

Cinema North-West and the Irish Film Institute present

# *Adaptation 2008*



## Roddy Doyle on Screen

cinema north west



## How's it goin'?

Four years on, Adaptation has grown to become a significant event in the cultural life of the North West. The question started to surface a few months ago, "So who is it this year?" That alone speaks volumes about the impact of last year's festival and highlights the anticipation of this year's. We had a wonderful success with Edna O'Brien. It really made a difference having her present and being so generous about her life and work.

In answering the question, delight has been the universal response upon hearing of Roddy Doyle's participation. Growing up in Dublin was rarely expressed so well as in *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*. As one displaced Northside Dubliner, it's a particular pleasure for me to welcome him to this event in our village.

Cinema North West's core mission has been to bring contemporary world cinema to rural audiences, a ground-breaking model which covers the two counties of Leitrim and Sligo. Recently we've extended our season through the summer, and next year we hope to go year-round in our programming, bringing to audiences the kind of experience usually only available in major cities.

Adaptation sits as one of the key events of our year. In its simple documentation of a body of work, there is a wonderful chance to engage with, and deepen our understanding of, a particular writer's talents. This is what emerges most clearly in the public interviews and many discussions around the screenings; people seeing work from a richer and deeper perspective. It's simple and it works.

Of course, making all of this possible is not so simple, and much credit is due to the wonderful work of Sunniva O'Flynn and Alice Black of the Irish Film Institute and Irish Film Archive in sourcing and organising all of the prints and materials which have come to make this programme. Also, thanks to the Board of the Cinema North West, whose contributions are key to the ongoing success of the cinema, and Sinead Dolan who provided all of the local administration. Finally the man at the door, Tommy Aherne, our cinema manager, known to many of you. He combines many rare skills with the most amiable of manners, and runs up a lot of hours during this particular weekend.

Tom Weir

Board of Directors:

Lelia Doolan, Rhona McGrath, Paul Kirkpatrick, Tom Walsh, Tom Weir, Hans Wieland

Cover: Ros Kavanagh

cinema·north·west

## Doyle Eireann - Roddy Doyle's Ireland on Film

It is a pleasure to renew our association with Cinema North West to mount this fourth Adaptation festival. This unique event which celebrates Irish literature and film has, in previous years, celebrated the works of William Trevor, Edna O'Brien and the late John McGahern. This year, the spotlight falls on Booker Prize-winning author Roddy Doyle, as we present a powerful programme of feature films, television dramas and shorts based on his work. This programme provides a comprehensive picture of Roddy Doyle on film, and a compelling picture of the evolution of Irish society over the past two decades - from the largely homogenous pre-celtic tiger Dublin of *The Commitments* (1991) to the multi-cultural post-boom Ireland of *New Boy* (2007).

Roddy Doyle's engagement with cinema is complex. The films in this programme are not mere by-products of their literary origins. Doyle remains intimately involved with the work as it is translated from page to screen: whether as adaptations from novel or short story to feature film (*The Commitments*, *The Snapper* and *The Van*) or whether written directly for the screen (*Family*, *Hell for Leather*, *When Brendan Met Trudy*). His love for cinema is vividly apparent in *When Brendan Met Trudy*, which is filled with playful allusions to a broad range of cinema classics from *Song of Bernadette* to *A Bout de Souffle* to *The Quiet Man*. This passion appears to have been passed on to the next generation as we can see in his most recent project - *The Future is Green* - which he has co-directed with his son, Jack.

The liaison with the Cinema North West is a most rewarding one for the IFI. Adaptation road-tests (quite literally) these programmes to a most discriminating North Western audience and then takes the programmes nationwide. Adaptation programmes, which premiered in Leitrim, have since travelled to arts festivals in West Cork, Kilkenny, Dublin and indeed further afield through IFI's Reel Ireland programme, which takes Irish cinema to international audiences worldwide.

These programmes continue to thrive thanks to the considerable support of RTÉ and BBC - both of whom were involved in the production and provision of copies of material for the series. Thanks of course are due too to our colleagues in the Irish Film Archive wherein many of the films are held.

We are particularly pleased and honoured that Roddy Doyle will join us in Leitrim for a public interview - which no doubt will provide many fascinating insights into the process of adaptation.

I, along with my colleague in the IFI, Alice Black, Regional Development Manager, hope you enjoy the festival.



Sunniva O'Flynn  
Curator, Irish Film Institute

## Adaptation

I remember a Friday afternoon in London, in March 1988, when I met four film producers in a row. My first novel, *The Commitments*, had just been published in the U.K., and they were all keen to make a film out of it. There were four, but I only remember two of them, the second-last and the last.

