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Bringing it all back home

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SHELLEY MARSDEN meets Dolores O'Riordan and Noel Hogan of The Cranberries to talk about panic attacks, growing up and getting their mojo back...

Fresh from a morning at Radio Two in the company of long-time fan and fellow Limerick native Terry Wogan (they sang Linger at Terry's behest, and the new single Tomorrow), Dolores O'Riordan and Noel Hogan are looking chilled out and happy when I meet them in the lobby of a Kensington hotel.

Noel is thoughtful, and softly spoken while Dolores, despite a clear case of cold, is positively bubbly. Both seem extremely relaxed, and it becomes clear that the ups and downs of their time in The Cranberries – at one point one of the biggest rock acts of the 90s, selling over 15 million albums in the US alone – has led them to a somewhat philosophical viewpoint on life and what's important.

The band are back and touring with a new album *Roses*, the first for a decade, due out next month. They also reveal they have a London date for mid June. But this time round, the pressure's off – it seems Dolores and Co. really are in it for the kicks.

Demons have been battled, babies have been had, loved ones have been lost and the group have, quite simply, grown up. The new songs reflect this more mature outlook (there are no angry anthems in here against "their bombs and their guns"), but *Roses*, under the direction of producer Stephen Street, has also managed to distil that gorgeous Cranberries sound that so many of us first fell in love with.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE BACK?

N: Well we've been playing as The Cranberries for two years now really, with the tour in 2010. We get tons of time off, too. But it's not like before where it was just all you did!

D: Yeah, it just got boring, it became a job. Having kids and things has given us a good balance in life. Before, you'd stop touring and it was this mad anti-climax. Now when we go home we're very busy being parents as well... we've got a good balance. No matter what you do in life, it is nice to have kids. It's the future, you know?

DID YOU STAY IN TOUCH AFTER THE BAND SPLIT IN 2003?

D: After 2003, we kind of lost touch for a couple of years. In around 2005 Noel and I started emailing stuff to each other. We'd send each other ideas creatively again.

N: The bulk of the album is songs that we were kind of working on and sharing ideas about since then. Dolores had her own stuff as well, so it's a combination of both. When the two boys came back, we played them some stuff, and... it just fell together really naturally. When we started the reunion tour, there was never talk of an album. It was really for the fun of being able to write, and not have any pressure.

YOU'RE TOURING ACROSS EUROPE – WHAT ABOUT THE UK?

N: We've actually just confirmed a gig for London – we'll be announcing the date and venue very soon, but it will be mid-June 2012.

DID YOU HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT A 'REUNION' AT FIRST?

D: It didn't really kick in until 2009, when I met the lads at an event at Trinity College, where I had been made an honorary patron of the Philosophical Society. I rang Noel and said "Look, they want me to do a few acoustic songs, will you come with me?" He said "Yeah, I'd love to, I'll get Mike as well". So I met the lads there. I was living in Canada – I still am – and hadn't seen Mike or Noel at that given point for six and a half years! Sometimes it's a year before I see siblings and nieces; I have a huge family, 43 nieces and nephews!

WHAT WAS THAT FIRST MEETING LIKE?

D: It was as if we hadn't stepped away from each other at all. There was no awkwardness; if anything there was an element of, "Let me scrutinise you until I see how you've changed". It was so comfortable, a feeling of family. As a band, you're put on a bus, squashed into confined areas all the time, it's unnatural. Can you get any closer? No, we're on top of each other! But it does leave you with that closeness. And when it's gone for a while, and you get it back, it's a nice feeling.

TEN YEARS IS A LIFETIME IN MUSIC. ARE YOU APPREHENSIVE ABOUT A CRANBERRIES ALBUM AFTER SO LONG?

D: Do ya know, we're very chilled out actually. It's all about having fun and enjoying it, day by day. A lot of stuff happens on the journey of life; you see a lot of things. If anything, we feel very fortunate to have gorgeous children, and enjoyed the success we had when we were young, and not gone completely mental. Well, at least I don't think we have, have we?!

HAVE YOU CHANGED A LOT AS PEOPLE?

N: Yeah, it's just maturity. No matter what you do in life, as you get older your views change on most things. When 'this' was all we had before there were families and other lives outside of the music, you scrutinised everything so much. You got worked up about silly things, whereas now, you realise there's far more in life. The Cranberries as a priority has dropped. Even though we love doing it, we have so many other things that are important to us. It makes it all a lot easier. We're far more relaxed; we don't think we know everything any more.

HAS 'ROSES' CAPTURED THE QUINTESSENTIAL CRANBERRIES?

D: Definitely, it's captured what it was we had the first couple of albums, really. Like his album, it was that vibe of... just doing it for a laugh, we had no contracts. And the material turned out to be good. It's when you're not trying that you write good stuff. After all the success, we were trying to write a lot of rockers, and went through the angry person phase... You're young and famous and everybody's asking you to write another song, write another song, and it's very hard to move on because people won't let you. So you're subliminally trying to write another hit, and it doesn't work. It's when you throw everything down, and you have no expectations and you're away from the public eye that the good stuff comes.

YOU WORKED ON IT WITH PRODUCER AND OLD FRIEND STEPHEN STREET. HOW WAS THAT?

D: Having had the experience of working with so many different people, you develop your confidence. When we worked on our first two albums with Stephen, he'd worked with Blur and people – as kids it was a little intimidating - "oh my god, he worked with The Smiths!" But now it's grand, we've had so much success since then together. We then did an album *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee* during the 90s, which I just cannot remember. Noel can't either.

THAT'S IMPRESSIVE MEMORY LOSS! WHY WAS THAT?

D: We were on tour, and we were obviously doing too much because... some things just are a bit of a blur when you're living that life. That album wasn't really here nor there. It was after I had my first daughter. I didn't do much of a tour after it, I had two little kids at that stage... In 2003 I remember thinking, what am I doing rushing back out on tour for? I'll never have my kids at this age again. I did not want to be in a band. We stopped, and it was the best thing we ever did.

N: Looking back, the writing was on the wall a little bit for the band. The fun element had gone a bit. It felt like a bit of a duty. We weren't bouncing out the door like we used to. Though it was scary to leave it all, because we went into the band from school, it's all we'd ever known. But that's what was great about *Roses* and the songs on there we've come up with over the years, in our own time. And with modern technology you could advance everything a bit more. Also, we had no record company banging on the door with release dates.

D: You've got to take a break when you feel the magic's gone. It's like any relationship. If your marriage has gone stale, you can work on it, take a break, then come back and see what you had to begin with.

'ROSES' IS CERTAINLY ABOUT GROWN UP THEMES - PARENTHOOD, DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS, ONE'S MORTALITY...

D: Oh yeah. When you have kids you think, it's actually quite hard being a grown-up! It's much easier to be a young woman jumping around the stage and acting like an idiot than a mum with responsibilities. Having that balance of keeping the excitement and then taking a break when it gets too much is great. It's all about choices... but sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees.

For the full interview, buy this week's Irish World (issue 28th Jan 2012) now!



The Cranberries' new album 'Roses' is out on February, 27 on Cooking Vinyl. For more info, including tour dates, visit www.cranberries.com.