

Limerick, Ireland  
1989

Brothers Noel and Mike Hogan start a band with their friends, Niall Quinn and Fergal Lawler. Noel played guitar, Mike played bass, Niall sang, and Fergal played drums. Heavily influenced by bands like The Smiths and The Cure, they called themselves the Cranberry Saw Us. They recorded a demo together called *Anything*, but shortly afterward, Niall left the band to rejoin his old band, The Hitchers.

The rest of the band decided to continue on as an instrumental group, but after a few months of that, they realized that they really did need a singer after all. Fortunately for them, Niall's girlfriend's sister had a singer friend who was looking to join a band. Her name was Dolores O'Riordan. Not only could she sing, but she was a songwriter, writing both lyrics and melodies. After auditioning with the band, she started writing lyrics for some of their instrumental stuff. However, the band couldn't really hear her that well, so they weren't quite sure if she'd be the lead singer or not. Fortunately, she came back the next week with lyrics and melodies over one of their instrumentals, and the band was so impressed that uh...yeah, she was now the lead singer for real. Oh, and by the way, that song was "Linger," which would later be a major hit for the band.

Soon Noel Hogan and O'Riordan were a dynamic songwriting team, and they began recording a demo to send to record labels. Meanwhile, they began performing with O'Riordan. Their first performance with her was in a hotel basement in Limerick with three other local bands. At their first few shows at clubs and pubs in town, despite being on stage they were often the youngest people in the room.

Soon the band began rehearsing at Xeric Recording studio, run by local record label Xeric Records, owned by a dude named Pearse Gilmore. Gilmore had already been producing their stuff, and he once again helped them record a demo EP that featured four songs, including "Linger." Called *Water Circle*, Xeric made just a limited amount of copies of the EP, on cassette tape, I might add, and the band sold them at shows and in local record stores. How rare is the EP? Well, a copy of it listed on Ebay in 2011 for just under \$1500. Anyway, afterward Gilmore decided to become their manager and helped them produce a "real" EP called *Nothing Left at All*. All 300 copies of IT sold out in Limerick record stores within just a few days.

Meanwhile, Noel had continued to send demos out to major record labels, and many were indeed interested. However, by the spring of 1991 nothing had officially worked out yet. By that time, they were now calling themselves "The Cranberry's." Yeah, that's uh grammatically incorrect, there.

On April 18, 1991, the Cranberry's played their first really big show on the campus of the University of Limerick to around 1,400 students. In the audience was a bunch of talent scouts for major record labels from London, including Denny Cordell of Island Records. After this there was a bidding war to sign the band between multiple major record labels. Uh, yeah, the Hogans

quit their day jobs after that. The band, now called the grammatically correct “The Cranberries,” did decide to go with Cordell and Island Records. They also went on their first tour of the United Kingdom.

While they were waiting to move forward with Island Records, they recorded one more EP with Gilmore at Xeric Records called *Uncertain*. Xeric made about 5,000 copies of this one, anticipating it to do well, but it actually didn’t do as well as the band had hoped it would.

For the rest of 1991, the band were hopeful of their future, but did have their share of doubts as their EP got bad reviews and they barely made any money at all as they toured the UK once again. In December, they were supposed to tour with the breakout band Nirvana, but Nirvana backed out after their lead singer, Kurt Cobain, got sick. On January 10, 1992, things were looking up as the band appeared on the Irish TV show “On the Waterfront.”<sup>1</sup> Soon after that, they attempted to record their debut full-length album with Gilmore at Xeric Recording Studio, but Gilmore had become very difficult to work with and they felt he was hurting their songs, so ultimately, they fired him, despite being locked into a contract with him. They hired Geoff Travis, the founder of the legendary Rough Trade Records, to be their new manager.

In March, the Cranberries began working with producer Stephen Street, who had previously worked with the Smiths, at Windmill Lane studios in Dublin to again attempt to record their debut album. For the rest of the year they would continue to perfect it. By that time, the Cranberries had quite a distinct sound, especially with the unique voice of O’Riordan, who had both range and authority. Meanwhile, the band played a bunch more shows, touring both Ireland and the UK, now as headliners.

