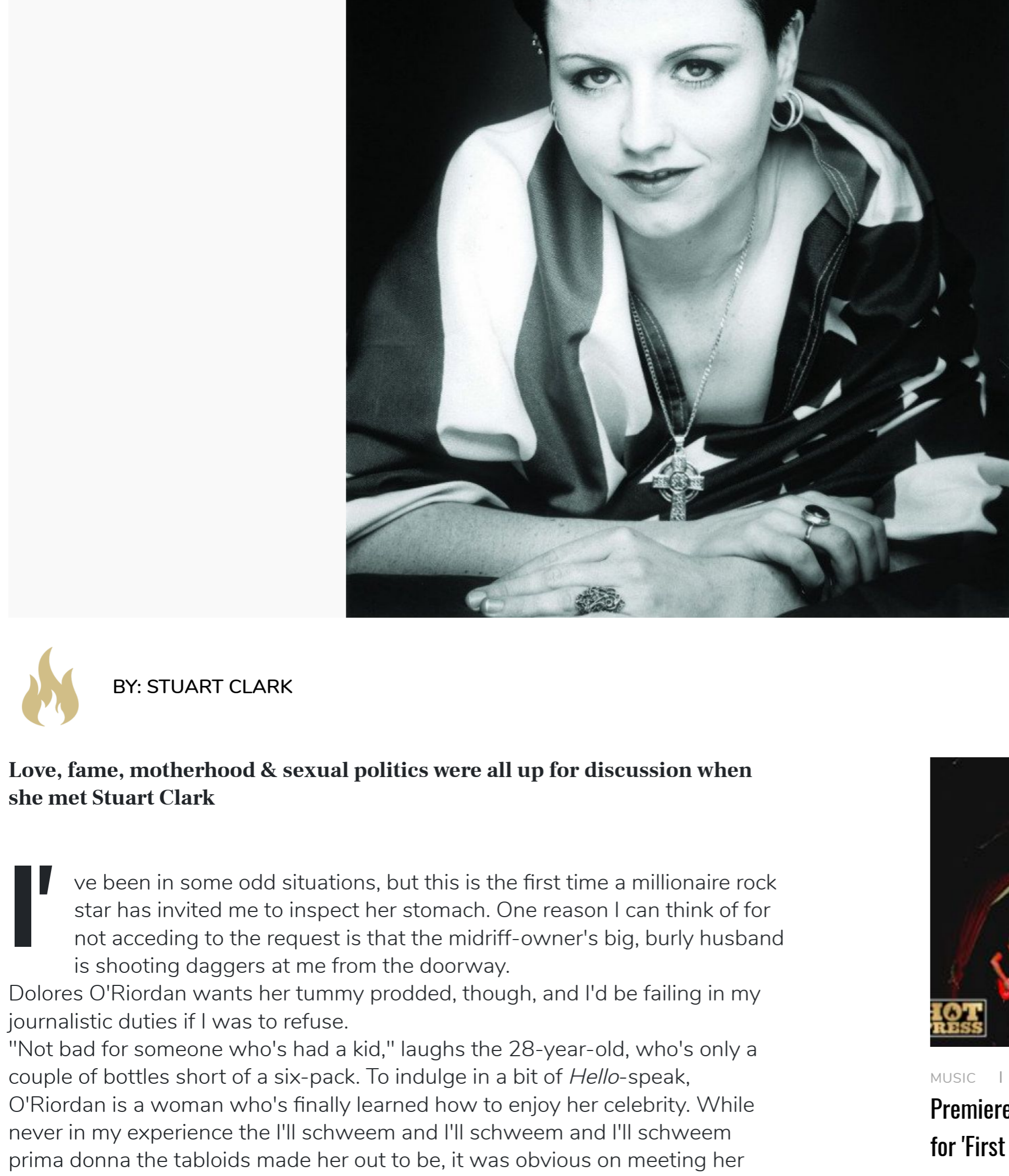


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DEEP DIVE INTO THE ARCHIVE: Dolores O'Riordan gave one of her most personal ever interviews to Hot Press in 1999



BY: STUART CLARK

Love, fame, motherhood & sexual politics were all up for discussion when she met Stuart Clark

I've been in some odd situations, but this is the first time a millionaire rock star has invited me to inspect her stomach. One reason I can think of for not acceding to the request is that the midriff-owner's big, burly husband is shooting daggers at me from the doorway.

