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'I WAS SO YOUNG WHEN I GOT FAMOUS. I DIDN'T WANT TO SHOW PEOPLE ANY FRAGILITIES OR FEARS: I WAS TRYING TO BE THIS TOUGH PERSON THAT I FELT WAS EXPECTED OF ME'

DOLORES O'RIORDAN

Words by MICHELLE DAVIES

She fronted one of the 90s biggest bands, but her life was tragically cut short last year. Now, in her honour, The Cranberries have released their final album with the late singer

In 1980 it was tradition in the town of Ballybricken, Ireland, for children to be taken to the local pub at weekends by their uncles and aunts. For nine-year-old Dolores O'Riordan it was a treat not just because she got to drink lemonade and eat crisps, but because she was invited to sing for the punters. 'When I'd go to the pub, they'd be like, "Oh, there's the little O'Riordan" and "Would you sing this song?" They'd always ask me to sing a lot of country songs - Dolly Parton and things like that,' she revealed. The locals obviously knew talent when they saw it - just 13 years later, O'Riordan had swapped the small-town pub for concert venues around the world as the lead singer of the alt-rock band The Cranberries. They sold an estimated 40 million records worldwide and achieved critical acclaim for their bestselling tracks *Linger*, *Dreams* and *Zombie*.

Sadly, though, like too many of music's great names, O'Riordan's life was cut short last year when she was found dead in a London hotel room at the age of 46. A year on, her bandmates - guitarist Noel Hogan, his bass-playing brother Mike and drummer Fergal Lawler - have released a final album, *In The End*, featuring recordings O'Riordan made shortly before her unexpected death. 'It's like a little gift she left behind,' Lawler recently said.

The singer was born Dolores Mary Eileen O'Riordan on 6 September 1971 in Ballybricken, a town ten miles outside Limerick. The youngest of nine children (two died in infancy), she was close to her father, Terry, a former farm labourer who was brain damaged in a motorbike accident, and her mother, Eileen, a school caterer. 'I had a really good childhood,' said O'Riordan. 'There was always a good dinner on the table every day, clean clothes every morning for school and we were warm in bed at night. We grew up with very little materialism.'

In 1990, the Hogan brothers and Lawler held auditions in Limerick for a singer to join their band, then known as The Cranberry Saw Us. Eighteen-year-old O'Riordan went along and the trio were bowled over by her raw talent. 'When she sang I wondered how and why she wasn't already in a band,' said Noel Hogan. 'I didn't want to question it, though; we were lucky enough that she had come into this room.' They'd already made a demo of *Linger*, but O'Riordan took the tape home, listened to it and rewrote the lyrics to become a powerful anthem about first love. 'You know when you're a teenager, you're dating and you get a broken heart and it's just so fatal? Well, *Linger* came around that "fatal love" kind of stage in my life, when it was all drama,' O'Riordan would later recall.

After a name change to The Cranberries, the band signed to Island Records and released their first album *Everyone Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?* in March 1993. It charted low, but then MTV began playing the *Linger* video on heavy rotation, and on rerelease in 1994 the album went to number one in the UK and sold 5 million copies in the US. But O'Riordan was so shy, she often performed with her back



Clockwise from far left: O'Riordan on stage in Dublin in 1995; The Cranberries in 1993; the singer on her wedding day with husband Don Burton



