

The Reluctant Emigrant

by Denise Hession
in Abu Dhabi



THE abandonment of strict censorship in Ireland takes a little digesting when one is used to the stringent laws and social rules around sex and innuendo back in Abu Dhabi.

Since I've returned to Ireland for the summer, it's been impossible not to notice the many puns and plays that exist in marketing and advertising. The overtone being sex and the undertone tacky, it is one of the aspects about life in Abu Dhabi that I prefer — tackiness is nowhere to be found.

Expats in the Middle East generally keep their heads down and see out their years there just earning and saving, and not getting in trouble with the authorities or offending neighbours.

So in everyday expat life in Abu Dhabi, one doesn't see much ruffling of feathers; no going against the grain; very few piercings and tattoos; no top-shelf filled with naughty magazines in the local supermarket; no mini-skirts; few string tops and not a mention of sex in public. That is, no talk of sex in public, the act of having sex in public is generally prohibited across the world, as far as I know.

So, it was when sitting, second in line, in the local beauty salon waiting for one of the glamorous young attendants to show me to a treatment room that I overheard a conversation that began my awakening to the realization that sex is very much alive in Ireland... and more so than ever since the launch of *Fifty Shades*, mommy porn for the Irish housewife.

"Hi luv, I'm here for the Hawaiian with a skinny landing and a loveheart vajazzle, oh and a touch up on the gel please," said the lady in her late thirties confidently. I cast my eyes back to the price list to seek some kind of confirmation that this was indeed a Beauty Salon and not a café.

The skinny Hawaiian could be some type of pineapple coffee and the mention of a loveheart vajazzle reminded me of my Granny and the delicious mini macaroons she used to make, sprinkled with icing sugar before serving.

Looking around, I was definitely satisfied that this was indeed a beauty salon and not a café — I mean, no café in Ireland would have large posters of bronzed women strutting on the beach and the lines of nail polish up behind the desk was a giveaway.

"No problem, love, I'll heat up the wax now and you can pick out your own vajazzle." I couldn't even understand this new language, not to mind her order. All this talk was making me and my monthly treat of an eyebrow shape seem unsophisticated.

So, when the attendant asked me "What are you having done, love?" I didn't have the heart to tell the truth, so instead I replied cockily: "I'll have the same, whenever you're ready thanks."

In the claustrophobic waiting area, I clenched my back teeth with anticipation of what lay ahead. Relief washed over me when the girl invited me to look at the previous girl's vajazzle to see if the position of the lovehearts was OK for me.

Well, nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to see — the silhouette of the over-indulged body of a near 40-year-old with a sparse pubic area apart from three diamante lovehearts which guided the way to Utopia, or so I imagine was the inference.

Shock alone nearly flung me straight out of my Birkenstocks. Upon further nosiness, I learned this is a new popular trend among women of varying ages from 18 to 40, one of the many efforts being made by women around Ireland today to impress their fellas.

"A lot of it is down to *Fifty Shades*," the beautician explained. Frazzled and dejected, I left the salon and wondered what happened to a Friday night Chinese with a bottle of wine. I mean, should we all embrace this spirit and get the fellas to add a little spice and become bejeweled!

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COLETTE SHERIDAN reflects on the 50th anniversary of one of the great Cork artistic institutions

A new double act at the Montforts' helm

A POSITIVE outlook on life, high energy levels and a passion for the theatre — these are the key elements that keep founder of the Montfort College of Performing Arts, Eileen Nolan, committed to her job.

Celebrating 50 years, the college is embarking on a new phase with the appointment of actor, director and drama teacher Trevor Ryan as a partner and director.

The college's new headquarters are at Penrose Wharf in Cork city and the drama school is introducing a database of students for film and TV companies looking to cast young performers.

Aged 'a little over 70', Eileen Nolan has no intention of retiring: "I love going out to work," says the woman who regards her students as her family.

Married to Tony Nolan, the couple don't have children of their own. When she was 25, Eileen underwent a serious operation on a tubercular gland. It resulted in a huge abscess.

"In taking it out, the doctors didn't know what they interfered with. I went to Lourdes and said my prayers but I didn't get a miracle. However, I got peace of mind and Tony is the wind beneath my sails."

Originally from Turner's Cross, Ballyvolane-based Eileen comes from a theatrical family. Her father, James O'Brien was an amateur actor and her mother was a violinist who played with the Cork Symphony Orchestra and appeared in numerous musicals.

As a child, Eileen learned how to play the violin. She went on to study speech and drama at Trinity College in London and obtained a teaching diploma from Maria Assumpta College in Dublin.

Since then, she has devoted her life to teaching speech and drama and employs 12 teachers who teach drama, singing and dancing.

