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Festival seating

Young Dubliners take their Celtic rock to a wider audience

BRIAN MCCOY
Record Entertainment Editor
Published Thursday, Sep 22, 2005

For most of its career, if you wanted to catch the Young Dubliners live, you had to head for a club.

That suited the group just fine. From the start, founder and Dublin native Keith Roberts envisioned the band incorporating Celtic influences into a hard-rock sound. The group played its earliest shows at a pub he owned in Los Angeles.

That, however, has begun to change, the singer-guitarist said from his San Fernando Valley home. Yes, the Young Dubliners still play 200 dates a year, but more festivals are showing up on its tour itinerary as promoters recognize there's more to Celtic music than its centuries-old acoustic traditions.

"There was sort of a turning point," Roberts said. "They started to kind of split it up a little bit. You're going to get an idea of how Celtic music can be in all these sounds and forms."

That trend brings the Young Dubliners to Northern California this weekend to headline the International Jousting Championships at the Mother Lode Fairgrounds in Sonora. Along with the jousting, magicians, medieval performers and refreshments, the event includes a musical lineup featuring Tempest, Black Irish Band and Crazy Ivan.

While the Young Dubliners have rarely played the Central Valley and foothills, it should be a comfortable performance for the band. Roberts noted a long-standing friendship with Tempest frontman Lief Sorbye; he's also close to the more punk Flogging Molly, which performs Friday at the Bob Hope Theatre.

Young Dubliners come to the region at the end of a particularly busy summer. Road dogs that its members are, the band has been on the road for months in support of its latest album, "Real World." In addition to Roberts, the band features Bob Boulding (guitar), Chas Waltz (keyboards), Brendan Holmes (bass) and Dave Ingraham (drums).

Roberts came to California 15 years ago to be a journalist. Armed with a degree from University College, Dublin, he had received an internship at a Southern California public television station only to find that the work didn't suit him. He later opened a pub, and it was there that he met Paul O'Toole, another expatriate musician, and founded the Young Dubliners.

That O'Toole is no longer with the band is hardly exceptional — the Young Dubliners have

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seen much coming and going since the release of the group's first recording, "Rocky Road" (1994). Waltz himself departed in 1995 before returning in 2002.

Roberts, however, has persevered. Influenced by such Irish rock giants as U2 and the Pogues, he has forged a sound that blends anthemic rock with traditional instrumentation.

As heard on "Real World" and onstage, it's a muscular, hook-filled rock sound. If it hasn't caught on with American audiences, it's not from lack of trying.

"There is no lack of support in the country," Roberts said of the crowds that greet the Young Dubliners in clubs and festivals alike. "The radio stations are just a complete write-off. It's just been the way it's been."

Contact Record Entertainment Editor Brian McCoy at (209) 546-8293 or bmccoy@recordnet.com

CONCERT PREVIEW

Young Dubliners

What: International Jousting Championships

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