



Katherine Manley, Claudia Boyle and Robin Adams in *The Last Hotel*

## New Irish opera a harsh comment on modern society

### Opera

#### The Last Hotel

By Enda Walsh and Donnacha Dennehy

The Lyceum, Edinburgh  
International Festival, August 8

Rating: \*\*\*

Reviewed by **Stephen Bourke**

**T**he Last Hotel, a new opera by Donnacha Dennehy and Enda Walsh, puts four people on the brink of a breakdown in a hotel for the weekend and force-feeds them alcohol, jealousy and despair until they burst.

Acclaimed soprano Claudia Boyle is Woman. She has abandoned her children and plans to kill herself. Nobody plans to stop her.

She has history with Robin Adams's Husband, a boorish, swaggering bully who flirts with her to the dismay of his neglected Wife (Katherine Manley). All the while, Mikel Murfi lurks and scowls and serves, as his Caretaker evolves from comic relief into a sinister agent.

The eponymous hotel is not sure if it's half-built or half-derelict: the set is dressed in bare plasterboard and retro wood veneer and scattered with the stray detritus of the hospitality industry.

"Who has made love here and woken here with regret?" Woman sings. "No one." Bona fide Celtic Tiger ghost hotel or not, it speaks of failure and collapse, and as a stage for the colliding lives of its four burnt-out protagonists, it could not be more apt.

Donnacha Dennehy's shifting, subtle, shimmering har-

monies and disharmonies lend the tension of a taut piano string to the work. Inside the claustrophobic hotel, the orchestra hints at a world outside, and a world beyond.

There is the waft of a wet weekend in the air, and the score of almost-digital bleeps and bleeps have a suggestion of the internet. It's wild, beautiful music with the energy to match both Adams's rousing gusto and the subtlety of Boyle's soaring arias.

The music is punctuated by blasts of ordinary sounds – the TG4 weather forecast, the crash of yelled conversation under the muffled bass of nightclub music.

The realism of the dialogue and its interpretation is evocative and vivid, but it is also The Last Hotel's weak spot. At times, it feels like a series of pot-shots at low culture, vernacular architecture, and lower middle-class taste.

Husband, a tradesman, boasts of the large extension he plans for their terraced house, the audience laughs at his slideshow, and Wife vomits. Later, at the hotel's seedy nightclub, the Caretaker-cum-DJ plays harsh, violent house music, which seems to bring Woman pain rather than ecstasy as she writhes on the floor. Woman takes a selfie purely because that's something that makes her look vain.

But If the Last Hotel has something to say about drunken, over-stuffed contemporary society, saying it this way serves to alienate rather than satisfy.

*The Last Hotel is at the O'Reilly Theatre, Great Denmark Street, Dublin 1, from September 27 to October 3 as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival*

### Film

John Maguire



## Trainwreck crushes the rom-com clichés

**L**ast month, while conducting a public interview with the actress Goldie Hawn on a film festival stage, the former chief executive of Disney, Michael Eisner, said that "beautiful women are not funny". He then had the grace to note that the horrified Hawn was "the exception", but his ill-considered comments caused a furore.

Eisner, who is neither funny nor beautiful, went on to say that "in the history of the motion picture business, the number of really beautiful, funny women is impossible to find". The first part of his thesis being entirely in the remit of the beholder, two films released this week comprehensively rebut the second.

Written by and starring Amy Schumer, and directed by Judd Apatow, **Trainwreck** is a raunchy, contemporary romantic comedy about a 30-year-old woman named Amy who is terrified of commitment. She has taken the childhood lesson of her deadbeat father (Colin Quinn) to heart: "What if I told you there was only one doll you could play with forever?" he asks his young daughters by way of telling them he is divorcing their mother.

Twenty years later, this internalised message plays out as a string of one-night stands in which Amy

sends a series of bewildered men, expecting post-coital snuggles, out into the New York night clutching their shirts to their chests. As she sees it, she has a great job at a magazine edited by an unrecognisable Tilda Swinton, a great apartment in which she can watch television and smoke pot, and an adorably married little sister Kim (Brie Larson) through whom she can live vicariously as an adult. Why would anything change?

But change must come. When she meets sweet-natured, goofy sports doctor Aaron Connors (Bill Hader), he rebuffs her phobia of commitment with a clear-eyed logic. "We like each other", he says, "and we should start dating." Aaron's best friend, the basketball player LeBron James (playing himself), is a romantic soul who wants to see his pal settle down with a nice girl.

Amy isn't particularly nice (Schumer writes her as a complicated, prickly woman, not a manic pixie), but Aaron has fallen in love. As they go about overcoming the obstacles placed in their way, *Trainwreck* cheerfully dismantles the tired clichés of the rom-com.

