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The Cranberries, Dublin, July 1994: (from left) Fergal Lawler, Mike Hogan, Noel Hogan, Dolores O'Riordan. "To their advantage, they have no sense of cool."

A year ago, nobody had a clue who The Cranberries were, let alone where they were from. Now, survivors of managerial arm-wrestling, leprechaun stereotyping and a disastrous press campaign, they've had a British Number 1 LP, sold three million albums worldwide and won armfuls of gongs. Andrew Collins pieces together their long, strange journey to stardom.

IN AMERICA THEY call it Dream Pop.

"Oh my life is changing every day, in every possible way. And oh my dreams, it's never quite as it seems, never quite as it

seems."

Yes, The Cranberries Story is all about dreams...

"They are testament to the amount of bollocks that's talked about marketing, because you couldn't have fucked up the Cranberries campaign more than it was fucked up."

Dreams and fuck-ups.

BORN DOLORES MARY EILEEN O'Riordan, she was Irish. Her family lived in a modest farm cottage in Ballybricken (don't look for it on the map), eight miles outside Limerick, goat feeding on the grass out the back, loads of chickens, the requisite two big brothers on Harley Davidsons, Catholic. Dolores wasn't into dolls; she buried them in the garden. She was always having stitches as a child, and she sang in church. Beautifully.

Down the road, in Moycross (don't look for it etc), Mr and Mrs Hogan from the bakery were bringing up two deceptively quiet lads, Noel and Mike. Fergal Lawler, a year their senior, and related to Limerick luminary Richard Harris by marriage, lived in Parteen. By the time he was 19, he'd find himself playing about in a band with the Hogans. And you should've heard their singer.

He was rotten. Bloke called Niall. He was into comedy songs (sample track list: My Granny Drowned In A Fountain At Lourdes, Throw Me Down A Big Stairs), and came up with the appalling band name The Cranberry Saw Us. It was a pun on sauce. Niall's days were numbered, as were the name's.

1990, and the other three, straggly-haired, rabid Smiths fans all, were on the lookout for a new vocalist. No ads were placed in music shop windows; Dolores heard about the vacancy through a

friend at school. She'd been looking for a decent group for four years, having flirted with a few covers bands. ("Great players, no creativity," she now recalls. "They were just in it to play for an hour and make £60 in a pub.")

The Cranberry Saw Us – the last two words occasionally hyphenated, as if to assist the pun – had day jobs at the time. Dolores worked part-time in a shop. Fergal was a hairdresser. Mike was on an electronics YTS course. Noel, telephone-answering. They spent the next year "learning our instruments" as they went along.

They notched up some low-key gigs in Limerick (their first in a hotel basement, since demolished), one or two in Dublin and Cork, "places the size of this room". It was at this point that they met Pearse Gilmore, a local big-fish entrepreneur who ran a small label and studio called Xeric.

He became their manager, a decision the band would come to regret bitterly in time. They recorded a three-track tape with Gilmore, Nothing Left At All, and it went on sale in local record shops, selling out all 300 copies. (The title track would re-surface on the B-side of their first true single a year later.) Posters for the tape claimed, prophetically, "A first glimpse of a bigger picture". They also put together a five-track demo cassette and mailed it out to some record companies on the mainland, crucially ditching the "Saw Us". The handwritten tape inlays credited the work to "The Cranberry's". Not a major fuck-up.

THE DEMO ARRIVED AT ROUGH TRADE in London. It was opened by Sarah Bolton, who no longer works there. She wrote "an encouraging letter" back to The Cranberries, though the music was not her cup of tea. This was the first response from "outside" they'd ever had.

Geoff Travis, Rough Trade supremo and nowadays The Cranberries' manager, says he didn't even know about it at the time. Bolton had invited them to London to play, but they couldn't afford it.

Travis says "We'd have been even more pleased if Sarah had said, Sign up The Cranberries! But she didn't like them."



The Cranberry Saw Us, Limerick, 1990, and (right) their "disappointing" debut EP, October '91.

Pearse Gilmore

take my calls or set up a business meeting, which is pretty unusual behaviour for a manager whose group is unsigned. It was very, very odd."

Lee: "I met the band briefly and made a very good immediate connection with Dolores. It was hard to get to the boys because Pearse was protecting them."

