

Sham-Rock

By Rob Tannenbaum

Black 47

Twice a week, for the last two years, far too many people have shoved into Paddy Reilly's, a Gramercy-area pub, to see Black 47, a dynamically sloppy, potently original six-piece, half of whom play horns. They won friends very quickly: *Black 47*, a 12-song independent album released in 1991, thanks Joey Ramone and Joe Strummer on the sleeve, the bald guy in U2 endorsed them, and when their biweekly shows turned into the hottest club residency since Buster Poindexter filled the old Tramps, word trickled all the way down to the *New York Post*,

which declared them "the most important new band of the year." For a local act without a label deal, that degree of attention is as rare as a rent-stabilized lease. But what's even more rare, if you can actually push your way inside Paddy Reilly's and ignore the word of mouth that positions Black 47 as a cross between the Pogues and the Beastie Boys, is the response the group inspires: a mass pumping of right fists that links them, more precisely, to the legacy of Bruce Springsteen and Boogie Down Productions.

What do you call this consciously pomo Irish/American compound? How about sham-rock? The Pogues comparisons

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

TANNENBAUM

CONTINUED FROM LAST PAGE come because they're postfolkies who knowingly indulge in cultural stereotypes, proudly crowning themselves Paddys the way rappers call themselves niggers. Ten of the songs from *Black 47* reappear on *Fire of Freedom* (SBK), their first major-label album, including "Rockin' the Bronx," a self-mythologizing autobiography that's as much "No Sleep Till Brooklyn" as "The Ballad of Mott." Larry Kirwan, the charismatic red-headed motormouth who writes the songs, boasts about alienating the regulars at Irish pubs on Bainbridge Avenue, and mocks an unassimilated Mic caricature who requests "Danny Boy" (pronounced "boyee," which adds to the Beasties comparisons). There's a harsh rap-rock guitar and beatbox riff, plus a penny-whistle reel (like I can tell a reel from a jig), plus an adaptation of "Rock Around the Clock" in the chorus, all of which indicates the dimensions of Kirwan's ambition. The Pogues are merely about mockery, ebullience, and heartache—Kirwan wants all that, plus enough oral history to qualify as Boogie Down Productions for Irish Americans. His group's repertoire includes "James Connolly," a rousing remembrance of the martyred Irish nationalist, "Free Joe Now," a shout-along plea for the release of the IRA's most famous prisoner, and "Black 47," which blames the British for causing the potato famine in the deadly year that gives the band its moniker. For all his tales of Paddy debauchery, Kirwan, who moved from Ireland to New York in 1977, has grand aspirations: his former group was pointedly called the Major Thinkers, and he's written a play about the Beatles, "Liverpool Fantasy," which will be produced later this month at the West Bank Cafe. Shane MacGowan, meanwhile, can't even keep a dentist's appointment.

Consider the song that gives *Fire of Freedom* its title: "You can break down my door, you can even strip-search me/You're never gonna take away my human dignity," Kirwan proclaims. On the one hand, there's that ridiculous chorus, and a ska-reggae beat that makes him sound like Johnny Clegg backed by the Selecter; on the other, there's Kirwan's gift for the memorable chant, and his pop-Marxist observation that religion and faith oppose activism and change. It's easy to believe his boasts of excessive drinking—Kir-

wan just doesn't know when to stop, resulting in songs that average five and a half minutes.

Which brings us to the Springsteen comparisons. Kirwan is drawn to heroism, both in his themes and in his bawling megaphone of a voice, which may inspire nonadmirers to invoke the name of Kevin Rowland (especially since *Black 47* saxophonist Geoff Blythe played in Dexy's Midnight Runners). For metaphors, nothing less epic than angels will do, which is just the kind of overstatement that attracts a devoted following. And Blythe does a great Clarence Clemons. "Oh Maria, I'm so sorry I wrecked your wedding," Kirwan begins, a hell of an opening line, and the horns flash with a melodramatic pomp that turns the song into his "Rosalita," complete

with an antagonistic relationship with her dad (or, rather, her da).

