

How the Cranberries' final album, after the death of Dolores O'Riordan, was completed

By **Ben Rayner** Pop Music Critic
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Here, world, is your new Cranberries album. The Cranberries are finished.

The Cranberries were finished the moment their singer, Dolores O'Riordan, [died](#) unexpectedly at just 46 years of age in a London hotel room on Jan. 15, 2018, and her friends and bandmates of nearly 30 years knew that instantly. There was never, *ever*, any question that the Cranberries would continue without her.



Noel Hogan, left, and Fergal Lawler of the Cranberries are firm that the Irish band will not carry on without its late lead singer Dolores O'Riordan. (RENÉ JOHNSTON / TORONTO STAR)

Before she passed away, however, O'Riordan had committed to tape enough worthy material intended for a new Cranberries album that the shell-shocked surviving Crans — guitarist Noel Hogan, bassist Mike Hogan and drummer Fergal Lawler — were compelled to finish the record they'd tentatively begun with her the previous May before the reality that the Cranberries, as a whole, were finished could properly set in.

Now that *In the End* is finally being released to the public this Friday — titled after the winsome folk-pop [lullaby](#) that, sadly but appropriately, draws the Irish quartet's eighth and final studio album to a close — a genuine reckoning with the future must occur.

"We started tomorrow last year," says Noel Hogan, halfway through a promo trip to Toronto with Lawler two Mondays ago, of the posthumous sessions that begat *In the End*. "So there's a whole mix of things going on. Having this distracted us from those thoughts because we were still in 'Cranberries' mode. When people would ask 'What are you doing?' we'd say, 'We're going to do an album' and it was business as usual, in some respects.

"And I guess it's only really now, as we're coming to the end of it, that you do start to think, 'What is next?' But I also think there's a bit of exhaustion amongst us at the moment.

"Since that day in January of last year, really, it's been full on, you know?" he added. "Between dealing with her death, where we all very much went to ground in many ways ... and then going straight to London to do the album and working kinda behind the scenes on it since then, it's been a great distraction to do that. But, I guess, now that this is coming to an end, it's the time to start thinking about what does happen next."

What happens next will have nothing to do with the Cranberries whatsoever. Nothing.

The suggestion that Lawler and the brothers Hogan might find their way to making music together under another guise or in a different configuration instantly meets with a terse "no" from both band members. No need to argue, as it were. Not gonna happen.

"I don't know about 'together,' you see, because then you have that Cranberries sound," says Lawler quietly. "It just happens when we play together."

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The three remaining Cranberries were initially reticent to do anything further at all with the songs they'd stockpiled with O'Riordan over the weeks and months leading up to her death from what was eventually ruled to be an accidental drowning attributed to excessive alcohol intoxication in a bathtub at London's Park Lane Hilton. A coroner's inquest determined her blood-alcohol level at the time to be four times above the legal limit for driving in the U.K.

Despite some very public wrestling in the past with depression, anorexia and alcoholism, and the concomitant psychological fallout from a period of childhood sexual abuse she revealed to the Irish Independent in 2013, O'Riordan appeared to her bandmates to be in a good place as exploratory work on *In the End* commenced.

"She had been through the wars and she was very open about everything that had gone on in her life, and her way of dealing with this type of stuff was to write songs, so she was very, very keen to write," sighs Hogan. "And particularly that summer, it just seemed to be that she had kind of put that behind her and wanted to move on, and this was her way of doing it."

O'Riordan, then living in New York, had enthusiastically emailed Hogan some new material the day before and was in London to mix a second record by D.A.R.K., her groove-oriented side project with former Smiths bassist Andy Rourke and her boyfriend, New York DJ/producer Olé Koretsky, with whom she released the [album](#) *Science Agrees* in 2016.

On the day she died, she was also planning to hit a studio there to add her own vocals to a Bad Wolves cover of "Zombie," the Cranberries' signature hit and the lead single from the Limerick-bred quartet's 17-million-selling 1994 sophomore smash *No Need to Argue*. That cover subsequently did so well upon issue in February 2018 that the members of Bad Wolves were able to present O'Riordan's four children and Canadian-born ex-husband, Don Burton with \$250,000 in proceeds by last June.

In the End, such as it existed at the time of her death, was "at the very basic demo stage, nothing too crazy" — basically just raw vocals — and "a rough idea of where the songs were at," Hogan says, so the notion of trying to splice random verses and recording scraps into "complete" songs or to gather a bunch of rudimentary tracks together into a posthumous collection was never on the table because "there isn't a great history of that."

Once they started combing through the odds and sods O'Riordan had left them, however, the Cranberries were struck by the strength of the lyrics and vocal performances. They sensed an album was there.

"We spoke to her family. We wanted to check with them and see how they would feel and they gave us their blessing that they were all up for it," says Lawler. "We put a message on Facebook kind of seeing how fans would feel about it and, again, loads of positivity saying, 'We'd love you to do this.' Because it was almost kind of like a gift that was there, you know?"

"And for us not to do anything would have been a shame because it would have just finished after Dolores died. That would have been it, kind of left hanging. But with this, it's kind of a nice closure to the whole thing. 'Here's the last album.' And the quality of the songs is amazing. I mean, we were extremely blessed."

