

07.24.2004 » Noel Hogan in the Zombieguid Interview

Cranberries guitarist Noel Hogan admits that it's been over a year since his last proper interview. News on the band has tighted to a trickle since they announced last September that they plan to take a break to pursue solo projects over the next coming year. On Wednesday, Noel talked with Zombieguid's Alex Kraus over the phone about his first solo album, the challenges behind it, and the future of The Cranberries.

Noel has been no slouch over that period, as he tells Zombieguid in this exclusive first interview for his upcoming solo album. He's been working with artists like Eagle Eye Cherry and Alexandra Hamnede, programmer Matthew Vaughan, and producers Marius de Vries and Stephen Street on an album he best describes as "diverse" and able to take the listener "through different feelings. You know, there are some hard-hitting moments, some happy moments, there's quite sad moments." Working on his own is no easy task, as he admits, the prospect of creating an album on his own has been an incredible challenge. Next year, he plans to take his solo material on the road with a showcase tour that will take him across Europe and the USA.

Noel gives us the unadulterated scoop on his solo album, Dolores, and the future of The Cranberries...

INTERVIEW

Zombieguid: I suppose this is officially the first interview in promotion of your solo album?

Noel: ***Yeah, I suppose so, I haven't done anything yet before this, so this is the first. I'm doing this now cos the album is almost finished.***

Zombieguid: I guess it's been awhile since the last interview you did?

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah, it has been. I guess the last one was sometime last year right after we were touring with the Rolling Stones. After that we did a once-off gig in Ireland, in August, was it? No, it was July. Anyway, we did an interview that night and that was the last one.***

Zombieguid: Well, we have lots of questions here for you from Zombieguid visitors, so we'll get to those in a minute. But right now, I have to ask you, first of all, straight from the horse's mouth, what's the status of The Cranberries?

Noel Hogan: ***Well right now, we're just doing what we said we were going to do, which is to kinda go our separate ways and experiment for awhile. We were going to record our sixth album, but then Dolores's mother-in-law got ill and she couldn't concentrate. Unfortunately, she died a few months ago... so we said, look, take as much time as you need. There are alot more things that are more important than the band all the time. So Dolores went there [Toronto] and she couldn't give us a date that she could come back to us. We've talked about this for so long about everybody doing their own thing that maybe now is the right time to do that. And then when we feel that the time is right for the band to get back together, then we'll do that. As it stands right now, everyone's doing this, their own little bits and pieces. But in a year or so maybe. I talked to Dolores maybe a month or so ago and we were talking about when to get back together again. It will happen, we just don't have a set date yet. We know that Dolores has recorded stuff as well and she wants to do her own thing as well. You know, we've done The Cranberries for 13 years and we've never had a chance to get outside it. So it kind of makes it more exciting for us and hopefully the things we've learned from doing our own thing, we can bring back and make the next album a really good one.***

Zombieguid: Alright. Last summer you guys recorded a 4-track demo that you were using to shop around to different distributors. Did anything come out of that?

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah, we've four tracks and we played 2 of them live. We've done one live called "Astral Projection" ...***

Zombieguide: ...and "In It Together"?

Noel Hogan: **Yeah, that's right, so they're recorded, but they haven't been mixed, so we have rough mixes of them. They're in the bag and ready there to go. So I guess when we're ready to go, we'll have those four titles to fall back on.**

Zombieguide: Can you give us the other two titles, by any chance?

Noel Hogan: **There was "Written on My Heart"... and I'm trying to think, I can't remember to be honest, I can check that and can get Rainer to email that to you, cos I have the demo at home. It's just been so long since I listened to it that I forget the names. But those three are definite because we've had those for awhile.**

Zombieguide: You guys said you wanted to go off on an experimental side with the sixth album and the demos you did for that. What were your influences for that? Did you guys have any influences that influenced...

