

SIR BOB GELDOF has maintained a reputation for versatility in his career.

The spotlight first shone on the Dublin native when his 70's rock band The Boomtown Rats, with their debut single *Looking After No. 1*, reached the UK Top 40 Singles Charts. He used the platform afforded to him by this mainstream success to express his humanitarian soul in the most international form. In 1984, with Midge Ure of Ultravox, he wrote *Do They Know It's Christmas?* The song was recorded by various artists under the name of Band-Aid.

A year later, that was followed by Live Aid, a huge live concert staged simultaneously in London and Philadelphia, which raised over £150 million for famine relief.

More recently, Geldof has turned his attention to film.

In *A Fanatic Heart: Bob Geldof on W.B. Yeats*, he delves into the life story of the man he believes to have "invented and laid the foundational stones of modern Ireland".

This week he told **Ryan Price** why he was drawn to the figure of Yeats...

DID YOU ENJOY MAKING THIS FILM?

"To be honest, I don't like doing television. It's not natural to me. When you write a song you get an instant gratification but doing telly is always a personal argument for me...I'm not David Attenborough. With Yeats, I got to where I wanted to get to simply because when I began I didn't quite know enough. I think he is the central revolutionary character in the genesis of a modern Ireland. I think he is to Ireland what Shakespeare is to the English language and to Britain. From Ireland's point of view, this is the man who invented and laid the foundational stones of modern Ireland."

WHAT MAKES YEATS' WORK STAND THE TEST OF TIME?

"Genius will always do that regardless of where you're from. He is a clear Irish voice, but people elsewhere hear it in their own voice. That is achieved by a vast intellect. Yeats set out to write a poem "as simple as the dawn". He wanted to write poems that

anyone could understand - that the beggar on the streets of Dublin could understand. When he had that, he'd write it. That's why it translates across the board, across all of humanity. And why it particularly throbs in an Irish soul. Because you hear Ireland when you read Yeats."

OVER THE YEARS HAS YOUR APPRECIATION OF IRISH LITERATURE GROWN?

"No I've always loved it. I was always shocked by how this country produces language that can immediately be transliterated into literature or poetry or whatever. It always strikes me as odd. I route it back into the fundamental time of the late 1800s coming into the 20th century. I think the foundational moment is the year zero. It's the famine. Out of this migration came this understanding, particularly from Yeats, that you are not a defeated people. Go back to before all of that history of failure which we love to repeat. Our heroes are just as great as the Greek legends."

WHERE DOES NATIONALITY COME INTO YOUR WORK?

"I hate nationalism. I absolutely loathe it. I am deeply uncomfortable with it. I don't see any good coming out of it. Patriotism is completely understandable and healthy but evil men and women with an unconvincing vent curdle that natural empathy into a political philosophy and that can be very very very dangerous. We've seen it in our time in our own country and we see it in Brexit Britain now. We have to be really careful because it leads to blood."

WHAT WOULD YEATS MAKE OF THE IRELAND OF 2018?

"Yeats in his head was living in the Ireland that exists today. I'm very comfortable with the Ireland of today, but I felt alien in the Ireland I grew up in. Yeats introduced me to the actual Ireland. He railed against the censorship that was a part of the Catholic coup d'etat. He railed against the divorce laws which they brought in. Now, we got rid of that but it kept all of our geniuses out of our country. We had no voice during this



period of cultural claustrophobia until we broke out of it many years later. So, the Ireland of today he would totally understand. As he said himself, it'll only be understood 50 years after his death. He died in 1939 and in 1989 we get our new Ireland. I will vote for a repeal of the eight amendment. In this case, Yeats would be totally engaged in it. He would understand it. This debate isn't like the equality of marriage. That was different. If two people want to get married, who cares. If you want to get married go and do it. I was brought up in another time when that was considered weird, but now we consider it absolutely normal. This referendum is different. We need to be more respectful of each other's point of view. I would hope that somebody who comes at it from a religious point of view or an instinctive point of view can respect my point of view. Hopefully the side I will be on can look at the argument in the same way. I think Yeats would be the side I'm on. Also, I think he would completely understand the other point of view. I don't have a vast intellect but this man could encompass any point of view either for or against. In this case, however, I think he'd be for it."

■ **A Fanatic Heart: Bob Geldof on WB Yeats is available now on DVD**



BOOK CLUB: Actor Liam Neeson features in Geldof's new film

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