



CONCERTS



Black 47
B.B. King Blues Club

March 17, 2014

MANHATTAN, NY—Larry Kirwan left Wexford, Ireland, for New York City at age 19 and played local clubs in several pub bands, including Turner And Kirwan of Wexford in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1989, he formed Black 47, named after a traditional term for the summer of 1847, the worst year of the Irish Potato Famine. The band built a local following by playing extensively at two Irish pubs in Manhattan, Paddy Reilly's and, later on, Connolly's. In short time, Black 47 attained international recognition through its albums and international notoriety for its outspoken political stances on British-Irish relations and the American invasion of Iraq after 9/11.

The band is presently comprised of Kirwan on lead vocals and guitar, Geoffrey Blythe on saxophones and clarinet, Fred Parcells on trombone and tin whistle, Joseph Mulvanerty on uilleann pipes, flute and bodhrán, Joe Burcaw on bass and Thomas Hamlin on drums. After 25 years together, the group is presently on a farewell tour. The band's final album, *Last Call*, was released March 4.

There was nothing more Irish than being at a Black 47 concert in Manhattan on St. Patrick's Day. At B.B. King Blues Club & Grill on March 17, the band rocked strong in the Bruce Springsteen school of rock, yet everything the band played had a touch of the Irish. Opening with songs from early in its legacy, "Green Suede Shoes" and "Big Fella," Black 47 set out to please by playing many fan favorites. Yet even reggae, funk and hip hop-flavored tunes got an Irish workout thanks to the ever-present sound of traditional penny whistles and 18th century uilleann pipes. Even Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds," Them's "Gloria" and The Bobby Fuller Four's "I Fought The Law" never sounded so ethnically Irish.

But powerful? How about how Black 47 reworked the traditional "Danny Boy" into a non-



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traditional interpretation that painted an ugly picture of anti-gay violence in New York? Political injustice sentiments similarly rallied the audience in "Fire Of Freedom" and "James Connolly." Nevertheless, songs like "Desperate," "Rockin' The Bronx" and "Different Drummer" reinforced that this was a party and the band's excitement-infused music was the drive. The band punctuated the party atmosphere with three songs debuted from the new *Last Call* album, the Latin-inspired "Salsa O'Keefe," "Culchie Prince" and "The Night The Showbands Died."

Midway through the two-hour set, the instrumentalists engaged in an extended jazz jam. While the Irish identity permeated the performance, the eclectic sound and the New York stories in the lyrics kept the band rooted on home ground. It will be hard for New Yorkers to let go of Black 47.

Black 47 will be perform its final show ever on Nov. 15 with a return engagement at B.B. King Blues Club & Grill. In the meantime, visit Black 47 at black47.com.

—by Everynight Charley Crespo, April 16, 2014



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