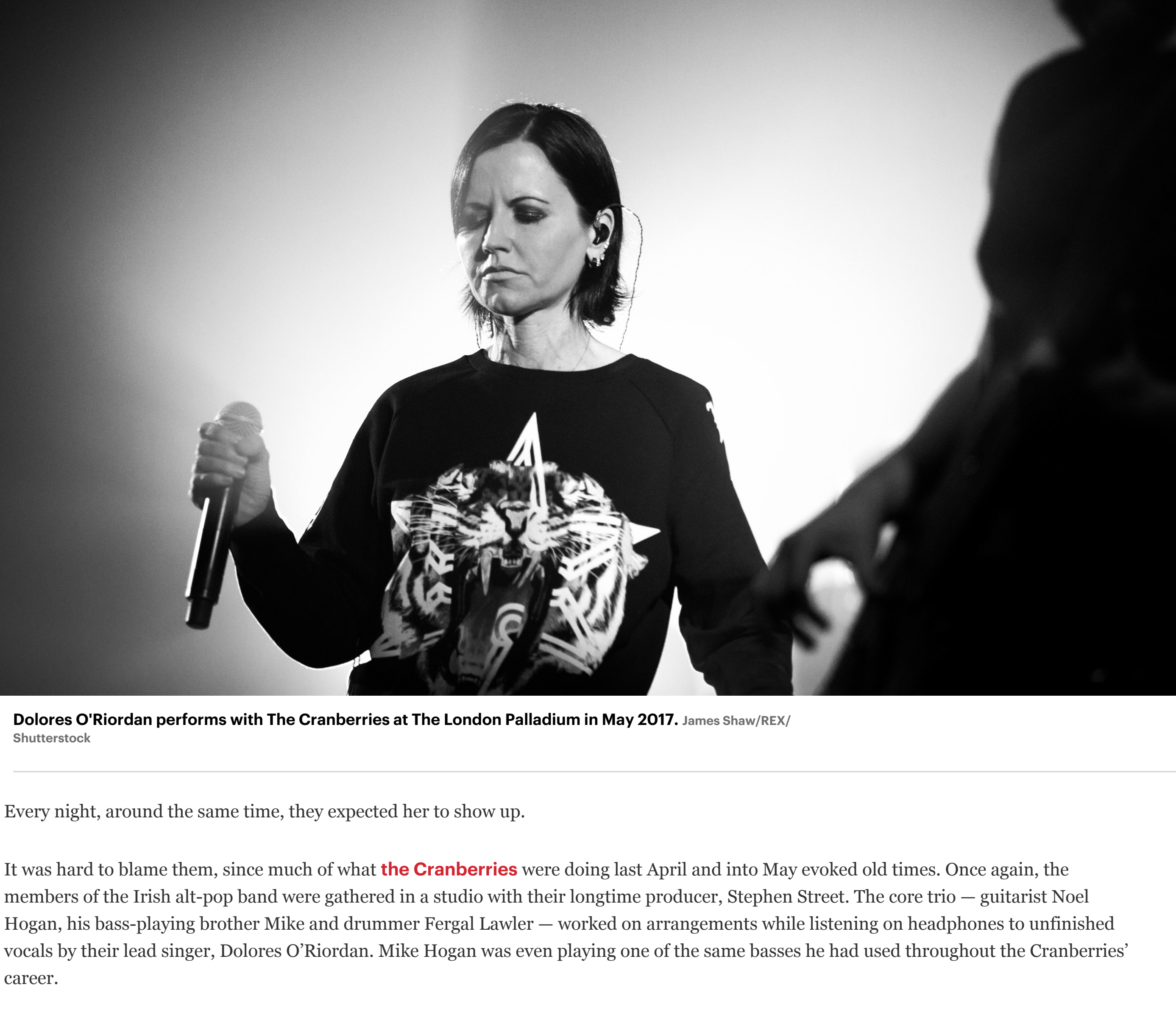


The Making of the Cranberries' Haunted Farewell

Dolores O'Riordan's band and family talk about her troubled last days, the songs she left behind and the creation of the band's final album, 'In the End.'

By **DAVID BROWNE**



Dolores O'Riordan performs with The Cranberries at The London Palladium in May 2017. James Shaw/REX/Shutterstock

Every night, around the same time, they expected her to show up.

