

Young foodies are turning up the heat in hard times



The recession has not stopped two Irish women from following their dreams, writes **Lucinda O'Sullivan**

'MY MUM always made lovely ice-creams and desserts," says Louise Bannon, a pastry chef at Noma Restaurant in Copenhagen, Denmark, which ranks third in the list of the World's 50 Best Restaurants.

Louise, who is 28 and comes from Greystones, Co Wicklow, attributes her interest in food to her mother, who has always been an aficionado of French food, and is herself a very fine cook.

After leaving Rathdown School in Glenageary, Louise did a certificate course in culinary arts in DIT Cathal Brugha Street. She then went to work on the waiting staff in Ballymaloe House where, after a few months, Louise asked head chef Rory O'Connell if she could work in the kitchen. O'Connell said "yes" and so began Louise's real love affair with 'the professional kitchen'. She returned to Cathal Brugha Street and took her degree in culinary arts.

Whilst completing her degree, as part of the European Commission's Leonardo da Vinci programme, 18 of the students got their first international culinary experience by going to Paris for three months to work in different restaurants. Louise asked to be placed in a Michelin star restaurant, which she was, in the fabulous two-star Les Ambassadeurs Gastronomic Restaurant at Hotel de Crillon in Place de la Concorde.

In 2005, she worked for a year on starters and pastry in Dublin's Michelin-starred Thornton's Restaurant. She describes Thornton's food as "a bit more classical" than the Crillon. Louise then applied to do a Stage (unpaid work experience) at Heston Blumenthal's famous "Fat Duck" restaurant in Bray in Berkshire — "Number two on the world's 50 best". Whilst there, she went to visit the two-star Michelin restaurant of Tom Aiken's in South Kensington and he offered her a job on the spot. Louise describes Aiken as "incredibly inspiring".

"It was very tough, maybe working up to 18 hours a day but you learned a lot. . . the food looked amazing and tasted amazing." It was undoubtedly a defining experience.



CULINARY STAR: Louise Bannon, from Greystones in Co Wicklow, is a pastry chef at Noma in Copenhagen, ranked third in the list of the World's 50 Best Restaurants. Photos: Gerry Mooney



FAMILY TRADITION: Amy Caviston, granddaughter of John Caviston, has opened her own shop and cafe in Greystones

er, Louise is loud in her praise of the chef and her experiences in working with him. She said: "I knew I was going to get into the long hours, madness and ambition, a la Aiken's, but I love to work under pressure."

"Dylan was very much involved with, and supportive of, his team — and his presentation is so impressive." Unfortunately, however, the economic situation was not in McGrath's favour at that time, and Louise and her colleagues found themselves out of jobs when Mint closed in April 2009.

Louise decided to leave Ireland for a new challenge and applied to Noma. Noma's founder and head chef, Rene Redzepi, previously worked at the World's Number One Best Restaurant — the three star Michelin restaurants El Bulli in Spain and The French Laundry in California — but his food is not in any way Mediterranean.

Noma has risen stratospherically in a short three years, developing its own distinctive style. The cuisine in Noma is completely Nordic — horse mussels, deep-sea crabs and langoustines from the Faroe Islands, halibut, wild salmon and curds from Iceland, lamb, musk ox, berries and the purest drinking water from Greenland. They are constantly smoking, salting, pickling, drying and baking on

slabs of basalt stone. While others use wine in their sauces, at Noma they use beers and ales, fruit juices and fruit-based vinegars for imparting a lively freshness and edge. Vegetables, herbs, spices and wild plants in season play a prominent role.

Louise says it was always her dream to work in one of the best restaurants in the world, where she could learn and progress. There are lots of new ideas at Noma and she finds it a very exciting environment to be in. Most of her colleagues are from other parts of the world — English, German, American — and one other Irish person, Trevor Moran from Stillorgan in Co Dublin.

