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Cranberries follow career arc at Riviera

May 17, 2012 | By Kevin McKeough | Special to the Tribune

Dolores O'riordan looks like a punk and sings like a pixie.

Not like one of the Pixies, mind you, although O'riordan and the rest of the Cranberries overtly recalled the indie rock pioneers at times during the Irish band's performance at the Riviera Theatre Wednesday night.

Her voice, on the other hand, suggested a sprite. O'riordan sang in a piquant alto, her thick brogue adding a keening edge to melodies steeped in traditional Irish folk.



The Limerick quartet's combination of *auld* and *nouveau* made the Cranberries stars in the 90s alternative rock era, as they reached sales of more than 30 million records before their 2003 breakup. Inevitably, the band reunited, and this past February they released "Roses," their first studio album since 2001.

The 90-minute concert followed the trajectory of the Cranberries' career, with the dreamy pop hits "Dreams" and "Linger" from the group's 1993 debut followed by increasingly aggressive rock. Guitarist Noel Hogan alternated between jangling arpeggios and barking power chords, his brother Mike Hogan's bass rumbled and Fergal Lawler's drums tumbled. A female backing singer swathed O'riordan in harmonies and helped out with the high notes, while a keyboard player added shimmering washes.

O'riordan punctuated the songs with lovely trills and banshee cries and repeatedly held out her microphone to the crowd to sing parts of the most familiar songs. Dressed from boots to sleeveless T-shirt in black, her bare arms sporting a collection of tattoos, some obtained in Chicago ("I got some ink here," she told the crowd), she struck stiff-armed poses, marched like a wooden soldier and shook her bowed head frantically.

The songs ranged from the doo-wop indebted "When You're Gone" to the Ramonesy rave-up "Salvation." Too often, though, the center did not hold (to borrow a phrase from W.B. Yeats), as the chiming guitars and O'riordan's trills on songs including "You and Me" and "Tomorrow" meandered instead of coalescing into a formidable whole.

The Cranberries proved better at the furthest ends of their spectrum, which they juxtaposed with the finale, "Zombie," which suggested an Irish drinking song crossed with the Pixies' "Monkey Gone to Heaven," and the first encore, the ballad "Conduct," which found O'riordan in an evening gown, singing a melody that was pure enchantment.

etc-arts@tribune.com

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