

Grit and Soul

The Dropkick Murphys



Pipe player Scruffy Wallace was born in Essex, Great Britain, and moved to Canada at age eleven. His grandmother played an important role in his journey with the bagpipes. Raised in Calgary, Wallace grew up listening to traditional Celtic music in the home, something that "culturally had been around forever" in his home, constantly being played by his mother and grandparents. He wanted to play guitar, but his grandmother convinced him to learn how to play the pipes first. At the request of his grandmother, he started to study the instrument he had always been fascinated by.

At age fifteen he joined the Highland Cadet Core, and was tutored by pipe-major Robert Henderson in Calgary, Alberta. His interest was in playing piobaireachd, classical music for the bagpipe. Henderson was both a good tutor and a good influence on Wallace, serving as a father figure to him. "In my opinion, he's the best pipe player there is," says Wallace, "I was honoured to be tutored by him."

Wallace applied a strong work ethic to study the challenging classical music under Henderson, having the realization that "if you can master this, you can master anything." Wallace graduated from the Military School of Piping in Ottawa, Ontario, in 1990.

Ten years ago he joined the Celtic Punk band The Dropkick Murphys, and has since emigrated to Boston, Massachusetts. The band formed in 1996 — what started as a group of friends who played music for fun in the basement of a friend's barbershop — soon to discover that people liked their music. Three years later an opportunity arose when the piper dropped out, Wallace joined the Dropkicks and has been playing with them ever since.

Most of its band members are of Irish descent, and they are all proud Americans. They support the troops overseas and the working class. The Dropkick Murphys are committed to their blue-collar background both in their music and life. Prior to joining the band Wallace was a steel worker and a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. Wallace feels it's noble to come from a background where you have to work for what you want, and that "it gives you grit, it gives you soul."

This kind of spirit conveys through their songs and lyrics, and their growing fan base is a testament that their music resonates with many. Now working on their tenth album, the band has fans across the globe.

The Dropkicks have fused together Punk Rock, Irish Folk, Rock, and Hardcore into an authentic, one-of-its-kind-mix. When asked about the unique blend of punk music and Irish music, Wallace points out the bold tenor of both forms of

music. "I feel that both Irish music and Punk music are made of the same cloth. Both are forms of music that are rebellious. It is very easy to blend them together," says Wallace, "so in a way Celtic Music is the original punk rock."

The band began to make a name for itself building a following with non-stop touring across the world. Their big break came when their music opened the movie *The Departed* in 2006, directed by Martin Scorsese, putting The Dropkick Murphys on the map. Despite their enormous success band members haven't strayed from their roots, and that Irish sensibility of a humble approach to life. For Wallace, the new recognition didn't change a thing. "For me personally, nothing has change. I have always just loved the life of playing, touring and making music. It was an honour being a part of the movie, we've always been huge fans of Martin Scorsese movies.

Like the rest of the band, Wallace has gratitude for the loyal fan base across the globe. "We have the best fans in the world, wherever we go they always make us feel very welcome, and that's amazing." The audience has a wide range of fans, women and men of all ages. With The Dropkicks in their 13th year, many of their fans have grown up with them, some of their thirty-something devotees have been going to concerts since they were teenagers.

In addition to having an appreciation for their fans, the band members are grateful for their success, and show it by giving back. Newly launched, the Claddagh Fund is

a charity established by bass player and front man Ken Casey. Fundraisers support non-profits aimed at helping children, veterans and those suffering from alcohol and drug addiction.

The fans in their hometown of Boston appreciate The Dropkicks for more than music. In 2004, the band played a remake of the Broadway song "Tessie inside Fenway Park", home of the Boston Red Sox. The song "Tessie" had been the rally cry of the Royal Rooters, an established group of diehard Red Sox Fans in the early 1900s. (The Royal Rooters included Mayor "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, grandfather to JFK.) The Rooters cheered on the Red Sox singing the fight song "Tessie" for their first World Series win in 1903 and continuing the tradition until 1918, the last time they won the title. In 2004, The Dropkicks revived the fight song to carry on the tradition as they cheered on the Red Sox in their dramatic come-from-behind-victory to defeat the New York Yankees, going on to win their first World Series in 86 years. Superstitious baseball fans speculate if it was The Dropkicks' "luck of the Irish" that helped the Red Sox team in that fateful series.

The band is currently working on new songs for a album to be released this year and have plans to release a live album/DVD from the 2009 St. Pats show. The 2010 world tour kicks off on St. Patrick's Day, and as is the tradition, their March 17th show will be a lively gig held in Boston, a town known for its widespread Irish heritage.



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