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**National College of Art and Design
Department of Fashion and Textiles**

**The Development and the Decline of the Live
Music Scene in Dublin 1986-1996**

by
Katrina Rooney

**Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art & Design and Complimentary
Studies, in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design.**

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The Development and the Decline of the Live Rock Music Scene in Dublin from 1986-1996

Introduction

This thesis begins with a commonplace observation and a simple hypothesis; the observation being the significant talent and abundance of Irish rock bands in Dublin. From 1986, after the meteoric rise of U2 to world-wide recognition, there was an explosion of Irish rock bands playing live in Dublin venues such as The Rock Garden, Whelans, The Baggot Inn, all waiting for the same breakthrough into international fame. From 1990-1992, Irish rock music never seemed so prolific with bands such as The Pale, The Stunning, Blue in Heaven all signed to major recording companies. From 1992 to the present day there has been a steady decline on the live rock music scene. Any of the bands signed to labels in the early nineties have been dropped and are either still struggling for that breakthrough or have completely dissipated.

The hypothesis deals with the contributing factors for this decline. The changes in social and leisure activities resulting in the introduction of ecstasy in 1991/92 popularised dance music within a club environment and resulted in the divergence of live music. Consequently, venues changed their 'gigs' from live music to recorded dance tracks.

The interest in Irish rock bands from the recording studios, promoters and music companies has languished since the early nineties. There is no denying that musical patterns change but rock has ceased to be the binding force of the counter-culture. The rock audience has fragmented into separate groups

The Irish Rock Band: A Study of the Irish Rock Band in Dublin from 1980-1990

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of fans, (heavy metal versus dance versus adult rock). The makings of a "star" has become a simple matter of applying the right sales formula, and with radio dominated by market research playlists and very little corporate money going into developing new acts, the pop market has never been so conservative or so firmly controlled.

Chapter One outlines a simple introduction into the historical background of the live music scene in Dublin from the 1960s. During interviews with band members Keith Connolly (Seven), Paul Wonderful (The Glam Tarts), Glen Hansard (The Frames) and Dave Fanning (rock show presenter with Irish radio station, 2FM), I asked their views on the state of the live rock music scene today, and if, in their opinion and from their experiences, there is a definite decline in live rock performances since 1986 to present day, and why. The people I have interviewed have been personally involved in the music business from 1986 and have been conducive in its development and decline through the decade.

Chapter Two discusses the views of the interviewees in relation to my own opinion that there has been a decline in live rock performances in Dublin in relation to the changing visage of music through the decade, developments in musical technology, the changing face of performance venues and music industry politics.

Chapter One

'Got a job in a showband/workin' like a slave/six nights and
every Sunday/c'mon and put me on a wage'

- *Skid Row*, 1970

It began with the showband, a peculiarly Irish phenomenon sporting neat hairstyles and dressed in shiny suits and starched shirts, they featured a minimum of seven band members on stage. Non-stop cover versions were churned out with varying degrees of competence.

Throughout the 1960s and most of the 1970s the showbands dominated the live music scene. They played large ballrooms which were either 'wet' or dry', the former had a bar licence while the latter did not. However, by the mid-1960s there were distinct rumblings in most of the major Irish cities. The beat group phenomenon was about to boom.

Outfits to make an early impact included Bluesville, The Greenbeats, The Chosen Few, The Chessmen, The Semitones, The Movement, The Creatures and The Action.

Dublin was soon spilling over with live beat music and the action revolved around venues like The Caroline Club, The Crystal Ballroom (then McGonagles, now The System), The Five Club, The Scene Club and Club A Go Go, as well as an extensive school hall and tennis-club circuit in the outer suburbs.

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As the 1970s dawned, a new phenomenon called Celtic Rock was bubbling under collective rock psyche. This was instigated by the Horslips (an unlikely collection of musicians with art school, literary and advertising backgrounds) Fig 1. The definitive line-up included Eamonn Carr (drums), Jim Lockhart (keyboards/flute), Johnny Fear (guitar), Charles O'Connor (fiddle/mandolin) and Barry Devlin (bass). 'Johnny's Wedding' (1972), their debut single, was a glorious fusion of rock and traditional influences and it raced up the Irish charts.

Horslips were to prove exceedingly influential in the overall development of Irish rock music Fig 2, providing the impetus for countless other bands to get together. Their members had often been inspired by seeing Horslips live on stage. The inclusion of traditional instruments in their line-up also paved the way for bands in the 1980s and 1990s who used uilleann pipes and fiddles in a rock idiom.

Ireland in the mid-1970s was a mixed up musical maelstrom - punk had yet to arrive and hippie music was still around, along with a few second division progressive rock bands long past their sell-by dates. In Dublin's Moran's Hotel, the sharp knife-edged performances of r'n'b acts like Eddie and The Hot Rods were noted by The Boomtown Rats, who played the same venue themselves on a regular basis. The Rats changed their image and a high velocity rhythm and blues repertoire was perfected. The bands like The Radiators From Space and The Vipers wholeheartedly embraced the new music.



The Horslips, an unlikely collection of musicians with art school, literary and advertising backgrounds. Fig 1



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By the later 1970s the Dublin music scene was looking decidedly healthy with bands such as The Blades, Revolver, DC Nien, U2, The Vultures, The Virgin Prunes, Rocky De Valera & The Grave Diggers, The Atrix and Chant, Chant, Chant performing regularly. Besides Moran's Hotel in Talbot Street, Baggot Street's famed Baggot Inn, The Project Arts Centre in Essex Street and The Dandelion Market on Stephen's Green (now a shopping centre) were regular venues.

