



The Irish thriller film *The Courier* opened in London some weeks ago to mixed reviews and is now on circuit. Despite its shortcomings, it is seen in Ireland as something of a breakthrough. Here MARTIN MCNAMARA and MARK PIGGOTT find out why from Padraig O’Loinsigh, who plays the title roll.

Padraig O’Loinsigh is a lucky man. He is a young, attractive and talented actor. He also has the lead role in one of the most powerful films to have emerged from Ireland in years.

The Courier is set in contemporary Dublin. It follows the naive motorcycle courier Mark (O’Loinsigh) around the city as he becomes immersed in the heroin underworld. A brutally realistic thriller, the film’s aim is to highlight one of the major social problems facing Dublin in the 1980s.

The film has been made independently on a shoe-string budget by City Vision, a company set up by three young Irish film makers Frank Deasy, Joe Lee and Hilary McLoughlin. After just one short feature - *Sometime City* - they managed to get *The Courier* written, financed, cast, shot and edited within twelve months.

O’Loinsigh gives a strong performance in his first screen role as Mark, who finds his world being invaded by the smack industry in the shape of Val, a big-time pusher played by Gabriel Byrne, and by Danny (Andrew Connelly), addict and one-time friend. “It shows the two sides of Dublin,” explains O’Loinsigh. “There’s the suburban Dublin and the criminal underworld. Andrew plays Danny, a friend of mine who I get into doing smack with. I get out of it and get into motor bikes instead to compensate.”

The Courier is very different from the standard Irish film. Dublin and the problems that arise from its being a modern industrial city have finally been properly explored on the big screen. It was one of the prime motivations for City Vision’s making of the film, and a major factor in attracting O’Loinsigh. “Nearly all the films that are made over here are either very kitsch, very scenic, showing the nicer parts of Ireland, or they harp on about the 1950s and the repressed Catholicism. It is very important to write about those things, but it’s been done quite a bit. I think it’s incredible that this is the first time a film of this sort has been made. The film is not realism, it’s a thriller, a fantasy in a way, but at the same time where it gets its inspiration from is very real. You’ve got 20% unemployment over here and a huge drugs problem.”

The Courier has many deliberate similarities to *Taxi Driver*. As Travis, the ex-Vietnam veteran, drove around New York in his taxi, so Mark, the ex-addict, drives around Dublin on his motorcycle. When Mark takes on the drugs world single-handedly he becomes a more inept version of Travis. It is near the end that *The Courier* loses some of its grip and O’Loinsigh’s performance becomes stilted as he pursues Val. Like *Taxi Driver*, *The Courier* could be criticised for glorifying violence, a danger O’Loinsigh is aware of.

“I think cinema always glamourises. I was watching *Platoon*. I was thinking ‘Look what these guys are doing, that’s terrible,’ but at the same time wanting to be there, to have that experience.”

In the film, Mark finds love and salvation with Danny’s sister Colette, played by ex-Pogue Cait O’Riordan. The film is a cut above her cinematic debut, *Straight to Hell*. Music is provided by Cait’s old man, Declan McManus (Elvis Costello) and by a dozen or so of Dublin’s garage bands, from U2 downwards. The film was financed partly by the (now defunct) Irish Film Board and by English money. Despite the loss of the IFB setback,

O’Loinsigh is confident that Irish films are taking a new, stronger position:

“I think it’s coming from inside. There have been a couple of films made recently that are similar to this, that are covering subjects that haven’t been covered before. And where in the past people have starved for years before getting the break into films, it seems to be the thing to do in Dublin now. It used to be writing books or poetry, now everyone’s writing film scripts.”

For O’Loinsigh himself the role was a major breakthrough. He had worked in the Horizon Theatre Company and studied at the Oscar School of Acting, but this was interspersed with work on building sites and unemployment. When the chance came for his first film he had just started at the Drama Centre in Chalk Farm, London. Now, with the film under his belt, he’s coming back.

“I have an agent over there now. I’d like to do some of the classics over here, Shakespeare and stuff, the tragedies, I like acting on stage, but I’d like to do good movies too. The trouble with being an Irish actor in England is that you always end up playing Irish parts, and they tend to be stereotypes - priests or Provos. I haven’t got anything against playing Irish people, but I’d like to break that mould.”

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