

# Comedy & Drama

Exhibition



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BBC



informing... educating... entertaining... connecting...

## Stories, people and programmes



This exhibition is the latest in a continuing series of initiatives celebrating the achievements of writers, performers and programme producers associated with the BBC. It profiles the extent and diversity of their work and provides a useful reminder of BBCNI's long-established role in both nurturing, and providing an outlet for, local creative talent.

Radio and television dramas have explored universal themes using accents and storylines familiar as our own. And comedy – as well as making us laugh - has given us alternative perspectives on the problems, pre-occupations and occasional absurdities of life wherever it is lived.

BBCNI has assisted local performers in reaching audiences beyond this place and their success has helped to nurture the region's reputation as a provider of Network programmes across a range of genre and subject areas. Building on these accomplishments by seeking out new writers and production talent is a key objective for the future. Its achievement will be critical to the growth and viability of the creative industries in Northern Ireland and the social, cultural and economic benefits associated with them.

Society, like broadcasting itself, is constantly changing and BBCNI's comedy and drama output must reflect that reality. Quality, innovation and distinctiveness must remain its guiding ambitions as BBCNI fulfils a role that is made uniquely possible as a result of its licence funding and Charter obligations.

This exhibition is an indicative, but inevitably incomplete, account of the stories, personalities and programming which have kept us informed, educated and entertained over almost 80 years of BBC broadcasting in Northern Ireland. With our wealth of local creative and production talent who knows what yet might be achieved?

*Professor Fabian Monds, BBC National Governor for Northern Ireland*



# Comedy



## Keeping us in Stitches



A year or so ago I was invited, for some reason, to attend the opening of a posh shirt shop, in Mayfair, London. It was full of expensively dressed people. We were served pink champagne; a glamorous model with strawberry blonde hair and a dog the size of a cotton bud, also dyed pink, mingled among us. It was as camp and kitsch an occasion as you could possibly imagine. I asked the shop's manager where the shirts were made, and she said, 'Portadown.'

This was at the height of the Garvaghy Road violence, and I thought of all those women stitching and seaming and buttonholing maybe a mile from the mayhem. But Northern Ireland never fails to surprise, astonish and delight you.

I was a reporter based in Belfast from 1968 to 1973, and my great regret was not getting enough of the jokes, quirks, eccentricities and plain lunacy into my copy. This was, admittedly, difficult when people were being bombed, terrified out of their homes, beaten up by the military, or assassinated in front of their children.

At the same time I felt we had missed out some of the flavour of the place, that sardonic, sarcastic, black humour which never died even at the height of the troubles; indeed was often inspired by them. The girls who it was alleged used to take six new dresses into a changing room, then have a friend phone in a bomb warning so they could scamper from the store. ('Did you hear Jimmy was done for shop-lifting? Aye, he lifted BHS six feet.') And the ferocious old ladies who would come out at every event, and say: 'I'll som it op in two words: Ridick. Lous!' Martin Bell and his BBC crew were once filming a rare Protestant riot on the Newtownards Road. He was suddenly aware of a little old lady banging his arm with an umbrella: 'You're photographing things that aren't happening!' she explained.

The Europa Hotel was ground zero for black humour. Once during one of the innumerable evacuations an American reporter demanded to get a letter from his pigeon-hole. Tommy Dunne, the unflappable hall porter, said: 'if ye wait a wee minute, ye'll be getting it airmail.'

It's humour that has kept Northern Ireland sane – comparatively sane – during one third of a century of bad news. Frank Carson is a classic, of course, and Dave Allen may be one of the funniest men on the planet. The Hole In The Wall Gang make me laugh very loud – so much contempt, so lightly worn! But all these people are brilliant; enjoy, relax and let out a massive bellylaugh.

Simon Hoggart



© BBC

#### **Dave Allen (1936-)**

Dublin-born Dave Allen (real name David Tynan O'Mahony) has had a long and celebrated career but is probably best known for *Dave Allen at Large* which ran for 15 years on BBC One. He first came to notice on the *Val Doonican Show* in 1965. Allen's debut for BBC television came with *The Dave Allen Show* which ran from 1968 – 1969. Through his astute analysis of English and Irish society, Allen is recognised as one of the first true observational comics to appear on UK television. Today he lives in semi-retirement in London and devotes much of his time to a favoured pastime, painting.



© BBC

#### **Gerry Anderson (1944-)**

Gerry Anderson, the man who coined the phrase 'Stroke City' after finding himself talking so often about Derry-stroke-Londonderry, is an accomplished bass-player and spent much of his youth touring extensively at home and abroad with some of Ireland's top bands. When he left the music scene he spent five years at university before lecturing and becoming the editor of the *Community Mirror* in his home city. In 1985 he began broadcasting for the BBC. He became a familiar television presence in 1992 with the BBC Northern Ireland chat show *Anderson on the Box* (1992-95). After a period with BBC Radio 4 he returned to Radio Ulster and Radio Foyle, although he still contributes regularly to network radio. The BBC Northern Ireland television series *Anderson in...* in which he takes a wry look at various pursuits, from boating to body-building, recently earned him a Royal Television Society Award as best regional presenter. He has also won a Sony award and a Belfast Telegraph EMA award.



© BBC

#### **Ed Byrne (1972-)**

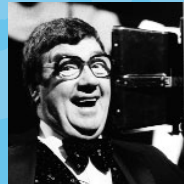
Born in Dublin, Ed Byrne discovered comedy to be his true vocation when he went to Strathclyde University. Stand-up gigs were scarce so he opened and hosted his own club in Glasgow. In addition he also appeared a number of times on BBC Radio Scotland. Byrne has worked extensively in television as both a performer and writer, making memorable appearances on the BBC's *The Stand Up Show* in 1996 and *The Empire Laughs Back* for BBC Northern Ireland in 1998. He has also appeared on programmes ranging from *They Think It's All Over* to *Test the Nation*.



© Dawn Sedgwick Management

#### **Jason Byrne (1972-)**

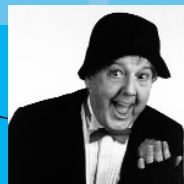
Jason Byrne was born into what he describes as 'a funny family' in Ballinteer, Dublin. A short stint learning accountancy was only 'to keep my mother happy' and it was not long before he was doing gigs in Dublin's pubs and clubs. His manic style of comedy performance soon made him a hit. He has gone on to regular sell-out shows at Vicar Street in Dublin and has been one of the most popular comedy acts at the Edinburgh Festival. On television he has been a regular team captain on BBC NI's *Elvis Has Left the Building* and appeared in the series *The Empire Laughs Back* in 1998. He has also made his mark as an actor in several films - with Brendan Gleeson in John Boorman's *The General* and with Whoopi Goldberg and Gene Wilder in a version of *Alice in Wonderland*. His latest television venture, a production by BBC NI, is a surreal quasi-gameshow *Jason Byrne Hates*.



© BBC

#### **Frank Carson (1926-)**

Famous for his catchphrase 'it's the way I tell 'em', Frank Carson was born and brought up in Great Patrick Street in Belfast's Sailortown area, a place he recently revisited for the BBC Northern Ireland documentary series *Bits of Belfast* (2003). He left school at fourteen and tried his hand at a number of jobs: he worked for a Smithfield bookseller, was a plasterer and even served in the Parachute Regiment. His road to fame began when he joined the minstrel troupe of the Belfast Newsboys' Club in York Street, going by the nickname 'Snowball' Carson. His big break came when he won *Opportunity Knocks* three times and appeared on the BBC's classic variety show *The Good Old Days*. Since then he has been a television regular and has taken his act all over the world. He now divides his time between his homes in Blackpool and Balbriggan, where he has twice been mayor. In 1987 and in recognition of his work for a number of charities, he was knighted into the Order of St Gregory by the Pope at a private ceremony in Rome.



© Wellie Boot Productions

#### **Jimmy Cricket (1945-)**

Born James Mulgrew in Cookstown. He left school at 16 to work in Butlin's at Mosney. He later moved to England where he began to gig in the pubs and clubs of the North. As he worked the clubs, he continued to develop his act and eventually TV producers started to notice. In 1981 he reached the second grand final of LWT's *Search For A Star*. Numerous TV and radio opportunities followed, including five series of *Jimmy's Cricket Team* for BBC Radio 2 and his own show for ITV. He has featured in BBC Radio Ulster's *Recollections* and more recently on TV in BBC Northern Ireland's *Comic Asides*.