But nobody was prepared for the success of the U2 phenomenon ^{Fig 3}. They did for Ireland what pristine pop purveyors ABBA had done for Sweden, becoming one of the country's biggest exports. They highlighted their achievements even further by doggedly basing themselves at home. While U2 came to international prominence in the 1980s, back home in Ireland they left a trail of destruction and broken dreams in their wake. Hundreds of bands attempted to emulate the U2 'sound' as British and American companies descended on Dublin all waving cheque books and raving about the new U2.

A host of Irish artists were signed to international deals, most notably In Tua Nua, Aslan, Cactus World News, The Fountainhead, Les Enfants, Blue In Heaven, Light a Big Fire, Tuesday Blue and Cry Before Dawn. They were all unceremoniously dropped when their talent failed to translate itself into record sales. The harsh economic realities of the music business soon came home to scores of Irish musicians who overnight were consigned to the scrap-heap. All were unable to crack either the American or the British markets, having been swept along by optimism and precious little else. Aslan, In Tua Nua, Cactus World News and Blue In Heaven, in particular, had great potential. Sinead O'Connor (the Dublin born signer/songwriter who had her

biggest song 'Nothing Compares 2 U') and to a certain extent, The Hothouse Flowers, were to come close to emulating U2's international success by 1992.

At the turn of the decade a new generation of bands were signed to various labels. An Emotional Fish, Power of Dreams, The Black Velvet Band, The Fat Lady Sings, The Forget Me Nots, Blink, The Pale, House Broken, and Andrew Strong all had major record deals, none have today.

U2's lead singer, Bono, believed that Irish bands could stay at home and achieve international success abroad. He has since changed his mind about Dublin as a starting base for fame and fortune, and advises young Irish bands to journey to London where life isn't quite so comfortable and safe. Bono believes that "for years we've been encouraging Irish bands, telling them that they don't need to go abroad. But now I would never say to any Irish band "stay at home at all costs". There's something maybe too loose (Dublin), too easy. You need to find a certain sharpness. You've got to go through the fire. If it's on your mind, I'd say go, go to London and get burned". He believes that in the 1990s Dublin may be friendly, but it's not cool. "Dublin is a warm place and that's the beauty of it. People aren't afraid to make fools of themselves. If anything links Dublin bands it's lack of inhibition, we just conform to rock-'n-rolls rigid form of cool and you need that lack of inhibition to be creative, you've got to be prepared to jump in the deep end".

The Joshua Trio were effectively born when U2's Rattle and Hum album was released in 1988. Previous to that (or at least from The Joshua Trio onwards) the idea of performing U2 songs in completely different musical styles had only been talked about, free-form jazz renditions of 'Pride' (in the name of

love) were discussed, poems based on the more risible aspects of U2 such as The Edge's bald spot, Bono's speeches, Adam Clayton's bass playing were written. The result was a group that satirised what many people involved in Irish music regarded as "the golden calf". Initially looked upon by editors, executives and promoters as a crude joke, The Joshua Trio finally got the last laugh when, in early 1992, they released a country and western version of 'The Fly'. They re-released this song on Son, a label directly connected to U2's very own Mother records.

Both through being shortlisted on Britain's Radio One and beaming out from hip music programmes, The Joshua Trio had proved that being funny, as well as business smart sometimes works even better ^{Fig 4} when doing things the non-mainstream way rather than going through the normal channels. The Joshua Trio frequently moonlighted as kitsch cabaret stars, Tony St James & His Las Vegas Sound, a band who have managed to subvert Irish showband/cabaret shenanigans with often intentionally hilarious results.

Paul Woodfull (a.k.a. Paul Wonderful) is the frontman of the band. He was involved in entertainment in the National College of Art & Design in 1986, the same year he formed 'The Dog City Slickers', a band influenced by Dwight Joachim & The Beat Farmers and which essentially satirised country and western bands. They played venues such as The Pembroke, The Herschfield Centre and college balls. At that time the National College of Art & Design was inductive in providing a live venue for new up and coming bands in the late eighties - A House, Pleasure Cell and Sharkbait.

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Nobody was prepared for the success of the U2 phenomenon^{Fig 3}



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sometimes works even better when doing things the non-mainstream way.

According to Paul, The Underground provided a hip venue for live bands in 1986. The Dog City Slickers evolved into The Joshua Trio at a time when Paul began working for Hot Press (Ireland leading music magazine). He says that Hot Press had an almost "reverent attitude towards U2 at that time". The band members consisted of Paul (guitarist, vocalist), Kieran Woodfull (bass) and Arthur Matthews (drums, now co-creator of Father Ted). They played their first gig in The Baggot Inn (a celebrated venue on Baggot Street).

The Joshua Trio's first publicity performance transpired on Ireland's then hip programme 'Nighthawks', hosted by Shay Healy. This programme featured live performances by established and new bands, along with celebrity interviews. This opened the band up to nationwide recognition and the gigs started rolling in.

Paul says "NME was the first music magazine to publish an article on The Joshua Trio, Hot Press could not be seen to ally themselves to a band that satirised U2". According to Paul, The Joshua Trio filled the Baggot with three hundred people on a Tuesday night, some feat for a relatively unknown band on a week night. He believes the reasons for the decline of live music in Dublin are the growth of club culture, smaller p.a.'s in clubs, clubs pay less money for a DJ, and finally, he believes that live bands do not live up to peoples expectations.

He says in 1986, most bands had major record deals and MCD were the main promoters. "There was a lot of interest in Irish bands at that time and bands who signed to the MCD label were The Golden Horde, Aslan, Something Happens and The Stunning. These bands were filling venues around the

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country. MCD pushed heavy advertising and promotion and basically controlled the circuit. They began to push smaller bands into the more recognised band slot and venues began to lose money because of this. The venues started to pull out from playing live music, replacing it with dance music".

