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The Cranberries, HMV Hammersmith Apollo, London



MATILDA BATTERSBY | WEDNESDAY 03 OCTOBER 2012

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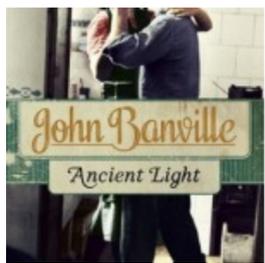


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Dolores O'Riordan opens tonight's performance with an apology: "I'm sorry it took us so long to get here". The diminutive singer, whose hair has been cropped short and dyed from its native auburn a shocking ash blonde, is not referring to the fairly respectable starting time of 9pm on a Tuesday.

This gig, the whole European tour, in fact, was originally scheduled for June and July. But it was cancelled at last minute, due to unspecified personal reasons. "I wasn't very well," explains O'Riordan. "And I lost my father a year ago. So thanks very much for waiting."

The band kicks off with "Conduct" from their new album, *Roses*. It is a low-key start, the familiar lilt of O'Riordan's honey rich voice not quite hitting the heights it used to. But she jiggles and gyrates up and down the stage enthusiastically and the crowd wakes up when the strains of "Linger" ring out and the much-loved banshee wailing begins. The initial low ebb swells up as the crowd mouths every word: "You know I'm such a fool for you. You got me wrapped around your finger, ah, ha ha." O'Riordan gives up trying to sing the chorus and hands the mic over to the audience.

With No Doubt and Garbage, The Cranberries are among a slew of popular nineties bands to have reformed after many years of hiatus. Their latest album, released in early 2012, has received mixed reviews. New single "Tomorrow" takes an upbeat, electronic direction which is pleasing; and "Losing My Mind", set to a thumping percussive heartbeat reminiscent of early Radiohead, is another winner. But the crowd clamours for the old tunes - not many of which are forthcoming.

A further hint at O'Riordan's state of health comes when she disappears from view during "I Can't Be With You". Her bewildered-looking bandmates peer helplessly into the wings and strum the equivalent of hold music for a good ten minutes. When O'Riordan re-emerges she has swapped her jeans and cardi for a black puffball tutu which she looks incredible in. But the break feels unscheduled and takes a lot longer than a normal costume change. "It's been four months, so I'm taking it easy," she explains. "The old anatomy's not what it used to be."

They troop on, playing "Zombie" and "Salvation", encoring with "No Need To Argue". But tonight, in its languorousness, feels like the end of an exhaustive tour, not the beginning of one.



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