Dolores O'Riordan wants her tummy prodded, though, and I'd be failing in my journalistic duties if I was to refuse.

"Not bad for someone who's had a kid," laughs the 28-year-old, who's only a couple of bottles short of a six-pack. To indulge in a bit of Hello-speak, O'Riordan is a woman who's finally learned how to enjoy her celebrity. While never in my experience the I'll schweem and I'll schweem and I'll schweem prima donna the tabloids made her out to be, it was obvious on meeting her three years ago that she was underweight and over-stressed. Our familiarity doesn't extend to me sticking her on the weighing-scales, but since then she's put on at least 8 or 9 lbs and is positively exuding good health. She's also swapped her severe crop for a glam blonde bob which makes her look decidedly more feminine. If that's not a politically incorrect thing to say...

"It probably is," she laughs, "but, yeah, I do feel more feminine and like my old self again. When I came off the To The Faithful Departed tour, I thought I'd never sing again. I really hated singing and I really hated what had become of the band because it was just a work machine. Every day, every hour, there was something scheduled. It was just so crazy, I couldn't sleep.

"So I kind of got consumed by things on the third album, and we just over-toured and over-worked and I got burned out. We were thinking of splitting up and not making any more records because I, we, were all so sick of it."

Echoing those sentiments later on, guitarist Noel Hogan talks of being, "totally disillusioned with the whole thing. It reached the point where we didn't care about selling another million records, we just wanted some time off to enjoy ourselves. I'd be sat there in a 5-star hotel romanticising about when I was on the dole, because at least then I got to go on the piss with my mates. The buzz we'd always got from playing live was gone and we were hardly talking to each other."

Realising that they were about to implode, the Cranberries pulled a major North American tour and headed back to Limerick for copious amounts of pint-quaffing, and spending the whole of the next day in bed recovering. The record company were distinctly unimpressed, but as Dolores stresses, "It was really important to take a break. It made me realise that I don't have to kill myself working anymore. Maybe I'm allowed to have fun. Maybe I can have a life outside of the band. Maybe I don't just have to be a singer and spend the rest of my life being judged and criticised, because at that stage the media were doing my head in. If they see a weakness they kind of pounce and I was weak at the time, so there were all of these malicious rumours going around."

These included talk of temper tantrums, rows with husband Don Burton and going on stage in Germany sans underwear. The Daily Sport had to cough up £5,000 for that particular work of fiction, but still the tele-photo lenses remained outside her Dingle home. Meanwhile, there was no respite on the artistic front with virtually every UK and Irish reviewer panning To The Faithful Departed. The most vicious asides were reserved for tracks like 'Bosnia' and 'I Just Shot John Lennon', which will be remembered for the immortal couplet, "With a Smith & Wesson .38/John Lennon's life was no longer a debate."

Looking back now, Dolores acknowledges that she rather lost the lyrical plot. "You can't write about normal things because you don't have a normal life," she pleads in mitigation. "When you want to go from A to B you have to have security around and there are people screaming at you all the time, so basically you become a little bit weird and isolated and feel like you're in a cage. Your only form of escape is the TV. You watch CNN and go, 'Oh my God, that's awful, I'm going to write a song about this.' So you do become the sad old rock star, viewing the world from a hotel room."

Dolores is guarded when it comes to talking about her marriage, but admits that without Don there are times she might have gone under. "You get to a point in your life where you've done the dating and all that stuff, and just want the one big love thing. It really helps if you have a partner behind you that loves you unconditionally, and no matter what shit you go through, they're always there and take your side. You go through your ups and downs, but that person is still there, loving you, no matter what."

Tired of suffering from what she calls 'Poor Little Rich Girl Syndrome', O'Riordan set about reclaiming her life. First on the agenda was a move to a stud farm just outside of Kilmallock in County Limerick, which can only be described as palatial. The umpteen-acre spread includes her own studio and rehearsal stage, which means she can put in a full day's work with the Cranberries, and still be there to kiss her son, Taylor, goodnight.

