Aer Lingus

February/March 2012

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Dolores O'Riordan is back

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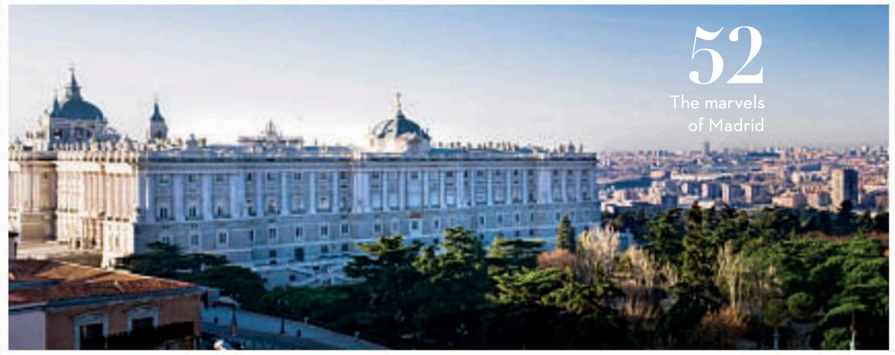

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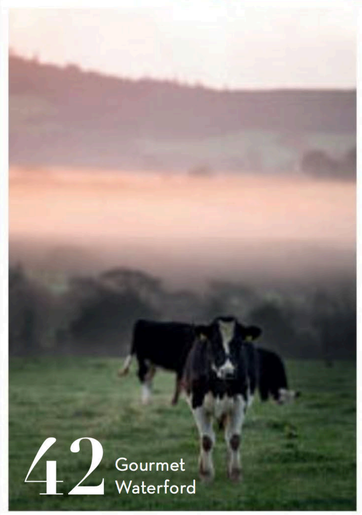

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Coming up *Roses*

Dolores O'Riordan is glad to be back with "the lads" as The Cranberries release their first album of new material in over ten years. She tells ***Tony Clayton-Lea*** *why motherhood and life in Canada are so good for her. Photographs by* ***Matthew Thompson****.*

She is the epitome of the word "elfin", the personification of the word "slight", but there is nothing fragile about Dolores O'Riordan. When she first started performing with The Cranberries, she would turn her back to the audience or keep her eyes fixed firmly on the floor of the stage. Shy, nervous back then, she has subsequently bloomed into – yes – Ireland's most successful and steely female rock star.

But what's this? Almost 25 years of The Cranberries? Who would have thought it possible? Back in 1989, the quartet from Limerick were the kind of ingénue act that the more seasoned observers of Irish rock music had thought would wind up operations after a few years and retire to whence they had come from. Clearly, those observers were wrong; equally clearly, The Cranberries were tougher than perhaps even they themselves had reckoned.

Success came quickly to the band, resulting not only in a fan base that adored them and their music (notably the 1993 debut album, *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We*), but also media attention, which the band members found difficult to engage with. As is usual in rock and pop bands, the focus was on the lead singer, in this instance a petite, pretty young woman by the name of Dolores O'Riordan, whose innate durability seemed at odds with the daintiness of the band's music. It's fair to say that success rested uneasily on her slim shoulders, yet for a while in the mid-1990s The Cranberries could do no wrong: two further albums, *No Need To Argue* (1994) and To *The Faithful Departed* (1996) consolidated their worldwide appeal, making them a major, international rock music success.

The burden of being a successful rock star was bravely (and often publicly) shouldered by O'Riordan, but the way she tells it now – on the cusp of the release of *Roses*, The Cranberries' first album of new material in over ten years – it is clear that part of those heady