But then again, "Rosalita" always made you root for Bruce; in "Maria's Wedding" you sympathize with Maria's poor da. Like bohemians from Bob Dylan to Gregg Allman to Steve Earle, Kirwan has a problem with women, especially after he fucks them. In "Banks of the Hudson," he thrills a girl near the West Side piers, vows he'll never leave her, and then, drawing his sense of manhood from "Paradise by the Dashboard Light," loses her like an empty Guinness bottle. Then in "Funky Ceili (Bridie's Song)," the video currently on MTV, he knocks up a proper Irish lass, flees the country under threat of her da, and heads for America, where "the wild, wild women are waiting for me," not to mention stardom

("Think of me Bridie whenever you see me there on your MTV," he tells the mother of his kid, having learned the way to the network's heart from "Money for Nothing"). He encourages Bridie to follow him to New York for more of his Hibernian howitzer: "I've got the biggest bed in the world, girl, we can stay in it and make babies forever." Let's tally this up. In "Funky Ceili" and "Banks of the Hudson," he flees from women who love him, while in "Maria's Wedding" he chases after a woman who doesn't. Whether this is more rap-inspired mockery of ethnic stereotypes or the unwitting admissions of a shiteheel, only Kirwan's ex-girlfriends can say. ■

Black 47 will be at the Ritz March 17.

Naughty's Not Audi

By Greg Tate
Naughty By Nature

Don't get me wrong. I still love hip-hop. It's these young rappers I can't stand. They make me feel like a New York girl. She been macked on so many times she knows all your tiredass lines. You stopped being amusing about the same time you started dressing better. If I was talking about jazz nobody would be scratching their head right now. Everybody knows jazz is one thing and young jazz musicians are another. Jazz is the text of life, and young jazz musicians are characters in search of an author. Where the young and the rap-less are concerned, my blasé attitude runs the spectrum, from Del to Digable, from Onyx to Organized Konfusion, from Snoop Doggy Dogg to Fu-Schnickens and, regrettably, the Pharcyde, whose tracks are the slickest jazz/hip-hop hybrid yet.

Maybe I do need a gangsta bitch. 'Cause these new hacks ain't boom-booming my poon-poon. Even worse, they inspire no loyalty. Any exceptions to the rule? I'll give props to CL Smooth, Groove Garden's Ambersunshower, Speech, the unsigned Sounds of Silence, and, waving the chainsaw high, my hip-hop hooraying heroes of the hour, Naughty By Nature. *19 Naughty III* (Tommy Boy) is the first hip-hop album since *De La Soul Is Dead* that I'll listen to from beginning to end. And I'm

just loving every minute of it. Reason being, I'm down with Treach's sound and Treach's flow like a big dog. In the words of Anita B (comin' atcha from the mecca D), the Naughty brings me joy. I'd listen to Treach scream on your mother. His lyrics are a steady stream of schoolyard snaps and witticisms. But it's the way he sustains the swing on them that marks homes as a long-playing tenor man—one cut in the Chuck D as Coltrane mold, though his spew is juicier, after the L.L. Cool J as Sonny Rollins model.

What's more, he's one of the few youngsters around who kicks the rhyme like *his* life depended on it as opposed to yours—a la all these wanna-stick-a-nime-in-your-mind-and-call-it-a-song muhfu-kus. Some days I'm not in the mood for playboy gangsters.

Treach takes you back to the playground days, when you had to be quickmadfunny to slide by on your fat-lip charm. On *19 Naughty III* he piles rude-boy rhymes up like they were Jersey stolen vehicle reports. My fave being, *if you can't say hello at the same show, then don't sit your r&b ass down in the same row*. People were waiting to see if Naughty could do a Chicago Bulls and follow up the champion pop catchphrase of 1992. Outside of hip-hop, Digable probably got 'em beat. *I'm chill like that, too*. But everywhere I roam I hear my negroes going, *hip-hop hooray, ho, hey, ho, hey*, like they're waving the world bye from the deck of the *Titanic*.

That's enough of a comeback to satisfy me. Elsewhere, Heavy D guest stars on the record's token dancehall jammie, "Ready for Dem." And believe it or not, the Heavster steals the show, dropping the album's most phat-memorable lyric: *I went pop but I still kept my ghetto pass, and anyone who laughs can kiss my yellow ass*. (I might be evil but I'm easy to please.) Freddie Foxxx's ragamuffin turn on "Hot Potato" gives Treach a run for his money ear-nin' powers of invention too. Got to watch these riddim kings, Treach. They'll house your shit if you let 'em.

Hip-hop is like jazz in the sense that just when you think what's wrong with *da* youngstas is their concepts, one of dem reminds you that it still don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. I knew Treach was truly bad when I saw him on *Soul Train* ruling the stage by himself. Solo, a cappella, spitting on the curb, he got the mad sexy old school skills and flava going to the degree that you'd get off on his ghettocentric mouth even if the beats wuz wack. The production on *19 Naughty III* is anything but, rolling up on ya ear-hole with big spiff-size grooves, lightly seasoned, high in polysaturated phawwk, low on recognizable samples, though inquiring minds wanna know if that chop suey bass line on "Hip Hop Hooray" is a slowed-down version of Chaka Khan's "Clouds," "I'm Every Woman," or what? Is it hardcore or is it hip-hop pop? What if