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THE CRANBERRIES

Dolores' Blonde Ambition

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DOLORES O'RIORDAN - Photographed by MATT BRIGHT

"Understand what I've become/It wasn't my design"
— "Ode to My Family", The Cranberries

BEEN WITH DOLORES?" THE driver glances back, overhearing our conversation as we head home from Heathrow. An affectionate half-smile crosses his face. "Been driving her for two years. And her husband, now. Oh, I've seen some changes."

"D'you see me, d'you see me?/Do you like me? Do you like me standing there?"

SALT Lake City at Thanksgiving, the self-conscious American celebration of The Family, when every prodigal child trails home for the fatted turkey. With cranberry sauce.

A snow-covered city where the omnipresent Church of Jesus Christ Of Latterday Saints means there's a lot of God about. Possibly as much as in Ireland, of which Dolores says simply, "I don't think there's another country as Catholic as mine."

At the Saltair Pavilion, a cow palace a few miles from town, oh yes, they see and like Dolores standing there. A triumphant, tiny platinum-haired woman filling the stage with windmilling arms, smiles and "Hello, Salt Lake". Like she was born to it, like the shy girl who once hid behind her hair and baggy clothes never existed. She's up there with three young men whose love affair with their music is as clear as ever. Unlike the now-glamorous Dolores, they seem to have grown more sober-looking over the years; their sensible haircuts and dark suits wouldn't look out of place on Mormon missionaries.

That'll be the band, then. But it's Dolores they're bellowing for, sweaty boys lowing like lovesick calves. Punching fists airwards, mouthing the words to each shimmering song from megaplatinum successes "Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?" and this year's "No Need to Argue". The boys moo and surge. Their girlfriends hold their jackets and shout for Feargal ("Fuurr-gulllll!) when he plays bongos at the front of the stage.

Out of nowhere, a boy gallops unhindered toward Dolores and seizes her in a clumsy headlock as she jerks back from the keyboards, frozen. Seconds later, he escapes into the crowd.

A pause. Then, effortlessly poised, she gives us a big smile and resumes singing. The crowd roars.

"My mother, my mother, she hold me/My father, my father, he liked me"

POP songs are inevitably about lurve (wanting/having/losing), larded with rebelliousness-by-rote (staying up late, getting fiddly, crossing against the light). From that viewpoint, the gorgeous, troubled "Ode to My Family" is an untypical (yet stubbornly Cranberries-like) single.

You might even call it conservative: the title, certainly, would hearten the Moral Majority. But it's hardly that simple: as with most of singer/songwriter Dolores O'Riordan's lyrics, its leapfrogging syntax paints an impressionist picture as sad as it is joyous.

Maybe its internal contradictions aren't surprising, coming from a tough and gentle 23-year-old girl who proudly recalls her inarticulate rebellion as a teenager, but who, wedded four months ago to the father of a three-year-old boy, stands by marriage for life. Who tells French magazine Les InRocks she supports the death penalty, and bristles with fierce compassion for abused and murdered children. Who refers again and again to her Catholicism, and plays with a band whose merchandise table sells souvenir condoms.

"It is different," admits Ballybricken's famous daughter, turning toward the fireplace to warm a scarred leg that remains numb, months after a skiing accident. "I wrote it at a point where everybody thought we were so lucky, selling all these records. But out on the road, every day was another going by where we never saw our old school friends, and our lives were changing. And my family seemed so far away."

Like the experience of 10 years, condensed. "Into one year." Dolores' eyes widen. "It was extreme. We were sat on a bus, travelling around America. And there was no escapism for me; I can't drink on tour. I'd finish at the end of the night and just sit down and feel it all. I'm not one of those people who gets totally out of it, though it's pretty easy to do, when you realise you're travelling from one town to



When we first chatted up THE CRANBERRIES — and it was MM who discovered the band in 1991 — even we couldn't predict that their defiant Irish noise would become an international crossover success. With their latest single 'Ode to My Family' in the charts, JENNIFER NINE meets the band on their current American tour and talks to reluctant superstar DOLORES O'RIORDAN about acclaim, fame, love, trust and that wedding outfit. Butterfly child: MATT BRIGHT

FAMILY VALUES

another, and you're not going home."
Like a travelling saleswoman, except people assume that a pop star's lot is infinitely more fun.
"That's the irony. People think it's glamorous, a party every night... but if I partied two nights in a row, my voice would clap out! Because I actually sing" — the pride in that astonishing instrument we know as the voice of the Cranberries is unmistakable — "unlike a lot of females in bands who really don't sing."
It must make you more demanding now about the conditions you perform in.
"When you get to a point where so much is expected of you, you say, okay, if you want that, I want this." She sets her chin defiantly. "When you're making multimillions for some guy at the top, a lot more than you're making for yourself... you have to be able to put your foot down. Because the guy at the top is at home relaxing, saying 'the Cranberries are doing me well.'"

