

Examiner.com: “The High Kings hold court at Music Box on Paddy’s Day Eve”

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By Pete Roche

The Music Box Supper Club was the place to be Wednesday night for those looking for an early start to their St. Patrick’s Day fun, courtesy Irish super-group The High Kings. The all-star quartet’s March 16th show found the lads supporting their latest studio album, *Friends for Life*—and the recent concert compilation *Four Friends Live*.

But naturally, the fellows also reached back to their self-titled debut *The High Kings* (2008) and sophomore effort *Memory Lane* (2011) for a few sensational sing-alongs, austere originals, classy covers, and tried ‘n’ true traditionals. This boisterous band doesn’t merely pay homage to the golden era of Irish folk (The Dubliners, The Chieftains, The Clancy Brothers); they’re a biological extension of it: Tipperary native Finnbar Clancy is the son of Bobby Clancy (and nephew of Paddy, Liam, and Tom). Dubliner Martin Furey is the offspring of folk legend and master piper Finbar Furey.

Kilkenny-born Darren Holden kicked off his entertainment career opening for Belinda Carlisle and The Backstreet Boys. He was a featured vocalist in *Riverdance: The Show* and later played piano man Billy Joel in Twyla Tharpe’s Tony-winning Broadway production of *Movin’ Out*. Dublin’s Brian Dunphy—son of ‘60s show singer Sean—also appeared in *Riverdance*, and garnered further fame as one-third of the Three Irish Tenors (not to mention his stint in the band *Druid*). All told, the lads play nearly fifteen musical instruments. Vocally, they’re unrivalled. Each man took a turn on lead, but most selections saw them stacking their voices into exquisite chordal harmonies that resonated throughout the concert hall and (we’re guessing) audience members’ hearts and souls. The Kings commenced the pre-Paddy’s day festivities with a rollicking “Rocky Road to Dublin,” wild “Marie’s Wedding,” and feisty “MacAlpine’s Fusiliers.”

“Ah, nothing like the smell of burgers and beer to get you going!” quipped Dunphy, who fielded lead vocal and strummed a Takamine acoustic guitar on “All Around the World.” Holden thumped along on an electronic keyboard as Clancy plucked away on banjo. Furey let loose early with the first of many fluid, spritely flute solos on “World,” but spent the majority of his time manhandling an exotic-looking bouzouki.

Christie Moore’s “Nancy Spain” benefited from the Venetian sound of Holden’s accordion bellows as Clancy fingerpicked a Taylor acoustic guitar. Holden reverted to his piano on the tender, harmonious ebullient “Fields of Athenry” while Dunphy belted away. The crowd was only too eager to add an improvisational “Oh baby, let the free bird fly” to the otherwise heart-

melting chorus. “Green Fields of France” and “Town I Loved So Well” had Clancy and Furey alternating banjo duty, Holden tickling the strings of a mandolin, and Dunphy tipping a bodhran with a cipin for percussion. “Red is the Rose” was performed a cappella, with the guys gathered around a single microphone. Swedish folk song “Ballad of Joe Hill” wasn’t truly a ballad at all, but a foot-stomping rebel song for striking immigrant laborers. “Pub Song” and “Step It Out Mary” kept the spirits high (and tempos brisk), with the latter tune sporting a Rolling Stones guitar riff or two. Second act highlights included “Rising of the Moon,” “Oh, Maggie,” “Spencil Hill,” and the new “Ride On”—which will probably appear on the boys’ next album. Dunphy and Furey reported that they recently finished tracking new songs at Cauldron Studios in Dublin for a Summer 2016 release.

Dunphy snapped a couple strings during the second set (one on bouzouki, one on guitar), but the band’s roadie was quick to appear with a wire cutters. Furey commanded the pace on “The Star of County Down,” while Dunphy sent out “Dublin in Rare Auld Times” out to his departed father, with whom he used to sing the tune. “Sailing Ireland’s Shore” was triumphant, while Dubliners throwback “Hand Me Down My Bible” boasted a whistled solo from Dunphy. When Holden turn at lead vocals came, his lungpower nearly shook the room.

Campfire classic “Goodnight, Irene” and sea shanty / lament “Leaving of Liverpool” turned into audience sing-songs. The Kings invited a guest “queen” onstage (apologies, but we missed the name—Chandra? Chandler?) to help out with finale “Whiskey in the Jar.” Dunphy said the band had to rise at 4am the next day to catch two flights over to New York, yet they stayed on for a bouncy “Finnegan’s Wake” (with Holden quoted AC/DC’s “Thunderstruck” on his squeezebox) and last call classic “The Parting Glass.”

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