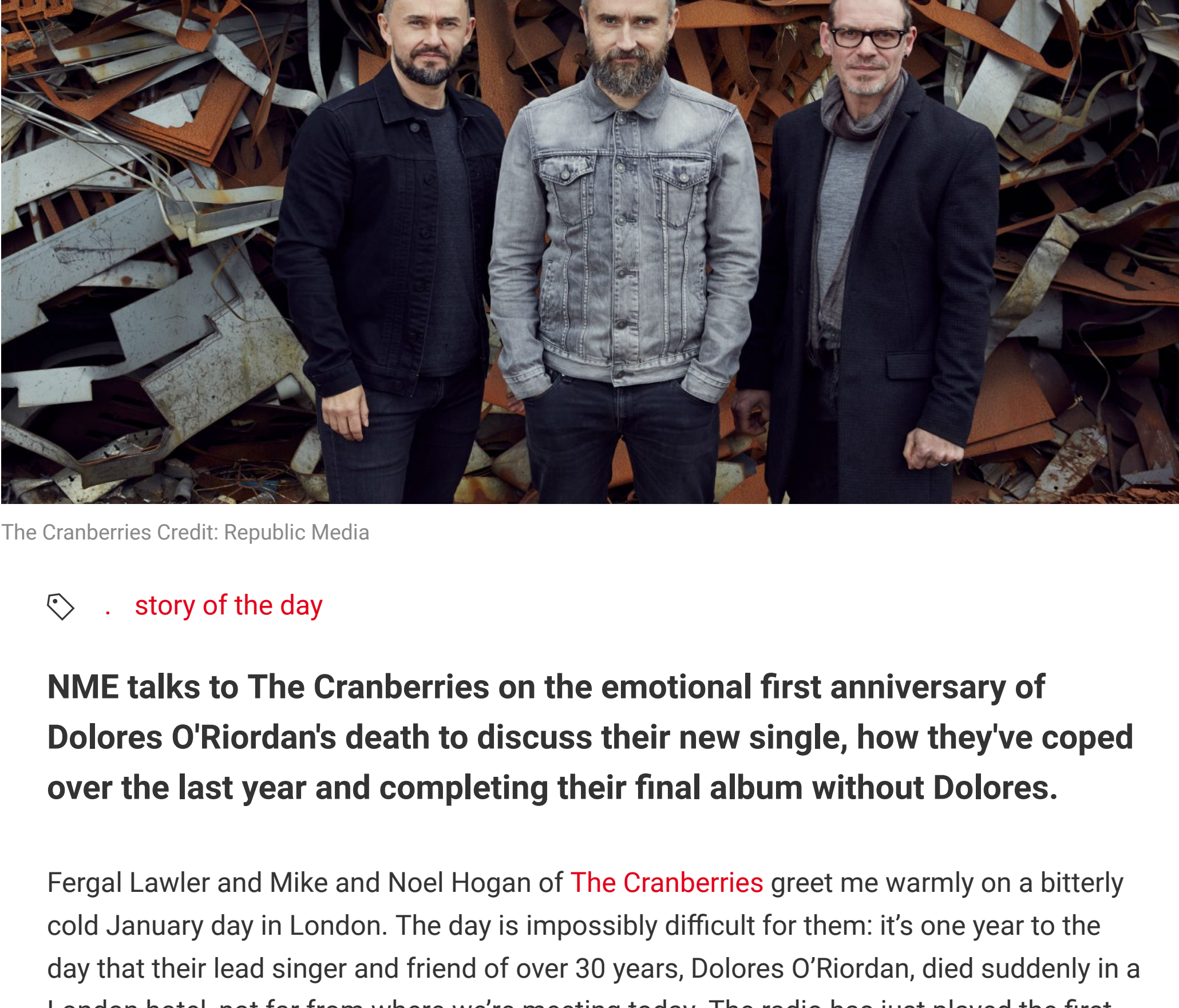
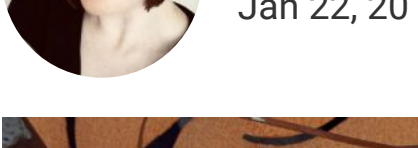


The Cranberries on their final album: “It’s like a little gift Dolores left behind”



The Cranberries Credit: Republic Media

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NME talks to The Cranberries on the emotional first anniversary of Dolores O’Riordan’s death to discuss their new single, how they’ve coped over the last year and completing their final album without Dolores.