Travis: "It was a complete brick wall." Dolores, ever the single-minded one, wanted to meet Rough Trade, so she went to London alone. "You got the feeling that she was really having doubts about what they were about to do."

They signed a six-album deal with Island records, through A&R Denny Cordell (his CV includes producer of A Whiter Shade Of Pale and "starmaker" behind Joe Cocker, J.J. Cale and Tom Petty). "We went with Island because they

were the larger company," Dolores explains. "Geoff wanted to sign us, but the boys wanted to go with Island. There was a little division in the band at that stage—but it was a majority rule thing in the end."

The band freely admit to being incredibly naive at the time. Xeric Studios was in a disused factory in suburban Limerick (Best: "It was a pit") and Gilmore used a significant sum from Island to

upgrade it in order to record the band's debut album there. The band saw none of it. They recorded their debut single, Uncertain, which came out on Xeric in October 1991. Meanwhile, Best had been working—inadvertently—on the fuck-up.

"I did something that I would never do again, in my gauche enthusiasm for the band, which was take the demo out to the music papers."

The demo was remarkable, containing strange, tinkly versions of Put Me Down, Dreams, Nothing Left At All, Linger and Them, in that order. But because, at the band's behest, their debut 45 was a low-key item, the "second grade songs", it disappointed many of the journalists who had initially raved about the demo.

"Because of me, everyone had heard Linger and Dreams," confesses Best.

Then came the dreaded Melody Maker feature to coincide with Uncertain. Then-features editor Everett True was flown out to Limerick. Full of genuine enthusiasm, and promising a possible cover (it eventually went to Curve), he wrote a huge piece which presented The Cranberries as, in their words, "four little leprechauns from Ireland wearing green hats with bows on the top, who don't have a clue."

Best: "It was the second nail in the coffin. The most patronising piece. He treated them like bog-wogs." A month later, NME's Gavin Martin produced a feature of similar tone, entitled (though not by the writer) Yo! Bumpkin Rush The Show. In it, Dolores revealed her surprise at first meeting a black man on her maiden trip to London. Dolores was a very different young woman then.



Best remembers the first time she came into his office in the summer of 1991 to do interviews: "She chain-ate crisps all day. Twenty-one packets of crisps."

Response to the first EP was a let-down. A scan down John Best's journalist-reaction sheet for Uncertain reveals such faint praise as "Didn't like", "Slightly disappointed" and "Much preferred demo".

Best: "The band felt gutted, I felt gutted. I'd really done them a disservice."

JANUARY 1992. BACK AT XERIC STUDIOS, The Cranberries had started work on the album with Gilmore at the production helm. They only got three songs down in four weeks, and the tension between band and would-be Svengali proved sufficient to result in a parting of the ways. They sacked him, and scrapped the album-so-far. The Cranberries were in a mess.

Best advised them to get in touch with Geoff Travis, which they did. "Dolores phoned, and more or less said, Help!" Travis recalls. "And we said, Whatever we can do. So we became, completely unintentionally, managers. That was the last thing on our minds." (Travis and Lee have managed The Cranberries as Rough Trade Management ever since; they also now look after Pulp.) Was Travis the knight in shining armour?

"I wouldn't say he saved us, but he did pull us out of a bad patch," Noel admits.

They started the album again, in Windmill Studios, Dublin, with Stephen Street, engineer and co-producer of The Smiths' last three LPs, at the controls. Noel's alternative producer choice had been, oddly, Johnny Marr himself. Travis had asked Johnny through his manager, Marcus Russell. The answer was no.

Of Gilmore's aborted album attempt, Street told Sound On Sound magazine: "He was trying to put too much production control over them and in the end he succeeded in breaking everything up, to the point where they weren't playing together as a band any more. The first thing I had to do was get them back together as a band."

Best: "Stephen Street actually blanded them out a bit".

EVERYBODY ELSE IS DOING IT, SO WHY Can't We? was the name of the finished album, handwritten apologetically across the bottom of a dark, apologetic band-shot. The title, Dolores assures us, was meant literally. "It is clumsy, and it is awkward, but it's us. It may have seemed like a cheeky statement but we believed it.