Forget your apple pie and icecream, no matter how nice, it is all about intricate, delicate detail on a plate. Her favourite dessert at Noma is Skyr sheep's yoghurt mousse and sorrel granite. Louise is a star on the culinary planet — watch out for her.

Another young woman who has been making waves in Greystones in recent times with her superb fish shop, deli and cafe is 27-year-old Amy Caviston. The shop, simply called 'A Caviston', on Church Road, will be two years old next month. Amy's grandfather, John Caviston, founded the well known Caviston's Fish shop, deli and restaurant in Glashule, so you can take it Amy knew her pollock from

her pike by the time she was five years old.

Dad Stephen Caviston believed she should learn the business from an early age and Amy "was working, washing pots in the kitchen during holidays from 12 years old".

When Amy met her future husband, accountant Shane Willis, a native of Greystones, they decided to open their own fish shop in Greystones. They looked for about two years for a suitable spot and eventually their present location right in the heart of Greystones came up. The premises was bigger than they initially wanted but they decided to go the full hog with fish counter, deli and a really smart cafe dining area.

Amy, who has the friendliest and most welcoming personality, said her mornings start at 4am, when she gets up and heads for the fish market, now in the Millennium Business Park in Finglas. She loves the market, saying everyone there is nice and such great fun. "They really mind me and load up the van for me." She then heads back to Greystones and Shane unloads the van.

Shane's brother, Ronan, has also joined the business and takes care of the "office end of things", leaving Amy and Shane free to concentrate "on the floor".

The cafe does lovely homemade desserts, including a flour-free orange cake. You can have all sorts of light bites from their deli and fish counters, as well as open sandwiches of Annagassan crab, Boston shrimp, fish pie, lobster in season, Cajun salmon burgers, lamb casserole, Toulouse sausage and chickpea stew.

Amy also has a great range of artisan products, including Kelly's Organic yoghurts from Moonshine Dairy Farm in Co Westmeath, Wicklow Farmhouse buttermilk and cheddar cheese, Terry Buttery's Coastguard Seafood's smoked salmon and crabmeat from Annagassan, Co Louth. She is also doing pizza bases from the Artisan Pizza company. Also proving very popular are a new range of lollipops and fudge under the label of Pandora Bell from Limerick.

Amy said that the "hot" fish off the slabs these days is Gurnard — "with which you can do so much, great for goustons, fish pies or anything".

Amy and Shane now have a son, 10-month-old Freddie, who "has been to the fish market three times already".

As I was leaving on a cold day on which they were closed for business last week, an old man tentatively approached the door. A smiling Amy greeted him by name, saying "is it a cup of tea you want — come in, come in, I'll get you some".

Louise and Amy are shining lights in the foodie scene and brilliant examples of young people's 'get up and go' in these recessionary times.



JUST FAB: Around 14,000 fans of the Beatles relived past glories at McCartney's recent O2 show. Photo: Alan Connor

Stirring up memories with trip to Penny Lane

For Eddie Naughton and his late friend Christy Egan, the music of the Beatles was the 'soundtrack to their lives'

IF there was any justice in the world then my late friend Christy Egan would have been at one of the most extraordinary Irish concerts of this or any other century — I'm referring to, of course, Paul McCartney's December gig at the O2 in Dublin.

Though to call it a gig somehow diminishes this great, great show.

Christy was, like me, unashamedly a Beatles fan; and from adolescence into adulthood and beyond, the Beatles music was the soundtrack to our lives.

Unlike me, Christy could play the piano and earned a modest living backing singers in pubs and bars who knew with great screeching certainty that they were Ireland's answer to Neil Diamond, Elton John or Celine Dion, to name but a few.

But, notwithstanding this, Christy always managed to pull the night back together again with his Beatles repertoire. The disease that killed Christy three years ago first attacked him (cruelly) through his throat and choked off the voice that gave so much pleasure to so many people over so many years.