"Where I live now is nice because it's not in a tourist area," she enthuses. "The house in Kerry was beautiful, but every single day the Dingle tour buses were pulling up and all the people were looking out, going, 'Is that where she lives?' I remember being three months pregnant and I was coming down my path one day and this guy stopped in a car. I said, 'Look, this is a private residence,' and he blew a gasket on me. He goes, 'I wouldn't say that to you if you came to my house, and I'm like, 'I'm pregnant. I'm not on a showcase here. I'm just a woman having a baby, please leave me alone.' So I guess I had to get a house somewhere quieter with less access. Here's perfect because it's generally farmers and there's no tourists."

The plethora of gold discs on the wall and crate of vintage champagne in the corner are a reminder that there's an upside to this rock star lark. One of the richest women in the country, O'Riordan could retire tomorrow and never have to worry where her next bottle of Dom Perignon is coming from.

"I'm glad I joined the band when I did because I don't think I'd have accomplished so much otherwise," she acknowledges. "It was nice to be able to have a baby. I'm 27 and my son is one-and-a-half. The band have sold 28 million albums worldwide; it's our fourth album and we're doing it purely for the music. We've done the fame thing and it's not for the money. We don't have to worry about that. It's really nice that after everything that's happened, songwriting and being in a band is still really fun. And I mean being in a rock band where you're in control of everything - the videos, the clothes, the songs, everything."

While the O'Riordan family flitted off to their other home in Toronto, Noel Hogan indulged in a six-month orgy of watching daytime TV and strolling into town to get bladdered with his mates.

"I just sat there with the remote control going, 'Great, Emmerdale!' he laughs. "I didn't do anything for months and months, but then I found myself picking up an acoustic and wanting to write songs. It didn't register at the time but what I was doing was going back to how we used to work in the beginning.

Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We? came about as a result of me sticking a tape-recorder in front of my guitar at home, and giving the tapes to Dolores. The only difference with Bury The Hatchet is that I had to get them couriered over to her in Canada."

A couple of Fed-Ex deliveries later and the Cranberries were back in business. "Dolores had also been writing, so with her pregnant and unable to travel, we couriered ourselves over to Toronto to do some demos," Hogan continues. "As soon as we heard the playbacks it was, 'Right, we have to do another album.'" Out this week, Bury The Hatchet is probably the record the band would've made if Everybody Else Is Doing It had flopped and they'd been given a clear run at the follow-up. Having been rather over-gymnastic with her vocals on To The Faithful Departed, Dolores keeps things nice and simple and demonstrates on Just My Imagination that she's still capable of sending whole cold fronts down spines. The same goes for the subject matter which is mainly straightforward relationship stuff. The notable exception is 'Fee Fi Fo' which with lines like "How can you get your satisfaction from the body of a child? You're vile/you're sick", is a scathing attack on child abuse.

"It's the worst crime," she says unequivocally. "I think they should be castrated. I just think that people who sexually abuse children get off too easy. They get back out after a couple of weeks because, 'Oh, he's psychologically ill. Which I can understand, but then people get thrown in the can for eight years for smoking dope or something. I think the system is kind of weird that way. It hampers people who are doing harmless things while these perverts, these paedophiles, are shown leniency."

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You don't have to agree with Dolores opinions to find it refreshing that she has them. Ever since Sinéad O'Connor was crucified for tearing the Pope up on the telly, there's been a reluctance among Irish artists to say anything that may impact on their record sales. That includes going against the liberal grain, as O'Riordan did when she condemned abortion.

"I think Sinéad's pretty cool" she says. "She's Irish and outspoken - sometimes to a point where it's her own undoing - but at least she's original and does her own thing. She's not a safe Mary O'Shea kind of head. She's a little bit crazy sometimes, I guess, but I think we all are.

"[As for what I said] I can understand people having to have abortions when they get raped or whatever. In certain situations, grand, but still I don't like the idea of a baby being sucked out and thrown into a bucket squealing and crying. It's sick. I think, as well, that they shouldn't abort foetuses after a certain amount of time because they do start moving. I had a baby so I know. It's one of those things where I've always said what I thought. I could never not give a toss, y'know?"

Does she agree with what Sinéad says about women having a tougher time of things in the business than men? "It was never a man so I don't really know! It's debatable. Maybe from her shoes it's harder, but from mine it's kind of handy because if you know how to play it properly you can use it to your advantage. You can always sit back and say to your husband, 'Honey, everything's falling apart out there, can you fix it?' Because you're the woman you can sit inside. So I like to sit back and play the lady thing. I enjoy being a woman."

