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THE RISE AND FALL AND RISE OF THE CRANBERRIES



Trailing a new album and a new contentment, DOLORES O'RIORDAN tells STUART CLARK about how she got rid of her hang-ups and learned to love being a pop star.

"GO ON, have a feel."

I've been in some odd situations, but this is the first time a millionaire rock star has invited me to inspect her stomach. One reason I can think of for not acceding to the request is that the midriff-owner's big, burly husband is shooting daggers at me from the doorway.

Dolores O'Riordan wants her tummy prodded, though, and I'd be falling in my journalistic duties if I was to refuse.

"Not bad for someone who's had a kid," laughs the 28-year-old, who's only a couple of bottles short of a six-pack. To indulge in a bit of *Hello*-speak, O'Riordan is a woman who's finally learned how to enjoy her celebrity. While never in my experience the "I'll schweem and I'll schweem and I'll schweem" prima donna the tabloids made her out to be, it was obvious on meeting her three years ago that she was underweight and over-stressed. Our familiarity doesn't extend to me sticking her on the weighing-scales, but since then she's put on at least 8 or 9 lbs and is positively exuding good health. She's also swapped her severe crop for a glam blonde bob which makes her look decidedly more feminine. If that's not a politically incorrect thing to say...

"It probably is," she laughs, "but, yeah, I do feel more feminine and like my old self again. When I came off the *To The Faithful Departed* tour, I thought I'd never sing again. I really hated singing and I really hated what had become of the band because it was just

a work machine. Every day, every hour, there was something scheduled. It was just so crazy, I couldn't sleep.

"So I kind of got consumed (*by things*) on the third album, and we just over-toured and over-worked and I got burned out. We were thinking of splitting up and not making any more records because I, we, were all so sick of it."

Echoing those sentiments later on, guitarist Noel Hogan talks of being, "totally disillusioned with the whole thing. It reached the point where we didn't care about selling another million records, we just wanted some time off to enjoy ourselves. I'd be sat there in a 5-star hotel romanticising about when I was on the dole, because at least then I got to go on the piss with my mates. The buzz we'd always got from playing live was gone and we were hardly talking to each other."

Realising that they were about to implode, the Cranberries pulled a major North American tour and headed back to Limerick for copious amounts of pint-quaffing, and spending the whole of the next day in bed recovering. The record company were distinctly unimpressed, but as Dolores stresses, "It was really important to take a break. It made me realise that I don't have to kill myself working any more. Maybe I'm allowed to have fun. Maybe I can have a life outside of the band. Maybe I don't just have to be a singer and spend the rest of my life being judged and criticised, because at that stage the media were doing my head in. If they see

a weakness they kind of pounce and I was weak at the time, so there were all of these malicious rumours going around."

These included talk of temper tantrums, rows with husband Don Burton and going on stage in Germany sans underwear. The *Daily Sport* had to cough up £5,000 for that particular work of fiction, but still the tele-photo lenses remained outside her Dingle home. Meanwhile, there was no respite on the artistic front with virtually every UK and Irish reviewer panning *To The Faithful Departed*. The most vicious asides were reserved for tracks like 'Bosnia' and 'I Just Shot John Lennon' which will be remembered for the immortal

couplet, "With a Smith & Wesson .38/John Lennon's life was no longer a debate."

Looking back now, Dolores acknowledges that she rather lost the lyrical plot.

"You can't write about normal things because you don't have a normal life," she pleads in mitigation. "When you want to go from A to B you have to have security around and there are people screaming at you all the time, so basically



Dolores invites Stuart Clark to engage in a spot of navel-gazing. Pic: Liza Caldwell

you become a little bit weird and isolated and feel like you're in a cage. Your only form of escape is the TV. You watch CNN and go, 'Oh my God, that's awful, I'm going to write a song about this.' So you do become the sad old rock star, viewing the world from a hotel room."

Dolores is guarded when it comes to talking about her marriage, but admits that without Don there are times she might have gone under.

"You get to a point in your life where you've done the dating and all that stuff, and just want the one big love thing. It really helps if you have a partner behind you that loves you unconditionally, and no matter what shit you go through, they're always there and take your side. You go through your ups and downs, but that person is still there, loving you, no matter what."

Tired of suffering from what she calls 'Poor Little Rich Girl Syndrome', O'Riordan set about reclaiming her life. First on the agenda was a move to a stud farm just outside of Kilmallock in County Limerick, which can only be described as palatial. The umpteen-acre spread includes her own studio and rehearsal stage, which means she can put in a full day's work with the Cranberries,

"It's the worst crime, I think they should be castrated. I just think that people who sexually abuse children get off too easy."

and still be there to kiss her son, Taylor, goodnight.

"Where I live now is nice because it's not in a tourist area," she enthuses. "The house in Kerry was beautiful, but every single day the Dingle tour buses were pulling up and all the people were looking out, going, 'Is that where she lives?' I remember being three months pregnant and I was coming down my path one day and this guy stopped in a car. I said, 'Look, this is a private residence', and he blew a gasket on me. He goes 'I wouldn't say that to you if you came to my house', and I'm like, 'I'm pregnant. I'm not on a showcase here. I'm just a woman having a baby, please leave me alone.' So I guess I had to get a house somewhere quieter with less access. Here's perfect because it's generally farmers and there's no tourists."

