



IT'S BEEN two years, two long years, but the wait has been worth it. Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We? is an album that would be worth waiting any amount of years for...

"We feel very comfortable with this album," offers Dolores O'Riordan lead singer with the Cranberries. "We've had so much time to get it right. We know it's the best we possibly could do. Whether that's good enough for everybody else, well..."

Another bite of the cherry

The Cranberries interview

The long break between our initial hype and the actual release of the album has meant that we're a much more mature band now," says Fergal Lawlor, the band's skin-basher. "If we had've released it during that initial press frenzy, we'd probably be obnoxious, blubbering idiots today."

little things like releasing top albums. Dolores: "Looking back to when we first started, we were getting rave attention from the likes of Melody Maker and NME and we were only kids really. There was one 17-year-old and three 18-year-olds. If we hadn't stepped back when we did... well, the nose job wouldn't be far off, would it?"

The Cranberries were formed in the fair city of Limerick in the summer of

1991, four like-minded souls into the mystic, the music and the thrill of it all. The four were content to play their own particular and peculiar form of ethereal dreamscape pop for anyone who'd care to listen, and that soon became quite a few.

"We simply didn't know what was going on," laughs Fergal. "Is this the way it is for all bands? It can't be this easy! We knew it couldn't last though. We knew it would end in tears."

"It was like being swept off your feet," explains Dolores, "and then realising that you may be just dropped on your backside without any forewarning. Pretty soon, we knew we'd better get out of London and get back to Limerick. It was all getting too much."

Deciding to lie low for a while the band set about writing and recording their debut album, having secured a deal with Island Records. That was last year. Before it was to be released however, the band had one more problem that had to be solved. A manager with an ego as big as Texas.

"He just got way out of hand," Dolores states flatly. "He was beginning to suffocate us; he was over-protective, and it was like, 'You're my band, and don't you go off and develop your own personalities too much'. We had to part company."

The Cranberries' immediate plans include a handful of secret gigs at the beginning of April ("No, we can't tell you where..."), with a short tour of France and Holland following, plus a handful of summer festival dates already penciled in.

Question Time:

TO MANY people Dáil Éireann seems to be an expensive, poorly run talking shop, in which long-winded, pointless speeches are delivered to an almost empty chamber.

This view may be oversimplistic; much of the real work done in Leinster House happens behind closed doors, away from the television cameras. And in any case the empty Dáil chamber is matched by empty public and press galleries, most of the time. But are the speeches delivered there really as pointless and irrelevant as some people think?

Few TDs would agree with this viewpoint, though all are agreed that the Dáil badly needs to review the way it operates. According to Frances Fitzgerald, new Fine Gael TD, front bench member and a former chairwoman of the Council for the Status of Women, the standard of Dáil debates has been mixed.

"You can get very high quality speeches that are quite thought provoking... but is it really debate? In a sense what you get very often is a series of statements as opposed to debate. Some speeches are read in a ritualistic way without intellectual conviction. They are going through it for the sake of routine."

Pat Rabbitte, Democratic Left TD and a former trade union official agrees. In his view, the Dáil's procedures invites TDs to treat speeches as opportunities "merely to place one's point of view on record of the House."

Furthermore the Dáil's procedures add to the impression that the Dáil is irrelevant. "It's absurd that there are major issues of the day debated everywhere but in the Dáil chamber."

The Dáil's procedures would appear to the layman almost to have been designed to stifle debate and discussion. TDs can't, for example, interrupt during someone's speech to ask a question or check a fact. In the British House of Commons, such interventions, even when ruled out of order, can be made because the small size of the Commons chamber enables members to be heard without microphones.

The larger Dáil chamber, in contrast, relies totally on the power of microphones. When they are switched off no contribution can be heard by the TDs or by the press and the public.

Pat Rabbitte says: "It's terribly frustrating, in the middle of the cut and

It's absurd that major issues of the day are debated everywhere but in the Dáil

thrust of spontaneous debate, as distinct from stage-managed mock indignation, that one finds oneself with one's mike cut off, as a deliberate tactic to control the exchanges. That's regrettable."

In the experience of Michael Noonan, Fine Gael front bench member and a TD since 1981, even the presence of the television cameras has had the effect of restricting TDs' ability to intervene.

"Microphones are synchronised with the camera. Camera off. Microphone off."

The camera follows the Ceann Comhairle in the event of a disturbance or a major row in the House. "And as soon as the Ceann Comhairle's microphone goes on your're cut. So there's less opportunity to interrupt now."