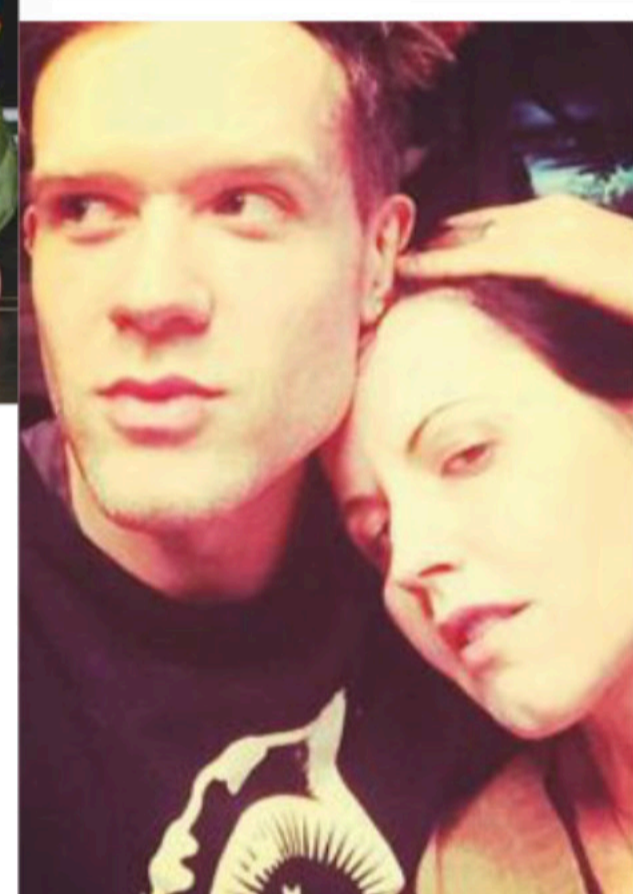
to the audience. And, as the band's popularity grew, she struggled with being in the spotlight. 'I lived in a bus with strangers, touring the world with the band, seeing the insides of hotels. These were the days before mobile phones, so I had to find a phone box just to talk to my parents. I went nuts I was so lonely,' she said.

She began to experience depression, triggered in part by a skiing accident in January 1994 in Val D'Isere, France. O'Riordan, then 22, had never skied before, but inexplicably decided to go on a treacherous black run for her first attempt. 'As it was getting steeper and steeper, and I was going faster and faster, I realised that I'd have to throw myself over to try and stop,' she later recalled. 'I crashed, and the next thing I remember is being carried down the slope on a stretcher.' She severely ruptured a ligament in her knee and underwent surgery. It took intensive physiotherapy to get her walking again, but she had a terrific incentive - her forthcoming wedding to former Duran Duran tour manager, Don Burton. 'My aim was to walk down the aisle, which I did,' she said. The pair had met when The Cranberries supported Duran Duran on tour in 1993 and were married in the tiny town of Holycross, in Tipperary, 35 miles from Ballybricken, in July 1994. The bride wore a see-through lace jumpsuit and knee-high boots, and the Canadian-born groom, then 32, was in a snakeskin suit.

Despite her joy at getting married, however, O'Riordan's depression worsened and later that year she had a breakdown. The couple moved to a house they bought on Big Bald Lake in Ontario, Canada. However, she and The Cranberries continued to record and perform, and their next album *No Need To Argue* went triple platinum within a year. The lead single *Zombie* reached number one in eight countries.

By the mid-90s, such was her fame that the band had become known as 'Dolores O'Riordan and those three other guys'. They embarked on a 117-date world tour but never finished it. The singer, who was 5ft 1in, had developed anorexia. Her weight dropped to just 6st 7lb and she had another breakdown. 'I was having nightmares, seeing things that weren't in the room,' she said. The rest of the ►

Clockwise from below left: with daughter Molly after winning an EBBA award in Cannes; performing in Paris in 2012; the band at the 1996 MTV Video Music Awards; with boyfriend Olé Koretsky



Canada, she was living in New York and not seeing them. 'She missed her kids,' said Lawler. 'She found it very hard to be away from them. That kind of ate away at her.'

O'Riordan spoke to Lawler and the others about recording again a few months later, and

the singer seemed to be on a more even keel – she'd begun dating her D.A.R.K. bandmate DJ Olé Koretsky. 'She was a lot more herself,' Noel Hogan told *Rolling Stone* magazine. '[Her doctors] had found the right cocktail of whatever [medication] she needed to be on.' By the latter half of 2017 The Cranberries had started working on a new album and things looked positive. O'Riordan would write the lyrics in New York and email them to Hogan in Ireland to come up with the melodies. In January 2018, they agreed to begin rehearsals in Ireland for a tour, but first O'Riordan needed to fly to London to complete some other work.

