

inner:view

DROPKICK MURPHYS

By Rex Rutkoski

You can watch them on video, listen to their records and read the lavish and heavyweight praise accorded them.

But if you really want to experience the essence of Dropkick Murphys, one of the most beloved bands in their genre, a tasty marriage of punk rock and Irish folk, it's best to do it live, says vocalist Al Barr.

"That's where it all kind of makes sense to people. We're just a band trying to do what we can as honestly and from the heart as possible," says the frontman. "We are sincere. You've got to come to see us for yourselves to see what we are all about."

They even arrive with their own mission statement: to play music that creates an all-for-one, one-for-all environment where everyone is encouraged to participate, sing along and enjoy themselves.

That's the true spirit of punk rock, they remind, where the band and the audience is viewed as one and the same.

"That's why if you haven't seen the band you've got to come see that," Barr insists. "We are only 50 percent of what makes up the show. The other 50 percent comes through the door. Together we reach that goal. That's the beauty of what we do and get to do together. With people coming and singing along it makes a great show. That's what makes it so successful."

Each night it is magical for the Dropkick Murphys, he assures.

"When you go on stage and see those faces light up, and they sing the lyrics you wrote back at your face, does it get any better than that? That drives us to do the best we can do every night, even if it is every night consecutively," Barr says. "We can be having the worst day of our lives and get out there and we're able to shelf all that and live in the moment."

And what a moment it is!

It resonates with others, he believes, because the universal themes in their music, including family, friends, children, and loyalty, has relevance for everyone.

Their audience comes from all walks of life: firemen, police officers, military, all manner of working people. "It's just regular people with every day issues. The bottom line is they are people who want to come forget their woes and have a great time," Barr says.

It is a multi-generational experience too, from grandparents to grandchildren. "It's a special thing to have," he

acknowledges.

Vocalist-bassist Ken Casey says the Dropkick Murphys always wanted to be the band that didn't forget where it came from. It is not difficult to hold to that philosophy, Barr assures. "Not when we have families like ours who would take the wind out of our sails immediately and just remind us where we come from, not that they would have to anyway," he says. "We would never want to put ourselves ahead of others. In rock and roll they like to put you on a pedestal. If you believe that stuff that's when you start to lose. At the end of the day, it's all about family."

He is confident such family values fit in nicely with the punk rock ethos. "When you are growing as a teenager it is a natural course to be at odds with your parents. If you are lucky to have parents who love you through those times, you come out realizing they were doing the best they could. The family values fit right into the punk rock thing."

"We are basically family guys," Barr adds. "It's family and friends that basically inspire us to do what we do."

What the Dropkick Murphys do seems to be an inspiration for others, including Boston Redsox players and fans, for whom the group's music is a soundtrack, and high profile admirers such as Martin Scorsese, who used their "I'm Shipping Up To Boston" (from their breakthrough 2005 "The Warrior's Code" CD) prominently in his Academy Award winning film, *The Departed*. He even gave the band a shout out from the Oscars ceremonies.

Bruce Springsteen attended a show, accompanying his son who is a fan of the band. The Dropkick Murphys performed at the Sex Pistols 2002 Golden Jubilee gig.

The Boston band also collaborated with the Woody Guthrie estate to use the folk pioneer's unpublished lyrics to create the song "Gonna Be A Blackout." It made them feel like a link in a chain of the American folk music tradition, Barr says. "Woody's music was the punk rock of yesterday, the ethos of punk: by the people, for the people, singing about the daily trials and tribulations of the working man. That's pretty punk rock."

That sensibility is reflected in the band's new *The Meanest of Times*, their sixth studio album which Barr calls a celebration of life as well as the Murphys' best CD of their career. "We all agree it is our best record and we're all very proud of it," he says. "It's right from the heart, as organic as we can make it."

The CD's opus, "Flannigan's Ball," features guest appearances by Spider Stacey of The Pogues and Ronnie Drew of The Dubliners, uniting three generations of modern Irish folk music.

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He believes the band fused its various musical influences with a background of punk perhaps more effectively than it has in the past. In the end, the listener makes that decision. "It's what they hear," he says. (cont. p. 30)

Coming together in 1996, the group was just a gathering of friends playing music for fun in the basement of a friend's barbershop. "We grew up listening to rock and punk rock. We kind of accidentally ended up doing music

that included the traditional music of our parents and grandparents." It was not contrived. It just happened, Barr says. "It was very cool."

The band always has said it is a punk group with folk influences. "We kind of fuse it together all in one, as opposed to separating it. We grew up hearing American and Irish folk in the household. At the same time we didn't want to all be listening to our parents' music. It kind of ended up coming full circle as we got older."

Editor's Note: Dropkick Murphys play Water St. Music Hall, Thursday, November 15.