



FLOGGING MOLLY

Speed of Darkness

THE LIGHTS HAVE GONE OUT ON THE WORKING CLASS

Three years ago, hard working men and women the world over were collectively under the assumption that their nest eggs were secure, their homes were the safest of all investments, and that the economy was on the upswing. Then, with virtually no warning, their lives were turned upside down, as an entire generation saw their dreams dashed and plans dismantled. It all happened with the *Speed of Darkness*.

The creation of Flogging Molly's new record, *Speed of Darkness*, was anything but business as usual for the band. "It wasn't the album we set out to write," vocalist/guitarist Dave King says. "It became the album we *had* to write."

Musically and lyrically, Flogging Molly has never sounded so mature or rousing, nor have the messages of alienation and hope behind their songs ever been so relevant. *Speed of Darkness* was written over several months when the band would descend into the basement of King's Detroit home—a home he shares with his wife, Flogging Molly fiddler, Bridget Regan (they maintain dual residences in Ireland and Detroit, where Bridget was born and raised). As the country struggled to stay afloat, the songs evolved into odes to the working man and battle cries against the elite establishment that so quickly and callously cast him aside. "I write from my surroundings," King says. "I wanted people who've lost their jobs to know I was paying attention. We're singing for them, all of these good people brought to their knees." Nowhere is this more apparent than on the charging and bluesy track "The Power's Out." ("The power's out, there's fuck all to see/The power's out, like this economy/The power's out, guess it's par for the course/Unless you're a bloodsucking leech CEO").

With *Speed of Darkness*, the band went into uncharted territory. The album was recorded at Echo Mountain Recording Studio, which is housed in a converted church in Asheville, North Carolina. The setting underscored a record that continually asks hard questions of faith and suffering, of belief and deliverance. "We liked making music in a building that had been a voice for the community," King says. "We just wanted to sing a little louder than they had before." And sing louder they did. Songs like "A Prayer for Me in Silence" and "The Cradle of Humankind" are journeys through hardship and heartache, through besieged homelands and losses that open like chasms. Other tracks like "This Present State of Grace" and "Oliver Boy" are songs of searching, of country and democracy, songs that bear witness to the glory and terror of being human.

Speed of Darkness also marks the debut of Flogging Molly's own record label Borstal Beat, which they founded after a great run with SideOneDummy, their home for the last decade. The new chapter in the band's life also makes perfect

sense: they're more independent than ever, more themselves than ever. "We're more serious now and we're taking risks. It's who Flogging Molly is," King says.

Flogging Molly has never conformed to industry tastes; they've always been the outcasts who put their fans before commercial success, and they've always put their music before marketability. The rewards of such independence and integrity are undeniable on *Speed of Darkness*. You feel it from the first note to the last, the pathos and the passion, the sweeping and rollicking electricity of inspiration.

Founded in Los Angeles in 1997, Flogging Molly has always defied categorization. The infectious originality of their songs is a badge of honor and key to the band's creativity, their urgency. They infuse punk rock with Celtic instruments—violin, mandolin and the accordion—and they merge blues progressions with grinding guitars and traditional Irish music, the music of King's youth. "We're not a traditional band," explains Dublin-born King. "We are influenced by traditional music and inspired by it, but without question we put our own twist on it." Theirs is music of exile and rebellion, of struggle and history and protest. It's music of a country torn down the middle; a deeply beautiful and wounded country that knows no quit, and Flogging Molly pays homage to that resolve in every note. Whether it's a driving anthem like "Black Friday Rule" or the upbeat duet with Lucinda Williams, "Factory Girls", the band's only criteria for its music is simple and bone-deep: that it matter.

Flogging Molly's fans have always appreciated the social and political awareness driving the music. *Swagger*, the band's first album, transcended everyone's expectations in 2000, and the track "The Worst Day Since Yesterday" was included in the film *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. *Drunken Lullabies* was released in 2002 and certified Gold. In 2004, the band released *Within a Mile of Home*, and in 2008, Flogging Molly put out *Float*, a deeply stirring and personal album recorded in King's native Ireland. No surprise that *Float* found the band's widest audience yet. Through all of this, *Flogging Molly*—first, last, and always a live band—was touring, playing raucous and adrenaline-fueled shows in bars, pubs, and nearly every major rock festival in North America, Europe, and Japan. "In Ireland," King says, "you go to the pub to have a conversation. That's what we do every night on stage, go to the 'pub' and trade stories." In 2010, to showcase their unparalleled and limitless energy on stage, the band released *Flogging Molly: Live at the Greek Theatre*, a three disc set chronicling their legendary sold out shows at one of LA's most famous music venues.

Speed Of Darkness is music to play after you've lost your job or your love, and music to listen to as you dream of better things for your family and country. It's the music you hear as you fight a bigger man, and it's the music you hear as you help him from the floor and buy him a pint at the bar. The album, like Flogging Molly itself, is a testament to youth and resilience, to growing old and the wisdom of scars, and yet for all of the record's darkness and the speed with which it descends, the ultimate theme is one of light: We can persevere. We must and we will persevere.

- Bret Anthony Johnston

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