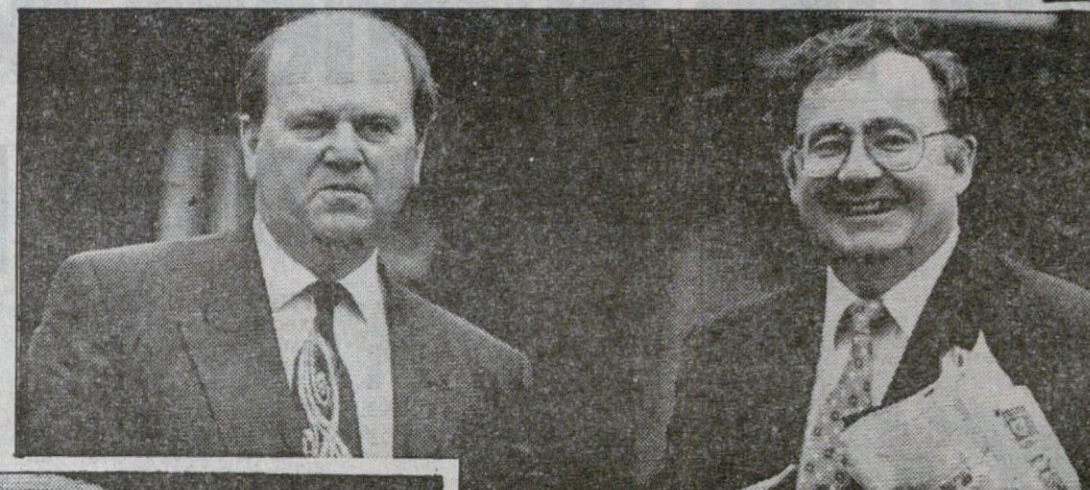
As one of the most experienced TDs Michael Noonan has noticed a substantial change in the standard of Dáil debating in the last decade. "There's less debate and more speech-making."

People now speak in rota from prepared scripts except on the Budget. The Minister's speech is normally scripted by the Civil Servants, and then the Opposition man gets up and he reads his speech. There isn't a clash of opinions. The problem is that if you go into the Dáil and really debate, in a sense of picking up ideas generated and discussing them, there is no coverage in newspapers, because the press won't cover anything unless the script is given to them."

As evidence of this he notes the absence of journalists from the Dáil's press gallery except for "set pieces, first speeches in debate etc." To get coverage, a TD is told by

How can we improve our TDs' word power?

SOMETHING TO SAY: Some of the TDs who compliment each other on their eloquence (clockwise, from right) Michael Noonan with Pat Rabbitte, Dr Jim McDaid, Frances Fitzgerald and Charlie McCreery.



SPEECH! SPEECH!

Jim Duffy LOOKS FOR REAL DÁIL DEBATE

his or her press office "you have to have a script." Even some of the best unscripted comments in the Dáil may not get coverage because journalists may not be there to hear them.

Other TDs too lay part of the blame for the increasing reliance by TDs on scripts for the media. For Jim McDaid, a Fianna Fáil TD since 1989, the problem is not with the

demand for journalists that they get scripts in advance but in the need of the TDs to avoid being misquoted.

The dangers of having opinions misrepresented or misunderstood by commentators are reduced when a TD has a script that can be supplied to whoever wants it.

One of the few times for unscripted speeches is the Budget debate. By its very

nature much of the opposition's Finance spokesperson Budget speech, which follows the Minister's own speech, must be ad-libbed. This adds to the drama of the occasion.

According to Michael Noonan, until recently Fine Gael's Finance spokesman: "When the minister begins to read the (Budget) speech, the full text is given out to former

Ministers. So you read faster, silently, than he reads orally." It may take a Minister up to an hour to read his Budget speech whereas the Opposition spokesperson can read the speech through in about 20 minutes, and spend the rest of the time drafting his reply.

But what about the risk of failure, of an Opposition spokesperson making a mess of it?

"Two things could happen. Because you are reading very quickly and you are not listening to him you may miss an important announcement. And there is always the fear that you don't mention what's really agitating the nation. The other risk is if he announces something new in the tax area that's complex and not quite clear, and suddenly you get the wrong end of the stick."

With the experience of replying to every Budget since 1987 it's hardly surprising that Michael Noonan is regarded as one of the Dáil's best speakers. Among Michael Noonan's own favourite debaters are: Charlie McCreery, "when he was in opposition;" Pat Rabbitte; and the man he will now be shadowing, the Minister for Transport, Brian Cowen, who is

"intelligent and good with words." Another favourite was Charles Haughey, "the best, a very good parliamentarian. Very astute."

In Pat Rabbitte's view the best current Dáil speakers include party colleague Eamon Gilmore, Michael McDowell, Jim Kemmy, Michael Noonan and Michael D. Higgins. Deputy Rabbitte himself is regarded as one of the best Dáil contributors by

Frances Fitzgerald. In her words the Democratic Left TD is "quite outstanding in his use and understanding of the mechanisms of the Dáil." Another of her favourite contributors is PD Deputy Leader, Mary Harney, while for Jim McDaid, among the best Fianna Fáil speakers in the House are Brian Lenihan and Brian Cowen.