Fergal Lawler and Mike and Noel Hogan of [The Cranberries](#) greet me warmly on a bitterly cold January day in London. The day is impossibly difficult for them: it’s one year to the day that their lead singer and friend of over 30 years, Dolores O’Riordan, died suddenly in a London hotel, not far from where we’re meeting today. The radio has just played the first single from the last ever Cranberries album, ‘In The End’, a project they’d all started work on in the months prior to Dolores’ death. Wanting to honour her memory and the work she’d already started, the three decided to finish the album. They have, understandably, mixed feelings about the release.

“I was nervous yesterday, actually,” Noel admits, reflecting on the build up to the release of the first single – ‘All Over Now’. Like many who have experienced loss, they coped initially by busying themselves with work in the immediate aftermath, finding solace in the familiar. Only sharing the work with a selected few, they guarded the material they’d created until they felt able – and strong enough – to share. For Noel, it feels strange now the first single is finally out there for all to hear.

“We’ve kept the work very close to our chests and only a handful of people have heard it,” he says. “Suddenly, yesterday, I started to overthink it. Knowing that everybody in the whole world is going to hear it after we’ve held it close for so long is a bit daunting. We finished recording last May so we’ve had it for a long time now.”

His brother Mike nods in agreement, echoing the “nervousness” they are all feeling about the release. “But there’s delight too,” Mike says, because it’s a chance for fans to once again hear the “incredible voice” of their bandmate; a voice which Melody Maker described in 1991 as “the voice of a saint trapped in a glass harp.” The album, Fergal adds, ultimately honours their work together. “The album celebrates the work that Dolores did, and gives something back to all the fans that have supported the band over the years.” The band all agree. “It’s like a little gift she left behind,” he concludes, his head lowered.

“It’s obviously the first thing you think of in the morning when you wake up, what day it is and what happened a year ago,” Noel says, before reasoning that the single release today was, in hindsight, a good distraction to have. “Grief comes in waves. Some days you are fine, then on other days the reality hits you and even now you can’t believe it,” Fergal explains, saying that they are still struggling to come to terms with the enormity of the loss. “Like even driving around, you will see someone walking past and they might look like her. Some days it’s not even believable and you just have to kind of accept it and get on with it as best you can. Recording on the first day without her was really difficult, but we had to do justice to the work Dolores put in, make it sound as good as possible. Hopefully she would have been proud of it.”



The Cranberries in 2017

Work on the album initially began in the summer of 2017 after they’d started to discuss the prospect of a new album during a holiday. “The work originally kind of came about a little bit out of boredom,” Noel smiles. “It was June 2017, we had finished the tour and Dolores had a back injury and we all went our separate ways to our families. I was away in France and I remember texting her asking how she was feeling.” Dolores replied saying she was bored, something she often did soon after starting a break. “I suggested using the time productively to just write and see if something comes. The album really began there. Suddenly, she was sending one song after another: the songs just kept coming from her.”

“I think we realise how lucky we were to have as much stuff as we did,” Noel continues. “An awful lot of the work was done as Dolores had recorded a lot of vocals and sent a lot of emails. They were meant to be demos mostly but they weren’t really because she was such a good singer that her demos were great... A couple of weeks went by [after the funeral] and I started going through the hard drives and the demos that had been sent around. I soon realised that actually, these would make a really good album.”

“It was really important to us that Dolores’ mam and brothers were OK with us finishing the album”
– Fergal Lawler

They eventually visited Dolores’ family to share details of the work they’d amassed, and to seek their support. “It was really important to us that Dolores’ mam and brothers were OK with it,” Fergal explains. “We contacted them before we even said anything to anyone else. We wanted to chat with them and see what they thought; they were fully supportive because they thought it would have been a shame to have that recording and not be able to do anything with it.”



