

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by: **PROFESSOR GERRY O’SULLIVAN**, University College Cork - National University of Ireland, Cork on 4 June, 2004, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **PIERCE BROSNAN**

A Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

There are those exceptional people whose accomplishments and contributions transcend boundaries, disciplines, and generations. I have the honour to present such a person in Pierce Brosnan, an internationally distinguished actor and film producer, an accomplished artist, an astute and successful businessman, a generous benefactor, an acclaimed ambassador for noble causes, a beacon in the Irish diaspora and a devoted family man.

Born in Navan, County Meath in 1953, he moved to London at the age of 11. Early life for him had its tribulations requiring adjustments to new family experiences, new friendships, a change of school and education system and indeed a change of accent and manner of speaking. There is little doubt that these experiences significantly influenced his subsequent career choice and development.

He would later say, "The joy and pain of growing up in an environment such as Ireland in the mid-fifties - I could put that to good use." It was not for him to wallow in a culture of victimhood or self-pity but rather to develop an outstanding career forged from his innate talents, and honed by experience, training and the highest levels of motivation and integrity.

On leaving school at age 15, he worked as a trainee commercial artist at Ravanna Studios, where he became involved in experimental theatre at Oval house in Kennington Oval. Here serendipity takes a hand. A fellow employee introduced him to theatrical workshops and he enrolled in a three-year course at the Drama Centre in North London – a rigorous education and apprenticeship that he would later find invaluable. His initial employment was as an acting assistant stage manager at the Theatre Royal York, where within six months he was selected by the eminent Tennessee Williams to take the role of McCabe in the British premiere of *Red Devil Battery Sign*. Subsequent starring roles in a diversity of stage productions added to his prestige and were good training for someone eventually drawn to the media of cinema and television.

1981 was a defining year for the young actor when he was introduced with critical acclaim to the United States audience through his powerful portrayal in the lead role in the mini-series *Mannions in America*. Here the consummate professional, drawing on his acting talent and Irish background, gave notice that a new star with screen presence had arrived. Subsequently, cast in *Remington Steele*, he achieved worldwide acclaim for his characterisation of the cultured and charming sleuth with both humour and mystery. It would become one of the most widely viewed syndicated series of all-time.

The clamour for a new *James Bond* was now audible. He was an inspired choice for he has reinvigorated the popularity of the Bond films. Through his own inimitable style, he has added significantly to the character, appearing in five consecutive productions, which already gross more than one billion dollars. His bankability is not only from his looks and talent but also from his professionalism, peer respect and interpersonal skills.

But there is, however, much more to this man's artistic range than the cool, suave, sophisticated, good-looking, clothes hanger of Bond. He was widely acclaimed for his performance as the deceitful villain in Boorman's production of *LeCarré's Tailor in Panama*. His *James Bond* and his roguish portrayal in *The Thomas Crown Affair* have seen him perceived as the natural alternative to Connery and McQueen, both long reigning screen icons of masculinity. He has proved himself adept in a diversity of roles including comedy, action thrillers and intense drama. He has received numerous prestigious awards for filmography including the Chicago International Film Festival Career Award, Saturn, blockbuster entertainment and empire awards.

The launch of his own production company in 1998 with his production partner Beau St Clair, provides him with the artistic freedom to take risks and to choose his projects, producers and artists. The company name "Irish Dreamtime" combines his romantic and positive disposition to the land of his birth with his harder entrepreneurial acumen. Already firmly established through the production of several films including *The Nephew*, *The Thomas Crown Affair* and *Evelyn*, it seems certain that more Irish themes will achieve international exposure. It will continue to provide much needed energy and support to the Irish film industry through investment, employment and the provision of a bridge between the native artistic talent and the international studios.

Together with his wife and soul mate Keely Shaye Smith, he has adopted a passionate and active leadership role on behalf of environmental and conservation issues. This is no mere passing interest by a celebrity, but rather a deeply held conviction that mankind's future security requires immediate attention to issues including environmental pollution, the endangered ecology and changing climate. Both have been honoured by the Environmental Media Association and Women in Film.

At great personal cost, he refused to attend the Cannes Festival in protest against the French Government's policy of nuclear testing in the South Pacific. In 1997, Pierce was presented with the Environmental Leadership award by Mikhail Gorbachev, President of Green Cross International, who cited him as "A truly committed leader whose bold actions and clever voice have been instrumental in marine mammal protection as well as that of fragile ecosystems".

He generously lends his name and support to numerous humanitarian causes, particularly for educational opportunities, research against cancer and for women's health.

Recently

- He financed a school for technical education of young men in Tibet
- He serves as campaign chairman for the Entertainment industry Foundation which raised and distributed \$45,000,000 last year
- He is a special patron for UNICEF Ireland
- He is an Ambassador for the Princes trust
- He is an Ambassador for The National Women's Cancer Research Alliance

For his lifetime achievements and support for humanitarian cause, he has received numerous awards including an honorary OBE and, perhaps most dear to him, the Freedom of the town of his birth from the town council of Navan.

The world would have been a poorer place without Pierce Brosnan. There is much about him in the public domain about influences derived from his humble origins and particularly from the loss of his beloved Cassandra in 1991 through ovarian cancer. From all these disappointments, there emerged someone with great strength of character and altruism

who has used his prestige to share his insights and experiences for the benefit of his fellow man.

For his richly developed talents, and for his constructive commitment to so many humanitarian and noble causes, it is with great pleasure that I present Pierce Brosnan to the Chancellor of the National University of Ireland for the conferring of the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totaeque Academiae