According to Paul, Bjorn Again (an ABBA cover band) were the biggest live act in Britain in 1993. Basically the college circuit in England determined the popularity of bands and there was a loss of interest in indie bands.

"Although record companies were not making money out of dance music, dance tracks were being mixed and recorded in peoples bedrooms and garages, then bootlegged onto the street and into dance clubs. 1996 has seen a revival in guitar-based music simply because record companies can make more money out of them". In Paul's opinion "there were a thousand bands sounding like REM and Something Happens was the best of them". Something Happens formed in the mid-1980s. From lowly beginnings as quasi-REM devotees, they soon became one of Ireland's most inventive and exciting fast pop/rock bands. Initially the band had a disposition towards finding (and forcing) a fun element in everything but soon tired of this and started to experiment in both song structure and attitude in their second album. A superb rock band, they still have to break into the commercial heart of the music industry.

Over the last six years, The Frames have established themselves as one of the most incendiary live acts ever to come out of Ireland ^{Fig 5}, with frontman Glen Hansard also emerging as one of the country's most gifted song-writers. The

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Over the last six years, The Frames have established themselves as one of the most incendiary live acts ever to come out of Ireland, with frontman Eoghan Harris also emerging as one of the country's most gifted song-writers. The

band were dropped by Island Records after disappointing sales of their debut album 'Another Love Song', but returned three years later with the self-financed 'Fitzcarraldo', landing another deal with ZTT in the process. The band have just split with co-vocalist Noreen, bass player Graham and manager Frank Murray. They have just clinched a deal with Elektra and are now preparing to go into the studio with Pixies/Nirvana/PJ Harvey producer Steve Albini to re-record a version of their classic 'Revelate' to the American market.

Touring put a lot of pressure on the band. After just touring England they were set to go back on the road again, making it clear to their agent, record company and everybody else that they did not want to go. But they all said "you need to try and break 'Revelate' in England". The band members could not cope any more and split. When Elektra started getting radio play in the states for 'Monument', the bands album, things started to happen. The band is now talking to five different managers and in January were hoping to go into the studio with Steve Albini.

Glen Hansard says about the English music industry: "In England, if you're anyway giving of yourself in music, they take it as a weakness, they don't understand spiritual strength or vulnerability . I get sick of reading irony in all their reviews. We do have people who love our band, but if we were to do it on a touring level the way they want us to, we'd be touring for the next sixty years and our experience in America has been that if we play a gig one night, the next night it's full. Even on a business level you're going to go where the market is hot".



The Frames have established themselves as one of the most incendiary live acts ever to come out of Ireland Fig 5



The Flames have established themselves as one of the most incendiary fire
acts ever to come out of Ireland.

Ireland's top rock broadcaster Dave Fanning began his career in pirate radio, but was headhunted by 2FM (Irish radio station) in the late 1970s. Since then, his nightly rock programme has enjoyed continued success with his down-to-earth delivery, one of the keys to the popularity of his rock show. Sessions have also helped young up-and-coming bands, and virtually everybody who is or was anybody in the Irish music industry have performed live on his show. Close to U2 through the years, Fanning has introduced them live onstage at major outdoor performances in Ireland; he is also the only radio broadcaster who can claim to have conducted a live nude interview (all five together in the altogether) with the band.

"What I like now and what I've always liked, call it guitar or indie or whatever, has a much smaller audience than it used to have and I'm not necessarily checking out the latest acid-jazz bands or the West/East LA hardcore rap band. I haven't gone totally metal or death metal and haven't gone totally rap - maybe I should, so perhaps the spread of the audience is possibly smaller than it used to be". Fanning admits, however, that he just can't ignore the changes that have taken place over the years and increasing pressures of competition from other media. "It's a small audience and it always has been" he says. "Anyway, eighty per cent of people who push a button at eight at night are pushing a TV button, so the night-time audience is never meant to be huge".

He freely admits that on occasions some of the material he plays can be too much, even for the most broad-minded, dedicated listener. "Someone said to me they were listening the other night and I'd played seven bands in a row and they had never heard of one of them", he says. "You just can't do that

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anymore. There are too many reasons for people to switch off and go elsewhere and I'm not prepared to play exclusively to one section of the audience. I can understand that there are a lot of people who, while they might like what I do in general, might be alienated by some of the stuff I play". The Fanning Show will continue to provide an oasis of quality in a market research formatted pap.

Keith Connolly became one of the members of The Joshua Trio (which evidently consisted of four members in 1990) from 1990 to 1994. He was the drummer and sometime vocalist in the band. Today, he is presently working on a number of projects and is progressive in his attempt to combine dance music with live performance, using the "traditional" rock band idiom of guitar and drums.

According to Keith, 1991-1992 were instrumental in the introduction of 'E' and the dance culture to Ireland. He believes the difference between live and dance music is that club culture involves taking ecstasy to enjoy the musical process; the live band scene involves a process of identifying with bands, depending on the music you like you are more involved in the knowing. Through the process of live performances the band has to deal with a number of challenging factors, for example, how to mirror the recorded version live on stage, audience interaction, touring, etc. and will all eventually determine the quality of the music.

"Dance music has an instant appeal. Apart from the instant of the 'rush' produced by pills, it has no specific identity. There are no music sensibilities involved. The fidelity to the record is one to one. Sound systems in clubs

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have a quality and a clarity that is hard to replicate on a live p.a. system". He believes that dance music has not caused a destruction of live music but rather a shake-up. Bands demand applause and interaction. Dance music has no demands. The atmosphere is more instantaneous and because of drug-taking, people are more introverted.