The plethora of gold discs on the wall and crate of vintage champagne in the corner are a reminder that there's an upside to this rock star lark. One of the richest women in the country, O'Riordan could retire tomorrow and never have to worry where her next bottle of Dom Perignon's coming from.

"I'm glad I joined the band when I did because I don't think I'd have accomplished so much otherwise," she acknowledges. "It was nice to be able to have a baby - I'm 27 and my son is one-and-a-half. The band have sold 28 million albums worldwide; it's our fourth album and we're doing it purely for the music. We've done the fame thing and it's not for the money. We don't have to worry about that. It's really nice that after everything that's happened, songwriting and being in a band is still really fun. And I mean being in a rock band where you're in control of everything - the videos, the clothes, the songs, everything."

While the O'Riordan family flitted off to their other home in Toronto, Noel Hogan indulged in a six-month orgy of watching daytime TV and strolling into town to get bladdered with his mates.

"I just sat there with the remote control going, 'Great, *Emmerdale*!' he laughs. "I didn't do anything for months and months, but then I found myself picking up an acoustic and wanting to write songs. It didn't register at the time but what I was doing was going back to how we used to work in the beginning. *Everybody Else Is Doing It*,

Hatchet Men

SHE MAY be the one who gets all the attention but let's not forget it was Dolores who auditioned her way into the Cranberries, and not the other way around.

Indeed, without Mike, Noel and Ferg to steer her in the right direction, it's possible that her vocal flexings wouldn't have extended beyond the Laurel Hill school choir.

Talking to the trio about *Bury The Hatchet*, it's obvious that they'd love some critical acclaim to go with their 28 million-plus sales.

They may be surrounded by a huge corporate machine but the bottom line is that they're still hopeless fans - Noel Hogan is delighted when I mention how much 'Desperate Andy' sounds like The Smiths.

"We usually have one Smiths moment per album and that was it," he acknowledges. "I didn't set out to write a Morrissey song but knew almost straight away that that's where it was heading. When Dolores heard the tape and made the same connection, we thought, 'Right, let's go the whole hog here!' It's one of three or four songs that we demoed in Toronto, and didn't re-record because the feel of them was perfect."

With "spontaneity" the buzz-word, *Bury The Hatchet* was completed in less time than most bands spend on getting the



right snare sound.

"We didn't want this thing of having unlimited studio time to mess around with and going up our asses," Fergal Lawlor expands. "The attitude was, 'Who gives a fuck if it's technically a bit off? Let's keep the tape rolling and go for it!' Dolores did the vocal for 'Dying In The Sun' in just two takes, and I honestly think it's the best she's ever sounded."

Like Mike and Noel, Ferg admits to a few panicky moments when the band decided to take their career break.

"There was a sense of, 'If the Cranberries are over, what the fuck am I going to do with the rest of my life? I've been teaching myself a bit of guitar and piano but, I dunno, I can't really see myself going solo or playing with another band. Writing's something I might try and

get into but, as things have turned out, I won't have to make that decision for a while."

With the Cranberries dictating their own schedule, Lawlor can't wait to start playing live again.

"We were shitting ourselves beforehand but, as it turned out, we didn't want the Nobel Peace Prize gig to end," he laughs. "We only got to play three songs which, on one level, was way too short but, on another, perfect for getting us fired up again."

Having kicked off last week at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire, the first leg of the *Bury The Hatchet* world tour takes in Paris, Hamburg, Cologne, Milan, Madrid and 11 cities throughout North America.

According to Mike Hogan, the lack of an Irish date will be rectified by Christmas.

"We're conscious of the fact that, for various reasons, we haven't gigged enough in Ireland," he confesses. "Whether it's five or six shows around the country or one big one at the Point, I dunno, but we'll definitely be doing something here in 1999."

So *Why Can't We?* came about as a result of me sticking a tape-recorder in front of my guitar at home, and giving the tapes to Dolores. The only difference with *Bury The Hatchet* is that I had to get them couriered over to her in Canada."

A couple of Fed-Ex deliveries later and the Cranberries were back in business.

"Dolores had also been writing, so with her pregnant and unable to travel, we couriered ourselves over to Toronto to do some demos," Hogan continues. "As soon as we heard the playbacks it was, 'Right, we have to do another album.'"

Out this week, *Bury The Hatchet* is probably the record the band would've made if *Everybody Else Is Doing It* had flopped and

they'd been given a clear run at the follow-up. Having been rather over-gymnastic with her vocals on *To The Faithful Departed*, Dolores keeps things nice and simple and demonstrates on 'Just My Imagination' that she's still capable of sending whole cold fronts down spines. The same goes for the subject matter which is mainly straightforward relationship stuff. The notable exception is 'Fee Fi Fo' which with lines like "How can you get your satisfaction from the body of a child? You're vile/You're sick", is a scathing attack on child abuse.

