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Reunited Cranberries regain raw power

May 04, 2012 | By Alan Sculley, Special to The Morning Call

Ask Dolores O'Riordan, lead singer of Irish pop-rock group Cranberries, about her expectations for her recently reunited band's new CD, "Roses," and the band's world tour, and she's humble.

"I'd say we don't have huge, great expectations, so that way we can never really be let down," she says. "I think we're just hoping that people, our true fans, really like this album because our fans have stayed with us for so many years."

Beyond that, O'Riordan is just pleased that the Cranberries can now operate on the group's own terms. The band is no longer on a major label, and the expectations and pressures that came with being a chart-topping act no longer exist.

"You know, when you're young and you get too much too young, and they keep you going and you would be burned out," O'Riordan says. "At least I know myself [now]. I know how to stay in control, and that's very important."

Early on, the Cranberries were as big as a band can get.

The Cranberries' 1993 debut, "Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We" — recorded when the four band members were still in their teens — turned the group into global stars behind the hits "Linger" and "Dreams." The CD sold 6 million copies.

The second CD, 1994's "No Need To Argue," was even more popular, selling some 12 million, as the single "Zombie" gave the Cranberries another smash hit.

O'Riordan discovered firsthand the toll that sort of fast and massive success can take.

As the group was hitting the heights of its popularity in 1994, O'Riordan had a major accident. While skiing with her bandmates (guitarist Noel Hogan, his brother bassist Mike Hogan, and drummer Fergal Lawler), she crashed and required several surgeries on her right knee.

During the first half of the year, she went through physical therapy, re-learning how to walk in time for her wedding in July 1994 to Don Burton, manager of Duran Duran. Then it was back to work. Fearing that any interruption in the band's schedule of touring and promotion could curb its popularity, the Cranberries stayed out on tour, where Noel Hogan and O'Riordan wrote the songs for the third CD, "To The Faithful Departed."

The third CD was released in spring 1996 and despite feeling the strain of the busy schedule, another 100 or so tour dates were booked.

That's when things went wrong. During a May concert in Australia, O'Riordan landed awkwardly on her right leg, re-injuring it. Tour dates were canceled. And the mental strain O'Riordan was experiencing was so severe that doctors advised her to see a psychiatrist.

That turned out to be a moment that helped O'Riordan turn around a downward spiral.

"He [the psychiatrist] said 'You're just under too much pressure,'" O'Riordan recalls. "He just had to tell them [people involved in the Cranberries' business] I was not fit to go out and tour because I was quite a danger to myself at that point because I was too stressed."

The band returned to the road later in 1996 for a North American tour, but O'Riordan was exhausted and unable to finish the first part of the tour. Finally in October, the group canceled the third leg of the North American tour altogether. By that time, O'Riordan was the subject of all sorts of speculation.

"The media started to follow me and they started to say I had anorexia and they started to say there was nothing wrong with me and all these bad things," O'Riordan says. "When you're down, people will really jump on top of you."

The canceled tour turned into a full-on hiatus that lasted until 1999, when the band released its fourth CD, "Bury The Hatchet."

That was followed in 2001 by "Wake Up And Smell The Coffee," but after the tour cycle for that CD, the group went on hiatus once again.

This time, it looked like the break might be permanent.

As the Cranberries fell further off the radar, O'Riordan resurfaced in 2007 with her first solo CD, "Are You Listening?" and followed that with a second solo release, "No Baggage," in 2009.

The other band members also had found other projects.

But instead of launching a tour behind "No Baggage," O'Riordan was laying the groundwork for the band's return. In early 2009, O'Riordan and the Hogan brothers bumped into each other, and that summer, she invited all three of her Cranberries bandmates to her son's confirmation.

"I was kind of realizing that we weren't getting any younger and just feeling like a family feeling and realizing that maybe we should go for it," O'Riordan says. "Then that night we were having a few beers and the bass player [Mike Hogan] just said, 'You know, let's do it now.' I guess we were all getting a bit emotional and we were yeah, like OK, OK. It was very much like following your heart."

The band booked a reunion tour for that fall, which continued into 2010.

The shows went well, and thoughts then turned to making new music together. As music took shape, the band contacted Stephen Street, who had produced the first two Cranberries' CDs, as well as "Wake Up And Smell The Coffee," to handle "Roses."

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For the CD, Street sought to recapture some of the intimacy and innocence he remembered from working with the band on "Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We."

The songs the group had written suited this approach, as "Roses" is made up almost entirely of ballads and mid-tempo material.

Street's work with O'Riordan on her vocals was an example of his methods.

"From all the years of performing I had started to sing like somebody who was performing on stage, and projecting by belting it out, trying to be, wow," O'Riordan says. "I was singing [in the studio] and I kind of belted out a little bit. And he goes 'No, no, you know the way you were doing it soft right there. That was nicer.' And I kind of go 'Really, that's great because that's much easier on me.' So it works out that this album is actually very easy to sing, very easy to perform, which is good now because I'm not getting any younger here, you know."

Speaking of performing, O'Riordan says the Cranberries' live shows in support of "Roses" are long on music and short on visual flash.

"We're going to try to keep it very simple and keep it raw," O'Riordan says. "[We'll] keep it [the focus] on the actual songs, keep like the authentic rawness that we had when we started out that we kind of lost over the years and go back to that."

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CRANBERRIES

- When:** 8:30 p.m. Saturday May 5
- Where:** Electric Factory, 421 N. Seventh St., Philadelphia
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