Perhaps the film's most subversive idea is to present the men in Amy's orbit as sensitive, tender-hearted people and the women as sarcastic, brash misanthropes who might – only might – be reformed through the love of



Amy Schumer and Bill Hader in *Trainwreck*

### Cinema

#### Trainwreck

Directed by Judd Apatow

Nationwide, 16

Rating: \*\*\*\*

#### Mistress America

Directed by Noah Baumbach

Nationwide, 15A

Rating: \*\*\*\*

a significant other.

At two hours long, *Trainwreck* has perhaps too much time for comic diversions but, this being a Judd Apatow film, the focus is

## Go see...



Photographer Noel Bowler's IMAN exhibition is at **Uncovering A Collection** in Dún Laoghaire

### Festival

#### Lughnasa International Friel Festival

The inaugural Lughnasa International Friel Festival (August 20 to 31) celebrates the life and work of playwright Brian Friel. His most famous play, *Dancing At Lughnasa*, is 25 years old this year and has been chosen as the signature production of the festival.

Director Sean Doran is staging the festival in Donegal and Belfast, with venues centred on the landscape including a pier, a peace





Henry Cavill in *The Man From UNCLE*

**The Man From UNCLE**  
(Nationwide, 12A)

Big-screen adaptation of the 1960s spy television show.

**Precinct Seven Five**  
(selected, 15A)

Documentary about police corruption during New York's crack cocaine epidemic in the 1980s.

**ALSO  
OPENING**

named Mom's with her billionaire Greek boyfriend Stavros (who we never meet). Tracy has moved to the city to study English literature at Barnard, and is struggling slightly with an unrequited love for Tony (Matthew Shear) and entry into a prestigious writing club named Moebius.

The first half of the film is a zingy, dialogue-heavy sisterhood comedy in which the two gorgeous young women race around the city getting into minor scrapes and laughing about it, while the second half ascends into full-blown farce when the main players, and a handful of strays they pick up along the way, descend on an architecturally adventurous house in wealthy Connecticut and work themselves into a confused froth.

At one point, there are seven people talking all at once, a display of precision that speaks to the film's confidence and its enjoyably hysterical momentum. It's terribly witty and sharp and then tender and easily bruised.

Written by Gerwig and Baumbach, Brooke and Tracy are the antithesis of the character we meet in Frances Ha: assured and confident women whose spirit and charm remain undimmed as we watch them come of age.

*twitter.com/maguiremovies*

farce, the film casts Gerwig as Brooke, a free-spirited, creative 30-year-old living a bohemian lifestyle in New York who meets and befriends the 18-year-old Tracy (newcomer Lola Kirke), the daughter of the man her mother is about to marry. Brooke and Tracy are about to become sisters, and the bond they instantly form will see them through a series of increasingly frantic adventures.

Tracy idolises the cool, hip Brooke from the first moment they meet, in the middle of a throbbing crowd of sightseers in Times Square. Brooke has been making her way in the city since she was a teenager, and has a variety of money-making schemes on the go at any one time. She's a gym instructor, a maths tutor and a budding restaurateur, hoping to establish a hip-sounding eatery

on correcting outdated cinematic concepts of rightness and order while at the same time emphasising family, structure and tradition. It's his best work in some time and establishes Schumer, previously best known as a television comedian, as a fully-fledged movie star.

● Following 2012's delightful Frances Ha, Greta Gerwig and her creative and romantic partner Noah Baumbach reunite for **Mistress America**, another witty, urbane comedy about lost women.

A tightly-focused character study with elements of screwball



Greta Gerwig and Lola Kirke in *Mistress America*

**A festival celebrating Brian Friel takes place in Donegal and Belfast at the end of August**

wall, an island, a mountain-top and Iron Age fort.

It also includes a food festival and open-air celebration of dance in Belfast. The two parts are named respectively Donegal, Welcome to Friel Country (August 20 to 23), and Belfast, Here I Come! (August 27 to 31).

*lughnasainternationalfrielfestival.com*

**Exhibition**

**Uncovering A Collection**

Selected works from Dún

Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's collection highlight some key moments in the collection's history – from a donation of paintings in the mid-20th century including Mainie Jellett, Mary Swanzy and Pierre Bonnard – to recent works created during artists' residency programmes.

This is the first time that these works have been exhibited together.

Many of the featured artists have strong connections to the county of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. *dlrcoco.ie*



Danielle Hope as Maria von Trapp

**Musical**

**The Sound Of Music**

One of the greatest musicals of all time, The Sound of Music takes to the Bord Gais Energy stage this year with a new production. Danielle Hope takes on the iconic role of Maria von Trapp, with Steven Houghton playing the much-loved Captain von Trapp. The score by Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II features some of the most memorable songs ever performed on stage.

*bordgaisenergytheatre.ie*