© John Lynn



### Sean Crummey (1957-)

The man behind BBC Northern Ireland's political satire series, *The Folks on the Hill*, was born in Belfast in 1957 and educated at St. Malachy's College and Queen's University, Belfast. A career in teaching followed but at the same time another career was taking shape. His gift for mimicry led to appearances on Downtown Radio's *John Daly* show where he did impressions of politicians and celebrities. Soon he was appearing at various clubs, pubs and hotels under the stage name Johnny Day. It was when he teamed up with journalist and broadcaster Ivan Martin that *The Folks on the Hill* radio show was born. There have been six series on BBC Radio Ulster and it has since been launched as an animation series on BBCNI television.

© Chris Hill  
Photographic



### Paul Evans (1950-)

As Head of Production for BBC Northern Ireland, Paul Evans was instrumental in bringing both Patrick Kielty and The Hole In The Wall Gang to radio and television audiences. He has been a key figure in the progress of the Gang who made their debut on BBC Radio Ulster in 1990. Kielty was one of the comedians taking part in *The Empire Laughs Back* which Evans developed for Network television. He then led the team that produced *PK Tonight* and *Patrick Kielty Almost Live*. He is currently working with BBC Northern Ireland's new Comedy Unit.

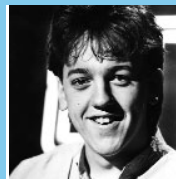
© David Hull  
Promotions



### Gene Fitzpatrick (1945-)

Gene Fitzpatrick became widely known in Northern Ireland during the 80s when he presented the Radio Ulster series *Out to Lunch* and he gained national television exposure through programmes like *Harty* and Scottish Television's *Hogmanay Show*. He was also a regular stand-in presenter for a number of BBC Radio Ulster's daily programmes. In 1986 he featured on Radio Ulster's *Recollections* series.

© Wilfred Green



### Jackie Hamilton (1962-)

Jackie Hamilton was a rock musician before he left the Christian Brothers School in Derry at 16. This was the era of bands such as the Undertones and his own outfit, The Moondogs, who enjoyed success for a time. Later, alongside Caron Keating, he presented BBCNI's youth programme *Channel One*. Various television production roles followed over the years and in 1992 he launched Northern Ireland's first comedy club. He went on to produce some of BBC Northern Ireland's most memorable and successful comedy shows including the double award-winning *Empire Laughs Back*, *Two Ceasefires and a Wedding*, *Give My Head Peace*, *Comic Relief from the Belfast Grand Opera House* and *PK Tonight*. He ran his own company before rejoining the BBC in 2001 as a network development producer. He now heads BBCNI's Comedy Unit.



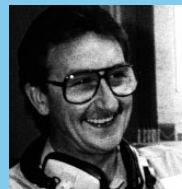
© BBC



### The Hole In The Wall Gang (1989-)

The Gang comprises Michael McDowell, Tim McGarry, Damon Quinn, Martin Reid, and Alexandra Ford who replaced original member Nuala McKeever. Damon Quinn had begun his writing career with school plays and soon progressed to staging amateur productions at the Group Theatre with his friends McDowell, McGarry, Reid and McKeever. Quinn, McDowell and McGarry went to Queen's University, Belfast where, inspired by Live Aid, they put on a charity show entitled *Dram Aid*. But it was after a visit to the Edinburgh Festival that they began to take their comedy more seriously. The Gang's first major public exposure came with a weekly slot on BBC Radio Ulster's *Talkback*. Within three years they were presenting their own series *Perforated Ulster* and winning Sony Awards. UK-wide audiences were to hear them on BBC Radio 5 Live, Radio 2 and Radio 4. Early television appearances included *The Empire Laughs Back* but it was a radio sketch from *Perforated Ulster*, poking fun at love-across-the-barricades story lines, which led to the next big development. Rewritten for television, it became *Two Ceasefires And A Wedding*, broadcast on BBC2 in 1995. It received wide acclaim and a Royal Television Society Award for Best Regional Programme. The following year saw the start of *Friday Night With The Hole In The Wall Gang* and then came *Give My Head Peace*.

© Chris Hill  
Photographic



### George Jones (1944-)

Born and brought up in East Belfast, Jones began his career with groups and showbands such as the Monarchs, along with Van Morrison, and Dave Glover. Then came the cabaret act *Clubsound*, which mixed music and comedy and in which George began to make his mark as a 'character' comedian. Out on his own, he performed at Belfast's Arts Theatre in the show *Up Ulster*, then did the rounds as a stand-up comic entertainer. The opportunity to perform on radio came in the form of a Sunday slot on Downtown Radio. From there he moved to BBC Radio Ulster and his own show *Just Jones*. Within a year he had won a Sony Award for best local radio presenter. He continues to entertain audiences on radio and on television where he has appeared in programmes including *Town Challenge* and *Children in Need*.

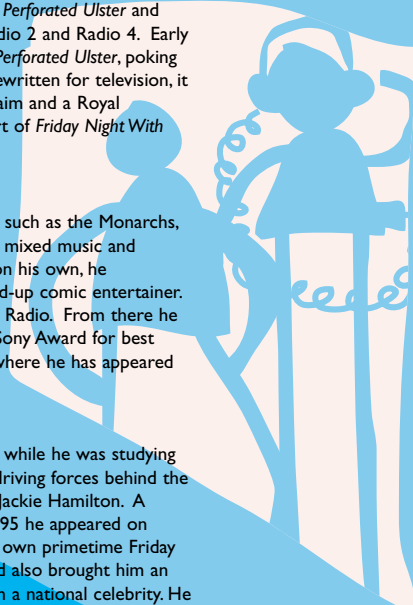
© BBC



### Patrick Kielty (1971-)

Dundrum-born Patrick Kielty is one of Northern Ireland's biggest comedy stars. It was while he was studying psychology at Queen's, Belfast that he began to develop his talent. He was one of the driving forces behind the establishing of Belfast's first stand-up club, The Empire Laughs Back Comedy Club, with Jackie Hamilton. A television special *The Empire Laughs Back* (1994) followed and won an RTS award. In 1995 he appeared on *Comic Relief* and he believes this was the pivotal moment in his career. He was given his own primetime Friday night show on BBC Northern Ireland. *PK Tonight* was a huge success with audiences and also brought him an RTS award for best regional presenter. In 1998 *The Lottery Show* on BBC One made him a national celebrity. He has continued to appear on network television with the series *Patrick Kielty Almost Live* and *Fame Academy*.

on air



© Valerie Whitworth



**Kevin McAleer (1956-)**

Kevin McAleer was born in Omagh in 1956... as he puts it, for something he didn't do. 'I was innocent,' he says, 'and they gave me life.' A renowned comic storyteller, his major breakthrough was on *Nighthawks*, RTE's late 80s programme which mixed chat and music. He went on to become a sell-out at major venues such as Dublin's Olympia and is still a big hit on the comedy circuit. Television appearances include *The Empire Laughs Back*, as both cast member and writer, and *So You Think You're Irish* for ITV. He has written an animation series for the BBC and presented a BBC Northern Ireland comedy night special *My Wee Northern Ireland*. He lives on a farm in Tyrone and lists his pastimes as 'milking the cows and the social security system.'

© BBC



**Owen McFadden (1961-)**

Owen McFadden is the producer behind the successful satire programme *The Folks On The Hill*. He has been with BBC Northern Ireland for fifteen years, during which time he has produced features, documentaries and music programmes for local and network radio.

© David Hull Promotions



**May McFettridge (1951-)**

May McFettridge describes herself as "one of our most renowned sophisticates, the greatest cultural creation to come out of Ulster since the fry". She is also the alter ego of John Linehan who brought the character to stage, television and radio. Early broadcasting work came via Downtown Radio and appearances on UTV's *Kelly*. A great supporter of *Children In Need*, May makes regular appearances at the annual event. In 2003 'May's plod for Pudsey' took her all around the country in a two day fund-raising trek. John Linehan took a personal look at Belfast's Antrim Road, where he was brought up, in the BBC Northern Ireland television series *Bits of Belfast*.

© Chris Hill Photographic



**Nuala McKeever (1964-)**

After graduating from Queen's, Belfast Nuala McKeever joined the BBC where she worked in current affairs. During that time she was also developing her comedy performing and writing with a group of friends. Together they were to become The Hole In The Wall Gang. She featured in their first big successes, the award-winning series *Perforated Ulster* and the classic *Two Ceasefires and a Wedding*. Then came *Give My Head Peace*. Some time later she left the Gang to develop a solo career. She has since had her own series on UTV and has written and presented a profile of C.S. Lewis for the BBC Northern Ireland television series *Northern Writers* and is an occasional guest presenter on BBC Radio Ulster.

