautiful and I am so happy that it welcomed me with open arms. I have shared a pint with people from many different countries, I have found a new love for the colour green, and of course, the rain that falls every day.”

behind. I miss my family and my friends dearly. I wish I could bring them with me and show them everything I have seen. I wish I could get them to comprehend the changes I have gone through. But I do know they will be waiting at home with open arms when I return.

I know that I was meant to go on this journey and I send out my eternal thanks to everyone who

helped me get here. If this trip has taught me anything it is that everyone needs to step out of their shell and travel. Everyone needs to jump on a plane, or boat, or bus and go somewhere they have never been before. The world has so many amazing things to see, and so many amazing things to do. For those who feel they cannot afford it, it is easy to grab a cheap flight and an

inexpensive hostel for a night or two. It does not have to be a long and expensive trip to change your life. I am a firm believer that the less money you spend on a trip on all of the elaborate tourist destinations, the more you can truly learn from and appreciate the culture.

This country is beautiful and I am so happy that it welcomed me with open arms. I have shared a pint

with people from many different countries, I have found a new love for the colour green, and of course, the rain that falls every day. Thank you to the University of Limerick for accepting so many International Students every year, and for giving all of us the opportunity to change our lives forever.

Erasmus in Stockholm

Tom Horan

THREE weeks in Stockholm and the honeymoon period is over. It's no longer a novelty to wake up to six inches of snow each morning, and I'd be a happy man to not have to eat another meatball for the rest of my days. I've even got a decent handle on how much Krone a slice pan should cost. I'm almost disappointed to be reasonably adjusted to life here, it's what an accountant in Disneyland must feel like; blind to all the magical wonderment they now take for granted. All that being said, I still have an inconceivably large amount of Stockholm left to frolic through and that's not including the rest of Sweden, Eastern Europe, Finland, and part of Russia.

Routines have formed. Except for the odd instance of getting completely lost, I'm beginning to understand the layout of the small but dense campus, which is only about the size of UL's main building. I've had two four-hour instalments of my main module: Media and Storytelling, and instead of being a relentless bore, we get to write film scripts and generally be creative. Our lecturer is one of those enthusiastic 'Robin Williams in Dead Poet's Society' types. The whole class is convinced he's going to ask us to rip up our textbooks and then change the way we view life.

The workload is acceptable in all my classes, and so is everything else in Stockholm- the Swedish are nothing if not accommodating to us international students. In fact, the President of Stockholm City Council requested the pleasure of every international student's company at a reception in City Hall, the very same City Hall where the Nobel Banquet is held every December. Though a bit brown, the name "City Hall" doesn't do the building justice; it's red brick walls are intimidatingly high and even though the building was completed in 1923, it feels like an Ancient Temple to the Norse Gods of Thunder and Ikea. After a few speeches we were led up to the 'Golden Hall' for fancy pasta and a drink that, although served in a wine glass, we were dismayed to find out was not actually alcoholic. The Golden Hall being walled with mosaics of literal gold made up for that, and the whole event had an air of sophistication I suspect none of us were used to. It was humbling to use the very same bathrooms as countless Nobel prize-winning physicists.

One good thing about the honeymoon period ending is that all the Erasmus students are now that bit closer. It's nice to have some Irish people at hand but it's even better to connect with people I've barely



The Golden Hall in Stockholm's City Hall

anything in common with. Despite myself, I feel a sense of competition between us Irish to see who is the best at being an International

student; who can talk to the most new people, and look like they're having the best time in the endless barrage of photos. Coming as part of

"The Irish Guys" I guess I feel that bit more incentivised to show the world how wonderfully unique I am.

AF Charity Week Special

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MONDAY

11:30:
Duck Race
@ River By Kilmurry

13:00:
Raft Race {w/ UL RAG Soc}
@ River By Kilmurry

13:00:
DJ Marty
@ Stables Courtyard

13:30:
Shave or Dye
@ Stables Courtyard

14:00:
Leg Wax
@ Stables Courtyard

14:00:
Yard of Ale / Coke
@ Scholars Club

14:00:
Cadbury Egg Eating
Competition
@ Stables Courtyard

14:30:
Rock Band Competition
@ Stables Courtyard

17:00:
Grinding Competition
@ The Stables

17:30:
Fruity Games
@ The Stables

18:00:
Lovely Girls Competition
@ Stables Courtyard

19:30:
Char-aoke (Charity Karaoke)
@ The Stables

21:30:
Scholar's Beer Club Plus Live
Band "Emma's Lovely Friends"
@ Scholars Club