It was hard to blame them, since much of what **the Cranberries** were doing last April and into May evoked old times. Once again, the members of the Irish alt-pop band were gathered in a studio with their longtime producer, Stephen Street. The core trio — guitarist Noel Hogan, his bass-playing brother Mike and drummer Fergal Lawler — worked on arrangements while listening on headphones to unfinished vocals by their lead singer, Dolores O'Riordan. Mike Hogan was even playing one of the same basses he had used throughout the Cranberries' career.

O'Riordan rarely showed up in studios during daylight hours; concerned about over-singing and smothering the raw emotion in her delivery, she preferred to arrive later, after the rest of the band had done their work. "Dolores would come in to do the vocals and we'd have a chat," says Lawler. "She'd have a listen to what we'd done and then we'd head off and let her do her thing. So in the evening time, you're almost looking out in the corridor to see if she's coming in."

Lawler pauses. "And then you realize, 'Oh, yeah, she won't be in.'"

About three months before those sessions, on January 15th, 2018, O'Riordan had been found dead in the bathtub of her London hotel room at age 46. An inquest later determined she had drowned from excessive drinking. The alcohol in her system added up to more than four times the legal limit for driving in the U.K. The British coroner called it a "tragic accident."

Yet O'Riordan left behind songs and tapes — and with the band playing along to her now-ghostly voice, those recordings have been fashioned into a new album, *In the End*. Scheduled for release this April, it is being billed as the last Cranberries album. "It's the end of the Cranberries and so on," Hogan says. "I think it just brings it full circle. Everybody knows now that this is the final ... for us, definitely ... It makes it feel like a proper ending after so long spent with this thing."

By "this thing," Hogan means the process of constructing a unique posthumous record. But in some ways that phrase also means more: the often uplifting but equally difficult life of one of the most treasured alt-rock stars of the '90s.

Everyone remembers the girl in the tracksuit who showed up at an audition in Limerick, Ireland, in 1990 to sing in a local band, the Cranberry Saw Us. "It was a Sunday afternoon," says Lawler. "She arrived with a keyboard under her arm, just set it up and played a few songs. We couldn't really hear her because she was singing through a guitar amp or something. I gave her a lift up to the bus stop and I was saying, 'Will we see you next week?' We gave her a tape of the music for 'Linger,' which she took with her. The following week she came back, and she had lyrics written out and melodies and she sang along to what we were playing, and it was like, 'Oh, my God. She's great.'"