In his opinion, the buzz people get on ecstasy first is the ultimate buzz. Afterwards, the buzz is diluted and people find themselves taking more and more tablets. He says people he knows have experienced this and have finally stopped taking 'E' - but they still find themselves 'buzzing' at a club, whether based purely on nostalgia or the appreciation of the music, he believes that the future of dance will be drug free - perhaps.

Keith says there is nothing like the experience of a live phenomenon whether its Chris De Burgh or Pantera. He believes that record companies have no integrity as to pure or good music. They are out to make a profit. Ireland produces rock bands such as The Cranberries and Therapy?. There is a reluctance amongst most musicians to embrace new technology, and as a result, most bands use a traditional line-up of instruments". He says the hippy movement of the 1960s, the punk era of the mid-1970s and now dance music of the 1990s are the biggest social generation gaps there have been.

"All music is the same. When a performer/artist is on stage, both the audience and the performer are touched and inspired, hearts soar - that's live music at its best. Lights and sound are then not imperative to the experience".

- Quincy Jones

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"All music is the same. When a performer/artist is on stage both the audience and the performer are touched and inspired. Hearts soar - that's live music at its best. Lights and sound are then not imperative to the experience."

Chapter Two

At the right cultural movement rock music can have a remarkable power to create a movement, and at such moments it seems to need no other force than its own fidelity in itself. When that faith falters it comes crashing down to earth. It has happened the live rock scene in Dublin. Since 1994 there has been a steady decline in live rock in the capital city. Why was the live scene so prolific between 1986 and 1994? The answer is probably due to the international success of U2, Horslips, Thin Lizzy and The Boomtown Rats ^{Fig 6}. Bands playing in Dublin in the late eighties/early nineties, were brought up on the wave of success of these bands. Dreams of fame and fortune propelled an onslaught of talented musicians onto the capital city. The fact that U2 ^{Fig 7} had managed to achieve international fame from basing themselves at home spurred the ambition and belief that other bands could do the same.

The hub of Ireland's music industry was centred in Dublin, with the studios Windmill Lane and Litton Lane practically within walking distance from each other.

Venues such as The Rock Garden, Whelans, The Baggot Inn, McGonagles and The Attic offered bands the chance to be seen and heard, thus creating a melting pot that was the 'live' scene in Dublin from 1986 to 1994 when it began to decline. An abundance of talented bands were playing live around the city, hoping to be seen, heard, discovered and lampooned into international success.

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The Boomtown Rats Fig 6



The Boomtown Rais File



U2 Fig 7



"1986 was an excellent year for Irish bands, singles releases were aplenty. These included Brush Shiels elegiac 'Old Pal', Dorian Mood's 'It's a Funny Thing', and Something Happens debut EP 'Two Chances', which featured 'Shoulder High'. On the live front, performances from The Golden Horde, A House, Blue in Heaven and Something Happens proved rousing events".

- Tony Clayton Lea, *Hot Press*, 1986

In 1986 there were seventeen venues around Dublin playing live rock music seven days a week by up and coming Irish bands. Today in 1996 there are eight venues in Dublin out of fifteen playing live rock, five out of twenty five bands playing the regular live rock circuit in Dublin in 1986 are still playing live today. None have achieved international success.

In an attempt to create an integral picture of the talent around the city between the years 1989-1994 and to appreciate the zealous atmosphere around the venues, it is important to characterise some of the bands playing at that time.

An Emotional Fish burst on the Dublin scene in 1989, with a barrage of advanced publicity. After finally managing to shake off the allegation of hype, they settled down to becoming an exciting straight-ahead noisy rock band fronted by singer Ger Whelan, a man who gave 110% on stage. Their debut album received mixed reviews, but they exhibited potential by teaming up with Clannad's (an Irish language-based sound band) Maire Brennan for a

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reading of their own highly melodic 'Blue' for the 'Bringing It all Back Home' television series.

The Forget Me Nots consisted of former buskers Michelle Burrows and Eithne Flynn. They met up with ex-Classics guitarist Maurice McGrath and in November 1989 The Forget Me Nots were born. The band was signed by Sony Music International in August 1990 and they began working on their debut album with producer Peter Winefield. However, they soon switched to Lutch Easter (REM, Suzanne Vega) and in late 1991 journeyed to America to complete recording with him. The Forget Me Nots sound was bright and breezy pop with crisp harmonies, briskly strummed guitars and sharp three minute tunes.

The Pale were one of Ireland's curiosities. They did not fit the standard brief for Irish rock bands. Although both their image and music seemed contrived (skin head haircuts and distinct European rhythms) there was something intuitive and natural about the band. After much speculation they signed a major record deal in 1991 with A & M Records and were managed by Columb Farrelly, an ex-member of Ton Ton Macoute (an early to mid-80s Dublin band).

Power of Dreams were a power-house Dublin group who specialised in writing songs of great pop structure ^{Fig 8} albeit with a brutal and forceful playfulness. They were fronted by Craig Walker. Power of Dreams had like so many other native bands, the capabilities to break down the international commercial barriers that dogged Irish acts through the years. The image, the songs, the attitude were all there.

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The Black Velvet Band was formed by singer/songwriter Kieran Kennedy. The band signed to Elektra and released their debut album in 1989. Essentially comprised of Kieran, wife Maria Doyle-Kennedy and bassist Shay Fitzgerald, in 1991 the Black Velvet Band adopted a more electric punchier sound, leaving the acoustic raggle-taggle, Bob Dylan influence behind. Maria, who was both a former member of Hothouse Flowers and a star of The Commitments movie, also ventured forth to lead vocals on several songs, having previously confined her talents to backing vocals with the band.

