

One day, Jake went looking in the backroom closet for his trusty snare drum, but found only an old, black leather bound suitcase covered in dust. He tried to open it, but the latch was stuck. He called Joe and Colin over. Joe shook it—they could hear something inside. Colin worked on the latch with a screwdriver, nothing. Jake grabbed a drumstick from off the floor and started hitting the top of the case, hoping it would open. Within minutes Jake realized he had found something, and within a few hours the Toughcats' first album, Piñata was completed.

Energetic. Catchy. Fun. Exciting. Danceable. Memorable. Loveable. Beautiful. Amazing. At times, unabashedly hirsute. This is not the Toughcats ad on Matchmaker.com; these are just some of the words die-hard Toughcats fans mutter in their sleep after a performance. Toughcat shows are as exhausting for the audience as they are for the beat-red drummer and the blister-fingered string players. The intensity can induce a stoic crowd to dance, and a wild crowd to stop and take a look. They pull out a little something for everyone, the young folks, the old folks, the hippies and the hipsters, the yuppies and the rural unemployed. If you don't fall head-over-heels in love with one of the band members, you are either a super villain, or an igneous rock (all other rocks have been noted to contain trace amounts of love for Jake Greenlaw.)

The Toughcats tour regularly, promoting their first album Piñata, which was so well liked as a rough cut that it was then mastered by Kramer (renown producer and former Butthole Surfer.) They have made multiple national tours playing music and film festivals, theaters, bars, boats, fields, and everything in between. The band has shared the bill and worked with the likes of Kathy Mattea, Hot Buttered Rum, Deerhoof, Sam Bush, The Mammals, Tony Trischka, The Avett Brothers, The Red Stick Ramblers, even author Jim Hightower, to name a few. They recently played two back-to-back shows with Ketch Secor (of Old Crow Medicine Show) performing music from both repertoires and even some covers like Springsteen's Thunder Road. The band's sophomore album Run to the Mill was released February of 2010.

With their unusual sound, a blend of old timey bluegrass, thoughtful indie rock, and classic pop twitches a la early Beatles, they bring their audience a best of both worlds scenario: timeless music that is at once unquestionably danceable and haltingly listenable. The feverish beats from Greenlaw are engulfing, and his energy captivating...the whole band provides vocals and lyrics that are self reflexive and without pretence...the melodies and complex tonal structures from Joe Nelson on guitar and Colin Gulley on banjo are dulcet, frolicking, even headbanging, pieces of artistry, built from chops that prove hands down they're worth their salt as musicians. Their music is the kind that builds a following because it is pan-generic, yet respectful of the greats, and mindful of the nuances of their influences. Their music is attentive not only to their musical ancestry, but also to their contemporary audience. This is not a band that forces itself on a listener—this is a band that is sought by a listener.

Pop quiz: What could cause a band to play a Devo-esque robotic klesmer melody in the middle of a poppy, bluegrass dance hit?

Answer: the suitcase.