

Dolores O'Riordan, one year on - Sinead Crowley on an Irish icon

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By **Sinead Crowley**
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It was the 1991 Freshers Ball at DCU and I was a second year student, an old hand. A year before I'd disgraced myself by asking for a 'glass' of cider from the keg provided by the Media Production Society but the sharp answer 'you're in college now, it's pints or nothing' soon sorted me out, so this time I came prepared, and met friends in the pub beforehand instead of being an overeager newbie and first in the queue for the gig.

In fact so cosy was the pub, and friendly were the friends that some of them were tempted to skip the 'band' bit of the ball altogether, but I insisted we finish our drinks and head into college in time to see the opening act, a group from Limerick who I had heard were worth checking out.

It seemed like only moments later that the dark haired woman who couldn't even face a crowd of beer mellowed students was a blonde, international mega star.

That makes me sound a bit cooler than I was, actually, as most of my 'inside information' about music came from the pages of *Hot Press*, rather than personal experience but still, my air of expertise must have been enough to propel my friends out of the pub and into the venue – which was actually the college canteen, with strobe lighting and bouncers for the evening crowd.



Those same *Hot Press* pages had told me that the Cranberries' lead singer was extremely shy, but as the band had been gigging for quite a while before they hit the bright lights of Glasnevin I assumed Dolores O'Riordan would be well over her stage fright phase. Not so, however. Even as the rest of the band got into their stride the singer stayed in the corner of the stage, her back to the audience, hunched over the microphone. It didn't really matter though because her voice was so distinctive, so memorable that we crowded near the front to see her anyway. She was brilliant, the band were great and I got kudos for persuading the others to go and see them. A good night all round, really.

It seemed like only moments later that the dark haired woman who couldn't even face a crowd of beer mellowed students was a blonde, international mega star. By the mid 90s, Dolores O'Riordan was on the cover of magazines, guesting on chat shows and the Cranberries' music was on heavy rotation on MTV.



And her success, alongside that of Sinead O'Connor's really mattered to me. I was a big fan of Irish rock music but when I started going to gigs in the late 1980s almost all of the musicians people talked about were male. It was just how things were, boys joined bands and girls went to see them. If a group had a good night there would be an inevitable conversation about 'getting signed' and whether they were the 'next U2'. It's only now I realise how astute my friend's older brother was when he shut down one such conversation with the observation that the 'next U2' would most likely be Sinéad O'Connor. A couple of years later the only real challenger to her title, and indeed U2's, were The Cranberries themselves.

There are many lovely aspects to my job but there can also be a sad side and nothing is more poignant than cutting an obituary package for a star who has died before their time.

Of course there was a focus, too much of a focus on what women like Sinead O'Connor and Dolores O'Riordan wore and how they looked and I have no doubt that that level of attention took a significant toll on both of them. But I didn't think about that when I was buying their music and reading their interviews. I was just happy they were there, and that they were brilliant.



Time moved on. If you'd asked me in the DCU canteen that night what I'd like to do with my Communications degree I might, with several ciders on board, have admitted an ambition to write for *Hot Press* myself one day. It would have taken far more than a pint of Scrumpy Jack to convince me in January 2018 I would be reporting on the tragically early death of Dolores O'Riordan and, in fact, referencing that same canteen gig on the RTÉ 6:1 News. There are many lovely aspects to my job but there can also be a sad side and nothing is more poignant than cutting an obituary package for a star who has died before their time. Whether it's David Bowie or Prince or Dolores O'Riordan, all I can ever hope for is that we do the performer justice and that their fans feel we remembered them in the appropriate way.



The strangeness of the night of January 14, 2018 didn't end there. My report that day was supposed to have been on the concert being held at the NCH to mark Shane McGowan's 60th birthday and after I'd finished working on the 9 o'clock news I headed down to see the second half of the show. There was a curious atmosphere in the place, joy, of course that a songwriter of the magnitude of McGowan was being celebrated, but also deep sadness that another Irish star had passed away so suddenly. It felt like Dolores was in the building that night, in the snatch of *Linger* sung by Bono and whispered conversations of the journalists between the acts. And then Sinead O'Connor walked out on stage and we cheered her so warmly and so loudly that she wasn't able to begin her performance. We were cheering for Sinead herself of course, on a sad night for music it was great to see her looking well and happy, and we were also cheering for Shane McGowan and his family and friends. But we were cheering too for Dolores O'Riordan, marking her passing in the only way available to us and wishing, quite simply that she could have been on the stage too.

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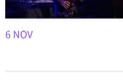
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