



Patriotism Rocks

So much for sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. The rock band Madison Rising, which has opened for Aerosmith and Lynyrd Skynyrd and this past Veterans Day shared the stage with Dropkick Murphys and Trace Adkins, says it's built on patriotism and traditional American values.

"We need to come together as a nation and just believe in great things, be positive," says drummer **Sam Fishman** '10, a founding member of the band, which puts its hard-rock, post-grunge energy behind anthems such as "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America." "To spread that uplifting message using these songs, it's a higher calling. It's more than just music."

Madison Rising released its self-titled debut album in 2011, followed by last summer's *American Hero (RED)*, with originals including "Hallowed Ground II" and "Reflection (PTSD)." Its audio and video release of "The Star-Spangled Banner" in 2012 catapulted the foursome into the national spotlight. Partnered with Concerned Veterans of America and the Young Marines National Youth Organization, the band's 70-city tour continues into 2016.

The band wants to be perceived as inspirational, not confrontational, as it promotes the principles of liberty, independence, small government, and personal responsibility. Its tagline: Music with meaning.

"We've had people call us crazy right-wingers, but if you talk to us, you realize that's not true," says Fishman, who lives in New Jersey and is a drum instructor when he's not touring. "We have our beliefs, and they tend to resonate with conservative audiences, but we're really about respecting one another. We want to make people feel better about standing up for what they believe in."

Given its strong following among military, veterans, and first-responder groups, Madison Rising has launched Madison Rising


Shows for Heroes, a nonprofit that will allow the band to double the number of charity shows they've been able to do in the past. Lead singer Dave Bray served in the U.S. Navy as a corpsman for the 2nd Battalion/2nd Marines; other members are lead guitarist AJ Larsen and bassist Tom DiPietro.

Entrepreneur and GoDaddy.com founder Bob Parsons, a former Marine, introduced the band at a 2013 show with Steppenwolf in Scottsdale, Arizona. The group had impressed him with "a rendition [of "The Star-Spangled Banner"] that I think is one of the most exceptional songs I have ever heard in my life," Parsons told the crowd. "These guys take it to a whole new level." Calling Madison Rising his "favorite group," he sent the musicians a \$10,000 check days later to show his support.

Fishman, who majored in music and took lessons, mostly in jazz, at the Eastman School of Music, dabbled in funk, reggae, and "everything I could get my ears on" before learning about the formation of Madison Rising on social media. He found out about the band's focus after his audition.

"I was absolutely into it," he recalls. "My grandfather served in the Marines at the Battle of Iwo Jima. If he were alive and seeing what I was doing with this band, he would be ecstatic."

A former lead drummer for the University's jazz ensemble, Fishman credits his undergraduate music history and theory classes, as well as impromptu jam sessions on nights and weekends with Eastman students, for preparing him to perform at his current level. The band has been featured in NFL half-time shows, the opening ceremony of the 2014 Special Olympics, and other events with tens of thousands of spectators.

Says Fishman: "It's such a comforting feeling to know people are being affected by our music in such a positive way." 

—ROBIN L. FLANIGAN

AN AMERICAN BAND: Drummer Fishman (second from right) says he and the members of the band Madison Rising built their music on patriotism and traditional American values.