"It's the worst crime," she says unequivocally. "I think they should be castrated. I just think that people who sexually abuse children get off too easy. They get back out after a couple of weeks because, 'Oh, he's psychologically ill.' Which I can understand, but then people get thrown in the can for eight years for smoking dope or something. I think the system is kind of weird that way. It hammers people who are doing harmless things while these perverts, these paedophiles, are shown leniency."

You don't have to agree with Dolores' opinions to find it refreshing that she has them. Ever since Sinéad O'Connor was crucified for tearing the Pope up on the telly, there's been a reluctance among Irish artists to say anything that may impact on their record sales. That includes going against the liberal grain, as O'Riordan did when she condemned abortion.

"I think Sinéad's pretty cool," she says. "She's Irish and outspoken - sometimes to a point where it's her own undoing - but at least she's original and does her own thing. She's not a safe Mary O'Shea kind of head. She's a little bit crazy sometimes, I guess, but I think we all are."

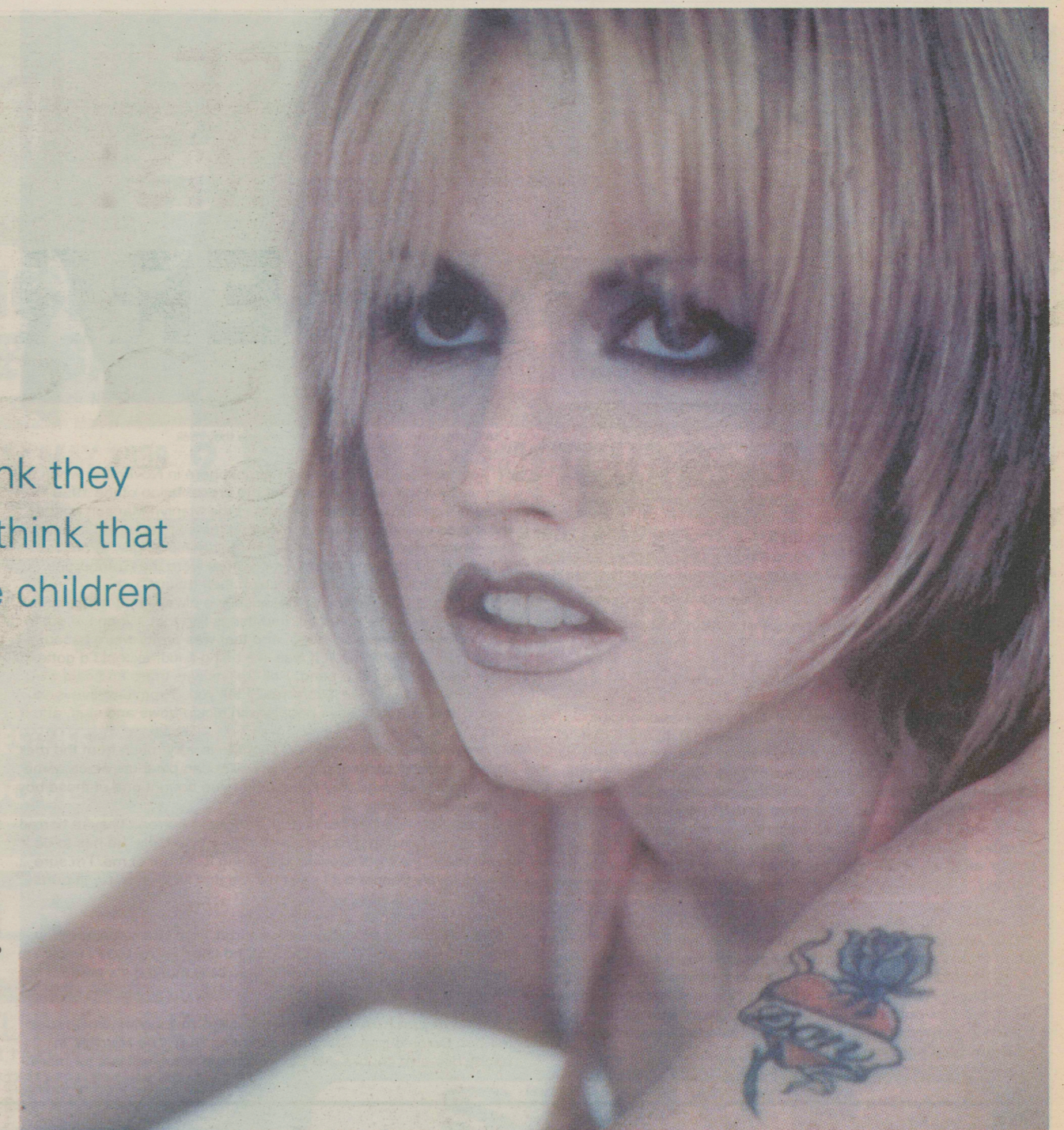
"(As for what I said) I can understand people having to have abortions when they get raped or whatever. In certain situations, grand, but still I don't like the idea of a baby being sucked out and thrown into a bucket squealing and crying. It's sick. I think, as well, that they shouldn't abort foetuses after a certain amount of time because they do start moving. I had a baby so I know. It's one of those things where I've always said what I thought. I could never not give a toss, y'know?"

