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# 'THERE WAS A LOT OF SHIT HAPPENING'

They had separate tour buses, daily alcohol-fuelled arguments, and in the end, splitting up seemed the only option. But they survived. Just. Now back in the fray, THE CRANBERRIES relive their living hell

"I WAS sick," shudders Cranberries singer Dolores O'Riordan, "I was seriously sick. And chronically depressed. I'll never forget it." The other Cranberries nod solemnly. Dolores leans forward, frowns anxiously and lowers her voice to a confidential whisper. "And that made you lose your own soul. You completely shut up. It's total isolation. You just sit there and think that absolutely everybody hates you, everybody's looking at you and talking about you. It obviously affected the band's morale." "We were close to splitting up," confesses drummer Feargal Lawler mournfully, his eyes fixed and unblinking. "Yes, very," confirms Dolores. "Looking back, I can pretty much laugh at it, but at the time it was hell. Absolute hell."

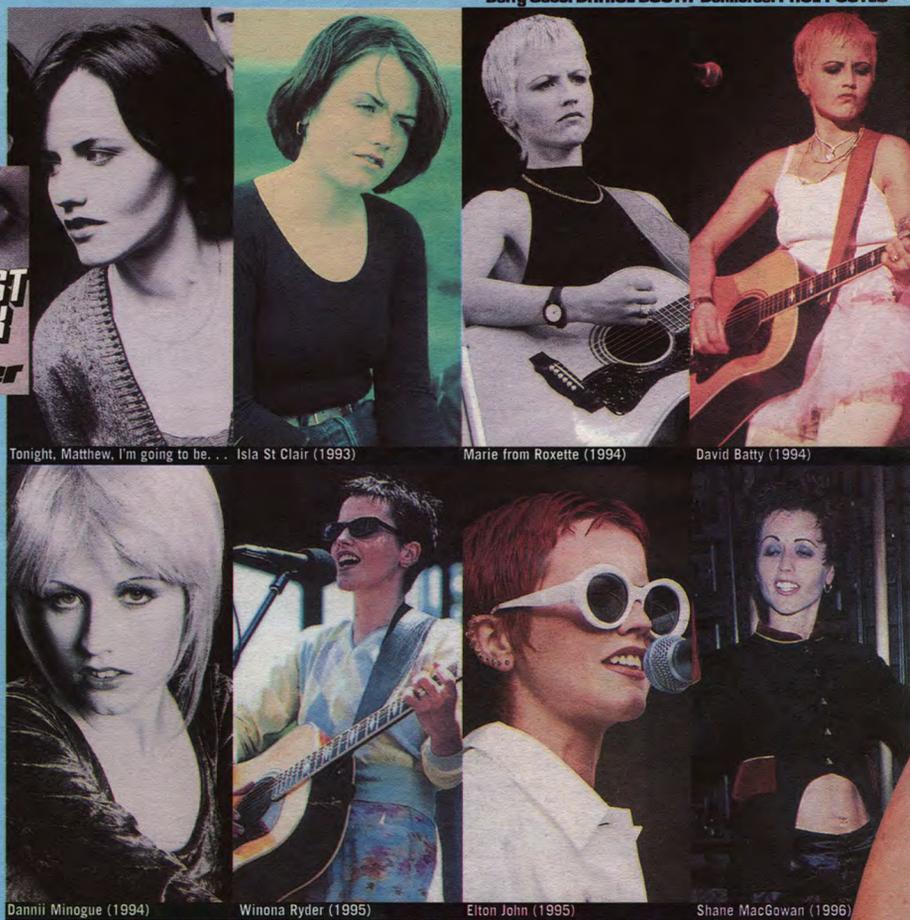


**REMEMBER** The Cranberries? You may be one of 28 million people who bought a Cranberries album to hear the litting indie pop melodies and the piercing voice behind Dolores' volatile public persona. You might even have heard the new single, "Promises", which bustles with the energy of a band who have rediscovered their love of pop music. Equally as vibrant is the forthcoming album, "Bury The Hatchet", which is something of a little miracle, considering the turmoil that enveloped the band three years ago. Sitting in a Dublin hotel room, The Cranberries exhibit little of the gloom they suffered on their 1996 world tour, the "hell" to which Dolores refers. But the memories persist. Having achieved U2-rivalling sales with their 1994 album "No Need To Argue", The Cranberries were expected to push themselves with their follow-up album, "To The Faithful Departed". But a second world tour in three years proved too much. Amid much alcohol-induced turmoil and psychological distress, the solidity of the band began to crack. "Somebody was always having a tantrum somewhere," recalls Dolores. "It's like, 'Where's Dolores? Oh she's in there banging her head against the wall.' It was scary that



