

Monkey Fightin'? Snakes rock Maynooth



By Nate Smelle

When singer-songwriter Matthew Davies heard actor Samuel L. Jackson shout 'I've had it with these Monkey Fightin' Snakes on this money fightin' plane,' in the edited-for-television version of the cult classic film, *Snakes on a Plane* he knew he had found the perfect name for his band? Monkey Fightin' Snakes. Composing the band with Davies are: Dave Stoyles on bass, guitar, button box, souzaphone, trombone and backing vocals; and Darren Atkinson on drums, percussion, mayhem and backing vocals.

Before the band hit the stage at The Arlington in Maynooth on Saturday, July 18 Davies sat down with Bancroft This Week to discuss his passion for sound and most importantly the music of Monkey Fightin' Snakes.

'We got the name from the movie, but after sitting with it for a while we started to appreciate it for other reasons,' said Davies.

'It's a slap in the face to the establishment, but it also makes you question if you are a monkey or a snake. In reality we are all both at one time or another.'

Growing up as part of a musically-gifted family Davies was destined early on for the stage. Having famed Canadian songsmith Neil Young as a cousin and legendary Canadian author Robertson Davies as a great Uncle, his creative roots run deep. As a young child he remembers the first time he was moved by a piece of music after enjoying a family dinner.

'We had finished eating and my Grandfather sat at the piano and my Mom and my two Aunts and he just started singing this beautiful three-part harmony,' Davies said.

'I remember thinking it was as if they were all in a secret club, and they knew the code. I wanted to know the code too! I do remember specifically my Grampa sitting me on his knee with a ukelele wrapped around me and showing me *Aint She Sweet*. I was probably still in diapers.'

Davies's jam-filled guitar spoons out the flavor on each and every song when performing live, and on the band's recently released debut album, *Finish What You Star*. Produced by multi Juno Award winning producer Michael Philip Wojewoda and mastered by Grammy Award winning engineer João Carvalho, the album was recorded live off the floor, through an old Neve console on two inch tape to achieve the band's heavy yet smooth and pure sound.

'We were making the record exactly the way Sabbath, Led Zeppelin or Aerosmith made a record,' explained Davies.

'We were literally using gear from the 1970s, mics from the 50s and 40s even. It has that real sound.'

Sound quality is of the utmost importance to the members of Monkey Fightin' Snakes, as is the sequence of the songs that appear on their album. Such careful concern for quality in music seems to be going the way of the Great Auk as more and more people listen to music exclusively through digital devices.

'One of the weird things is that when music is digital and it is just being played in iTunes you don't really think so much about how songs flow together because sometimes it is on shuffle and it can be non-linear,' he said.

'Whereas a record is a set, fixed thing when you put on a side of an LP, so now all of a sudden the spaces between the songs, how

much of a gap there is and which song is flowing into the next one became more important.?

Citing a diverse list of musical influences that includes everyone from Crowded House to The Grateful Dead, Davies said there is one musician who stands out above the rest? Jimi Hendrix.

?I really love Jimi's tone, also the way he played blues was just so fluid,? said Davies.

?I was so influenced by him that I spent many years trying really hard not to sound like him. He is just so musical, and although he was the ultimate rock star, he was never about the flash or technique, just about conveying emotion. There are many reasons why people are still talking about him, a guy with a three year career in the spotlight, 45 years after his death.?

When writing a song Davies strives to honestly convey his own thoughts and emotions with creative enthusiasm. He sees music as its own language that speaks to its audience in three different but interconnected ways: rhythm, melody and lyrics.

?Rhythm speaks to the body and makes us move in sympathy, if we are listening,? Davies said.

?Melody speaks to our feelings and makes us feel in sympathy, if we are listening. Lyrics speak to the mind and make us think or wonder if we are listening. When those three sides of a song really work and hit us together, that is LISTENING and really hearing a song in its totality. I believe the difference between a good song and a great song is how well those elements work together.?

According to Davies, for a song to truly be great it must touch its audience on all three of these levels. However, to reach people in this way a piece of music is not required to be 100 per cent perfect. In reality, he said it takes a little bit of funk, and a whole lot of soul. If a song is too perfect in its production it loses its ability to connect with us.

?There needs to be the element of risk, the possibility of wrong notes, that walking the tightrope. Great resolve is only achieved through preceding tension.?

To connect with, and/or purchase the music of Monkey Fightin' Snakes visit www.monkeyfightinsnakes.com.