Noel Hogan: **Well, you're always going to be influenced by everything that's going on. You know, music has changed so much since when we began. There was a time I swore that I'd never ever go near a computer to do anything with music. But then I started to hear what other people had done. Especially -- not the hardcore dance stuff, no -- but more stuff like even, say, Moby, that style of music, I got interested in. I thought, there are some interesting sounds here. I didn't want the band to go off into dance rhythms or anything like that, but I just thought, in the background, you can get some interesting sounds that you can only get in a computer. You could try to mix what we do with this together and see what results you get. So that was kind of the plan. That's how initially I came in touch with that programmer I ended up working with, Matt Vaughan. I had written a few songs and I wanted to see how they would sound with different samples and things. I kinda started to get into like that.**

Zombieguide: So there is a possibility of The Cranberries going on tour at some point in the future.

Noel Hogan: **Oh yeah, yeah, obviously it would be after the album would be recorded, but it's something that we all want to do. This is the longest we've gone without doing something or other. We were just saying how exciting it will be to get back again and do stuff.**

Zombieguide: Well, I just have to nag you on behalf of your fans in South America, they're dying for you to come visit them.

Noel Hogan: **Yeah, well, hopefully. This album that I'm doing and this album that Dolores is doing, we'll have a year of that. By the time we start the next album and record it, you're looking at two years before the unit will be together as The Cranberries, touring. It will happen at some point.**

Zombieguide: This could be a mistranslation, Dolores was at a press conference in Sanremo, Italy, in March, Dolores said that it was her call to go on this break and that you three guys were a bit disappointed. Is that true?

Noel Hogan: **Um, no, because she rang about it. It was me she rang and the two boys were on holidays at the time. We were meant to go back into the studio, I think it would have been September-October. When the boys came back, I told them, look, Dolores has this stuff to deal with, so I don't think we're going to be recording in the near future. So I guess they were disappointed initially. I didn't bother ringing them while they were on holidays because I wanted them to enjoy themselves during that. So, I'm sure that's what she was referring to when she said that. But a couple of weeks later, everybody was fine, we all got used to the idea and planning what everybody was gonna do with themselves.**

Zombieguide: OK, someone asked after you and Dolores finish promoting your solo works, will there still be a lots of material left over for The Cranberries and the sixth album? (Asked by

Irishset)

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah, I'm sure because we're lucky in that we write constantly. Like I have far more songs finished than what I need and Dolores is the same. So it's never been a problem for us to write. You get a bit picky I guess and you want to try to get the best songs that you can. You can write in an eight or nine month period, you can write and write eight or nine songs. But sometimes you think, well, five of these songs are kinda crap, and four are worth doing and you follow those. But that's what takes most of the time is weeding out the ones that you think aren't as strong as the strong ones.***

Zombieguid: Dolores said in an interview last year that you guys were really trying to do that now with the newer stuff, that you'd write a lot but only pick a little bit out.

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah, exactly. You know, like sometimes I could send Dolores a tape or CD with four rough ideas in it and sometimes she might pick none or sometimes she might pick one. We would kind of chop through them like that. The thing is, the ones that you don't think are as strong, you end up chopping those up and putting two bits together and they make a better song later on. It's not like you ever forget them, most of them I do keep records of and when I'm trying to get a chorus or something for the song, I think, oh, remember that, I had whatever months ago. You dig it out and use it again, and it worked great this time.***

Zombieguid: This is the last Cranberries-related question. In August 2002, while you guys were in Hong Kong you filmed a new documentary , but it wasn't finished in time to release with "Stars." Do you think we'll ever get to see it?

Noel Hogan: ***Um, you know, I'm not sure really. We did alot of stuff like that, there's a lot of unfinished stuff there. Maybe someday that could all be put together. I think it'd be great to do a proper full-length documentary, it's something we've always been interested in.***

Zombieguid: Now, you made some news earlier this year because you have invited fans to submit names for your solo album. So the question is, do you have a winner? (Phil, N. Ireland)

Noel Hogan: ***No, not yet. I've got it down to about 50 actually. It's really hard. I tried myself first for ages and I just couldn't come up with anything. The ones I did come up with had been taken already or even things like companies had them. You got to be careful about that. We got a great response when we put it on the 'net. There were so many that we just sat there and go through them all. We have a shortlist now and I'd say, because I'm running out of time, in the next six to eight weeks, I'll have a winner.***

Zombieguid: What made you decide to hold a contest, other than not being able to come up with a title?

