

The Social Network



Kevin Courtney
Sarah Geraghty

'The whole Eurovision thing doesn't seem real' to Molly Sterling

"Well, you've got my douze points," the Austrian ambassador, Thomas Nader, told Ireland's Eurovision starlet, Molly Sterling, after her performance at the Austrian residence on Wednesday.

"We have a young and energetic foreign minister who said the embassies could do send-off parties," the ambassador said.

Sandie Shaw's *Puppet on a String* and Johnny Logan are his Euro-favourites. And *Father Ted*. "I loved the one where they showed how not to win it."

Did you Euro(vision)-sceptics miss the Austria connection? This year's extravaganza is in Vienna.

Our man on the ground, RTÉ's Marty Whelan, approaches his commenting gig as the viewers do. "We laugh with it, never at it. It's brilliant because it doesn't and

shouldn't make sense. I mean, the Australians are in it this year."

No sense.

Molly's jolly dad, Andrew Sterling, said it was "unbelievable" to be at an embassy reception in honour of his daughter.

"She'd get dropped off from school a kilometre from home and sing the whole way. I used to joke to the farmers that the cows would all look up when she passed and say, 'Oh, it's only Molly,' and carry on."

Molly's parents, sister, pregnant godmother and granny fly to Vienna on the Tuesday of Eurovision week. "I'm not nervous," said Andrew. "I just want her to enjoy herself."

She's really enjoying herself. "It's all so cool," said the so-cool 17-year old from Tipperary, whose voice and lyrics sound like

those of someone with a bit of a life lived.

"That's kind of worrying," said her dad, laughing.

The whole Eurovision thing doesn't feel real. "It just doesn't sink in, it's so weird. It feels like it's so out of reach, and suddenly people are asking for pictures and autographs."

Douze points from us, too.

DAVID BLAKE KNOX'S favourite Eurovision song is Luxembourg's 1965 winner, *Poupée de Cire, Poupée de Son*, written by Serge Gainsbourg. "It's a fantastic song, very subversive. It was the cutting edge."

The former RTÉ head of entertainment was launching his new book, *Ireland and the Eurovision*, at the Spencer Hotel in Dublin's docklands, on Tuesday evening.

Having been involved in key moments of the contest's 50-year history, including Johnny Logan's double victory in 1980 and 1987, Blake Knox knows his Eurovision.

"I've written about every entry for the past 50 years, but it's also a trajectory of Irish society during the same period."

What Ireland needs now is a win to really knock us out of recession. "If we send a good song it does well," said Louis Walsh, "but we're sending amateur singers and amateur songwriters, and it doesn't work. You have to have a great song. Dana, Linda Martin, Johnny Logan: they all went out with great songs, and the best song won."

Don't mention Jedward. Rory Cowan from *Mrs Brown's Boys* is planning to cast his Yes vote early in the marriage referendum, then fly straight out

to Vienna for this year's contest.

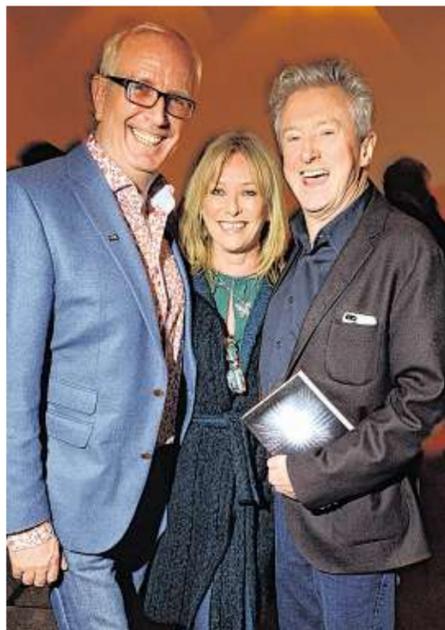
"This is going to date me, but Sandie Shaw, *Puppet on a String*, is my favourite Eurovision song of all time. Once I saw Sandie Shaw I was gone. I loved her."

The writer Fiona Looney will be glued to her telly—and Twitter—on May 22nd. "When the Yes vote comes in, what better way to celebrate than by watching the Eurovision?"

■ From left: Marty Whelan, Molly Sterling and Minister for the Environment Alan Kelly at the Austrian ambassador's residence; and Robbie Fox, Fiona Looney, Steve Lindsey, Rory Cowan, Margaret Beere and Louis Walsh at David Blake Knox's launch. PHOTOGRAPHS: REINHARD SCHOLLER AND DARA MAC DONÁILL



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Smocktails for a third birthday bash

Smock Alley Theatre hosted its third birthday bash on Tuesday night, and no one was more relieved to be reaching this milestone than the Dublin theatre's director, Patrick Sutton.