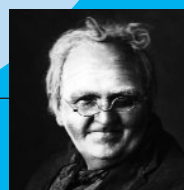
© Alwyn James



**Ivan Martin (1952-)**

Ivan Martin has dabbled in comedy and the stage since his early teens. At thirteen he appeared in *Sticks and Stones* at the Group with the late James Young. He went to Queen's to study politics and history and then began a long career in radio. He was with Downtown Radio from its early days and presented the station's breakfast show for almost 20 years. It was when he teamed up with the impersonator Sean Crummey that the idea for *Folks On The Hill* was born. Encouraged by the BBC's Owen McFadden they began to write material. After a pilot, *Folks* was commissioned for a six-part series. It is still going strong on radio and has made a successful transition to television as an animation series.

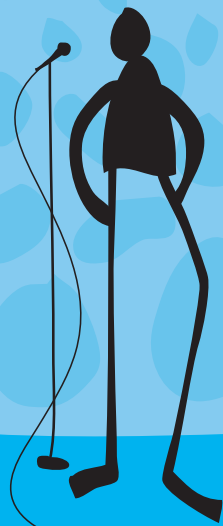
© BBC



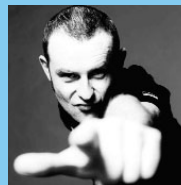
**Matt Mulcaghey (1875-1959)**

'The oul' besom man from Tyrone,' whose real name was Wilson Guy, made his first broadcast for 2BE, the earliest incarnation of BBC Northern Ireland, in March 1927. He was to remain a regular writer and broadcaster for the next 25 years, reciting humorous dialect monologues such as *Courtin' and marryin'*. However, at a time when producers such as Sam Hanna Bell and Raymond Glendinning were roaming Northern Ireland and bringing the authentic voice of the countryside to the microphone the idea of a middle-class actor attempting to pass himself off as a Tyrone rustic made his act seem increasingly stagey and his popularity waned.





© Dawn Sedgwick Management



**Colin Murphy (1968-)**

Colin Murphy, from Downpatrick, was an illustrator for magazines including *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan* in London before becoming a comic. It was after returning home in 1992 that he paid a visit to The Empire in Belfast and plucked up the courage to do an open spot. He went down well – so well that he was soon to become a regular MC there. His standing as a live performer grew rapidly. Now he performs sold-out runs at the Edinburgh Festival. His broadcast media CV includes *The Empire Laughs Back*, the comedy music series *Elvis has left the Building* and *Something for the Weekend*, of which he presented several series. Murphy is also an actor. He appeared as a comedian in the movie *Divorcing Jack* and in 2003 *Holy Cross* gave him the chance to play an altogether more serious role.

© BBC



**Jimmy O'Dea (1899-1965)**

Jimmy O'Dea was the 'archetypal Dublin comedian' and enjoyed great success whenever he visited Northern Ireland, drawing large audiences to see his frequent performances at Belfast's Empire Theatre. In 1941 he was one of the stars of a controversial Saint Patrick's day broadcast jointly undertaken by the Northern Ireland Home Service and Radio Eireann. The programme was prompted by a desire to recognise the contribution made by the thousands of Irish men and women to the war effort. *Irish Half Hour* was a resounding success, enjoyed at home and abroad. Throughout his career, O'Dea toured constantly. He was in a number of films. First came *Penny Paradise* (1938) then *Let's be Famous* (1939) and in Disney's *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (1959) where he was cast as the King of the Leprechauns.

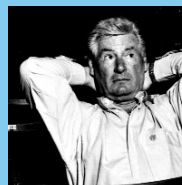
© Malcolm Hulme



**Owen O'Neill (1954-)**

Cookstown-born O'Neill's first ambition was to be a poet. Living in London he began reciting his work in local venues. His readings became more and more like comedy performances and eventually the poetry element disappeared completely. In 1985, he secured a slot at London's Comedy Store. His television debut came in 1986 on *Saturday Live* and he has since made numerous appearances on programmes such as *The Empire Laughs Back*. In 1991 he wrote *Arise And Go Now*, a comedy for BBCNI about the IRA, priests, pigeons and W.B. Yeats, as part of BBC2's *Screenplay* series. Other writing credits include the one-man play *Off My Face* and *The Fitz* (2000) a surreal comedy series for BBC2. He has also appeared in films, including *Michael Collins*.

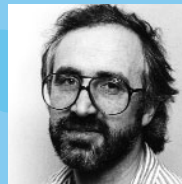
© Andy Hollingsworth



**Roy Walker (1940-)**

Belfast-born Roy Walker became famous as the host of *Catchphrase* on ITV. In his youth he was an athlete, holding the title of Northern Ireland champion hammer thrower for two years. Later he joined the Army where he served for seven years. In the late 60s he was a regular performer at the Talk Of The Town club at Bridge End in East Belfast before moving to England where he toured in clubs and cabaret. In 1977 he came to national prominence through the television programme *New Faces*. Many major television appearances followed and in 1987 he became host of *Catchphrase*. On BBC Radio Ulster he has presented a six-part comedy series *The Way We Tell 'Em* and has been a stand-in presenter of *The George Jones Show*.

© Wilfred Green



**Charlie Warmington (1950-)**

Charlie Warmington, originally from Enniskillen, has enjoyed a successful and diverse career in the BBC, working as a journalist, producer, editor, station manager, commissioning editor and writer. His first comedy venture proper was *Scene Around Bricks* (1972) which he performed with the Queen's University Revue and was a loose parody of BBC Northern Ireland's tea-time news. Throughout the 80s he built an impressive comedy portfolio which included the long-running radio and theatre satire *Northern Lights* (1984), which won a Sony Silver, and *Perforated Ulster* (1988) co-written and performed by the Hole in the Wall Gang and which won a Sony Gold. Since then he has been editor and executive producer on a number of BBC Northern Ireland's most successful productions, including *PK Tonight*, *Half Sketch*, *Half Biscuit* and *Something for the Weekend*.

© Stanley Matchett



**James Young (1928-74)**

Born in Ballymoney, James Young's first job was in an estate agent's office. At 16 he joined the Youth Hostel Association's amateur dramatic group and in 1943 he won the best actor award at the Ulster Drama Festival. Soon he was a professional actor and over the years toured everywhere from London's West End to the Middle-East. Real fame began when Joseph Tomelty offered him the part of Derek the window cleaner in the BBC Northern Ireland Home Service show *The McConeys*. Later he got his own radio series, *The Young Idea*, which was to spawn some of his best known comic characters such as Mrs O'Condriac, Wee Ernie the shipyard worker and the Cherry Valley snob. In 1960 he appeared in the Group Theatre's production of Sam Cree's *Wedding Fever*. It was to run there for eleven years. He toured with his various solo stage acts which were recorded on LP and in 1973 began a Saturday night comedy/variety television show for BBCNI with all his most loved characters. Catchphrases such as "Och, go on" and "Stap fightin'" became embedded in the public consciousness. His sudden death in his mid-fifties robbed Northern Ireland of a comic genius who was at the height of his popularity.

# Drama



## A Torrent of Talent

© Justin Sutcliffe



Drama works in mysterious ways. A play adds perspective, bestows new meaning, unfolds our understanding because it has spoken to us directly through its characters and we recognised them, let them in. If it's good, the characters stay. I wish I lived in Annie McCartney's *Two Doors Down*. I think of William Trevor's *Beyond The Pale*, on its smooth surface an ironic reflection on middle age and marriage, below it a rip tide of memory and misapprehension. John McGahern's *Amongst Women*, with Tony Doyle perfectly cast in the lead, played the same, subtle game. You met the man, you couldn't help but listen to him. Gradually, you comprehended what had made him.

Plays move us, in time and space, into tricky situations, behind other people's eyes. Just hearing a voice with a Northern Irish accent can make English people anxious. But put that voice into a play, place it in a dramatic situation, give it the right lines to say and people will stay and listen. They may even be moved to laugh, cry, reconsider.

This is why it is vital for plays to be written from the heart and played with integrity. When drama recreates an episode from real life, as in Terry Cafolla's *Holy Cross*, we may recognise its story from the news but a play, gradually, makes us enter its meaning. Drama communicates complications. It makes bare fact blossom.

