

The Cranberries join a very elite club as *Zombie* passes one billion YouTube views

The Cranberries have beaten U2 to become the first Irish band to join Guns N Roses and Nirvana in YouTube's exclusive hall of fame

By Neil McCormick, MUSIC CRITIC

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The Cranberries' video for *Zombie* has surpassed one billion views on YouTube | CREDIT: Universal

Zombie by The Cranberries has passed a billion views on YouTube, putting them in a tiny elite of rock bands to achieve this incredible level of video streaming. The video platform is dominated by pop, the musical lingua franca of the globe, with artists from Taylor Swift to Ed Sheeran notching up extraordinary numbers. But only a handful of rock artists have ever reached the billion mark.

Hair rock monoliths Guns N Roses have two songs registering over a billion views, November Rain and Sweet Child O' Mine. Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody from 1975 is the oldest song to hit the mark, whilst Nirvana weigh in with 90s grunge anthem, Smells Like Teen Spirit. American rap rockers Linkin Park and inventive contemporary outfit Twenty One Pilots have registered huge views, and there is a big audience for the slick electro pop dance rock blends of Imagine Dragons and Coldplay. These are all globe straddling rock brands. And then there is [a certain little Irish indie guitar group](#), fronted by a soft-spoken Limerick woman with the demeanour of a choirgirl and voice like a force of nature.

Undoubtedly, the tragic [death of singer Dolores O'Riordan](#), in January 2018 aged 46, has contributed to The Cranberries status among the elite. But their spookily intense song had exerted its uncanny grip long before. *Zombie* is The Cranberries fiercest rocker, from their second album, No Need To Argue (1994). An accusatory lament, it grapples with the endless recriminations of the Irish Troubles, with a slow rolling bass and thumping mid tempo beat, finding tension between melodic delicacy and introspection in the verses with an electrifyingly fierce chorus charged with distorted grungy guitars.

It was written by O'Riordan as a protest after IRA bombings in Warrington killed two children and injured 56 others in March 1993. The video was directed by Samuel Bayer, who also made the promo for Nirvana's Teen Spirit. It cuts between black and white footage of Northern Irish street scenes depicting children playing war games, and surreal images of a golden O'Riordan performing before a giant cross wearing a crown of thorns. Recorded and filmed 11 years before YouTube was even launched in 2005, its powerful anti-war message has continued to resonate, slowly accruing a billion views over 15 years. To put that in perspective, their countrymen U2's most popular video, for Beautiful Day from 2001, is a very long way behind with 138 million views. *Zombie* received a further boost in 2017, when Eminem sampled it for his comeback album, Revival, O'Riordan's voice rising up feverishly on the choruses of In Your Head.

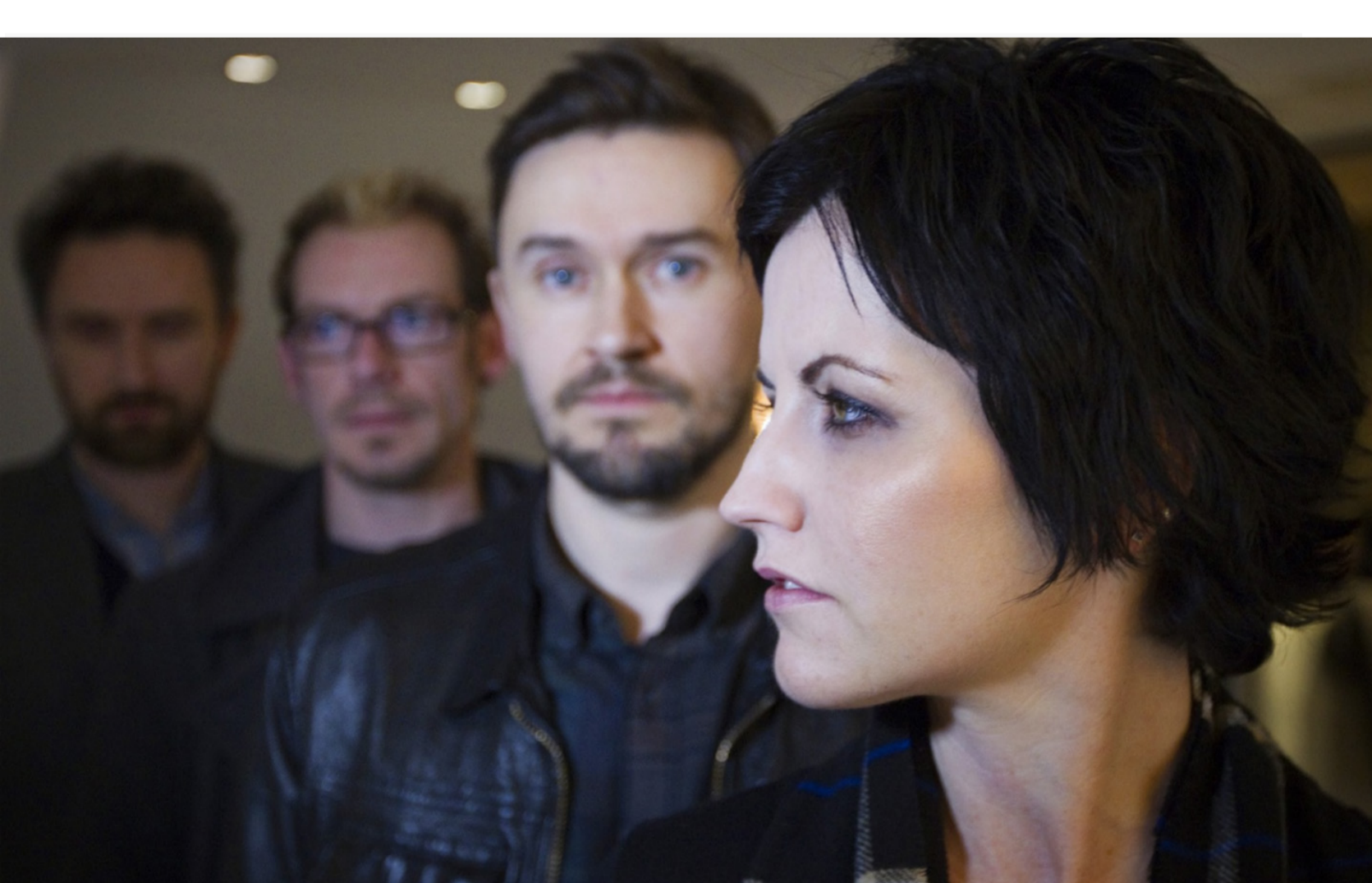
There was always a quality of intense vulnerability about [O'Riordan](#), the sense of a thin emotional skin. Her distinctively tremulous vocal style was deeply rooted in her Irish heritage, somewhere between keening folk and banshee wail. Alternating between feyness and fierceness, her extreme sensitivity feminised The Cranberries' Celtic rock.