Does she agree with what Sinéad says about women having a tougher time of things in the business than men? "I was never a man so I don't really know! It's debatable. Maybe from her shoes it's harder, but from mine it's kind of handy because if you know how to play it properly you can use it to your advantage. You can always sit back and say to your husband, 'Honey, everything's falling apart out there, can you fix it?' Because you're the woman you can sit inside. So I like to sit back and play the lady thing. I enjoy being a woman."

A further insight into her sexual politics comes later on when she observes that, "You're always best to play the sweet Colleen, if you can. You catch more flies with honey than you do with shit."

While not much gone on role models, Dolores admits to being taught the prime women-in-rock directive by Tanya Donnelly and the rest of Blixy.

"Tanya was the first time I'd met a female on the road," she enthuses, "and it was just so nice having girls around because up till then it had always been boys. The bass player - she used to



play with that punk band L7 – was a crazy rock 'n' roll babe, and it was great seeing her and thinking, 'Hey she's worse than the guys. Cool!' They were really well able to deal with whatever happens when you're on stage and you're a female."

As possibly the only Irish woman that every American teenager could name, does Dolores have any sense of representing her country or her gender?

"I guess I feel more like an ambassador for myself, but as far as Irish women go, I represent them pretty well because I'm not totally crazy and I'm not too conservative. I'm kind of in the middle of the road. I'm pretty normal, really."

Well, as normal as someone who's sold 28 million records can be. O'Riordan's face doesn't so much cloud as storm over when, as a throwaway aside, I suggest that the Cranberries have paved the way for The Corrs.

"I don't like their music. I don't like people who put skid-li-ay into rock or pop. To me, it has to be either trad or rock. Mixing things is like, 'uuuurgh!' I hate it."

"I went to see *Riverdance* in England and was pretty impressed," she continues. "I thought it would be kind of tacky, but it's well done. It's very, very traditional which I can handle much better than something like The Corrs. It's easier to do skid-li-ay because you grew up with it. It's an easy trade off, and foreign people like it because it's different for them. For me, it's a bit cheesy to do that. Trad is trad and that's it. It's way more challenging to do presentable global rock which appeals to people everywhere."

What about the pre-*Riverdance* bouts of Irish dancing that Dolores used to treat American audiences to?

"It was something that I grew up with and thought, 'Hey, maybe I'll do a bit of skipping round the stage here for two seconds to make the show more interesting.' I was never a genius, though, when it came to Irish dancing."

Four years is a long time to be out of action, but with kindred spirits like Alanis, Jewel and Ani DiFranco dominating the American charts, the Cranberries should be able to pick up where they left off in the States. They may have a tougher time of things in Europe – a guest appearance at the MTV Awards in Milan demonstrated to Dolores just how much the musical landscape has changed.

"When we took the career-break, there were a lot more rock 'n' roll bands on the scene, and now it's weird because it's like a different world. It's full of polished boys and girls with not a lot of talent. Just three years beforehand, I remember doing the MTV Awards in New York, and Metallica were there and Alanis Morissette was there. Maybe the scene is just really different in Europe."

"There was one band (*in Milan*) that kept screaming, 'Cleopatra, comin' atchyal', and it was like, 'Okay, you've said it, now stop'. Actually, I found Rammstein the best performers. They were interesting."

Does she think that Massive were right to give Fergie the bird?

"God, that girl gets such a hard time!" she sympathises. "I wouldn't do that to anybody. If somebody put their hand out to shake mine, I wouldn't pull it away unless I had a personal grudge. I think that Massive Attack thought it was a set up, and that someone was taking the piss out of them by doing that. It was strange having someone like her presenting an award but, at the same time, I don't have anything against her."



The Cranberries: even Phil Collins reckons they rock

There was a far more civilised atmosphere in November when the Cranberries journeyed to Oslo for the presentation of the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize. While not quite in the Marilyn Manson league, the band caused consternation among the suits and twin-sets when they launched into *Bury The Hatchet's* flagship single, 'Promises'. Whatever about Gerry Adams' mob, here were the Cranberries steadfastly refusing to decommission their guitars.

"I thought it was really nice because I've always had respect for it, and associated it with Gandhi and things like that. When we got to the venue A-ha were on stage, and that was pretty weird because I used to be a fan of theirs. It was like being a kid, except I'd gotten older now and was in a band. Phil Collins was there and said we rocked because we did 'Promises'. I tell you, 'Promises' live is so loud. There were all these people with dickie-bows and stuff, and it was like 'wooooooah!'"

Forget Montessori, Dolores O'Riordan is very much from the rock 'n' roll school of parenting. Young Taylor can plead as much as he wants, but there's no way he's going to be bought one of those boy or girl band records.