The Cranberries - saucy (l-r): Noel, Dolores, Mike and Feargal

we had become so big and hadn't taken a bloody break. There was a lot of other shit happening, too. Lots of friends passed away and we were unable to go to the funerals. It was considered more important to play the gig than to do anything else." "We weren't communicating with each other," reveals bassist Mike Hogan. "We had separate tour buses. After each gig, Dolores would go straight into hers, and we'd go straight into ours." "Didn't that alienate you, boys?" "No, it was all right," shrugs guitarist Noel Hogan. "We'd been together seven years, and after that amount of time what is there to talk about?" "Didn't it worry you that people would interpret it as a telling symbol of internal friction?" "I didn't really care what they thought," says Dolores. "It was always going to be difficult being the only girl with three boys, so we always said from the beginning that as soon as we could afford a second tour bus, I'd have it. But when we stopped talking, I guess it enhanced the tension." Drained through overwork, Dolores found the seemingly never-ending media commitments increasingly stressful. "I wasn't sleeping, but my schedule was just as tight as ever," she shivers. "So you get wound up. And there was one particular interview with a female - females are always more difficult because they're more bitchy and catty - and there was a real 'miaaooow' atmosphere." Her hand claws the air and she grins mischievously.



Tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be... Isla St Clair (1993) Marie from Roxette (1994) David Batty (1994) Danni Minogue (1994) Winona Ryder (1995) Elton John (1995) Shane MacGowan (1996)

"I ended up walking out of the interview. I can't remember what we were talking about, but I was asking her to move on to another subject and she wouldn't. I don't regret walking out. In the interview, I thought there was mutual aggression, a two-way head-butting situation. And because the article made me look like the bitch, I became really pissed off with the idea of doing interviews. I was so tired that I decided, 'No more press.'" What was it about your personality that she found so objectionable? "Erm... she just didn't like me! Women can be really vindictive. And for seven years I had mostly been living with men, and after such a long time it's hard to deal with women again, because they're more direct and analytical." Were you upset or amused that it led to you developing a reputation for being "difficult"? "A bit of both. It developed into a reputation because I didn't do any more press to correct it. And, as a result, the next time a journalist walked into the room, they would be nervous of me, which in turn made you nervous yourself, so you became defensive straight away. Jamie Theakston was nervous when he interviewed me recently. The first thing he said was, 'My friend told me to be careful because you might bite my head off.'"

**EMOTIONALLY**, Dolores was a paranoid mess. But the relentless schedule affected her physically, too, her weight crashing dramatically to a skeletal six and a half stone. It wasn't an eating disorder, but a side-effect of the intense misery caused by her punishing itinerary. Did anyone ever conclude that you had anorexia? "Yes, women would," she replies. "They'd look at me and ask if I was anorexic and I'd say no. I found it really funny to begin with, but then it began to annoy me because it hit the media. I thought, 'I'm not f\*\*\*ing anorexic.' But everywhere I looked there were people judging me." Are you shocked now when you see photographs of you from that period? "Yes, because I never noticed how bad I looked. My husband says now that I was really skinny, but he didn't notice it at the time, either. I thought if anybody would tell me he would, but he didn't." Was it an open subject among the boys? Did you feel comfortable talking about it with Dolores, or was it taboo? "I remember telling her that she was looking really skinny," says Mike. "But I saw her eat all the time, so I knew it was just down to work and stress. She used to eat as much as anybody else." Exacerbating her condition, Dolores was finding it impossible to sleep without the aid of alcohol.

"You'd come off the stage at 11 pm," she sighs, "and then you'd get on the bus by about 12.30am and it got to the stage where automatically I had to drink a couple of glasses of wine just to make me sleepy. But you'd be arriving at the hotel at six in the morning thinking, 'Well if it's six now, what's the point in going to sleep?'" Did you ever find solace in drugs? "No, I've never been interested in drugs," she says. "Just drink. I was so depressed that the only time I could laugh was when I was drinking. But it didn't worry me that I might become an alcoholic because I'm too clever. I know my limits. OK, there were some days when I'd wake up and immediately look forward to lunch-time, thinking, 'Wa-hey, lunch-time, a good excuse to have a beer!' But I never had one at breakfast. It wasn't total dependency, it was just a way to keep things rolling." "Whenever we had a day off, we'd go out and drink," continues Noel. "Fortunately, we never got into any trouble. We're not the fighting type and kept ourselves to ourselves. And that was part of the problem. We never said to each other, 'I've had enough of this.'"

