

The paper's prophets

The people we at the Sunday Independent feel can give much-needed inspiration in these troubled times

BRIAN HAYES

ENDA KENNY felt strongly enough about Brian Hayes's attempt to dethrone him that he cast the young Dublin deputy from the frontbench. But not for long. For all his faults, Kenny is a man who recognises talent and his need to be surrounded by people brighter than himself. Hayes is intelligent, articulate and tenacious and eschews the usual bullshit of Leinster House. When he lost the Education portfolio he did not sulk, but carried on the fight from the backbenches, as if ready for the call that came after just a few months. Now in his newer and arguably more immediately relevant role as spokesman on finance with special responsibility for eliminating waste in public expenditure, he is stronger than ever and seems a shoo-in for ministerial office in the next government. Labour is suspicious of him and we can only look forward to many a spat around the cabinet table as he laughs some of the brothers' more loopy ideas out of the room.

LOUIS WALSH

Everybody likes Louis Walsh. He may irritate Simon Cowell on the X Factor judging panel, but when he does he is deflating the pomposity of the music mogul for the enjoyment of us all. Louis's international popularity isn't just down to the fact that another branch of entertainment needed a token Irishman. He is there because he has a hugely successful track record behind him. He turned the unpromising Boyzone in a multi-million pound business by sheer hard work; and then topped this exceptional achievement with the phenomenal Westlife project. He could do it because of his natural talent for showbusiness and the years of graft he put in at that particular coalface. That is the kind of success we admire and desperately need in the years to come.



SIR TERRY WOGAN

TERRY Wogan has achieved the best kind of success and worn it lightly. He has had a lengthy career at the very top, consistently charming and entertaining the population of Britain with his wit. He managed to hold on to the biggest audience of any radio presenter in Britain for as long as he wanted and then stood down at a time of his own choosing. Such is his standing that even the cheeky young alternative comedians who hold no part of the establishment sacred are loath to take a potshot at this British and Irish treasure. Equally at home on television, he has an impressive screen curriculum. At one stage he preferred to accept a substantial loyalty bonus from the BBC rather than engage in the type of channel hopping many of his lesser contemporaries deemed essential in order to get on. An icon to inspire, at home and abroad.

AIDAN O'BRIEN

FILLING the shoes of the great Vincent O'Brien must have been daunting for Aidan O'Brien (no relation), an essentially shy, quiet young man whose achievements might have been expected to match the modesty of his personality. But the steel was there. 1993/94 was the season he became champion amateur jockey, and it was also when he trained his first winner. Under the Coolmore banner, Aidan has become champion trainer on a number of occasions and added several Group 1 victories to his achievements over the past 25 years, with outstanding horses such as Giants Causeway, Rock Of Gibraltar, Galileo, St Nicholas Abbey and Mastercraftsman. In a sport where money talks and travels where it wishes, Aidan O'Brien has done more than anyone to keep the Irish flag flying in the sport of kings with the genius of his equestrian talent.

PADDY COONEY

THE former Fine Gael Minister for Justice was a serious man. He did not engage in spin or theatrics. He said what he meant and he meant what he said. Impressive in appearance and tone, he took one of the most difficult roles in government at a time when our very democracy was under threat from those who wished to usurp elected authority through a murderous campaign. But he was also a liberal at heart and showed that a politician can be effective without falling into the category of hard right or soft left. He had the personality and charisma to inspire confidence and respect. In short, just the kind of guy we could do with in government today.