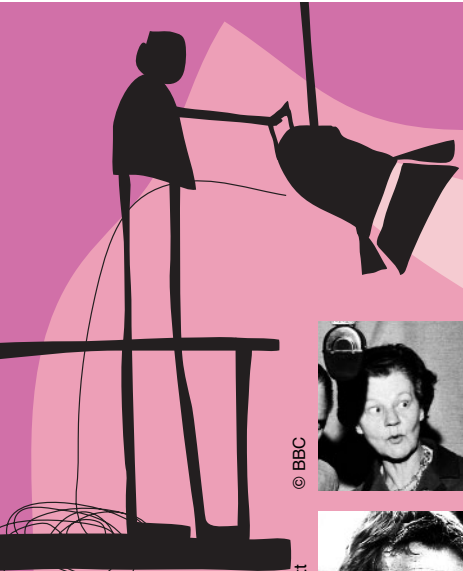
A significant drama department in BBC Northern Ireland does not mean every work coming out of it has to be freighted with local history, flagged with political messages, swagged with big names. Its great flair has been constantly to look for new voices, new people. When it finds them the audience shares the thrill. I remember seeing Kenneth Branagh, long ago and way before he was an international name, in Graham Reid's *Billy* plays. The plays were great. He was, undoubtedly, a star even then. Both he and Reid are names on a very long list that the drama department in Northern Ireland either found or helped flourish.

The BBC's role as patient nurse of talent is significant. If there is a producer, a Ronnie Mason, a Michael Heffernan, a Robert Cooper, say, who will look at your work and bring it into full dramatic being then the whole audience benefits, not just in Northern Ireland, or even the UK, but right around the world. Writers, directors, actors, composers, designers, become part of a creative community. One idea leads to another, one argument about how to get it right, or where to find the truth – becomes part of a continuous (if sometimes tumultuous) flow.

The important thing is that this river should go on rolling. Other nations and regions of the BBC have seen it come and go, in space one decade, dry the next. Not so Northern Ireland. Long may its torrent rush and ripple and roar.

Gillian Reynolds





© BBC

**Elizabeth Begley (1909-1993)**

One of Northern Ireland's best-loved actors, she was one of the founding members of the Group Theatre, which was at the forefront of Northern Ireland drama in the 40s and 50s with plays by writers such as Joseph Tomelty and Sam Thompson. Her achievements on stage and screen were many but she may perhaps be best remembered for her role as Henrietta Toosell in the BBC NI radio series *The McCooeys*. In this and a string of other productions, her voice became familiar to BBC Home Service listeners. She acted in a number of highly-regarded radio plays including *Quin's Secret* (1957) and *Tully's Experts* (1960) by George Shiels, *All Soul's Night* (1964) by Tomelty and *Over the Bridge* (1965) by Thompson.

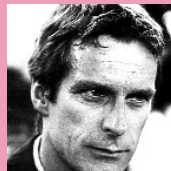
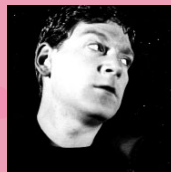


Image courtesy of Ronan Bennett

**Ronan Bennett (1956-)**

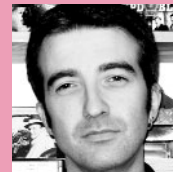
Belfast-born playwright Bennett lives in London. He was the co-writer of *Stolen Years: Before and After Guildford* (1990), the account of Paul Hill's trial and imprisonment. His first major television success came with BBCNI's *Love Lies Bleeding* (1993). The tale of a Republican prisoner released from the Maze prison for 24 hours to track down the killers of his one-time girlfriend won an award at the 1993 New York Festival. Later, the series *Rebel Heart* (2000), for BBCNI, centred on the Easter Rising and the subsequent conflict. His most recent television screenplay was *Hamburg Cell* (2004) a Channel 4 dramatisation of the 9/11 plot. Bennett is also a gifted novelist. His book *The Catastrophist* (1998) was nominated for the Whitbread Prize and won the Belfast City Council Literature Award whilst his most recent novel *Havoc, in its Third Year* was a contender for the Man Booker Prize 2004.



© Wilfred Green

**Kenneth Branagh (1960-)**

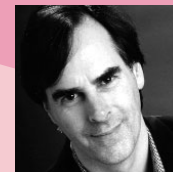
Kenneth Charles Branagh was born in Belfast. When the Troubles began in 1969, his family moved to Reading. He went to RADA after which he won a major part in the West End production of *Another Country*, a performance which brought him awards and accolades. Aged 23 he joined the Royal Shakespeare Company where he became the youngest actor ever to play Henry V and earned the label 'the new Olivier.' Later he founded his own Renaissance Theatre Company. His television breakthrough came as Billy in Graham Reid's three classic plays for BBC Northern Ireland. *Too Late to Talk to Billy*, *A Matter of Choice for Billy* and *A Coming to Terms for Billy* were broadcast in 1982, 1983 and 1984. While working on another BBC mini-series, *The Fortunes of War* (1987), he met his future wife, Emma Thompson but they divorced in 1995. Branagh's international standing continues to grow. He directed and starred in a powerful new film version of *Henry V* and he brought Shakespeare to mainstream audiences in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) with Denzel Washington and Michael Keaton. Recent major roles have included that of the Nazi SS chief Heydrich in the award-winning BBC Television broadcast *Conspiracy* (2001), the explorer *Shackleton* (2002) and the foppish Gilderoy Lockhart in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002).



© Emma McKenna

**Terry Cafolla (1969-)**

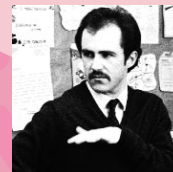
Terry Cafolla grew up in Armagh and now lives in Belfast. He is one of the current group of writers to have started in television, learning his craft through the prestigious Carlton Screenwriters' Course. He made an immediate impact with his first television drama, *Holy Cross* (2003), a BBCNI network production centred on two fictional families on either side of the divide during the traumatic events on Belfast's Ardoyne Road in 2001. *Holy Cross* won Cafolla recognition as a writer of skill and sensitivity. Awards included a BAFTA nomination and an FIPA D'Ors at the Biarritz Festival.



© Chris Hill Photographic

**Robert Cooper (1950-)**

Robert Cooper studied English and Drama at Hull University. He began his broadcasting career in local radio and later worked as a producer at the BBC network centre in Manchester before spending a brief period with the BBC in Belfast. He quickly developed an affinity with Northern Ireland and returned in 1977, producing radio plays. In 1984 he moved back to Manchester where he produced plays by Anthony Minghella and Jimmy McGovern. In 1988 he returned to Belfast as television drama producer. Soon afterwards he produced the feature film *Truly Madly Deeply*, directed by Minghella and starring Juliet Stevenson and Alan Rickman. A number of television films followed, including *Beyond The Pale* (1989) by William Trevor, *The Hen House* (1989) and *Love Lies Bleeding* (1993). He later became Head of Drama, responsible for both radio and television, and was executive producer of *The Hanging Gale* (1995), the Graham Reid films *Life After Life* (1995) and *The Precious Blood* (1996), as well as the Oscar-nominated short film *Dance Lexie Dance* (1996). In 1993 he was instrumental in bringing *Ballykissangel* to television screens. Other productions include *Amongst Women* (1998), *Eureka Street* (1999), *Rebel Heart* (2000) and the feature film *Divorcing Jack*. More recently, he was executive producer of *Messiah 1*, *Messiah 2* and *Messiah 3*, *Murphy's Law*, *As The Beast Sleeps*, *Holy Cross*, *Pulling Moves*, and *Gunpowder, Treason and Plot*.



© Wilfred Green

**Lorcan Cranitch (1959-)**

Lorcan, (Irish for Laurence), was born and brought up in Dublin. A talented pianist, he believes that if he had not been an actor he might have become a professional musician like his sister. He began his theatrical career while at university and enjoyed many successful years of stage work before television roles came his way. He has appeared in a diverse range of productions, from *Life after Life* and *Rebel Heart* to the light-hearted *Ballykissangel*. But it was his performance as Jimmy Beck in ITV's *Cracker* that brought him most notice. Recent appearances have included the BBC spy drama *Spooks* and his role as RUC Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan in Channel 4's *Omagh* (2004).