"By the time it finally came out, the press had

gone, the record company had signed new acts . . . and because we weren't getting the press, the record company weren't behind us."

Also, before Gilmore's "departure", The Cranberries had done support tours with Top and Moose in the UK, which, reckons Travis, "weren't the right tours to be doing. As a strategy, it was very poor. Every move a band makes is critical, including who they associate themselves with. Our attitude was, Let's make sure The Cranberries do a serious tour with the right people . . ."

Dreams and Linger preceded the LP as singles in September '92 and February '93 respectively. The latter charted at Number 74. The album, originally scheduled for October '92, didn't come out until the following March, when it managed a humble 78 and a meagre 12,000 sales. Best "worked" the record but received "the push" when he couldn't personally get to a Camden Underworld gig . . . and they resented it. I could see exactly where they were coming from when they dropped me. I orchestrated every fuck-up in their career. And none of the good stuff."

Travis got the band on a UK tour with Belly in March '93, which was a great success, Dolores ended up singing with Tanya Donnelly for an encore at ULU. A tour across Europe with Hothouse Flowers followed, a choice the band initially resisted, but which, in retrospect, was closer to what they were doing than, well, Scouse janglers Top. (They also supported Mike Oldfield at the Albert Hall, again, not such a left-field booking.) "The Cranberries like to tour, which is quite rare," observes Travis. "You couldn't get The Smiths to go on an American tour for more than a couple of weeks."

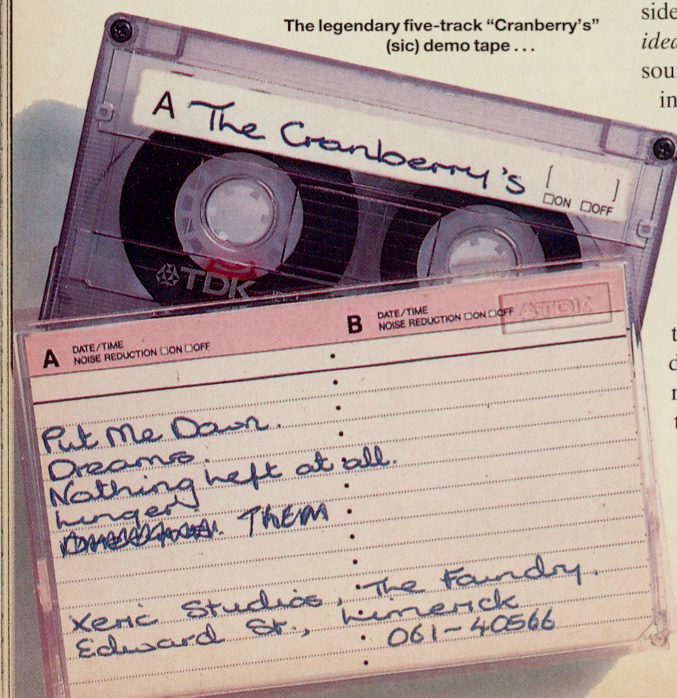
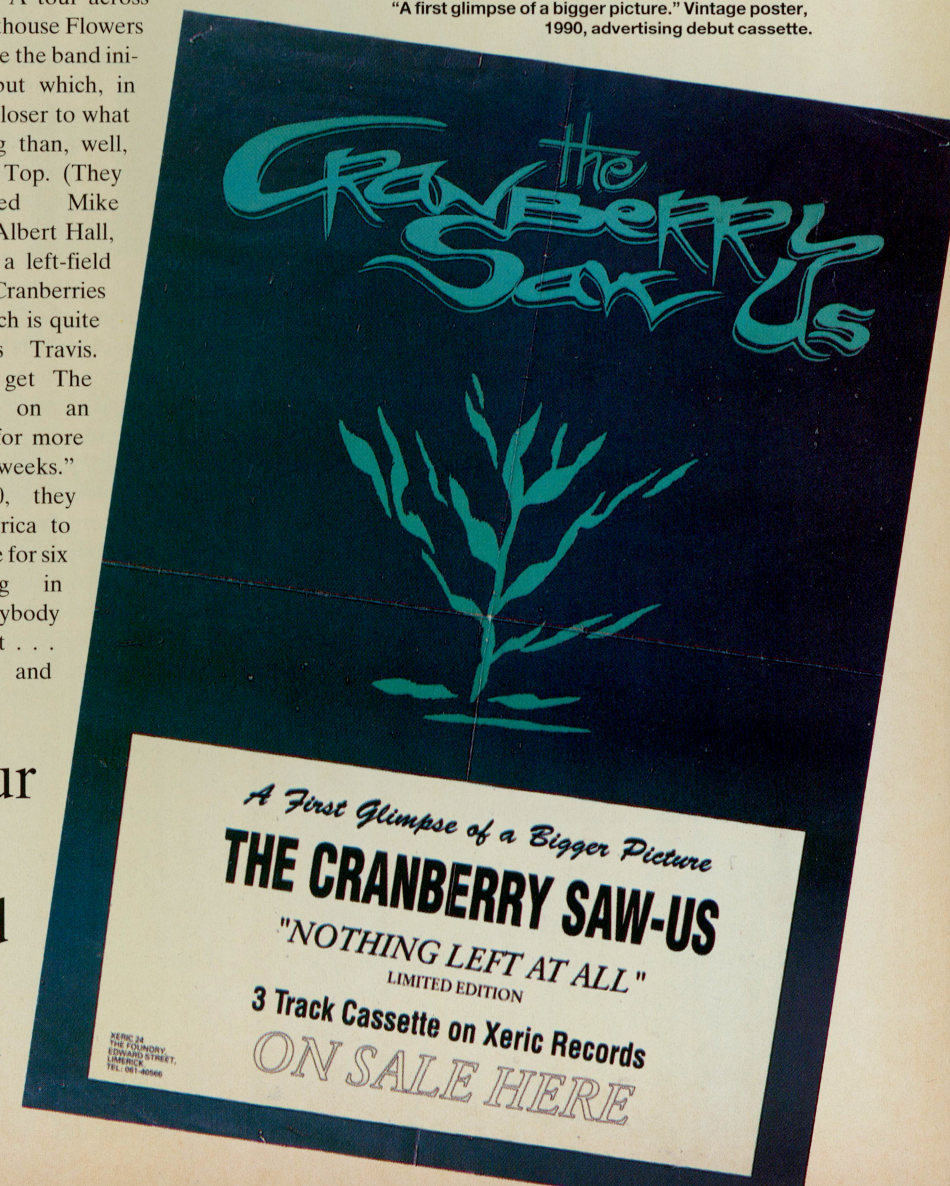
On June 10, they arrived in America to open for The For six weeks, starting in Colorado. Everybody Else Is Doing It . . . was released, and