"I love teaching and directing and I love going out to schools but I'm absolutely hopeless at new-fangled things like the iPad and the iPhone and all the technology. I was advised by the Cork Opera House that I wouldn't be able to continue my work and bring it to fruition without some help."

Trevor Ryan offered to come on board as a partner. "It was as if God sent him to me" says Eileen.

In May this year, the Montforts staged *The Magic of the Musicals* at Cork Opera House. "Trevor directed and presented it. He did all the projection work for the show which I wouldn't have been able to do at all. He's a great friend and very loyal."

Eileen has more than 600 students on her books, including children all over county Cork.

With the popularity of TV



Founder of the Montfort College of Performing Arts, Eileen Nolan, and right, actor, director and drama teacher Trevor Ryan, a partner and director in the Montforts.

Picture: Larry Cummins



PAST PUPILS

THE following are past pupils of the Montforts:

- Michael McCarthy, who starred in *Les Misérables* on Broadway and the West End.
- Alf McCarthy and Mary Kingston from RTÉ.
- Marion Wyatt, director and drama lecturer.
- Catherine Mahon-Buckley, teacher and director.
- Elaine Symons, of Waterloo Road and Holby City fame.
- Damien Delaney, who starred in *Billy Elliott* and *Cats*.
- Michael Sands, of *Les Misérables* and *Fiddler on the Roof* fame.
- Actor Frank Twomey.

programmes such as *X Factor* and *The Voice of Ireland*, children are exposed to the idea of a career in showbusiness. Do they all want to be stars?

"You have only a small percentage who want that. Nowadays, the children are more academically inclined than they were before. Most of their parents want them to get a degree before they think about the stage.

"I don't think our students think too much of *The X Factor* because the judges often upset the contestants. They're a bit harsh. It's very hard to accept rejection, especially when you're a teenager.

Referring to the recent, hugely successful production of *The*

Sound of Music at the Opera House, Eileen says 90% of the cast would have been members of the Montfort College of Performing Arts in the past. Trevor played Max in the musical.

As well as teaching drama, singing and dancing, Eileen says the college is all about instilling confidence, explaining: "To love yourself is the greatest love of all."

Eileen would like to see speech and drama on the school curriculum and she travels around the county to teach speech and drama.

"The Transition Year students love to do musicals. I'm doing a production of *Oklahoma* in Clonakilty in November and I'm doing *Grease* in Middleton."

Trevor will be directing Disney's *Camp Rock* at the Everyman in October. It will involve as many Montforts students as possible.

Trevor, aged 40, will now be dividing his time between his job at Shandon Travel and his new position.

"I've been teaching at the Montforts for the last 20 years. I started with the college when I was 12. In my new job, I'll be looking to maintain the high standards that Eileen has developed over the last 50 years.

"The core philosophy of the college is to build self-confidence, imagination, communication, fluency of speech and performance skills. It's also about giving the students an appreciation of the arts such as dance, music, plays and literature."

Students range in age from three to 18. As a young boy, Trevor joined the Montforts "just as an extra-curricular activity."

He adds: "I discovered that I loved it. Valerie O'Leary taught me until I was 18. I then got my teaching qualification from LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts)."

Trevor says that the Montfort College of Performing Arts "offers great opportunities."

He explains: "I was very lucky that Eileen gave me the opportunity to direct when I was 20. Up to 10 or 15 years ago, the Montforts would have been known for their productions of straight drama. The first play I directed for them was *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. That's one of the highlights of my career."

Trevor is looking forward to directing *Camp Rock*.

"As well as casting students from the Montforts, we're going to have open auditions as we're looking to recruit new talent. There will be a cast of between 80 and 100."

The Montfort College of Performing Arts is planning a new role in film. As well as the database for film and television companies, there are going to be workshops given by film practitioners.

"We will have three sessions a year on acting for the camera. We'll be setting up our own casting agency service, operating as a point of contact for film and TV production companies. We're going to give all our students a free head shot which will form part of their profile.

"Richie Hayes, runner-up on *The Voice of Ireland* is going to give a workshop to our students on musical theatre.

"Killian Donnelly, who has forged a hugely successful career in the West End, will give a *Les Misérables* workshop in the new year.

"Sean Hackett, an ex-pupil of ours, will give dance workshops. We want our students to benefit as much as possible from industry professionals."

Trevor says that the showbusiness and acting world has become very competitive.

"One of our students, Sally O'Leary (daughter of Valerie) is the only Irish student to be accepted on the full-time drama course at LAMDA this year. Last year, Brian Fenton, formerly of the Montforts, was accepted by Oxford University to study drama."

Trevor is hugely excited about his new role at the Montfort College of Performing Arts.

"Being a partner in the Montforts is something I've thought about for a few years. Like Eileen, it's my passion. My plan is to stage a full scale musical every year."

Clearly, it's all systems go at the Montforts as it embarks on a new chapter.