



by Linda Maher

Moonlight: The Philip Lynott Enigma
Vicar Street, June 20-22;
UCH Limerick, June 24

Verdict: Live, dangerous and thoroughly entertaining

★★★★

HE'S one of the greatest musicians and song-writers this country has ever produced but could Phil Lynott be considered a poet too?

That's the question posed by this clever look at the Thin Lizzy star's life. Part-theatre/part-rock gig, it asks if he could be considered among the great Irish writers such as Brendan Behan and Oscar Wilde.

As his death is announced aged just 36, the spirits of the two are waiting for him when he arrives to 'Tir na bhFíll' – a place between heaven and hell, where the poets go when they die.

With neither sure if he actually belongs there, a barefooted, dishevelled Behan (Padraig O'Lloinsigh) sits for a few pints and a chat with him, delving not into Lynott's personal life but into the creative processes that drove him, a far better measure of whether or not one is in the right place.

It's about how he lived, not how he died.

Lynott (Peter M Smith) talks Behan through his childhood, interspersed with excerpts from interviews at the time, footage from 1960s Dublin and letters he wrote to his mother Philomena, who had stayed in England while her parents raised her son in Dublin.

He also dips into Thin Lizzy's back catalogue with a live rock band, with each song unveiling another part of his life. The melancholic comfort of A Song For While I'm Away contrasts perfectly with the hard-hitting The Rocker, alongside hits from Jimi Hendrix and an original score.

He tells of his childhood in Crumlin, where he encountered not just stigma due to being born out of wedlock, but also racism. Lynott, however, always insisted the latter was uncommon and rarely direct and he knew how to handle himself to deal with it.

HE began singing in bands and travelling the country, which inevitably led to partying and women. A girl he'd broken up with later found out she was pregnant and had a son who was given up for adoption – something which greatly affected Lynott given his own childhood.

One band he was a part of, Skid Row, replaced him when he took a leave of absence to have an operation on his tonsils, but it ended up being one of the defining moments in his career. Another member, Brush Shields, felt so guilty about it that he offered to teach Lynott how to play bass.

Telling Lynott's story is not an easy quest but the narrative tool used here by John Merrigan and Danielle Morgan is clever and effective.

Peter M Smith is absolutely perfect in the role and embodies the pride yet vulnerability that personified Lynott. He nails the accent and affectations, and dare I say it, the voice is almost too good.

Eric Bell himself makes a cameo appearance – it's worth the ticket price alone to see such a maestro in action live.

For fans of Thin Lizzy, this is a must-see. A welcoming of a true vagabond into the pantheon of poets.

Dancing in the moonlight as Smith brings Lynott to life again



The rocker: Peter M Smith is Phil Lynott



by Claire Ruby Young

Dockers

The Ambassador Theatre until April 12
Verdict: Bleedin' Brilliant

★★★★

‘FOR hundreds of years, Ireland's best export was its people’.

While many today will conjure up images of high-rise buildings, offices and swanky apartments when thinking of Dublin's docklands, Dockers is a sensitive untangling of the landmark's ‘Wild West’ days to its unravelling, which marked the end of an era.

As dockers themselves, their children and grandchildren poured through the doors of the Ambassador Theatre, the pressure was on for the small but mighty double-act cast on stage. George Murphy emerges as docker Jacko Dunne and is joined by Tara Howley, who shines as his cousin Nora, the owner of the bar where Jacko earns a few bob, and a few pints, performing for her patrons.

This is a pared-back, no frills production, but the two don't need much more than their spoken word poetry-esque dialogue, hearty voices and effortless musicianship to leave an impact. With a simple bar backdrop, a projector



Full of heart: Murphy and Howley

displaying archival footage of the port's hey day and a signpost prop at their helm, the duo launched into an immersive deep dive into the rich and fascinating story of the dockers, which felt educational without the school lesson stiffness.

Packed with Dublinisms, (see ‘wet your beak’, ‘decorate the mahogany’, and my favourite ‘pox bottle’) and plenty of laugh-out-loud moments, Dockers succeeds in capturing both the light and dark of Ireland's long history, delicately approaching themes of emi-

gration, alcoholism and abandonment.

A refreshing departure from the either post-card positive or utterly glum depiction of our past, while it is an undeniable ode to the city, this Gary Brown production isn't just for the Dubs. Its captivating premise serves as a springboard to tell a wider story, bringing its audi-

ence through the 1916 Rising to the War of Independence and then finally how mechanisation saw a total overhaul in the port's operation in the 1970s.

Another element that served as a breath of fresh air is how Nora's character, through her Dublin wit, would occasionally remind her cousin, and in turn the audience, of an often-forgotten about cohort in history – women.

