



Voodoo Loons, who will be returning to their roots in Donegal and Cork this summer. l-r: Bill McCarthy, Dennis O'Hagan and Chris Hooks

Voodoo Loons have the Donegal Connection

A New York City band with very strong links to both Donegal and Cork have just released their debut album which is receiving rave reviews across and the pond and equally in Europe.

Listening to the band's guitarist and singer, Dennis O'Hagan, speaking about his mother Kathleen's native Donegal, you could hear how strongly he feels about his roots.

"I spent most of my life bouncing back and forth between my mother's hometown of Buncrana and our home in New York City.

"In recent years, my 'day job' has taken me to Dublin on a very regular basis, which gave me another good excuse to head up and see the family, the O'Hagans and McDonalds in Buncrana, more often," said Dennis.

"A lot of my mother's brothers, who were living in New York, have moved back and my mother will be moving back soon as well to be closer to the family."

Dennis, who has dual citizenship, said that regularly spending time on 'home ground' gave him a lot of inspiration for his writing.

He said: "I wrote a lot of my early music while I was here and as we are a group that consider ourselves both Irish and American, we're slowly trying to migrate back to Ireland."

The songwriter said a lot of Irish bands, from the Clancy Brothers, Hothouse Flowers to The Pogues, were very influential in his writing.

"The writing just happened gradually over time, but I wasn't doing much with the songs I had written, said Dennis who added that the mu-



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sic comes to him much easier than lyrics.

"I'd be very self-conscious about my lyrics and usually the best lyrics have just come to me while I was playing around with the music, they just seem to happen.

"I then heard about former Waterboys keyboardist Karl Wallinger's World Party project, where he recorded all the instruments himself.

"I started recording the demo tracks in my home studio in New York City and in 2005 I decided to put some of the songs online," said Dennis.

"I received a lot of great feedback, especially from people in Europe, and then 'Pro Bono Publico' a free DVD magazine based Dublin picked up my song 'The Unabashedly Political Song' which they featured in their publication."

On receiving good feedback, Dennis decided it was time to form a band: "I contacted my old school

friend and drummer, Bill McCarthy from Boston, about joining the band.

"Bill is a partner in a recording studio and production company and therefore knows a lot of session musicians and that's when he suggested Chris Hooks, originally from Cork.

"Hooks is just a brilliant bassist and has toured with the likes of The Platters and even Ray Charles, amongst many others."

The three band members began recording some of Dennis' demo tracks and exchanged recordings via the web until they got together last summer to record their full album.

Dennis said: "The final result, Euphoria, was really quite interesting as it, by chance, ended up having a theme or progression.

"You could maybe describe it as an inverted pyramid starting with a very political and global subject matter progressing to more immediate, relationship orientated songs closing with more personal songs," he said.

"The album starts big, with a sound that has been compared to The Pixies or Sonic Youth, and finishes with a more acoustic sound with a very big Celtic influence, and the Press has really picked up on this."

Dennis said there was no intent to come up with a 'concept' album while the band was recording: "It all happened when we started trying to put the songs into sequence for the album, that is when the theme slowly emerged subconsciously."

The album also features some guest musicians, including mandolin virtuoso Mark Daly and pianist Michael Sokolowski.

Dennis said: "We returned the

favour for Michael and worked on a track for his solo album, along with world-renowned Dave Matthews and Tim Reynolds.

"As a result of this we have hooked up with Tim, who has frequently guested with the Dave Matthews Band, and will be working with him in the near future."

With the album being released early this year, the band has been inundated with interview request and reviews are beginning to surface in music magazines Stateside.

"We're not following the typical path of being a three-man band living and working together," said Dennis, "We are being more strategic and selective in choosing places to perform.

"Last year we played at several Indie Rock festivals in the States and following a great reception are hoping to do so again, but our main goal is to perform at festivals in Europe and, more importantly, tour Ireland this summer."

The band is currently in talks with promotion companies in Dublin and Spain: "When we finally head over to Europe this summer, Ireland, especially Donegal and Cork, will be our first stops.

"It's nice to go somewhere where you know you'll have a place to sleep," he laughed, "But ideally we would also like to combine this with performing at one or two of the major summer festivals in the UK and Europe to make the tour more economically viable."

Euphoria has given the band a good reason to go out and perform and all the while have something behind them said Dennis.

"America is too big of a market, and when we received the latest album sale figures we saw that our album is selling evenly in both Europe and The States, we don't haven't received the iTunes download figures as yet.

"Europe is really the place for Independent music, as the seems to be more pockets there where people are more receptive towards 'the little guy'," said Dennis.

Dennis said that Voodoo Loons are also opposed to bands being judged by image, rather than their music:

"We don't provide publicity photos without our faces unobstructed. It's our way of dealing with the fact that despite how 'music orientated' different media outlets, music festivals, etc. claim to be, they're often ultimately (and sometimes hypocritically) still very 'image' conscious. What the band looks like is just as or sometimes more important to them than what the music sounds like," said Dennis.

"Our position is that we're a band, not models or actors, so we encourage people to make their decisions based on the sounds we make, not what the pretty pictures look like.

"So far people have been receptive to the position, as we're simply hiding our faces to make our point, not resorting to costumes like The Residents or KISS."

You can listen to Voodoo Loons on www.myspace.com/voodooloons and if you would like to purchase their album 'Euphoria' log onto www.voodooloons.com or iTunes.