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## ENTERTAINMENT

### Flogging Molly gives voice to those struggling to survive

The band, which will play the House of Blues, sings about persevering in harsh economic times.

By Ernest Hardy, Special to the Los Angeles Times  
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"I sometimes drink 'til I am empty, grab another from the shelf," begins a verse from the Flogging Molly song "The Cradle of Humankind." It concludes with the couplet, "Never listened to much reason, 'til I hear it's last call / When I notice that my ghost is still dancing on its own."

"Cradle" is one of the highlights off the seven-piece band's angry, beautiful, politically charged CD "Speed of Darkness," a raucous, punk-folk collection that celebrates everyday people struggling to survive the here and now.

Released late last year, "Speed" balances high velocity anthems like video single "Don't Shut 'Em Down" (inspired by the pluck and perseverance of the people of Detroit) with the melancholy yet defiant "Cradle."

Flogging Molly leader, singer and songwriter David King explained that the song and CD were inspired by the loss of jobs and economic security that have ravaged his native Ireland and his adopted home of Detroit. King, who on Wednesday plays the House of Blues with the band, says one goal of the CD was to capture the psychological toll of the global recession.

"A lot of people, when they lose their jobs, their homes, their families and everything they've worked for, blame themselves," said King, speaking from his Motor City home where he lives with his wife and band mate, violinist Bridget Regan (a Detroit native). "My saying that we all still belong in the cradle of humankind was my way of saying I'm only human. We all are. It's a song of hope in the sense of crawling yourself out of something that you feel you put yourself into, even though a lot of factors outside your control contributed to your situation."

Flogging Molly is not shy about naming those external factors on "Speed of Darkness." In songs propelled by traditional rock instrumentation as well as accordion, fiddle, banjo and mandolin, the band calls out the banks, CEOs and politicians who colluded on

creating the economic crises circling the planet.

King's perspective was largely honed by an impoverished childhood in Ireland, and partly by living in one of America's most ravaged cities. He divides his time between his home just outside Dublin and his home in Detroit, which has afforded him some insight into the plight and coping mechanisms of the poor and marginalized — regardless of their region.

But King's lyrics are hardly all doom and gloom. "What I love about the people of Ireland and the people of Detroit," he said, "is that there is a sense of humor in both places. The people are truly wonderful, and they have a way of seeing the world that is not at all about being defeated."

Flogging Molly, which formed in Los Angeles in 1997, is now a hugely popular live act around the world. Their signature sound is rooted in the punk-rock-meets-Celtic exuberance of the Pogues while their lyrics are steeped in the poetic reportage of Irish literary traditions and the social ire of old-school punk rock.

From the start of their career, the band (who releases its music on its own Borstal Beat Records) packed its boisterous sound with a political content and consciousness that may sometimes elude the Friday-night-pub crowd.

The working-class frustrations that Flogging Molly has voiced throughout its seven-CD career (including two concert discs), are most pointed on "Speed of Darkness." The band's political sensibilities reflect the present but also recall the righteous anger and activism of men and women who once agitated for unions and had a healthy distrust of corporate fat cats.

But in the current political climate, a group like Molly can almost seem traitorous to some of its blue-collar constituency when it lobs critiques at corporate malfeasance and howls songs of protest against unfounded wealth and unbridled greed.

That sense of betrayal surfaced late last October when guitarist Dennis Casey and his 3-year-old son visited the Occupy Wall Street encampment in New York, igniting a firestorm of controversy. "A guy gave my son a sign that said, 'We're the 99% / Occupy Wall Street,'" Casey said. "My boy was so proud. He was walking around holding it up."

Casey sent a photo of his son holding the sign to the band's management for laughs, and someone in the office asked if they could post it online. Casey gave his consent and thought nothing of it. A few days later, there was a controversy raging on the band's Facebook page.

"Hundreds and hundreds of people had responded," Casey said. "I had no idea. I was just taken aback that one photo would create so much response. And when I read through the comments, it showed me how many angry, misinformed people are out there on the subject of Occupy. But what really surprised me were the people who were, like, 'I'll never listen to this band again... You guys are pawns.'"

"I was, like, 'Where have you been?' Every record we've done deals with similar things politically. Some songs are about Ireland, some songs are about America. But it's all essentially pretty consistent in terms of the politics. So what band did they think they were listening to?"

King shrugs off the controversy, saying it didn't really register with the band, seeing that the politics of Occupy are fairly in keeping with those long espoused by Flogging Molly.

"We don't have the answers," he said thoughtfully. "But being a part of a community that doesn't have the answers, shouting about it individually, we all start to intertwine and become one big voice. That's the main thing."