But, on 15 January 2018, she called her mum at 3am from her room at the Park Lane Hilton Hotel intoxicated. Eileen said her daughter was upbeat, but admitted she'd been drinking to relax. Later that morning, a maid found O'Riordan submerged in the bath in her pyjamas. Tests showed that while she had only 'therapeutic' amounts of medication in her blood, she was four times over the drink-drive limit, and an inquest held in September 2018 ruled she'd drowned due to intoxication. A verdict of accidental death was recorded. It was devastating for many, especially her bandmates, who thought she'd turned a corner. 'It felt like this fog had kind of lifted and gone, that she was coming out of a darker time in her life,' said Noel Hogan.

They hope fans will agree *In The End* is a fitting tribute to O'Riordan. Speaking publicly about the album in February, her mother admitted she had yet to play it. 'I'm delighted with it. I thought I'd listen to it, but I don't feel ready. No use in getting yourself upset,' she said. Asked for her final thoughts on her daughter, she said, 'I think she's at peace.' ■

tour was cancelled, the band put on hold, and O'Riordan and Burton flew to the Bahamas to allow her to recuperate. Despite the ongoing stress, she gave birth to their son Taylor in 1997. 'He helped me get better,' she said. 'I found my happiness again so I started singing again.'

She returned to the recording studio with the rest of the band and the aptly named album *Bury The Hatchet*, featuring the single *Promises*, was released in the UK in April 1999. It struggled to match the sales of their previous releases, and their next two albums fell similarly short of expectations. Then, in September 2003, The Cranberries announced they were taking a break to pursue individual projects. For O'Riordan, then 32, that meant settling into family life in Canada. By then she and Burton also had a daughter, Molly, born in January 2001. Dakota, their third child – a girl – came along in April 2005. 'I enjoyed living in Canada because I was treated like any ordinary person. It was very grounding,' she remarked.

What her fans didn't realise was that O'Riordan was struggling to come to terms with a disturbing secret: between the ages of eight and 12 she'd been sexually abused by a family friend. In 2013, after years of counselling, she revealed the abuse in an interview with *The Belfast Telegraph* conducted by journalist Barry Egan, a long-time friend. 'I buried it. It's what you do initially. You bury it because you are ashamed of it,' she said. 'I never talked about it before because I actually wasn't able to.' O'Riordan recounted how, in November 2011, she had come face to face with her abuser at her dad's funeral after his death following a long illness. 'I had nightmares for a year before he died about meeting him,' she told Egan. To her horror, her abuser approached her – he 'came over and cried and said "Sorry"'. O'Riordan admitted she often drank heavily to cope with it. 'I have a bad day when I have bad memories and I can't control them, and I hit the bottle,' she said.

In the midst of an otherwise bleak time, The Cranberries reunited and released the album *Roses* in 2012. But again it failed to replicate their early successes and, in April 2014, amid reports of an acrimonious fallout between her and Noel Hogan, O'Riordan began a solo project, forming a rock band called D.A.R.K. It was just seven months later that the singer was back in the headlines when she was arrested following an incident of 'air rage' at Shannon Airport. According to reports, the 44-year-old screamed at police officers that they 'can't arrest me. I'm an icon. I'm the queen of Limerick!' She was charged with assaulting a police officer and a flight attendant, and the case came to trial in February 2016. The presiding judge declined to convict her after learning she'd been diagnosed with bipolar disorder in the aftermath of the incident. He ruled that the mental illness had 'completely inhibited her judgement' and ordered her to donate £5,100 to the court's 'poor box' instead. It was during the case that it emerged O'Riordan was also divorcing her husband, and while he retained custody of their children in

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