Noel Hogan: ***That was the main reason. I was sitting here in the office and I couldn't think of it. One of the guys who's been with us for years, it was Sett, I don't know if you know him, he's been the tour manager with us. He said to me, you know, maybe you should think about this. I went home and thought about it and thought, you know, that's a great idea. And it gets the fans involved as well, which is something we've always tried to do. So that's what we did. I met some guys who -- there's a huge art college here in Limerick -- so I met up with them. We sat down and kinda thrashed out the idea for a website. It was great, and it turned out great.***

Zombieguid: What were you going for in a title? Fans had a really hard time coming up with ideas, since we had NO idea what your solo stuff sounds like.

Noel Hogan: ***I guess, without anyone hearing it, I was trying to get something that would sum up the music. Now I know that's really hard without hearing it. But I kinda figured that somebody would stumble onto something for me.***

Zombieguid: Were you looking for something, funny, serious, witty...?

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah, witty enough, but I guess it'd have to be a little bit serious.***

Zombieguide: Alright. Celticyodels from Syria asks, how far back does your solo material go? Is there any that you wrote with The Cranberries but then decided that somebody other than Dolores should sing on it?

Noel Hogan: ***I guess the first few I had written when we were recording those 4 songs we spoke about earlier. Like I said, I keep writing all the time. There were 2 I had written that I had kept, that I was thinking, now these two songs I could take them somewhere else. I hadn't really thought about the vocals or anything at that point. As I said to you, we had intended to do another album, so I was still writing for The Cranberries still at that point. So that's when... I guess it would have been February or March of last year that I first got in touch with Matt [Vaughan]. I brought the songs very raw, basically just the guitar part, into the room that he works out of and started working on them. Because it was a new way of writing for me, it took a few months for me to get a point where I was happy with them. Then at that point, we decided that we weren't going to do another album. That's when I started thinking OK... that's what gave me the initial idea of "Well I have these songs started. Maybe it might be interesting to see what it would sound like with other people singing on them." That sparked the idea really then, so that's what became now this album.***

Zombieguide: We know the name of two of your collaborators, Alexandra Hamnede and Richard Walters, who I think is going to record with you next month. Cranlady1981 asks, with whom else are you going to work and there are you going to work and are there going to be any big surprises? (Cranlady1981, Greece)

Noel Hogan: ***Well, there are a few. The most well known one is Eagle Eye Cherry, is doing one track. There's a girl called Kate Havnevik, she's a Norwegian girl. She's got a bit of a buzz over here at the moment. She's on two other tracks. There's a guy from a French band called Overhead. His name is Nicolas and I can't even pronounce his second name so I won't even attempt it. [Editor's note: Overhead is fronted by Nicolas Leroux] He's a singer with them. He's got an amazing voice, he sounds kind of like Jeff Buckley. So he's done another track and he's actually working on a second one at the moment.***

Zombieguide: I was reading some reviews for Richard Walters and someone else compared him to Jeff Buckley...

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah, he's kinda got that vibe as well. I'm in with him not next Tuesday but the following Tuesday. I'm booked in with him. The last guy I can think of offhand, he's in an Irish band called Woodstar and he sings with them. He's done two tracks, these were the first 2 tracks I did because I know him pretty well.***

Zombieguide: They've opened for you, right?

Noel Hogan: ***That's right, they did some gigs here with us. They're doing their second album at the moment, so I got him in between albums to work on two tracks with me. He's got quite an interesting voice, very high voice he has. He'd actually done stuff -- their first album was produced with Stephen as well, so I got to meet him through a bunch of different people. And there's some instrumentals on there as well. There was one I did where I had a sitar player brought in because it had a very Middle Eastern type of vibe to it and I thought this would be good. Then I worked with Marius de Vries on that track and he brought in this Turkish girl. She's not singing lyrics as such, more like wails over it, and it's completely different to anything I've done before. So it's quite varied, some of it's quite rocky, some of it's very laid-back. It is electronic sounding, some of it, because the majority of it was done on computers.***

Zombieguide: Let's see, Kerrie from Spain asks... now we know Mike and his wife just had a baby and Ferg's studying programming at home. Do you know if they have any projects lined up for their time off?