"When you start a business, they say, after the third year you'll know if you're going to sink or swim. And this year has been really significant for us, because apart from the feeling that the recession is leaving us behind there's a kind of confidence that's building," Sutton said.

Guests sipped "smocktails" and listened to live music in the theatre's magnificent banquet hall.

Of course, Smock Alley is really three and a half centuries old, having first opened its doors in 1662, but since its restoration in 2012 it is looking good as new.

"It's such a beautiful restoration of a theatre space and a great example of how you can reclaim a building," said Aideen Howard, the new director of the Ark children's theatre.

She has been two weeks in the job, and enjoying it immensely. "It's full of potential, and what's so interesting to me is that the audience keeps refreshing itself."

"It's a fantastic achievement for Patrick and the team," said Cian O'Brien, artistic di-

rector of Project Arts Centre. "It's become this hub for new and exciting work, and it's important historically."

In August Smock Alley's production of *Waiting for Godot* will travel to Brazil to mark the 40th anniversary of bilateral trade agreements between Ireland and Brazil.

In December the theatre is staging *A Christmas Carol*, featuring "the scariest ghost ever to appear on an Irish stage".

"By our fourth birthday the Arts Council will have realised the error of their ways in not supporting us from the get-go," Sutton predicted.



■ Aisling Mooney, Aideen Howard, Cliona Duke, Patrick Sutton, Emily Elphinstone and Paul Halpin. PHOTOGRAPHS: DARA MAC DONÁILL



Little law firms get a helping hand

In the contemporary surroundings of the Solomon Gallery in Dublin, Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald launched the solicitor Flor McCarthy's guide for colleagues navigating the contemporary legal world: *The Solicitor's Guide to Marketing and Growing a Business: How to Turn Your Legal Practice into a Financial Success*.

"The book is aimed at small firms with five partners or less," said the Clonakilty-based author.

"These firms make up 92 per cent of the profession in Ireland. However, they've have been hardest hit by the recession, and many of them have struggled."

"The people who need most help with legal services—the ordinary citizens and small businesses of Ireland—depend on small firms, but if those firms are to have a future, and continue to be viable for the long term, to help the people who need them, they need sustainable modern business models."

Seán Gillane SC was MC; among the 100 guests were Jim Daly TD, Seán Guerin SC and Dr John O'Mahony SC.

Walt Hampton, a trial lawyer for 30 years (and a business coach) describes the book as "cutting edge" and says the biggest misconception of lawyers is that they are "unavailable".



■ From top: Flor McCarthy with Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald; Flor's wife, Mags; and Stephanie Molloy and Brendan Molloy. PHOTOGRAPHS: BRENDAN LYON

Life Abroad Morocco

I left Ireland because all my friends had left

Elaine Carney

It is not difficult to find a job teaching English as a foreign language in Ireland. I left because all my friends had left. I left because my relationships had all been ended in airports. My body was in Ireland, but I was walking around with a tight map, divided into Brazil, Japan, England, Austria, Australia and China, in my chest.

I started teaching English because when I graduated from college I was too shy to be a journalist and too inexperienced to be anything else. One day I was living with my parents in Mayo and the next I woke up with the fingers of palm trees brushing a hotel window. I was in Rabat, the capital of Morocco.

Morocco is old. You can feel its age immediately, leaking from the walls and gates surrounding Rabat like an ancient sandcastle. But I felt the age even more so in the people. Moroccans are much like their weather. They know when to be warm and at the same time they know when to build a ceiling for you when you need the shade.

When I went walking around the city my red hair didn't help with the staring. Equally, I would stare at the women with their hair wrapped in silk and cotton, crossing the streets together, shoulders together, laughing and having secret conversations. I saw their closeness, and it reminded me of home. I felt the map of my friends tighten.

The first day teaching at the Moroccan college was fear, just fear. I was the only female teacher working there, and I started to wonder how I would fit in their minds. I have given some of them Mayo accents; they have given me gifts from their cities and towns, traditional

“I saw the closeness of the Moroccans and it reminded me of home. I felt the map of my friends tighten



■ Widening map: Elaine Carney

earrings, silk scarves, books on Islam and small biscuits shaped like half moons. I was teaching them, but they taught me a lot about Islam, not to convert me but to help me understand what they felt they understood before they could even speak.

There is a duality there that reminds me of Ireland. There are those still close to the traditional religion and culture and those taking a few steps away. If you walk down Avenue Mohammed V you can see people dressed in traditional djellabas and yellow Berber slippers weaving through younger Moroccans dressed like Grafton Street hipsters. In a clothes shop one day I watched women in hijabs pick clothes from rails to the blare of explicit English lyrics.

You can feel this duality even in the buildings. Across from an old mosque is the new Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, where you can find progressive work by young Moroccans. One photograph there shows a dirty white horse chained to a