It gave truth to the saying that whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. His favourite Beatles track was *Let It Be* and when McCartney sat down at the piano at the mid-way point of his super show and played the opening bars of that particular song, the sluice gates behind my eyes opened.

This was always going to be a bitter-sweet moment for me, and so it proved.

From the moment McCartney walked on stage I had been in an emotional state.

'Several times I was close to tears with the emotion of it all'

He could have played Daniel O'Donnell's entire back catalogue and it wouldn't have mattered — for me it was the second coming and from the off there was a sense that we were in the presence of something exceptionally special.

Several times I was close to tears with the emotion of it all and the absence of Christy made it all the more poignant. Though it wasn't the first time musical memories of the Beatles made me cry. A couple of years back in the famous Cavern in Liverpool's Matthew Street, I was almost overcome as I stood at the empty stage and thought about the days that were no more.

There is hardly an event in

my existence that doesn't contain some kind of Beatles reference, no matter how obscure; and in the early days especially, as far as I was concerned, Christy and myself were the undiscovered fifth and sixth Beatles hiding out in Ireland.

One particular event stands out. Back in those halcyon days of the 1960s (yes, I do remember them) myself, Christy and other friends took ourselves off to a Fleadh Ceol in Wexford for a cultural weekend. We sang Beatles songs (to rapturous applause it has to be said) for the entire three days of the festival.

The great revival of Irish music that took off in the mid-1960s was very nearly nipped in the bud that legendary weekend in Wexford by the Beatles guerrillas from Dublin.

In the O2 arena McCartney didn't play anything outside of his own brilliant repertoire and it was highlighted after stunning highlight, culminating in an almost heart-stopping *Abbey Road* finale — and you really had to be there to appreciate it. And had Christy been there, I would have been dragged from my comfortable seat on the balcony to the front of the stage to absorb every note and inflection.

And oh, how ecstatic he would have been to hear 14,000 voices demanding an encore by way of singing a blood-scalding rendition of the *Hey Jude* finale.

Beyond magic! After the show we would have found the nearest bar with my brother Liam and my sons Warren and Dylan to reprise the more memorable moments of the concert. And, after closing time, we would have bought a carry out and made our way to my home where we my wife (feigning annoyance) would have joined us.

We would have broken out the *Anthology* and sang Beatles songs in to the wee, small hours of the morning.

He would have told achingly funny stories (as was his wont) from our teenage years and from escapades in our twenties, and we would have raised a glass or 10 to absent friends including John and George. And then he would happily have gone gentle into that good night.

If there is any justice in this world then the music of Paul McCartney during that most fantabulous night will have taken flight in sound waves out of the O2 to wing its way up over the shivering waters of the Royal Canal, before pausing in the petrified cemetery at Glasnevin. There they would have settled over Christy Egan's grave for a few soul-soothing moments before moving on. As Hemingway has it: "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

Thank you for the music Paul — and the memories.

No going back to the miserable 'Valley of Tears'

The days of the long-suffering mna na hEireann are well over, writes **Florence Horsman-Hogan**



COMING from the Sixties and early Seventies in Ireland when the 'Mna na hEireann' lay back, closed their eyes and thought of Jesus as their fir were exercising their conjugal rights, I've always thought it rich that many of the mna of my acquaintance could be so vehement in expressing their scepticism as to the sincerity of the 'bright and breezy' brigade.

This was a term I had as a teenager for women like my mam who were good looking,

full of life and devilment, wore make-up and enhanced the morale of any male within giggling range of them. According to the older mna, these women who dressed in bright colours, 'tarted themselves up' and so obviously enjoyed the company of men were somehow 'floozy' with no sincerity.

