

# **Swansong**

## **Story of Occi Byrne**

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## Synopsis

It is 1970s Ireland and in the squinting streets of his home town, Austin Occi, Byrne (MARTIN MCCANN) is an outcast. He does not know his father, he is taunted by his classmates and he spends his time chatting with the swans on the town's quayside. There is only one person that Occi loves just as there is only one person who loves him: his doting but damaged mother, Bridget (JODIE WHITTAKER).

Fatherless and friendless, the child grows up fearless. If everybody laughs at Occi Byrne, it is only behind his back because he has a fiery temper. But he also has a wicked mischievous streak, getting the town's dogs to chase him on his bicycle and recklessly tumbling down lofty sand dunes in an old tar barrel. No one can tame his wild spirit or dampen his rage at the world. Thus Occi pinballs from one crazy adventure to the next, raising hell and terrorising all, until one day he goes too far and pays a high price.

In the unlikely surrounds of his incarceration, Sligo Mental Institute, Occi finds purpose, peace and love when he falls for another patient, the quiet and troubled Mary (MARCELLA PLUNKETT). But their fragile relationship, and Occi's rehabilitation, is shattered when Mary is attacked and Occi thunders to her rescue, wreaking terrible vengeance. His sentence in the asylum is extended but when he emerges from the bowels of the Institute, Occi resolves to start anew.

Working as a hired hand on a fishing trawler, he finds comfort in the long days and hard work. He befriends another crew hand, Dermott Lynch, and together they spend an idyllic day on Inishmurray Island. But Occi's past comes back to haunt him and a terrible event threatens to tear his life apart.

Following the death of his mother, he is alone again in the world but hope comes from an unexpected quarter.

Occi might have loved and lost but he has faced his demons and won. His feet are now touching the bottom of the barrel. His swansong is a song of redemption.

SWANSONG: STORY OF OCCI BYRNE is produced by German based Florin Film in association with Irish production companies Zanzibar Films and Borderline Productions. The Executive Producers are Hermann Florin, Edwina Forkin and Tom Maguire. The Director of Photography is Alexander du Prel with Joan O Clery on Costume Design and Padraig o Neill on Production Design.

## THE PRODUCTION STORY

SWANSONG: STORY OF OCCI BYRNE began life on stage as *Swansong*. Conor McDermottroe wrote his first stage play in 2002, setting it in his hometown of Sligo. At the centre was the misanthropic character of Austin 'Occi' Byrne a misfit that was drawn from McDermottroe's own memory and experiences. "There were quite a few kids back then in Sligo who didn't have a father figure and they were ostracised or treated differently and unfairly," he says. "So this Sligo character was always in the back of my head and I wondered how I could write him. That was the beginning of the character of Austin 'Occi' Byrne, the young man who sits on his own on the Sligo quays, feeding and chatting to the swans and looking out over the bay."

The one man show premiered in Sligo in 2003 and later toured to Galway, Dublin, Edinburgh, London, New York and Philadelphia. It was a tour de force by writer/director/actor McDermottroe who nightly recreated the embattled world of Byrne, a fatherless child striving to make sense of his life among the squinting windows of small town Ireland. It was dark, comic and caustic but on that first opening night in his home town of Sligo McDermottroe was nervous. "I remember thinking at the time, 'if this goes wrong it will go horribly wrong'. But it didn't. I then took it to the Galway Arts Festival in 2004. That's when *Swan Song* the movie began."

McDermottroe was en route to Galway when he received a call from a friend who was directing the TV series *Foreign Exchange*. An actor was needed to play a small role. Could Conor do it? Wary of committing, McDermottroe agreed on two conditions: that he would be back in Galway at 4 o'clock sharp every day and that *Foreign Exchange's* producer, Hermann Florin, would see his play. "It was just Conor on stage with very few props," recalls Florin, who showed up on the last night. "I was blown away by his performance and the play. Later we had a drink. During the first pint I asked Conor whether he had ever thought about adapting it for screen as it was a tale very well told and the central character of Austin 'Occi' Byrne was

compelling. He just leant down, reached into a bag and produced a draft. Three pints later we had a deal. That was *Swansong*."

The screenplay McDermottroe handed to Florin that night had been written the previous year. If *Swansong* was one from the heart, a story inspired by scenes from McDermottroe's own early days in Sligo, the initial draft of the screenplay flowed from that. "*Swansong* is a monologue, a guy *telling* the story of his life whereas the screenplay *is* his life," he says. "I have now written more than a half dozen screenplays and *Swansong* was probably the easiest, because the play was a monologue. I performed every role and so all the parts of the story and its history were in my head. It was easy and quite quick to finish even though there are something like 47 characters in the screenplay."

The main character is Occi Byrne, a damaged young man who doesn't know his father and has an inseparable bond with his mother, Bridget. Teased and tormented by the other local kids, he fights back the only way he knows how, with his fists and boots. But he's caught in a cycle of anger and fear that threatens to roll him off the face of the world. "This is a very emotional movie about a young man who is trying to find his place in life and in society," comments Florin. "It is an intense journey for this character, an odyssey of a lost soul who goes from being neglected and treated like a pariah to some kind of redemption because ultimately *Swansong* is about dignity. It is about a search for a place to belong, to be allowed to be who you are, to be part of society and to be treated well by that society. It's a movie about respect."

