

Dating?

I don't want to be defined by who I might be seeing

He's happy to chat about his famous father – but just you try getting up-and-coming actor Domhnall Gleeson to open up about his love life...
Patricia Danaher meets a reluctant romantic

The quickest way to end a conversation with Domhnall Gleeson is to ask him a personal question, particularly anything that's connected to his private life. The 29-year old Dubliner is more than willing to talk about his work and his famous father, but try to get beneath the public face to



discover anything about his intimate life, and you'll see him head for the hills.

Given that one of his most recent roles was the lead in *About Time*, a romantic comedy by Richard Curtis — who wrote and directed *Four Weddings And A Funeral* and *Notting Hill* — it's a question he's been trying to avoid for quite some time. 'That's the one area you will not get me to talk about. I refuse to define anybody by somebody they know. I think that's really bad,' he says. 'If I was dating anybody, I wouldn't want to be defined by it, and if I wasn't dating anybody, I wouldn't want to be defined as a single loner who just buys towels for himself and sits at home crying in the evenings.'

Growing up in an artistic household in Malahide as his father's very successful career took off, the Gleasons have always been very close. Domhnall is the eldest of four boys and the second son to follow his father in his profession. Brendan continues to be a massive influence on Domhnall and his brothers, and it's clear that his mammoth body of work is both encouraging and intimidating. It is to Brendan and his family that Domhnall goes again and again when he needs advice or help.

'My dad has a particular influence on me,' he acknowledges. 'He's a very successful actor. He's done amazing work over many years. He's very well respected. People know who he is and like him. I obviously look to him for guidance in that way. He's pretty good in knowing when to give advice. He asks questions and talks about problems you might be having in a different way. He never tells you what to do. As an actor, he'll talk things through with you. It's always about finding out what you want to do and then finding the best way to do it. He's really exceptional in that way and so is my brother Brian. He's pretty fantastic that way too.'

'My dad will ask very insightful questions that help you find the answer. He'll ask all of us and my mam our opinion on stuff. Everybody in the family really respects and values everyone's opinions. I turn to everybody in my family for different things at different points and I always come out of it in a better state of mind.'

They have collaborated on several movie

projects in the past decade, including Martin McDonagh's *Six Shooter* and more recently in director John Michael McDonagh's upcoming *Calvary*. It's clear that he relishes any chance he gets to work alongside his father. 'Calvary is really my dad and John McDonagh's gig. I was only on it for a day, but I was as excited about doing that movie as I was about doing the Richard Curtis film. The opportunity of going toe to toe with my Dad and John was exceptional. You just grab an opportunity like this with both hands and hope you don't mess it up. I feel like I did a good job. I haven't seen it yet but I'm expecting it to be a success on its own terms which is the best you can hope. I think what John has done with this film is extremely interesting. It's got everything that people loved about *The Guard*, but he's found another level of film making here.'

Domhnall, along with Gabriel Byrne, Michael Fassbender, Colin Farrell and Cillian Murphy — the cream of the Irish male acting fraternity — have all been attached to Brendan's directorial debut of *At Swim - Two-Birds*. But although the script has been written and some funding offered by the Irish Film Board in a co-production with Luxembourg, they have not succeeded in raising all the money necessary to begin making the movie. 'That's one of those ones, where I feel like I'm cheating in talking about it. Dad and the people who are making the film are all operating goodo trying to get it made, but I've just



started to look the other way,' he

says. 'I realised I was craning my neck looking that way all the time, ignoring other opportunities coming along. It's an amazing script — and I say that without any sense of false pride because my father wrote it — but it is an amazing script and a big undertaking. They've got some great actors.

'All I'm hoping is that they can get it together while I'm still young enough to play somebody important in it!

'Having everybody available and having all the money at the same time is the toughest nut to crack — the calibre

of those people committed to it is so high that they are booking work all the time. As far as I know, the main thing holding it back is getting the money together."

Meanwhile his own stock is firmly in the ascendant, with offers of bigger parts coming all the time. He has just finished filming a starring turn in the Lenny Abrahamson-directed *Frank*, opposite Fassbender and Maggie Gyllenhaal, and is shortly about to begin filming *Unbroken*, a movie none other than Angelina Jolie is directing in Australia. He has also signed up for the film *Brooklyn*, written by Nick Hornby based on Colm Tóibín's book, and co-starring Saoirse Ronan.

Despite quite a short CV for someone just nudging 30, the accolades and international recognition keep coming. Last year, *Variety* magazine named him as one of Ten Actors to Watch. (That list has in the past included Jennifer Lawrence, Jeremy Renner and Emma Stone.) He won a Tony for his role in *The Lieutenant Of Inishmore* in 2006 and was named as a Shooting Star at the Berlin

Film Festival last year. When IFTA named him as a Rising Star, Brendan, who picked up the award for him, couldn't resist joking that it was ironic he was named a rising star, seeing as he himself had never been able to get his son out of bed in the mornings.

Domhnall studied Media Arts at Dublin's Institute of Technology, during which time he also started writing short scripts, including *What Will Survive of Us*, which was later made into a popular short feature. Shortly after leaving college, he was acting in productions at the Abbey and Gate theatres, as well as Druid productions, before being offered parts on West End stages in London. 'To be perfectly frank with you, it's all pretty amazing what's happened in my career since I left DIT,' he says. 'I didn't particularly set out to be an actor, although drama and stories were always a big part of our house growing up because of the different jobs my dad got on stage and then in film. Maybe in a way it was inevitable. I don't know. Because I've seen my father cope with fame, graciously, I just don't fancy it at all. What I do want to do is work that's successful, so I can work again.'

That work includes the well-received 2010 short film *Noreen*, which he wrote and directed, and in which his father also stars. He also created and wrote the profane *Your Bad Self* which ran on RTÉ for several seasons. Wisely, he seems determined to keep a mixed palate when it comes to his career in entertainment. 'I would always see myself doing a mixture of things in this business. I've been writing for years and feel very at home in the medium, so I wouldn't ever imagine not writing. I kind of regarded acting as something I did in between writing and directing.

'The only writing I've done in recent years were these comedy sketches, *Immaturity For Charity*, which I did with my dad and Robbie Sheehan and my brother [Brian]. I wrote them with a friend [Michael Moloney] and everybody worked for free and it made money for the hospice where my grandparents died in Raheny. That's the last bit of writing that I've done. I've been busy enough



with the acting. I took three months off to write those because I really wanted to make money for the hospice.' It's clear he is itching to get back to writing the moment he gets a break from his filming commitments.

Despite the ever more lucrative offers he's been getting, Domhnall, like his dad, is committed to continuing to live in Dublin... where he may or may not have a girlfriend. 'I'm buying towels in Arnotts as we speak, so I think that tells you everything you need to know that I've no plans to leave the country just yet. As long as the towels are alive and well, I think I'll be in Dublin. The only regrets I have are that I didn't come in a week earlier when there was a big sale on in Arnotts.'

Frank will be released in cinemas on 4 May





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MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY





Glee(son) Club Above, left: Domhnall's father, Brendan Gleeson, in *The Guard* (2011). Above, right: Domhnall with his younger brother Brian, who is also an actor. Opposite page: Domhnall with Rachel McAdams, his co-star in Richard Curtis's 2013 romantic comedy *About Time* and (above) the actors in a scene from the movie