By April, with 11 solid tracks in hand, Lawler and the Hogans headed into the studio with longtime Cranberries producer Stephen Street and a primary goal of making it sound "like it was the four of us in one room at the same time." The nature of her demos dictate the sound of the record, which often harkens back to the "Linger"-era sweetness of the Crans' 1993 debut, *Everybody Else is Doing It, So Why Can't We?*

It wasn't easy, but they got through it. And they came out of it with a final album that does O'Riordan's and the Cranberries' legacies proud.

"It was a reminder each morning when you'd put on your headphones because you'd go in, you'd have a coffee and be chatting and then, 'Right, let's go' and suddenly everything comes flying back to you, the reality of what you're doing and what's happened," says Hogan.

"And it was only April. So it was very close to the time after she passed away. But you weren't doing anyone any favours by thinking 'Oh, this is awful, I shouldn't be doing this' and being depressed. You kind of had to go 'We're here to do a job.' ... You'd start to forget about all the negativity and you'd kind of go with, 'I want each song to be the best that it can be.'"

And that really will be it.

"We were strict on what could make it and what couldn't," says Hogan.

"There are some extra little bits of vocals from a verse and then maybe another song might have just a chorus but no verse and some humming ideas where she wasn't sure what she was going to do, and they'll never be heard," vows Lawler. "She wouldn't be happy if we released that."

Which, of course, is the right thing to do.

"She'd kill us," says Lawler. "She would haunt us from the grave, she would."

"If there is an afterlife," chuckles his bandmate. "She'd be standing there waiting."

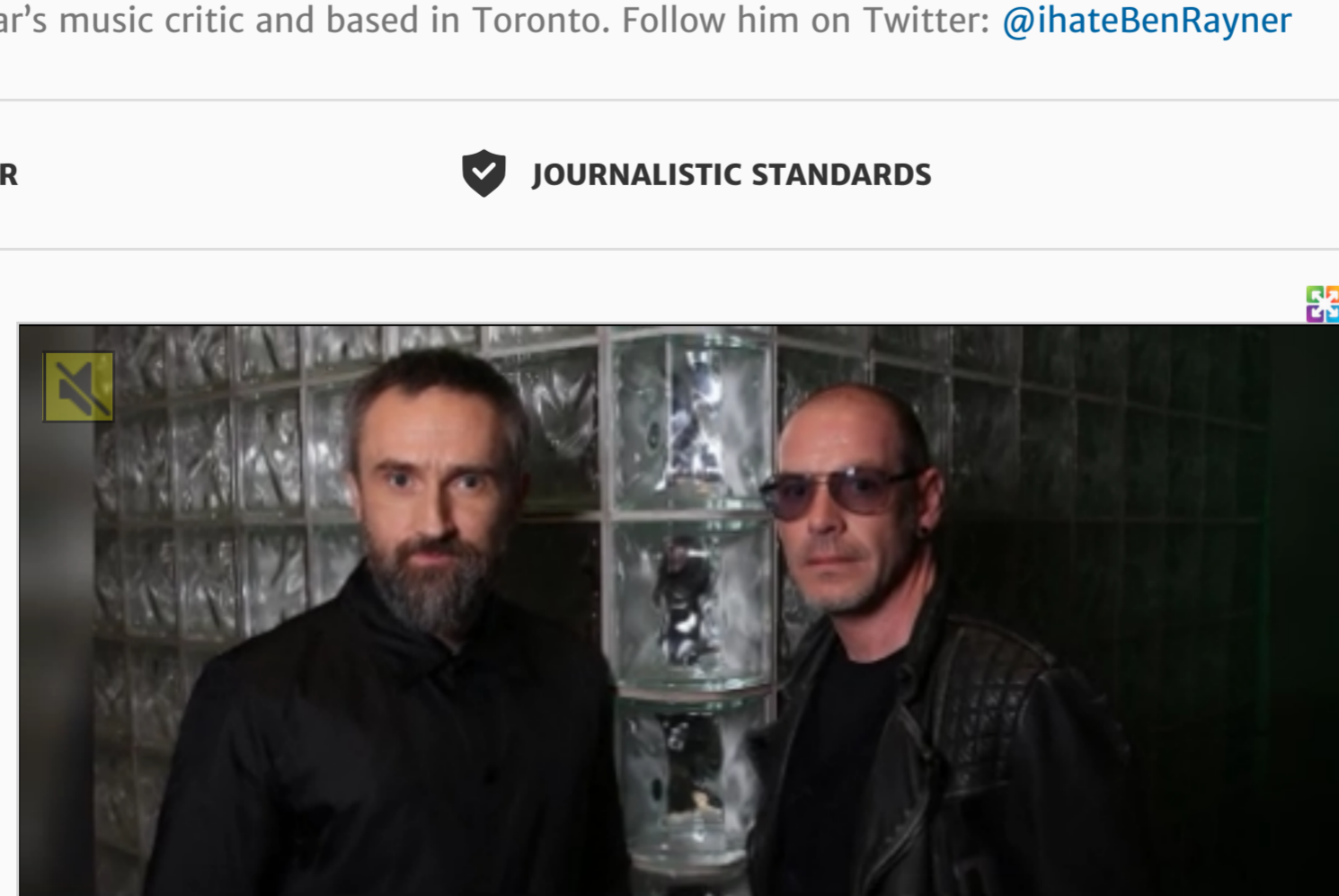
Lawler laughs again. "Hands on hips, going, 'What the hell were you thinking?'"

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