Dolores: hopefully she doesn't suffer from beriberi

Eventually, in New York during September 1996, with the band disintegrating around her, Dolores made the crucial decision to cancel everything and go home. "Yes, it was me!" rejoices Dolores, raising her arms triumphantly. "Women are talkative and open. They can sense vibes and like to bring up things, while boys like to keep it quiet and hidden." "I thought it about a hundred times, but didn't say it," remembers Noel. "You didn't want to be the one to say anything, but you hoped somebody would. I was relieved when Dolores spoke up." "I didn't want to do it because it would disrupt so many people," admits Dolores. "And of course we were going to lose so much money if we cancelled. But we were dying in our hearts. The most annoying thing was going to the doctors to prove that I couldn't continue the tour. It meant standing in a room full of four male doctors which was very intimidating." Did they prescribe anti-depressants? "No. I didn't need drugs. All I needed was to get back into real life. The doctors passed me on to a counsellor in London who said that he'd seen a lot of people get to that point living a non-normal lifestyle and he thought I should just get away from it. I felt terribly exposed, like I couldn't escape. Suddenly, journalists would follow you to your house, into the supermarket, they take photos of you at your grandmother's funeral. It was the front cover on some newspaper the next day, me at the funeral with my grandmother laid out. That stuff does your head in."

**BACK** home in Ireland, with the nightmare still a fresh experience, they took a six-month hiatus, hoping that a return to reality would help them regain their sanity. It worked. The two remaining unmarried Cranberries, Feargal and Mike, finally tied the knot with long-standing girlfriends, while Dolores had her first baby, Taylor Baxter Burton, in November 1997. But now, with "Bury The Hatchet" about to be released, they're due to tour the world again. Aren't they worried the horrors will repeat themselves? "No," Dolores declares emphatically, "we'd be able to recognise the warning signals. If we start to get tense about things, then we'll just gently draw back a bit. I can't believe that I used to get stressed out over a gig. I'm laughing now because I've got a baby. I just think now, 'A gig's a gig, ha-ha, I'm doing what I love.' Everything's in perspective now. What happens if I forget the chords to a song? Who gives a damn?" Won't having a child make it more traumatic to tour? "Oh, he's coming with me. I'd never tour without him. No way. I can only ever leave him for three nights at a time. Any more than that and you feel like a part of you is missing. Becoming a mother was such an amazing moment. You get worried towards the end of the pregnancy that you might not bond straightaway, but I was like, 'Give him to me, give him to me.'"

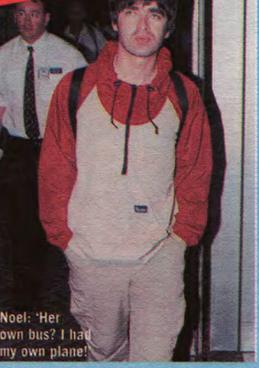
"I've never seen her happier," discloses Mike, arousing Dolores' curiosity. "She's more calm and relaxed. It even comes across in the writing of the music. She openly enjoys it more." "The reason I'm more content now is because I have a life," explains Dolores. "I didn't have that before. I was just the singer, nothing else."

**THE** financial aftershock of abandoning the 1996 tour was cushioned by the considerable wealth The Cranberries had acquired over the three years since the release of their debut album, "Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We". A recent report lists Dolores as the one of richest women in the British Isles, calculating that she's worth £30 million.

**'It didn't worry me that I might become an alcoholic, because I'm too clever' - Dolores**

## THIS IS THE ROAD TO HELL OTHER GROUPS WHO HAVE SUFFERED ON TOUR HELL

- BLUR** American tour of 1992 met with apathy from the grunge-fixated natives. Blur regrouped in England, declared war on Yank culture, and invented Britpop.
- MANIC STREET PREACHERS** Thailand tour in the summer of 1994 now viewed as the genesis of Richey's breakdown. Unwisely toured Europe again that autumn, deepening Richey's despair.
- OASIS** Ninth tour of the States in September 1996 ended suddenly when Noel flew home after a fight with the group. The remaining members followed the next day.



Noel: 'Her own bus? I had my own plane!'