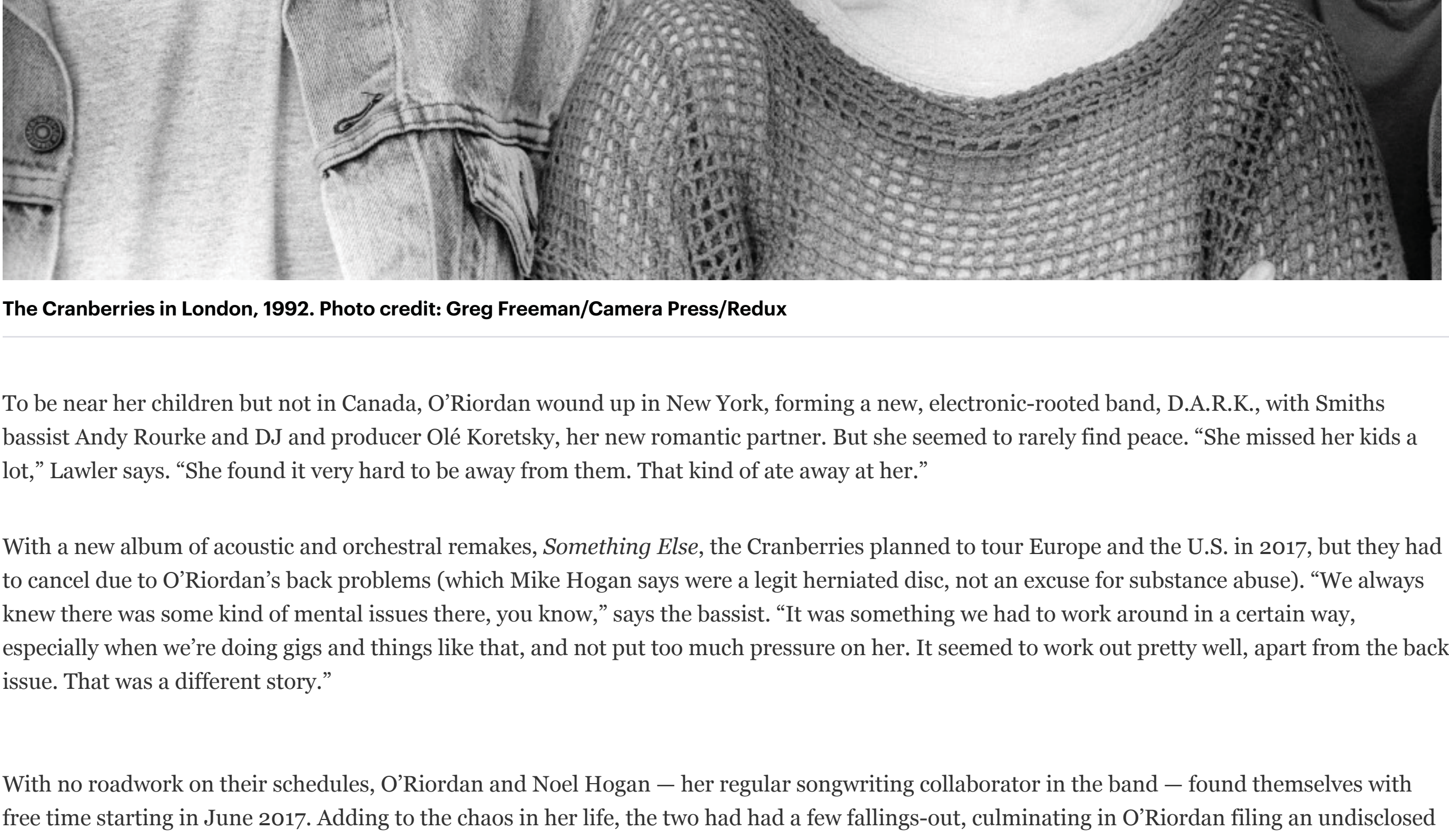
Thanks to early songs like "Linger" and "Dreams," the renamed Cranberries rode the alt-rock wave of the early '90s. Their music was grunge-hard but also crisp and wispy, and O'Riordan, seemingly frail but siren-voiced, captivated music fans. Although the band was greeted with a collective meh in their home country, America took to them — starting with an opening act slot on a U.S. tour with Suede — and the band's first two albums, 1993's *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?* and the next year's *No Need to Argue*, sold millions. "Zombie," from the second album, fulfilled O'Riordan's wish to give the group a harder musical edge. In 1994, she married Dan Burton, a former Duran Duran road manager; their first of three children arrived in 1997.

Even if her band mates didn't know it yet, O'Riordan was, as she later called herself, "a bit of a trainwreck." She later confessed she had been sexually abused by someone in the Limerick area, starting when she was 8 and lasting for four years. The band's success and accompanying luxuries (like a personal wardrobe assistant for O'Riordan) didn't diminish her feelings of self-loathing, and the pressures on the singer, who was in her early twenties when international fame hit, were enormous. A bout of flu and exhaustion forced the band to cancel U.S. tour dates in 1996. "She lost an awful lot of weight from an eating disorder," her mother, Eileen O'Riordan, says. "She was very young. I remember I brought her back home to her little small bedroom in the house once. It was too much, too soon."

Starting in 2003, the Cranberries took a five-year hiatus, and O'Riordan began spending more time in a small town just west of Toronto with her husband and children. "The fame thing definitely didn't help," says Lawler. "Her mother had wanted her to become a piano teacher or teach music. Had she gone down that path, who knows? It might have been more suited to her."

But the quiet life didn't stick. "She tried breaking up with the band, taking time off and being ordinary," Eileen says, "but she went to music all the time."

After various side projects, including two under-the-radar O'Riordan solo albums, the band reunited in 2009. O'Riordan talked openly about her issues in the years that followed. In a notorious incident in 2014, she was arrested for alleged assault after accidentally stepping on the foot of a flight attendant with her heavy boots; the attendant had asked an agitated O'Riordan to take her seat as the singer was attempting to grab something from her overhead bin. Although charges were dismissed, she made a voluntary contribution to a charity. Gaunt and sometimes skeletal-looking, O'Riordan announced she had bipolar disorder. She and Burton divorced that same calamitous year. According to Lawler, "She never really drank until she was older. Until after she got married."



