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# That time the Cranberries played a free show in DC — and a riot broke out



By Neal Augenstein | @AugensteinWTOP  
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With the death of Cranberries singer Dolores O'Riordan, long-time fans are recalling an impromptu show in the nation's capital that turned into a melee.



Dolores O'Riordan and the Cranberries played a free, lunchtime show at the Sylvan Theater on May 15, 1995. (Photo: 1995 by Brian Liu/ToolboxDC)



**WTOP's Neal Augenstein recalls The Cranberries in D.C.**  
JASON FRALEY

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WASHINGTON — As the Cranberries rose to global stardom, on May 15, 1995, they played a free show in the nation's capital that turned into a melee.

With Monday's sudden death of singer Dolores O'Riordan, at the age of 46, Cranberries fans who have lived in the Washington area are remembering the lunchtime show at the Sylvan Theater, on the grounds of the Washington Monument.

In 1995, WTOP Director of Marketing Mary Kay LeMay was the promotions manager at WHFS, the alternative station that sponsored the show.

"It was a (Monday) so we only expected 3,000 and 10,000 showed up," said LeMay. "So, there weren't enough police."

At the time, the Cranberries were hugely popular on MTV.

Bill Glasser, the director of marketing and promotions at WHFS at the time, orchestrated the show which turned out bigger than anyone had predicted.

"I'm the guy who put the deal together, with the U.S. Park Police, and the Metropolitan Police Department," Glasser recalled.

"Little did we know, it seemed like everybody in the Washington area cut school, and showed up," said WHFS DJ Bob Waugh.

Despite the show starting 45 minutes late, LeMay recalled O'Riordan didn't seem in a rush to take the stage.

"There was an antsy crowd and she was literally filing her nails," LeMay said.

Waugh said the crowd started an impromptu mosh pit.

Eventually the concert started — but didn't last long.

"They finally came out, and people actually were stage diving and moshing to 'Linger,'" a largely acoustic ballad, said LeMay.

"They only got through a song and a half before we were told to stop the show," said Waugh.

LeMay said other people in the outdoor amphitheater were tossing bottles and cans toward the stage.

"I had crap all over me from people throwing food and drinks at the stage," she said.

"Wes Johnson (then of WHFS, and also longtime P.A. announcer for the Washington Capitals) was on stage, trying to tell people to stop pushing and calm down, and that made it worse," said LeMay. "Then all hell broke loose."

U.S. Park Police determined the free show had turned dangerous, and ordered the music stopped. The Cranberries left, and were replaced on stage by police in riot helmets.

"They pulled the plug," said LeMay.

As the crowd surged, O'Riordan's acoustic guitar was stolen, LeMay said.

Waugh said he whisked the band to the airport, as Johnson tried to calm the disappointed crowd.

"I put the Cranberries in my black Izuzu Rodeo, and drove them to National Airport," said Waugh. "All along the way they seemed quite amused — it really struck them, for the first time perhaps, how popular they were in the United States."

**WTOP's Jason Fraley remembers Dolores O'Riordan**  
JASON FRALEY

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*Editor's note: A previous version of this story said that Mary Kay LeMay was WHFS's Director of Marketing in 1985, the story has been updated to show she was WHFS's promotions manager in 1995, when the concert took place. Bill Glasser was the director of marketing and promotions.*

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