Noel Hogan: ***Well, I know that Ferg has started writing stuff. I heard a few bits of it and I know that he's working with a few people here, locals guys in Limerick. He's***

definitely... I'm not sure how many songs he's got done yet. I know because he's played on two tracks for me, I got him to play drums on. But he's working away, he's definitely working with different people. He's really gotten into the whole programming side of things.

Zombieguide: What kind of promo are you anticipating to do for your solo CD? Maybe a promo tour or...?

Noel Hogan: **Yeah, the plan is... I've got a couple more vocals to finish. I've got half the stuff mixed. I just have to mix the rest of it. By September, I should be finished the bones of the recording. And then the plan is to start rehearsing with a band. I've already approached different people that I know, they're just friends of mine that have played for years. [We have to] start learning the parts and working through it. And then to do some showcase gigs across Europe and then over to the States. I'm talking about January to start doing that. I'll probably start doing other promo towards the end of the year, press and that sort of thing. I'd like to get one song out somehow or other before Christmas just as a sampler for people to hear, and then come January, start touring proper.**

Zombieguide: Mouna asks, what sort of message are you hoping to convey with your album or what do you hope people will get out of it? (Mouna, Toronto)

Noel Hogan: **Um, well, like I said earlier, it varies a lot, so there's a lot of different moods in it. Some of it is very very atmospheric. Most of the people that I've played it to or have worked with, I'm giving them bits of the instrumental part, more or less finished, to do the vocal part over. A lot of people has said it's very cinematic, the vibe that they got off of it. [That's what] they thought without even a vocal in there, what you would hear in a movie in the background. Obviously not the more rocky ones... hopefully, when people listen to it, it takes them through different feelings. You know, there are some hard-hitting moments, some happy moments, there's quite sad moments, I guess.**

Zombieguide: That's interesting you mention "cinematic." Someone asked if you're considering doing any movie music. (Chloe, France)

Noel Hogan: **Well, it's something that the publisher I'm with at the moment has approached me with. There's a girl there who does what they call "synch," which is basically movie, TV, and cinema. When she heard the stuff, she approached me and asked me if I'd be interested in doing stuff solely for movies, which is something myself and Dolores have always talked about, it's something that we've always been interested in. I said to her, look, let me finish this and we'll see what happens after that. I don't wanna commit to anything else right now, just get this done. I'll probably do the band after that. It's just [a matter of] trying to fit it all in to get the time. I would imagine that takes up a lot of time as well.**

Zombieguide: Sigma from Mexico City points out that in earlier Cranberries works, we can hear pretty simple guitar arrangements, but in later works like New New York, Stars, and WUASTC, we can hear that your guitar playing has become a little more complicated. Do you think we'll be able to hear more of that in your new solo work?

Noel Hogan: **Yeah, I think so. What I started doing is, I did it first on that track, "In It Together"... I've always used the regular tuning on the guitar. I met a guy, he was one of the guitar techs on tour, and he said to me, have you ever tried alternative tuning? So I'd heard of it, but I'd never really tried it. He gave me a bunch of tunings and basically this whole album was written around these six or seven tunings that I've been using. It's like learning guitar all over again, it's really opened it up completely for me, it's been incredible. Sometimes you feel like you're running out of ideas if you just use the regular tuning, since you've used it for so long.**

Zombieguide: Actually, someone asked a question about that, if you're going to use alternate tunings or open tunings? (Nigel)

Noel Hogan: **Yeah, basically every song is a completely different tuning, which is fine**

in the studio and when I'm writing, but I haven't even thought of how I'm going to approach it live yet. Obviously you can't have whatever, 12 or 13 guitars, it'd be crazy.

Zombieguide: Especially after you give one away in the contest!

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah, exactly, so I'll have to work that out. Because of doing this, it's opened it up completely and it's given me a lot more freedom playing live and a lot more confidence.***

Zombieguide: Alright. Mummbz wants to know, do any of the band members plan to start a record label now that you've left Universal?