"Occi Byrne was inspired by these kids I knew who left school early," says McDermottroe. "There was one in particular whom I saw, many years ago begging on the streets of London. He had been bullied and stigmatised from an early age because he had no father. We sat close to each other in school and when I saw him on the street in London our eyes briefly met before he looked away because he was embarrassed. Some aspects of the story are drawn from my own experiences."

Other aspects, especially the harrowing scenes in the Mental Institute, are also drawn from McDermottroe's first-hand experience. "My mother had a laundry and dry-cleaning business and my summer job was to collect the laundry from the hospital," he says. "The way it is painted in the script is, if anything, actually brighter than what it was like. It was a pretty horrendous place in the late Seventies and early Eighties and those images stayed with me. I was about 14 or 15 years old and I used to be absolutely petrified going into the different wards. I'd knock on the door and pray that the sheets would be ready so that I didn't have to hang around there. I will always remember very vividly what they were like and those women and men that were incarcerated there."

Armed with the draft both McDermottroe and Florin worked on it for a year. "Working with Conor was probably the most collaborative work that I have ever done with a director," says Florin. "Ideally you want to work with people whose company you enjoy because you spend so much time together. Conor would write the script - he's a very fast writer - and then he gave it out. It was no problem with him if I suggested that it needed more work because he's open to listening and open to change. He does not have an ego in that respect. So from the beginning it was a process of understanding, of respect and of trust."

Meanwhile, during 2004 and 2005, McDermottroe completed three short films. The first was SQUADDIE, which McDermottroe directed on location in Belfast. Following that he wrote an Irish language short called, 20 NÓ 22 which was developed into a six-part series. But his biggest critical success was A WOMAN'S HAIR which won the top prize at the Venice Short International Film Festival. Now Hermann Florin had an award-winning director and McDermottroe had a show reel the business of selling SWANSONG could begin in earnest. From his Berlin base, Florin approached potential financiers in Germany.

"In 2006 I secured Media Single Development Funding to develop the script and then we started raising the money to shoot it which took a while. We started with ZDF-ARTE, the big German broadcaster. They were the first to come on board following 18 months of negotiations," he explains. "We were also in talks with the Irish Film Board who told us that we needed an Irish co-financier".

Tom Maguire, a producer on *Squaddie* and *20 nó 22* was introduced to Florin and brought on board the same year to raise Irish funding through his company, Zanzibar Films. "We got RTÉ involved, we got the Irish Film Board involved and we were also chasing distributors in this country and helping Hermann with his applications in Germany," says Maguire. "And Hermann got ZDF, the big German broadcaster on board at the end of the day."

"I had seen the play before Conor brought me the screenplay. Initially I couldn't quite pin down what *Swansong* reminded me of," comments Maguire. "When we pitch we always try and find a comparison to help the potential financier to see what kind of movie we are aiming to create. But with *Swansong* we just pitched it on its own merit: a story about ordinary people in an ordinary town who have to deal with certain difficult things in their lives. It was only when I saw the rough cut that I realised that we'd made an Irish *Breaking the Waves*".

Tom Maguire brought co-producer Edwina Forkin, Zanzibar Films on board for whom the screenplay resonated in a very personal way. "I'm a single mother so I can only imagine what it must have been like to raise a kid back then in Catholic Ireland and what kind of life my son might have had," she says. "So I had an empathy for that and a connection to people's preconceptions about being a single mother especially if you come from a small town. I knew that despite some difficulties in raising finance for *Swansong* that we would get it across the line".

"Step by step we put the other financiers in place" says Florin. "At the beginning of 2008 we had all the partners in situ, we just had to close the contracts, get the money into the bank to start shooting." In May 2008 McDermottroe relocated from his London home to live in his sister's holiday house in Sligo. But the financial deals that needed to be sealed were being negotiated up to the very last minute. "I was thinking 'any week now we will start' but we didn't start shooting until October," he says. "Those six months of waiting were tough, wondering what I was doing down there away from home and all."

*Swansong: Story of Occi Byrne* started shooting in October 2008 and lasted 49 hectic days. It was shot at various locations in Sligo, a region very familiar to McDermottroe even if it did throw up the occasional surprise. One such location was the small village of Banada, just five miles from Tubbercurry. "I was driving to the Arts Festival in Galway in July 2008 when I remembered that my parents fostered a child from the orphanage in Banada," he says. "I went into the town and drove up the pathway to the convent. Behind the convent was the old orphanage which was converted into a secondary school. On another corner was a national school. The place had been closed for six years but it had not gone to rack and ruin. So there were all these potential locations that were perfect for the film. In fact nearly forty per cent of the movie was shot there."