"Absolutely no way," his mother shrieks in horror. "They're barred. If he wants to listen to Boyzone and the Spice Girls, he has to do it in his room. He's not allowed to listen to it in front of me. I'm sure they're lovely people but I can't handle that kind of music. It hurts my ears in a big way."

There's no need to sit on the fence.

"That Ronan Keating guy – eeeeeurgh, he's just so bland. Why does someone who's 22 want to sound like they're 102? I know I'm going to have lots of girls shouting 'bitch' at me, but it's product not music."

Mindful of just how fucked up the last Cranberries world tour left her, Dolores is insisting on promoting *Bury The Hatchet* in handy bite-size chunks. No trip away from home will last for more

than a month, and there'll be a couple of extra O'Riordan's on the bus.

"The nipper's coming everywhere with Mama," she confides. "I've already done publicity in LA and New York, and it's so different to walk into my hotel room and have my son and my mum and my husband there. It's like, 'This is nice. I feel human. I have a family.' It's so much better than being on stage and having this kind of fake love, and then going into a hotel room and getting really depressed because it's so quiet and dead and you can't go out because the fans are in the lobby and you're stuck in a kind of prison or something."

Asked about his bandmate's more relaxed approach to life, Noel Hogan smiles and says, "Motherhood agrees with her. When things started going wrong three years ago, all any of us had to focus on was the band. Getting married to Don and having Taylor has made her realise that there's life outside of music. I've known her 10 years and she's never been happier."

Dolores is certainly at her most animated when talking about Taylor who, celebrity mum or not, is going to go to the local national school and muddy his knees playing GAA.

"I'll raise my son in Ireland, yeah. I think it's a great place for kids to grow up. As countries go, it doesn't have a very high crime rate and it doesn't have a lot of violence. My mum takes him to church all the time, so she's doing the religious stuff. I like the idea of him getting first communion and confirmation because I got it. It's nice to give your kids something to believe in, spiritually."

The spirit concerning her now is the one she was imbuing far too freely last night at Limerick's swankiest drinkerie, The Globe.

"I've got two inches of make-up on and I still look like shit," she growls in very un-mummy fashion. "That's what life's about, though, isn't it? Going out with your friends and getting pissed."

We'll drink to that! ■

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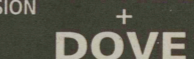
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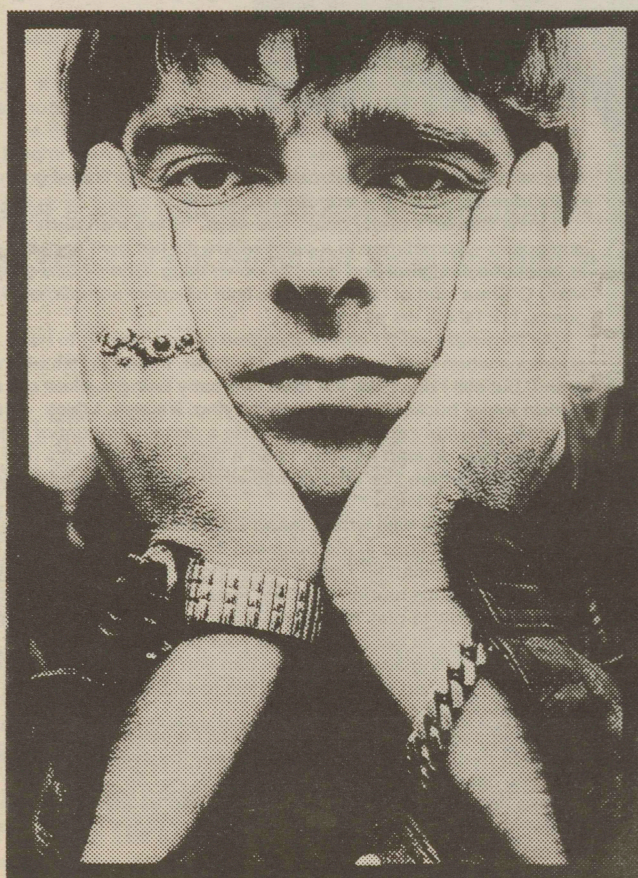
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ALBUMS

Sharp As A Blade

THE CRANBERRIES

Bury The Hatchet (Island Records)

THEY'RE BACK. With a bang. Never ones to do it colour by numbers, The Cranberries waited 'til their third trip to the studio before encountering the difficult album syndrome. And now that *To The Faithful Departed* has finally well, departed, Dolores & Co. can get back to doing what the 'Berries do best: writing divine melody lines and conjuring vocals that sometimes sound like they've come from some Elysian field and at others, are nothing less than demonically possessed.

The Cranberries took a three-year leave of absence from the business, an act of bravery that most outfits wouldn't dare dream of, and while they mightn't merit a purple heart for it, the gamble has paid off handsomely. *Bury The Hatchet* sees them back at the ranch, guns blazing, horses chomping at the bit, and best of all, bellies hungry for a chunk of cow pie.