© Wilfred Green

### Margaret D'Arcy (1918-)

Margaret D'Arcy was born in Belfast. After drama college in London she performed at Stratford before working with repertory theatre in the North of England. Back in Belfast, she joined the Group Theatre, then an amateur company, while during the day she had a job monitoring armed forces' mail for lapses of wartime security. When Harold Goldblatt turned the Group into a professional company she was able to concentrate on acting full-time. She has had a long and distinguished career. She gave notable performances in the dialect plays of George Shiels and St John Ervine, radio versions of which were broadcast on the Northern Ireland Home Service in the 50s. She has appeared in numerous BBC Northern Ireland productions, featuring in plays such as Stewart Love's *Run Rabbit Run* (1972), Sean O'Casey's one-act burlesque *Bedtime Story* (1972) and Stewart Parker's *The Iceberg* (1975). An enjoyable cameo was her role as Mrs Parker in Graham Reid and Bernard Farrell's Northern Ireland television sitcom *So You Think You've Got Troubles* (1987).



© Pacemaker Press

### Tony Doyle (1942-2000)

Tony Doyle, born in Frenchpark, County Roscommon, was arguably the finest Irish actor of his generation. He was an ever-present figure on screen from the 60s but television viewers may remember him best as Brian Quigley, the wheeler-dealer in *Ballykissangel*. He was to receive two awards for one of his final roles, that of Michael Moran in the BBC Northern Ireland network production *Amongst Women*. His portrayal of Moran in the John McGahern adaptation won him a best actor award from the Irish Film and Television Academy and a Silver Nymph at Monte Carlo. After his death BBC Northern Ireland established the Tony Doyle Bursary in his memory.



© Wilfred Green

### Adrian Dunbar (1958-)

A noted stage and screen actor, Dunbar was born in Portadown and spent childhood years in Enniskillen before studying at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. A memorable early screen appearance was in the BBC Northern Ireland production *The Englishman's Wife* (1990), in which he starred opposite Imelda Staunton. He came to international prominence with *Hear My Song* (1991), his film about Joseph Locke. Further high-profile roles followed, including *The Crying Game* (1992), *Force of Duty* (1992) and *The General* (1998). Dunbar has been in a number of BBC Northern Ireland network productions and in 2000 he appeared in the film *Wild About Harry*, also featuring Brendan Gleeson, Amanda Donohoe, James Nesbitt, George Wendt (Norm in *Cheers*) and Bronagh Gallagher. The film enjoyed a cinema release before premiering on BBC2 in 2003.



© Brendan Murphy

### Pearse Elliott (1972-)

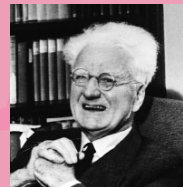
Elliott, born in Lenadoon, West Belfast, divides his time between Belfast and Dublin. His writing career was kick-started when he won the BBC Young Playwright's award in 1995 for *The Demise of Joseph Loughran*. Later *A Rap at the Door* (1999) examined the lives of a West Belfast brother and sister struggling to come to terms with the disappearance of their mother, a theme with disturbing real-life resonances. Elliott's first foray as a director was *Short Back & Sides* (2002), set in a West Belfast barber's shop and starring James Ellis. His more recent comedy drama series *Pulling Moves* (2004), set in Lenadoon, follows the fortunes of four lads trying to make a living by doing as little as possible and getting into trouble in the process. A recent project, as both writer and director, is the film *The Mighty Celt*, with Gillian Anderson, Robert Carlyle and Ken Stott.



© BBC

### James Ellis (1932-)

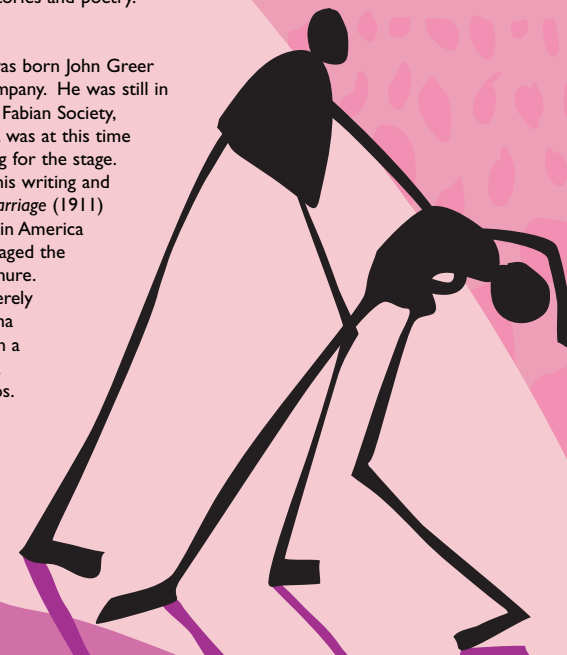
Originally from East Belfast, Ellis won a scholarship to Methodist College, Belfast where he first discovered acting. In 1950 he went to Queen's but he abandoned university for the stage, joining the Belfast Arts Theatre. In 1951 he received a Tyrone Guthrie scholarship to the Bristol Old Vic. He returned to Belfast and to the Group Theatre where he became Artistic Director in the late 50s but he resigned when the Group's directors refused to stage Sam Thompson's play *Over the Bridge*. Instead, he mounted the play himself at the Empire Theatre and later at the Olympia in Dublin. It was to break house records at both venues. As an actor, Ellis featured in a number of plays for the Home Service of the BBC. Then came television and the role that was to bring him into every UK home - PC Bert Lynch in *Z Cars*, a series that ran for 16 years. It is the part for which he will always be remembered. But numerous other significant performances followed, most notably the character of Norman Martin, father of Billy, played by Ken Branagh, in the Graham Reid trilogy. In recent years he has been Uncle Minto in *Ballykissangel* (1999). Ellis now lives in England. He acts, directs and is a prolific writer of both short stories and poetry.



© BBC

### St John Ervine (1883-1971)

The acclaimed playwright, novelist, critic, biographer, and conversationalist was born John Greer Ervine in Belfast. His first job was at age fourteen in a Belfast insurance company. He was still in his teens when he moved to London. Once established there, he joined the Fabian Society, another member of which, Leonora Mary Davis, became his wife in 1911. It was at this time that Ervine became involved in repertory theatre and first attempted writing for the stage. He met W.B. Yeats, another Fabian Society member, who was impressed by his writing and facilitated the staging of his first full-length play, the Belfast tragedy *Mixed Marriage* (1911) at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Further success followed both in Ireland and in America with plays such as *Jane Clegg* (1913) and *John Ferguson* (1915). He even managed the Abbey for a time but the conflict in Ireland in 1916 meant it was a short tenure. Joining the Dublin Fusiliers, Ervine fought in World War I where he was severely wounded and lost a leg. He lived in England after the war and became drama critic of *The Observer*, returning to his own dramatic writing in the 30s with a number of plays reflecting the Ulster personality. His most celebrated work, *Boyd's Shop* (1935) has long been a firm favourite of amateur dramatic groups. Ervine viewed himself as a defender of individual liberty and *Jane Clegg* is often cited as a prototype for modern feminist drama. Among his most memorable radio dramas were the plays *Friends and Relations* and *John Ferguson*, the latter featuring the eminent Ulster actor R.H. McCandless. Ervine contributed much to BBC Northern Ireland's output, including a masterful account of the work of Shaw for the 1948-49 series *Irish Writers*. On his 80th birthday, a special BBC programme paid tribute to his life and work.



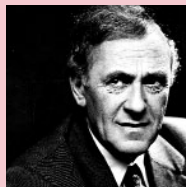
© BBC



#### **Bronagh Gallagher (1972-)**

Bronagh Gallagher is one of the most sought-after of the current generation of Northern Ireland actors. She has appeared in numerous high-profile Hollywood films and worked with some of the great acting names. However the Derry-born actor is most drawn to roles which tackle issues closer to home. She made her name as the feisty backing singer Bernie McGloughlin in the film adaptation of Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* (1991). The film's success spawned a spin-off ITV series, *Over the Rainbow* (1993), written by Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, which gave her the opportunity to reprise the role. In the cinema, she appeared in *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Mary Reilly* (1996) and *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* (1999). She has been in a number of BBC Northern Ireland's successful film productions including *Divorcing Jack* (1998) and *Wild about Harry* (2000). More recently she has given moving performances in the award-winning BBC television films *Sinners* (2002) and *Holy Cross* (2003).