The second-last producer: I can't remember his name. He had a beard and he seemed quite nice. I asked him if the proposed film would be set in Dublin. He said Yes. (It might seem like a strange question. *The Commitments* is a story about a bunch of working class Dublin kids who form a band, in Dublin – so where else would you set it? But I'd asked the same question of a different producer, some months before, and the answer was New York.) I asked him if he thought the film would need star names. He said Yes, because he could never attract the finance without 'names'. I asked him if the language would remain intact. 'No' he said. 'The fuck-quotient is too high.'

The last producer: Her name was Lynda Myles. (It still is.) She had produced *Defence of the Realm*, which I loved. I asked her if the film would be set in Dublin. She said Yes. Did she think the film would need stars? She said No. She thought a group of unknown kids should be played by unknown kids. And would the language remain intact? She looked at me as if she didn't quite understand the question.

Now and again, we can look back at decisions we made years before and realise that, not only were we lucky, we were wise. The job change, the house move, the decision not to mind the neighbour's pit bull while he's in jail. I was wise that day in London when I decided that Lynda Myles should produce *The Commitments*. (She co-produced *The Commitments*, and also produced *The Snapper*, *The Van* and *When Brendan Met Trudy*.) Lynda's ideal world is dark, with rows of seats; I've never met anyone who loves film more than her. (I've met producers who have no interest in film.) She has written about film, she has produced films, she has advised on film production; her holiday destinations tend to have the word 'Festival' attached at the end. I was keen to have a bash at writing the script of *The Commitments* myself, and something about the conversation with Lynda told me that she'd be a great help to someone who'd never read a script before, let alone written one. And I was right. Lynda's a great teacher. She didn't panic when she read what I thought were my first script pages. She pointed out how twenty-five bad pages – she never used the word 'bad' – could become eight reasonable pages. She showed me how two dull scenes – she did say 'dull' – could be joined to deliver one much livelier scene.

So, I got to co-write the script for one of the most popular films ever made in this country, and I learnt how to write scripts at the same time. But I don't remember much about the actual writing. I still have the copy of the novel I used as I chose what dialogue to keep, what scenes to add. It doesn't tell me much. There's a bit of underlining, and a few red arrows where I must have brought separate bursts of dialogue together. I also wrote the words *Dark End of the Street* on the title page. That song isn't in the novel, so I might have decided to use the opportunity to add more songs – I don't know. But I do know I cracked open the book. I broke its spine, and the pages started falling out. Breaking the book is a good idea. As early as possible: get rid of the book, start seeing the film.

Roddy Doyle

The Future is Green, Dir: Roddy Doyle, Jack Doyle



# The Commitments

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Director   | Alan Parker  |
| Screenplay | Dick Clement, Ian La Frenais, Roddy Doyle  |
| Year       | 1991   |
| Length     | 118 minutes  |
| Country    | Ireland / U.K. / USA   |
| Cast       | Robert Arkins, Michael Aherne, Angeline Ball, Maria Doyle Kennedy, Dave Finnegan, Bronagh Gallagher, Andrew Strong, Félim Gormley, Glen Hansard, Colm Meaney |
| Cert       | 15   |

Adapted from Roddy Doyle's best-selling book and directed by Alan Parker, *The Commitments* depicts the fortunes of a rock n' roll band from Dublin's Northside. The first in Doyle's *Barrytown Trilogy*, the film follows tireless entrepreneur Jimmy Rabbitte as he assembles a motley band of musicians in the hope of bringing soul music to Dublin.

The film is both gritty and comic, as seen in unforgettable scenes of Rabbitte auditioning some increasingly unsuitable applicants, then leading his lily-white protégées through James Brown's *I'm Black And Proud*. The group's initial success is bittersweet though, and the band members are soon torn apart by rivalries off-stage.

Parker, famously held open auditions and after seeing thousands of aspiring actors and musicians, settled on a cast of largely unknown (at the time) young performers for the lead roles. The performances feel absolutely spontaneous and the exuberance of the musical numbers is undeniable. Strong's *Mustang Sally* enjoyed chart success for real.

A huge box office success when it was first released, *The Commitments* resonated with contemporary Irish audiences who hadn't seen their lives or heard their language on the big screen in such a way before. Doyle's dialogue vividly brought this Dublin to life, and the film definitely stands the test of time, being one of the best cinematic portrayals of the highs and lows of being in a rock band.

Alan Parker has said of the film: "The heart of *The Commitments* was really the brilliance of Roddy Doyle. It was his ear that gave us a chance to do it. I did take the film to another place than the book did. Its strength was in its honesty, with regards to the kids themselves. All of which came from the quality of the original writing."