McDermottroe and Florin helped scout the locations. As Sligo town itself was largely unsuitable for many of the urban sequences (yellow lines, parking meters, railings, health and safety issues) it was done as a composite. "The town scenes for *Swansong* were shot in Tubbercurry because that town looks like it was in the 1970s or 1980s," says Florin. "It's beautiful and original. But the scenes at Occi's grandfather's house were shot in Sligo, the mental institute was in Banada, Brigid's house was in Ballymote, the trawler sequences were shot in Sligo harbour, the swans were in Dooley Park, the sand dunes were at Strandhill and certain parts of Mullaghmore was used for the island as well as the island of Inishmurray itself."

The trawler scenes and island sequence were shot in the choppy month of November. "The shooting at sea was the most risky part of the production so we scheduled that at the end," says Florin. "We were all very nervous. Sometimes we had four seasons in one day. The first day we had high tides which made it tricky to shoot on board because the boat was moving about quite a bit. One time a wave hit the boat and the DoP was thrown backwards. Thankfully we had one good day of sunshine when we were on Inishmurray. Suddenly the sky cleared and the sun came out. It was like a miracle."

"We were categorically told that we would not be able to get out to the island but we did," recounts McDermottroe. "Even so it was extremely difficult. We were

limited as to the number of crew members we could get on the action boat, the trawler. Alongside that we had a support boat and a safety boat. As we were shooting those scenes in November the light was fading and the weather wasn't great. At one point the propeller got caught up in a lobster pot and we were caught in a current and the divers had to go in and release the rope. When we landed on the island to shoot the sequence with Occi and Lynch, the boat was offshore and then the rudder broke. The boat had to be towed back to Sligo. We were there with the rest of the crew wondering. 'How are we going to get home?' The rescue helicopter came in but I didn't want to be photographed like that in *The Sligo Champion*. So that whole sequence was tricky."

The movie was shot on 16mm film with anamorphic lenses, the Berlin based DoP Alexander du Prel having worked in this format before. It was a choice that appealed to McDermottroe "It gives the movie a grainy look, a different look which reflects Occi's view of the world".

For McDermottroe, his first feature film was an experience, a rite-of-passage as rigorous in some respects as Austin 'Occi' Byrne's. "If someone was to ask what I'm like, I'd say that I have a rough exterior but I have a huge soft heart," he says. "So I think that's also what *Swansong* is like. It's a rough, tough story on the exterior but on the inside it glows with sentimentality, redemption and a feel good factor. You will be rocked in your seat by certain scenes but in the end there's a softness and a sense of redemption."

## THE CASTING STORY

"The camera loves Martin McCann," observes Conor McDermottroe. "His intuitions are right and he understood Occi Byrne immediately, both his journey and the type of character that he is. Martin grew up in a tough part of Belfast and so he probably knows the kind of world that Occi lives in. He looks terrific on screen and can tell so much with his eyes. This is important because all the time there's this inner monologue going on inside Occi's head, questions like: 'Why have I been treated this way?' Why are these people doing this?'. Martin can stay still and silent in front of the camera and yet you know exactly what is going on behind those eyes."

McDermottroe first heard about the relatively unknown McCann through a friend who was deeply impressed by the actor's performance in *THE SOUND OF PEOPLE*, a short film that premiered at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival. "It's a wonderful film with virtually no dialogue whatsoever," says McDermottroe. "When I saw Martin I immediately thought, 'who's he?'. I discovered that he was a very talented young actor with no formal training but great camera presence." McDermottroe then watched Richard Attenborough's most recent film, *CLOSING THE RING*, in which McCann played a crucial role. Impressed again by the young man's presence and ability he resolved to meet him. And so in late summer 2008 both men met in a café in Enniskillen.

Impressed by the originality and passion of *SWANSONG*, McCann figured that he had the inside track on the character of Occi Byrne. "Some scripts you read you get the sense that the writer has plucked the ideas second-hand because they sound good," he says. "But Conor is born and bred from Sligo, that's clear from the writing. He was aware of the hardships of mental institutions because he had seen it as a young person. That came across in the story which was very detailed and very layered and a great read."

Within half an hour of their meeting, the producers called, eager to know if the director had got his man. McDermottroe assured them there was no need to look

elsewhere for Occi Byrne. When Florin met the young Belfast actor he was similarly taken. "Martin has such presence, those piercing eyes and he's also a charming character," he says. "That's what I wanted Occi to be. Martin, who is a very intense actor, was the right person to do it because he feels everything he plays."

McCann, a compact, intense actor with startling eyes is largely self-taught and assured beyond his years. From a young age he was already 'auditioning' for his big break, trying out impressions and imitating well-known TV celebrities for anybody that cared to watch and listen. "I loved film and stories and reading books," he says. "One day my mum brought me out onto the Falls Road, where I grew up, and put me in a black taxi that took me to the city centre where I joined this young amateur drama troupe. That group focused on bringing together kids, both Catholic and Protestant, from the more disadvantaged areas of Belfast and creating friendships through drama. That was my first taste of being on stage and I have loved it since then."

