

'The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker' - Mary Davis (quoting Helen Keller)



Tom Burke

JOHN HUME

First to have the vision to bring peace to Northern Ireland

JOHN Hume's legacy, as evidenced by his recent awarding of the title of Ireland's Greatest by RTE viewers, will be as the first person in the tragic saga of Northern Ireland to propose a reasonable, realistic and ultimately successful strategy for peace. Though he attracted controversy for initiating Sinn Fein into mainstream politics at a time when its military wing's campaign showed no sign of relenting, his courage has been vindicated by the stability that has reigned since the Good Friday Agreement. Encouraging the Provisional Republican movement to accept the principle of consent was an extraordinary feat, and one not without severe criticism of him, and even physical danger to him. Of all the protagonists in the Troubles, he was the one with the vision. Similar vision will lead us out of this depression.

MICHAEL O'LEARY

His opening of the skies to ordinary people shows the reward in taking a risk

MICHAEL O'Leary's flamboyancy may irritate, even infuriate. Nevertheless, his divisive public persona should not detract from the praiseworthiness of his achievement, which was to allow Irish citizens the opportunity to travel abroad at an affordable rate. This innovative prospect was unprecedented in Ireland, and indeed since its modest inception in 1985, Ryanair has taken countless people, here and elsewhere, on journeys on which they may never otherwise have gone. We are all indebted to him for his enormous part in this commendable accomplishment. Economically, the Ireland of 1985 was not unlike the Ireland of 2010, and Ryanair's success was no forgone conclusion, but the gamble has paid off substantially. If Michael O'Leary were to bequeath a valuable lesson to us at this moment, it would be that even in bleak times, risks can reward.



GAY BYRNE

Fearless tackler of controversial topics who didn't promote his own views

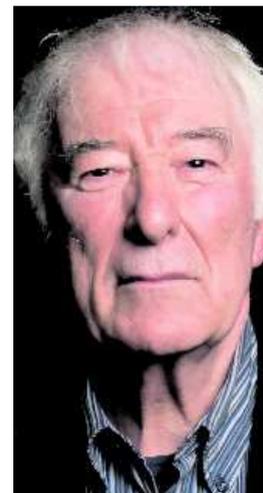
DURING his tenure on *The Late Late Show* – still the world's longest-running chat show – Gay Byrne introduced controversial issues into Irish homes with a bravery that stood out in what was then a very conservative nation. Rather than conform to safe broadcasting standards, he fearlessly tackled subjects that may not have been socially acceptable, forcing the Irish people to confront them directly. His longevity stemmed from his unique interviewing style; subtly extracting information from guests without dominating proceedings, or promoting his own point of view. Combined, these traits played a huge role in helping Irish society evolve into the tolerant, pluralist country it is today. And if tolerance and pluralism are the by-products of Gay Byrne's guidance, then a present-day confrontation of controversial issues can only breed similarly noble attributes.



SEAMUS HEANEY

He keeps alive our reputation for literary excellence

SEAMUS Heaney has kept alive the reputation we earned for literary excellence throughout the world with his many volumes of poetry and prose. These accomplishments have taken him everywhere from the White House to the Swedish Academy, where his Nobel Prize for literature was a particularly proud moment for Ireland. Our modest size as a nation is disproportionate to the wealth of great writers we have produced, and Heaney is the worthy inheritor of a long line that stretches back to Kavanagh, Beckett, Joyce, Yeats and Synge. Additionally, despite the level of his achievements, he remains a uniquely humble and unassuming man, one who is to be emulated.



MARY ROBINSON

Doughty campaigner for women's rights whose transforming of the face of the Presidency provides a template for change