The Cranberries in London, 1992. Photo credit: Greg Freeman/Camera Press/Redux

To be near her children but not in Canada, O'Riordan wound up in New York, forming a new, electronic-rooted band, D.A.R.K., with Smiths bassist Andy Rourke and DJ and producer Olé Koretsky, her new romantic partner. But she seemed to rarely find peace. "She missed her kids a lot," Lawler says. "She found it very hard to be away from them. That kind of ate away at her."

With a new album of acoustic and orchestral remakes, *Something Else*, the Cranberries planned to tour Europe and the U.S. in 2017, but they had to cancel due to O'Riordan's back problems (which Mike Hogan says were a legit herniated disc, not an excuse for substance abuse). "We always knew there was some kind of mental issues there, you know," says the bassist. "It was something we had to work around in a certain way, especially when we're doing gigs and things like that, and not put too much pressure on her. It seemed to work out pretty well, apart from the back issue. That was a different story."

With no roadwork on their schedules, O'Riordan and Noel Hogan — her regular songwriting collaborator in the band — found themselves with free time starting in June 2017. Adding to the chaos in her life, the two had had a few fallings-out, culminating in O'Riordan filing an undisclosed and later retracted High Court action against him in 2013. (Neither would discuss it.) She had once told Hogan she couldn't write because I have so much to feel like that she wanted to jump on new material was telling. "She said, 'Oh, we've got to start writing songs, because I have so much to say right now,'" he says. "She found it a lot easier to write lyrics when there was turmoil in her life."

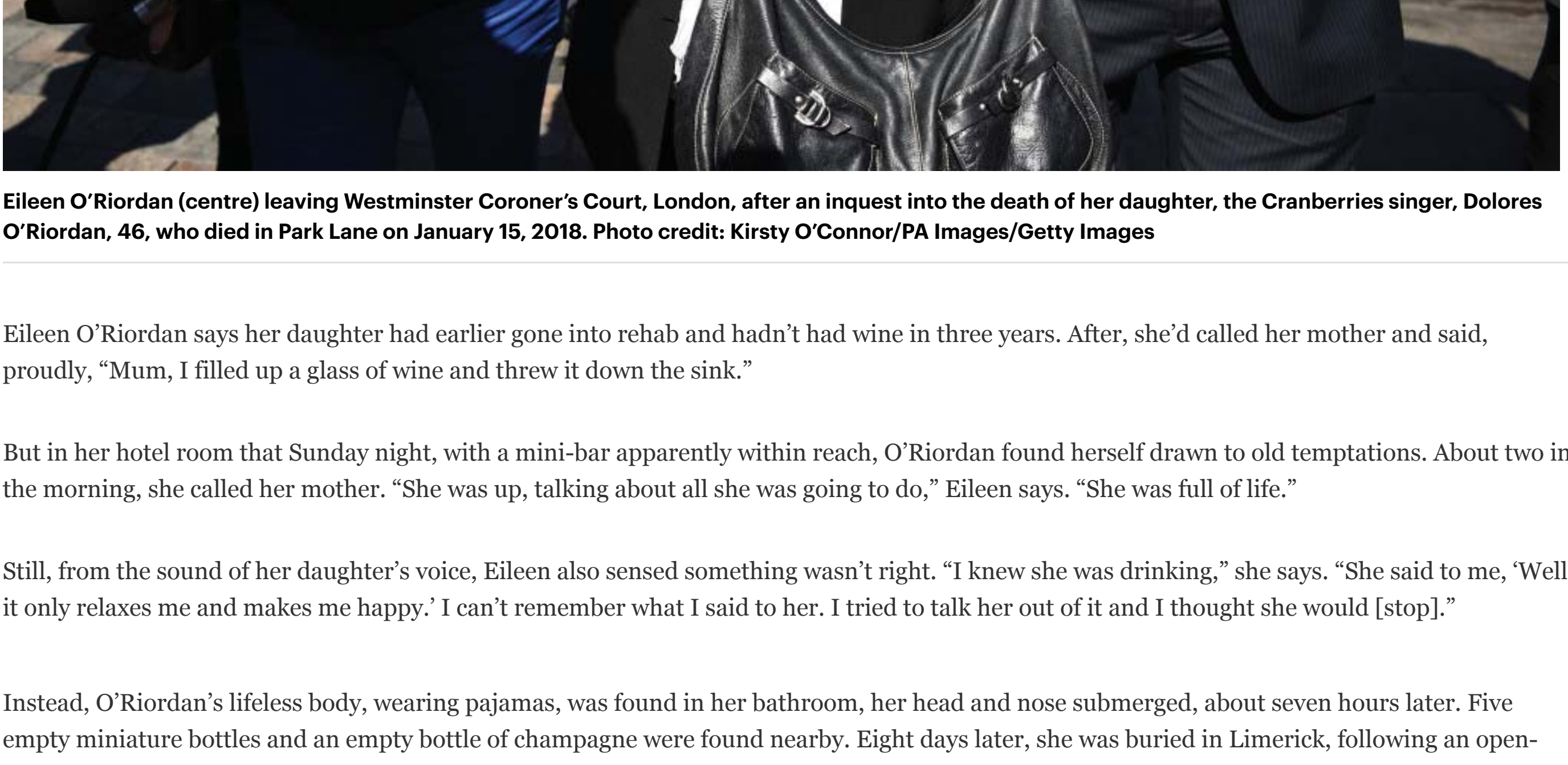
On and off over the next six months, the two wrote new songs, usually by email. Hogan would shoot her a melody, and she would add a rough vocal and send it back. She told Hogan that she also had songs she'd written and recorded in bare-bones form in the States, which she would be willing to contribute to the Cranberries as well.