"I orchestrated every fuck-up in their career. And none of the good stuff." PR John Best

things fell into place very quickly. No preconceptions, no press build-up, their album had sufficient AOR values to reach a wide audience, yet The Cranberries were seen as an alternative act from England. ("Fifty per cent of the fans don't even know we're Irish. We're seen as The Cranberries from England. Limerick, England!") They did some club dates of their own, Linger was picked up by MTV and a "buzz" resulted from college radio support. They sold out New York's The Grand and The Troubadour in LA on the back of it.

Dolores: "People discovered it themselves rather than have the press force it down their throat." (For the record, they had been out to the States once before, to shoot the Linger video in downtown LA, with director Melody McDaniels, who'd worked on Losing My Religion. As a result, Michael Stipe paid them a casual visit. Noel, the biggest R.E.M. fan among them, had just been talked into dying his hair black by Dolores; thus, slicked back, and sporting white make-up, he had an embarrassed photo taken with Stipe. "Nice guy," they all concur.)

"A first glimpse of a bigger picture." Vintage poster, 1990, advertising debut cassette.



The legendary five-track "Cranberry's" (sic) demo tape . . .

"If you have a bad gig and your manager comes in and says you've gone platinum, you'd still be pissed off about the bad gig." Dolores O'Riordan



Cranberry sauce! Dolores marries Don Burton, July 1994.

Then they notched up five weeks with Suede in September, doing 1,000 to 2,000-seater venues, which marked the great turnaround. Suede may have been the bees' knees in the UK, but it didn't automatically translate at the box office in Pine Knob, Michigan. They co-headlined on paper, but Suede went on last, which The Cranberries didn't mind ("We do our thing; we don't care whether we're first or last").

