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Relative values. From left, Brian, Domhnall and Brendan Gleeson

He's starred with Leonardo Di Caprio, been directed by Angelina Jolie and his career looks set to hit fever pitch with a role in the new *Star Wars* movie. But for DOMHNALL GLEESON all the success hasn't been building up to fame, as he tells **EOIN BUTLER**, but to finally feeling ready to share the stage with his father...

Keeping it in the family

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» Ireland. One of its unique challenges, then, must be that it requires the talented trio to play the part of bad actors? Gleeson doesn't quite accept the premise of that question. "I think they should be good at performing the farce sometimes," he replies. "They've been rehearsing it for 15 years, after all. So parts of it should work. But there is definitely fun in over-playing things. They certainly enjoy a bit of the old slapstick. [The stage direction] says 'in the style of *The Three Stooges*'. There's great joy to be had in that sort of largesse." But first, presumably, comes a hell of a lot of rehearsal? "Oh yeah, of course," he agrees. "The point is to make it look easy. But a lot of work goes into that. It really is about nailing moments, nailing little physical routines, and building on that as you go along."



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ance. But I suppose I am a little freer with the boys than I would be with other actors. Because you know you're not going to fall out long term with them over anything." Naturally, advance hype for *The Walworth Farce* has focused on the three Gleeson men sharing a stage for the first time. But it is worth sparing a thought for Leona Allen, the young English actress faced with the daunting task of holding her own alongside the Irish trio in a Dublin theatre. Shop assistant Haley is her first professional role. Domhnall laughs when I mention this, and recalls his own first acting gig. "Leona is 21," he says. "She's fantastic in the part and a great presence in the room. It may be her first job, but she's done plenty of plays before. She's been to drama school. It's not like she's walking in blind. I was 19 for my first job. I was performing in London, living away from home for the first time. And I really did walk in there blind." The production he's referring to, Martin

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McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, eventually transferred from the West End to Broadway and earned Domhnall a Tony nomination for his performance as Davey in 2006. The by-then 23-year-old actor returned to Dublin shortly thereafter rather expecting the work offers would come flooding in. But that's not how it worked out. "It sounds big-headed now," he shrugs. "But we were on Broadway for five or six months, getting very good reviews. The show was tight, man. So you do come back thinking: 'I know I can do something well.' Then it just doesn't happen. Maybe I'm naive, but I didn't expect to spend 10 months unemployed and in the wilderness." In retrospect, that dose of humility so early in his career may have served Domhnall well in the long-run. The better part of a decade later, and with considerable film success under his belt, today he seems utterly devoid of arrogance or presumption. Quite the opposite, in fact. Is it true, I ask, that he secretly believes he's ruined every film he's been in? He cringes. That, he explains, was an off-hand comment he made in one interview that was slightly blown out of proportion. "You know how people say they can't stand the sound of their own voice when they hear it on a tape recorder? Well, that's all I meant. Then it became a headline and, all of a sudden, I was made to sound like this weak, nervous human being."

But didn't he also fret that his entire performance in *Unbroken* would end up on the cutting-room floor? His was the third-billed character in that movie, so that seemed an unlikely outcome. "Well, yeah. But every actor in every movie has important scenes that end up on the cutting-room floor. I'm still in that movie and I feel like I did a reasonable job." "I know the director [Jolie] was happy, and the daughter of the [real life] character I played was happy. That's about the best outcome you can hope for." If I have one bugbear about interviewing actors (and in Domhnall's case this is the only minor gripe I could possibly make, given how unflinchingly courteous and generous an interviewee he is) it would be that the bigger their co-star, the less likely they are to divulge anything remotely interesting or revealing about that person. I give it a shot, nonetheless. No dice. "Angelina Jolie is just an extremely talented, generous, nice person to be around and to work with. I was very happy to have the opportunity. So far with Leo, it's been the same. He's a fantastic actor. He works with brilliant people I'm terribly happy to be around him and make it

