

THE PEOPLE WHO INSPIRED:**EOGHAN HARRIS**

WE are shorn sheep, close to winter's bone, and no shepherd in sight. What is to be done? Common sense tells us to avoid the charismatic pied pipers, the panic-mongers and the pedlars of panaceas. What we need now are the stoic, the steady and the steely of spirit. What Shakespeare calls "warriors for the working day". Above all, we need people who can talk us down from the ledge of depression, people who can remind us we saw better days and will see them again, people who, in Yeats' words, remind us of what is past, passing and to come. And that means we need artists, broadcasters, and public figures who can say what we feel, and feel what we cannot say. Here is my list of those who lift my heart.

JOHN BOWMAN

The broadcaster's broadcaster, and nation's moral sage

THE sound of Sunday morning, he summons up the heroic ghosts of our recent past and gives us a glimpse of a better future. The broadcaster's broadcaster. A political interviewer without peer; an academic historian who can make the past present; an archival mole who burrows deep into RTE's rich repository of recordings and re-masters them for the modern age. Once, he was our weekly moral sage and guide through the bog of Irish politics. Today, he is our national teacher in the truest sense, our moral sage and guide. But nothing would raise our spirits so much as the return of *Questions and Answers*. Just to watch him at work would relax our nerves: his sixth sense for the furtive political fish lurking deep in the muddy pool of a mundane statement, his confidence in casting his fly over its nose, his good humour in hooking it and lifting it into the light of day. By taking public life seriously, but not solemnly, he ennobled and enhanced the profession of politics, which needs him now more than ever.

**BONO**

Rocker who believes we're on the earth to do good, and does it without ado



ALTHOUGH I am not a fan of U2, I am a fan of Bono. A do-gooder with a Dublin drawl, driven by a sense of decency, who says to the world, "give me your tired, your teeming huddled masses and I will try to give them a dig out, or at least draw attention to their plight". And I must salute him as leader of the band that greeted the Good Friday Agreement — albeit with an anthem composed by Van Morrison. Even so, every time I see Bono on television, which is a lot, I still feel the frisson of a day like that, the day of the Good Friday Agreement, which confounded those who had given up on Northern Ireland. Beyond that, I salute Bono for still believing in the public sphere. Unlike most rockers, who are full of themselves, or full of it, or spend their spare time counting their money and snorting cocaine, Bono spends as much time being pro bono as being pro-Bono. True to his roots in decent Dublin Protestantism, Bono believes we are put on earth to do good. And without much ado, he does it.

GARRET FITZGERALD

Forever sharp, forever teaching, forever hopeful



TO SEE him bounce into a television studio in his 80s is to be energised and certain that we can roll back this recession. Earliest of the computer nerds, evangelist for Europe, pioneer of pluralism, standard-bearer for social democracy, bulwark against the Provisional IRA, Taoiseach who took us into the modern world, political agent of change who always acted with good authority, even if it was bound to bring him into conflict with the party he put back on the political map. A role model for those who want to remain mentally and morally young — at 84, forever sharp, forever hopeful, forever teaching, the product of a mixed marriage that made him sensitive to the two great traditions on this island. A practical politician who still inspires us to remember we are the indomitable Irish: let me salute Garret the Good.

MARY HARNEY

Moral Mother Courage who reminds others they have a backbone



FEMININE to her fingertips, a Mother Courage when it comes to carrying on, Mary Harney has more stoical moral bravery than most men. Stoical moral bravery was a virtue vital in the State's stand against the men of violence — Harney never had any time for armchair generals like Haughey who got a good night's sleep on other men's wounds. And it's a virtue which is still worth a thousand "visionary speeches" void of substance. Among Harney's many gifts is to make men around her remember they were born with a backbone. Along with Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher and Hillary Clinton, she is the kind of purposeful political driver who makes political wimps want to get out of the car. She sought out Health because it was hard, because she could not bear to surf along in a soft job, because she always marches at point, seeking the frontlines where the fire is fiercest. That is why she is my favourite politician of modern times, and I hope she stays around to show us how to hold our nerve.

**PAUL DURCAN**

Republic's national bard, and the most political poet when he sees injustice

THE poet I pick up on dark days, when I need light, and when I need a laugh. The nearest thing to a national bard in the Republic of Ireland. Seamus Heaney's roots remain in Northern Ireland, but Paul Durcan's roots go deep into the Free State. Although a totally original voice, you can hear many voices vibrate when he speaks: the cold passion of Yeats, the warm sentiments of Tom Moore, the gentle good humour of Percy French. But Durcan has seen more political violence than Yeats, has none of Moore's nonsense about avenging and bright falls the swift sword of Erin, and does not romanticise Irish rural life like French. When he is angry about injustice he is the most political of poets. But his stand against Provo barbarism was not the only mark his poetry made on the public psyche. His elegies for his loving but lost marriage mirrored the inner life of many Irish marriages back when separation was the sole substitute. And his vibrant voice will forever speak of the way we were.