JAMES GALWAY

IN an age of instant celebrity, great musicians can too easily fade from the minds of all but the cognoscenti. But the virtuoso skills of Sir James Galway have never really gone away since he first embarked on a solo career as a flautist of outstanding facility and feeling. Even though he now lives in comfortable seclusion in Switzerland, every appearance by the Belfast-born musician is an occasion to remind us again that one of our own is among the world's greats. We should take pride in his achievements, which are real and enduring and a constant reassurance that we are capable of producing great men and women in every field of endeavour. And whether it is performing before three American presidents, the Pope in Rome or the British royalty, whether he is collaborating with entertainers as diverse as Stevie Wonder, Elton John, the Chieftains, Ray Charles, Joni Mitchell, Jessye Norman, Cleo Laine, Andrea Bocelli or Pink Floyd, the little man with the golden flute stands tall on the world stage.



BERNIE GUERIN

THERE is no more appalling tragedy than to lose a child. When that child is a vibrant, exciting, intelligent and successful young woman, and as prominent in the Irish media as Veronica Guerin was, it is even worse. Veronica's mother Bernie Guerin has never made any secret of how badly her heart was broken, but she also met the tragedy with courage and fortitude and has done everything she possibly could to find the positives in the rest of her life, as her distinguished daughter would have wanted her to. She has championed the causes her daughter cared about, speaking out for the drug-addicted and the forgotten. And she has fiercely protected Veronica's memory and reputation, while showing kindness and humour to those from all around the world who still seek her out. By example she has led.



BRIAN LENIHAN

HE is not having the best of times in this troubled era, but amid a mass of mediocrity, he stands out as intelligent and independent-minded. He may yet turn out to be the best Taoiseach we never had, but in the meantime, we must watch him struggle under the yoke of a less enlightened leader and hope he maintains the strength of character to persevere. That he has this character is evident from the courage with which he has faced a terrible illness while carrying on in one of the toughest jobs in government. Likeable and able, he inspires affection and still seems our best hope that politics will prevail.

IMELDA MAY

THIS gorgeous young Liberties lass is outstanding. No gimmicks, no fast-track talent contests, just pure class. Her performances are something wonderful; she's an artist who is instinctively in touch with her music, whose heart and soul are connected to her singing, so that she leaves audiences and peers gasping with admiration in her wake. In terms of God-given gifts, she is in the Amy Winehouse mould, but manages to live a normal family life without the need to make herself seem interesting through being wasted.



MICHAEL FLATLEY

NOT many aficionados of dance regard *Riverdance* as high art. But millions of people all over the world see it as great entertainment. Michael Flatley's creative input was immense, but when he found himself the paid employee of a production company he chose to end his run as the highly paid star of the show and trust in his own talent to begin again. It worked because he had what it takes — in spades.



COLUM McCANN

Just as he made the transition from Dublin schoolboy to family man living and working in Manhattan, so Colum McCann's fictions transcend different worlds. From his elegant reimagining of the life of Nureyev to his moving evocation of the Irish who dug the New York subways in *This Side of Brightness*, here is an Irish novelist who turns his gaze definitively outwards. His latest work, *Let the Great World Spin*, won the prestigious National Book Award, engendering a great sense of national pride when it was much needed.

ANTHONY CRONIN

LIKE a good deed in a naughty world, Tony Cronin's *Sunday Poem* in this paper brings a glimmer of joy among all the doom and gloom. Only last week he introduced us to Ho Xuan Huong, a Vietnamese female poet who wrote about sex in the late 1700s. With his insistence on the importance and relevance of poetry, he consistently demonstrates how much art matters in our daily lives.



MARTIN McDONAGH

HE began collecting unemployment benefits as a teenager in London but visits back to his native Connemara inspired Martin McDonagh's stunning dramatic *oeuvre*. In both the Leenane and the Aran Islands trilogies, the playwright cast a cold comic eye on post-modern rural Ireland. He also demonstrated he wasn't a one-trick pony, writing and directing the savagely violent and funny *In Bruges*. Probably the finest forensic analyst of the Irish psyche writing today, with black humour and flair McDonagh demonstrates the importance of acknowledging our shadow side.

'If at first you don't succeed, get up and give it another go — you'll get there.'
- Eimear O'Connor

'Be yourself'
- Pádraig Harrington