© Leslie Stuart



#### **Harold Goldblatt (1901-1982)**

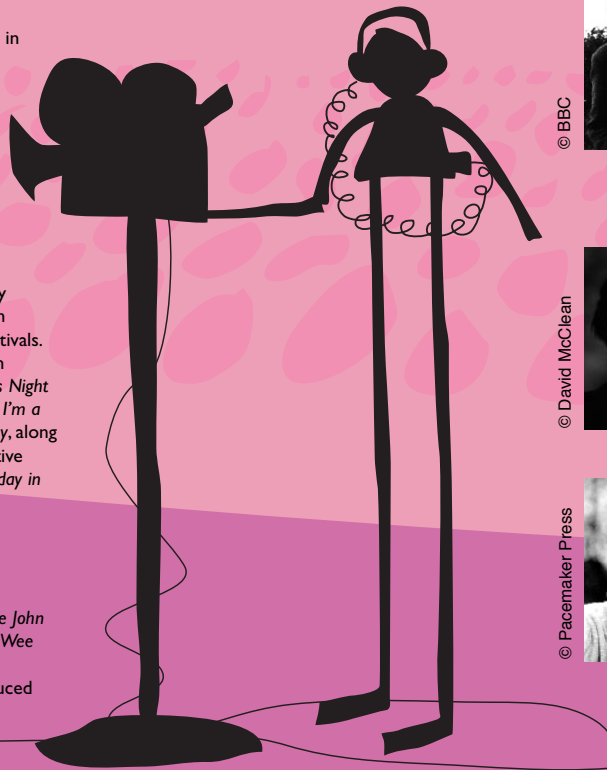
Harold Goldblatt was born in Manchester. His father, a tailor, had come to England from Kiev, fleeing persecution. But Harold's mother was perhaps the most important influence on his life. It was she who took him to Manchester's Victoria Theatre to see the popular melodramas of the period. When he was eight, the slump in the cotton industry forced the family to move to Belfast. In his teens, Harold was apprenticed to a linen factory on the Springfield Road. He pursued his interest in theatre through the Jewish Institute when it opened in 1929. His productions were staged regularly and entered for local festivals. He was one of the founders of the Group Theatre, modelled on the Abbey and with a distinctly local voice. For the Northern Ireland Home Service he was one of a core group of actors who featured in significant radio plays – Joseph Tomelty's *All Souls Night* (1964), Sam Thompson's *The Evangelist* (1965), *The Old Broom* (1972) by George Shiels and works by Stewart Parker including *I'm a Dreamer Montreal* (1977). He had a distinguished career in major films, including *Nine Hours to Rama* and *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, along with guest appearances in popular TV series such as *Dr. Who*, *Danger Man* and *The Persuaders*. He continued to have a productive relationship with BBC Northern Ireland and was reader or narrator on such programmes as the radio series *Today and Yesterday in Northern Ireland* and *Modern Irish History*.

© Phil Smyth



#### **Dan Gordon (1960-)**

Dan Gordon is probably best known on BBC NI for his portrayal of Red Hand Luke in *Give My Head Peace*. Often seen in television drama and comedy he has devoted much of his career to the theatre gaining international recognition through his performance in Marie Jones' one man show *A Night in November*. Regular appearances on BBC NI have been as diverse as *The John Daly Show*, *I Fought the Law*, and *Pulling Moves*. He has presented and co-authored the documentaries *Farewell To Mersey Street*, *Wee Buns*, *Behind the Scenes of Give My Head Peace* and a profile of Brian Moore as part of the BBC NI television series *Northern Writers*. He is also presenter of a six part *Primary Focus* series for schools and has appeared in over a hundred BBC NI produced plays for Radio 4.



© BBC



#### **Sir Tyrone Guthrie (1900-1971)**

Born in Tunbridge Wells, Tyrone Guthrie was only three weeks old when his family moved to Ireland. After studying at Oxford University he joined the BBC as a drama producer and was sent to Belfast to the fledgling 2BE station. He was to have the distinction in 1924 of being the first voice listeners heard and was also responsible for directing and producing many of the first plays transmitted from Belfast. It was a steep learning curve but he never looked back. One of his first productions was *Land of Heart's Desire* by W.B. Yeats and he took a leading role himself in *The House in the Quiet Glen* by John Coulter. Guthrie was to stay at 2BE for only two years and went on to become one of the greatest directors in the English theatre, being perhaps most associated with the Old Vic in the years 1937-1952. He later established the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis and was knighted in 1961. After his death his home at Annaghmakerrig, Co. Monaghan, became a retreat for writers and artists. It is funded by the Arts Councils of Northern Ireland and the Republic.

© David McClean



#### **B J Hogg (1955-)**

B J Hogg, from Lisburn, was a showband musician when someone mentioned that the Arts Theatre were putting on a musical called *The Rockin' 50's* and needed actors who could sing and play a bit. A sell-out run and an Equity card later, the die was cast. He has since established himself as a fine comic performer and a multi-faceted actor. Early television work saw him writing and performing in BBC Northern Ireland's controversial late-night live programme *The Show*. Today he is seen most often in *Give My Head Peace* as Uncle Mervyn. Other television appearances have included parts in *The Hanging Gale* (1995) and *Eureka Street* (1999) and he has been in the films *Titanic Town* and *Divorcing Jack*. In 1998 he was in Hollywood for Oscar night with the nominated short film *Dance Lexie Dance* in which he played a father struggling to bring up his daughter after her mother has died.

© Pacemaker Press



#### **Tina Kellegher (1967-)**

Dublin born Tina Kellegher became well known to television audiences as Niamh in *Ballykissangel* (1996-1999). However, her first major break was in another BBC Northern Ireland production, the three-part comedy thriller *Murder in Eden* (1991). Her first substantial film role was in Roddy Doyle's *The Snapper* (1993). In 1995 she appeared in *The Hanging Gale* and in *Sinners* (2002) she played the strict disciplinarian Sister Bernadette in a drama based on the Magdalen laundries in Ireland.

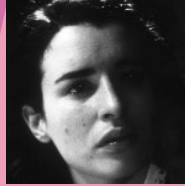
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**Dervla Kirwan (1971-)**

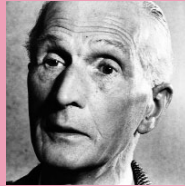
Dervla Kirwan grew up in Churchtown outside Dublin. She began attending drama classes at the age of 15 and it was not long before she landed her breakthrough role in *The Troubles* (1988). Further offers came for both television and stage work but she stayed at school to concentrate on her Leaving Certificate. When she did embark on her acting career she was immediately in demand and has remained so. An early major role was in Melvyn Bragg's *A Time to Dance* (1992) in which she played an 18-year-old having an affair with a bank manager. Then came the wartime comedy series *Goodnight Sweetheart* (1993), with Nicholas Lyndhurst, which ran for three years. In 1996 *Ballykissangel* brought her to television audiences all over the world with the part of the bar-owner Assumpta Fitzgerald. She has since appeared in many BBC television series including *Eureka Street* (1999), *Randall and Hopkirk Deceased* (2000) *Dalziel & Pascoe* (2002) and *55 Degrees North* (2004).



© Pat Redmond

**Susan Lynch (1971-)**

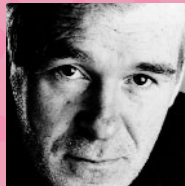
Born in Newry, her earliest stage performances were in Irish language plays. After winning a place at London's Central School of Speech and Drama in 1989, she was awarded the Kenneth Branagh Renaissance Award for most promising student. Following college she performed at many top theatres, including the National. Her breakthrough television role was in *Cracker* in 1993. Numerous parts followed, including a memorable performance in *Amongst Women* (1998), the BBCNI adaptation of John McGahern's novel. She also appeared as the eccentric and humorous Stevie in BBCNI's *Any Time Now* (2002), a series about a group of friends living in Dublin. Feature films have included *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994), *Nora* (2000), in which she starred opposite Ewan McGregor, and *From Hell* (2001).



© BBC

**R.H. McCandless (1884-1971)**

Ballymena-born McCandless began his career in the theatre aged 12 years when he appeared in the melodrama *London by Night*. He later became one of the pioneers of a thriving amateur drama scene in Northern Ireland. In 1923 he formed the Carrickfergus Players. In its early days the group specialised in one-act 'native' plays about local people and local lives and delivered in a local dialect. At about the same time he also became involved with the Northern Drama League for whom his first production was Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* but the League broke up at the beginning of the War. Later McCandless became a prominent member of the Group Theatre. He featured in countless radio dramas for the Northern Ireland Home Service including adaptations of Rutherford Mayne's *The Drone* (1942), George Shiels *Macook's Corner* (1959) and W.B. Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* (1965). However, he is perhaps best remembered for his mesmerising performance in the adaptation of St John Ervine's *John Ferguson* (1946) in which he played the title role.



