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MPs ON SAUDI GRAVY TRAIN

REVEALED: Brutal regime blamed for dissident's death triples hospitality lavished on Westminster

By **Sam Greenhill**
Chief Reporter

CRISIS-torn Saudi Arabia has lavished hundreds of thousands of pounds on British MPs, the Mail can reveal.

The kingdom – under international fire over the suspected state-sponsored murder of a journalist – has been pouring cash into a charm offensive.

In just two years it has tripled the amount of money spent on MPs to pay for luxury hotels and business-class flights.

Campaigners say 38 MPs who got freebies over the past five years are ‘accessories’ to a cynical bid to brush up the oil-rich Gulf nation’s tarnished image. Saudi Arabia’s slick PR offensive comes as it battles condemnation over the suspected murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul.

The kingdom is also under intense scrutiny for staging bombing raids across Yemen that have killed thousands of civilians.

In 2016, British parliamentarians accepted £35,062 of junkets, gifts and other benefits from the authoritarian regime. But this year the figure is more than three times higher at £106,418 – and it is only October. The total since 2015 has been put at £208,000.

The Mail’s investigation into MPs’ financial links with Saudi Arabia came as:

- Donald Trump said it ‘certainly looks’ like Mr Khashoggi was dead, and pledged ‘severe’ consequences if Saudi royals were responsible;
- British military sales to Saudi Arabia soared by

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Beckham: My marriage to Posh is such hard work

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NINE



by **Adrian Thrills**

THE CRANBERRIES: Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We? (UMC)
Verdict: Fitting tribute ★★★★★

RICHARD ASHCROFT: Natural Rebel (RPA)
Verdict: Well-judged return ★★☆☆☆

CAUGHT between the fading embers of American grunge and the first sparks of Britpop, The Cranberries didn't really fit in anywhere when their debut album arrived in March 1993.

The quartet, led by singer Dolores O'Riordan, looked to folkish melodies and the chiming guitars of The Smiths. They also hailed from Limerick, an Irish provincial city, just as the media gaze was alighting on the newly swinging London of Suede and Blur.

Yet they became global stars. Fuelled by its singles Linger and Dreams — and the power of MTV — *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?* sold more than five million copies in America.

The UK, while reluctant at first, also fell big-time for O'Riordan and her bandmates.

Now repackaged to mark its 25th anniversary — and out as a four-CD box (£35), double CD (£13), single CD (£6) and on vinyl (£21) — the album has aged surprisingly well.

In the noisy aftermath of the Nirvana era, The Cranberries were portrayed as musically flimsy. In hindsight, they sound robust, with Dolores's haunting voice framed by imaginative arrangements.

This reissue is sadly now a eulogy to the singer. Dolores, 46, died in the bathroom of a London hotel suite in January, with a coroner ruling that her drowning had been a 'tragic accident'.

This package, already in the works, was put on hold before the three surviving band members decided to press ahead with it. It's

Sparky, spiky and troubled ... Dolores's magic still lingers on

a stirring testimony to one of Irish music's great voices, its yearning tone set by *Dreams* and *Linger*. The former — '*oh, my dreams, it's never quite as it seems*' — lays bare the melancholy beneath even the band's happiest songs, while *Linger's* account of a teenage kiss that led only to romantic disappointment showcases O'Riordan's ability to sing with conversational ease: '*I'm sure I'm not being rude, but it's just your attitude! It's tearing me apart, it's ruining everything.*'

Elsewhere, love is either unrequited (Sunday), cruelly snatched away (*Waltzing Back*) or angrily thrown aside (*Not Sorry*).

I Still Do delves into the band's first four years without resorting to the persistent repetition that blights so many deluxe re-issues.

often avoid eye contact with an audience. Her plaintive singing is fortified by drummer Fergal Lawler and the Hogan brothers, bassist Mike and guitarist Noel.

THE latter, despite an unhealthy reverence for the tough, jangling sound that Johnny Marr brought to The Smiths, is an inventive guitarist. Stephen Street's production is detailed and dynamic.

As well as a re-master of the original album, a string of outtakes, sessions and live recordings paint a comprehensive picture of the band's first four years without resorting to the persistent repetition that blights so many deluxe re-issues.



Shy: Dolores O'Riordan

AS FRONTMAN of The Verve, the enigmatic band he formed at Wigan's Winstanley College in 1990, Richard Ashcroft began his career by singing over dreamy, free-form grooves.

His enigmatic swagger eventually led the group to 1997's all-conquering *Urban Hymns*. His approach is now light years away from those heady days. Rooted in conventional verses and catchy choruses, his fifth solo album points Ashcroft, 47, towards the middle of the road.

Natural Rebel's songs are more everyday than rebellious, but they suit his rich, melodic voice. There's a heartland rock hue to All My

Dreams and Rolling Stones references aplenty on *Money Money*, which echoes Gimme Shelter.

But the singer's forte remains the slow-burning melodrama. He's in his element on *That's How Strong*, and *Born To Be Strangers* even puts a name to his style — 'that country soul blues thing'.

An abundance of mid-tempo numbers gives *Natural Rebel* a rather uniform feel, but also provides him with a solid framework to ad-lib with aplomb. It's good to have him back.