As Christmas 2017 approached, the band mapped out its future. According to Noel Hogan, they were to start rehearsing early in 2018 for a tour of China that spring, after which they would begin recording what would be the first all-original Cranberries studio album since 2012's *Roses*. "That was the plan," Hogan says, "even up to the last couple of conversations I had with her that week. It was like, 'We'll get moving on this stuff in the next couple of weeks.' Everything was normal."

First, however, O'Riordan had to visit London; a new D.A.R.K. album was in the works there, and she had been asked to sing on a remake of "Zombie" by the L.A. hard-rock band Bad Wolves. On her way from New York to London, she stopped in Limerick, and Eileen O'Riordan noticed her daughter was struggling. "She was a bit down on herself," she says. "She wasn't really herself. She wasn't happy. But she was very happy that this would be something positive, to get her album done."

On Friday, January 12th, two days before she was scheduled to fly to London, O'Riordan spoke with Noel Hogan, who still sensed their plans were in motion. She was so eager to work, he says, that she emailed him from Shannon Airport on Sunday, January 14th, to make sure he'd received an earlier message about a new song. "Check this out and I'll call you tomorrow," she wrote. After arriving in London later that day, she checked into the Park Lane Hilton hotel.

That day, exchanges with family, friends and work associates were equally reassuring and vexing. She emailed Lawler, asking if they should consider a song called "So Good" for the new album. Lawler had to remind her that they had already cut it and included it on *Roses*. "She said, 'All right — pity, it's a good song,'" he recalls. "She didn't realize we had already recorded it." Just after midnight, she left two voicemails for Dan Waite, a label executive (and former business associate of the band) who had set up the collaboration with Bad Wolves. In the messages, she talked sweetly about her children and sang a snippet of the Verve's "Bitter Sweet Symphony" (produced by Youth, who was overseeing the D.A.R.K. album). Waite says she was in "good spirits and making jokes."



Eileen O'Riordan (centre) leaving Westminster Coroner's Court, London, after an inquest into the death of her daughter, the Cranberries singer, Dolores O'Riordan, 46, who died in Park Lane on January 15, 2018. Photo credit: Kirsty O'Connor/PA Images/Getty Images

Eileen O'Riordan says her daughter had earlier gone into rehab and hadn't had wine in three years. After, she'd called her mother and said, proudly, "Mum, I filled up a glass of wine and threw it down the sink."

But in her hotel room that Sunday night, with a mini-bar apparently within reach, O'Riordan found herself drawn to old temptations. About two in the morning, she called her mother. "She was up, talking about all she was going to do," Eileen says. "She was full of life."

Still, from the sound of her daughter's voice, Eileen also sensed something wasn't right. "I knew she was drinking," she says. "She said to me, 'Well, it only relaxes me and makes me happy.' I can't remember what I said to her. I tried to talk her out of it and I thought she would [stop]."

Instead, O'Riordan's lifeless body, wearing pajamas, was found in her bathroom, her head and nose submerged, about seven hours later. Five empty miniature bottles and an empty bottle of champagne were found nearby. Eight days later, she was buried in Limerick, following an open-casket viewing attended by thousands of fans. Her music was played throughout the church service. When the Cranberries' "When You're Gone" was played at the end, those in the church broke out into applause.

