

EG

Dolores O'Riordan

THE CRANBERRIES

Their third album debuted at No.1 on the Australian music charts this week. Their 24-year-old lead singer and songwriter is rock music's latest pin-up queen. The Cranberries have come a long way from Limerick, and they're headed for Melbourne.

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Story by Stephanie Bunbury

A LOT OF LIVE venues a few years ago, a lot of kids playing in bands that merged and dissolved with friendships, followed by a slow decline and the grim triumph of the cover band. Any Melburnian would recognise the Limerick music scene. Except that, out of all that pub jollity, came the Cranberries.

The three years since the Cranberries produced their debut album, *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?*, the four provincial Irish kids have been transformed from bright musical hopefuls, supporting local tours of bands such as Belly and House of Love, into one of the biggest album-selling bands in the world.

Their waif-like leprechaun lead singer, the 24-year-old Dolores O'Riordan, for one, was rated fifth only to some bloated airport novelist, and *Murder She Wrote* star Angela Lansbury in a recent magazine *Highest Paid Women in Britain* survey. Not a bad effort for the young girl named Dolores, who joined a band called The Cranberry Saw Us ...

Thankfully, they changed their tacky punning name, and produced *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?*, which performed modestly enough down in the big numbers on the charts. Then, a year later, the phenomenal success of *No Need to Argue*, their follow-up album, whizzed *Everybody Else* back into the British album charts at number one. Meanwhile, *No Need to Argue* notched up sales figures of 13 million, with its flier single, *Zombie*, achieving Top 10 status in 25 countries in September 1994.

Their latest album, *To the Faithful Departed*, has a similar buzz to it. As a success story, the Cranberries take some beating.

The group always made their mark, even on the Limerick pub trail back in 1990. The Cranberries' sound was nothing like the local grunge du jour. Despite the power chords that provided their lyrics with a solid rock architecture, they were distinctive for a peculiarly Irish melodic mournfulness. Surrounded by thrash, says drummer Fergal Lawler, they were "like the runts of the litter. So perhaps that's why we did rise out."

The core of that sound is the searing lyrics and soaring voice of Dolores O'Riordan. Dolores is so much in the spotlight now that pundits mutter darkly that the Cranberries might as well be a one-woman band. The March 1995 US *Rolling Stone* magazine front cover profile of the band, for instance, used the headline: 'Dolores O'Riordan & The Cranberries.' It's the kind of personality cultism that has dragged many bands apart, but Lawler, for one, hardly seems to notice.

Dolores writes the lyrics, of course, says Lawler, because "she has to sing them, so it wouldn't be fair otherwise". But once you're in the rehearsal room, all musicians are equal. And out in the real world, well, if you can get a quiet Guinness down at the local because nobody recognises you, that can't be such a bad thing.

"It's the press people who put her on the front cover of the magazines," he says. "The four of us are very strong; we get on very well together and we wouldn't let something as stupid as that affect us. We're not in it for the stardom or the fame or any of the crap."

They are in it, he says, for the long haul. Their compatriots, such as U2, beat the path on to the world stage, but he is quick to mention Bowie and REM as performers who play "real music" and have stayed the distance by striving and changing. "That's how you make a successful career in this



There was a young band from Limerick... the Cranberries

business. And, even if we're not popular from year to year, we might go down for a year or two but come up again, I think, if you believe in yourself and what you're doing."

How is it that the Cranberries have their feet so firmly planted on the peat? "I think it's got a lot to do with the way we were raised," says Lawler. "We were raised by simple people in simple families who never expect that much success, you know, and then when it does come we're all really down-to-earth people."

It was *Zombie*, the worldwide hit single from *No Need to Argue*, that plunged the Cranberries into the collective consciousness of the mainstream. The refrain "in your he-e-ad, in your he-e-e-e-ad" was the catchiest moan on the airwaves, hummed by thousands of pop fans who had never heard of the band.

