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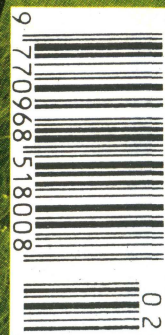
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"I want to give my children a life like I had, playing in the fields all the time. Playing with nothing but a tin can and a stick."

LIMERICK LULLABYES

Delores O'Riordan's best songs are written when she feels gloomy. But she also writes the Cranberries' material when she's angry. She was neither when Gary Paul (of the dreaded species *Musculus Writerus*) met up with her.

Driving alone along autumnal country lanes, wipers splish splashing the beads of gentle rain from the windscreen. The car smells of leather and cigarettes and there's a faint, cool fresh breeze breathing in through the slightly opened window. It licks the back of your neck, making you feel wide awake and more clear headed than you can ever remember. The fading greens and burning reds of the trees ahead reach up to the forbidding, slate grey sky as the dusk draws in. It's one of those bittersweet evenings that your Polaroid memory will snap up for the album. You're happy to be lonesome, happy to be sad. You're having a maudlin five minutes and it feels great to be alive. It's that Cranberries moment. The Limerick four-piece craft the perfect pop for such an occasion. Stunning, simple songs about relationships, loving, losing and loving some more, dripping with honeyed and haunting guitar and delivered by the vulnerable yet defiant, gorgeous yet gutsy warble of 21-year-old Delores O'Riordan.

With the long overdue March release of their brilliant debut album, *Everybody Else Is Doing It So Why Can't We*, and recent support slots with Belly, American Music Club and Hothouse Flowers

under their guitar straps, The Cranberries seem to be ripening nicely, at last. Delores, Fergal Lawler (drums), Noel Hogan (guitars) and brother Mike (bass) got their first whiff of stardom with their debut single, *Uncertain*, back in '91. There were lazy press comparisons to The Sundays, The Cocteau Twins and The Smiths and then nothing. Ill-treated and rendered penniless by their unscrupulous, now ex-manager, the band found themselves back in Limerick on the dole. It wasn't until nearly a year later when things were sorted that they managed to record the album under the watchful eye of producer Stephen Street, the man responsible for albums by The Smiths, Morrissey and Thousand Yard Stare amongst others.

Backstage at London's Astoria awaiting an afternoon soundcheck, Delores sits in a seedy, drawer-sized dressing room nibbling peanuts. Her diminutive figure is a vision in black, from her closely cropped hair down to her sturdy Doc Martens. Lurking beneath that spiky fringe, an ethereal, palefaced pout yields to a lullaby Limerick brogue. "I don't like journalists," she says, immediately putting the man with the microphone at ease. "I used to be nice to them but I don't have respect for them any more. It's just what the term journalist stands for: a person who goes around judging people. When we first started, the stupid things they used to say made me physically sick. They portrayed us as four, ignorant little country people out in the big bad world for the first time."

To a certain extent though, Delores does admit

that she was quite naive. She joined the Cranberry boys straight from school. They made a demo tape within twelve weeks and were soon talking to interested record labels. "I'd never been in a band before," she remembers, "I didn't have a clue. I came from a different world. I lived in a secluded area and was only into traditional Irish music. I didn't know all the terminology. I was thinking, what's a record company, what's the NME, what's the Melody Maker, who are journalists and press officers? All I knew was that I was writing songs and saying what I felt."

Listening to The Cranberries' songs it sounds as though what Delores feels most of the time is sadness, disillusionment and desperation. Each tune is a gorgeous, lovelorn and world-weary sigh. "I write best when I'm gloomy and downward feeling, when I'm angry or sad," she says, "rather than writing happy, happy stuff. I can't do that."

Two years on from the band's first faltering steps a more mature, experienced Delores is looking forward to the future. "I'm glad that the press have stopped hovering over us. Perhaps things will start happening naturally now."

"Lyrically I never talk about physical contact, I deal with feelings and emotions which are more important to me. I don't talk about sexuality much. Female singers tend to go on about it too much. I'm a woman, so what?"

It looks like they already have. Sales of the album are building slowly but steadily, purely, it seems, on the strength of the band's live performances. Noel and the boys may seem content to let Delores hog the spotlight but that doesn't detract from their ability as a band. On stage they stand quietly confident, weaving intricate musical backdrops while the versatile Miss O'Riordan puts goose pimples on your goose pimples as she swoops and soars from a sensuous whisper to a Sinead-like wail. Delores prefers this slow-building success. "Thank God this wasn't hailed as the latest big album from the latest big band." She says, "What's the point, where are you going to go next? I'd hate to get really big because it's so hard to see when people are crowding around you."

Meanwhile the crowds are swelling with every Cranberries gig which, far from being riotous, sweaty evenings are polite, relatively reserved affairs. "Most of the people who come to see us are quiet and shy," says Delores. "We don't get any thugs shouting lousy comments. I think that's because the music isn't very physical. Lyrically I never talk about physical contact, I deal with feelings and emotions which are more important to me. I don't talk about sexuality much. Female singers tend to go on about it too much. I'm a woman, so what? Men and women make the world go round. You have babies, he puts them there. Sometimes when guys are at gigs and shouting things like 'get them out' or something stupid like that, usually the woman behind the microphone is saying things in her songs that are physical and encourage men to

think about her in a physical way."

Riot Grrrl she is not. Delores won't be knocking on Huggy Bear's door for a backing singer's job, that's for sure. "The girls in Huggy Bear look like they want to be guys. They look like they have hang ups about being women," she says. "I certainly don't. It's lovely. If a fellow wants to open the door for me then that's great. He can carry my bags too if he wants because to be quite honest my back is weaker than his."

For Delores, one of the greatest things about being a woman is having children. She reckons she wants kids by the time she's 25 and plans to move back to Limerick and a cottage in the country to raise them. Coming from a large Catholic country family - she has three brothers and two sisters - she wants to raise her family in a safe and sheltered environment. "I want to give my children a life like I had," she says, "playing in the fields all the time. Playing with nothing but a tin can and a stick. There wasn't a lot of materialism around us when we grew up. We got a toy at Christmas and one for our birthday and that was it. The world has gone crazy that way. People are lost and don't have their own identity."

For the moment though, the band and music is her life. Her ultimate musical ambition is to get eight good albums under her belt. Then there's America, which she's looking forward to because "everything's fresh there. They haven't heard any of our stuff yet so we can start from scratch." Delores talks about her love of performing as though it's as essential as the air she breathes. "I love singing. I love that feeling of standing on stage. The energy is an amazing thing. I was halfway through a song the other night and I could hear people in the front row of the audience singing every line word perfect. I couldn't stop smiling."

Later, down at the soundcheck, while roadies and Astoria staff bustle around in preparation, Delores picks up her guitar and steps up to the microphone alone. Dwarfed by the stage and looking out at the vast empty darkness of the stalls, she plucks the opening acoustic chords to *Linger*. It's a magical moment as her giant voice fills the house, bringing tears of joy to hardened security staff and reaching all the nooks and crannies that the cleaners missed. By the time she's finished you're an emotional wreck and as you step outside, just like leaving the cinema in the afternoon, your eyes are surprised that it's still daylight. You desperately want to grab somebody and tell them what you've just seen. But a blinking, bleary-eyed madman who pins strangers up against the wall shouting, 'The Cranberries are marvellous!' is bound to cause a stir, so instead you go for a shandy to settle your nerves. The Cranberries are indeed marvellous. Go and see for yourselves. 🙌