"A lot of those publications aren't genuine," she smiles. "It's guesswork. Different bands have different recording contracts. I've never been obsessed with money. I used to drink crap cider and eat pasta every night because it was so cheap." What is your greatest extravagance? "I've got a Mercedes," she beams, "and about seven or eight horses. It's only been in the last couple of years that we've been able to enjoy what we've worked for." Dolores estimates that "60 to 70 per cent" of their earnings come from American sales ("No Need To Argue" went platinum seven times over in the States). America has been good to The Cranberries in other ways, too. It was while supporting Suede there in the autumn of 1993 that Dolores' transformation from a "painfully shy" petal, who sang with her back to the audience, into a confrontational sudehead capable of commanding stadium-sized venues began.

"We toured for so long that after each night you'd get a bit more confident," Dolores recalls. "And the Americans are always telling you that they love you. It really surprised me. When you start as a teenager, you stare at the floor in between each song and you imagine that they think you're a spastic. I just closed my eyes and sang as well as I could." Did that shyness ever impede your love life? "Yeah. It's fine for some of the people who are born gorgeous and automatically get boyfriends. But, as a teenager, I had a face like the back end of a bus. I used to think, 'Why, God, did you give me this face?' I had a lot of adolescent insecurity." By the time she married in 1994, you suspected that most of her insecurity had vanished. She said "I do" to former Duran Duran tour manager Don Taylor in a wedding dress translucent enough to reveal decidedly risqué underwear, cheekily inappropriate, you'd think, for a place of worship. Did you feel just a slight frisson of excitement that you might upset so many people, most notably the Catholic establishment?

"I swear to God that I had no idea it would have an impact," she says. "I've always been a small girl. I've never had the Pamela Lee boobs hanging out everywhere. My dad saw the dress and he's very religious, but he still thought it was lovely." And your husband? "He loved it, too." Some people saw it as a crass publicity stunt... "Everybody in the congregation thought it was cool," blasts Feargal. "It was only the f\*\*\*ing media who blew it out of all proportion." "The priest was a bit shocked, though," chortles Mike.

**IT'S** testimony to The Cranberries' current state of mind that they can giggle their way through such a litany of personal, often agonising memories. As the title of the new album indicates, The Cranberries have fully exorcised the demons of the past and learnt how to lead a fulfilling

life outside the music industry. Dolores is so engrossed in her own family life that when asked if she thinks Cerys Matthews is the Welsh Dolores - on account of her exaggerated singing accent - she replies innocently, "Cerys who?" "Incredibly, she has never heard of Catatonia and relies on Feargal's prompting: 'You know, she sung on 'The Ballad Of Tom Jones.''" "Oh, I like that song," she trills, as the penny drops. "But honestly I've never heard of Catatonia."

Earlier, we had swapped some highly libellous Ronan Keating anecdotes, which had reduced the male three-quarters of The Cranberries to hysterics. It would be no exaggeration to say that they loathe Boyzone. Since "To The Faithful Departed", other Irish groups have coasted to fame and fortune because, some would say, of The Cranberries' absence. Was that frustrating? "No, because we'll always have our own distinct sound that people will like," says Dolores. "I don't think we ever felt threatened. But I don't think any of us likes that sort of music."

Does the shallow packaging of Irish culture for world-wide consumption, epitomised by B'Witched's "C'est La Vie" rerdance, offend you? "It's a bit disappointing," groans Dolores, with more diplomatic benevolence than she probably feels. "The Cranberries have always been cautious about playing obviously traditional Irish music. When I was five years old, I could play the tin whistle, my father's accordion, the spoons, all of them really well. But when I joined The Cranberries, it was rock'n'roll. And if you throw traditional music into rock, it just sounds cheesy. It sounds so much nicer if you just go to a pub on the Irish coast and hear that music being played authentically." Would you switch off the TV if The Corrs were on? "Yeah, I have done on a number of occasions," says Feargal, twinkling maliciously. "I'd rather watch 'Barney The Dinosaur,'" sniggers Mike. Cackling loudly, Dolores joins in the Corrs-baiting. "I heard their single this morning while putting my make-up on..." "... And you accidentally stabbed yourself in the eye?" "Ha, almost. Well, it's just played every bloody two minutes, isn't it?" And The Cranberries, a band staring oblivion in the face just two and a half years ago, a band whose last tour saw all four members approach nervous breakdowns, dissolve into unstoppable, wicked laughter.

Dolores was right. There'll be no problems this time. 'Promises' is out on March 29 on Island

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