'Promises', the first single release, is more than a tad misleading, if it's a thermometer reading of the album you're looking for. Strident, stubborn, and bland, it tries too hard and stands out alright, but only as a weak track in the line-up. Elsewhere, there are far more challenging and adventurous seams worth mining, and most of them lead back to the core of *Bury The Hatchet*, which is a far more mature attitude than The Berries have demonstrated to date.

Now, it seems that they're not trying to prove anything anymore. Like so many of their predecessors who felt themselves under siege (everyone from Brian Wilson to Damon Albarn) they reacted by thrashing and flailing aimlessly. Now though, real life has re-entered the arena, they've had time to smell the roses, and the conclusion seems to be that even the coffee smells OK these days.

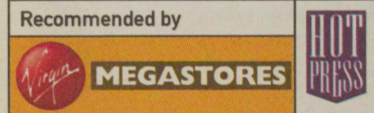
'Animal Instinct' is a gorgeous opener; an acoustic guitar-driven commentary on domestic relationships, it's a pitch perfect marriage of Dolores' trademark razor-sharp vocals with the rest of the band's penchant for catchy bass lines and straightforward percussion – a fine calling card.

Shifting landscapes are remarkably captured on 'Copycats', a wry telephoto lens-take on the candyfloss world of pop that rules today. With lyrics that tell it like it is (*"Everyone wears the same clothes now/And everyone plays the game"*), and driving, muted guitars punctured by cocky percussion, this is Cranberries with attitude – but one that's more considered and worldweary than vehement.

Real life impinges everywhere else too, with lyrical preoccupations ranging from child abuse ('Fee Fi Fo') to, unsurprisingly, motherhood ('You And Me'), the perils of peer pressure ('Shattered') and the comforts of emotional security ('Dying In The Sun'). But while the lyrics reflect a far more relaxed mood, it's the cool-headed arrangements that leave their mark. Take 'You And Me', with its classically ice-cool brass lines and veiled sequencers underscoring one of the catchiest melodies on the album.

Maybe one of the keys to The Cranberries' triumphant return is the decision they've taken to sit at the production desk, alongside Benedict Fenner (who's played knob-twiddler for the likes of Brian Eno and Laurie Anderson). This way, the personal moods and nuances of the original songs are far less likely to get lost in the mix.

Fourth time round, The Cranberries are best listened to with the shutters wide open and the headphones cast aside. Because this is music for grown ups. Or at least for people who like their music to last beyond the current Warholian 15 minute diklat.



Welcome back 'Berries. Reunions can be such sweet things.

Siobhán Long



Illustration by Aine Duggan

AINE DUGGAN

Kicks Like A Mule

TOM WAITS

Mule Variations (Epitaph)

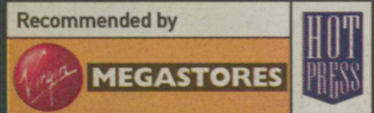
A SHAGGY dog story: Tom Waits shows up at a Northern Californian studio, prospecting for premises close to home so that he can ferry his kids to and from school while working. The in-house engineer duly gives his guest a guided tour of the facility. "Here's where we record the drums," he says, indicating a carpeted cell. "Yeah, yeah, we'll try it for a while," the singer growls before disappearing out the back of the building. Twenty minutes later, the tech finds Waits crawling around in a chicken coop in the yard, belly up in bantam-shit, banging slats of wood together and cocking his head to gauge the acoustics.

Green On Red guitarist Chuck Prophet once related this tall tale to the present writer, and if it ain't true, it should be. See, Tom Waits, to paraphrase Mickey Rourke in *Angel Heart*, has a thing about chicken coops: *Mule Variations*, his first album in six years, was recorded in Prairie Sun Recording Studios, a converted fowl-house in Sebastapol.

But then, Waits hates conventional sonic configurations, the production-line furniture of rock 'n' roll; drumkits, Marshall stacks, wedges, lighting trusses and sterile studio set-ups. Here's a rock 'n' roll primitivist who won't think twice about replacing a thousand dollar bass drum sound with the slamming of a toilet lid, preferring his source noises not so much rare as raw and bloody. Accordingly, this new selection continues to uphold the credo William Burroughs croaked on *The Black Rider* in 1993: "It ain't no sin to take off your skin/And dance around in your bones".

However, *Mule Variations* has more in common with *Bone Machine* than that last sulphurous symphony, incorporating the caveman blues of Huddle Ledbetter, Captain Beefheart and Howlin' Wolf. This is music that doesn't bother wiping its feet at the door. And despite the adoration of the many young bucks (Gomez, Mercury Rev, the No Depression-ites) who sit at his muck-crustured workboots, Tom has more kinship with the dope-talk and prison rhythms of hip-hop, the present day equivalent to the coded black vernacular of the chain-gangs. Indeed, the singer was forging his own proto-gangsta rap as far back as 1993 on tracks like '18 Shells From A 30.6', a strain still evident here in the clanking consonants and boiler-room hiss of 'Filipino Box Spring Hog'.