Though it was originally scheduled for October 1992, Island released the Cranberries’ debut studio album, *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can’t We?* on March 1, 1993. By that time, Island had already released two singles off the album, “Dreams” and a new version of the aforementioned “Linger.” However, radio stations, at least initially, didn’t play the songs much. But the band kept at it, and throughout the rest of the year, they slowly started to get mainstream success, especially after MTV started putting their videos into regular rotation.

In June, the band toured the United States for the first time. By the end of that tour, nearly every college radio station and alternative rock radio station were playing the Cranberries and *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can’t We?* had re-entered the charts having sold more than 200,000 copies. Based on this new momentum, Island RE-RELEASED both “Dreams” and “Linger” as singles in early 1994. “Dreams” got all the way up to #27 on the UK charts and “Linger” peaked at #14. In fact, Island ultimately re-released ALL of *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can’t We?*, and it hit #18 on the Billboard 200 albums chart and stayed on the chart for 130 weeks. The album also eventually sold more than six million copies worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYbtDtybx2A>

In July 1994, O’Riordan married the band’s tour manager, Don Burton.<sup>2</sup> He was Canadian, and they’d eventually settle down and start a family in Canada.

In the summer of 1994, the Cranberries returned to tour North America and were drawing more than 10,000 people per show. One highlight was performing at Woodstock ‘94.

Meanwhile, the band had already been recording what would become their second studio album, *No Need to Argue*. These songs were much darker, moodier, and a bit heavier than their previous stuff. Street returned to produce. Island released *No Need to Argue* on October 3, 1994, and it was an even bigger hit than *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can’t We?*, peaking at #6 on the Billboard 200.

Its lead single was “Zombie,” which was a slightly grungy protest song O’Riordan was inspired to write after hearing about the Warrington bombings, in which two children were killed by terrorists. O’Riordan’s singing in “Zombie” is unforgettable. I mean, she yodels in it, for crying out loud. The band performed the song on the Late Show with David Letterman, and it topped charts in eight different countries, including spending six weeks at the top of the Billboard Modern Rock Chart. The music video for “Zombie” also won several awards.

Critics generally praised *No Need to Argue*, and today it continues to be the band’s most successful album BY FAR, selling more than 17 million copies worldwide. It also featured the hit songs “Ode to My Family” and “Ridiculous Thoughts,” as well as the single “I Can’t Be with You.”

On February 25, 1995, the band performed on [Saturday Night Live](#). Throughout the rest of the year, the Cranberries toured relentlessly to promote *No Need to Argue*, first in Europe, then touring Australia and Asia for the first time. This is when the band had arguably reached their maximum fame, especially O’Riordan, who paparazzis regularly followed around. In April, the band headlined a tour of major American college campuses. On May 15th, they played a free show on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., [and an estimated 15,000 people showed up](#). The radio station that put on the show only estimated 3,000 would show up, and things got pretty crazy. A riot even broke out after the local police made the band stop the show early. By the end of their American tour, an average of around 20,000 people per night were attending their shows. Also by the end of the tour? Rumors swirling that O’Riordan was going to leave the band to pursue a solo career.

But nope, that didn’t happen. In November, the Cranberries decided to finally take a break from touring and went back to the studio. They decided to record a new album in memory of Denny Cordell, who had died earlier that year. This time they worked with producer Bruce Fairbairn, who had made a name for himself working with hard rock bands. And the Cranberries’ new songs were even more heavier and aggressive than their previous stuff. Oh, and O’Riordan’s lyrics...even more political.