BOTH albums are out today. Richard Ashcroft starts a tour at Glasgow Barrowlands on Oct 26 (gigsandtours.com).



Reviews by **Quentin Letts**

Wise Children (Old Vic)
Verdict: Tumbling with ideas ★★★★★

DIRECTOR Emma Rice, freed from the suffocating old bores at Shakespeare's Globe who sacked her as artistic director, explodes with ideas in her new company's debut production.

Wise Children adapts an Angela Carter novel (it is also the name Miss Rice has given to her new troupe). The production is a bit mad. There are so many inventive touches, you almost wish it was reined in by 25 per cent.

Yet that is the appeal of an Emma Rice show: the whole thing is so dolloped with theatrical bombast, so suffused with warmth, it finally melts you into submission.

The story is about septuagenarian twins in Eighties London. Dora and Nora Chance are one-time showgirls with a complicated family story.

Their father is a great Shakespearean actor who long ago disowned them. The shallow plot device is that the sisters have been invited — today! — to his 100th birthday.

Various Rice trademarks are evident: berets, butterflyes on rods, a stage band, a yokel freshness and a company of mainly youthful, lithe actors who multi-task and mime and sing and cavort.

To the rear of the stage is a retro caravan used for various purposes: as an ice cream van, a house, a theatre dressing room and more. Its flank becomes a screen for an animated film which, alas, conked out on press night.

That did not really matter, but I was sorry it happened

because the animation, describing a trip across London, was beautifully done, after the school of Raymond Briggs.

Gareth Snook and Etta Murfit get the comedy off to a slow, Monty Python-ish start as the adult sisters. Some of the language is needlessly coarse: despite the title, this is not a play for children.

THINGS pick up when the story reaches back to the sisters' Victorian ancestry, told with broad, cartoonish humour.

There is little point going on about the plot because it is so tangled, but the unmatchable Paul Hunter does one of his music-hall showman turns and Katy Owen, who with her dated quirkiness embodies the Rice

style, is ace as the girls' occasionally naturist grandma. Her nude suit is a cheery wonder of flapping gables.

Glamour is introduced with Melissa James as Dora in her heyday. Opposite her is Omari Douglas's drag Nora, legs like a giraffe. A gymnastic singer called Mirabella Gremaud weighs in with songs delivered in a bewitchingly echoey voice.

As the story leaps from Brighton to Brixton and beyond the whimsiness threatens to run out of hand, but it is finally brought under control with an ending marinated in positive vibes.

When other directors try this sort of thing, it often feels fey and forced. When Emma Rice does it, it feels madly English and, for all the other-worldliness, rooted.

Bonkers but brilliant, a very English Rice pudding



Inventive (from left): Paul Hunter, Melissa James and Omari Douglas

Tone down the spiv, Robert, and crank up the pathos

TERENCE Rattigan was nearing the end of his life when he wrote the 1973 play *In Praise Of Love*.

A neglected wife has a terminal illness and hopes to keep the news from her self-absorbed husband. The story is a vehicle for the great Rattigan value of emotional reserve — which, on stage, can paradoxically be terribly moving.

Yet my headlamps remained resolutely undampened by a Bath revival starring Robert Lindsay (right), the likeable Tara Fitzgerald and Julian Wadham, who plays the couple's best friend.

Lydia, the wife, is from Estonia and suffered badly in her homeland during World War II. She owes her current life in London to her husband Sebastian, a sometime

In Praise Of Love (Ustinov Studio, Bath)
Verdict: Rattigan regrets ★★★★★

British intelligence officer who now writes for an upmarket Fleet Street newspaper. Sebastian is priggish, conceited and a designer socialist. A perfect role for our Robert!

For this relationship to work on stage, Sebastian possibly needs to be more low-key than Mr Lindsay makes him. His performance contains a lot of eyebrow work, a slipping accent and a generally spivvy nature, with sleeves rolled

off the wrist, a vain beard, natty clothes and canny glances.

In the small Ustinov Studio you are close enough to the actors to see every twitch.

I could have done with Sebastian being more indolently unkind to his wife, more foggish, more Rattiganesque. That might wring more pathos out of later developments.

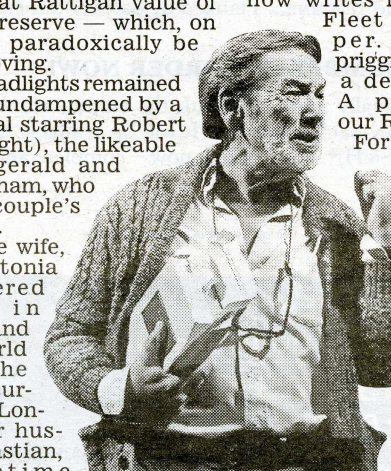
Miss Fitzgerald puts her all into Lydia's Estonian-English accent. Too much at times.

The scenes of devotion between her and Mr Wadham's ambiguous American, Mark — who loves Lydia but is also gay — are the most affecting.

It is always a treat to watch Rattigan and there is a strong undertow of regret as the fading playwright dwells on *'le vice Anglais'*, which to him means our English refusal to admit to our emotions.

I don't think it was the vice that prevented me from connecting completely with this production.

Still worth seeing, though.



Picture: NOBBY CLARK

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