A further insight into her sexual politics comes later on when she observes that, "You're always best to play the sweet Colleen, if you can. You catch more flies with honey than you do with shite."

While not much gone on role models, Dolores admits to being taught the prime women-in-rock directive by Tina Turner and the rest of Betty. "Tanya was the first time I'd met a female on the road," she enthuses, "and it was just so nice having girls around because up till then it had always been boys. The bass player she used to play with that punk band L7 was a crazy rock 'n' roll babe, and it was great seeing her and thinking, 'Hey she's worse than the guys. Cool!' They were really well able to deal with whatever happens when you're on stage and you're a female!"

As possibly the only Irish woman that every American teenager could name, does Dolores have any sense of representing her country or her gender? "I guess I feel more like an ambassador for myself, but as far as Irish women go, I represent them pretty well because I'm not totally crazy and I'm not too conservative. I'm kind of in the middle of the road. I'm pretty normal, really."

Well, as normal as someone who's sold 28 million records can be. O'Riordan's face doesn't so much cloud as storm over when, as a throwaway aside, I suggest that the Cranberries have paved the way for The Corrs. "I don't like their music. I don't like people who put skid-li-ay into rock or pop. To me, it has to be either trad or rock. Mixing things is like, uuuuurgh! I hate it."

"I went to see Riverdance in England and was pretty impressed," she continues. "I thought it would be kind of tacky, but it's well done. It's very, very traditional which I can handle much better than something like The Corrs. It's easier to do skid-li-ay because you grow up with it. It's an easy trade off, and foreign people like it because it's different for them. For me, it's a bit cheesy to do that. Trad is trad and that's it. It's way more challenging to do presentable global rock which appeals to people everywhere."

What about the pre-Riverdance bouts of Irish dance that Dolores used to treat American audiences to? "It was something that I grew up with and thought, 'Hey, maybe I'll do a bit of skipping round the stage here for two seconds to make the show more interesting. I was never a genius, though, when it came to Irish dancing."

Four years is a long time to be out of action, but with kindred spirits like Alanis, Jewel and Ani DiFranco dominating the American charts, the Cranberries should be able to pick up where they left off in the States. They may have a tougher time of things in Europe - a guest appearance at the MTV Awards in Milan demonstrated to Dolores just how much the musical landscape has changed.

"When we took the career-break, there were a lot more rock'n'roll bands on the scene, and now it's weird because it's like a different world. It's full of polished boys and girls with not a lot of talent. Just three years beforehand, I remember doing the MTV Awards in New York, and Metallica were there and Alanis Morissette was there. Maybe the scene is just really different in Europe."

"There was one band [in Milan] that kept screaming, 'Cleopatra, fomain atchya!', and it was like, 'Okay, you've said it, now stop!'. Actually, I found Rammstein the best performers. They were interesting."

Does she think that Massie were right to give Fergie the bird? "God, that girl gets such a hard time!" she sympathises. "I wouldn't do that to anybody. If somebody put their hand out to shake mine, I wouldn't pull it away unless I had a personal grudge. I think that Massive Attack thought it was a set up, and that someone was taking the piss out of them by doing that. It was strange having someone like her presenting an award but, at the same time, I don't have anything against her."

There was a far more civilised atmosphere in November when the Cranberries journeyed to Oslo for the presentation of the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize. While not quite to the Marilyn Manson league, the band caused consternation among the suits and twin-sets when they launched into Bury The Hatchet's flagship single, 'Promises'. Whatever about Gerry Adam's mob, here were the Cranberries steadfastly refusing to decommission their guitars.

"I thought it was really nice because I've always had respect for it, and associated it with Ghandi and things like that. When we got to the venue A-ha were on stage, and that was pretty weird because I used to be a fan of theirs. It was like being a kid, except I'd gotten older now and was in a band. Phil Collins was there and said we rocked because we did 'Promises'. I tell you, 'Promises' live is so loud. There were all these people with dickie-bows and stuff, and it was like wooooooahh!"

Forget Montessori, Dolores O'Riordan is very much from the rock'n'roll school of parenting. Young Taylor can plead as much as he wants, but there's no way he's going to be bought one of those boy or girl band records.

