

'They say the darkest hour is right before the dawn.'
- Joseph O'Connor (from *Dylan's Meet Me In The Morning*)

'Never take advice.'
- John Banville

FIACH MAC CONGHAIL

SINCE its foundation at the beginning of the last century by Yeats and Lady Gregory, the National Theatre has held a mirror up to our society in its many incarnations. As a theatre, film and visual arts producer and former adviser to the Government, Fiach MacConghail has both the luvvie credentials and political nous to steer the Abbey through the choppy waters of recession and relocation. We also have him to thank for recently bringing a much-needed dollop of Hollywood glamour to our beleaguered capital in the shape of Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan.

DIARMUID GAVIN

WHEN he urged us to be positive and get up and do something on a recent *Late Late Show*, many people thought Diarmuid Gavin was either drunk or on drugs. For the record, the designer, writer and landscape gardener touches neither. But he knows what it is to feel despair and how not to give up. In his journey from sleeping on the floors of friends' houses, all his worldly possessions in a black bin liner, to talking to the Queen of England about his award-winning garden at the Chelsea Flower Show, this (extra)ordinary boy from Rathfarnham is living proof of what happens when you follow your dreams.



FIONA SHAW

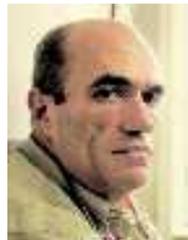
OUR greatest actress, and an Irish export to be proud of. Whether it's as Harry Potter's ghastly Aunt Petunia, Hedda Gabler, Electra or Richard II, Fiona Shaw brings her exceptional gifts — commitment to hard work and consummate professionalism — to every role she inhabits. She also fends off tabloid intrusions into her private life with a winning combination of dignity and humour. This Cork woman has twice won the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Actress and is also highly rated as a director. A stellar example of what talent, positivity and hard work can bring you.

JIM SHERIDAN

HE left his native Dublin in 1981 with a couple of hundred dollars in his pocket and settled his young family in Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan. Since then, Sheridan's films have earned six Academy Award nominations. More important than this though, in movies such as *My Left Foot*, *The Field*, *In the Name of the Father* and *In America* he uses his artistic vision to manifest how the marginalised and the dispossessed, and specifically the Irish, can fight back.

COLM TOIBIN

BACK in the day when Ireland was enduring an earlier recession, Wexford-born journalist Colm Toibin was editing *Magill*, the current affairs magazine. Since then he has gone on to write novels, plays and books of criticism, and still finds time to pen some journalism and organise literary festivals. Three of his novels have been either short- or long-listed for the Booker Prize, including his most recent, prescient study of emigration, *Brooklyn*. A beautiful writer of international stature who makes us proud to be Irish.



MARIE CHAWKE

THE hotel industry is one of the most exposed and vulnerable in Ireland, yet Marie Chawke of Aghadoe Heights has adapted to the freezing winds of change with energy and courage. Dividing her time between Killarney and Dublin across seven working days per week, she and husband Pat continue to provide the standard of service that Irish people have grown accustomed to in the last decade. Both locally, in the retention of jobs, and nationally, she has refused to be daunted by the downturn, remaining upbeat and dynamic when approaching her chosen field. Gratitude is merited for one who would ensure that our services do not deteriorate amid the turmoil.



PAUL COSTELLOE

PAUL Costelloe's continued success as an Irish dress designer shows that nothing can beat the old dog for the hard road. He has continued to produce top-quality clothes with the requisite amount of self-criticism and self-analysis, and without any pause for self-pity. The standard of his work, like that of Paul Kelly and John Rocha, reminds us of one crucial thing — even in the hardest of times, people's need for beauty is intimately bound up with self-esteem.

JOHN ROCHA

HONG Kong-born John Rocha is an honorary Irishman who has stuck by this country through thick and thin — a fashion designer whose work remains effortlessly beautiful. Although proudly claimed twice a year by London Fashion Week, his allegiance and inspiration, as he so frequently restates, remain in Ireland. Though his own personal economy has suffered pitfalls, this has not diminished or daunted his efforts, and his ability to recover from financial drawbacks should be held up as a model for all during this depression.



