

PROFILE JUSTIN BIEBER

That's all the toys out of the pram, I'm off

The pop idol stunned his fans with a festive tweet announcing his retirement at 19. Yes, a troubled year has left his squeaky clean image battered but did he really mean it?

Teenagers are meant to be moody, unpredictable and self-absorbed, but Justin Bieber — who has just announced his retirement at the age of 19 — seems to be suffering adolescent angst writ large.

On Christmas Eve the teenybop idol tweeted: "My beloved believers, I'm officially retiring", causing consternation among his millions of fans. One replied: "nooo! u cant take my life . . . ur my life . . . being a belieber is all about me . . . n retiring is not a good decision . . . for sure". Another complained that he had "basically ripped our heart out in a matter of seconds" and for a third the festive season was over there and then: "Just found out about Justin Bieber retiring. It's impossible to enjoy Christmas now. The day is ruined. Cancel Christmas."

Bieber's manager, Scooter Braun, moved quickly to assure everyone that the singer was "just taking a break", but question marks remain about Bieber's state of mind and what 2014 holds for the baby-faced phenomenon.

After his meteoric rise to superstardom, things started to go off the rails earlier this year. In the space of eight months the squeaky-clean Canadian singer had been caught speeding, got into a fight at a New York nightclub, turned up two hours late to a concert, visited a Brazilian brothel and appeared naked on the internet.

His new movie, *Believe*, opened in America last week, taking £1.3m on its first day at the box office — roughly a 10th of the opening-day takings of his previous concert film, *Justin Bieber: Never Say Never*, released in 2011.

If Bieber is in freefall, would it be such a surprise? He has grown up in the unrelenting glare of the spotlight, surrounded by fans, pursued by the paparazzi and flattered by hangers-on. His work schedule is relentless: his latest tour, which finished earlier this month, was a 154-show extravaganza across North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, South America and Australia.

Those at whom life throws too much, too young are often casualties of their own success — think Lindsay Lohan and Britney Spears — and Bieber has about £80m and a Ferrari but seemingly few close friends.

His mother, Pattie Mallette, was 18 when he was born and brought her son up alone (although she and Bieber's father, Jeremy, have remained friends). Mallette recently spoke while promoting her book, *Nowhere but Up: The Story of Justin Bieber's Mom*, about the pressures Bieber was under, but when she was asked whether she liked her son's friends, there was an awkward silence. "I don't know how to answer that question," she said.

Mallette was presumably downstairs basting the turkey while Bieber sat in his room alone on Christmas Day, filming snatches of his recent songs to post on Instagram. Although the tweets that followed his "retirement" had the soothingly managed air of damage limitation — "Blessed to spend Christmas with my family. Hope everyone around the world had a blessed Christmas as well. Much love" — the films Bieber put up that day "as a gift to his fans" have a melancholy air. You don't see the singer's face; instead, a camera ranges round his feet, a dark carpet and stripped pine skirting board. Bieber sings simply, unaccompanied.

"I'm one of the people who think Bieber's



very talented, but this whole year has been out of control," said the music writer Lisa Verrico. "He needs some time out. What people are talking about is what he's been up to, not about the music."

"Bieber's got a smart manager and my guess is he's been told to take a year off. He's losing his teenage audience as his fans grow up and he needs to start making music for adults. For years he's had his life mapped out with travelling and touring, meet-and-greets for hours after every show; it's no wonder he's started to throw his toys out of the pram. This is the moment to step back and think for a while."

Bieber's success came not only early, but by accident. He taught himself to play the piano, drums, guitar and trumpet and, aged 12, came second in a local singing competition in Stratford, Ontario. His mother posted a video of the performance on YouTube for family and friends, and then uploaded more videos of him singing R&B numbers.

Braun discovered one of the videos while searching for another singer. Mallette was dubious about letting her son sing professionally but Braun was persuasive. He flew Bieber to Atlanta, Georgia, where he recorded some demo tapes and performed for the singer-songwriter Usher. Bieber was signed to a management company jointly owned by Usher and Braun.

His first single, *One Time*, released as he recorded his first album in 2009, went platinum in Canada and the United States and gold in Australia and New Zealand. Later that year Bieber performed *Stevie Wonder's One Day at Christmas* for Barack and Michelle Obama at the White House. He became the first artist to have seven songs from a debut album in the *Billboard* Hot 100.

Since then Bieber has sold more than 15m albums. He has more than 48m followers on Twitter and is listed by *Forbes* magazine as the

ninth most powerful celebrity in the world (according to *Forbes*, the most powerful is Oprah Winfrey). Two days before he announced his "retirement", the success of his new album, *Journals*, knocked Beyoncé off the top of *Billboard's* Social 50, which ranks the most popular artists on YouTube, Vevo, Facebook, Twitter, Soundcloud, Wikipedia, Myspace and Instagram.

There are waxworks of Bieber at Madame Tussauds in London and New York. When he had an unexpected haircut in 2011, it reputedly cost £60,000 to alter Justin Bieber dolls for the 2011 Christmas season.

