

# Murphys' draw

By JED GOTTLIB **Boston's Dropkicks remain loud and proud**

**T**he Dropkick Murphys do more before 9 a.m. than most bands do all day. The Dunkin' Donuts morning rush was in full swing across the street when the Murphys' Ken Casey unlocked the group's worn and weathered South Boston practice space.

"We're the anti-rock band," said founder, bassist and occasional singer Casey. "We've always done our rehearsals early in the morning. You get into these spaces too late and you can hear 10 other bands bleeding through the walls. Then it's too hard to get work done."

The local Celtic punk purveyors' anti-band ethic isn't limited to dawn-patrol rehearsals. Most bands in their position would be working every angle to capitalize on the success of their "The Departed" soundtrack hit, "I'm Shipping Up to Boston," which has sold a quarter of a million downloads. The Dropkicks' strategy is different: Do nothing. Or at least nothing they weren't planning on doing anyway.

Casey admits the band did a rush job to complete its sixth CD, "The Meanest of Times," which was released yesterday. That aside, it's business as usual.

"We're not really trying anything new to promote the band," Casey

said. "All we want to do with this album is keep the core fans happy."

"(The album) is the best marriage of what we do," said guitarist James Lynch, referring to the CD's blend of banjos and breakneck punk. "We somehow approached it in a different way and got a consistent mix of both our styles."

For the first time in its 11-year career, the band has left the California-based Hellcat label and released its new CD on its own Born & Bred Records, distributed by Warner Music. The Dropkicks have also hired MSO, a big Los Angeles PR firm.

Some might regard these moves as signs that the band is looking to cash in on its "Departed"-raised profile. But Dropkicks manager Dianne Meyer maintains these moves are designed to remove the middlemen between fan and band.

"We're trying to do lots of grassroots marketing," Meyer said. "Things like YouTube, MySpace and Guitar Hero, which will feature the Dropkicks on its next edition, work best for us. We pretty much do all these things on our own, but we don't know how to run a label. So the partnership with Warner is perfect."

"We're like a baseball player that finally got free agency," Casey

said. "Not that we didn't get along with Hellcat. But now we can do what we know is right for us. We had to fight them to do (2004 Red Sox theme) 'Tessie,' which was like a no-brainer for us."

If anything, the Dropkicks — who will close out Avalon with a sold-out show Sept. 30 before the club shutters for a major renovation — have upped their fiercely local ties. The school kids' cheer that begins the new CD was recorded by youngsters on Casey's block. His neighbor shot the cover photo. All the tracks — including "The State of Massachusetts" and "Echoes on a Street" — were recorded in Stoughton. Most tellingly, IBEW Local 103, without consulting the band, used its billboard to advertise the album's release date.

When the Dropkicks punch into a new tune and deafening drum thuds and distorted guitars rebound around their rehearsal room, it's obvious they haven't been mellowed by success. While staying local has never failed them — the Sox plan to invite the band to perform the national anthem when the team makes the playoffs — neither has staying loud.

— jgottlieb@bostonherald.com



HOMETOWN HEROES: James Lynch, Matt Kelly, Ken Casey and Tim Brennan, from left, of the Dropkick Murphys keep the noise level high in their South Boston practice space. STAFF PHOTO BY JED FITZGERALD