"Absolutely no way," his mother shrieks in horror. "They're barred. If he wants to listen to Boyzone and the Spice Girls, he has to do it in his room. He's not allowed to listen to it in front of me. I'm sure they're lovely people but I can't handle that kind of music. It hurts my ears in a big way."

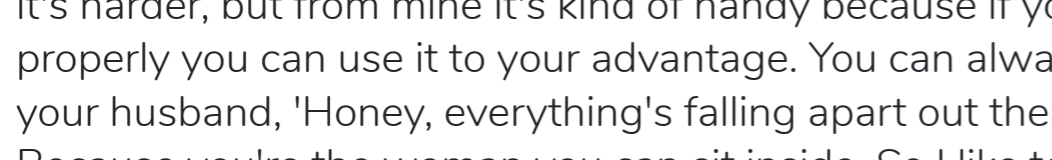
There's no need to sit on the fence. "That Ronan Keating guy - eeeeeuurgh, he's just so bland. Why does someone who's 22 want to sound like they're 102? I know I'm going to have lots of girls shouting bitch at me, but it's their product not music."

Mindful of just how fucked up the last Cranberries world tour left her, Dolores is insisting on promoting Bury The Hatchet in handy bite-size chunks. No trip away from home will last for more than a month, and there'll be a couple of extra O'Riordans on the bus.

"The nipper's coming everywhere with mama," she confides. "I've already done publicity in LA and New York, and it's so different to walk into my hotel room and have my son and my mum and my husband there. It's like, 'This is nice. I feel human. I have a family.' It's so much better than being on stage and having this kind of fake love, and then going into a hotel room and getting really depressed because it's so quiet and dead and you can't get out because the fans are in the lobby and you're stuck in a kind of prison or something."

Asked about his bandmate's more relaxed approach to life, Noel Hogan smiles and says, "Motherhood agrees with her. When things started going wrong three years ago, all any of us had to focus on was the band. Getting married to Don and having Taylor has made her realise that there's a life outside of music. I've known her 10 years and she's never been happier."