PAUL KELLY

PAUL Kelly is a retailer par excellence. Because of his position as managing director of Selfridges in London, he is universally recognised on the world retail stage. Ireland is fortunate to still have him as CEO of Brown Thomas. Scientific in his analysis of spending trends, his instinct gives the impression that he holds the secret to the consumer economy. Our politicians could learn much from him if they would come off their high horses and listen to one who knows how to get people spending again.



NOIRIN NI RIAIN

AS important as the economy undoubtedly is, there are times when we must transcend the crisis, and it is then we need to reflect on one of the heavenly choirs, such as the angelic voice of Noirin Ni Riain. Her spiritual, traditional Irish singing seems backed by a celestial choir; as indeed is almost the case when she performs with the Monks of Glenstal as or as part of A.M.E.N. with her sons Eoin and Micheal Music has the power to lift and transport us from our daily grind, and remind us that, though media coverage may dwell incessantly on our woes, there are greater things in life.



MICHAEL McDOWELL

MUCH as we may wish to avert our gaze, the crisis we currently face can be likened to war, albeit an economic war as opposed to one featuring the familiar trappings of military hardware. Bearing such analogies in mind, the lessons of history insist that the indispensable figures in wartime have integrity, courage, wisdom and experience in the Churchillian mould. Michael McDowell possesses these traits in abundance. His status in the public consciousness has undergone quite a comeback, one reflected in his own career. His tendency as a young politician to raise the fears of the middle class like quills upon the fearful porpoentine has been replaced by an enviable grasp of the common touch, one synonymous with the mellowing of age during his time as attorney general. Fearless in the face of the scourges of criminality and terrorism, he is exactly what we need in a political leader in Ireland at the moment, regardless of party affiliation.

RUAIRI QUINN

PAIRED together, both Ruairi Quinn and Pat Rabbitte represent the twin pillars of the Labour Party, and their collective experience is vital for surviving this depression. Though we perhaps need a different approach to politics at present, difference is not synonymous with greenness. Ruairi Quinn has seen both sides of the coin in Irish life — the boom times and the current bust. Far from our predicament being unprecedented, comparable obstacles were visible in the 1980s, when Ruairi Quinn was no cub politician. This instilled in him an awareness that the grinding down of the human spirit will do little to ease our problems; we must instead look to uplift. His recent statements on the disestablishment of FAS are a testament to his character, particularly coming from a Labour politician. He also knows that, though hostility may not be far from the surface of many Irish people, we cannot write off developers, as the country will need them again in the future.



PAT RABBITTE

AT a time when the eloquence of certain party leaders leaves a lot to be desired, Pat Rabbitte's verbal dexterity is sorely needed. Like Michael McDowell, the intelligence he brandished ensured he was not easily fazed. The cut and thrust of parliamentary debate were elevated to a higher plateau by his concision and consistent ability to pin down *le mot juste* when providing a sound bite. He was also a much more fluid political thinker than many of the reactionaries in government today, fluidity being an undervalued commodity in all walks of life. We are worse off for having lost his leadership in the face of disappointing election results, for he was a Labour politician in the Gordon Brown mould. Contrast his elegance with the boorish volume of Brian Cowen, and you'll see his value.



EINO MORGAN

WITH Remembrance Day having just gone by, and the future of this State so uncertain, Ireland may finally be coming to terms with its past, pre-independence — a period often suppressed in the public's memory. Eoin Morgan, the Dublin-born cricketer aged just 24, represents this new-found sense of pride in breaking previous historical taboos. His prodigious talent, displayed on the England cricket team, might distance many Irish citizens who lack confidence in our relationship with the UK. However, it is worth remembering that 150 years ago cricket was Ireland's national game. That Eoin Morgan has travelled to England to play his sport of choice only proves his eminence; given that country's pride in cricket, its selection of an Irishman is no token gesture. Nothing is more inspirational than the sight of an athlete at the top of his or her game. That is what we see when we look at Eoin Morgan.

