

THE LEISURE LIST

PRIMAL FORCE OF NATURE

GOOD old Camus, eh? "Love cannot accept what it is," the Algeria-born French existential philosopher wrote. "Everywhere on earth it cries out against kindness, compassion, intelligence, everything that leads to compromise. Love demands the impossible, the absolute, the sky on fire, inexhaustible springtime, life after death, and death itself transfigured into eternal life."

Of course, Nicki Minaj's passions, both for *amour* and the more physical pleasures, would make Camus's views seem ordinary. "I have bigger balls than the boys," she told the *Guardian* recently. And who am I to argue? She has been dubbed, quite possibly by herself, as the hottest female rapper in the world. Listen to any of her recent releases like *Pound The Alarm*, *Starships*, *Super Bass*, and you would be disinclined to argue with this statement either.

On stage, she is a primal force of nature. I saw her do a two-song set in New York in August. Like a black Marilyn Monroe on industrial strength LSD, Nicki had every one in the crowd up chanting her name in wide-eyed appreciation of an incredible performance of larger-than-life showmanship. She is no bland pop moppet, however. On *Itty*



BARRY EGAN
MUSIC

Bitty Piggy, she sings: "It's like I've just single-handedly annihilated, you know/Every rap bitch in the building"

Born Onika Tanya Maraj in Saint James, Trinidad and Tobago, she relocated to Queens in New York when she was five. She told a TV show that she grew up with an abusive father troubled by drug problems and that her father threatened to kill her mother, and once set fire to the family's home. It's only fair to point out that her dad Omar and sources close to the family say her claims are exaggerated and that while he did have anger issues, he was devastated when she spoke on TV about his personal problems.

All of these troubles in her early years inspired Nicki to do something with her life. She attended La Guardia High School for the Arts, and was introduced to rapper Lil Wayne, who launched her career. Nicki's 2010 debut album, *Pink Friday*, went to



PASSION: Nicki Minaj, who brings her sexed-up full-on rapper show to the O2 in November'

the top of the Billboard charts in America.

As the *New York Times* put it, she has crashed Hip Hop's Boy's Club; she did that while becoming a very sexy post-feminist role model. She credits her mother with this drive. "I've always had this female-empowerment thing in the back of my mind," she told *Details* magazine, "because I wanted my mother to be stronger, and she couldn't be. I thought, 'If I'm successful, I can change her life.'"

Now a judge on the US reality TV series *American Idol*, the raunchy rapper has reportedly already clashed with fellow judge Mariah Carey. Over the coming shows it will be fascinating to see what Carey, and other judges such as Randy Jackson and Keith Urban make of Nicki, in her Day-Glo wigs and make-up that is inspired by Japanese anime raps, and her variation of generally mad accents.

Recently she caused confusion when she appeared to endorse - albeit in her own inimitable manner - Republican candidate Mitt Romney. "I'm a Republican voting for Mitt Romney/ You lazy bitches is f**king up the economy,"

she spits provocatively over the Kanye West's song *Mercy*. In the next line, she is singing, "Out in Miami, I be chillin' with a zombie", so who knows what she meant?

Not even the President, it would appear. When Barack Obama was asked about Minaj's apparent endorsement of Romney, he replied: "I'm not sure that's actually what happened. I think she had a song on there, a little rap that said that. But she likes to play different characters. So I don't know what's going on there. I don't think my daughters really listen to Nicki Minaj that much," he went on. "But let's face it, they are now hipper than me. There's a certain point where your kids get old enough where they're hipper than you are."

Nicki's style is a hybrid of Lil Kim and Foxy Brown, fusing sexual rhymes and full-on energy. Blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, Nicki has created the impression that she is rap's first bisexual sexed-up singer.

"Had that girl singing, singing like me," she groans on *Sex in The Lounge*. "She be like, ooh, oh, oh, ooh, oh She looking at me like she

want it I'm over here /She climbing on top of me /I'ma make her scream, her scream."

Nicki has on occasion batted away the bisexuality rumours, saying that her support for gay culture means she will always attract that sort of attention.

Yet, this is the same sexed-up full-on rapper who flirts openly with Rihanna on Twitter and in July 2010 talked even more candidly about her girl-crushes on R&B chanteuse Cassie and actress Lauren London. Nicki said she would "Minaj-Up" Lauren London and Cassie given the chance.