After CLOSING THE RING, McCann spent ten months in Australia working on the epic HBO WWII TV series, THE PACIFIC. "That was some experience," he says. But he admits that playing the part of Occi Byrne, his first lead role in a feature, was a steep and exciting learning curve for him. "Occi Byrne is a young lad that is confused and doesn't really belong where he is," he says. "I don't know if he belongs anywhere. He has had a tough life and he's just trying to sift his way through his own emotions and his own mind and his own background to find himself and to find peace. He's just a young man at war with himself and his community."

Before principal photography started on SWANSONG in October 2008, McCann decided to base himself in Sligo. He needed time to work on the character and the accent and slot into the town and its milieu. "I hung around the estates and talked to local guys who were my age from the town," he says. "I wanted to get really comfortable with the accent and the people and the place before I went in front of the camera. In a way I could relate to Occi.: I'm the same age as him and there are parts of me that are like Occi Byrne. There are parts of my friends

that are like Occi Byrne. I've known a lot of young guys and girls my age who have had quite troubled lives with a dysfunctional family and society."

"Conor gave me so much freedom in relation to where I wanted to go with Occi," comments McCann. "He was very close to the script as he not only created the original stage play but he also directed and acted in it. So for him to hear my views and opinions and accommodate them was very generous and courageous. He knows his stuff and let me go with my feelings and intuition and gave me the confidence to believe that I could carry the part."

McCann was a natural, on land and water: even if the latter scenes on the fishing trawler left him wobbly. "I used to get terribly travel sick when I was a child," he says. "The amount of ginger biscuits and ginger tablets that I was eating on the boat was unprecedented among the other cast and crew. On one occasion I told Caolan Byrne, who plays Lynch, that you have to chew the ginger tablets. Of course you don't chew them. You actually swallow them with some water but he didn't know that. So I gave him these little capsules with pure ginger concentrated oil in the middle of them when he was feeling particularly queasy. I don't know why I did it. I must be a terrible person. But he chewed on those tablets and I'll never forget his face as he did so."

Behind the camera McDermottroe watched McCann grow into the role of Occi Byrne. "We did a lot of the scenes in the Mental Institute first with Martin because I wanted him to look a bit more bedraggled," he says. "It was the second or third day of the shoot and it was the scene with Owen Roe who plays Dr Scanlan, head doctor in the Institute. Martin is seated opposite him and saying very little. I told Martin that he's just there, after a horrible incident, and he's just trying to come out of it and the doctor's trying to get him to talk. He just sits there, rubbing his neck and simply asks where Mary is.

It was at that moment I went 'wow!'. That's the movie. He had the character just there. That was it. That's Occi!. Martin's instincts were always right."

Apart from Occi Byrne, the other central axis of the film is Bridget, Occi's mother and the only true person in his life. McDermottroe wanted the young English

actress, Jody Whittaker for the role having seen her in the film, VENUS, in a performance that 'blew him away'. Also her Englishness dovetailed with the character's seeming rootlessness. "I always wanted to give the feeling that this girl feels out of place in this town. She has come back from England and everybody turns their back on her. She is not wanted in the town. So I had no problem with Jody being from England. In fact I thought that it might give the character another dimension. So I met her and she had read the screenplay and adored it."

Jodie Whittaker, a graduate of London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama, had appeared in the films VENUS and ST TRINIANS and the TV dramas, TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES and WIRED. "I found SWANSONG powerful because it's not a traditional story," she says. "In the sense that the structure of the script is quite unique with the concept of the barrel and this outside presence all the time for Occi, and his mentality and his perception of the world."

For Whittaker the role of Bridget presented its own challenges, not least the age difference and the fact that the film covers many years in Bridget's life. "She starts out at 19 and finishes mid to late 30s," she says. "I'm 26 so 19 is a stretch but not as much as say mid to late-30s which was incredibly difficult. And also towards the end Bridget is battling a drink problem and bad health. One scene can jump ten years, and it was terrifying, although I do believe as an actor it is great feeling to be scared of the part."

"Bridget is very lost," says Whittaker. "She comes back from England after giving birth to a child. Her parents think that she has gone to England to have an abortion but five years later she returns with her son. She's not married, the dad's not around or playing a part in his life.

So she just built up barriers and eventually hardened, which is incredibly sad. You just feel like giving her a hug and telling her its going to be alright, but there is absolutely no one who going to do that. The lucky thing is that she has an absolute love and is loved by Austin, her son. Their relationship, though difficult and very complex, is essentially a very intense love for each other. Occi really loves his mother and he wants to protect her."

But playing that mother/son relationship also threw up other problems for Whittaker. "My initial fear was I didn't think I was old enough to be his mum," she says of playing opposite Martin McCann. "He is 25 and I'm 26 so I was like 'oh my god, we're the same age!'. But then he switches on and he is an incredibly intense and specific actor and he's brilliant to work with because I feel like we really got to grips with this relationship. Its very difficult, we are the same age, but we're playing a very tempestuous and fractured and intense relationship and it was fascinating to work with some one who brought out so many layers in such a huge part."