Dolores performing on stage during day one of Fels Festival 2011 at Finsbury Park

Did they ever have any doubts about the project or wonder if it was the right thing to do? “At first we laid low for the band’s sake,” Noel explains. “You don’t want to ruin the legacy of the band. We wanted to share the work Dolores had done, and complement that as best we could. I had no doubts – I don’t think any of us did at all – when we started that it was the right thing to do, and we were really happy with it.” The fact the material was in such good shape helped the decision,” Fergal adds. “We didn’t want to just scrape things together or cobble stuff together – it had to be really good, and it was.”

“There is that temptation during grief to put it away and come back in a year and revisit. I don’t know if we would have felt the same about it then,” Noel explains. “It definitely helped us all, as hard as it was. It was like therapy in some ways.” Their long-term producer, Stephen Street, also helped to convince them to finish the album, both for Dolores’ legacy and for their own healing.

“There was never any question of not working with Stephen again,” Noel says. “Once we decided that we had enough songs that we were happy with, he was the next call we made. We sent him what we had and he loved it. He’s a friend and we’ve known him for years, and that helped us greatly. It kept us going.”

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It was also made easier by the fact Dolores had been excited by her new material, both with the Cranberries and her side-project, D.A.R.K.; Dolores was in London on the day of her death to mix a record with the latter. At the time, Noel says Dolores was happy despite her previous difficulties. “It’s well documented that Dolores had troubles but the last few years she put those behind her and moved on,” Noel recalls. “She had difficult days like all of us do, but people will realise when they listen to the full album that she was very much in a great place. She had a lot to write because of her experiences and she wasn’t afraid to share those.”

The day before her death, Dolores emailed Noel more new songs. The following day, in the early hours, she’d messaged a friend telling them that a new record was sounding “fucking terribly good”, shortly before calling her mother. Just a few hours later, Dolores had died; a coroner later ruled she had drowned accidentally in the bath whilst intoxicated. After struggling with bipolar disorder, the band say she was “in a good place” after getting support and seeking help for her health in recent years. Dolores had also battled with depression and anorexia, something she later revealed was a consequence of the sexual abuse she suffered as a child from someone in “a position of trust” in her local community.

“Dolores was so open about everything, there were never any secrets,” Mike says, the band all remembering her candid nature. “Everybody knew everything because it was already out there,” Mike adds. “It’s not like if somebody went rooting – if thematically based something, she was just like ‘I have this problem, I have that problem...’ not a lot of musicians did that [at the time].” Dolores told Mike that she “needed the drama in life to be able to write,” often turning her experiences into compositions. Their very first song, ‘Linger’, was written by Dolores about a personal experience when she was just 17-years-old: it went on to be one of their biggest hits. The last songs she wrote, Noel says, were some of her strongest. “It’s the first thing we all noticed on this album – how great the lyrics were. She was locking on to something and that kind of fuelled the creative side of her.”

“Dolores was so open about everything, there were never any secrets...Everybody knew everything because it was already out there” – Mike Hogan

Is there a theme running through the album? “It’s far from dark or moody kind of album,” Mike explains. “People will be really surprised about that. I think some fans are thinking it will be, but that’s not the case.” The first single, ‘All Over Now’ has a classic early Cranberries sound, bright alt-rock set against positive sounding – if thematically bleaker – lyrics. “The subject matter is quite varied. There are songs about relationships, your kids, your family dynamic,” Noel adds. “There are stories about characters, and one about something that happened in the eighties. There isn’t a theme as such. If anything, we tried to go back to the roots of the band, the first album where there was a sort of simplicity there. I think we are better musicians now than we were on those early albums, but this is kind of a modern version of that,” Noel describes. “To me, every song on this album is a classic Cranberries piece – you’d know it was us a mile away...”

Continuing in the future as a trio, “was never an option,” Fergal states, explaining that it was “unimaginable” for them to continue without Dolores. “It has been an amazing career, and to say it has gone further than we ever thought is an understatement. I think we have a nice legacy now to leave behind us and walk away. We will always be remembered for those things, and we are not twenty anymore,” Noel smiles. “It’s the right time to end and we need to have that closure now really. We’ve had an amazing life and I think to do any more now would just destroy it all. We look at it as a celebration album for the band and Dolores – to show people where we were at this point in our career. You know, it just so happens to be the end of it, but so be it. At least there is something there to put a finality to.”