Anyway, *MV* is a record of at least two minds; scuffed rooming-house madrigals ('Lowside Of The Road', 'Cold Water', 'Pony') contrasted with big, fat, bleeding heart ballads ('Picture In A Frame', 'House Where Nobody Lives'). Here are songs about the sadness of empty abodes, the heat of hog-horniness, dreams gone mouldy, the lure of the hearth. And, as if for the first time, we can hear what an amazing voice Waits has got. Folk who reckon Toni Braxton is the last word in vocalese might haul us all off to the nearest red-brick building for propounding such a view, but listen to the grain, no, the ridges in the vocal chords as he tears lines like "Why



wasn't God watching?" out of his chest on the agonising child-murder ballad 'Georgia Lee'.



Tom Waits: giving it some caveman blues in his own inimitable style.

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Less harrowing is the opening music biz piss-take 'Big In Japan', where the vocalist sounds like he's enunciating through a smoker's throatbox (it was rumoured he'd been afflicted with throat cancer). Either way, one is tempted to imagine Otis Redding, if he lived to hit the skids, spending his days hollering tunes like 'Hold On' or 'Take It With Me' for spare change.

Waits has been using the word "surrural" to describe the field he's currently potting crows in ('Chocolate Jesus' was recorded outdoors – you can clearly hear the breeze and the traffic), and it's as good a one as any. You don't have to be country to understand his bog-warped humour, but it doesn't hurt. Take 'Eyeball Kid' for example, a mutant showbiz spreg "born without a body/Not even a brow... He's just a little guy/But women go crazy/For the big blue eye".

Elsewhere, 'What's He Building?' parodies parochial paranoia (recalling Burroughs' dry observation of America as a country "where nobody is allowed to mind his own business" in his 'Thanksgiving Prayer'). Over waves of wireless noise and what sounds like a musical interpretation of Japanese water torture, the

narrator growls, "Now what's that sound from under the door?/He's pounding nails into a hardwood floor... he has a router and a table saw/And you won't believe what Mr. Sticha saw/There's poison underneath the sink of course/But there's also enough formaldehyde to choke a horse... What the hell is he building in there?"

Mostly though, it's an emotionally forthright record, due in no small part to Kathleen Brennan's co-writing/production labours and textures like Charlie Musselwhite's blues harp on 'Get Behind The Mule'. There's also sterling work from Tom's long-term skeleton crew: Joe Gore, Greg Cohen and that half-man/half Gila monster Marc Ribot, who, an evidence of his solos in 'Black Market Baby' ("There's no prayer like desire/There's amnesia in her kiss") and 'Cold Water', still plays guitar like he's got hacksaws for hands. And I mean that as a compliment.

If the stunning cover art and the songs on this record (particularly the convivial Billy Goat Gruff stomp of 'Come On Up To The House') are anything to go by, Uncle Tom is becoming a comfortable kind of old scarecrow. Welcoming as it is though, *Mule Variations* is unmistakably Waits' world. We're just renting head-space in it.

Peter Murphy

TRASHMONK

Mona Lisa Overdrive

(Creation)

That's me sold on Trashmonk. *Mona Lisa Overdrive* contains some of the most unusual, atmospheric, surprising and mystical songs that I've heard in ages. The vocals are knocked back and meaningful, reminiscent of Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, The Beatles and Spacemen 3; the instrumentals are rich and tapedried, with excellent indie-guitar mixed in with violins, cellos and a plethora of weird samples and effects.

This is one of those rare albums that is totally unclassifiable because the styles it encompasses are so diverse. In one jump you move from the slow acoustic gentleness of a track like 'Sapphire', which glows incandescently with its own innate symbolism, to the bass-driven, *danse macabre*-like intensity of 'Amaryllis', a spooky number about the games people play.

If there is a unifying theme to *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, it's a very subtle, almost imperceptible influence, in both philosophy and sound, from the

magical country of Tibet. 'All Change', for example, contains crashing sounds from a lama dance festival in Nepal, and vocal chants from a Tibetan monastery, as well as train sounds recorded on the Fez to Tangiers Express.

Mercifully, Trashmonk have avoided that naïf, culture-robbing thing which plunks a bit of Eastern mysticism into the middle of whatever, taking only the surface and not the depth. Their music is genuinely transcendental.

Pure spirit. Pure sex.

Adrienne Murphy

A Bad Ride



REEF

Rides (S2)

REEF ARE not the future of rock and roll. In fact, if we have to talk in such grandiose terms about this four-piece from Glastonbury, the best you can say is that they produce an adequate simulation of heavy rock music from the late '60s/early '70s. *Rides* is all shapes but very little substance.

Even if you set aside the plethora of clichéd guitar riffs that run through every track, you're still left with lyrics woefully short of any depth, meaning, insight or originality. Too often in the first half of the album, the opening four lines of the song are just repeated as fillers.

Hence, 'New Bird' is a growling mess about needing a change of country or something. The new single, 'Something To Say' doesn't (have anything to say, that is). Reef also have this annoying habit of changing a song halfway through without any relevance to what has gone before.