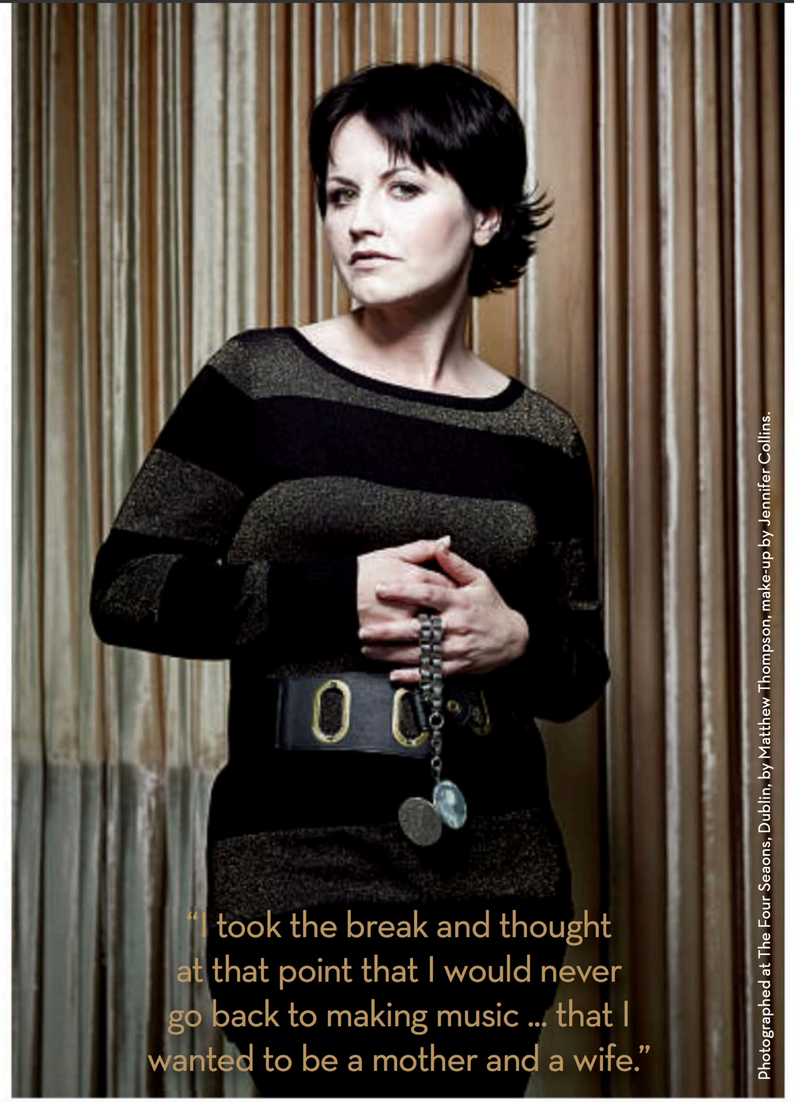
times were not necessarily the best years of her life.

"For anyone who gets so famous so quickly and so young, you're bound to be a bit of a casualty in some fashion," says O'Riordan, looking quite the radiant 40-year-old rock star as she holds court, al fresco, at Dublin's Four Seasons Hotel on an unusually warm winter's day. (Her bright demeanour is underpinned by melancholy, however, as she is in Ireland for numerous reasons, the most crucial of which is to spend time with her ill father, who died a week after this interview was conducted.) "You go through life, and then you realise that you only live once, and that there are some things you might have lost or gave away when you were young, so you go back to find them."

And so in September 2003, O'Riordan and the other band members (Noel Hogan, Michael Hogan, Fergal Lawler) decided to put a stop to proceedings. While "the lads" (as O'Riordan calls them) took up the musical equivalent of gardening and tending to their sheds, O'Riordan simply quit and split.

"I took the break and thought at that point that I would never go back to making music, that in my life I needed to find 100 per cent sanity, and that I wanted to be a mother and a wife. I didn't want to be a famous person, or to be in a band. I didn't want to have contracts in my life. In short, I needed to find elements of my life that I felt I had lost. I thought I'd start a different life, maybe go back to school; I started painting, as well, which was brilliant, as there was no pressure or pull from people to finish with the canvas. I found it very therapeutic, as well as a great way to pass time and to find myself, to a degree."

Well, you can take the girl out of music but you can't take music out of the girl, and so, as the months passed in a quieter, softer swirl of domesticity, motherhood (O'Riordan and her husband, Don Burton, who married in 1994, have three children: a son, Taylor, and two daughters, Molly and Dakota), painting, meditation and a teensy bit of thumb-twiddling, O'Riordan found herself being drawn towards the family piano.



Photographed at The Four Seasons, Dublin, by Matthew Thompson, make-up by Jennifer Collins.

"It unfolded, and just happened," she says of how the new material began took shape. "There was no great plan or anything like that. It was just that, despite myself, I started writing songs when the children were in school. And then it dawned on me: I knew I had to follow the very thing that I was here to do – write and sing music. And so I fell back into doing it."

Part of the results of this acceptance were two creatively and commercially underperforming solo albums (*Are You Listening?* in 2007 and *No Baggage* two years later) that proved an important point about chemistry and constituent parts. Rewind to three years ago: when O'Riordan was bestowed with honorary patron status of Trinity College's Philosophical Society, she and "the lads" clicked back into Cranberries mode. "I was told to stop messing around with the solo albums," recalls the singer with much amusement. "I was also informed that we're not getting any younger and that we had to make another album.

"So we got back," she continues. "We did the reunion tour and it was really successful. So many shows sold out, which really surprised me. We had taken seven years off from the music, and we had all gone into our own planets, yet when we went back on stage it was as if we had never left. You'd look over at the lads and

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there's a great chemistry there, and the crowds are there, and it's as if they never went away, either."

It seems as if, in the interim between putting The Cranberries on ice and taking them out of the freezer, O'Riordan has gained a stronger degree of self-confidence and belief. True?

She mulls this over for a few seconds before answering. "Well, I'm 40 now, which has been great for me. And, to be honest, I'm very happy with the fact that I have my daughters. I was very hard on myself, as a woman, in that I had thought I should be this weight or that size, and with being famous and young it isn't just being a woman – it's being a woman in the public eye. And you know what women are like – we're bitches. Oh, we're way bitchier than men – 'ooh, look at the size of her arse!' Guys aren't like that, which is why most of my life I've had more male friends than female. It's easier – it's like Jekyll and Hyde with women, one face for this and another face for that. We're deadly!"

