



LYRA V BEYONCÉ

IT HAS been hard to avoid Irish singer **Laura McNamara** (aka **Lyra**) in recent weeks as the hype machine cranks up around her eponymous debut album. Given that she is a protégé of **Caroline Downey's**, the media profile she has attained, despite her limited chart success, should not come as a surprise.

Certainly, the campaign to keep Lyra front and centre has been impressive and last weekend there were even stories discussing how the plucky artist's record could well be overshadowed by the new album from, er, **Beyoncé**.

Whether Lyra can topple the global superstar next week is not a question anyone is asking seriously but the subject has proven irresistible to the hacks.

Of equal significance for Lyra is the big advertising spend behind her album, with full-page adverts and posters in prominent sites around the country. This financial muscle is another tool for Downey and partner **Denis Desmond**, who are the most powerful force in the Irish music industry. (On her recent Irish tour, Lyra performed at the Desmond/Downey-controlled Olympia Theatre.)

Predictably glowing reviews in the likes of *Hot Press* and a slot on *The Late Late Show* last weekend are par for the course, with **Patrick Kiely** noting that Lyra has been "selling out venues across Ireland and the UK". The good news for fans is there are still plenty of tickets left for next month's UK leg.



Lyra

LARA HICKEY'S CLOSE-UP

THE FILM and TV business has long been one where 'who you know' features high on the lists of credits, even more so since the coinage of the 'nepo baby' phrase that gained traction

online and has been chucked around with abandon.

A recent name firmly establishing a second-generational presence in the film and TV business is **Lara Hickey** (see *The Phoenix* 4/11/22), daughter of **James Hickey** – former star performer at Screen Ireland

(SI) and legal eagles MOPs, and current board member and negotiator at producers' lobby group Screen Producers Ireland (to name but a few of his hats).

Lara's younger brother, **Jack Hickey**, is a fellow actor and producer, with whom she incorporated production

company Copper Alley Productions as a 50:50 venture at the end of 2014.

Jack is listed as creative director, while daddy, James snr, came on board here as a director in 2019, immediately after he stepped down as chief executive of SI after 11 years.

Lara is also co-director of X-Pollinator – a development initiative "for female, trans and non-binary talent" – alongside co-director and founder **Katie Holly** of Blinder Films. Hickey also recently popped up as the producer of the new Storyhouse screenplay shindig for Element Pictures.

Happily, X-Pollinator is strongly backed with funding from SI, as was the recent Storyhouse festival.

While Jack was one of 30 early stage producers selected for SI's Emerge development programme (sorry, "bespoke initiative") this year, La Hickey's own undoubted accomplishments will presumably be garnished with her producer credit on Element's forthcoming Cannes entry, *September Says*, based on **Daisy Johnson's** novel, *Sisters*, and backed by the BBC and SI.



TONY'S FAILED APPEAL

THE RECENT overturning by the IHRB appeals panel of the referral committee's findings on trainer **Tony Martin** is not the first significant setback for the trainer.

It will be recalled (see *The Phoenix* 5/4/24)

that, following an appeal by the IHRB on the grounds of "undue leniency", the panel chaired by retired judge **Peter Kelly** overturned a decision by barrister and RTE board member **Susan Ahern et al** to suspend a six-month training ban for Martin. The referral committee had ruled after the trainer's horse, *Firstman*, had tested positive for lidocaine in January 2023.

As a result of the March 28 appeal ruling, however, three

months of the suspension kicks in on May 15.

It was the third time in four years that a horse trained by Martin had tested positive for a banned substance, with both *Moonmeister* and *Patsy's Honour* having been disqualified for positive drug tests. In the case of *Firstman*, Martin blamed the paper bedding used at Dundalk (see *The Phoenix* 12/1/24).

Following the failed test at Dundalk, the IHRB sprung a surprise raid on Martin's training premises, when his vet, **Donncha Houlihan**, happened to be present.

Houlihan (the 100% owner of Greenmount Equine Hospital, which is "based at the edge of Limerick Racecourse") had absolutely no role in Martin's latest controversy. His name did feature in the IHRB inspection report on the grounds that "products including bottles of [pain medicine] 'Bexco Sarablock' were obtained from the car of Mr Donncha

Houlihan MVB". Significantly, Sarablock does not contain lidocaine.

Houlihan would be familiar with the IHRB referrals process

courtesy of certain clients. He was, for example, vet to trainer **Denis Hogan**, whose licence was suspended for a period of three months in October 2022 when *Ballyadam Destiny* failed a drug test for triamcinolone acetonide (TCA) and dexamethasone. It was determined at the hearing that Hogan had not taken all reasonable steps, having failed to heed Houlihan's advice that there was a withdrawal time of 40 days for TCA.

Separately, in May 2019 Hogan's horse, *Turbine*, tested positive for the anabolic steroid nandrolone, with Houlihan explaining that the nag may have been administered laurabolin (a product containing nandrolone) in error at his Greenmount Equine Hospital.

On the grounds that the treatment had been administered to *Turbine* instead of the horse stabled next door, Houlihan accepted responsibility and, therefore, Hogan escaped any ban for the error.

O'BRIEN'S OBSTACLES

WHILE TRAINER **Aidan O'Brien** supplied three of the five runners in Leopardstown's Group 3 PW McGrath Ballysax Stakes, it was **Adrian Murray**

who provided the shock 50/1 winner, *Dallas Star*. It presumably proved very satisfying for newly freelance rider **Seamie Hefernan** to deliver on Amo Racing's charge, in what is customary seen as a Derby trial.

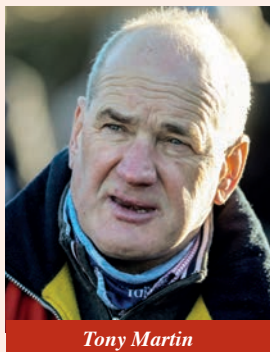
Kia Joorabchian and his advisor, **Robson Augiar**, will now have strong hopes for the former **Dominic Ffrench Davis** inmate.

Worryingly for Ballydoyle, another of its staying three-year-olds, odds-on favourite *Illinois*, folded quickly in the straight. This followed the odds-on shot *Capulet* having suffered the same fate 24 hours earlier in Chelmsford's Woodford Reserve Cardinal Conditions Stakes (the final leg of "The Road to the Kentucky Derby Series").

This race was won impressively by **Sean 'Ballymore Homes' Mulryan** and wife **Bernadine's** *Bracken's Laugh*. Sold for 200,000 guineas to former jockey **Ted Durcan** and the horse's trainer, **Richard Hughes**, at last year's Tattersalls Guineas Breeze-Up Sale, the son of *Zoffany* provided jockey **Finley Marsh** with his biggest success to date.

The horse will now head to Chester for the Dee Stakes – a race that O'Brien has won in five of the last six outings.

It could prove quite the contest.



Tony Martin

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