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ENTERTAINMENT

Dummies to crash Earth Day party

By Pat Malach
Emerald Managing Editor

It seems like a natural combination: A day to celebrate the Earth and its vast resources, and a performance by a band that glorifies the "country life" and getting away from fast-paced city living.

But with the Crash Test Dummies, the band headlining tonight's "Earth Day Celebration with the KAVE" at the Downtown Mall, nothing's ever that easy.

Although on the surface songs like "The Country Life" from the band's 1991 debut album *The Ghosts That Haunt Me*, seem to paint an image of getting back to the basics of life in the country as a cure for city hassles, Dummies lead singer Brad Roberts says there's more to it than that.

"For the most part, I was taking standard themes and turning them on their head," Roberts said. "In 'The Country Life,' there's this protagonist who yearns to get back to the more basic way of life. But throughout the course of narrating this vision of a rural paradise one begins to realize in fact he has no idea what he's talking about."

In fact, Roberts said the most obvious lyrical flow or ideas in his songs probably aren't the ones he was ultimately striving to get across.

"If there's any consistent vision on the record," he said, "it would contain irony."

Roberts' subtle messages and the band's unusual country/western, rock-influenced sound have combined to make *The Ghosts That Haunt Me* the No. 1 requested record of the year at KAVE Radio, the celebration's sponsor.

It was this popularity that led KAVE to invite the band to play the benefit concert, said station co-owner David Miller.

"The (Dummies) are really a signature artist for the station," Miller said. "They are popular with young and old listeners, and no other station in town will touch them."

The Dummies' sound is anything but mainstream. Using fiddles, slide guitars (instruments generally associated with country music) and Roberts' distinctive baritone voice, the band has definitely found a niche that defies easy categorization.

Roberts said the Dummies started out playing together about five years ago for recreational pur-



Courtesy photo
The Crash Test Dummies will headline tonight's Earth Day celebration.

poses and didn't think of making a living at music until this last year.

"We did some ironically re-worked acoustic guitar/cello versions of Alice Cooper hits," Roberts said. "We did TV themes to Steve Earle. It was an extremely eclectic type of band."

It's just this somewhat carefree attitude and the band's sophistication that bred "Superman's Song," the Dummies' hit single. "Superman's Song" is a manic ballad with a subtle fight-the-good-fight message. The feather-light subtlety of the message is pulled off with lyrics more suited for a biblical parable than a pop song.

"I wanted to write a song concerned with certain political topics," Roberts said. "However, one of the problems I have with a great deal of political writing in pop music is that it tends to be very preachy sounding. And that's really annoying. I wanted to avoid that. I didn't want to be heavy handed."

Roberts and the rest of the Crash Test Dummies bring that light touch to Eugene beginning at 6 p.m. with local favorites Mark Alan and the Ron Lloyd Band starting off the evening. Admission is free.

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