When *Details* magazine asked her in 2010 as an openly bisexual rapper, does she think hip-hop is getting more gay-friendly, she didn't seem too bothered by the question. "I think the world is getting more gay-friendly," she replied, "so hip-hop is, too. But it's harder to imagine an openly gay male rapper being embraced. People view gay men as having no street credibility. But I think we'll see one in my lifetime."

She brings her Pink Friday: Reloaded Tour 2012 to the O2, Dublin on November 5

THE FOUR-MINUTE INTERVIEW



Clare O'Malley

What was the worst moment of your life?

The moment I realised I was too old to play Gretl in *The Sound of Music*.

What secret talent or skill do you have?

I trained in musical theatre and love to sing. I regularly burst into song without even noticing, much to the joy of my friends and family.

If there were one song you associate with your youth, what would it be?

Somewhere over the Rainbow.

What is your greatest regret?

No big regrets. I try to keep learning from my hiccups!

What is your ultimate guilty pleasure?

Several packets of white chocolate buttons.

Who is/was the love of your life?

My Grandad O'Malley was my number one fan and I was his.

What is your present state of mind?

Delighted at the opportunity to work at The Gate Theatre, and in a new play by an Irish writer.

What do you consider the greatest work of art?

A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte by Georges Seurat. It's also the basis of my favourite musical *Sunday in the Park with George* by Stephen Sondheim

What's been your biggest recession sacrifice?

I am lucky enough to be earning a living doing what I love at the moment. No sacrifices there!

On what occasion do you consider it OK to lie?

When I have a cheeky McDonald's at lunch hour.

What's the sexiest quality in a man/woman?

I would have to say a good sense of humour: it's important to be able to laugh together.

What are the consolations of getting older?

You get wiser, I hope.

Which local star — in any field — should the world outside Ireland know about?

Collapsing Horse Theatre Company founded by Matthew Smith, Aaron Heffernan, Eoghan Quinn and Jack Gleeson.

What's your best chat-up line?

As Emily Dickinson would say: 'I am nobody, who are you?'

Donal Lynch

Clare O'Malley appears in 'The Last Summer' a new play by Declan Hughes at the Gate Theatre until October 13 as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. Tickets from €25, bookings on 01 874 4045

WHAT LIES BENEATH NIALL MACMONAGLE

Steel Yard, Mountain and Trailer

by Nick Miller 2012
Oil on linen
Courtesy of the artist and Rubicon Gallery

IRELAND'S "Table Mountain", Ben Bulbin, Co Sligo, is only 1,722 feet high but it's a towering presence in our imaginations. Ben Bulbin and WB Yeats belong in the same sentence. Not only was Yeats haunted by this landmass all his life but he asked that he be buried beneath it.

But move over Yeats. Make room for Nick Miller who has had his brilliantly sharp eye on it for some time and who has given this iconic image a contemporary twist.

London-born, Sligo-based, artist Nick is a man with a

van. A decommissioned Post Office truck has become his mobile studio. He finds his spot, backs up the van, opens the door and before him is a world that becomes the painting.

In this image that world is both the age-old natural world and a man-made, spoilt one.

Sky, cloud, mountain, fields, flowers and yard are all framed by the doorway of the van.

This is one among many of Miller's distinctive touches. The frame is never stark and bland, it is as if his palette is forming the strips that outline and define the image.

His paintings are made in all weathers and, befitting Ben Bulbin, this is a very large

work. It's both romantic and a grittily realistic one. The top celebrates an expansive landscape sweeping downwards, rocks and trees add drama but even in that natural world the eye snags on man's interfering presence. The telegraph poles and wires cut across the beautiful.

In the middle ground a stretch of grassland with wild flowers swirl with colour and the foreground with its scrap metal, the rust-red trailer and its ugly randomness brings us down to earth. This is the world of work a male world where harsh metal and trailer are viewed against a majestic, vibrant backdrop. But even within the functional yard Miller delights the viewer with



a tiny, delicate bird perched on the concrete and ready for flight, lower left.

This is a major work, and if any contemporary Irish painting deserved a permanent home in a public collection,

'Steel Yard, Mountain and Trailer' is it.

Nick Miller's show *Yard* runs at the Rubicon Gallery, 10 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 1. Until October 27