Has she found a different side to herself by the age of 40? "It's the latter, yes, because you get so tired of being on that treadmill, running and running and trying to keep up the façade. Come 40, you just couldn't be bothered with stuff like that. And my daughters have helped me with that, too, in the sense that I'm a role model for them.

"I'm there to say to them not to be shallow or insecure, or succumb to the pressures of society in the ways that women are supposed to look, appear or behave. You have to learn to be yourself and be strong – they won't know unless their mother tells them. My daughters helped me to realise that it's okay to have a bit of a spare tyre. Who cares about that – it's your heart that counts."

Indeed. O'Riordan and family left Ireland several years ago, and now live in a secluded area north of Toronto. Canada, she says, "is very different – there are no off licences! There are lots of Indian reserves, which are lovely and cool. The wildlife is amazing and the experience generally is out of this world. The seasons change dramatically."

Snow? "Buckets of snow, yards of snow, but it's the culture in that you're prepared for it, so it's no problem. It's freezing, yes, but you have the proper clothes for it. And there's snow ploughs everywhere – even domestic houses have snow ploughs in order to shovel the snow from your drive."

Does she miss Ireland? "Yes, but Ireland for me isn't going anywhere in that it's always in me. I can fly over and back, anyway; I miss my family and friends, of course."

It's time to head inside – the afternoon temperature has taken a sudden dip, and this, coupled with the singer's naturally reflective nature, gives sway to serious considerations. "My saving grace, I say it again, is my kids. If I didn't have them, I'm fairly sure I wouldn't be here – seriously. When you have them you live for them; you can't be feeling too sorry for yourself, or worrying about yourself, when you have kids to look after."

HEAR THE MUSIC LIVE

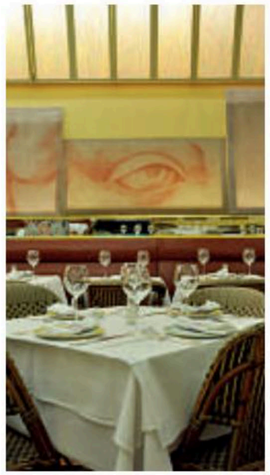
Catch Dolores O'Riordan and The Cranberries in concert – and take a summer break – in Barcelona at Poble Espanyol, on July 9, or in Madrid where they perform at the Palacio Vistalegre, on July 10; tickets available at *thecranberries.com*.

The Cranberries new album, *Roses*, is released on February 14. The band undertake an Australian tour from March 17, and embark on European tour dates from the summer.

DOLORES O'RIORDAN'S FAVOURITE ...

... CITY "I don't have a favourite city but there are places that I'm very fond of, such as Paris, Dublin, London, Toronto, New York. They all have their own significance and warmth in my life because I've lived in different regions."

... RESTAURANT "I've a few favourite restaurants, but one of the best that comes immediately to mind is **Trattoria Dell'Arte**, left (900 Seventh Avenue, between 56th and 57th Streets, New York; 001 212 245 9800; *trattoriadellarte.com*). It's located just across from Carnegie Hall, and has the best pizza I've ever tasted. It's wafer thin, but not too crispy – it's just amazing."



... BAR "My favourite bar is probably the **Black Swan**, in Ballybricken, Co Limerick. I grew up in the town, and I remember my grandparents used to go in there – it's a lovely, small bar."

... BOOKS "When it comes to reading I always like to have a couple on the go at the same time. I'm reading a really good one at the moment – *The Weird Sisters*, by Eleanor Brown, is one. It's about three siblings who go back home because their mother has cancer. They all live in a small village, and some start dating guys they haven't seen in 20 years, so it's a bit of a laugh. The other book is *Tinkers* by Paul Harding; it's about the death of an old man, and how his family gather around him in his hour of need."

... MUSIC "When it comes to music, I tend to calm it down a bit. I meditate a lot so I put on relaxation music for that. Other than that, my husband tends to take over the remote control. I try to put on Morrissey but it's no good, he just can't be listened to! Instead, it's metal, and to be fair there's some great stuff I'm hearing from the likes of Black Sabbath, AC/DC, Led Zeppelin. It isn't all heavy, though, as I'm also listening to a Canadian singer-songwriter called Marshall Dane, who reminds me of a young Garth Brooks – really excellent. Oh – and I love Sarah McLachlan's music, too."

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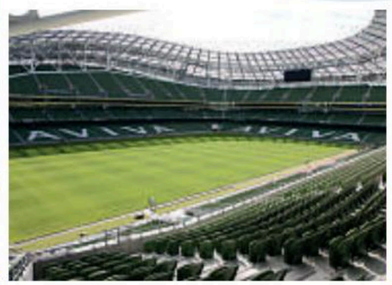

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