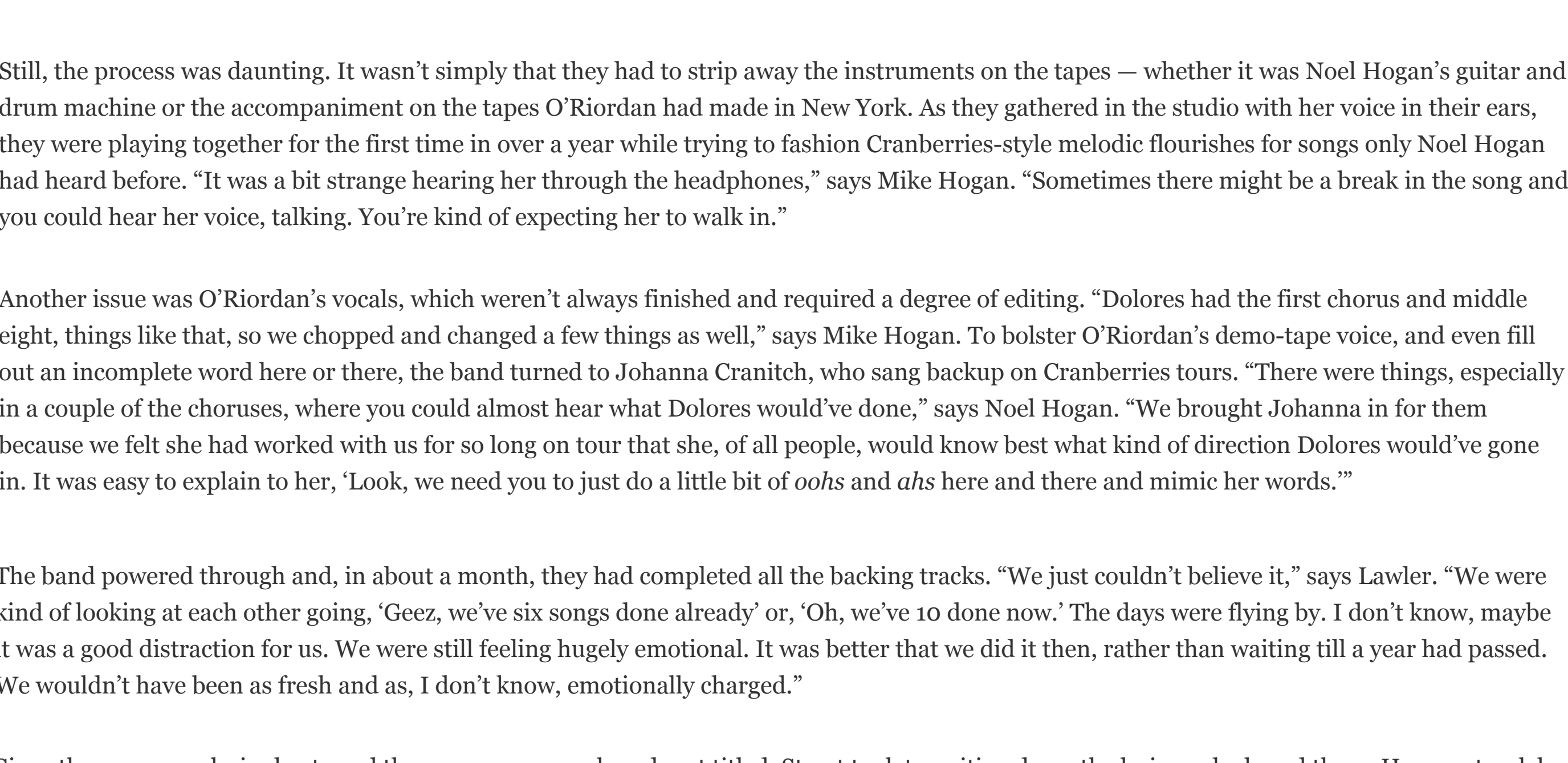
When word of her death began making its way to her fellow Cranberries the morning her body was found, the musicians first had trouble processing it. "That's the weirdness of it all," says Noel Hogan. "That Dolores, and the Dolores of the year before, were like two different people. It had felt like this fog had kind of lifted and gone, and that she was coming out of a darker time in her life. She walked away from it, and then suddenly this happens."