Things get a little better from track six, 'Sweetie'. 'Spooky' is an admirable call-to-understanding and 'Metro' a tender pop tune. 'Love Feeder' also attempts to avoid the more turgid rock riffs that sound great in the empty zones of large stadia but are exposed as indulgent in the heart of your living room.

Rides will be lapped up by all those who think that this sort of music has some higher political agenda. However, bad art is always conservative. Needless to say, Reef's third album is not essential listening.

Patrick Brennan



BLESSED ARE THE STRONG IN SPIRIT

CATATONIA

Equally Cursed And Blessed (Blanco Y Negro)

THE MOST remarkable aspect of Catatonia's success is that they articulate that rarest of values amongst the pop clamour: common decency. The warmth transmitted through this quintet's songs makes

breakfast radio almost digestible.

However, as much as the blokes contribute heavyweight writing credits and sturdy musical settings, it's Cerys Matthews who has assumed the status of wartime sweetheart in Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, not just through dint of voluptuous charm, but an

irresistible singing voice.

But then Matthews also tackles subjects close to the hearts of the everyman – the futility of counseling ('Postscript'); the joy of catharsis in even its tackiest forms ('Karaoke Queen'); the unbearable weight of mundanity. As a result, *Equally Cursed*... is a far more coherent lyrical statement than its predecessor.

So, once the lovely Nelson Riddle-like shimmer of the vanguard single 'Dead From The Waist Down' (*"like in Califor-ni-ay"*) is out of the way, the remaining first third of the album showcases some almost-great songs; a little word-heavy and overlong perhaps, but delivered with guts and imagination.

Consider 'Londinium', in which our heroine voices the pride of the oak who has been to the metropolis, felt intimidated, then realised there's no sin in hating the big shiny. Elsewhere, in the tragi-comedy of 'Bulmic Beats' (Cerys scouring the kitchen, plotting "custard's last stand"), she sounds for all the world like Ursula Burns doing 'Lilac Wine' – this is the weary wisdom of a woman who has at last found a home in her own skin after a history of binge and purge sessions.

And if the prevailing mood is more plaintive than *International Velvet* or *Way Beyond Blue*, there are plenty of interesting detours. Like, for instance, the galvanising rabble-cri of 'Storm The Palace', and most tantalising of all, 'Shoot The Messenger', where Cerys straps on Lotte Lenya's corset and rewrites Weimar-winebar routines to suit her growing pains (*"I felt myself become a bitter old shrew"*).

So, while the newfound predilection for balladry can get a little ponderous at times, there isn't a track here that doesn't reflect how much Matthews loves the act of singing (remember the steamy and steaming duet with Tom Jones on Jools Holland's *Hootenany?*). On that level, both the aching 'Valarian Unwanted' and the triumphant last moments of 'Dazed, Beautiful And Bruised' constitute career-highs.

Equally Cursed And Blessed finds Catatonia consolidating strong, and learning a few new licks into the bargain. It ain't folk music, people, it's *people* music.

Peter Murphy

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They can be heard at the exclusively designated Hot Press listening posts in



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INTONICATING	VERY GOOD	GETTING THERE	NOT THE WORST	STODGY	IMPOSSIBLY BAD

All Blown Out

HURRICANE #1

Only The Strongest Will Survive (Creation)

WITH A line-up that includes former Ride guitar-slinger Andy Bell, it's a fairly safe assumption that the second album from Hurricane #1 is going to have loads of crashing guitars, soaring guitars, scorching guitars, grinding guitars and then some more guitars thrown in for good measure. And yes folks, that is pretty much the case. But there's more to this band than simply guitars, with drum loops, scratches and other vibey effects thrown into the equation.

Unfortunately, the end result is more like Oasis with a beatbox than Primal Scream. From the slightly spaced out intro, through bog-standard tracks like 'Separation Sunday' or 'Come Alive', Hurricane #1 aren't exactly adding anything to the genre. And the acoustic 'The Price That We Pay' is as unexciting as it gets.

On the other hand, the bittersweet 'Greatest High' owes a lot more to the Gallagher Brothers, with Alex Lowe's vocals echoing the younger Mancunian unibrow's pubrockery. They're taking lyric lessons

from Noel, too, if the blissed out 'What Do I Know?' is anything to go by: "I will never let you down/ My feet, they barely touch the ground." Thankfully, there's nothing quite of the blister/sister/kissed her variety, however.

It's not all grim. On 'Remote Control', the dancy drum loops and searing guitar drive the song onwards, but it is the use of space, the uncluttered arrangement, which allows it to work so well. The title track is remixed with a string section and a dollop of drums, and it's still a great song, despite being infamously used in a TV ad for *The Sun*. 'Long Way Down' succeeds in doing a passable Primals impersonation, while the soulful 'Twilight World' sounds like a completely different band from the rest of the album.

In patches, Hurricane #1 manage to hit the spot, but all too often their attempts at sonic overhaul fail to hold the attention past the second chorus. Like a Hurricane? I don't think so.

John Walshe