But it wasn't just the thundering chords that squeezed *Zombie* into so many minds; people sparked to it because it grappled with a real subject. Perhaps its impact took the band by surprise; the 25-year-old Lawler says they are keen not to preach to

anyone. "The thing was, it wasn't so much about the north of Ireland," he says. "It was more Dolores venting her anger at how an innocent child could be killed for what people call a political reason. If you see something on the TV and it moves you as a human being and makes you want to ask: 'how can someone do that to somebody else?' It's a natural human reaction to be shocked by something like that."

Both singer and lyricist O'Riordan and guitarist Noel Hogan, who writes much of the music, say they write best when they're "pissed off and sad", according to Lawler. Aye, but it's a tragic life we're all leading. When Dolores is happy, says Lawler, "she'd prefer to be out in the pub getting steamed up with the lads ... I think that's why our songs aren't so poppy and twee."

To the Faithful Departed is also concerned chiefly with the dead. "But it's not on a sombre note," says Lawler. "It's remembering what they did while they were here and saying well, they've gone now, but hopefully to some place better and they're happy where they are ... Overall, it sounds a lot brighter than the

first two albums."

Some of this verve derives from the fact that most of the songs were written during the band's last tour. "I think when we're on tour, on stage, we kind of rock out a bit more. I think these songs have a bit more edge to them." That edge was honed by Bruce Fairbairn, veteran hard rock producer of bands such as AC/DC, Aerosmith and Van Halen, and a surprise choice for the Cranberries' latest album.

"We said: 'so what if it doesn't work, we can just try another producer,'" says Lawler. The studio work was rapid fire: they recorded three takes of each song live and picked the best one, then overlaid it with additional backing tracks. It worked, Lawler says, "fantastically well. There's a real freshness and energy."

Salvation, the first single from the new album, is a racy, punkish warning about the evils of drugs. Heroin is the new curse of the Irish; the cities' working-class youth gets through the daily grind on a cloud of stuff.

Even before they got into the music business, where, as Lawler says, "so many

people get into drugs and drink and generally make an idiot of themselves and the music is secondary", the Cranberries just had to look around at their less sensible schoolmates to see what other, shorter lives they might so easily have had. "A guy I used to know when I was 15 or 16 died last year from ecstasy," he says. "And that was in Limerick. You know, it's mad."

Other bands may lock themselves in their hotel rooms with a heavily laden mini-bar for entertainment. Not the Cranberries: they're the rubbernecks in town, up early to see the sights, still struck by the good fortune of having a job, involving travel. When they arrive in Melbourne for their forthcoming tour, look for them down by St Kilda Beach. There's the blonde woman, of course, and a bunch of others. Boys. You won't recognise them, but they'll have that Irish winter pallor and an air of good sense.

The Cranberries' new album, *To the Faithful Departed*, is released through Island. The band performs at Melbourne Park on Wednesday 29 May.

The Cranberries chronicle



Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We? (1992)
Stand-out single: Linger

"This Irish quartet's music hovers somewhere between folk and rock, but what best describes it is pure pop. Dolores O'Riordan's voice is one to fall in love with ... (she) wrote all 12 songs, nine with guitarist Noel Hogan, and is well served by a band equally adept at cranking up the dynamics with jangling guitars or producing delicate atmospherics."

— Saw T.
Herald Sun



No Need to Argue (1994)
Stand-out single: Zombie

Fame has found the Cranberries, and they're none too happy about it. Some things have not changed: Dolores O'Riordan still has that odd Celtic roll in her voice, that moment when her pretty wail flattens, detunes, pitches forward into a growl; her delivery is either strident or hushed ... But too often it's a case of gilding a dead lily, with only a handful of tracks — *Zombie*, *Ode to My Family*, *Yea's Grave* — in any sense memorable or compelling.

— Shane Danielson,
Sydney Morning Herald



To the Faithful Departed (1996)
Stand-out single: Salvation

"It happened to U2 during the 1980s and now it has happened to the Cranberries. When Irish rock bands gain big international success, they like to be the major generalised statement, rubbing a point of pride into all Irish music. That's the problem with them, and it's not that they're not good, it's that they're not good enough."

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