

# BOSS MEN

Boston's Dropkick Murphys meld Celtic folk with punk to keep tradition alive.

## Dropkick Murphys

w/Horrorpops/Everybody Out, 8 p.m. Mon., Sept. 24, Jannus Landing, St. Petersburg, \$22/\$25 day of show.

**M**att Kelly sounds busy. I can hear him rifling through drawers, rinsing dishes and rushing around the place he shares with his girlfriend in Boston. The drummer is a day away from hitting the road with his band Dropkick Murphys, who perform at Jannus Landing in St. Petersburg on Monday. He has the usual loose ends to tie up before getting on the bus.

"My fiancée's in law school," Kelly says, "I got to find a dog walker."

Formed in 1995 in Boston, the Dropkick Murphys quickly built a loyal following for their distinct blend of Celtic folk (bagpipes, banjo, bouzouki, mandolin) and hardcore punk (speedy guitar riffs, howled vocals). Their fanbase mostly consisted of New Englanders (the band is a household name in the Greater Boston area) and Warped Tour regulars — until recently.

While many acts (Goo Goo Dolls, Liz Phair) water down their sound to court the mainstream, Dropkick Murphys have witnessed their audience swell without altering their approach whatsoever. The mass exposure began in the summer of '04, when the band's revamped version of the Boston Red Sox theme song "Tessie" became a regular feature at Fenway Park, leading to DM performing at the World Series.

"You should've heard the original [version of 'Tessie,']" Kelly says in a thick Boston accent. "It was awful. We said, 'We need to rewrite the song and make it about Red Sox Nation and the Royal Rooters.'"

"The original was a woman singing to a parrot," Kelly continues. "During vaudeville or the turn of last century, that might have been a hot topic to sing about but —"

Kelly's words give way to laughter. He recalls the exact date — July 24, 2004 — that his band stood on the hallowed ground of Fenway and performed in front of a sold-out stadium that included hundreds of family members and longtime friends. Boston battled archrival New York that day. Yankees third-basemen Alex Rodriguez got beamed by a pitch, leading to a bench-clearing brawl. More importantly, the game seemed to energize the BoSox, who went on to top the Yanks en route to their first World Series title since 1918.

"It's humbling to be a part of this amazing Boston sports legacy," Kelly says. "They're America's ball team. The Red Sox have always been in the background of everything we have done. They were like our shared fabric growing up."

The second major lift the band enjoyed came last year via Hollywood. Kelly says they gave a buddy in the film industry a bunch of their CDs to distribute among producers and



**BREAKING OUT:** Dropkick Murphys have seen their fanbase increase without compromising their sound.

directors but didn't expect much. As fate would have it, Robbie Robertson, former songwriter and guitarist for The Band, got a hold of DM's 2005 full-length, *Warrior's Code*, and suggested to his old friend Martin Scorsese that the director use the song "I'm Shipping Up to Boston" in the director's Beantown-based crime drama *The Departed*. Scorsese dug the track and included it during a climactic scene. The Dropkick Murphys are joined on the soundtrack by such heavyweights as The Rolling Stones, the Allman Brothers Band, John Lennon, The Beach Boys, Patsy Cline and Van Morrison.

Warner Bros. held a private screening of the movie the day

Dropkick Murphys returned from touring Europe.

"I took a cab home from the airport, picked my girl up from school and got there just in time to catch the beginning of the screening," Kelly says. "It was surreal and bizarre. We knew our song was gonna be in the movie, but hearing it that first time, it was like 'What the hell is it? We're hacks. What are we doing in this movie?'"

"I thought people would say 'What is this crap?'" Kelly continues. "But then I saw the movie a second time and it clicked: This is exciting; we're a part of a great movie by a legendary filmmaker, and the music does add to the scenes."

As proud and excited as Kelly is about being a part of Red Sox Nation and having one of his band's songs featured in a flick that won four Oscars (including Best Picture), it's DM's new album, *The Meanest of Times*, (released Sept. 18) that really gets him yapping. Especially when I ask him about the disc's linchpin, "(F)lannigan's Ball," a traditional Irish song with a fresh arrangement and lyrics by DM. The band went to Dublin to record it with Irish music icons Spider Stacey (The Pogues) and Ronnie Drew (The Dubliners). The recording represents the past, present and, to a certain extent, future of Irish folk music.

"It was such an honor to work with those guys," Kelly says. "We took what they did in their bands and transformed it a bit and made our own thing."

"We are a folk band," Kelly continues, "[in that] we introduce younger people to that legacy. Our music brings father, mother and daughter together — even the grandparents who like the traditional covers. It's neat, an amazing thing to be part of."

Kelly's still bustling around his home. I called him at 9:30 a.m., and it's nearly 10. I ask him what essentials he won't leave home without.

"Gold Bond [powder] and baby wipes," Kelly says. "For summer touring in the South, you need those things — definitely. Socks and underwear, clean socks and underwear, that's what mom always says to bring, right?"

"I'll hit a bookstore. Other guys play video games but not me. I read or do crosswords. Nothing crazy. Good books, some good coffee. Pretty exciting, eh?"

Don't worry — on stage, the Dropkick Murphys are anything but bookworms. And look for the guys to be hanging in a "dark hole-in-the-wall-place" having a drink after the show. But don't worry about ordering 'em Guinnesses and Jamesons.

"We drink Budweiser," Kelly says. "We're just regular guys from Boston."

*Check out Wade Tatangelo's music blog at TampaCalling.com. To comment on this story, go to Music at tampa.creativeloafing.com.*

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