work. But that's the same with everyone in those movies. I'm very happy to be working with them all." *Star Wars* is another pretty obvious conversational brick wall. Domhnall is contractually prohibited from discussing the plot of the new movie or reveal any detail about the shoot. So I mention a quote from Ewan McGregor, who starred in the last revival of the franchise a decade and a half ago. The Scottish actor was quoted in *Details* magazine last month, calling some *Star Wars* fans "parasitical lowlives". "I can't believe that," Domhnall responds, shaking his head. "I don't believe he said that about *Star Wars* fans." Still, isn't Domhnall at all trepidatious about joining a franchise with such a fervent, passionate and, in some extreme cases, crazy/obsessive fanbase? He insists he is unfazed. "Not to compare the two," he says. "Because they're both very different, but I did *Harry Potter* and continued to live my life afterward very much as I did before." "My job is just to do the work. Beyond that, I try to live my life away from... Well, not the spotlight. Because no spotlight is searching for me to begin with. But I don't go to parties. I don't go to premieres. I'm not involved in. I don't seek out that aspect of things. Look at Cillian Murphy: *Batman*, *Tron*... those are some heavy-hitting franchises. But he works his way around it. He manages to have a great career and a great life." Which isn't to say there aren't some elements of the movie star lifestyle Domhnall could get used to. Here again he references yet another of his as-yet-unreleased movies. (I make a joke at this point about the trove of unreleased material his estate would be sitting on if he were hit by a bus tomorrow. He doubles over with laughter. "You are safely the first person over to compare me with Tupac!") The film he mentions is *Ex Machina*, the directorial debut of English novelist and screenwriter Alex Garland, due for release later this month. "I found myself in Norway," Domhnall recalls. "Standing on a glacier and looking down and it just shone blue, naturally, from the inside. And I was there with Alex Garland, someone whose work I have read ravenously since I was whatever age. That's a crazy, crazy memory." "Moments like those, they aren't damaging. You should rejoice in those moments. You should say: 'Isn't this brilliant?' Because a couple of years from now, if I'm doing something different, I want to look back on things like that and know that I properly enjoyed them while they were happening." He mentioned Cillian Murphy a moment ago. The Corkman is probably the best known interpreter of Enda Walsh's work. Does Domhnall know if Murphy plans to see the Gleesons' version of *The Walworth Farce*? "I don't know," he replies. "But it would make me extremely nervous if he did, as I admire him very much." As for the general public, why should they go along and pay the money? Because it's a perfect halfway house between horror and hilarity. If we get it right, if the crackle in the room is right, I think it could be very special. It's also to see the three of us together. The way all of our careers are going, this may be the only one."

The Walworth Farce by Landmark Productions runs at The Olympia until February 8. olympia.ie

Y ou might expect Domhnall Gleeson would turn a few heads, as he slinks across the lobby of this busy Ballsbridge hotel on a Thursday evening. He is, after all, one of Ireland's brightest young acting talents, with a slew of impressive big-screen credits already to his name. In recent years, the 31-year-old Dubliner has, amongst other things, worked with the Coen Brothers, starred in a Richard Curtis romantic comedy, appeared in two *Harry Potter* films and secured a role in JJ Abrams' *Star Wars* reboot, *The Force Awakens*.

This past Christmas Day, *Unbroken* — an Angelina Jolie-directed Second World War drama in which he appeared — topped the US box office. While next month, he returns to Canada to complete shooting on *The Revenant* with Leonardo Di Caprio (a superstar actor he knows simply as "Leo"). All things considered then, the foyer here should be twinkling with the light of a hundred flashing camera-phones as Domhnall Gleeson enters. Instead, the actor trudges past the reception desk and collapses onto the couch opposite me virtually unnoticed. His clothes are crumpled. His canvas shoes are damp. With a folscape pad full of scribbled notes, and flap of orange hair played across his forehead, his gait is less that of a leading man, and more like that of a weary college student cramming for his final exams.

Despite all his success, Gleeson says he still rarely gets recognised in public. The taxi driver who dropped him here didn't even look at him sideways. It must happen occasionally though, I suggest. "Not very regularly," he insists. "Certainly more so in Ireland than it does abroad. But even here they more likely know me for that sketch show I did [RTE's

Your Bad Self] than any of the films." It's not until he talks about his upcoming stage play, though, that Domhnall really becomes animated. Tonight, Domhnall will realise a long-standing ambition when he performs professionally on stage for the first time with his famous father Brendan and younger brother Brian. This half of the Gleeson clan (the rest comprises mum Mary and brothers Rory and Fergus) are starring in a hotly anticipated production of Enda Walsh's *The Walworth Farce* at Dublin's Olympia. Running at the theatre until February 8, when we meet rehearsals are proceeding at full throttle. "It's great," he insists. "It's exhilarating. But it's tiring. I've been going to bed at eight o'clock every night. I'm pathetic."

It was Domhnall himself who hit upon the idea of the family staging a version of Walsh's play, after he saw his friend Tadhg Murphy appear in the Druid Theatre's acclaimed production a few years ago. *The Walworth Farce*, conveniently, revolves around an eccentric Irish father and his two broodbeaten adult sons. But two years passed before he brought the idea to his father and Brian, who at 27 has starred in the likes of *Love/Hate*, *The Stag* and *Standby*. "Now just seemed like the right time," Domhnall explains. "I've still got a huge amount to learn from Da. Also from Brian. But it has gotten to the stage where it felt like we might be able to operate around the same..." He checks himself. "No, not the same level. That's not true. Dad has got so much experience and so much talent. But it began to feel like we're at least ready to occupy the same stage as him."

The play is about a dysfunctional Irish family, living in a grotty London flat, who each day enact the same ludicrous farce detailing the supposed circumstances around the father's departure from

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FAMILY ON FILM



Clockwise from top left: Domhnall in *About Time*, and (centre) *Unbroken*; Brendan in *The Guard*, *In Bruges*, and *Harry Potter*; Brian (left) in *Love/Hate*; Domhnall in *Anna Karenina*; Brian (far right) in *The Stag*

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