Better for them than for yourself.
"Damn right. We haven't seen a pound yet, the band. But we're on the case," she intones. "They're very slow to pay out."
Has your success made your family suspicious of people?
"I'm worried about people being over-nice, lick-ass, to my family. My mother had it the hardest. It still bugs me that the Irish press always want to interview my parents. Leave my family alone! They're not the singer... I've been doing this since I was 18, and every day I've learned a little more about what I was getting into. And now I'm 23." She sets down her teacup. "So I know quite a bit."
"Of course, my mother got excited at first, but she's pretty clever now, she doesn't talk to them any more. It's so unscrupulous," she sighs. "Their lives are different. They don't have any experience of this... crap," she says softly. The youngest of seven, Dolores says her family "are all proud of me. But," she adds,

"they always thought I was a bit wild."
"I was always into the Bob Marleys; I'd put on something torn to go to church... I think it was Christmas Day when I decided to wear two different coloured socks. You know the lengths you go to," she smiles. "Being rebellious when you're a teenager. My brothers would come round and ask, 'Why not wear a pair of normal socks?' And I'd be like... "She mimics the sullen confusion of her younger self. "Cos... I dunno!"
Didn't you have any allies?
"I got to a point in my teens where I thought they were all against me. The boys were always allowed to come home late, do all the things I wasn't allowed to do because I was a girl. Any time I went to a disco — until I was 19 years old! — one of my brothers would have to go with me. That seemed so old — like, nearly dead! And still not free, either!"
"I was a good little Catholic girl, mind," says Dolores, half-sarcastic, half-affectionate.

"But I was always rebellious underneath."
Were there no other tearaways in the family?
"My eldest brother was pretty wild when he was young," she admits. "He used to take out big bank loans, buy cars... and crash 'em! He always seemed so exotic. He'd drive off in a big flashy car... I thought he was a god when I was small. Then he went off and got married when I was 12, so I was put off him."
"He just left me there in the dirt!" Dolores exclaims, mock-dramatically. "So when I was in my rebellious teens, he was all sensible and married, and his car days were behind him. But he used to be wild..."
"He's 10 years older than me," she adds. "He's actually the exact same age as my husband."

Dolores jokes, marvelling that "the production manager from an arena tour" would agree to do the Cranberries' mere theatre tour. Modesty indeed: last I checked, the Cranberries' future looked at least as healthy as Le Bon's.
Don — Canadian, tall, someone who once exchanged six words with me — is the man countless boys are jealous of in the abstract. If they could hear the love in Dolores' voice — she calls him "my husband" with heart-swelling pride — they'd shrivel up and die.
"When he first met my husband, my brother announced, 'I don't trust him'. He was awful. At our engagement party, he kept saying, 'I don't trust anyone to take my sister.'"
"The laugh is," she continues, "they ended up the best of buddies. Hah! You can leave home at 18, live in a flat and be in a band, and after five years come home and say, 'I'm getting married to this guy', and it's like, 'Who said you could get married?'"
In their minds, you're still 12.

"And still theirs! But that's the nice thing about families. They're the ones who really care when it comes to the crunch."
Why does this song sound so sad, then?
When you say, "Understand what I've become", is that an apology?
"I suppose..." Dolores pauses. "I was sad and apologetic that... I'd change my family. I didn't want to do that. It was perfect."
What could change it?
"Artificial people. You know the way success changes things, that old saying, 'Success has made a failure of our home'. That's only weak homes, though, I assume," she decides. "But it's fine. Though it has affected everybody."
"So the lyrics, 'People everywhere think something better than I am', Dolores continues, "it's about how people start treating you like overnight you've become a better person because you've sold records. Which

'You know the way success changes things, that old saying, "Success has made a failure of our home". That's only weak homes, though' — Dolores

made it very difficult for me to go forward in relationships," she admits of the time before meeting Don. "I was stuck for about a year thinking, Arrgh! I don't trust men! It's hard to get suspicion out of your head. I'm grateful to be where I am now, married."
Does the ring make a difference?
"I'm Catholic," she reiterates. "So it makes a big difference to me. We went to the priest together; it was intense. It's not like going in and signing a document. It makes it a lot more serious when you do it in church. It's more than the ring."

AND nearly a three-ring circus, thanks to the Irish paparazzi. And that eye-popping dress. Beginning life as a sketch as Dolores lay bored in a hospital bed, it ended up as a rather diaphanous shift over a dazzling white bikini, complete with navel jewel and boots.
"I thought it was so cool!" she beams. "I brought my dad down to my bedroom the night before and said, 'Dad, it's not a normal wedding dress now, it's kinda different, but c'mon, I'll show you.' He looked at it and said, 'Dolores, it's lovely, but... where's the dress?' And I said, 'This is it!'" She laughs. "He looked at it again and said, 'Well, will your belly be covered, then?' 'Yeah, Dad,' I said, 'I'll cover it.' 'Will the priest give out, then?' he wanted to know. 'I'm covered, aren't I? You can't see my bum, can you?' I said, 'Well, you've got a point,' he said. 'God made you, after all!'"
"I didn't know it would end up as such a big deal," admits Dolores of her subsequent notoriety on Irish radio phone-in shows, in which the words "vulgar" and "disrespectful" popped up. To her amusement, "The only ones to really give out were women. Maybe be three out of 20, but... hah!" she snorts as if addressing the critics.