The Fat Lady Sings, The Four of Us, The Sultans of Ping FC, The Joshua Trio, Andy White, Blink, Therapy?, The Blue Angels, A House, My Little Funhouse and The Cranberries were bands playing the live Dublin rock scene in 1991. The only bands still playing today are The Cranberries and Therapy?. They are the only two bands that have managed to break into the international music scene and succeed.

There was, and is, a resounding disillusionment with the music industry in both Ireland and England throughout the past decade. Because of Ireland's geographical position bands have to travel to either Britain or America to reach a market substantial enough for bands to start making money to survive and continue to play. It would be naive to think that bands could survive on the live rock circuit in Dublin and nationwide touring alone. Ultimately, bands play a live circuit in the anticipation of being discovered and becoming famous internationally. Of course England is the obvious first step for most bands because of its promising and flourishing rock/pop industry. But there seems to be some underlying discrepancy against Irish bands.

...the band's sound is a blend of traditional Irish folk music and modern rock. The band is essentially comprised of Kieran, wife Maria Doyle-Kennedy and bassist John Fitzgerald. In 1991 the Black 7 vinyl Band adopted a more electric punk-rock sound, leaving the acoustic raggle-taggle. Bob Dylan influence behind Maria, who was both a former member of Hothouse Flowers and a star of The Commitments movie, also ventured forth to lead vocals on several songs, having previously confined her talents to backing vocals with the band.

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The Cranberries are an example of this trepidation in 1991. Their debut EP 'Uncertain' was released on Xeric Labels (a Limerick-based recording studio). With its circulation the buzz surrounding the band transferred to mainland UK, where Island Records underwent tough negotiations to tie-up a six album deal. However, 'Uncertain' disappointed many journalists and the band had no previous experience of a music press that loves to knock down whoever it has previously built up. The band split with their then manager Pearse Gilmore and contacted Rough Trade Records supremo Geoff Travis. The album was started from scratch at Windmill Lane Studios in Dublin with Stephen Street. 'Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?' was released in March 1993 following the issue of 'Dreams' and 'Linger' as singles. By 1993 much of the original impetus had dissipated and a tour with Belly (an American alternative rock band) offered some more exposure.

The Cranberries proved to have none of the preconceptions associated with the capricious British press and the band soon became a hot radio and concert ticket. The Americans kept buying the album in their droves and it became successful in the UK too, reaching No. 1 in the UK charts in June 1994. 'No Need to Argue' followed in October and with its release, The Cranberries were crowned the new kings of AOR.

Ultimately, the rock music industry feeds off the live music circuit and vice versa. The more bands that become famous and have been known on the live circuit before fame attainment, the more significant the live circuit becomes.

Rock is a mode of functioning, that is to say it works for its fans. The present situation is visible; subjectively as a "crisis" for many fans and objectively in

the changing place of rock within both the larger category of popular music and the economic practices that surround rock culture. As evidence of the former, there is an increasingly common rhetoric of the "death of rock", and the changing tastes of the potential rock audience. These changes have occurred before, they are now so widespread within culture today that they indicate significant changes as evidence of the objectives crisis. There is decreasing sales of records (despite the industry's claim that the recession is over, the number of gold and platinum albums has significantly declined) and decreasing attendances at live venues.

I was listening to the Mike Moloney show of the 16th January 1997 when I heard Greg Hughes (an up and coming rock critic) discussing the situation of the live rock scene in Dublin. He said "Eamonn Dorans (formerly the Rock Garden) has taken over the live rock gig scene in Dublin. The Mean Fiddler has stuck on a live gig on Wednesday night for young up bands and that seems to be the hub of it. We have Eamonn Dorans and The Mean Fiddler giving new up and coming bands the chance to getting on stage. Eamonn Dorans is brilliant because it's got bands on seven nights a week".

Dublin has never before seen so few venues entertainingly live gigs for new, young emerging bands with talent. I have to admit I had not seen a new band play live in a small venue in over three years. Last Wednesday I attended Eamonn Dorans to see a friend play his debut gig with his new band. The impact live music has on an audience is something that can hardly be described. Although the majority of the audience were friends of the performer, there was an electric atmosphere. Hearing and viewing a new fresh band with new material performing brilliantly is a fantastic experience.

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There is an instant appreciation for the music and the intimacy of performer, audience and venue is eclectic.

Eamonn Dorans in a previous life was better known as The Rock Garden. Situated in Dublin in the Temple Bar area, the venue opened up an entirely new vista on Irish music when it opened in 1989. The venue was instrumental in the breakthrough of many up and coming Irish rock groups. It was easily the best equipped mid-size venue in the city, thereby giving even the most rudimentary of outfits a boost heretofore missing on the Irish circuit. A 1994 edition of Hot Press 'The National Rhythm Guide' Vol. 18 No. 12 from 29 June boasts The Rock Garden playing live gigs seven nights a week. The venue unfortunately closed in late 1994 to reopen as Eamonn Dorans ^{Fig 9}. The new owners retained the same criteria for featuring live rock gigs every night of the week, despite the "naff" refurbished interior of the upstairs lounge.

The Baggot Inn ^{Fig 10} was another celebrated Dublin venue situated on Baggot Street. In its time, it played host to everybody from U2 and The Boomtown Rats to Phil Lynott (Thin Lizzy fame) ^{Fig 11} and during their 1991 tour, David Bowie's band Tin Machine. In 1986 The Joshua Trio (a then relatively unknown three piece band) played host to an audience of three hundred people on a Tuesday night. In the summer of 1995 fans packed the much acclaimed infamous venue to bid a final farewell. Whilst waiting for the 3am nightlink I met a young man who informed me he has risked life and limb trying to obtain a neon sign from above the venue's bar but when boarding the bus the driver refused to let him take his coveted memorabilia prize on. Bitterly disappointed he relented to leaving the sign on the corner of

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Westmoreland Street, probably to be vandalised by some drunken yobo who did not recognise the value of this historic artifact, the act of a true die hard rock fan, I comforted him on his loss on the night journey on the 66 bus route.