Recently he has cultivated a more "street-wise" look. Ryan Good, appointed by Usher to be Bieber's road manager and stylist, has been dressing him in hoodies, baggy trousers and dog chains. A baffling addition to his outfits (worn to dinner at Mr Chow in London and on

a shopping trip) has been a gas mask.

Bieber is a practising Christian who once said he talked to Jesus. When he was criticised for his behaviour in a nightclub last year he said: "I understand it is part of the job to be judged . . . but judge me on the facts, judge me on the music and be careful of the judgment u pass. But know this . . . I'm only judged by one power and I serve him."

For two years he dated the singer and actress Selena Gomez. Their every move was followed by the paparazzi, a breed of photographer that Bieber has learnt to detest. Forty minutes after his "retirement" tweet, he posted this rambling message: "The media talks a lot about me. They make up a lot of lies and want me to fail but I'm never leaving you, being a belieber is a lifestyle."

He has an ambivalent attitude to fame. In his book *Just Getting Started* he describes looking out of his hotel window at the crowds of fans below and seeing two of his friends skateboarding.

"My buddies had a freedom I no longer had. All I wanted was to do something normal and skateboard with the guys, but I knew that if I went downstairs to join them it would create chaos," he writes. He says Braun went downstairs and persuaded the assembled girls to let him join his friends and "be a normal kid for one night".

It was a moment one writer compared to the Christmas football truce on the western front in 1914. Bieber was able to skateboard in peace for more than an hour.

"Literally, all of the fans sat down on the pavement and watched me without a fuss or a scene," he writes. The funny thing about the story, he added later, was that "when my fans don't surround the hotels, I actually do get upset because knowing that they're there gives me comfort".

Let us hope he can wean himself off both extremes. This boy deserves a break.

HE GOT INTO A FIGHT IN A NIGHTCLUB, VISITED A BRAZILIAN BROTHEL AND APPEARED NAKED ON THE INTERNET

Be grown up about child care system

To be good 'corporate parent', new agency needs resource boost, argues Colin Murphy

"The corporate parent" is a phrase worthy of George Orwell. Most of us will never need to know what it is but, for about 6,500 Irish children, the harsh reality of their home circumstances has left them with a "corporate parent" in place of their actual ones. That corporate parent is the HSE. On our behalf, it takes children into care if their parents are incapable of looking after them adequately. The key question is: does the corporate parent do any better?

The vast majority — 90% — of these children are in foster homes. Many of these stay in touch with their foster families after they leave care at 18; some continue living with them, with HSE support. They may avail of "after-care" services and receive help in pursuing third-level education.

Such young people are a success story. The HSE likes to claim that their success means the care system as a whole works. But there are cracks in the system, and children are falling through them.

Over recent months, I have been talking to such young people. They have described being moved around from placement to placement; not having a social worker, or not being able to reach their social worker when they needed help; not getting counselling and other supports when required; and being largely abandoned by the HSE when they turned 18.

This was in no way a representative sample, but these issues also surfaced regularly in last year's report of the independent child death review group, co-authored by Geoffrey Shannon and Norah Gibbons. These young people were among the 530 currently in residential rather than foster care.

New HSE inspections of privately run residential centres have revealed cases in which the inaction of social work teams left children at risk. In one case, a young person who was "engaging in extremely at-risk behaviours" was left for 10 weeks without an allocated social worker.

The National Review Panel, chaired by Helen Buckley and which investigates deaths of children in care (and other "serious incidents"), recently reported that, in a third of the cases it examined in 2012, social work departments "were challenged in their capacity to deal with the pressure of work being referred to them".

Meanwhile, reports from the Health Information and Quality Authority (Hiqa) on child protection and welfare services have also found excessive waiting lists and staff shortfalls. In Cavan/Monaghan, there were 512 children awaiting an initial assessment. In Dublin South City, there was "a significant shortfall in staff", which had a "detrimental impact" on their work. The situation in Carlow/Kilkenny "was not tenable on a long-term basis and was potentially unsafe".

What is the reason for these stresses and failures? The obvious answer, though the HSE won't acknowledge it, is a shortage of social workers.

In response to the Ryan report in 2009, the HSE recruited an additional 270 social workers. But by the time they were hired, 250 others had left due to natural wastage. Just 114 of those have been replaced. That leaves a shortfall of 136, which is roughly 10% of the total number working in child and family services. Recruitment is in train, the HSE says, but by the time these are recruited, more will have left: this shortfall is chronic, not temporary.

Worse, this shortfall is calculated according to the level of need identified in 2009. Since then, the number of children in care has increased by 11.5% and the number of child abuse referrals by 58%. Demographic trends suggest the number of children in care will continue to increase.

I asked Aidan Waterstone, the HSE's national specialist for children and family services, whether a shortage of staff was compromising child protection. He couldn't comment on resources, he said, because that was a matter for the Oireachtas. But he insisted child protection was not being compromised, because the HSE would reallocate resources if necessary to meet child protection challenges — it was a management issue.

