

Twice The Holiday Feel-Good Vibe From NYC Indie Rockers

The Baghdaddios Celebrate Homeless Benefit's 20th Anniversary - and Release a Brand New Holiday Single!

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EINPresswire.com/ -- For 25 years The Baghdaddios have churned along, trolling the seedier dive bars of New York City that were fortunate enough to have a sound system and a cabaret license.

Occasionally they graced the spotlight of some higher profile venues (including their third-ever show at iconic punk birthplace CBGB). Somewhere along

the way, between the indie CD releases, music videos, trips to other countries and criss-crossing various part of the U.S., they got a bright idea in their 5th year that resulted in the proverbial 'gift that keeps on giving'. They founded a musically-themed benefit for their home City's homeless.....



Blank-Fest.

"We were a lot younger and naive back then", remembers front-man and Benefit founder Kenn Rowell. "We didn't even have plans for a second-year show until the very last moments of the first one, when I just looked at the few people who were left in the club and said 'See you all next year'. I remember walking off the stage and thinking to myself 'Uh-oh, what did I just promise?'"

But here they all are, 2 decades later and the little-Benefit-that-could is still rolling along, spawning satellite shows and still marshalling the best of the City's indie and unsigned talent to bring a diverse audience together at The Hudson House, a friendly little club in the New York City suburb of Nyack on Sunday, December 17 for what will be the twenty-first consecutive year for a worthwhile cause. When Rowell booked the first 5 acts back in 1997 there was no real blueprint, no primer - Hell, there was barely an internet - to lead the way. It started as a late-night post-gig barroom convo between he and fellow Blank-Fest founder (and fellow performer) Chuck DeBruyn where they hit upon the idea of mini-set performances by themselves, along with some of their friends. The price of admission? Just a blanket, any condition. These blankets, in turn, would be handed out directly to the City's less fortunate, spending Christmas Eve on the cold, dark streets. No middle-man, no huge organization (or red tape) to slow down their efforts and (here's the cool part) NO money involved. "We reasoned that if we made dime one, then we had failed", explains Rowell. "It was kind of a real hippie-type

thing; we felt money corrupts - so let's dispense with that. Just give us the blankets and we'll get 'em to the people".

Growth was near-exponential in the early days. Blank-Fest's inaugural show netted 40 contributions - 20 of which came from DeBruyn's mother's home. Blank-Fest II in '98 yielded 70 donations. By the early 2000's the Benefit was pulling in over 600 donations for what was by now the flagship show. Early attempts at City-based shows, while well-intentioned didn't come close to matching the main event. That all changed after a full-page feature in the New York Daily News in 2006. New Jersey rocker Rich Kubicz approached Kenn about developing a Garden State-based Blank-Fest and within a few years was outperforming the original venue. A tour of England for The Baghdaddios the following summer inspired a few enterprising rockers in Nottingham to organize the first Blank-Fest UK, soon to be followed by shows in Canada, Virginia and Florida. Today Canada boasts Blank-Fest shows in multiple major markets and there are talks of pushing the show onto the mainland in Europe (Germany is one such-rumored locale). All-in-all the organizers have estimated that Blank-Fest has been responsible for raising over 15,000 total donations, the vast majority being blankets, since it's inception, 20 years ago. As always, Blank-Fest XXI will be featuring the best of NYC and the surrounding area's indie talent including ex-Misfit and current Undead frontman Bobby Steele along with EMI-alumna, singer-songwriter Patti Rothberg. The rest of the lineup is rounded out by some great local and regional acts - including a few surprise entries.

For Rowell, it's been a fun - if sometimes crazy - journey. But he's used to the up-and-down micro-dramas that come with the turf considering that The Baghdaddios - his band, the band that's hosted this show every year since its founding - has had an even crazier up-and-down history. Despite only releasing two full-length albums and a handful of EPs, music videos and online-only efforts, the group continues to record new material and play shows, albeit not as many shows as they were accustomed to 'back in the day'. "We're all older now and a lot of the places we used to practically live at are gone", says Rowell. "CB's, Kenny's Castaways, Wetlands, Continental - now even Hank's Saloon in Brooklyn is closing. It's just not the same anymore - and even if it were, the crowd we grew up with got older too. They've all moved on, gotten married, raised kids, moved away.....or died. It's sad but it's the circle of life. That's why we love it when we can bring our show to a new audience. We sometimes wonder if they're going to be able to relate to what we're playing up there but in the end it's just three chords, a lot of feedback and some good ol' sweaty rock 'n roll - and that never goes out of style!"

Which brings us to their latest release: a punked-up Holiday bauble called "Let It Be Happy". Written on Christmas Day, 2015, the song started as an acoustic encouragement for Kenn's partner, celebrated Lower East Side bilingual poet Yvonne Sotomayor (See attached vid).

Info and history for Blank-Fest can also be found on www.blankfest.org

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