

YOUNG DUBLINERS

Saints and Sinners

The Young Dubliners are psyched up for the release of *Saints and Sinners*, their second album on 429 Records--and first batch of original material since 2005's critically acclaimed *Real World*. After taking an exciting retro, rootsy labor of love detour to give a shout out to the masters of Irish song past and present on their 2007 429 Records debut *With All Due Respect, The Irish Sessions*, the Young Dubliners drew inspiration from the trials and tribulations of the past few years on the road where they have encountered their share of, to borrow from an Irish proverb, "poets and patriots, saints and sinners," for the new album.

Seamlessly blending their rock and Celtic influences into a high energy, anthemic and lyrically poignant mix, the band—whose lineup since 2002 includes co-founder Keith Roberts (vocals, guitar), fellow Dubliner Brendan Holmes (bass, vocals), American-born members Bob Boulding (guitar, vocals), Chas Waltz (violin, keyboards, harp, mandolin, vocals) and Dave Ingraham (drums, percussion)--jumps energetically from ballad to barn burner, documenting as they go the vibrant yet chaotic world they find themselves in. From edgy political tunes to the travails of life in an internationally touring band, *Saints and Sinners* chronicles and tackles it all with joy, wit, enthusiasm and a profound belief that things can get better. They're joined once again by Uilleann pipe and pennywhistle master Eric Rigler, famed for his film work on the *Titanic* and *Braveheart* soundtracks, who has appeared on the band's last three albums and is a regular touring member.

"We really set a very high standard for ourselves as songwriters," says Roberts. "We live on the road, but we're aware that if every few years we don't give our fans the highest quality songs we can, that level of excitement and anticipation may not last forever. We've never been about hit singles, but we have always been focused on making the 12 tracks per project the best they could be. We consider ourselves songwriters first and never just jammed styles together to sell albums. Our goal has always been to keep getting better and make the songs mean something. When we did *Real World*, it was the beginning of when we started writing with a fun, personal realization of where we were in our lives as artists and family men, combined with an awareness of our political surroundings."

Beginning with the raucous title track, *Saints and Sinners* continues in the spirit of that dual mindset as the Dubs mix free-wheeling party rockers like "Howaya Girls" and the vocal harmony-laden jam "Backseat Driver" with anthemic and politically charged tunes like the 80s vibing "This Time." While "This Time" taps into the raw frustration of the past eight years, the band saves its most biting commentary for the U.N.'s inaction on giving aid to ravaged places like Darfur and not adequately addressing global poverty on the acoustic ballad "In the End." The moody rocker "Buy You A Life" is a plea for people to look beyond themselves and, as Roberts puts it, "look out for each other during difficult times."

The hypnotic, mid-tempo pop rocker "My Town" was written before the recent presidential election, from the perspective of a small town's working men who had previously given up hope for better economic circumstances, but who are now optimistic that their social situation could change. On the more personal side, "I Don't Think I'll Love Anymore," whose second verse is

sung by Dead Rock West lead singer Cindy Wasserman, is a gently swaying traditional ballad about the consequences of poor communication in a relationship. These heavier themes are balanced by tongue in cheek tracks like the densely percussive, supercharged “Rosie,” about a guy trying to sell his girl on the idea that marriage is overrated (and expensive!!).

The explosive instrumental rocker “Saoirse,” featuring guest artist, blues rock great Kenny Wayne Shepherd, is a clarion call from the Dubs that defines their longtime mission as American and Celtic rock ambassadors. “The title means ‘freedom’ in Gaelic,” Roberts says, “and to us, that means we have the liberty to take this style of music and push and pull it in every direction. The vibe of the song goes from Irish to rock back to Irish and rock again, with Kenny’s blistering blues on top of it. We’ve always defied pigeonholing because our sound is the result of Irish and American guys coming together and drawing from a little of everything.”

Keith Roberts pokes his usual cheeky fun as he looks back on seven albums and thousands of blistering U.S. and European performances since he and his buddies debuted their feisty brand of Irish rock at The Irish Rover pub in Santa Monica, California in 1988.

“Had I known then that we’d have such longevity and would still be out there doing 180 to 250 shows a year I probably would have come up with a different name,” says lead vocalist and acoustic guitarist. “When people say we’re no longer so young, I reply, ‘well, the Fine Young Cannibals never ate anyone’! (Original band member) Paul O’Toole and I were two young lads from Dublin who had moved to L.A., so the name was given to us by early fans and it made sense at the time. The cool thing is, we’ve stayed young at heart, doing our best to grow into the name rather than let the name grow out of us.”

Beyond the power and energy that infuses and defines their must-see live performances—which was captured on their 1998 concert recording *Alive Alive O’*--Roberts believes that the Young Dubliners’ success over the years is a direct result of the strong songwriting on acclaimed releases like *Rocky Road* (1994), *Breathe* (1995), *Red* (2000), *Absolutely* (2002) and *Real World*. As the band developed and its members became better acquainted with their individual strengths and weaknesses, the writing process became more fully collaborative. Rather than simply having individual members bring in fully developed songs, now for the most part they come in with songs in progress and flesh them out together, staying open minded about their individual contributions and being cool about tweaking where it’s warranted.

Building a fervent fan base comparable to that of jam band rockers like Phish and Dave Matthews Band, The Young Dubliners have over the years become notorious for the whirling “jig pits” that erupt at their live shows. Keith Roberts and Paul O’Toole first met on L.A.’s vibrant pub scene circa late 80s at a time when Roberts was composing some Irish ballads and thought casually about assembling a rag-tag team of fellow Irish transplants and like-minded American rockers. From their humble beginnings at the Irish Rover, the band evolved through various personnel changes into a pugnacious, crazy but coolly irresistible force of nature that eventually made its way into the studio to record their debut EP *Rocky Road*.

By 2000, the band had morphed into a septet without O’Toole, and upon releasing the critically acclaimed *Red* became an international sensation. Actor Gabriel Byrne hired the band to write

the theme song for his television show “Madigan Men” and they spent much of 2001 touring Europe with Jethro Tull and the U.S. as headliners and as openers John Hiatt and Robert Cray. The Young Dubliners were also plucked to rev up the crowds at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. That same year, the band, with the return of Waltz (who had left in 1995), the Dubs scaled back down to a five-piece, launching a period of renewed creative vigor.

After participating in a number of headlining and co-headlining US tours (Johnny Lang, Collective Soul, Great Big Sea, and others), the quintet settled down to record *Real World* - an album influenced by their predecessors (Waterboys/Pogues/U2/Big Country) and most importantly, life on the road. During the interlude between *Absolutely* and *Real World* came an event which drew the band in. Roberts underwent a throat surgery which required months of vocal cord rehabilitation. Reflecting on that time, he says, “My surgery made us all aware of how close we came to losing it all. Our determination to succeed is even stronger than before.” The raw live energy of their next project *With All Due Respect, The Irish Sessions*, was a unique and inspiring way to fill their audience in on the great writers and poets whose legacy the Young Dubliners are, album by album and show by show, boldly carrying on today.

“Even with all the touring we do, the thing that keeps us going is the one thing that never gets old,” says Roberts. “And that’s playing those older songs people love and then mixing in a new song and hearing a positive, excited reaction from the crowd for the first time. We’ve had our share of tough gigs too, but all it takes is that one great show, those perfect moments of band and audience communication, to appreciate what we’re doing up there and why. It’s all about the joy of performing, watching the people dance and hearing them sing along.”