21:30:
PaintGlow 2.0
@ The Stables

14:00
Hypnotist @ Stables
Courtyard

14:00
Dirty Shots @ Scholars Club

14:00
Breakdancing Competition
@ The Stables

14:30
Nearly Naked Mile {In
Association with UL RAG Soc}
@ North Campus

15:30
DJ Ber
@ The Stables

15:30
Head Banging Competition
@ Stables Courtyard

16:00
Cadbury Egg Eating
Competition @ The Stables

16:00
Helium Karaoke
@ Scholars Club

21:30
Shifters - UL Weekly Club
Night (€5) @ Sinbin Nightclub'

13:45
Charity Auction
@ Stables Courtyard

14:00
Mankini Challenge Day
@ Scholars Club

14:30
Cadbury Milking
@ Stables Courtyard

15:00
An Focal Vs
The Thomond Student Times
@ UL Pitches

15:30
Helium Karaoke
@ Stables Courtyard

16:00
Take Me Out
@ The Stables

16:00
Boat Race
@ Scholars Club

WEDNESDAY

13:00
King of the Campus Launch
@ SU Courtyard

14:00
Mud Wrestling @ Stables
Courtyard

14:00
Sex Quiz @ Scholars Club

14:30
King of the Campus finish
@ SU Courtyard

15:30
DJ Ber @ The Stables

15:45
Magician @ Stables Courtyard

16:00
The Sausage-Fest (sausage
eating comp)
@ Scholars Club

16:30
Blind Chat Up
@ The Stables

From 17:00
Ulfest at 4 Venues (SU
Courtyard, Scholars, Stables
Bar, Stables Courtyard)
@ The 4 Venues

FRIDAY

20:00
T.G.I.C.W. (Thank Goodness
It's Charity Week) - Red Cup
Party feat. Ruaila Buala & DJ
Ber {In Association with UL
International Society}@ The
Stables

TUESDAY

15:00:
Iron Stomach
@ Stables Courtyard

15:30:
DJ Ber
@ The Stables

16:00:
Kissing Competition
@ The Stables

16:00:
Musical Jenga Competition
@ Scholars Club

11:00
5-A-Side Soccer Tournament
@ Astroturf

12:00
Mock Weddings
@ Stables Courtyard

12:30
UL Wide Game of Tag
@ SU Courtyard

13:00
DJ Marty @ Stables Courtyard

17:00
Fifa '12 tournament
@ Room 3, Students Union

17:00
Nose Pea Push Competition
@ The Stables

17:00
The Big-Ass Comedy Gig
@ Scholars Club

21:30
Live Trad Band @ Scholars
Club

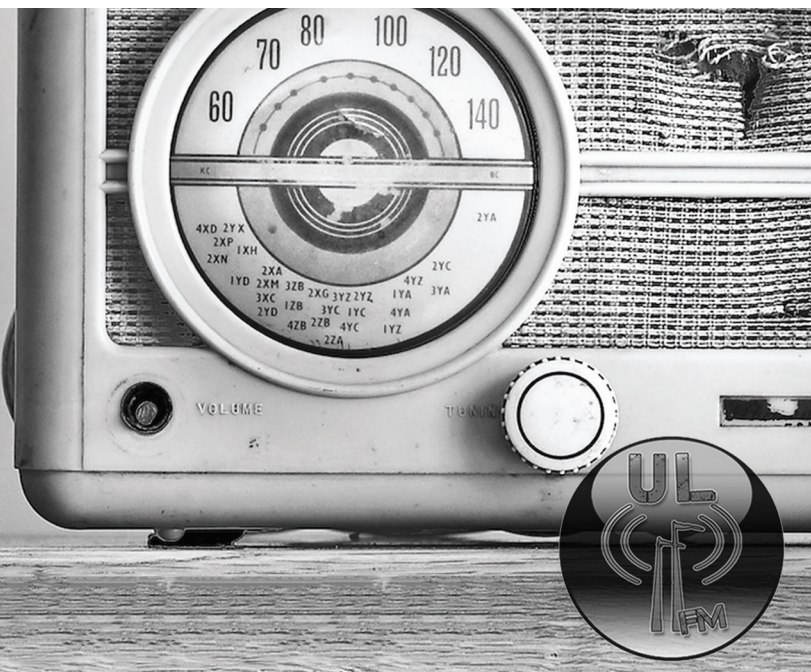
THURSDAY

12:30
Tag Rugby
@ UL Pitches

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11am-4pm Friday
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UL Charity Week 2013

The Charities

After much discussion last year of a charity ball being held for students in place of Charity Week, it has been announced that Charity Week will, once again, go ahead.

