



Left to right: Ian McDougall, Freddy Castro, Mike Wiebe, and Mark Baker

Riverboat Gamblers

BY ELI KOORIS PHOTOGRAPHY ASTOR MORGAN

When I catch The Riverboat Gamblers (Mike Wiebe, vocals; Ian McDougall, guitar; Freddy Castro, guitar; Patrick Lillard, bass guitar; Mark Baker, drums) at Alex's Bar, a diamond in a rough in Long Beach, I screw up and wear red, making me match the walls of the hipster haven rather than the preferred black tees for the guys and the revealing black tops of the beautiful girls with unfortunate haircuts. Like any punk rock band worth its salt, The Gamblers miss their pre-show interview so I'm forced to wait, to sink in to the mentality of the crowd.

That means buy a Tecaté tallboy and socialize with die-hard fans. Like the two guys who drove over from Phoenix for the show and planned to drive back that same night. And the Southern girl from the art gallery in the Valley who used to "tour with the band" and spent a considerable amount of time in their home base of Austin, Texas. We didn't get into specifics about her connection to the band, but her reunion tonight seemed to have reminded her of some very fond memories.

Everyone gets a little taste firsthand a few minutes later when The Gamblers stake their claim on Alex's Bar. Lead singer Mike Wiebe—the Iggy Pop-meets-something-else-entirely front man—stalks through the crowd, balance beams the length of the bar from each direction, scales the sound booth, slugs a patron's beer, and makes out with one of those aforementioned beautiful girls, who afterwards can't stop gushing. This is all during the course of a 45-minute set.

"We like to get the crowd involved in the show," Wiebe says later, during a post-show interview where he sits soaked in sweat in a back room, taking kisses and neck rubs from groupie chicks who have managed to sniff him out in between questions.

Sometimes, the involvement has painful results—that night Wiebe wears a Velcro bandage around one arm, covering the scars from a fall off a stage at a show in New Jersey a few months before. It took 20 surgical screws to put his wrist back in working order. Yet Wiebe seems almost soft-spoken and shy about his mad perfor-

mance antics: "I dunno, I just can't help it. When I'm up there I just have to express myself in a way that comes naturally."

The Gamblers' sound is as punk-rock traditional as their live performances, echoing back to The Ramones, The Misfits, Rocket From the Crypt, and even (dare we make the comparison?) early Green Day. Or is that because their latest album *To The Confusion of Our Enemies* has clear political undertones?

"It does," Wiebe admits, "but I think that's only because when we write songs, we write about the world around us. Maybe it's because we're just getting older and looking at the bigger picture.

"But," he adds quickly, "I think it's a punk rock cop-out to get on stage and preach. Our music should be a personal experience. If you find a message in it, great, if you don't, then I hope you have a good time." ▼

•• For more information on *The Riverboat Gamblers* check out www.theriverboatgamblers.com.