Bringing his signature word-smithery to the project, Dublin native Damien Dempsey sat amongst the team of song writers to produce a slew of

LITERARY FICTION ANTHONY CUMMINS



SKY DADDY
by Kate Folk
(Sceptre €18.85, 368pp)
SET in California, this kinky debut spices up the flourishing genre of the Millennial early-midlife crisis novel. It follows Linda, a Silicon Valley content moderator, who is led into a series of comic scrapes by her secret fetish for airplanes – she wants to marry one, then die (and yes, you read that right).

There's an ill-fated attempt to meet a pilot on a dating app – she only wants him for his joystick – as well as a sticky work situation when she's filmed in flagrante on one of the flights she obsessively takes. Above all, her unfulfilled desire imperils a dear friendship.

A little bit JG Ballard, a little bit Otessa Moshfegh, the surreal premise grabs you from the first page, buoyed by bright, zingy prose.

Told with verve – and nerve – it's a full-throttle thrill: strap in!



ON THE CALCULATION OF VOLUME I
by Solvej Balle
(Faber €16.95, 192pp)
BALLE, a Danish author, is on the longlist for the International Booker

Prize for translated fiction with this metaphysical puzzler about a woman reliving the same ordinary day hundreds of times over.

Tara, an antiquarian bookseller in France, goes to an auction for work and meets a friend – again and again and again. Gradually, her solo predicament enacts an estrangement from her husband.

Humdrum as well as surreal, the action is inherently funny, but Balle's poker-faced narration (translated by Barbara J Haveland) gives nothing away about how to interpret what's happening. Claustrophobic yet mind-expanding, the repetition encourages the protagonist – and us – to notice more closely how much a day contains.

This is the first novel in a series of seven, and I'll be fascinated to see how the concept develops.



THE USUAL DESIRE TO KILL
by Camilla Barnes
(Scribner €21.75, 256pp)

BARNES (niece of the Booker-winning novelist Julian Barnes) makes her fiction debut with this bittersweet comedy about an elderly academic couple trying each other's patience – and that of their exasperated daughter, a Shakespearean actor – as they grow old in rural France.

The author's background as a playwright shines through in some tip-top dialogue as the creeping indignities of age – deafness, failing memory – fuel constant conjugal bickering. Key to the everyday aggro in the here-and-now is a looming appointment for hip surgery in Paris, yet the core of the novel is a long-buried heartache glimpsed via a cache of old letters occasionally dropped into the action.

It's almost two novels in one: come for the petty grievances of marital and filial strife; stay for the sadness slowly unspooling between the lines.

A gentle tale with a profoundly melancholy sting.

Strangers on a Victorian train...

CLASSIC CRIME BARRY TURNER

MURDER IN TRANSIT
by Edward Marston
(Allison & Busby
€14.50, 352pp)

IF THE railway detectives are anything to go by, Victorian travel was beset with murder and mayhem. In Murder In Transit, the 22nd outing in this hugely enjoyable series, the indomitable Inspector Colbeck and his trusty sidekick Sergeant Leeming investigate the death of a property dealer who died on his way home to the Isle of Wight.

What looks at first to be straightforward turns out to be more complex as the detectives expose extortion and blackmail. With Queen Victoria in residence at Osborne, her private home on the island, the involvement of one of her closest companions piles pressure on Colbeck to find a speedy solution.

Words and phrases unknown to Victorian England can be grating, but this is a minor irritation in what is otherwise a cracking good read.

THE MOUTHLESS DEAD
by Anthony Quinn
(Abacus €29, 288pp)

AFTER a murder conviction is overturned, it emerges that a detective close to the case knows more than he let on. Inspector Key is on a transit-



Illustration: IFAN BATES

lantic cruise when he is persuaded by an aspiring filmmaker to assist in the reconstruction of events in January 1931 when a woman was bludgeoned to death.

Having closed in on the husband as the obvious suspect, the prosecution had relied on weak circumstantial evidence.

But the case might have turned out differently if Key had told of his friendship with the accused and of the revelation that might have triggered an act of savage violence. Fearing exposure as an accessory to the crime, Key must find a way to avoid arrest.

The build-up of tension is

palpable as Quinn weaves a powerful spine-tingler that keeps us guessing throughout.

THE CASE OF THE BUSY BEES

by Clifford Witting
(Galileo €15.95, 276pp)

ALL credit to Galileo, a small publisher tracking the back lists for lost treasures of classic crime. A prime discovery is the work of Clifford Witting whose mystery novels first appeared in the 1950s.

The Case Of The Busy Bees causes headaches for the police who are up against a criminal conspiracy specialis-

ing in extortion with kidnapping as a profitable sideline.

The stealing of a tomahawk from a local museum would seem to be incidental to the case, until the antique weapon is used to murder a prominent businessman.