Travis: "Everyone told us it was a waste of time playing with Suede, that The Cranberries are much bigger than Suede in America, but we thought it was right. We thought it would be good for Noel to see Bernard Butler play guitar and that worked out very well." Things came to a head in Atlanta where The Cranberries *had* to go on second. It is one of their strongest territories, and 4,000 punters turned up to a 2,000-capacity show. They moved the gig outdoors.

There was no bad feeling on the tour, and the legend that folk were literally leaving in droves after The Cranberries had finished playing was, according to Travis, "media exaggeration". The two bands got on famously, too. "Brett was fun; he was someone I could slag and thump," confirms Dolores. "We hung round with Bernard more, though. He was the one who ended up in our bus."

Ultimately, we have our own type of humour. But we got on."

The following six weeks were spent opening for Duran Duran. More "getting on" occurred. Bottles of complimentary champagne arrived in The Cranberries' rooms. It was during this leg that Dolores fell for Duran Duran's tour manager, Don Burton. They married in full Pope-upsetting regalia in Limerick this July; flash, bang, and in no small measure, wallop.

"THREE MILLION worldwide, platinum in UK, gold in Canada . . . and we've had no front covers in any European magazines. We haven't even had one from NME or Melody Maker, and do you know what? We don't want one. We're doing fine without it."

The Cranberries today, on the eve of their follow-up album, *No Need To Argue* (again produced by Stephen Street), are buoyant, level-headed and combative. And decidedly anti-press. "Press doesn't sell records or get you fans, it just makes you an icon. We found that out on the Suede tour. If you're on a

lot of front covers, it just wears out the name of the band. The art becomes irrelevant."

When Dolores got wed in her knickers, she, in fact, became a tabloid icon for a day. What must the goats out back have thought of her?

It's worth mentioning what Best refers to as "the Irish media's total antipathy" towards The Cranberries. He reckons they were initially seen by the influential Dublin-based *Hot Press* newspaper as "a London trendy band. They disowned them. Now she's the new Sinead." (They finally earned the cover of *Hot Press* in January this year, headed, double-ironically, "I Did It My Way". Travis: "It's a sad reflection on them, really.")

In June this year, 16 months after its release and on the back of second-time-around chart successes for *Linger* and *Dreams*, *Everybody Else Is Doing It . . .* went to Number 1 in the UK album charts, only the fifth album ever to do so after more than a year. (The others: *My People*

Were Fair by Tyrannosaurus Rex, 40 Greatest Hits by Elvis Presley, the original soundtrack of *Fame*, and Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*.) "We didn't lose our head over it because it's a small market, you know," says Dolores coolly. "Platinum's only 300,000 here. It's a million in the States!"

"If you have a bad gig and your manager comes in and says you've gone platinum, you'd still be pissed off about the bad gig."

Back in March, at the ninth annual IRMA Awards in Dublin, The Cranberries were voted Best New Irish Band. In the same month, at the Music Week Awards in London's bustling West End, they were named Top New International Act. A Cranberries fashion spread appeared in *Rolling Stone* in April ("O'Riordan wears a black leather jacket, \$450 by Diesel" etc).

"She's changed, *they* haven't," observes Best, from a distance. (There is no ill will between him and The Cranberries; he got an invite to the wedding.) "I don't know what's happened to her head. She always had some funny ideas. When she sang some backing vocals for Moose, she didn't do it for free. She then spent the next couple of weeks ringing me up asking when she was going to get paid for it. She was very interested in money."

Anyone viewing the recent Cranberries Live concert video will have noticed that it's Dolores who hogs the screen. This focus is bound to incite mutterings of a solo breakaway. The band joke that the new LP will be credited to "Dolores O'Riordan & The Three Other Fellers".

But seriously . . . "We're not like an indie band with some little chick there in boots going, La la la," says Dolores, her boys pulled in around her. "The singing is genuinely a very big focal point of the band. That's why I get the attention, and that's fine. Whether it's me there or the boys there, it's all publicity for The Cranberries!"