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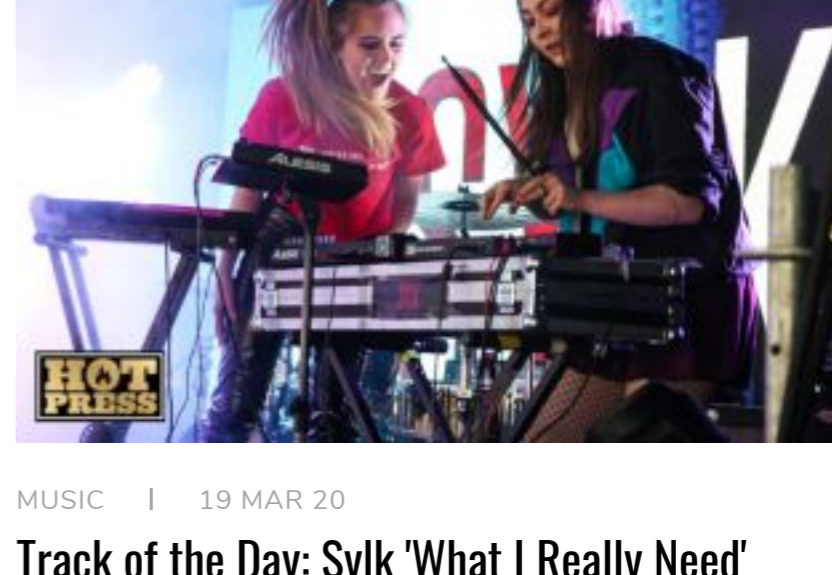
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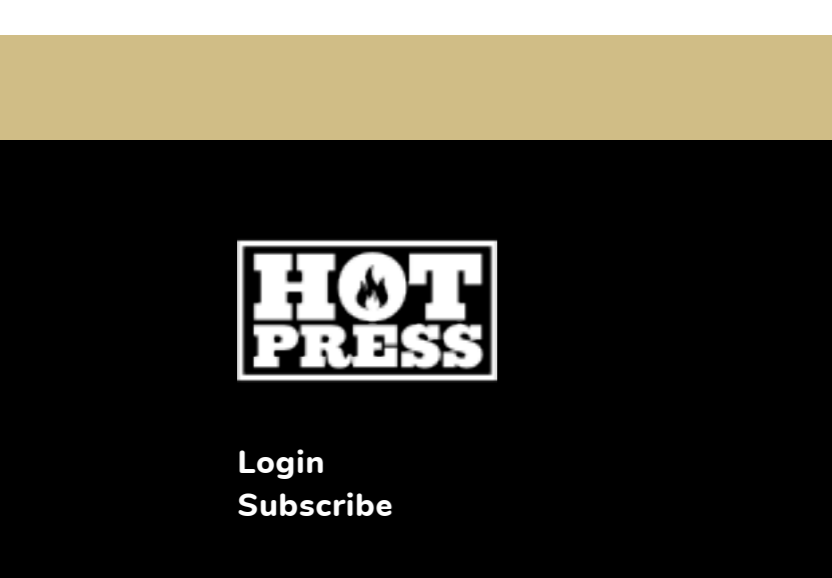
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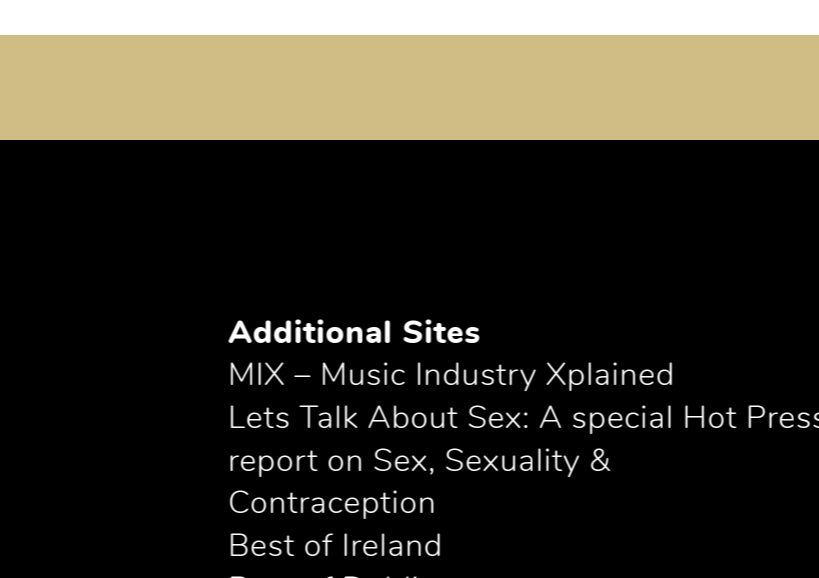
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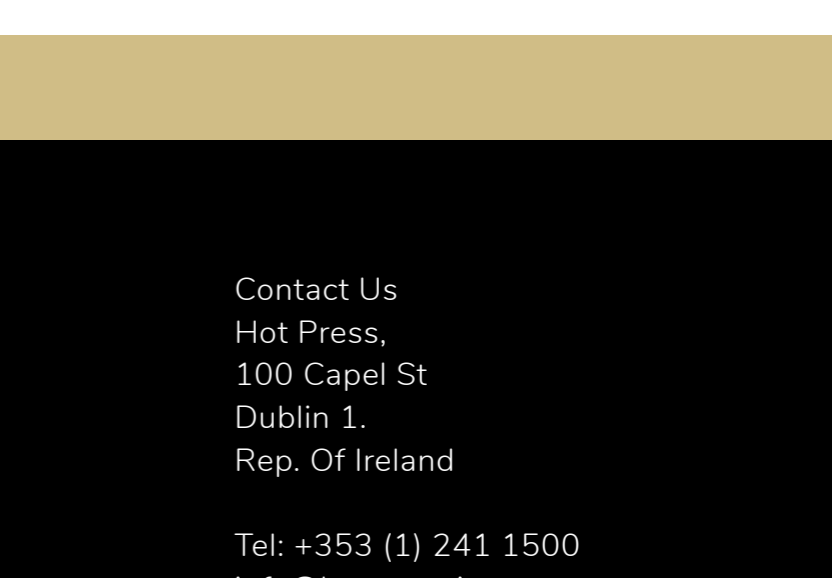
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