Whelans ^{Fig 12}, Charlies Bar, The New Inn, The Herschfield Centre, The Attic, The Ivy Rooms (now Fibber McGee's), The Underground, McGonagles (now The System) and The Wexford Inn were small venues who played host to the Irish rock scene in Dublin between 1986 to 1994. Sadly, only four of these venues (including Eamonn Dorans) feature regular live rock gigs by up and coming bands today.

The Mean Fiddler ^{Fig 12} is the only new venue (opened in 1995) to feature live rock music today. Although its future hangs in the balance with co-owners Vince Power and Kieran Kavanagh meeting in the High Court to sort out their increasingly public differences.

Why have venues stopped playing live music? Dance/club culture has taken over, venue owners began to recognise a larger crowd attendance on the venues' dance night. As the new rave music hit the turn-tables, venues did not have to deal with p.a. problems (sound checks for live bands, audibility of each instrument), as dance music could be pumped through a relatively mediocre sound system.

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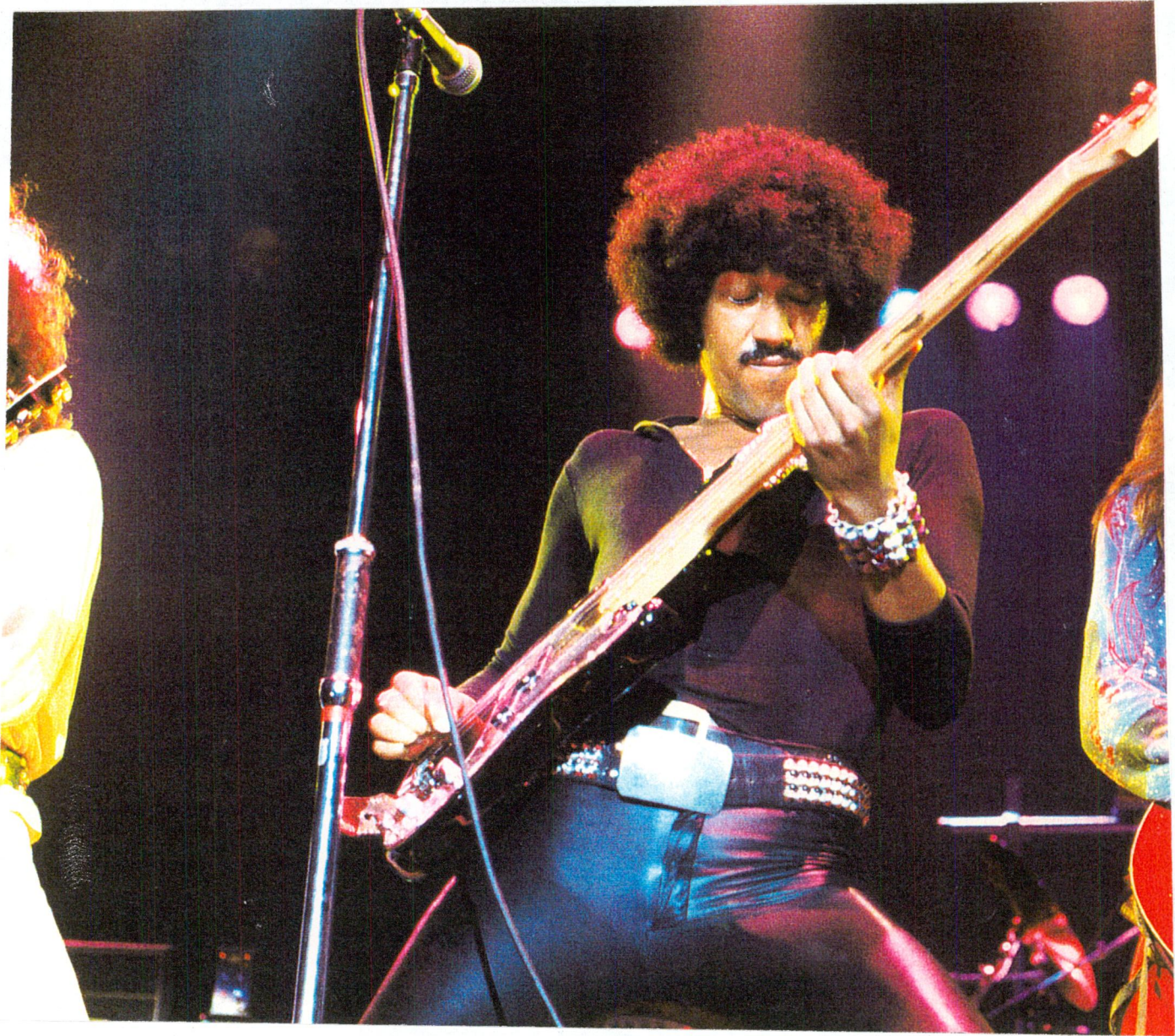


Eamon Dorans (formerly The Rock Garden) Fig 9





The Rabbit Inn Cafe



The Boomtown Rats to Phil Lynott (Thin Lizzy fame) Fig 11





Whelans and The Mean Fiddler Fig 12



DJs are not as expensive as bands and the owner is just dealing with one person on a one to one basis.

