

## NEWS

# Fratellis get coveted opening slot for Police

By **ROMAN GOKHMAN** | Bay Area News Group

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THE FRATELLIS are exhausted. After two years of constant touring in Great Britain — during which time they became the next big thing — they crossed over to America with their “Flathead” iPod ad. They embarked on a U.S. tour. And then it happened: They couldn’t go on. They were tired.

“The success wasn’t overnight; it is a lot of work, and the band has toured constantly for the last two years,” says bassist Barry Wallace (aka Barry Fratelli), 29.

But no matter how burned out a band feels, no one turns down an opening gig for the Police. So despite canceling some other shows, the Glasgow pub-rock band would not let go of its largest American crowd to date at McAfee Coliseum on Wednesday.

There is a mystique surrounding the Fratellis — mostly because Wallace, vocalist-guitarist John Lawler (aka Jon Fratelli), 28, and drummer Gordon McRory (aka Mince Fratelli), 23, made up some half-truths about themselves.

“When you answer the same questions 20 times in one day, your answers are going to start to change a little bit,” Barry says. “We sort of thought it would be funny to change the answers and see where they end up (in the press).”

That mystery starts with the band’s name: Fratelli was the name of the criminal family from the film “The Goonies.” And on the band’s Web site, Barry is described as a car thief, something he now says is “definitely false.”

In Italian, Fratellis translates to “sibling.” While it fits because all of the band members took up Fratelli as a surname, Ramones-style, it’s also false.

Real answer: Barry’s mom’s maiden name is Fratelli.

“That’s the definitive answer,” Barry says.

Then there are the tales of how they met and started the band. Barry plainly says the band members met by answering each other’s ads. But before the ads were posted at a music store, Mince, Barry and Jon were unknowingly working together at the same rickety carnival that traveled around Scotland.

“The whole thing was talked about as a huge romantic tale — but it was really just a (expletive) job,” Barry says. They kept working there for a few weeks after meeting each other. “It was just to get some cash as we were getting the band

together.”

Prior to the carnival, according to the band’s Web site, Jon was a nursing home attendant, cleaning up after the elderly, and Mince was a lion tamer.

“I think that one’s false — someone made that up,” Barry says, almost apologetically.

Barry, meanwhile, was busy getting fired from pubs, shops and office jobs. One month before the Fratellis were signed to Island Records, he was dumped by a Tesco’s grocery store.

The Fratellis’ first gig was in March 2005, and Island signed the band soon after. However, according to some reports, the band almost never made it into the recording studio after Mince broke his back in a car crash.

Luckily, he reportedly healed quickly, and “Costello Music” was released in 2006.

The album was named for the studio where the band recorded.

“It had nothing to do with Elvis Costello,” as some U.K. newspapers and magazines reported, Barry says.

After months of touring, the album rose to No. 2 on the U.K. charts. The Fratellis’ guitar-riff-based sing-alongs, often about boozing up and chasing dubious women, are now chanted by drunken soccer fans during games.

In “Got Ma Nuts From a Hippie,” Jon sings about losing his virginity: “In the middle of a Sunday afternoon, just dreamin’/ and it was warm in the back of her van/ when she made me a real man.”

“Flathead,” of the popular iPod ad, starts out: “Well just because she feeds me well/ And she made me talk dirty in a pink hotel/ Doesn’t

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mean she’s got eyes for me/ She might just want my bones you see.”

Are these songs truth or fiction?

“Both,” Barry says. But he shies away from any specific examples. “I don’t know if I can divulge any of that to the American public. It’s 50 percent truth and 50 percent made up and — you hear people’s interpretation of the rest of it. It all makes for good storytelling.”

The Fratellis are a busy band. Up until the recent cancellations, every day was either a gig or a commercial taping, appearance or travel day. But it was the iPod ad that brought their music to America.

“I see iPods in my sleep,” Barry jokes. “Obviously you want people to hear your music — as many people as possible. (Some of) the last couple of people who did iPod ads were Bob Dylan and U2, so we can’t really argue with that kind of company. I think we would be more worried if that was the best song we’ve got and that’s not true.”

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