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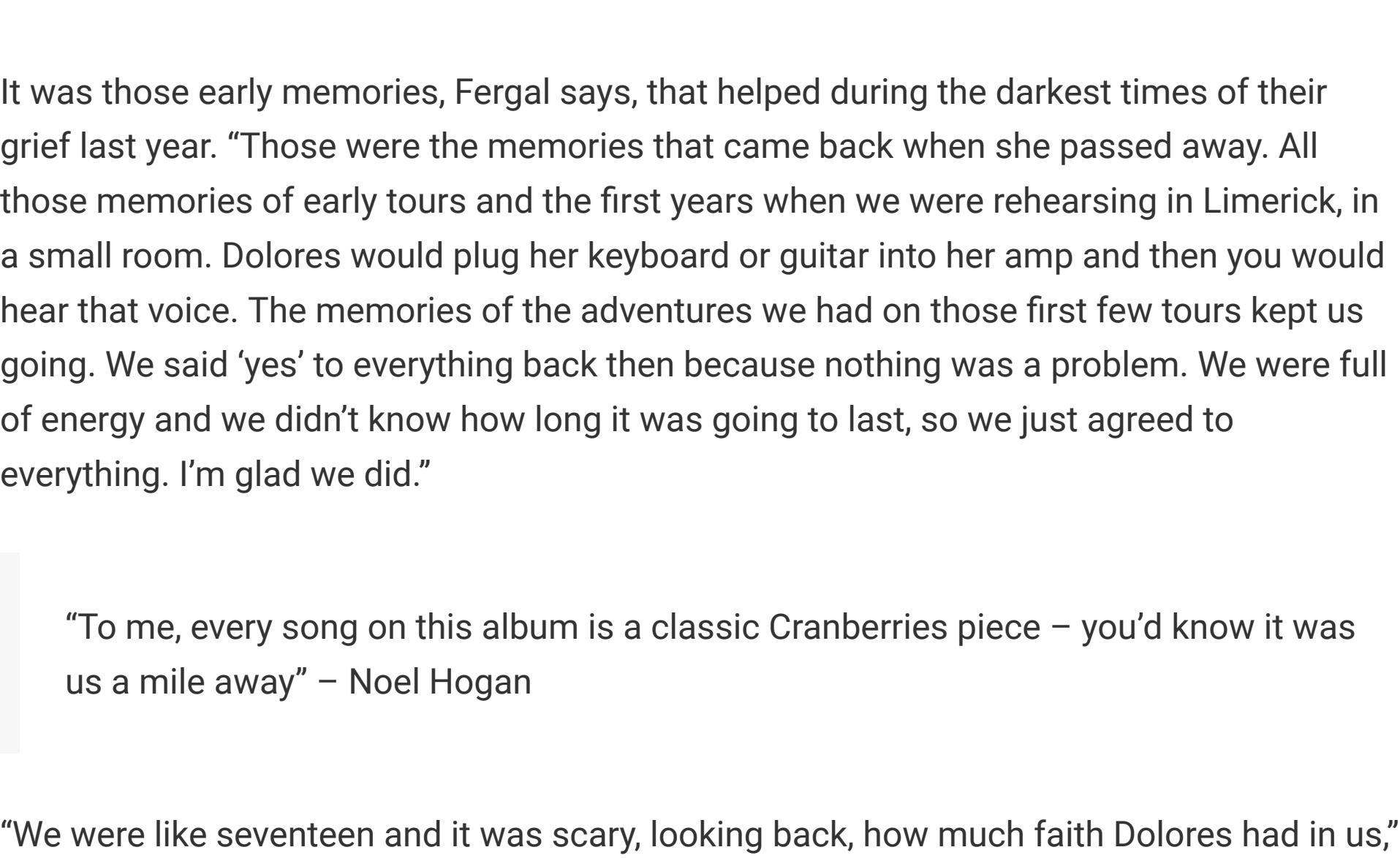
Recording in the studio as a trio for the first time was, Mike says, oddly not that different from how they usually worked. Dolores would often come in the evening and lay down vocals whilst the other three would come in during the day to build the music around what she had recorded the previous evening. “Dolores would normally come in and do like three or four vocals to a click track, maybe an acoustic, then she would head off like because she used to just get bored listening to us bang away,” Mike recalls, smiling. “She’d come in the next day and say ‘Oh, I don’t like what you did. Let’s recall it again.’” They all laugh at the memory. “She spoke her mind and we’ve all been on the other end of it. She would let you know if she was unhappy,” Noel laughs.