As the complications mount, Witting proves himself to be a master of period detail, leaving us to wonder, for example, at the customary appointment of a retired Army officer with no police experience as chief constable.

If the villain of the piece is easily spotted, this does little to detract from a strong storyline full of surprises.

beautifully written and brilliant on grief, love and family expectations. Wonderful.

SHOW ME WHERE IT HURTS

by Claire Gleeson
(Sceptre €15.99, 256pp)

RACHEL's husband Tom is driving her and their two children home from visiting his parents when, in one instant and with no warning, he destroys their family. After this shock opening, we see Rachel experiencing the heartbreaking aftermath of what happened and also go back in time to meet the family pre-tragedy.

Before, on the surface at least, life seemed good. Their relationship was full of love and tenderness, but there was a sense of darkness at the edges. The after is all dark, containing barely any light, but Rachel still cannot find it in herself to hate the husband she so adored.

I don't want to spoil the plot by giving away too much, but I was gripped by this emotionally intelligent, thought-provoking exploration of the worst thing possible and what led to it. There are no easy answers, however, and the deeper into it we get, the more complicated it becomes. Devastating and important.

DEBUTS SARA LAWRENCE



DEATH AND OTHER OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS
by Veronika Dapunt
(Bantam €21.75, 384pp)

THIS original story gripped me from the start and kept me hooked to the end. Death is the star, depicted here not as a terrifying skeleton clutching a scythe but rather as a flawed, relatable woman, simply trying to do her job in difficult circumstances.

Not only does this Death look nothing like humans have imagined her for millennia, she's also very funny. Death finds her job hard and decides to ask the Boss (also playing against type with no white beard or cloud) for a sabbatical.

She tells him she's near burnout and that spending serious time in the human world will improve her performance when she comes back to work. This clinches it and Death's sister Life helps facilitate the break, setting Death up with a new name,

a place to live and a job as a paralegal. But it's not long into her much-needed holiday before Death realises there's a murderer on the loose and she must catch him. Different and compelling.

ORDINARY SAINTS

by Niamh Ni Mhaoileoin

(Manilla Press €24.75, 368pp)

PROTAGONIST Jay is a teenager when she kisses a girl for the first time. Caught up in the moment, she ignores the messages from her parents asking her to call them. It's the next day when she finds out that her brother, Ferdia, who was living in Rome and training to be a priest, has been killed in a terrible accident.

Years later, Jay sees a similar message from her father and spirals into instant anxiety, imagining her mother dead. Jay's dread isn't helped by the fact that she can't remember how long ago it was that she spoke to her devout Catholic family.

Jay's dad tells her the church is starting the long process of canonising Ferdia as a saint and that she needs to attend a celebratory Mass at home in Ireland. Living in London now as an out-lesbian, Jay thought the religious stuff was long behind her. It's

calls him Daddy and follows him everywhere. Bear tries everything to offload Gozzle, who eats honey, refuses to swim or fly and sleeps on his chest.

As spring warms to summer, however, Gozzle meets a more suitable family with whom to migrate for winter. Bear is bereft – but a lovely twist brings a happy ending. Another winner from this brilliant team.

THE BOY WITH BIG DECISIONS

by Helen Rutter
(Scholastic €8.79, 360pp)

THIS interactive book, giving readers the choice of where the story goes, is a lesson in finding one's inner voice and has a wide range of characters from complicated backgrounds.

CHILDREN'S SALLY MORRIS



GOZZLE
by Julia Donaldson
Illustrated by Sara Ogilvie
(Macmillan €13.99, 48pp)

EVERY new Donaldson book is a reason to celebrate, and this warm and witty story, beautifully illustrated, is a welcome exploration of fatherhood.

When Bear wakes from his winter sleep, an egg hatches in front of him and out hops Gozzle, a gosling who immediately

Fred's domineering parents make all his decisions – including his secondary school (Dad's academic, sporty alma mater, of course). Fred would prefer arty Brownlee, so when the bus arrives on his first day he must decide – should he pretend to be a pupil there?

This first step dictates many possible storylines and, as each is quite short, it will encourage reluctant readers as well as those who relish the challenge. Funny, warm and wise.

THE CURSE OF SILVAN OAKS

by Georgia Channon
(Pushkin €13.05, 272pp)

SHAKESPEARE'S A Midsummer Night's Dream provides the backdrop for this fantasy of two warring kingdoms divided



world of Silvanland, she triggers a prophesy revolving around an ancient necklace.

She meets Prince Cory, kidnapped by his family's enemies, and together they battle forces of evil, cursed nature and shapeshifting servants to ensure justice is restored before it's too late. Action-packed and menacing, this is an impressive debut.