

# Bringing songs and spirits together

## Drunk or not, The Pietasters know how to make a party hot

By SCOTT FROST  
Staff Writer

Punks and fraternity boys have always been the Hatfields and McCoy's of the musical tree.

Never do they get along and rarely do they share the same style of musical tastes.

Each, under stereotypical terms, remains on separate planes of the musical spectrum.

Greeks tend to concentrate on Billy Joel piano rock, classic rock standards, '80s party anthems and Dave Matthews Band bootlegs. Punks, meanwhile, stick to brass politically-minded noise-icals with rare commercial appeal.

Thankfully we have ska/soul legends The Pietasters to keep the peace.

In a world that, at times, is segregated by musical allegiances, the Washington D.C.-based outfit use a drunken party atmosphere to finally bound the two factions together.

"Just shut up already, get along and enjoy the music," singer Steve Jackson, 35, says when punk fans complain about how jocks tend to embrace the band now.

"I'd like to think we are entertaining and that's why people like us," he said.

The Pietasters do topple certain boundaries with a blend of basic ska rhythms, upbeat dance numbers and white-boy soul that's easy on the ears and fun to sing along to.

Their addiction to beer and partying is legendary, but it's their Irish-drunk lyrics and horn-squawk insanity that induce sweat-stained T-shirts and early-morning hangovers.

It doesn't matter if you're into keg stands or political bombing, The Pietasters are here to rock the party without any time for interpretation.

It's the kind of rock 'n' roll you can't help to shake your bum to.

Double-fisting drinks is ideal. And if, in the meantime, you spill one of those tasty pieces of carbonation, don't worry there's plenty of alcohol-entrenched rocking forthcoming.

"We are still acting like fools. It's a way to stay young and run from tax collectors," Jackson joked.

Survivors of the late '90s ska boom, Jackson, guitarist Tom Goodin, saxophone player Alan Makranczy, trumpeter Toby Hansen, trombone player Jeremy Roberts, bassist Todd Eckhardt and drummer Rob Stewart were always the band you needed to hear live at least once. And even in 2005, the band shares that same intensity no matter how neglected the genre is nationwide now.



The Pietasters play the Trocadero in Philadelphia on Friday.

Photo courtesy of The Pietasters

Ska shows were always about peace and fun. The idea was that anyone with a pair of dancing shoes was welcome to the party, as long as personal agendas were left by the merch table.

But somehow The Pietasters have made a spectacle of their live performance by overcoming any inhibitions by chugging large quantities of brew.

A 14-member assault, before dropping two well-received albums on Epitaph Records' imprint Hellcat, the guys use a tight horn section, two-tone style and third-wave ska appeal (where punk elements fuse with the genre's reggae past) to keep audiences moving.

And in ska terms it's always cool to have the fans join the band on stage to dance and sing along to classics like "Out All Night,"

"Drinking and Driving" and the uber-popular cover of the Rod Stewart classic "Maggie Mae."

"Each show has to be wilder than the next show or nobody will come out next time," is the band's philosophy, Jackson said.

"We've been fortunate to be at the right place at the right time and back it up with good music and a good live performance," he said, noting stints with the Mighty Mighty Bosstones and on the Warp Tour brought their music to a wider audience.

"If we didn't, we'd have no business playing in 2005."

It's no secret where the guys get their energy. The Pietasters are legendary drinkers who party with fans and groupies in each town they infest.

That's a ton of sobering experiences considering the guys toured

non-stop from 1995 to 2001, Jackson said.

It's the alcohol abuse and general all-out party appeal that brought in the frat herd. Though, however strange, the punks became fans for the same reasons.

It's funny how a couple of drunken nights at the club can bridge those gaps.

Maybe we're all part of the same gang anyway?

The Pietasters are the Zen leaders of these misfits in training, and if a few beers knock down the barriers between jocks and punks, than that's just OK with them.

The ska survivors rock the Trocadero (1003 Arch St., Philadelphia) Friday night. Their brand-new DVD, "The Pietasters Performing Live at the 9:30 Club" is available on Music Video Distributions.

### The Scene

■ **Catch 22**, Tonight, Starland Ballroom (570 Jernee Mill Rd., Sayreville) — The New Brunswick ska-punk stud-muffins join fellow mainstream local rockers Midtown, Early November, The Starting Line and nine other bands for the second K-Rock Tsunami Relief concert. It's aim is to raise money for Music For Relief and UNICEF for those left homeless after last month's disaster in Southeast Asia.

■ **Sister Hazel**, Tuesday, Trocadero (1003 Arch St., Philadelphia) — Florida-based post-grunge rockers with cute radio appeal released "Lift" in August.

■ **Zolo of the Rock & Roll Destroyer**, Wednesday, Hamilton Street Cafe (22 Hamilton St., Bound Brook) — Lovable chick-fronted Philly indie poppers recently released their "The Popsicle" EP on North Jersey's Eyeball Records.

■ **Planet Smashers**, Wednesday, Bloomfield Avenue Cafe (347 Bloomfield Ave., Montclair) — For those about to skank-dance, these Canadians salute you.

■ **.38 Special**, Thursday, Starland Ballroom (570 Jernee Mill Rd., Sayreville) — Classic rockers with a southern twang headline the state's best venue.

■ **George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic**, Friday, Starland Ballroom (570 Jernee Mill Rd., Sayreville) — The fathers of '70s interplanetary funk can still tear the roof off live.

■ **Big D and the Kids Table**, Saturday, Bloomfield Avenue Cafe (347 Bloomfield Ave., Montclair) — Basic juvenile ska-punk encompass the band's new "How It Goes" CD.

Meet the Fockers

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