The first and last day of recording were, unsurprisingly, the hardest. “I think the first day in the studio with Steven was tough when we were thinking about it and talking about it, but once we actually got stuck into it, we just got on with the job and got it done,” Noel says, Mike and Fergal echoing his sentiment. “She would sometimes talk on the recordings so we’d hear her voice. During those moments we were all kind of looking at each other and it was hard, but we were determined to complete it,” Mike adds. “At the end, it got a bit sad and emotional with everything we were doing. It was a pretty emotional time because you know you’re done and then that’s it. The three of us have been together since we left school and before we met Dolores who joined the band a little later.”

It was those early memories, Fergal says, that helped during the darkest times of their grief last year. “Those were the memories that came back when she passed away. All those memories of early tours and the first years when we were rehearsing in Limerick, in a small room. Dolores would plug her keyboard or guitar into her amp and then you would hear that voice. The memories of the adventures we had on those first few tours kept us going. We said ‘yes’ to everything back then because nothing was a problem. We were full of energy and we didn’t know how long it was going to last, so we just agreed to everything. I’m glad we did.”

“To me, every song on this album is a classic Cranberries piece – you’d know it was us a mile away” – Noel Hogan

“We were like seventeen and it was scary, looking back, how much faith Dolores had in us,” Noel adds. After auditioning for the band in her teens, Noel says they couldn’t believe she wasn’t already in one: they were just thrilled she was now in theirs. “Dolores headed off with us, she’d maybe known us like a year and a bit at that point but she went off with three strangers around the UK. She put a lot of faith in us right there. Things work out that are meant to be. It was cheap and cheerful, the four of us...and that was it, just us, travelling around and playing shitty clubs and doing all the things that bands are supposed to do, that traditional sense of trying to build a fanbase. It was great fun but we were maybe wondering still if this was going to be our career or not. I don’t remember the later things with the band as much, nothing is as clear as those early memories for me.”



Aside from a possible anniversary release of ‘No Need to Argue’ – their second studio album from 1994 – the band have no further plans beyond the release of this latest album. Talk instead turns to their legacy.

“It’s only really since Dolores passed away that I’ve grown a proper appreciation for songs like ‘Linger’ and ‘Dreams,’” Noel says. “They were just songs in the set list for us; everybody else was losing their mind about them.” They all laugh in agreement. “And when I listen to them now I realise how great they are for someone so young, which I never, even appreciated until a year ago. We must have played it a gazillion times in our lives and it just becomes a part of the set, but it’s different now. We’re so lucky to have left that behind, to have that legacy.”

“The memories of the adventures we had on those first few tours kept us going” – Fergal Lawler

The support from fans, Mike adds, has helped them through the last year and especially during the weekend prior to today’s anniversary where a special memorial mass was held in Dolores’ hometown of Ballybricken, Co. Limerick. “It was her anniversary mass on Sunday, which her family did, so we all went along. It was amazing to see fans who had travelled from literally the other side of the world – from South America, Europe and all over. They are still as upset as they were a year ago but it was still good to meet them and share stories and that kind of thing. We have been blessed with fans who’ve stuck with us for such a long time and they’ve always been so passionate.”

“You want and hope, more than anything, for your music to be your legacy – that it will speak for itself,” Noel concludes. “You hope that in fifty-years-time, ‘Linger’ might come on somewhere and people will still speak of it as a classic. I think all we ever wanted first and foremost was the music to be our legacy. I think, even to the very end, if we’d have gotten the demos together, listened to them and thought they weren’t right, I think we’d have left it because you’d ruin it and we never wanted to do that. As it is, I think we’ve ended well and now we have closure. With ‘In The End’, it will make sense why this is the album title when people hear it...it’s actually a song about your career – what you expect and what you get. It was the very last song that we recorded and it just kind of sums everything up, really. It is the very end for us.”

‘All Over Now’ is available now; the album ‘In The End’ is released on April 26