Noel Hogan: ***It's something we have dabbled with. We've definitely talked about it over the years. I think we would feel better if we did it as the four of us instead of individuals, 'cos financially, it's a lot to pump into something. If you have the comfort of the other 3, you wouldn't worry so much. So it's not something I would completely throw my back on, but at some point it's something we might dabble in.***

Zombieguide: A related question, someone asks, are you disillusioned with the whole music business machine, especially in regards to the lack of support you received from you last record label? How will things change in the future as to how The Cranberries are promoted and how you are promoted? What lessons have you learned? (Sundaygirl, Manchester)

Noel Hogan: ***It is. There are moments when you are made a lot of promises and obviously these things don't happen. You do get seriously pissed off then. And you kind of wonder why you bother half the time because you're doing it and no one's getting to hear it. It does annoy you a lot but then when you sit back and relax, you realize this is the way it's gone on for years. We were very lucky because in the beginning we were successful and we had them at our beck and call. But as time goes by, they get used to you and they get acts that are more successful, so they go to them. Once you realize that, that that's the way the game is played, you don't get as upset about it as you probably should sometimes. I think at the moment, it's no secret that the record companies are all in a lot of trouble with downloading. Every week you pick up a newspaper or one of those interview papers and another company is about to fire another 20 people or whatever. They're struggling, but I think their problem is that they haven't embraced the whole Internet thing yet.***

Zombieguide: That's what I was going to ask you next, the Official Site said you were considering making your new album available through downloads. Are you still considering doing this?

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah. It's the way it's going, you can't turn your back on it. It's like saying when CDs came out, "I'm sticking to vinyl. I'm ignoring it. I don't wanna release it." It's the same thing. It's just the way it's going and you just have to go with it. You can't be living [in the past,] 10 years ago. I personally find that I love going into a record shop and wandering around for an hour or two, looking at covers and that type of thing. But that's not everyone's cup of tea, and, let's be honest, who doesn't download something or other?***

Zombieguide: Aiencran from Italy, who runs the great site [CranPortal](#), an Italian site, says we've heard that a song called "Brighty Sky" might be used as a single?

Noel Hogan: ***Yeah, that's the one with a sitar on it, the one I've done with Marius de Vries. It's the most, I guess, the most different song I've done compared to The Cranberries' stuff. And that's why I was thinking for an initial track to come out to have something completely different so that people hear straight off the bat that it isn't the same thing exactly. We haven't made any decision yet. There's about 3 tracks that we're throwing around as the first single. I'm at the moment in the process of getting another remix of it done as it's very much an upbeat type of song. I was trying to get a remix done of it to put on the B-side as well, for clubs and that type of thing. I'm just going through different remixes at the moment to see what we're going to do with that. The other option we were thinking about was not to***

release it as an official single but maybe doing it as a white label 12", maybe print up 2000 copies and give them to people...

Zombieguide: ...send them to clubs, that sort of thing...

Noel Hogan: **...or even over the 'net. It might become available as a download or something like that.**

Zombieguide: Now we know that you've been working with Marius de Vries and also Stephen Street now on this album, is that right?

Noel Hogan: **Yeah.**

Zombieguide: What has each of their roles been?

Noel Hogan: **Stephen has done a lot of the vocal parts. I'd be fine on my own to do the music, because it'd be just me in a room, or me with Matt and we got used to each other so I felt confident enough to deal with that, learning how to play different parts: keyboards and bass. But when it came to the vocal, because I was bringing in outside people that I wouldn't have known that well [whom] I maybe would have talked to two or three times before. I was just worried that I'd get them in and... you know, I've never recorded a vocal in my life. What if I'd get them in and I'd make a [?], so I got in touch with Stephen. We stay in touch all the time anyway. He was interested in what I was doing anyway. So I asked him as a favor, would he mind? He has a small studio in London now, that he uses, Olympic. I knew he had this room that he does a lot of vocals in. So I asked him, as a favor to me, would he mind if I just show up with this track and will you produce the vocal part for me? So he was delighted to do that. So I've done, I guess, it must be 6 or 7 tracks with him doing the vocal part at this point. I might get him to mix 2 of them at the moment. They're more guitar-oriented ones. I've always liked the guitar songs that he's done for me. We haven't done that at the moment, it's still kind of up in the air. That's what I've done with Stephen so far. With Marius, it was just one track that I had, the Brighter Skies track. I had it finished, there was just something I felt it needed, I just wasn't sure. I'd done as much as I thought I could. Marius has done a couple of bits before and I liked the sound that he had gotten. So we approached him with it, and he said send him the track, he was really busy, if he liked it, he said he'd work with it, which he did. I've actually never met him, only spoken with him on the phone.**

Zombieguide: So Stephen's handled a lot of the vocal parts, you say. Supervago from Spain wants to know who's been responsible for the lyrics.

