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Black 47

New York Town (Gadfly)

BY HENRY CABOT BECK

Black 47 has been invisible for several years now. These stout-rock stalwarts of the New York Irish rock scene -- veterans of places like Connolly's and Paddy Riley's -- have kept busy with gigs and side projects. But now they've released their first new CD in several years, *New York Town*. And a new CD, especially one this good, is cause to rejoice.

The band, formed in the late '80s, consists of playwright, singer, songwriter and co-founder Larry Kirwin, amazing saxophone player Geoff Blythe, trombonist Fred Parcells, bassist Andrew Goodsight, drummer/percussionist Thomas Hamlin and bagpipe player man/flutist/exotic wind man Joseph Mulvanerty. And though they take their name from the worst year of the Irish famine, Black 47 (that'd be 1847 for the history dunces) is really more about the plight of the Irish immigrant in New York, from the Five Points era chronicled in *Gangs of New York* to the funky junkie-and-artist world of Jim Sheridan's recent gem *In America*.

New York Town, as a result, is an insider's love poem to New York City, compressing 160 years and five boroughs into a series of musical sketches. It's a world full of broken hearts and hard times, long nights and short lives, of women chasing dragons with razors in their garters, with flashes of Latin and satin.

The album launches with a historic nod to the San Patricio Brigade, the Irish lads fresh off the boat conscripted into the Union army during the Civil War. "Too many cowboys, too many martyrs, too many questions, not enough answers," sings Kirwin.

A few tunes later, ex-New York Doll David Johansson (better known to younger men and wedding conga fanatics as Buster Poindexter) guests on "Staten Island Baby," which begins quoting Glenn Miller's "In the Mood." "Mychal" is a folksy number that tastes a bit of Bob Dylan's old talking-blues dream. The song is about firemen, deceased chaplain Mychal Judge and the 9/11 rescue effort that cost Judge his life.

New York Town, consequently, is a great Irish-eyed view of the Big Apple -- sordid, romantic, and sober only in hindsight.