Those were the days of the open turf fire, the stay-at-home wife, the lino-covered floors and garish wallpaper. The days when it was more practical to wear dark clothes and an apron than to have all



PEIG: A bean who knew misery, and loved to share it

the hard work on washday with the bath full of washing. The days when after the Angelus, the candle would be lit for the five decades of the rosary and the 'trimmin's'

(prayers offered up for the sinners and other causes). The days when living in the 'Valley of Tears' and the suffering of the soul was the lot of every good Catholic.

Usually in the homes of my mother's sisters, the prayers were for my mam — who wasn't actually a sinner — but neither was she 'right in the head'. She most defiantly, from what I as a child could see, never lived her life in any 'Valley of Tears', she was too happy in herself. But everyone else appeared to think that because the 'poor woman' didn't know she was suffering proved how far gone she was! The prayers were mainly to get her to be able to see how much pain and suffering she really was going through, then she might have a chance of getting into heaven.

"That one's much too sweet

to be wholesome," the older mna used to mutter darkly whenever they met one particularly 'bright and breezy' young woman in our village all those years ago. The young woman in question was working in a shop and always seemed to be laughing at something, her infectious grin and cheery "how's it going?" was somehow seen as being 'insincere'. God only knows, she had nothing to laugh about, they opined. There she was like a brazen young hussy in her short skirts, flowery shirts and high heels, and not a man in sight!

But as a child I loved these bright vivacious young women, they heralded a new era. This new breed embraced their sexuality and personal autonomy with gusto. They were not afraid to tell their men what they wanted, either

in the marital bed or out of it. Thanks to them, the view that to suffer in life is necessary to achieve eternal salvation is no longer part of our make-up.

Today I love people who look on the bright side and don't let life get them down. In my opinion, these women were way before their time in the Ireland of Saints and Scholars.

The new Mna na hEireann have long ago thrown off the old constraints of Church and narrow-minded thinking. Our previously provincial attitudes have been changed principally by our ever widening culture base, thanks to travel, immigration and emigration. Abu to the new Mna na hEireann, may we live long and prosper brightly. And if that means for some we're floozies, so be it.

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Sounds of the famous five from both past and present

JAZZ
GRAINNE FARREN

Stefon Harris and Blackout present: Urbanus (Concord Jazz) Harris (vibraphone, marimba), Casey Benjamin (alto sax, vocoder), Marc Cary (piano, keyboards), Fender Rhodes, Ben Williams (bass), Terreon Gully (drums) plus guests on five tracks.

EXCEPT for the pianist, this is the same quintet that played at the Bray Jazz Festival earlier this year. The best tracks are those by the quintet without guest musicians, especially the quirky *Minor March* and *The Afterthought*. Somehow the bigger groups don't work so well, despite the agreeable sounds made by two flutes and three clarinets. To hear

more exciting big-band music by Harris, listen to his 2003 CD *The Grand Unification Theory* (Blue Note).

Reinhardt/Grappelli: Swing from Paris (Living Era) Django Reinhardt (guitar), Stephane Grappelli (violin), Joseph Reinhardt (guitar), Pierre Ferret/Eugene Vees/Roger Chaput (guitar), Louis Vola/Tony Rovi-

ra/Emmanuel Soudieux/Roger Grassnet (bass). Rec. 1935-1939. Twenty-two tracks from the vintage years of the Quintette du Hot Club de France make up a great collection of the group's work in the Thirties. Musically, the Reinhardt-Grappelli partnership was made in heaven. Personally, it did not always run so smoothly, as the well-organised violinist found

the gypsy guitarist's volatile temperament a bit trying at times. The quintet varied in personnel, but it always had two rhythm guitars and a double bass providing a solid beat behind the leaders.

The tracks include originals by Reinhardt and Grappelli as well as tunes by W.C. Handy, Fats Waller and Duke Ellington. The pace varies

from leisurely to lightning, but at every tempo the legendary French group is the epitome of swing.

Next Thursday night in the John Field Room, Susannah de Wrixon pays tribute to the late Blossom Dearie, singer, pianist and songwriter. The backing group is led by Phil Ware.