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# Musicreviews



## The Cranberries In The End

★★★★★

CD BMG

**WHEN DOLORES O'RIORDAN** drowned in her bathtub in January 2018, The Cranberries' glory days were already behind them. She was 46 years old and the Irish band she had led to the top of the charts in the nineties had released only one album of new material in 17 years. At the time of her death, the group's most recent release was a limp attempt to relive past triumphs with a collection of 'unplugged' versions of their greatest hits such as *Linger*, *Dreams* and *Zombie*.

Yet the outpouring of grief on O'RIORDAN's death proved that the group had not been forgotten. More than that, when we turned back to their classic recordings, we realised just how much we had missed The Cranberries and their bittersweet, jangling pop-rock guitars. Above all, we had missed O'RIORDAN's uniquely keening voice. What we didn't know was that when she died The Cranberries were not only planning a comeback, but the songs for a new album had all been written.

For several months guitarist Noel Hogan had been sending demos of new tunes to O'RIORDAN at her home in New York, where she wrote lyrics and added vocals. With a horrible irony, Hogan received the final demos from her by email the day before she died. "Dolores was so energised by the prospect of making this record and getting back out on the road to play the songs live," he reported.

After a period of grieving, the band and O'RIORDAN's family agreed that the best way to honour her memory was to complete the album. Last autumn the surviving members of the band went into a London studio and spent four weeks building the tracks around her vocal demos.

Under the circumstances, *In The End* is a far better record than perhaps it has any right to be. In what turned out to be a masterstroke, Stephen Street, who had produced the group's early (and best) albums, was recalled and his deft touch has both revived the wide-eyed innocence of the

band's trademark sound and updated it by adding a patina of experience that's tinged in equal parts with both wisdom and regret.

The opener *All Over Now* fizzles with an edgy pop brio as O'RIORDAN sings about the past with heartbreaking poignancy. On the haunting *Lost* she sounds as troubled and vulnerable as Sinead O'Connor. There's a more upbeat swing to *Summer Song* on which a wistful vocal is juxtaposed against a sun-dappled guitar jangle before the album closes with the melancholic title track, on which she sings: "Ain't it strange when everything you dreamed of was nothing that you dreamed of..." It's as if she's singing her own obituary and it takes a hard heart not to weep.

Once the album was finished, the band announced that their work was done and The Cranberries are now no more. *In The End* is a fitting and powerful final chapter that stands as both valediction and celebration. **NW**