Friday 12 September

19:30 Festival launch in Stanfords Pub  
followed by screening of *The Commitments*





## Family

**Director** Michael Winterbottom  
**Screenplay** Roddy Doyle  
**Year** 1994  
**Length** 4 x 52 minutes  
**Country** Ireland / U.K.  
**Cast** Sean McGinley, Ger Ryan, Neilí Conroy, Barry Ward, Des McAleer, Gemma Butterly, Jake Williams, Lorcan Cranitch

*Family* was one of the most successful television programmes ever broadcast on RTÉ. Co-produced with the BBC, the searing four-part drama features an abusive husband, his wife and their children, living in a tough Dublin housing estate. Shown just three days after the infamous Riverdance Eurovision broadcast, *Family* drew almost as many viewers (1.1 million) and was a watershed moment in Irish television history.

The brooding, explosive Charlo Spencer (Sean McGinley) and his fearful, depressed wife Paula (Ger Ryan), burned themselves into the consciousness of the country, leading to an outcry and a national debate about wife-beating. Paula's excuse for her bruises (that she "walked into a door") subsequently became the title for Doyle's best-selling novel *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*.

It's a tribute to Doyle's writing that he doesn't treat the Spencers as a clinical case study. The narrative does not have the traditional television climax or resolution, but rather exists as a series of events and conversations unfolding in front of us. Each episode is devoted to a different member of the family, and allows the viewer multiple perspectives, as characters move from the background to the foreground and back again with ease.

Michael Winterbottom, who went on to make *Jude*, *24 Hour Party People*, *The Claim*, *Road to Guantanamo* and *A Mighty Heart*, deftly conveyed the wrenching experience of existing in the Spencer household. *Family* is as potent today as it was when first broadcast, and we are delighted to screen it here in its entirety.

**Saturday 13 September** 12:00 Part 1: Charlo 13:15 Part 2: John Paul  
18:15 Part 3: Nicola 19:30 Part 4: Paula



## The Snapper

**Director** Stephen Frears  
**Screenplay** Roddy Doyle  
**Year** 1993  
**Length** 91 minutes  
**Country** U.K. / Ireland  
**Cast** Colm Meaney, Tina Kellegher, Ruth McCabe, Eanna MacLiam  
**Cert** 15

When un-wed 20-year-old Sharon Curley (Tina Kellegher) announces that she's pregnant, her father Dessie (Colm Meaney) reacts in the only way he knows how. He shouts a lot, then goes down to the pub. Sharon won't say who the father of her child is, only that she plans to keep the baby. As the local gossip-mongers work overtime, the Curley clan find themselves torn between family, faith, friends and their community.

The rights to the Rabbite family name had been sold with the film rights for *The Commitments*, so they were rechristened the Curleys in this adaptation of Roddy Doyle's second novel in the *Barrytown Trilogy*. Originally made for the small screen by the BBC, *The Snapper* caused a bidding war after it was screened at Cannes, and won a well-deserved cinematic release. Adapted by Doyle himself, the film also bears the mark of director Stephen Frears' confident hand. Frears ensures the end result is warm and witty, without a hint of schmaltz or caricature. He's supported by an agile and spirited cast, especially Colm Meaney, whose touching performance of Dessie is a joy.

**Saturday 13 September** 20:30



## New Boy

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Director   | Steph Green  |
| Screenplay | Steph Green based on the short story by Roddy Doyle  |
| Year       | 2007   |
| Length     | 11 minutes   |
| Country    | Ireland  |
| Cast       | Olutunji Ebun-Cole, Norma Sheahan, Simon O'Driscoll, Fionn O'Shea, Sinead Maguire, Byron Kumbula, Sade Oyewole |

Funded by Bord Scannán na hÉireann / the Irish Film Board (IFB) as part of the Short Cuts scheme, *New Boy* is based on a short story by Roddy Doyle. This poignant film deftly captures the experience of being the new boy in school through the eyes of Joseph (Olutunji Ebun-Cole), a nine-year-old African boy. *New Boy* has been screened in festivals all over the world and won prizes at Tribeca, Dingle, Foyle, Seattle and Melbourne.

Sunday 14 September 13:00

## Hell For Leather

|            |                               |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| Director   | Kieron J. Walsh               |
| Screenplay | Roddy Doyle                   |
| Year       | 1999                          |
| Length     | 28 minutes                    |
| Country    | Ireland                       |
| Cast       | Barbara Brennan, Gemma Craven |

Commissioned by RTÉ as part of the *Two Lives* series, *Hell For Leather* was specifically written for television by Roddy Doyle, and marked his first collaboration with director Kieron J. Walsh, who would later direct Doyle's first feature film script *When Brendan Met Trudy*.