While it would not be fair to say that The Cranberries came out of nowhere, they came out of Limerick, which is almost the same thing. They were the first band from their hometown to make it on the international stage. Their 1992 debut album, Everybody's Doing It, So Why Can't We? was a slow burner before catching fire in America. Over the next five years The Cranberries scored number one hits in 26 countries, while their first three albums notched up sales in excess of 28 million. As frontwoman and chief songwriter, O'Riordan's emotional pitch and earworm hooks found resonance with fans of grunge, emo and the edgy drama of American alternative rock.

O'Riordan was initially portrayed as an innocent naif, perhaps because she spent her youth singing in church and spoke softly with the sweetest of accents. But there was nothing particularly delicate or winsome about O'Riordan in person, it has to be said. She dressed provocatively, spoke with conviction and generally comported herself with a very Irish quality of cheery friendliness. She was quite capable of drinking most of her band mates under the table. When I interviewed her for the Telegraph in 1999, she clattered in late complaining of an eight-pint hangover. "D'you ever go out sober and sit with a bunch of drunken people? It's so boring, man!" she explained. "So you have to get involved and start slapping it back yourself!"

Unfortunately, that swagger masked real vulnerability. At the height of her 90's fame, O'Riordan struggled with anorexia and suffered a nervous breakdown. "I weighed six and a half stone, I was like a walking bone rack," she told me. "I couldn't sleep, couldn't function, chronically crying all the time, I was just a mess... I never talked, just sat in a corner, silent, shaking my head, really freaked by people and very paranoid." On doctor's orders, the band cancelled their 1996 tour and to all intents and purposes ceased to exist for several years.



The Cranberries in 2012 | CREDIT: AFP

The Cranberries returned at the end of the decade, by which time O'Riordan was seeing a therapist, and had been diagnosed with Bipolar disorder. "I wish you could go to college and do a course on how to deal with fame," O'Riordan told me. "Cause nobody can't We? was a slow burner before catching fire in America. Over the next five years The Cranberries scored number one hits in 26 countries, while their first three albums notched up sales in excess of 28 million. As frontwoman and chief songwriter, O'Riordan's emotional pitch and earworm hooks found resonance with fans of grunge, emo and the edgy drama of American alternative rock." "I couldn't sleep, couldn't function, chronically crying all the time, I was just a mess... I never talked, just sat in a corner, silent, shaking my head, really freaked by people and very paranoid." On doctor's orders, the band cancelled their 1996 tour and to all intents and purposes ceased to exist for several years.

Even as she got her career back on track, O'Riordan continued to struggle emotionally. A 20-year-long marriage to tour manager Don Burton produced three children but ended in divorce in 2014. A 2017 tour was cancelled after a few dates because of O'Riordan's unspecified health issues. There had been at least two failed suicide attempts, although the coroner ruled her death to be accidental. She drowned in a hotel bath on 15th January, 2018, following sedation by alcohol and small amounts of prescription drugs. She was in London to re-record a version of *Zombie* the following day, with heavy rock band Bad Wolves. That sombre and highly charged version, without Dolores but respectfully referencing her iconic golden appearance in the original video, has itself registered over 300,000 views on YouTube.

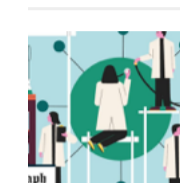
It is one of the tragic dynamics of rock culture that it is often the most vulnerable artists who create music that touches listeners most deeply. For some, music can be both balm and torment. O'Riordan's voice has remained a touchstone precisely because you can hear so much undisguised emotion in every note. *Zombie* is a song for the ages.

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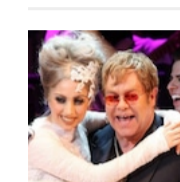


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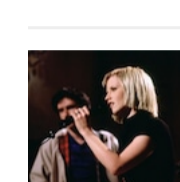
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