These songs made up what would become their third studio album, *To the Faithful Departed*, released by Island on April 30, 1996. Critics were more mixed about this one, but it did do well

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<sup>2</sup> <https://spockandchristine.com/biography/don-burton/>

commercially, topping the album charts in several countries and peaking at #4 on the Billboard 200. While it sold four million copies in six weeks, it sort of fizzled after that. It did feature four singles: "Salvation," "Free to Decide," "When You're Gone," and "Hollywood." Both "Free to Decide" and "When You're Gone" got a lot of airplay on pop radio, with both songs reaching #22 on the Billboard Hot 100. The band was set to once again tour heavily to promote *To the Faithful Departed*, but they had to cancel a lot of shows after O'Riordan injured her knee. In the fall of 1996, the band canceled both its European and Australian tours not only due to O'Riordan's knee, but her suffering from insomnia, paranoia, and anorexia. Overall, the band decided they needed a break from the music industry, and they avoided the spotlight pretty much all of 1997. O'Riordan spent most of the year cut off from not only the outside world, but even from her bandmates.

And here's where we'll take a break from the video, too. This video is sponsored by Incogni.

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Ok, back to the Cranberries

In 1998, the band slowly started to make appearances again. On December 11, they played at the Nobel Peace Prize Concert in Oslo, Norway. Meanwhile, the band had begun recording what would become their fourth studio album, *Bury the Hatchet*, produced by Benedict Fenner. Island released it on April 19, 1999, and it featured THIS cover, which Pitchfork once called one of the worst record covers of all time. I strongly disagree. I think the cover is amazing. Anyway, *Bury the Hatchet's* MUSIC still got mostly positive reviews from critics. It featured the singles "Promises," "Animal Instinct," "Just My Imagination," and "You and Me." However, "Promises" was the only single to get significant radio airplay. *Bury the Hatchet* peaked at #7 on the

Billboard 200 and eventually sold more than 3 million copies, not nearly as successful as their first three albums. The worldwide tour to promote *Bury the Hatchet*, however, was a smash success, the biggest tour of their career in fact. It was this tour in which the Cranberries became the first band to sell tickets exclusively through their own website.

After the tour wrapped up in July 2000, the band once again returned to the studio to record new material. Even though the band was no longer at the peak of their fame, in the studio they were definitely at the top of their game, and Stephen Street was back to produce. After the merger of PolyGram, who owned Island Records, with Universal Music Group, MCA released the Cranberries' fifth studio album, *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee*, on October 22, 2001. Critics once again mostly praised the album, but it did not do well commercially, only peaking at #46 on the Billboard 200. It featured three singles: "Analyse," "Time Is Ticking Out," and "This Is the Day," but none of them got much radio airplay. It didn't help that MCA didn't promote *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee* much. Still, the band once again had a successful tour to promote the new songs.

In 2002, Island released two compilations: *Treasure Box for Boys and Girls - The Complete Sessions 1991-1999* and a greatest hits album called *Stars: The Best of 1992-2002*.

In early 2003, the Cranberries left MCA and decided to record some new stuff once again with Stephen Street. However, by this point, all of the band was settled down with families, and they wanted a break. That break would end up lasting almost six years. During that time, O'Riordan finally DID start a solo career, even releasing a couple of albums and going on her own world tour. Meanwhile, Noel recorded a bunch of stuff under the moniker of Mono Band. Mike opened a cafe with his wife in Limerick, also helping his brother record stuff with Mono Band of course. Fergal joined the band Low Network, while also performing with and producing other Irish bands, including Mono Band.

Meanwhile, Island released two more greatest hits collections, believe it or not. Oh, and a live album. Gotta make that money, amirite?

In 2009, the Cranberries reunited and announced they would once again be touring Europe and North America. In 2010, they toured South America for the first time, and after spending most of that year touring around the world the band finally decided to return to the studio to record some new material, once again with Stephen Street. Recorded mostly at Metalworks Studios in Mississauga, Canada in April and May 2011, these new songs were more experimental than their previous albums. Noel later said, "Because we'd all gone off in different directions, we all came back into the band with these new experiences and a new way of working and it was great." The independent British record label Cooking Vinyl released the band's sixth studio album, *Roses*, on February 21, 2012. While *Roses* was a hit with long-time fans, it failed to gain any mainstream traction, peaking at just #51 on the Billboard 200. It featured the singles "Tomorrow," "Raining in My Heart," "Waiting in Walthamstow," and "Fire & Soul."