The *Two Lives* format required writers to create dramas for two actors in one location. Doyle created the characters of Mary and Joan, two middle-aged women, who meet for the first time at the funeral of the local priest. They discover that they have something in common – the love of the man who has just been buried. They explore, with humour and insight, their memories of the man they both loved – each needing to understand why he betrayed her with the other woman.

Both Doyle and Walsh rise to the challenge of a modest budget and unusual format to produce what is very watchable and compelling television. While obliquely referencing the clerical scandals of the day, such as Father Michael Cleary or Bishop Casey, this piece keeps viewers engaged with some great dialogue and two terrific performances by Barbara Brennan and Gemma Craven.

Sunday 14 September 12:00

## The Future is Green

|            |                            |
|------------|----------------------------|
| Director   | Jack Doyle and Roddy Doyle |
| Screenplay | Jack Doyle and Roddy Doyle |
| Year       | 2008                       |
| Length     | 15 seconds                 |
| Country    | Ireland                    |
| Cast       | Marlon Le Frog             |

*The Future is Green* marks Roddy Doyle's directorial debut as he collaborated with his son Jack to make this 15 second short film. A gardener mowing a lawn encounters a frog, also cutting the grass, albeit with a much smaller lawnmower. But which species will prevail?

Sunday 14 September 13:00



## The Van

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Director   | Stephen Frears   |
| Screenplay | Roddy Doyle  |
| Year       | 1996   |
| Length     | 100 minutes  |
| Country    | U.K. / Ireland   |
| Cast       | Colm Meaney, Donal O'Kelly, Ger Ryan, Brendan O'Carroll, Ruaidhri Conroy, Neill Conroy |
| Cert       | 15   |

*The Van*, Roddy Doyle's final installment in the *Barrytown Trilogy*, a gentler story than *The Snapper*, centres on the character of Bimbo (Donal O'Kelly) who is facing the dole queue after he loses his job in a local bakery. He enlists his old friend Larry (Colm Meaney) into a fast-food business run from a reconstructed chip van. The two working-class heroes spin a dream out of a junkyard truck and a good parking spot, cashing in on hungry punters coming home from the pub.

Set against the backdrop of Ireland's moment of near-glory in the 1990 World Cup, this is familiar Doyle territory. Tragedy and comedy mix in the lives of everyday people striving against the odds. *The Van* cheerfully brings to the big screen the lives of these men and women, trapped in the twilight zone of unemployment and family squabbles, where a filthy old chip van becomes the focus of hope for all involved.

Sunday 14 September 13:00



## When Brendan Met Trudy

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Director   | Kieron J. Walsh   |
| Screenplay | Roddy Doyle   |
| Year       | 2000  |
| Length     | 95 minutes  |
| Country    | Ireland   |
| Cast       | Peter MacDonald, Flora Montgomery, Marie Mullen, Pauline McLynn, Don Wycherley, Maynard Eziashi, Eileen Walsh |
| Cert       | 15  |

Brendan (Peter MacDonald), shy teacher, baritone and movie buff, meets gregarious Trudy (Flora Montgomery) in a Dublin pub and, despite their differences, a powerful attraction develops. For the first time in his adult life, Brendan discovers how to have fun. Then Brendan discovers that Trudy is in fact a burglar and not the pre-school teacher she claims to be.

Doyle's first feature screenplay, and his second collaboration with Kieron J. Walsh, is a wholly entertaining romantic comedy. It is filled with daft jokes, a whimsical action-packed plot, and moments of great hilarity – such as Brendan's grave rendition, in full operatic mode, of Iggy Pop's *The Passenger* to a class of bemused schoolboys; Trudy's observation that a miniature famine village is so real "you can see them starving"; and the finely observed inanities of staffroom conversation (hopefully not reminiscent of Doyle's own teaching experience). It is packed too with verbal and visual references to cinema classics from *The African Queen* to *Sunset Boulevard*.

The film is infused with Doyle's trademark, astute, social observation – at times comic – (suburban bumper stickers declaring the driver is "middle class and proud of it!") - and at times political - (Brendan's appearance on national TV protesting the deportation of his Nigerian friend (Maynard Eziashi)).

MacDonald and Montgomery play their roles with great panache, and are supported by a wonderful comic cast featuring particularly fine turns from Pauline McLynn, Rynagh O'Grady and Marie Mullen.

Sunday 14 September 19:00



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And of course, Roddy Doyle