Lawler agrees with that assessment. "She seemed pretty good, you know?" the drummer says. "It was up and down, to be honest. Some days she'd be better than others and be struggling. And other days she'd be great and strong. But I definitely didn't expect anything like this. She was working on her mental health and getting herself better. But this ... I think this was just an accident, you know? A pity. Because 46... *Jesus*, you know?"

A few weeks after O'Riordan's death, Noel Hogan filled in his brother and Lawler on the unfinished songs he and O'Riordan had left behind, reminding them they were all from a specific period and were meant for what he calls "a proper album." Even in their incomplete form, the songs stremmed Lawler of the songs from their first two albums, and the decision was made to flesh them out. First, though, the band ran the idea by O'Riordan's family — including her brother P.J., who manages the Cranberries. The family approved, as did fans by way of a Facebook post from the band announcing their intentions. "I know people can get a bit funny about this kind of thing — 'Oh, you shouldn't be doing this,'" Noel Hogan says. "But it was the complete opposite. It was met with this really positive outpouring."

Given that they'd be working with unfinished songs, Lawler admits that some on the business side expressed concerns about the quality of the project. "Even some of the record company were worried that it might be a bit patchy, but we reassured them the whole time that we were not going to disrespect Dolores and just throw something out there," he says. "It had to be either a top-quality album, or an EP if we didn't have enough songs."

To facilitate the process, the band turned to Street, convening at his favorite London studio last spring. "It was emotional seeing each other for the first time since Dolores' passing, but it was also, 'All right, we can do this,'" Street recalls. "You just have to try to hold it together. It had to be good, since you don't want to mess with the legacy of what was done in the past."



The remaining members of the Cranberries. Photo credit: Andy Earl

Still, the process was daunting. It wasn't simply that they had to strip away the instruments on the tapes — whether it was Noel Hogan's guitar and drum machine or the accompaniment on the tapes O'Riordan had made in New York. As they gathered in the studio with her voice in their ears, they were playing together for the first time in over a year while trying to fashion Cranberries-style melodic flourishes for songs only Noel Hogan had heard before. "It was a bit strange hearing her through the headphones," says Mike Hogan. "Sometimes there might be a break in the song and you could hear her voice, talking. You're kind of expecting her to walk in."

Another issue was O'Riordan's vocals, which weren't always finished and required a degree of editing. "Dolores had the first chorus and middle eight, things like that, so we chopped and changed a few things as well," says Mike Hogan. To bolster O'Riordan's demo-tape voice, and even fill out an incomplete word here or there, the band turned to Johanna Granith, who sang backup on Cranberries tours. "There were things, especially in a couple of the choruses, where you could almost hear what Dolores would've done," says Noel Hogan. "We brought Johanna in for them because we felt she had worked with us for so long on tour that she, of all people, would know best what kind of direction Dolores would've gone in. It was easy to explain to her, 'Look, we need you to just do a little bit of *oohs* and *ahs* here and there and mimic her words.'"

