

## A Toast to Irish Film



**DECLAN RECKS** on the success of the 3<sup>rd</sup> IrishFilmFesta in Rome.

There's a scene in the opening episode of the television series *Pure Mule* in which Shamie (played by the late great Tom Murphy) tries to make small talk with Aine (Andrea Kelly) in her bedsit. In an effort to charm her he has arrived at her door with a bottle of wine and a box of Roses. She suggests he open the wine and they have some while watching the *Eastenders* omnibus. Tom proceeds to pour the wine into two mugs. Normally when I watch this scene I enjoy the awkwardness of the sexually inexperienced Shamie as he tries to negotiate un-chartered territory. However, watching the scene with an Italian audience at the IrishFilmFesta in Rome, I began to see it through their eyes and when I saw Tom produce two large coffee mugs and proceed to pour the wine into them I wasn't surprised at the audible tutting and shaking of heads as the locals were horrified at this act of blasphemy.

Now, where I come from, drinking wine from a mug, or indeed direct from the bottle if there's no mug to hand, is perfectly acceptable behaviour. But that's one of the joys of seeing your work with a foreign audience – you can forget that what we take for granted can be abnormal to others.

### Cheesed off

Only the night before, when we were having dinner with the artistic director of the festival, Susanna Pellis, and Gerard McCoy, first secretary to the Irish Ambassador in Rome, someone amongst us had attempted to put Parmesan on their fish pasta, only to have their arm grabbed by the waiter as it hovered over the plate. The waiter shook his head sternly and guided the offending cheese away from the plate exclaiming 'NEVER with Fish!' The Italians love their food (and wine) as much as they love their film and it's this passion for film that brought us to Rome. In particular,



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the passion of Susanna Pellis, who invited us to take part in the IrishFilmFesta. As Artistic Director of the festival Susanna has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Irish cinema, having written two books (in Italian) on Irish cinema.

### Irish cream

I had spoken to Susanna a few months earlier in an interview for her second book and I'd asked her why she had a particular interest in our relatively young film industry. She told me that she thought Irish actors were amongst the best in the world and then proceeded to list off the cream of Irish acting talent, many of whom I've been lucky to work with. As a result, Susanna invited screenwriter Eugene O'Brien, actress Eileen Walsh and me to screen our film *Eden*

ABOVE: Barry Monahan, Declan Recks, Susanna Pellis, Eugene O'Brien, Eileen Walsh, Seamus Byrne (from left to right).  
BELOW: Barry Monahan, Eileen Walsh and Susanna Pellis.

along with some episodes of the television series *Pure Mule*. Also attending were producer Seamus Byrne and Dr Barry Monahan, lecturer of History of Cinema at University College of Cork. Over the course of three days we took part in screenings, panel discussions, radio interviews and debates about Irish film. Throughout we were looked after by the festival manager, Nick Kilcoyne, who ensured that the entire event ran like clockwork in the beautiful surroundings of the Casa del Cinema.

The festival was opened by the Irish Ambassador to Rome (and fellow BIFFO), Pat Hennessy, and he spoke of the importance of events like the IrishFilmFesta, not only in bringing Irish films to a wider audience, but in encouraging dialogue and understanding between countries. Among the films shown were *Kisses*, *Hunger*, *The Eclipse*, *Eamon*, episodes from the television series *Prosperity* and, in a tribute to Eileen Walshe, Peter Mullans' *The Magdalene Sisters*. The festival was made possible by the participation of the Irish Embassy to Italy and with the support of Tourism Ireland, Culture Ireland and the Irish Film Institute.

### Roman holiday

As we walked to the Casa del Cinema each day from our hotel on the Via Veneto, made famous by that classic of Italian cinema, *La dolce vita*, you couldn't help but be reminded of the power of film to imprint images of a place and city in the memory. The IFI and Culture Ireland do invaluable work in spreading the images of Irish cinema to festivals around the world and that's something worth lifting a glass, or mug, to. Salute! ❖