This year charity week will be held in Week 6, the 4th-7th of March. Similar to last year, there will be more than enough events to keep students interested!

While Charity Week is all a bit of fun, we must keep in mind what the goal of Charity Week really is: to raise money for local and national charities, who are always thankful for donations.

This year the chosen charities are:

- Body Whys; who deal with cases of eating disorders in Ireland.
- Aware; who provide support for people suffering from depression.
- Midwest Spina Bifida; who provide support and advice for families affected by Spina Bifida.
- Adapt House; who support women and children affected by domestic violence.

Bodywhys is the national voluntary organisation supporting people affected by eating disorders.

Discipline

We would like to ask students to keep in mind that, while Charity Week is a week filled with entertainment, there will be zero tolerance for acting out of line. Disciplinary procedures have been put in place and anyone seen to be overstepping the mark may be removed from the event they are attending. Instances of misconduct may result in the student being banned from all ULSU events, as well as from The Scholars, The Stables, The Pavilion and The Arena Sports Bar.

Please bear in mind that there are very serious repercussions should you behave in a manner which is unacceptable or which endangers the safety of another student or member of staff. Should the Gardaí catch you drinking in public, and this includes around any of the off-campus estates, you will be presented with an on the spot fine which, if not paid within the specified time, will go on your permanent record.

Similarly, should an issue of assault be recorded against you, you may be brought before the courts, fined, and have it placed on your permanent record. Along with this, should the University be informed of a serious case of misconduct, they can fine the student involved, push back the student's degree for a year or even revoke the student's degree completely.

There will be security and Gardaí present at all ULSU events and, should there be any issues, students are encouraged to inform a member of staff.

Keep in mind this week is all about raising money for the chosen charities, and 100% of the profit made from each event will go straight to the charities mentioned.

What Will You Do?

The big focus of the week is what will you do to raise money for a good cause? In previous years, students have gone to great lengths to raise money for good causes, but we want to see an improvement over last year. Some examples of what students did last year include:

- Shaving or Dyeing their hair for Charity
- Being handcuffed together for an entire week
- The Mankini Challenge



- Running the Nearly Naked Mile
- Taking part in 'The Great Adventure'
- Daring the Iron Stomach Competition

We want your ideas, no matter how crazy. In fact, the more off the wall the better. In Trinity this year they had a student run two marathons for RAG Week. Last year two girls dressed as if they were coming

from a one night stand every day. Now that's dedication! Submit your fundraising ideas to suevents@ul.ie to register your event.

Want to get involved helping behind the scenes?

We need a load of volunteers to help with the week, doing

everything from bucket collecting, to dealing with bands etc. who are performing on the nights, and everything in between. That's where the Helper Monkeys come in. If you are interested in becoming a Helper Monkey and volunteering behind the scenes please email Katie (Katie.scanlon@ul.ie)

Keeping your Possessions Safe and Sound

Sarah O' Dwyer

Coming back to college after Christmas can be a great time for students. However, students returning following the holiday period may have a lot of new valuables. Garda Eoin O' Connor recently spoke to An Focal about the importance of protecting your personal property after moving back to college.

Garda O' Connor has warned that most thieves are opportunists and, therefore, ensuring all windows and doors in the house are locked is of the utmost importance. Ensure car doors and windows are also locked and nothing is left on display. If items of value can be seen clearly through the windows, you are automatically more of a target. Burglars are certainly more likely to target a house or vehicle with valuables clearly on show, so try to not make yourself a target.

It was also suggested by Garda O' Connor that investing in a safe for your valuables would be a good idea. He suggests that they are a good hiding place and that they definitely slow thieves down. It's much more difficult to access a safe, than just picking up something left on show.

Thirdly, marking and documenting your valuable belongings is a must. Adding a small amount of spray paint to your bike, or a brush of nail varnish on your laptop inconspicuously makes your property much more easily identifiable should it be missing. Garda O' Connor also suggests photographing the valuables you own, so if something were to go missing, Gardaí would know exactly what they were looking for.

Should a burglary occur in your home ensure it is reported immediately to Gardaí. Call Henry Street Garda station straight away on 061-212400. Even if it is just suspicious activity, Gardaí want to know about it as they want to prevent as much crime as possible before it happens. Should you feel you need to contact Gardaí about something which you do not think is an emergency, call the community policing office on 061-433542. This is open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm. Should you call after hours, leave a message.



UL Kayak Intervarsity 2013

Photography by Michael Shaw