© Jill Jennings

**Ian McElhinney (1948-)**

Actor and director Ian McElhinney was born and brought up in Belfast. Educated at Belfast Royal Academy and Friends' School, Lisburn, he began his acting career in 1978 and has established himself as one of the best-known local faces and voices on television, film and in the theatre. Recent television roles have included *Murphy's Law* (2003) and *Omagh* (2004). His film career has included *Michael Collins* (1996), *Hamlet* (1996), *The Boxer* (1997) and *Divorcing Jack* (1998). In recent years McElhinney, who is married to the internationally-successful playwright Marie Jones, has directed productions of her *Stones in his Pockets* (1999) and *A Night in November* (2002).



© BBC

**Micheál MacLiammóir (1899-1978)**

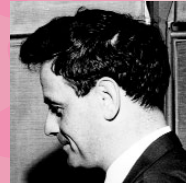
Micheál MacLiammóir was born Alfred Willmore in London. He was to become one of the most significant and influential figures in the Irish theatre. He enjoyed a long association with The Gate Theatre which he co-founded with his partner Hilton Edwards in Dublin in 1930 and which opened with a production of Goethe's *Faust*. MacLiammóir not only played the title role but designed and painted the set. He was to have a long involvement with the Gate and a long and distinguished career. Among its peaks were an acclaimed *Hamlet* (1934) and his one-man show *The Importance of Being Oscar* with which he toured the world in the 60s. His association with 2BE and BBC NI was productive. He played the title role in Richard Rowley's *Apollo in Mourne* and appeared in *The Exiled* (1955) alongside Margaret D'Arcy and Harold Goldblatt. Throughout his career he continued to contribute to broadcasting as writer, reader and actor and the series *All for Hecuba* on Radio 4 gave him the opportunity to recount the myriad stories from his life.



Image courtesy of Gerard McSorley

**Gerard McSorley (1950-)**

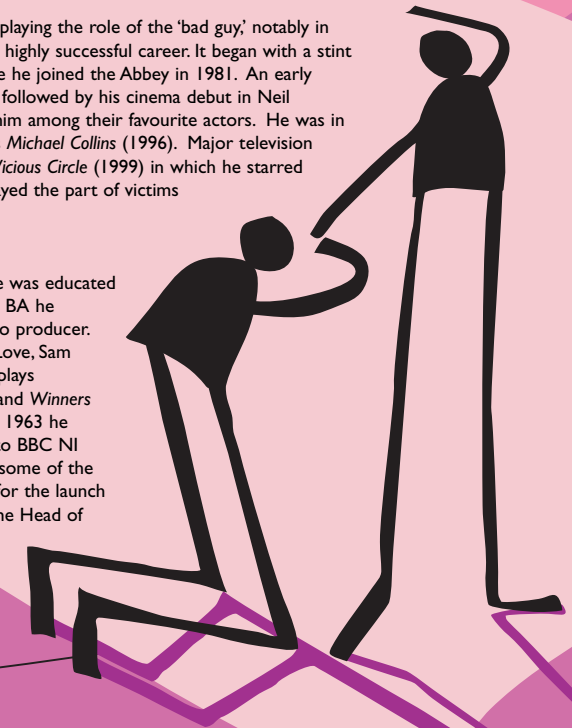
Tyrone-born McSorley is a renowned character actor, often playing the role of the 'bad guy,' notably in the film *Veronica Guerin* (2003), but his versatility has led to a highly successful career. It began with a stint working alongside Jim Sheridan at the Project Theatre before he joined the Abbey in 1981. An early screen appearance was in the TV film *S.O.S. Titanic*. This was followed by his cinema debut in Neil Jordan's *Danny Boy* (1982). Both Jordan and Sheridan count him among their favourite actors. He was in Sheridan's film *In The Name Of The Father* (1993) and Jordan's *Michael Collins* (1996). Major television credits include *The Hanging Gale* (1995) and more recently *Vicious Circle* (1999) in which he starred alongside Ken Stott. He was in *Bloody Sunday* (2002) and played the part of victims campaigner Michael Gallagher in *Omagh* (2004).



© BBC

**Ronald Mason (1926-1997)**

Ronald Charles Frederick Mason was born in Ballymena. He was educated at Queen's University, Belfast. After leaving university with a BA he taught for six years before joining the BBC in 1955 as a radio producer. He was particularly drawn to Irish writers such as Stewart Love, Sam Thompson and Brian Friel. He directed a number of Friel's plays which was awarded the BBC Prix Italia for Radio Drama. In 1963 he moved to BBC Radio in London but in 1970 he came back to BBC NI as Head of Programmes, a post he held for six years during some of the worst of the Troubles. During that time he was responsible for the launch of BBC Radio Ulster. He later returned to London to become Head of Radio Drama. Outside the BBC he was involved in the European Broadcasting Union, The National Council of Drama Training and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. He also found time to direct plays by Beckett and David Mamet. He died in 1997 at the age of 70.



© BBC



**Min Milligan (1881-1966)**

Mary 'Min' Briery born in Belfast on May 30th 1882 was a well known amateur actress. In 1942 and at the suggestion of her son-in-law, Joseph Tomelty, Milligan joined the emerging Group Theatre. She was a regular player there until Sir Tyrone Guthrie invited her to join his Festival of Britain Players in the *Sham Prince* where top London critic Ivor Brown in his review described her as having "the sweetest smile on the London stage". Milligan was Aunt Sarah throughout the run of the Northern Ireland Home Service's legendary *The McCooeys*. She even received a proposal of marriage from a besotted fan. Milligan went on to appear in films, the most notable of which was Carol Reid's *Odd Man Out* starring James Mason.

© BBC



**Liam Neeson (1952-)**

Ballymena-born Neeson was a forklift operator, a truck driver and an assistant architect before becoming an actor. He was also a keen amateur boxer, as his famous broken nose indicates. In the 70s he joined the Lyric, making his professional debut in *The Risen People*. In 1977 he moved to Dublin and the Abbey. An early television appearance was in a BBCNI schools' programme about the railways. Later came the BBC NI drama *My Dear Palestrina* (1980), by Bernard MacLaverty, in which he starred opposite Eleanor Bron. His cinema break was *Excalibur* (1981) directed by John Boorman who had seen him on stage at the Abbey. Other films followed but it was not until the comic book caper *Darkman* (1990) that he truly came to public notice. He is now a major Hollywood star with a long list of film credits. His portrayal of Oskar Schindler in *Schindler's List* has brought him most acclaim, as well as an Oscar nomination and a Golden Globe. He has also appeared in *Rob Roy* (1995), *Michael Collins* (1996) and more recently *Star Wars Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace* (1999) and *Gangs of New York* (2002).

© BBC



**James Nesbitt (1965-)**

Born in Coleraine, James Nesbitt first began acting at the Riverside Theatre and later went to drama school in London. Since then he has worked in theatre, television and film and has become one of Britain's most popular actors. He is perhaps best-known for his part in *Cold Feet* but has been equally impressive in other roles, such as that of the civil rights campaigner Ivan Cooper in *Bloody Sunday* (2002). He has recently starred in a new series of *Murphy's Law*, a role created by Colin Bateman with him in mind. Other television credits include *Ballykissangel*, *Soldier, Soldier*, *Playing the Field*, *Touching Evil* and the BBC ONE drama *Passer-by*. He has appeared in a number of feature films including *Welcome To Sarajevo* (1997), *Waking Ned* (1999) and *Wild About Harry* (2000).

© BBC



**Patrick O'Kane (1964-)**

Belfast-born actor Patrick O'Kane went to Manchester University where he won double honours in English and Drama before going to the Central School of Speech and Drama where he received the Lilian Baylis Award. He has an extensive list of stage credits including *Romeo and Juliet* at the National, *The Life of Stuff* at the Donmar Warehouse, *Ashes to Ashes* at the Belfast Lyric and *As The Beast Sleeps* at the Abbey. He has appeared in a number of BBC NI productions such as the comedy series *Safe and Sound* (1996), *As the Beast Sleeps* (2002), *Holy Cross* (2003) and *Gunpowder, Treason and Plot* (2004). He is set to feature in a new film, the *Exorcist* prequel *Exorcist: The Beginnings*.