MCD Promoters had somewhat undermined the live music scene in 1993 and 1994. From 1986 to 1993, MCD were the main promoters in Ireland and most bands had major record deals with their company. MCD pushed heavy advertising and promotion to fill venues, not only in Dublin but nationwide with bands like The Golden Horde, Aslan, Something Happens and The Stunning^{Fig 13}. MCD controlled the live music circuit. By 1993 MCD were losing their power as bands signed to them had not broken into the international music scene. The company began to pull the well-known bands out of big venues and substitute them with smaller unknown bands. Crowds heretofore attending live gigs had no interest in paying to see a relatively unknown and for the same price venue owners began to lose money and turned to mass appeal i.e. club culture, thus a notable decline in venues playing live music from 1993-1994 and increase in venues playing exclusively dance music.

Three new venues have opened in Dublin since 1993; Ri Ra, The Kitchen and The PoD. These venues cater exclusively for the dance music scene and feature absolutely no live music.

Factors that have deconstructed (and perhaps reconstructed) the possibility and power rock and youth culture. Punk not only opened up new musical and sociological possibilities it also reconstructed the music's relation to itself and its audience. Youth culture, (so crucial to rock) is being dismantled and undermined, partly by rock itself and also by other social and cultural

discourse, namely the introduction of ecstasy and club culture which has had a powerful effect on the decline of the live rock industry in Dublin.

The first people to take ecstasy in Ireland for recreational purposes, did so as far as we can establish in 1986. There were no dealers, no rave clubs, no tabloid headlines. There were two pockets of 'E' users; one in Dublin and one in Cork. The pills were probably brought over from London by returning emigrants. A hardy few, probably no more than fifteen or twenty people decided it was time to get the party pumping. Ten years later a whole culture has grown out of ecstasy. Attend any number of dance clubs at the weekend and 80% of the clubbers have taken 'E'. Dance music has an instant appeal, apart from the instance of the rush given by the 'E tab'. "Dance music has no specific identity. There are no music sensibilities involved. The fidelity to the record is one to one, there is a clarity and a fidelity on sound systems that is heard to replicate on a live p.a. system".

Dance music is cheap and easy to mix because of today's advanced technology. It is composed of a series of repetitive beats and layered tracks and is quite easy to formulate a dance track on a home computer (e.g. an Apple Mac). Because of this people began to mix tracks at home, compile their own cassettes and sell them on the street. Tracks and albums recorded in company studios were bootlegged across the UK and Ireland with more urgency than before. Record companies were losing out. The obvious choice was bring back rock-based bands, push the "star" and make the money.

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The Stunning Fig 13



A large part of the reason for the decline of the "star" today is the decline in record sales. This decline cannot be explained away as an effect of the general economic crisis, for all leisure commodities have not been affected in the same way. The record has lost much of its aura as a commodity; its social use value has fallen. This is especially evident with the rise of dance music, in which music has been reduced to its most functional use.

Another factor in the decline of the star has been the arrival of computer technology in music, which by-passes the relation between musicians and traditional instruments on which normally a large part of the star mythology is based. Music making has become an affair of technicians and record producers.

"The best thing about the 1980s for me was having to make sense of particular sounds (rather than, as before, general trends). For this, unexpectedly, live performances turned out to be more fruitful than records. Why? Because in live performances I could see music in the making (and in the receiving - the audience was always crucial for my understanding and enjoyment of a show). It is also true that 'live' performance still provides the most intense experience of music, as pleasure still defines what it means to be surprised of delight and as "magic" rock means sounds that happen to me."

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the feeling of euphoria of seeing rock music played live. There is a oneness with the performers and the audience. There is a sharing of ideals, screaming out lyrics at a live gig and feeling that person (or those people) has felt the same agony, the same joy, the same ups and downs in life. Maybe it's the angst-ridden teenager in me but I feel the decline of live rock music in Dublin has meant that young adolescents today have missed out. In a club there is no sharing of ideals, no aspirations to be someone - there is no safer place to go than inside your own head.

Teenage entertainment plays a cultural and educative role which commercial providers seem little aware of. Their symbols and fantasies have a stronghold upon the emotional commitment of the youth at this stage in their development and operate more powerfully in a situation where young people are tending to learn less from established institutions - such as the family, the school, the church and the immediate adult community - and more from one another. They rely more on themselves and their own culture, and they are picking up signals all the time especially from the generation just ahead.

Teenage culture is a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured; it is an area of self expression for the young and an ample opportunity for commercial providers to cash in. The figure of the pop/rock singer is usually exploited by this group of people. The pop/rock singer is usually a young person, springing from the familiar adolescent world and sharing a whole set of common feelings with his/her audience but once they are successful they are transformed into a commercial entertainer of the pop/rock music business. Yet in style, presentation and material they

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perform. They must maintain close involvement with the teenage world or they will lose their popularity.

The record companies see them as a means of marketing their products, they become a living, animated, commercial image. The audience will buy their products if they like their performances, and thus satisfy providers needs to keep sales high, but they will also regard the pop singer as a kind of role model, an idealized image of success, a glamorised version of themselves.

This has occurred with the decline of live rock music. Bands such as Boyzone (Irish male quintet), have taken over the limelight. Their commercial success is not dependant on their musical ability or live performances, but on a carefully marketed image, thus captivating the hearts of every Irish school girl and the aspirations of other Irish school boys.

It is a sad road that commercial pop/rock has taken but musical fashions and sensibilities change and I believe someday we will see a return of live rock in Dublin. The seeds have already been sown by young bands rehearsing in their living rooms and garages, the dreams of rock stardom never fade.

