

CLOVER'S REVENGE

John O'Regan talks to John Barron about a band who have embraced Celtic music in the sunshine state.



Florida, home of the Everglades, the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic Ocean and Florida Straits is a cultural melting pot as exemplified by the trio Clover's Revenge.

Clover's Revenge is deeply influenced by the music of the Dubliners, Pogues, Silly Wizard and Flogging Molly. They create a high-speed hybrid of technical traditional tunes and punk rock badassery. Guitarist Zachary Johnson with family roots in Ireland has a doctorate in classical music performance. John Barron who attended University in Boston is from a large Irish/American family in Chicago, he plays mandolin and guitar. He grew up around Irish music, and he studied theatre at university. Finally, Beau Wilberding, on Cajon Drum, a Sarasota resident of twenty years, has no background whatsoever in Irish music but played drums for thirty years before picking up the Cajon in 2014.

The band members come from a mix of folk and punk rock backgrounds. "Beau is steeped in the music of the Violent Femmes, Fugazi, and anything Joe Strummer was involved with." John cut his punk teeth with the Clash, and then was highly influenced by The Cure, The Smiths, REM, and Elvis Costello. Zach is more of a metalhead. "Currently, we all spend time listening to The Pogues, Flogging Molly, and The Dropkick Murphys as they represent the same synthesis of all of these influences, bringing together the Irishness with the punk/post-punk 80's. We broadly like to see ourselves as an Irish music version of the Violent Femmes," says John.

John explains their local appeal. "The west coast of Florida is one of the most ethnically Celtic areas of the United States. In fact, approximately one in ten people in Florida has roots on the Island of Ireland or in Scotland. As a result, there's always an appetite for proper Celtic music among the public here. There's also lots of community involvement with pipe and drum bands, up and down the Sun coast of Florida."

Cultural groups in nearly every community along the Sun coast raise awareness of Celtic cultural arts, including Irish dance, pipes and traditional musicianship, and then there is Highland dancing, Highland pipes and drum corps.

Clover's Revenge has made three albums: *Gotta Get O'Raggednized*, *Truants and Absolution*, and *Among Your Friends*. John reflects on their back catalogue: "Each one gets a bit better. We are very excited about the originality that is displayed on *Among Your Friends*. It is the first of our albums that features a majority of original songs, with songs written by each member. It is a capsule of the band's growth. We are not only proud of our growth as songwriters and arrangers, but also in the way we have learned to use the studio as another instrument. This is all thanks to our engineer, Erol Ozsever, and his ever expanding knowledge and patience. He has always been an important creative force in the sonic development of the band, both on stage and in the studio. He's a great dude."

"Since 2015, Clover's Revenge has performed at festivals and pubs throughout the south-east and also toured Ireland, Scotland, and England. The Irish tours stand out - The Irish tours have been legendary. We've built such a great group of friends and long term relationships. We promote them at our shows, but we like to have our track record speak for itself. The word of mouth from our past travels has made our job of selling the trip easier."

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"We generally go to well-known sites during the day and try to play shows most nights. Our last trip was themed around sites having to do with early Christian Ireland (Skellig Michael, Book Of Kells, Rock Of Cashel). Our upcoming trip is more of a literary focus where we will talk about Heaney (Belfast), Yeats (Sligo), Wilde (Dublin), and Joyce (also Dublin). We end the trip in Dublin while the 2025 Bloomsday Festival is going on."

This neatly dovetails with their plans for 2025; John gives us a heads up. "Through St. Patrick's Day, we have several festivals in Florida that we will be playing. Three of the festivals will be new for us, including the prestigious St. Augustine Celtic Music and Heritage Festival. We are very excited to be able to share our music with these new and larger crowds."

Find out more and plan to see them on their 2025 Irish tour. More info at www.cloversrevenge.com

