

CAREY FITZGERALD

Managing Director, Silver Mountain Productions

Film and television industry entrepreneur Carey Fitzgerald set up her company Silver Mountain Productions in 2017.

Prior to this her extensive career in production, distribution, advertising, financing, sales and marketing, saw her enjoy Oscar nominations, secure a-list festival selections and achieve a wide range of successful TV commissions.

Now, through Silver Mountain Productions she offers film production, distribution, and training services.

Based in Cork, her father's home county, the company specialises in creating film, drama and creative documentaries for the international market which also aim to focus on stories of the historically underrepresented.

In addition to developing and releasing its own productions, Silver Mountain also produces and co-produces content from all over the world in all languages.

Fitzgerald splits her time between Ireland and Britain, where she is involved in a number of other projects, many that support the Irish community directly.

The film industry stalwart is a partner and producer at Ballpoint Films, Co-Chair of BOFTV (Business of Film & TV), a Business Mentor for Screen Skills Ireland, Co-Founder of the Wise Women mentoring platform and Co-Chair of the London Irish social inclusion charity Ashford Place.

In February, it was announced that Fitzgerald would take on the role of Chair of Irish Film London, an organisation founded in 2012 to champion Irish film and animation in the UK.

Elsewhere this year Fitzgerald founded Shout London: The Ashford Place Mental Health Film and Arts Festival.

The inaugural festival, which took place in October, was so successful that the 2023 instalment has already been confirmed and plans for a nationwide tour are also in the pipeline.

BLINNE NÍ GHRÁLAIGH

Barrister

Described in the legal directories as a "fiercely intelligent barrister" and "tactically brilliant" Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh, of Matrix Chambers in London, is no stranger to controversial cases.

The second generation Irish woman, whose parents hail from



counties Mayo and Dublin, has an extensive practice across human rights, public international law, criminal law and public law.

She advises and acts for individuals, States, NGOs and other national and international bodies, appearing in domestic courts at all levels, and before international courts and tribunals.

In January Ms Ní Ghrálaigh was the sole female barrister to defend one of the 'Colston Four', representing the only female defendant, Rhian Graham.

The four protesters were cleared by a jury in Bristol Crown Court of criminal damage for toppling a statue of the slave trader Edward Colston.

The statue was brought down and thrown into Bristol harbour during a Black Lives Matter protest in June 2020.

While the Colston Four did not deny toppling the statue, they relied on a number of "lawful excuses" to the charge of criminal damage.

Ms Ní Ghrálaigh was able to draw on her previous experience in the case, including acting for anti-arms fair protesters in the case of Director of Public Prosecutions v Ziegler - a seminal Supreme Court case, which clarified that freedom of speech and freedom of assembly rights could provide a defence to a protest-related criminal charge.

Speaking after the verdicts were delivered, Ms Ní Ghrálaigh, said: "This case demonstrates the fundamental importance of trial by jury.

"That is because juries represent the collective sense of justice of the community."

She had argued that in this case, "a conviction for the removal of this statue - that glorified a slave trader involved in the enslavement of over 84,000 black men, women and children as a most virtuous and wise man - would not be proportionate".

In 2021 Ms Ní Ghrálaigh acted for Conradh na Gaeilge in the lengthy legal case regarding the gravestone

of Irish woman Margaret Keane in Coventry.

The family of the late Mrs Keane fought to overturn a ruling by the Chancellor of the Diocese of Coventry which barred them from inscribing their mother's gravestone with the Irish phrase in ár gcroíthe go deo" (in our hearts forever).

The family's appeal, which was supported by Conradh na Gaeilge, was eventually successful, with a judgement by the Arches Court of Canterbury ruling that the inscription refusal was unreasonable under the common law and in breach of the family's right not to be discriminated against under the Human Rights Act and Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Ms Ní Ghrálaigh previously worked on the Bloody Sunday Inquiry for one of the legal teams representing the wounded and the families of those killed.

She also acted for the 'Hooded Men', and the family of the young mother Jean Smyth-Campbell who was murdered in Belfast in 1972.

She continues to act in several Troubles-related cases in Northern Ireland and is called to the Bars of Ireland, North and south, in addition to the Bar of England and Wales.

MICHELLE O'NEILL

First Minister (designate) of Northern Ireland; Vice-President, Sinn Féin

In May 2022 the Northern Ireland Assembly election results saw Sinn Féin become the largest party.

That historic outcome marked the first time an Irish nationalist party had won the most seats in an Assembly election in the history of Northern Ireland.

It also means Sinn Féin Vice-President Michelle O'Neill, the party's leader in the North, will take up the position of First Minister of Northern Ireland, once the Northern Ireland Executive, which is currently out of action while the DUP refuses to return to power-sharing, resumes service.

As First Minister in waiting, the enormity of her achievement this year is not lost on O'Neill, a mother-of-two who hails from Co. Tyrone.

Indeed, she believes Sinn Féin's success is a mark of what's to come "at a time of major change right across our entire island".

"That change was demonstrated most loudly, when the people of the North voted in huge numbers in the Assembly election," she explains.

"It really was a defining moment," she adds.

"For the first time, the balance of power at Stormont shifted, and Sinn Féin emerged as the largest party, topping the poll with 27 seats.

"The electorate overwhelmingly endorsed our message of hope, optimism and of working in partnership with others to get things done."

She added: "I campaigned to lead a new Executive as a First Minister for all, and I meant what I said during the campaign.

"I will work every day as First Minister Designate to demonstrate through word and deed a spirit of partnership and respect towards

