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The Stars from The Commitments, are known as the hardest working band in the world and now they they are all set to bring 'Dublin Soul' to the Grill Music Venue Letterkenny

This band is truly 'Committed to Soul'

BY SEÁN P. FEENY

In 1991 Soul was revived thanks to a group of unknown Irish actors and musicians in a Hollywood movie that would bring the music to a whole new generation.

That movie was Alan Parker's *The Commitments*, a story about the rise and fall of group of struggling musicians in Dublin who decide to bring Soul to the masses with their young and ambitious manager Jimmy Rabbitte.

17 years on, most of the cast have gone on to do different things, but two of the original members have successfully kept on touring for over a decade.

Original cast members Dick Massey and Ken McCluskey took it upon themselves to lead the band and have toured all over the world and performed with some of the biggest names in music as *The Stars from The Commitments*.

On Friday, 2 May, the world's hardest working band is coming to The Grill Music Venue (GMV) in Letterkenny and it is guaranteed to be a night you'll never forget.

We caught up with Ken (Derek 'Meat man' Scully) to chat about life on the road, meeting Soul legends and sharing the limelight with some of the biggest contemporary artists out there.

Touring the US regularly, it so hap-

pened that even Capital Buildings in Washington DC needed to be filled with the sounds of 'Dublin Soul' on for a special St Patrick's Day reception.

Ken said: "We were on tour in the States we received a call asking us to perform at a St Patrick's Day luncheon at Capital Buildings right beside the White House.

"Bertie Ahern was there George W Bush and many other selected guests and we did an acoustic session, which had a totally different dynamic and gave our music a different slant from how we usually perform, but we enjoyed it a lot."

From performing for the American President and An Taoiseach, the band went on to share the stage with none other than the chart-topping Black Eyed Peas.

"Back in September we played at a peace festival in Jerusalem with the Black Eyed Peas, and the following day a tour guide brought us around the city.

"It's always nice to get a chance and see the cities you perform in, especially when you are so far away from home," said Ken.

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The band has also played with some of the biggest names in Soul, most notably having been the band that 'nearly' performed with Wilson Pickett, they eventually got to play with the late singer some years after the release of the movie.

"We got a phone call from Wilson's family some time after he had passed," said Ken, "They were organising a commemoration concert at the famous BB King's in New York and asked us to join the line-up.

"We were on tour in the States at the time, and needless to say, we re-roted and made our way to New York as we didn't want to miss this.

"We got to the venue and set up all our gear, and who arrived but Ben E King, man who wrote and sang 'Stand By Me' and fronted The Drifters," said Ken.

"We got chatting to him and told him who we were and he just said 'Yeah I know you're the guys from that movie, you brought Soul back' and to hear that from such a famous singer was so humbling."

Over the years there have been some changes to the Stars from *The Commitments* but the core group has

stayed pretty much the same.

Ken said: "There's Dick and myself from the movie, our great frontman Joe Walsh an opera singer before he joined the group, and our female vocalists Claire Malone and Karen Coleman.

"The brass section has recently changed and we have a new keyboard straight out of Harlem, New York."

New keyboard player Abraham Lincoln Hampton, met the band while he was on tour in England with the legendary Drifters.

Ken said: "We invited Abraham with us at a concert and he said 'maybe I can play with you guys again some time', so when a tour of Germany came along we asked him to join us and he's been with us since."

Every so often, Ken said, the band learns a new song to add to its repertoire but rest assured, all the old favourites are a given.

"All the classics featured in the movie are still there, from Try A Little Tenderness, Mustang Sally to In the Midnight Hour, you'd be crazy to get bored playing those great songs,"

he laughed.

Having been touring so much abroad through the years, the band didn't have that many opportunities to perform on home ground, but this has changed.

Ken said: "We used to tour so much that by the time we got home, we'd want a bit of time off, but now that we are in Ireland it's nice to get to tour the country."

The band is also currently working with a TV production company who want to do a documentary on *The Stars from The Commitments*.

"We've recently done several follow ups for the new DVD release, when a Hollywood crew came over to interview us all, and we were interviewed for a BBC documentary on the movie for the series *Hollywood Connections*," said Ken.

You can look forward to a very dynamic show with *The Stars from The Commitments* so go on and buy your tickets now for their performance at the GMV, on Friday, 2 May.

For more information log onto www.thecommitments.net where you can also purchase signed copies of the band's live album *Committed To Soul*, recorded live at The Empire Theatre, London, and featuring special appearances by Robert Arkins (Jimmy Rabbitte), Johnny Murphy (Joey "The Lips" Fagan), Dave Finnegan (Mickah Wallace) and many more.