And then, another hiatus. In 2013, it appeared that O’Riordan and Noel Hogan were not getting along, especially when O’Riordan filed a High Court case against him. However, that was ultimately dropped. Meanwhile, O’Riordan had her own personal issues. First, she was addicted to pills and alcohol. Not only that, but by 2014 she had left her husband, Don Burton, after 20 years of marriage. Around that time she got arrested after freaking out on a hostess on an airplane.<sup>3</sup> Soon after that, doctors diagnosed her with bi-polar disorder.

That same year, O’Riordan moved to New York City to join a band called D.A.R.K., which was founded by Andy Rourke, the former bassist of the Smiths. D.A.R.K. would go on to release an album called *Science Agrees* with Cooking Vinyl. Working with D.A.R.K. had rejuvenated O’Riordan, and she became more busy with new music projects than she had in decades.

In 2016, the Cranberries reunited once more, playing a series of shows and then returning to the studio to re-record a bunch of their hits acoustically with the Irish Chamber Orchestra backing them. The result was their seventh studio album, *Something Else*, released by BMG on April 28, 2017. It featured ten of their re-recorded hits, along with three new songs, including the single “Why?” Critics generally praised *Something Else*, and the band went back on a world tour to promote it. They played mostly smaller venues, and yes were joined by a live orchestra, baby. Sadly, this tour was also cut short after O’Riordan severely hurt her back. Little did they know, their show at the London Palladium on May 20, 2017, would be the last Cranberries show ever.<sup>4</sup>

For the rest of 2017, O’Riordan and Noel Hogan recorded new songs back and forth via email. Hogan would send her tracks and she would send vocals back. Meanwhile, O’Riordan had continued working with D.A.R.K. and had planned on recording with the band Bad Wolves for their cover of “Zombie.” However, the day before she was scheduled to show up to the studio to record with Bad Wolves, she died after accidentally drowning in her hotel bathtub in London. A coroner later found she had four times more alcohol than the legal limit for driving in her system. She was just 46.

News of her death shocked fans around the world. Noel, Mike, and Fergal decided the Cranberries could not go on without her. However, they did agree to release one final Cranberries album with the newest material they had recorded with Dolores. After getting permission and support from Dolores’ family, they returned to the studio one final time, joined by Stephen Street again. Due to some of O’Riordan’s recordings being incomplete, Johanna Cranitch, who had toured with the band from 2012 to 2017, came in to help fill in any gaps. The result was their eighth and final studio album, appropriately titled *In the End*, released by BMG on April 26, 2019. *In the End* was their most critically praised album since *Bury the Hatchet*. Standout songs off it include “All Over Now” and “Wake Me When It’s Over.” *In the End* became the band’s first-ever nomination for a Grammy.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.irishmirror.ie/showbiz/irish-showbiz/cranberries-star-dolores-air-rage-4606499>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-pYnyBLqMk>

Today, the Cranberries are one of the most successful alternative rock bands and IRISH bands of all-time. They have sold nearly 50 million copies of their albums.<sup>5</sup> Their mix of dream pop, jangle pop, post-punk, and even Irish folk gave them a distinct sound that is often seemingly ubiquitous with the 1990s. Their success seemed unlikely- a band from a small city in Ireland that mixed heavenly pop songs with dark and often political lyrics- but their success was often driven by the undeniable commanding presence of Dolores O'Riordan, a feminist icon who filled a void in the alternative rock world that countered the grunge movement. Her influence, in particular, is not brought up enough.

While making this video I went back and revisited the Cranberries later albums, and I gotta say, they are just as good if not better than their early stuff, man . I especially recommend their final album, *In the End*. It's underrated. But what's YOUR favorite Cranberries song or album? Also, which band should I cover next for this series? Keep those suggestions coming. Thanks for watching!

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