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The Scene



Ellis Island may be a two-man act, with Mick Doyle (left) on guitar and Dave Marsh on the accordion, but the duo plays several instruments during their high-energy shows.

Photos by Julie Odorisio

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Ellis Island can sham-rock

By Mick Forgey
Scene Editor

When a two-time world champion kick boxer and a child/family therapist get together on weekends, it is not for a counseling session. They make up the duo known as Ellis Island, often found livening the atmosphere at Irish pubs around Omaha.

Mick Doyle and Dave Marsh have been performing their brand of traditional Irish pub music for the last seven years, all the while attending to their other careers and busy family lives.

Ellis Island is not the typical Irish act meant to fill the pub with some background atmosphere, however. Some find it hard to believe two men play the more than dozen instruments incorporated into the group's sets.

"I think the thing that makes us unique is the variety of sounds we are able to produce in the course of a show," Marsh said. "From the bouzouki [a long necked mandolin] to the bodhran [an Irish drum], to the tin whistle and accordion, it gives us a wide range with our live performances."

Ellis Island's live performances have attracted a following throughout Omaha, with many of the same fans showing up week after week to catch a show.

"There are nights that are just magic," Doyle said. "The crowd is singing along, requesting songs; our audience dictates where the evening's show is going to go."

The bond the band forms with the audience is what keeps fans coming back for more. It is not uncommon to have elementary school children dancing alongside couples in their 60s as Ellis Island launches into a traditional Irish melody.

As a two-time world champion kick boxer, front man Doyle, who came to Omaha 18 years ago from Dublin, says the martial arts he practices, as well as the music, serve as a link to his heritage. He has continued both with hope that his children will appreciate where their family is from.

"I'm a martial artist before a fighter, but it needs to be balanced with something else — music is my balance," Doyle said. "It is my yin and yang; the two have always seemed like a perfect marriage. They give me peace in their own separate ways."

Ellis Island is scheduled to perform this Friday, Feb. 25, and Saturday, Feb. 26 at the Coast Saloon at 156th Street and West Center Road from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., 21 and over, no cover (minors may be allowed in with their families by speaking to the manager). The band will perform at its usual venue, the Brazenhead Irish Pub, on 78th and Cass streets, March 4 and 5, from 8 p.m. to midnight both nights. There is no cover or ID checked at the door.

The duo's St. Patrick's Day weekend performances will be at Harrah's Casino on Thursday, March 17, followed by shows at The Dubliner on Friday and Saturday, March 18 and 19.