One final analysis, then, from the Master Of Fuck-Ups, John Best: "The Cranberries' story is broadly indicative of the paralysis that grips British music, which is based on an over-awareness of the given horizons of ambition. Their awareness of music, particularly Dolores, is absolutely nil. It allows them a clean slate. British music so often has an ironical edge instead of true conviction to it. The Cranberries, to their advantage, have no sense of being cool."

All this and the youngest people at Woodstock II, too.

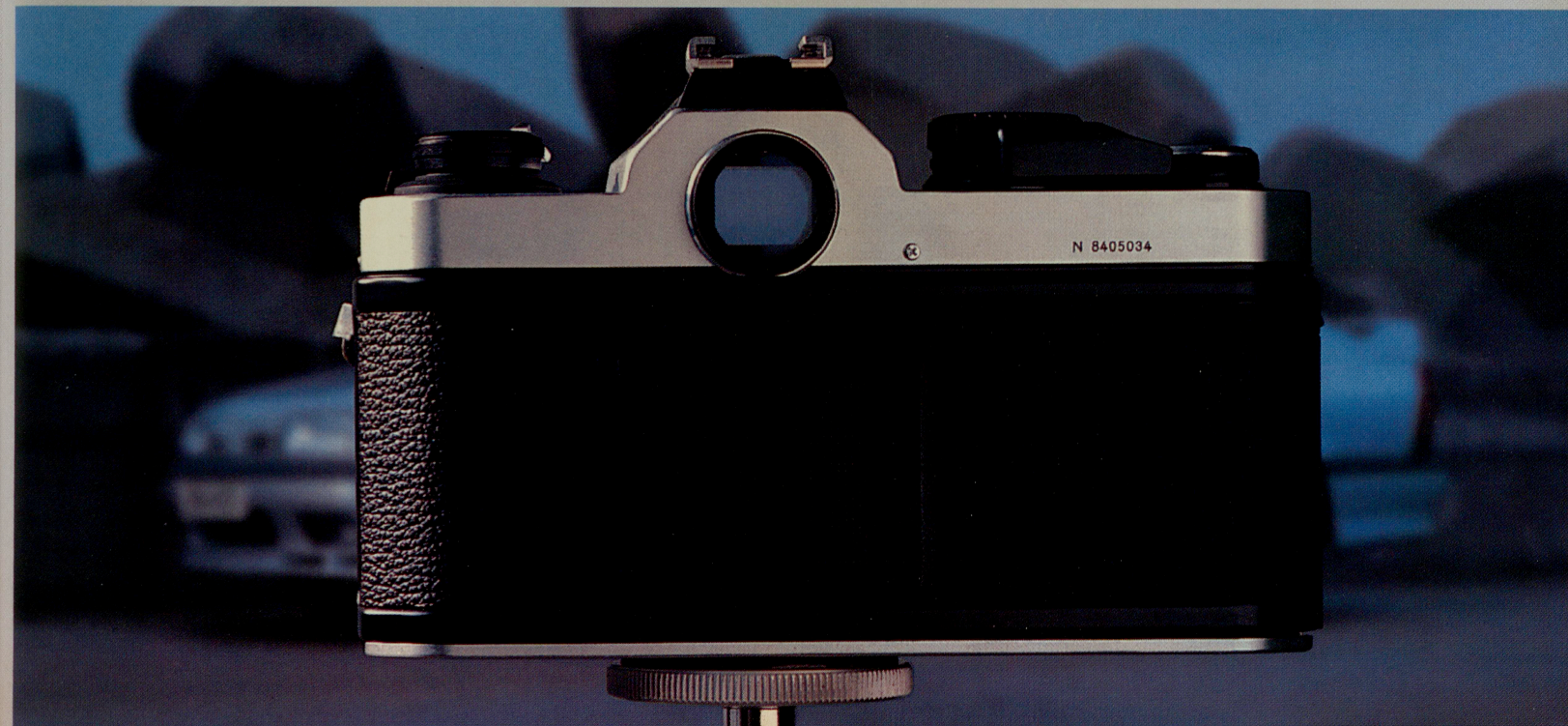
"We're the youngest people everywhere," they laugh.

*The first fruits of the new Cranberries material, the single *Zombie*, is released on September 19. The album follows in October.*

"People discovered us themselves rather than have the press force us down their throats." Dolores O'Riordan

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