

CALENDAR



The Cranberries

Guitarist Noel Hogan talks about the Irish band's sudden onset of popularity. The group, touring behind its 'No Need to Argue' album, will perform Thursday at Orlando's UCF Arena. Page 6

Cranberries ride rock's fast track

Success came so quickly that band members never had a chance to pay their dues.

By Parry Gettelman

SENTINEL POPULAR MUSIC CRITIC

The Cranberries are about as close to an overnight success as you get in rock 'n' roll. Not long after Dolores O'Riordan replaced the original male singer, the Irish band's demos attracted considerable industry attention and the intense interest of the British press, ever nosing about for the Next Big Thing.

"It was a bit strange," said guitarist Noel Hogan in a recent phone interview. "One week, we were playing to nobody, and the next week, we were still playing small clubs, but they were sold out. And we thought, 'Oh, no, we better learn how to play!'"

Pretty soon, O'Riordan, Hogan, bassist Mike Hogan (Noel's brother) and drummer Feargal Lawlor were major-label artists with a big hit, "Linger," and a platinum album, *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?* The band was well past the small-club phase without having had the luxury of paying its dues. Noel Hogan said facing huge audiences was a bit daunting initially.

"It's like starting a new job, and when you go in at first, you wonder what to do — will people look at me?" Hogan said in his thick brogue. "But it's like, we've been doing it a long time, and we're getting a bit better, I think. Hopefully. You've just gotta get comfortable. At first, you're not sure anybody actually likes you. You kinda dove in at the deep end, and you have a choice, swim or sink, really."

With the success of *Everybody Else*, the Cranberries were also out on the road constantly, leaving no time for woodshedding. (The band will play Orlando's UCF Arena Thursday.)

"When you're on tour, you don't have time to do anything, so you've just gotta get better kinda from playing gigs and stuff," Hogan said.

He does try to work on his chops as much as he can, hoping to improve month to month. Hogan said he'll listen to records to pick things up from other players, but he's not one for watching other players.



Guitarist Noel Hogan (right) says sudden success was a shock to the band.

"Like if I go to a gig or anything, I generally watch the singer, I guess, instead of being one of those guys saying, 'Look, he's playing this chord and that chord.' I say, 'Give me a break,'" Hogan said, chuckling.

Hogan said that when the Cranberries formed, all four members were into a variety of different bands, and no one was looking to emulate any particular group. So they were all rather surprised to hear some of the sounds-like comparisons that cropped up.

"Some, we'd take as a compliment and go, 'Yeah, I'm really into that band,' but others, we'd go, 'Oh, my God no, not them,'" Hogan said. "We got compared to Blondie, to the Pretenders, to Eurythmics... who else? Sinead O'Connor, Dolores gets compared to The Sundays. The Smiths were the only ones we got compared to who didn't have a girl singer. We took that as a compliment. Luckily, there was one in there we could all agree on."

Smiths producer Stephen

Street was therefore an obvious choice for handling production chores for the Cranberries — although Hogan was a bit intimidated by him at first.

"We [the band] had only been together I think maybe a year and a half; we weren't playing that long, and it was like a big-time kinda producer thing," said Hogan, still sounding a mite awed. "And we're thinking, 'Oh, God, we can't really play, and we're working with this guy.' But we met him and we became really good friends with Stephen. He doesn't really have an attitude. Luckily, he just kind of accepted us for what we were."

Of course, as Smiths fans,

the Cranberries did make a few attempts to get Street to reveal inside gossip. Hogan allowed as how they did try plying him with liquor — to no avail.

"It's really hard to get information out of him. He doesn't

like to talk about other people. Sometimes after a few drinks, he'd tell the odd story but no big give-away," Hogan said.

There's one subject the band members can't bring up around Street — O'Riordan's skiing accident, which inter-

rupted the recording of their sophomore album, *No Need to Argue* (now double platinum). Things were going well — the band already had plenty of songs ready when it went into the studio. Then Street sug-

gested a brief skiing holiday. Now he feels guilty because the trip was his idea, Hogan said. Hogan himself is eager to go skiing again, but he doesn't recommend O'Riordan's approach.

"Dolores really wanted to get up speed; she wanted to go very, very fast, and she didn't want to know how to stop or about turning and all that," Hogan said. "She just kind of pointed her skis down the hill and went straight. It wasn't that steep, but it was quite long, so it did give her enough time to build up enough speed. ... Her ligament in her knees was totally snapped in half, gone completely — now she's got a plastic one in there. She's got four bolts in her leg — it was pretty gruesome, all in all. I think she's only kind of getting over it now, about 15 months later."

O'Riordan still has to do physiotherapy every day and can't bend her leg fully. She's also a bit more cautious on stage.

"Sometimes someone jumps on stage or something, and she gets a bit worried — all it takes is one bad move again, and she's back to square one. ... She's gotta be careful where she treads, still."

Given the band's jangly, pensive sound, Hogan is a bit surprised by the amount of moshing and stage-diving that goes on at its shows.

"It's a bit weird," Hogan said. "The only people on the stage are the four of us — with the guitar techs who walk on in the changeover. And we're playing away and see something run across the stage; we have our heads down and look up, and generally the people on stage wear black, but you see a bright shirt or something fly by and wonder, 'What's that?'" he said. "Some people are mental."

The Cranberries' gigs have included an appearance on *MTV Unplugged*. They also performed at London's famed Albert Hall. Both times, they used a string section.

"It's cool — it kind of makes life easier for us, I guess! Let them do the work," Hogan said, laughing.

The Cranberries have been doing all the work themselves on the current tour. It's been a bit of an endurance test, but things are going well, Hogan said.

"It's OK," he said cheerfully. "It's kind of gotten to the stage where everything is a joke now. So we kind of enjoy it."

Photo from Island Records.