HSE inspections and Hiqa reports suggest that child protection is being compromised. But the HSE's specialist won't concede that these are related to staff shortages, because the agency is not allowed to do so. In effect our attention is being distracted from the obvious conclusion by the claim that any problems can be dealt with by mere reallocation of resources.

"Do more with less" is an in vogue corporate mantra. But good parenting is often about doing less with more — being prepared to invest whatever it takes in our children.

Next month the HSE will transfer responsibility for this area, with staff and resources, to a new Child and Family Agency, under the auspices of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This new corporate parent will start off with certain advantages: a ring-fenced budget; clearer lines of responsibility; and an exclusive focus on children.

On their own, these won't be enough. The agency will need resources. And if it doesn't get what it needs, it should say so, clearly and unapologetically. That, at least, will allow us to be honest about the kind of care system we want to fund, and whether we want it to be a parent we can be proud of.

Colin Murphy is a journalist. Research for this article has been supported by the Mary Rafferty Journalism Fund. A fuller account appears in the winter issue of the *Dublin Review*

Minding your manners makes perfect cents

At some stage over the next few days many of you will find yourselves sitting in a cafe somewhere in Europe taking a well-earned Christmas break. As you try to remember how to hold your unopened copy of *Le Monde* the right way up, and attempt to impress the locals with how expertly you can order one cappuccino using only the local dialect and two fingers, you should be aware that, behind the white napkins and lace curtains, a bitter battle of social engineering and legal regulation is being fought.

A cafe in Nice has decided to reinforce the value of good manners by fixing the price of its coffee depending on how politely a customer asks for it. According to the price list, "Un café" is €7; "Un café, s'il vous plaît" is €4.25; and "Bonjour — un café, s'il vous plaît" is a mere €1.40. This may look like one of those multiple-choice questions from Junior Cert French, but it is in fact a sophisticated experiment in manners.

According to the cafe owner, the pricing structure started as a joke but soon began to change the behaviour of customers. All of a sudden the rudest regulars started showing some consideration towards the staff. Clearly any invention that can make the French more polite is potential Nobel Prize-winning material.

Given how rude many Irish people are these days, it can be only a matter of time before cafes here follow suit. In our age of moral inflation it is no longer sufficient that it does not cost anything to be nice — you need to offer a positive return on niceness to persuade people to invest some of it with you.

The Irish price list would lack the poetry of the French language and would read something along the lines of: "Fix me a skinny flat white" at €7; "Please fix me a chai latte" would be €4.25; and "Story bud, would you please fix me a caramel macchiato?" a bargain €1.40.

If the scheme is a success, it could be extended into other areas. If you pay your property tax with a smile on your

PAUL ANTHONY McDERMOTT



face, and a word of gratitude for the fine job that the Revenue is doing collecting it, you would be granted a 10% discount.

The next time you congratulate the clammers on how efficient they were in immobilising your car in the time it took you to stop and light a candle in the church, you will be given a courtesy car.

And the next time you are presented with a bill from your lawyer, if you whistle and declare it to be much lower than you expected, you will be nominated as the Bar Council representative on the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority.

Academics have whiled away many

tough hours in university coffee shops reflecting on whether or not governments should bribe people to do things they are expected to do anyway.

In his book *What Money Can't Buy*, Professor Michael Sandel of Harvard reflects on the arguments for and against some schools' practice of paying pupils a reward of \$2 (€1.50) for each book they read. More novellas get read this way, but the dilemma is whether you want to produce a generation who read to make money and not because they love it.

We live in an age where the value of everything is measured on a monetary scale. How often do you hear a politician promoting or attacking a proposal other than because it will

save or cost money? Strategic decisions made by our universities are increasingly based on how much cash they will generate rather than on inherent academic value.

Many everyday acts of kindness now require to be supported by an allowance or top-up of some sort. Is the increasing use of financial reward to promote good behaviour a direct result of the failure of civic society to promote it?

Promoting politeness can have unexpected legal consequences. Last week it was reported that a pub-cafe in Brittany was fined €9,000 for using undeclared labour, after a polite customer gave them a hand clearing up.

There had been a long-standing tradition at the premises whereby customers carried drinks trays and used glasses back to the bar. Late one night the social security agency conducted a raid just as a customer was returning a drinks tray, and accused the owners of using illegal workers.

The owners thought it was a joke until

they were arrested a few weeks later. The pub in question held regular Celtic music evenings. The owners could not have visited Ireland for the Gathering this year, since if they did they would know a traditional Celtic pub features customers wearing reindeer jumpers and spilling their beer all over the floor before leaving half-empty glasses on the pavement or in someone's garden.

No Irish pub ever gets fined for the antisocial behaviour of its patrons. Thus, ironically, if the bar in Brittany had encouraged its customers to be rude rather than polite it might have stayed on the right side of the law.

So as I headed off for my Christmas holidays, I removed my Baedeker guide and a box of Barry's tea from my carry-on luggage and replaced them with my entire collection of legal texts.

In that way I was armed and ready for any misguided attempts to make me act any more politely abroad than I do at home.