"As long as the heart of rock'n'roll is still beating, the power of alternative to grab our guts will remain strong. It may sound completely different ten years from now, but that, after all, is the point"

Randi Reisfield

This Is The Sound

The Best of Alternative Rock 1996

...the fact that the music industry is a very competitive one and that the only way to survive is to be the best.

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Keith Richards

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The Best of Johnny Cash

Conclusion

"The future is what you make it and as invention and originality declines the emphasis will be more than ever on shrewd marketing and image. For such a tiny country, Ireland already has its fair share of world beaters."

- *Tony Clayton Lea & Richie Taylor*

Irish Rock 1992

The development of the live rock scene in Dublin originated from the massive success of U2 internationally. Success in the music business is a result of hard work and luck, being in the right place at the right time. U2 were lucky enough to have Paul McGuinness as their manager. The harsh economic realities of the music business soon came home to scores of Irish musicians who overnight were consigned to the scrap-heap. They were unable to crack either the American or British markets, having been swept along by a huge wave of optimism and precious little else. Aslan, In Tua Nua, Cactus World News and Blue in Heaven, in particular, had burned brightly but only briefly.

Most of the contenders from the class of the mid-1980s had dispersed by the turn of the decade with their hopes of fame and all its trappings, having endured the painful burning spitfire syndrome. Only Sinéad O'Connor and Hothouse Flowers were to come close to emulating U2's massive success by the early nineties.

Apart from that it was back to the rehearsal rooms and/or pub to dream of what might have been, or worse still, the dole queue and the realisation of a

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Irish Rock 1987

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mis-spent ten years. At the turn of the decade a new generation of bands were signed to various labels; An Emotional Fish, Power of Dreams, A House, The Black Velvet Band, The Fat Lady Sings, The Forget Me Nots, Blink, The Pale and Housebroken, all had international record deals, all played the live rock circuit in Dublin from 1989 to approximately 1993. None of these bands have a recording contract today, and all but A House have faded into insignificance.

By the 1990s Irish rock music was shooting off on a number of diverse, unrelated tangents. Sultans of Ping FC, The Joshua Trio, The Frank and Walters, The Stunning, The Saw Doctors and The Divine Comedy were set for varying degrees of success ^{Fig 14}, whilst superstars U2, Enya and Sinéad O'Connor became institutions in their own right.

The Sultans of Ping FC, The Frank and Walters ^{Fig 15} and The Saw Doctors enjoyed a measurable degree of media attention and success both here in Ireland and the UK, but unfortunately since 1994 and early 1995 we have not seen any of the bands on the live scene or on MTV.

The Joshua Trio are one band who have managed to adapt themselves to the changing fad within the music business and manage to do so with hilarious results since 1986. The band are now widely known as Abbaesque, (an ABBA cover band with a comic quirkiness).

There was no distinctive 'Irish sound' and the sheer scope and breadth of acts certainly made for exciting times, yet the individuality of many Irish bands has occasionally been undermined by the British recording companies.

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The Joshua Trio are one band who have managed to adapt themselves to the changing fad within the music business and manage to do so with relative results since 1986. The band are now widely known as 'Abbey Road' (an ABBA cover band with a comic quirkiness).

There was no distinctive 'Irish sound' and the sheer scope and breadth of the certainly made for exciting times, yet the individuality of many Irish bands has not been undervalued by the British recording companies.



Swoon

The Divine Comedy A Short Album About Love (Setanta)

And at just over 30 minutes, indeed it is, but what a lot of excellent music is stuffed into such a brief space of listening time. One would have thought by now that Neil Hannon might have outdistanced himself in terms of his smoking jacket, hush-puppy, and shagpile lifestyle, but apparently not. Most of the seven songs here are extremely good examples of Hannon's louche touch, with *If ...* (a '60s film reference turned bottoms up and given a damn good spanking) one of the best songs he has ever written. I bet you thought his time had come and gone, hadn't you? (8/10)



The Saw Doctors and The Divine Comedy were set for varying degrees of success. Fig 14



The Saw Doctors and The Divine Comedy were set for varying degrees of

success. Part 14



The Frank and Walters Fig 15



By 1990 there was an acute expansion and a sharp increase in the number of live bands playing in Dublin. Whilst the Irish music business was not totally aware of what was happening on its own doorstep, the British and American talent scouts were certainly tuned into The Cranberries and Therapy? International success came as the result of this interest. The reason that the international record companies were constantly looking to Ireland for guidance was the country's refusal to blindly and unquestionably follow musical trends.

There has been a definite decline in the live rock circuit since 1994. Statistical charts prove that the number of venues playing live music has decreased. Other factors are the emergence of club culture and the commercial ethics of the music industry.

Keith Connolly remarked that "the hippy movement of the 1960s, the punk era of the mid to late 1970s and club culture of the 1990s are the biggest social generation gaps there have been".

When a phenomenon like club culture comes along it is very difficult to sustain a live music circuit when there is no longer the demand for live music. Young people in the 1990s have immersed themselves in a new culture, clothes, media, music and ideas. Advertisers and commercial providers exploit this new culture trend and capitalise on its profits. Music comes to the fore of this exploitation because commercialists can provide visuals through video of what a young person can aspire to materialistically. The live rock scene has suffered, as a result. The search for a style among young people is really part of a deeper search for meaning and an identifiable pattern in life.

The Irish rock scene reached a peak in the early nineties. It declined because there was no longer a demand for it - youth culture had advanced into a hi-tech commercial culture. But that is not to say the Dublin rock scene must disappear altogether.

Irish rock must look at itself in the mirror and decide what needs to change, made better and developed. There is an abundance of talent in this city; it must be reaped and cultivated. I believe the seeds have already been sown.

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Offbeat Column