"She is the one rock, the one stable person in Occi's world," agrees McCann. "In fact she is his life. They are like the one person really in their own world. Everything outside of that relationship is tough. So his mum to him is all about familiarity and love and trust. Where the rest of the world lets him down, she never does."

Marcella Plunkett plays Mary Duggan, the other woman in Occi's life. They are an unlikely couple, from the moment they first meet in the harrowing surrounds of the Mental Institute. But Occi's brashness draws Mary slowly out of her shell. "Mary has a pretty amazing journey from the time we meet her first in the psychiatric unit of the institution," says Plunkett. "She's very uncommunicative, very nervous, very shy and aloof from other people and Occi is the only person who decides to push her or make an effort with her. He sees something he likes and she, for some reason, is not intimidated by this."

Together Plunkett and McCann add tenderness to a tough movie. In this respect McDermottroe nominates his own favourite scene from the film as the one in which Occi and Mary meet under a tree at the Mental Institute. That scene's quiet power and stirring emotional undercurrent was, for the director, more powerful than any 'frantic car chase.' "In that scene Occi is at peace for probably the first time in the film," he says. "I just love people talking and characters being revealed."

For Plunkett her co-star was a delight to work with. "Martin was great," she says "I don't think anybody could have played this part better. Occi is such a visceral character, he wears his emotions on his sleeve. When I read the screenplay I thought that here was a character that just feels everything too much, he has no barrier for moderating and it gets him into trouble. He lives on his emotions as opposed to living with them. Martin has an incredible energy or quality about him that he can portray brilliantly that kind of raw emotion. So it was very exciting working with him."

Bríd Brennan (ANNE DEVLIN, TROJAN EDDIE, TOPSY-TURVY) was cast as Bridget's mother, Theresa. It is an unsympathetic character, caught in the emotional eddy between a bullying husband and an estranged daughter. Brennan, who had been very moved by the screenplay, was intent on capturing the pathos and tragedy of her character.

"I was very moved by the screenplay," says Bríd Brennan who plays Bridget's mother, Theresa. "While it isn't a story that I haven't heard before, the way that Conor tells it is very affecting and powerful. Many of us know the story of the young boy, or young woman, who gets dealt a very bad hand in life. With the Occi character, things are very much stacked against him. It's the way he makes his way through his journey, and tries to get by these obstacles that I find quite affecting and sometimes amusing. It's quite unusual in the way its told."

"It would be very easy just to say it is a story of a small town in Ireland, but I don't think it is," continues Brennan. " I think it is a little more universal because it's a person trapped in their anger. Occi is very much a person trapped by rage and the confines of the narrowness of life he's been given.

He is definitely imprisoned by his circumstances, but it has a sort of surreal side to it. So I don't see it as another tale of small town Irish life, it's a lot richer than that."

Brennan's performance is just another part of the jigsaw puzzle that is the hard life and bleak times of Occi Byrne. Putting all the pieces together was a tough but rewarding challenge for first-time feature director, Conor McDermottroe. "At

the very beginning of the shoot the line producer told me, 'now when you behave like a rabbit in the headlights don't worry because we'll be there'," he says and laughs. "But I didn't plan to act like a rabbit in the headlights even if there were a couple of days of constant rain and we didn't get the shot that we really wanted. I loved it and can't wait to direct another feature."

Already Conor McDermottroe and Hermann Florin are working on that. "It's quite different from SWANSONG but it will also be set in the West of Ireland," says Florin. "The working title is SLIGO JIHAD, it will be a comedy about a culture clash in Sligo town which almost sparks a holy war."

## **CAST & CREW BIOGRAPHIES**

### **MARTIN MCCANN – OCCI**

Martin McCann's film debut as Jimmy Riley in the romantic drama CLOSING THE RING (2007) directed by Richard Attenborough. Attenborough cast McCann in the film after seeing him in a stage production of A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, McCann has featured in films such as SWANSONG: STORY OF OCCI BYRNE. McCann's up and coming releases include: THE PACIFIC, CLASH OF THE TITANS.

In terms of TV Credits Martin has featured in PACIFIC, MY BOY JACK, and DRY YOUR EYES.

McCann has many theatre appearances including: TO BE SURE, 1974, CLOCKWORK ORANGE, PSYCHO BEACH PARTY, CHARLOTTE'S WEB, FLIGHT, DIGGER DOC AND DEDEE, THE LITTLE MERMAID, THAT DRIVING AMBITION, OLIVER, BUGSY MALONE, ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA.

## **JODIE WHITTAKER – BRIDGET BYRNE**

Since graduating from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 2005 with a gold medal in acting, Jodie Whittaker has gone on to play award-winning roles and worked with some of this generation's most prestigious artists.