The standard of Dáil debates may be higher than the public realises but that doesn't mean that good contributors to debates can guarantee their re-election that way, as was discovered by Democratic Left's Pat McCartan, by everyone's estimation one of the best TDs in the Dáil, who lost his seat in last year's general election.

The fact remains that for most of the electorate the judge of a good TD is whether he or she does local constituency work and tackles local issues, not what contributions they may make on the Dáil floor. And that is why so few TDs are to be seen in the Dáil chamber during debates; instead they are to be found beavering away in their offices, doing the type of local work that will hopefully get them re-elected. And who can blame them?

GIG Guide

TONIGHT

Belfast - Rotterdam Bar: Dye
Cork - Lobby Bar: Acts from Scoll Stiofáin Naofa.
Derry - Dungloe Bar: Errol Walsh & Victor McCullough.
Dublin - Bad Bobs: Cool Cats, Baggot Inn: 3 to 1 Night, Harcourt Hotel: Sandi Miller, McDaid's: Joe Lahart, Rock Garden: Breakthrough Night (9pm)/Skatchewan (11pm), Whelans: Hada To Hada.

WEDNESDAY

Cork - Lobby Bar: Gerry Harrington & Eoin O'Sullivan.
Dublin - An Beal Bocht: The Sea, Bad Bobs: Brush Shiels, Baggot Inn: Godot, Barnstormers: Foreign Correspondents, Horse, Swamp, Madigans: International Blues Band, Mother Redcaps: Kieran Halpin, Rock Garden: Captain Rex, Gradapenda Rosindale, The Mahogany Men (9pm)/Bird (11pm), Whelans: Interference.
Galway - Seapoint: Christy Hennessey.

THURSDAY

Belfast - Rotterdam Bar: Chris Smither.
Cork - Brideswell Theatre: The Golden Horde.
Cork - Lobby Bar: Open Kitchen, Connollys of Leap, Medicine Shack.
Dublin - An Beal Bocht: The Sea, Bad Bobs: Brush Shiels, Baggot Inn: Godot, Barnstormers: Foreign Correspondents, Horse, Swamp, Madigans: International Blues Band, Mother Redcaps: Kieran Halpin, Rock Garden: Captain Rex, Gradapenda Rosindale, The Mahogany Men (9pm)/Bird (11pm), Whelans: Interference.
Galway - Seapoint: Christy Hennessey.

SOUNDSAROUND Weekly gig guide

FRIDAY

Belfast - Elmwood Hall: Bringing It All Back Home, Rotterdam Bar: Gary Hall & The Stormkeepers.
Cork - The Village: Leatherface.
Dublin - Andrews Lane: The Outbacks, International Blues Band, Mother Redcaps: Leon Francis with Honor Heferan, Meeting Place: Tiny Tribes, Smashing Things, Olympia: The Big Geraniums, Rock Garden: Maxman (9pm)/The Naked Lunch (11pm), Tivoli: Goats Don't Shave.
Galway - Vagabonds: Captain Rex, Kildare - Ballymore Eustace: Chris Smither.
Limerick - Theatre Royal: Wicked Sensation, Mrs Murphy's Horse.
Newmarket - Hi-Land: The Golden Horde.

SATURDAY

Belfast - Rotterdam Bar: Errol Walsh and Victor McCullough.
Cork - Lobby Bar: Chris Smither.
Derry - Union Hall: Leatherface.
Dublin - Mother Redcaps: Fallen Angels, Deiseal, Meeting Place: Red Head, Without A Face.

Paul Byrne

National Concert Hall: Bringing It All Back Home, Olympia: Sam Brown, Rock Garden: Warp Factor 4, Groovythings, The Foreign Correspondents (11pm)/Dann You Peter Pan (9pm)/Frog (11pm), Stadium: Christy Hennessey, Tivoli: Suede, Whelans: Mary Coughlan.
Limerick - Theatre Royal: Maura O'Connell (9pm)/Jacob Ladder, Arts (11pm).
Louth - Drogheda, The Village: The Precious Stones.
Sligo - Clarence Hotel: Captain Rex.
Tipperary - Roscrea, Pathe Hotel: Seventeen.
Westmeath - Athlone, Hudson Bay Hotel: Brendan O'Carroll.

MONDAY

Belfast - Rotterdam Bar: Hank Wangford & The Last Cowboys.
Cork - Lobby Bar: Rick Danko.
Dublin - The Garage: The Tolka River Delta Boys, Marlene's: Tyrrells Pass, Rock Garden: Breakthrough Night (9pm)/The Visitors (11pm), Whelans: Chris Smither.
Tullamore - Pat's Bar: Bringing It All Back Home.
Waterford - Forum: Christy Hennessey.

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