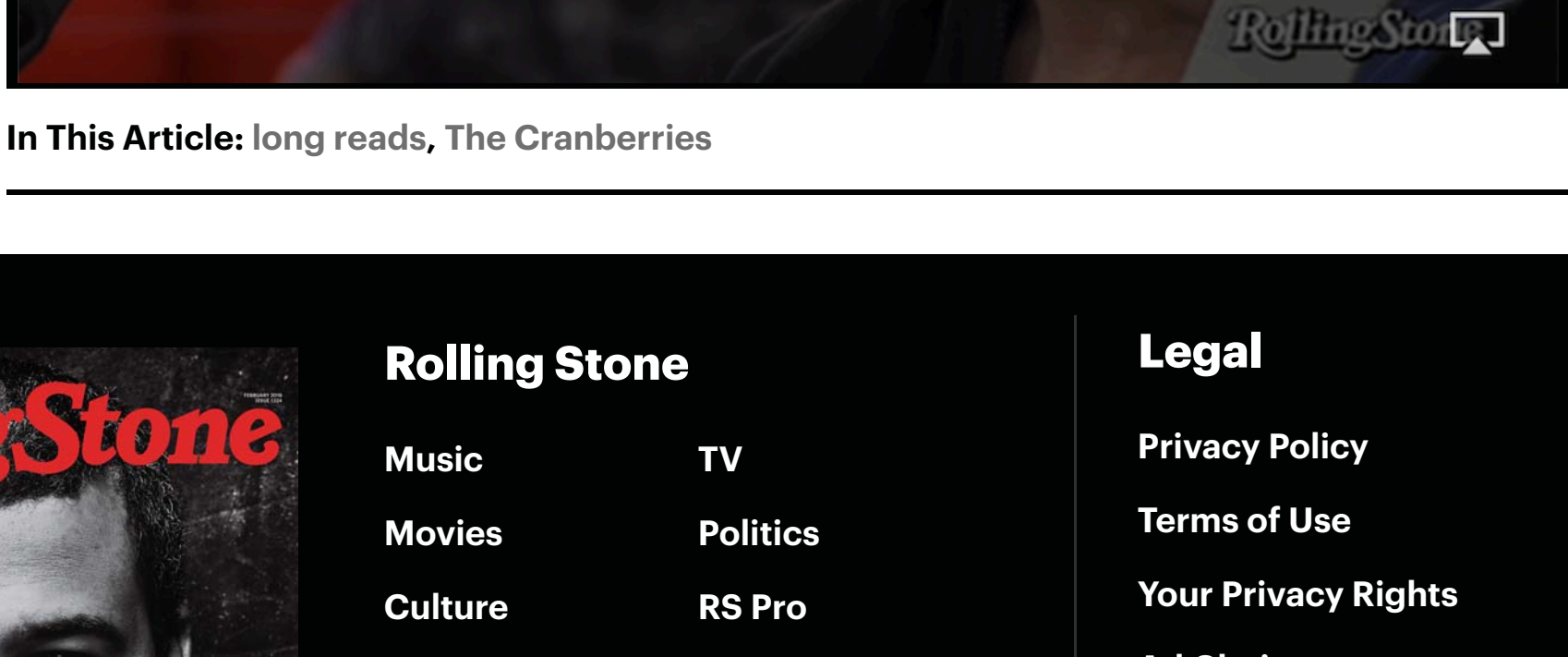
The band powered through and, in about a month, they had completed all the backing tracks. "We just couldn't believe it," says Lawler. "We were kind of looking at each other going, 'Geez, we've six songs done already' or, 'Oh, we've 10 done now.' The days were flying by. I don't know, maybe it was a good distraction for us. We were still feeling hugely emotional." It was better that we did it then, rather than waiting till a year had passed. We wouldn't have been as fresh and as, I don't know, emotionally charged."

Since there were no lyric sheets and the songs were numbered, not titled, Street took to writing down the lyrics as he heard them. He was struck by their intensity. "A Place I Know" appears to be addressed to her children ("I'm sorry I left you/I'm sorry, I love you") while "All Over Now" details a fight between a woman and her partner ("She told the man that she fell on the ground/She was afraid that the truth would be found"); chillingly, it also mentions "a lost in London." Other songs hinted at wanting to escape her inner pain: "Trudging through the darkness/Escaping from yourself/Only shoot to kill your pain," she sang in "Catch Me When It's Over." As Lawler says, "Some of them... I kind of want to say she could see into the future. There were some quite poignant ones there, even more so now that she's passed."

For all their productivity, reality would hit them later, as when Noel Hogan would return to his hotel room after a day's work. "I found that the most difficult time through the whole thing," he says. "You're sitting down listening to what you did that day, and you're not as focused, maybe, as you were when you were in the studio. The realization of it all comes to you more. Then you got up the next day and shook yourself off again, and you went back in and got kind of stuck into it again."

All along, Street knew there was at least song he wanted the Cranberries to refrain from tackling until the album was nearly wrapped up. "In the End," one of the songs that required a degree of editing and tweaking, has spare but affecting lyrics: "Ain't it strange?/When everything you wanted/Was nothing much you wanted, in the end?" O'Riordan sang. As Street recalls, "I don't think people who say that fully get it. Maybe they think they're being nice or something. It's not something we're ever going to entertain. I think the band accomplished a lot, and I think we'll leave it on a high with this album."

As of a few weeks ago, Eileen O'Riordan had not yet spent time with *In the End*. She has had a copy for several weeks, but it's still too difficult to listen. "I'm delighted with it, that it's finished," she says. "I thought I'd listen to it, but I don't feel ready yet to listen to anything. No use in getting yourself upset. I think she's in heaven now. I think she's at peace."



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