Jodie has already made a name for herself in the world of film, most recently appearing in Vincent Amorim's GOOD alongside a stellar cast including Viggo Mortensen and Jason Isaacs. In 2006 Jodie's performance in Roger Michell's VENUS alongside Peter O'Toole earned her nominations for 'best newcomer' at the 'British Independent Film Awards', 'best British newcomer' at the 'Critic's Circle Awards' and 'best actress in a motion picture' at the 'Satellite Awards'. The following year she went on to appear in ST.TRINIAN'S. This year saw the release of two films starring Jodie Whittaker. Ian Fitzgibbon's PERRIER'S BOUNTY has just premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and Jodie features alongside an impressive cast including Jim Broadbent, Cillian Murphy and Brendan Gleeson. She can also be seen in the South African hit film WHITE WEDDING. Next Jodie is due to appear in Nick Moran's THE KID also starring Ioan Gruffudd, Natascha McElhone and Rupert Friend.

Alongside her film work Jodie has also starred in numerous television productions and is currently shooting the lead role in Abi Morgan's new one-off drama ROYAL WEDDING for BBC2. She has also recently finished filming CRANFORD. The critically acclaimed BBC drama starring Judi Dench and Imelda Staunton is due to return to our screens for a Christmas special later this year. Last year Jodie took the role of 'Mary Boon' in the Channel Four drama CONSUMING PASSION. She also played lead character 'Louise' in the hit ITV thriller series WIRED alongside Toby Stephens and Riz Ahmed. The same year Jodie appeared as 'Izz' in the acclaimed BBC adaptation of TESS OF THE D'UBERVILLES alongside Gemma Arterton, Ruth Jones and Eddie Redmayne. Jodie's other television credits include Channel Four's THE SHOTING OF THOMAS HURNDALL, THIS LIFE + 10 on BBC One, guest lead roles in DALZIEL AND PASCOE and DOCTORS and the lead role of Sam in the BBC 'Afternoon Play', THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF BILLY TWO-SHEDS for which she was nominated for an RTS

Award.

True to her theatrical training Jodie has also appeared on stage in a number of acclaimed productions. She has performed twice at the Almeida, most recently in *AWAKE AND SING* and previously in *ENEMIES* both directed by the artistic director of the theatre, Michael Attenborough. Her performance in the latter earned her a nomination for the 'Ian Charleson Award'. Her other theatre work has included the role of 'Ampelisca' in Tim Carroll's Globe production of *THE STORM*, and 'Sue' in a production of *BASH* at the Trafalgar Studios.

## **MARCELLA PLUNKETT – MARY DUGGAN**

Wicklow born Marcella Plunkett has worked extensively in film, Theatre and television in the UK and Ireland. Her television credits include: ON THE EDGE, COUNTRY, FALLING FOR A DANCER and A KIND OF HUSH. Marcella most recently appeared in the role of Maura, a leading role in SINGLE HANDED III – THE DROWNING MAN directed by Antony Byrne for Touchpaper TV/RTE.

Theatre credits include: EXILES and ARISTOCRATS, PHAEDRA, SHADOW OF A GUNMAN, HONOUR, THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS, and MACKEREL SKY. Most recently Marcella appeared as Sister James in the London Premiere of DOUBT directed by Nicolas Kent at theTricycle Theatre, London.

Marcella's film credits include: ZONAD ON THE EDGE, COUNTRY, FALLING FOR A DANCER and A KIND OF HUSH. Marcella most Recently completed filming a leading role in SWANSONG: STORY OF OCCI BYRNE an Independent Irish Feature Film directed by Conor McDermottroe.

## **GERARD MCSORLEY – MICHAEL BYRNE**

Gerard McSorley is one of Ireland's leading character actors. He was born in Omagh, Co. Tyrone in 1950. In a career spanning 35 years, he has appeared in over two hundred theatre productions, one hundred and fifty radio dramas, and in the last decade he has appeared in countless films.

His screen career began in the early nineties when Jim Sheridan cast him as the tragic Detective Pavis in *IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER*. Over the next ten years he appeared in over 30 movies culminating in the multi-award winning film *OMAGH* for which he received 4 awards. Joel Schumacher cast him as John Gilligan in *VERONICA GUERIN* with Cate Blanchett, produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and lately he has done a series for TG4 in the Irish language. Other recent film credits include *THE CONSTANT GARDENER* directed by Fernando Meirelles, *THE FRONT LINE* directed by David Gleeson and *MIDDLETOWN* directed by Brian Kirk. Short films include *TELL IT TO THE FISHES* directed by Will Sinclair and *HESITATION* directed by Virginia Gilbert. Gerry is currently shooting *ANTON* by Anthony Fox.

In 1980 Gerard joined the Abbey Theatre Company and began a long and creative relationship with Ireland's National Theatre. He appeared in 20-30 productions at the Abbey, most recently in the Abbey 100 years celebrations in *DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH* by Stuart Carolan and as the father in *PORTIA COUGHLAN* by Maria Carr. He has had ongoing involvement with most of Ireland's leading dramatists including Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, Thomas Kilroy, William Trevor, Frank McGuinness, Jennifer Johnson, Sebastian Barry, Steward Parker, Derek Mahon and Seamus Heaney.