"What are you... 20 stone?"
"Brides always look beautiful, but they never really look sexy. And I wanted to look sexy on my wedding day! Because it's about giving yourself away as a woman, male and female combining and saying, 'Hello! We want to be lovers for the rest of our lives!'" With emphasis, it transpires, on "rest of our lives". "In Ireland, there isn't a lot of marital breakdown, or kids out of wedlock that much, because of the Catholic thing," she reminds me.
Is that for the good, then?
"I think your frame of mind going into marriage can determine the result. If you know it's for life — you take it a lot more seriously than a lot of people do. Though," she concedes, "I do think





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in extreme cases of wife-bashing or child-bashing, there should be annulments granted. . . But too many people get married and then two years later say, 'We're not in love any more, but actually I'm just tired and I've seen this other guy who's cute and fresh and exciting'. That's their business. But for me, marriage is far more serious."

But Don had a child before you met him, albeit out of wedlock. Isn't that the same?

"No, not really. I lived with somebody for three years, too, and the only difference is that my methods. . . worked, you know. The first night I met Don, he put the cards on the table, told me about his child. But if he was married," she shakes her head, "I would never have gone near him."

Even if he was divorced?

"No," she says firmly. "If somebody's married, they thought they loved that person so much they wanted to spend their life with them. And now they're telling you they love you this much?" Dolores looks incredulous, and frowns. "I wouldn't marry a second-hand man, it's like getting second-hand clothes!"

And first-hand? Her delight is palpable. "It's great, amazing, excellent. The four happiest months of my life," she exclaims, smiling again.

When I see her leaving for the venue later, Dolores looks as beautiful as only new-found confidence (or marriage, or stardom) can make someone. Dressed head to toe in black, a flowing overcoat and Scottish Widow headscarf, she has a queenly dignity.

She kisses me briefly on the cheek - almost as though we'd been talking as friends, and not as pop star to one of the journalists her husband so dislikes - and gets into the car.

"You did not find me, you did not find /Does anyone care?"

BACKSTAGE at the pre-show meet-and-greet, Don looks like he'd rather have teeth pulled than give us a photo pass. He finally hands it wordlessly to the press officer, holds up three fingers (to signify "first three songs") and turns sharply on his heel.

Meanwhile, the local Artie Fufkin bustles Feargal, Mike and Noel in to meet four desperately thrilled fans. All in Morrissey T-shirts. One asks the boys, "Had you ever heard the Smiths before you made your records?" A girl with a box full of homemade memorabilia (including a bottle of cranberry juice) grabs Feargal for an awkward hug. CDs are signed, snapshots taken. If anyone's disappointed not to find Dolores here, no one says so.

As Artie cheerfully boots the fans out the back way, Noel smiles a little wearily over his shoulder at me, and rolls his eyes.

'Ode To My Family' is out now on Island

CRANBERRIES CHRONOLOGY

1989 - Feargal Lawler and brothers Noel and Mike Horgan form The Cranberry Saw Us in Limerick.

1990 - 19-year-old Dolores O'Riordan (churchgoer and tearaway, angel-voiced and Doc Martened part-time shop assistant) replaces original singer Niall.

Now called simply The Cranberries, the four sign to Island.

1991 - Debut single "Uncertain" (Xeric Records)

1992 - Debut album recorded in Dublin with Smiths producer Stephen Street.

1993 - "Linger" released in February; charts at a modest 74 in the UK and goes on to become a gold single in the US.

Album "Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?" unveiled in March, charts at an underwhelming 78, and goes on to sell 3,000,000 copies worldwide.

UK dates supporting Belly are followed by North American tours with The The in June, Suede in September, and Duran Duran (where Dolores would meet her future husband) in November.

1994 - Cranberries voted Best New Band at the Irish IRMA awards.

"Everybody Else. . ." by now double platinum in the US and gold in Canada, is re-released in Britain in February. It reaches number one and sells over 400,000 copies in the UK.

Dolores badly injures her knee in a skiing accident in March, and marries Don Burton in Limerick in July.

"Zombie", a song about sectarian violence, is released to Top 15 UK success (and most-played status on the US Billboard alternative chart) in September.

Second album "No Need To Argue" appears in October. In a mere six weeks, it sells 1.5 million copies in the US, platinum in Canada, and 250,000 copies in the UK (number 2 behind R.E.M.) in a mere six weeks.

"Ode To My Family," its sleeve bearing anti-Criminal Justice Act information and its wistful lyrics offering a look at the changes wrought by success, is released at the end of November.