© The Agency



**Kieran Prendiville (1947-)**

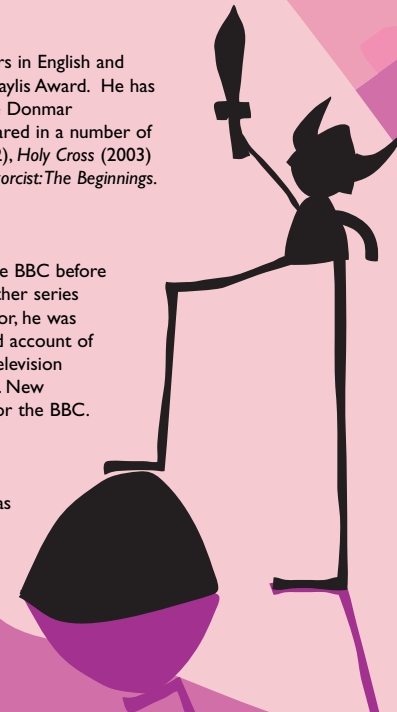
Kieran Prendiville had a long career as a journalist in Fleet Street and then in various roles at the BBC before he turned to writing popular drama. His first success was with *The Bill*. Individual episodes for other series followed and then came his most successful creation – *Ballykissangel*. As well as being its originator, he was the lead writer for much of its run of six series. His 1999 drama *Vicious Circle* was a fictionalised account of the story of the Dublin criminal Martin Cahill. It received a nomination from the Monte Carlo Television Festival in the category of best mini-series / television film. Prendiville remains much in demand. New productions include a single screenplay *The Day After Tomorrow* and a series *The Best Man*, both for the BBC.

© Wilfred Green



**Stephen Rea (1946-)**

Stephen Rea was already well-known when he achieved international fame for his performance as Fergus in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992). Rea, one of Jordan's favourite actors, has appeared in a number of his other films including *The Company of Wolves* (1984), *Michael Collins* (1996) and *The Butcher Boy* (1997). Television appearances have included *Scout* (1987) a film directed by Danny Boyle for BBCNI. On radio he continues to appear in BBCNI dramas. He was the narrator of Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* for Book at Bedtime in 1997 and he was in a radio adaptation of Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (2002).



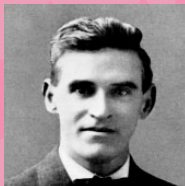
© The Estate of William Connor



#### Richard Rowley (1877-1947)

Richard Rowley was the pen name of Richard Valentine Williams. The playwright and poet was born in Belfast and educated at Sullivan Upper School in Holywood. His collections *The City of Refuge* (1917) and *City Songs and Others* (1918) were hailed as powerful evocations of Belfast and its industrial legacy. In 1918 Rowley moved his family to Newcastle, County Down, where the Mournes and the people there became the focus of his work. *Apollo in Mourne*, broadcast in 1938 by the Northern Ireland Home Service, was one of a number of farmhouse kitchen comedies with the character of Apollo being played by Micheál MacLiammóir. It was also one of the few plays at the time to be relayed to London from the region.

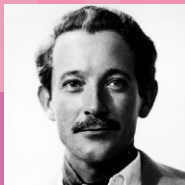
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#### George Shiels (1881-1949)

George Shiels was born in Ballymoney, County Antrim. He emigrated to Canada as a young man and was seriously injured in an accident. He then returned to Northern Ireland and lived at Carnlough where he spent much of his time writing in his study. Three of his earliest plays were produced by the Ulster Literary Theatre, the forerunner of the Group. In 1921 he began an association with the Abbey which was to stage more than 20 of his plays between then and 1948. Throughout the 40s and 50s his plays were performed regularly at the Group and he was the first playwright whose work was relayed live from the Northern Ireland Home Service to the BBC's other regions. *His Last Day in Business*, featuring Harold Goldblatt, James Mageean and R.H. McCandless was broadcast in March 1936. Shiels' plays were heard regularly on the BBC over the years. *Quin's Secret* (1957) and *Maccook's Corner* (1959) are also memorable for the performances of a young James Ellis.

© BBC



#### John D. Stewart (1917-1988)

John D. Stewart's first memories were of soldiers returning from the Great War to Belfast. He was an engineer when he made his first foray into broadcasting, writing the hugely popular series about a farm, *The Button Brown Family*, for *Children's Hour*. He went on to write for stage and screen as well as radio and was a frequent contributor of stories for the series *Today and Yesterday in Northern Ireland*. He is also remembered as a member of the café circle of 30s Belfast which met at Campbell's Coffee House and included Joseph Tomelty, Louis MacNeice and the actor John McBride.

© BBC



#### Ken Stott (1955-)

Ken Stott has made an indelible mark as detective Red Metcalfe in BBC Northern Ireland's *Messiah* thrillers. Born in Edinburgh in 1955 Stott attended George Heriot's school. He studied ballet until the age of 15 before attending the Mountview Theatre School in London and later joining the RSC. But he found life as an actor difficult and for a time he sold double glazing. However when he was 30 he won his first lead role in *Through the Leaves* at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. He made his mark in television in the award-winning series *Taking Over the Asylum* (1995), in *The Vice* and he was the criminal Martin Cahill in *Vicious Circle*. Film roles have included parts in *Shallow Grave* (1995), *Fever Pitch* (1996), *King Arthur* (2004) and most recently *The Mighty Celt*.

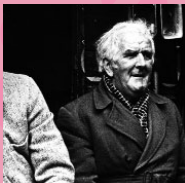
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#### Birdy Sweeney (1931-1999)

Born Edmund Sweeney in Dungannon. He earned his nickname through a performance on BBC radio in which he mimicked blackbirds. He was eleven years old when he made his radio debut, but hopes of a career as a bird impersonator were cut short when a dentist removed all his teeth, having incorrectly diagnosed an infection. His interest then turned to comedy and he was to spend many years on the stage, touring Ireland, the United States and Canada as Birdy Sweeney and His Harmony Trio. Acting came late in life. He appeared in *The Crying Game* (1992) and *The Butcher Boy* (1997) and was outstanding in the Lyric Theatre's 1997 production of *Playboy of the Western World*. But he is most fondly remembered as Eamon Byrne in *Ballykissangel*. He died whilst filming the fifth series.

© BBC



#### Joseph Tomelty (1911-1995)

Tomelty, born in Portaferry, was one of the great figures of Northern Ireland drama. A gifted writer and actor, he was a driving force behind the establishment of the Group Theatre and was its general manager from 1942 until 1951. During that time he was also writing for the BBC Northern Ireland Home Service, creating and starring in *The McCooeys*. Andrew Stewart, BBC Director of Programmes in Scotland, had seen the success of a serial called *The McFlannels*, so he suggested to his Belfast counterpart, Henry McMullan that he might like to try something similar. McMullan decided to approach Tomelty who was enthusiastic about the idea and thus *The McCooeys* was born. The programme was a phenomenal success and ran from 1949 until 1957. Away from *The McCooeys* Tomelty continued to star on stage and won great acclaim when he appeared in Tyrone Guthrie's production of the George Shiels play *The Passing Day* during The Festival of Britain. His numerous film roles included *A Kid For Two Farthings*, *Hobson's Choice*, *Hell Below Zero* and the epic *Moby Dick*. He wrote several plays, including *Barnum Was Right* and *All Souls Night*, and there were novels - *Red is the Portlight* and *The Apprentice*. In 1956 he was filming *Bhowani Junction* with Ava Gardner when he was seriously injured in a car crash. He never fully recovered or fully resumed his career. His work was recognised by Queen's University, Belfast with an honorary MA for services to the theatre. In 1995 Tomelty died at his home in Andersonstown. His daughters Roma and Frances have followed in his footsteps and established themselves as successful actors.



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**Harry Towb (1925-)**

Ulster-born actor and writer Towb was barely out of his teens when he began his professional acting career with a Dublin-based touring company. At 21 he decided to move to London. Since then he has enjoyed a long and varied career on stage, screen and radio. Film credits include *Above Us The Waves* (1955), *All Night Long* (1961), *Blue Max* (1966), *Lamb* (1986) and *Moll Flanders* (1996). Television appearances have included Uncle Connell in Stewart Parker's *Lost Belongings* (1987) and he has had parts in popular series such as *Dr Who*, *The Avengers*, *The Professionals*, and *The Saint*. His own writing has included the comic ghost-story *A Candle for Casey* (2003). Towb is married to the actor Diane Hoddinot and has three children.



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**Zara Turner (1968-)**

Ulster-born Zara Turner is a familiar face on television, on stage and in the cinema with films like *Sliding Doors* (1998) in which she starred with Gwyneth Paltrow. She has contributed to a number of BBCNI's most successful productions. She was Kate alongside her real-life friend Susan Lynch in the romantic comedy *Any Time Now* (2002) and she and Bronagh Gallagher played two anxious Ardoyne mothers in *Holy Cross* (2003), performances which brought them a joint best-actress prize at the FIPA Awards.



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