## **OWEN ROE - DR SCANLON**

As one of Ireland's busiest actors Owen's film roles include: MICHAEL COLLINS, FRANKI STARLIGHT, LET IT BE and THE GREAT ROCK AND ROLL CIRCUS, INTERMISSION, WHEN THE SKY FALLS, THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY, BREAKFAST ON PLUTO, Most recently, SWANSONG: THE STORY OF OCCI BYRNE, PRIDE AND JOY, WISE OPEN SPACES and ALARM.

Recently Owen has appeared in OF THE NORTH, PROSPERITY, GENTLY'S LAST STAND, Owen Roe has played many regular roles on TV such as; The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kevin Flaherty opposite Pauline Collins in THE AMBASSADOR, as the devious pub landlord, Paul Dooley in the long running and internationally successful BALLYKISSANGEL, and as the psychic weather man Frank O'Halloran in the romantic comedy series ANY TIME NOW.

Owen has just returned from Sydney where he was appearing in the Gate Theatre Production of FAITH HEALER. He has performed in numerous productions throughout Ireland. Arguably his most notable work has been with The Abbey Theatre (Ireland's National Theatre) in productions such as Tom Murphy's, THE GIGLI CONCERT (which was chosen to tour Australia in celebration of the Abbey's centenary year), as John Proctor in Arthur Miller's, THE CRUCIBLE, as music hall clown Johnny Patterson in Stewart Parker's, HEAVENLY BODIES, and as the heroin addict Eddie in Dermot Bolger's powerful and harrowing tale of drug abuse, ONE LAST HORSE- for which Owen was nominated best actor in the Bank of Ireland Arts awards. Outside of the Abbey, Owen has appeared in many other successful and award winning productions, particularly as Neils Bohr (best actor nominee in The Irish Times Theatre awards 2003) in Michael Frayn's COPENHAGEN directed by Lynne Parker and as Tom in the Irish premiere of David Hare's SKYLIGHT for Landmark Productions directed by Michael Caven.

## **CONOR MCDERMOTTROE – WRITER & DIRECTOR**

Sligo native Conor McDermottroe, has worked in a variety of theatre, film and television roles. In his teens he started with the Irish Theatre Company as an ASM then worked at The Abbey, Druid Theatre Company, The Gate Theatre Dublin and The Royal National Theatre as an actor. He spent 10 years in Australia, appearing in a number of award-winning TV and film productions as well as directing for theatre.

Conor started writing in 1999. His first two screenplays were selected for Moonstone International Screenwriter Workshops. His first stage play was translated into German and Swedish and has been produced in many different countries. Amongst other stage and screenplays currently in development, Conor wrote and directed three short films, the last of which won best film at the Venice International Short Film Festival. In July 2009 Conor finished his first feature film SWANSONG. STORY OF OCCI BYRNE. He is currently working on a Working Class, Culture Clash Comedy called SLIGO JIHAD. Earlier this year his play THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE received its world premier in Boston and is transferring to New York. His new stage plays, DIVERTED FLIGHT and DAWNHURST are in development with different theatre companies.

Awards include: Best film at the Venice International Short Film Festival 2005 A WOMAN'S HAIR. Special commendation at Kerry Film Festival 2006, SQUADDIE. Runner Up in Best Irish Feature at the Galway Film Fleadh July 2009 SWANSONG - STORY OF OCCI BYRNE.

## **HERMANN FLORIN – PRODUCER**

Hermann founded FLORIN FILM in May 2004 to facilitate his ongoing work as an independent producer after being employed by some of Germany's leading film and television production companies. Beside managing the affairs of FLORIN FILM and Florin Film Productions UK Ltd. Hermann also worked as a freelance producer for companies both in Germany and abroad (Neue Kinowelt, ndF, Apollo Media Film Management, Magma Film European Scripting House and Tyrone, Ireland as well as Southern star, Australia).

Feature Film Credits as Producer include the comedies THE BIG MAMBO (Berlin Film Festival in competition) and THREE CHINAMEN WITH A DOUBLE BASS (German Film Award, Studio Hamburg Newcomer Award, Grand Price Jury San Francisco Film Festival, Goldener Biber, Grand Jury Price Puchnan International Film Festival) – dramas like DER PREIS DER SEHNSUCHT, RUN FOR YOUR LIFE, FRIEDLICHE ZEITEN and the up and coming SWANSONG – STORY OF OCCI BYRNE and family entertainment HANNI UND NANNI based on Enid Blyton's bestselling books. In the realm of TV Florin has produced many titles including the TV series WILD TIMES, German cult series BALKO, international copros OUTRIDERS and FOREIGN EXCHANGE and amongst many others TV movies UNE FEMME SUR MESURE, KINDERRAUB IN RIO, MIRELLA and IMMER WIRBEL UM MARIE.

## **EDWINA FORKIN – CO PRODUCER**

After graduating from Trinity College where she was also Entertainments Officer, Edwina lived in San Francisco for five years working in the Music business. Returning with a new ambition to work in film she quickly graduated from the EAVE, Media Business School and subsequently from the ACE producers program. She set up Zanzibar Films in 2002.