Noel Hogan: **It's been each individual singer. They've all gone to Matt and said, look, is there anything you don't want, anything you do want? And I said, look, if I knew that, then I'd write them myself, you know? So just do what you think is right and send it to me. I make the decision then. I have worked with some people where it didn't work out. Not many, now, only 2 or 3. I just thought, no offense, but it's just not what I've been looking for for that song and they've been fine.**

Zombieguide: And I believe this is the last question, Adam from California wants to know what kind of pedals do you use and what's the name of the pedal you use in the Daffodil Lament?

Noel Hogan: **It's actually not a pedal, it's a little thing called an ebow. It's basically a magnet that goes over the strings and it vibrates the strings and then you play the notes. You can get them in any good guitar shop basically. It takes awhile to get used to because it makes the guitar very loud. There's a lot of positioning to be done. It takes about a month and you'll be able to perfect it pretty well. For the pedals, there's hundreds, I could be here all day, to be honest. They're your regular kind of Boss pedals that you can buy anywhere. What I've done is I've put it all into a big rack unit that's controlled by one big pedal. That's called a Bradshaw unit, it's a guy in California that makes these. You basically give him everything you want and he gives you back one little pedal board which is what you have in front of you then and its [the unit] backstage.**

Zombieguide: Alright. Lots of people wanted to say hi, I don't have time to mention them all...
Noel Hogan: **No problem.**

Zombieguide: Thank you SO much for doing this for us.

Noel Hogan: **Honestly, thank you, the reason I [?] is because I check out the site every week. Sometimes I don't talk to the guys and I mightn't see Dolores for a few weeks or Ferg or Mike, so sometimes I check out to see if you've any news about them that you would know that I wouldn't, so... it's a great site, you do a really good job.**

Zombieguide: Thank you very much. I try to keep it all accurate, that's the hardest thing.

Noel Hogan: **Yep, it's amazingly up-to-date which is what impressed me as well.**

Zombieguide: It's very hard to get accurate news these days with you guys on break...

Noel Hogan: **Yeah, hopefully over the next few months, there will be more stuff coming out with me doing this and Dolores's is quite near the end of her thing as well. Between the both of us, hopefully, we'll keep you busy.**

Zombieguide: Really? Any idea when Dolores's might be out?

Noel Hogan: **I'm not sure yet, I know that she was in LA earlier this week or late last week having different meetings with different people as well. I would imagine, to be honest, that it's so late in the year now that it wouldn't be until January or February as well. To get something out now before the Christmas rush is impossible. I had hoped myself to have mine out by this time, but there's so many unforeseen things that you have to add on months.**

Zombieguide: It's always harder than it looks, isn't it?

Noel Hogan: **Yeah, it's hard, especially when you're doing it on your own because you've had the comfort of 3 people to bounce things off of for so many years. You do get there, as I'm discovering finally.**

Zombieguide: Well, I wish you luck with it and we can't wait to hear it...

Noel Hogan: **I hope to see you soon.**

Zombieguide: We hope so too. Come to the States!

Noel Hogan: **Definitely. I just got back actually, I just got back actually. I was on holiday in LA, I just got back this day [Tuesday] last week. I did the photos for the album cover there. They're done, it's just a matter of picking the ones that I don't look too bad in.**

Zombieguide: Maybe Rainer could send us a sneak peek of those?

Noel Hogan: Yeah, I'm sure he could, as soon as we get them. The guy did like 600 shots and I picked out 20 earlier in the week. He said by the end of this week, he'd doctor them up and whatever they do for the final finished versions. Hopefully by the end of the week, he'll have some, and I'll get Rainer to send one or two over to you.

Zombieguide: Alright, that would be awesome! Thanks again! Cheers!

Noel Hogan: **Cheers, thanks, bye!**

Zombieguide would like to thank Noel Hogan for his time and also thank his management at The Artist Group for arranging the interview for us!

Source: Exclusive!!