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Ger is 'moral centre' of The Summit film

■ Screening in Limerick attended by family and film crew

ALAN OWENS

THE opening scene of *The Summit*, the film about the K2 mountain tragedy that claimed the life of Limerick climber Ger McDonnell, features a stunning 360-degree tracking shot of the treacherous mountain in all its glory, filmed from 7,400 metres.

It is an extraordinary shot, capturing the mountain's glory and fear-inducing majesty and was filmed by director Nick Ryan from the very Pakistan helicopter that lifted survivors of the 2008 disaster from the slopes of K2.

The mountain plays like a character in the film, which mixes real, never before seen footage of the climb and interviews with survivors, as well as reconstructed scenes to stunning effect.

Mr Ryan, speaking at the Limerick premiere of the film in 69 O'Connell Street as part of the Elemental Festival, said that Ger was the "moral centre" of the film.

"I never knew Ger, but I think it is a testament to who he was, through all of the footage, everything everybody said, he was an incredible personality," said Ryan. "Without a shadow of doubt he is everything that he is portrayed on screen."

The film centres on the controversy about Ger's final moments on the mountain after becoming the first Irishman to summit K2 at his second attempt - a mountain that one in four climbers do not return from after conquering.

Several climbers have offered conflicting tales of Ger's final moments, but the film, which includes interviews with JJ McDonnell - Ger's brother - and Damien O'Brien - his brother in law - who were in attendance on Friday along with Ger's mum Gertie plus his sisters and extended family, concludes

that Ger sacrificed his chances of survival in attempting to save several trapped climbers.

"Ger just couldn't stop and leave somebody behind - that is the point and in many ways it is a flaw. He knew very much what he was going to do," said the director.

"He had the skill, the ability, rescue techniques, he understood how to release these guys and it was sheer bad luck [that he didn't make it down]."

"If he had managed to get down the mountain that day, it would have been one of most amazing stories in

mountaineering history, and because he died it is a tragedy."

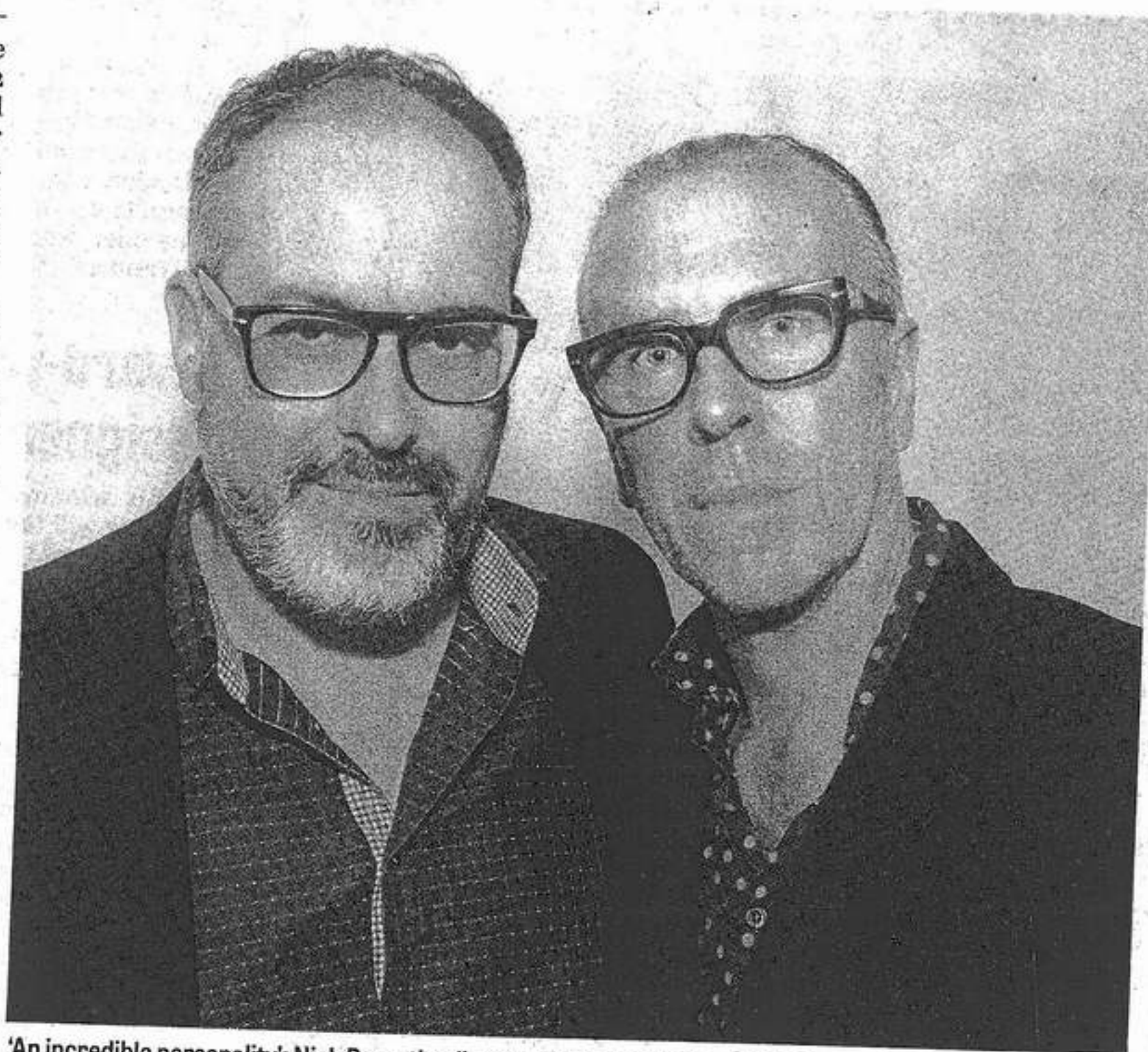
Money raised from the premiere will go towards a memorial trust, and Damien, who has written a superb book about his brother in law in *The Time Has Come*, said the film was "incredible".

"I think it is as accurate a portrayal of what happened on the mountain as can be expected," he said. "The family are very happy with the way Ger is portrayed in the film - that was Ger, the singing and dancing, but on the mountain he was very safety conscious as well. The one fault that he had

was that he was too kind on the mountain - it was his kindness that had him in trouble for a finish."

Damien added that "it is a big thing for the family to get Ger's story out there" through the film, which has been picked up for worldwide distribution and that it was important to have a screening in Limerick.

"It was a massive thing to have the screening here. You are dealing with your home crowd and a lot of people wouldn't have known the extent of what happened. You can read a book, but a picture paints a thousand words."



'An incredible personality': Nick Ryan, the director of *The Summit* and Nick Seymour of *Crowded House*, who wrote and performed the soundtrack to the film, at the Limerick premiere in 69 O'Connell Street