Edwina's debut Feature HEADRUSH (2003) has four international awards to its credit. Her second feature SUGAR premiered in Sundance 2005 and screened in competition at Edinburgh & Thessaloniki film festivals. She is also involved as co-producer on feature films DOT.COM (2006) & JOHNNY WAS (2005) SWANSONG – THE STORY OF OCCI BYRNE and SOUL BOY (2009) and in post-production on feature film 2 GRAVES – director Yvonne McDevitt, composer Michael Nyman. Her feature length documentaries are AIDAN WALSH - MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE (2002) and BREAKING BOUNDARIES – the Irish Cricket team's world cup (2008) and is in post production on Shimmy Marcus's Documentary GOOD CAKE, BAD CAKE.

She is working on numerous features THE STRAITS – director Johnny Gogan production late 2009 and LINGLING - director Patrick Jolley due for production early 2010 while also co-producing and SCOTTISH DOCTOR due for production September 2009 & IT TAKES THREE TO TANGO – director Audrey O'Reilly, due for production Spring 2010.

Also Zanzibar film – NEW BOY was nominated for an Academy Award for Best short film 2009.

## **TOM MAGUIRE – CO PRODUCER**

Tom is a graduate of the Film Business School, EAVE and Reading University. To date, Tom has produced nine short films, two theatre plays and three feature films.

In 2002, together with Patrick Fitzsymons he founded Borderline Productions in Northern Ireland and Line Productions in Southern Ireland to develop an expanding slate of feature films and documentaries with support from national agencies on both sides of the Irish Border. Their first feature, a gangster thriller JOHNNY WAS starring Vinnie Jones and Samantha Mumba, was shot in Belfast in July 2005, followed by QUEERING THE PITCH a feature documentary on the Emerald Warriors, Irelands one and only gay rugby team. His third feature film THE BIRD CAN'T FLY by Threes Anna, starring Barbara Hershey premiered in competition at the San Sebastian Film Festival, Sept 07. The film was shot entirely on location in South Africa.

Tom has also worked on ten feature films and four television series as a production accountant and has lectured on Film Finance on a number of courses including the European Audio Visual Entrepreneurs programme. He speaks German and Dutch, and can read Danish, Swedish and Afrikaans.

## **ALEXANDER DU PREL – DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPY**

Alexander graduated from the University of Hamburg with a master class for Alexander graduated from University of Hamburg with a master degree for Cinematography. He has received the German Camera Award (2001) by Filmbüro NRW (promotional awards).

Alexander's narrative work ranges from full-length features: SWANSONG - STORY OF OCCI BYRNE, VIVA EUROPA, WER WETTET DER BETRÜGT To shorts: UI, DAS FEST DER FESTE, ANNE, AUSGERECHNET, AATON. To Documentaries: MAKING OF SPEED RACER, DRUNKEN SAILOR, SCHLAUE BAUERN, and DAS SPIEL OHNE BALL. He also has worked on many commercials, one of them being KINO IM PARK for UFA.

## **PADRAIG O' NEILL – PRODUCTION DESIGNER**

Padraig O Neill trained at the celebrated Druid Theatre in Galway. In 1989 he worked as assistant to designer Frank Conway on THE FIELD. Since then he has designed and art directed many award winning films including BRAVEHEART, THE BOXER and BLOODY SUNDAY. In 2003 Padraig won the production design For SPIN THE BOTTLE. Other design work includes: THE DAISY CHAIN, BOG WOMAN, and SAVAGE. He has collaborated with director Lenny Abrahamson on the award winning pictures 3 JOES, ADAM AND PAUL, and GARAGE, for which Padraig received an IFTA nomination for Best Production Design.

## **JOAN O'CLERY – COSTUME DESIGNER**

Joan has twice been awarded Costume Designer of the Year by the Irish Times Theatre Awards, in '97 for *The Pinter Festival* at The Gate Theatre, and in '02 for *LOLITA* at the Peacock Theatre,

Joan has enjoyed a long association with the Abbey Theatre, both as Head of the Costume Dept (02-07) and as Costume Designer for numerous productions there, notably, *HAMLET*, *A DOLL'S HOUSE*, *THE WILD DUCK*, *A WHISTLE IN THE DARK*, *THE COLLEGE BAWN*, *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST*, and recently *THE LAST DAYS OF A RELUCTANT TYRANT*. She designed the costumes for Owen McCafferty's play *SCENES FROM THE BIG PICTURE* for The Waterfront, Belfast, and is currently costuming *DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES* for Galloglass in the same production team.

Recently Joan designed the costumes for *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*, for the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford and London's West End. This was her second show for the RSC, following a sell out production of *MACBETH* in '07.

Dance work includes *THE RITE OF SPRINT* and *SWEPT* for CoisCeim Dance Theatre, and Opera includes *LA TRAVIATA* for English National Opera at the London Coliseum, *TURANDOT* and *DEAD MAN WALKING* for Opera Ireland.

Other films include *BRIXTON BOB* for Fastnet Films, Carmel Winters' *SNAP* and the dramatised sections of Cathal Black's documentary, *LEARNING GRAVITY*.