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## Hearing Aide: Black 47's 'Last Call'

📅 September 10, 2014 By [Steve Malinski](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

One last musical statement. One more dance on the New York City skyline. One last call for Black 47.

New York's [Black 47](#) released *Last Call* on March 4, 2014 and it is just that: their last call. After 25 years the band made a decision to stand down while they are still going strong and to reinforce that fact made a final musical statement with a solid 13-track album.

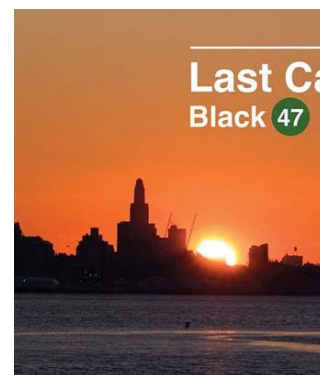
For the loyal Black 47 fan and new listeners alike, *Last Call* beckons the ears into a fire of music still burning strong 25 years after the band's first recording. It's fresh, relevant, and not repetitive while keeping strong roots in Irish heritage. By no means does it sound like the band has plans of standing down following this album; however it does bring things full circle by incorporating a little bit of everything from the styles the band has composed with over their career – rock, punk, reggae, and even a splash of Latin music for something new. In line with the band's Irish Republican sympathies, the lyrics on some songs are not shy on political and social commentary.

A strength of the album in its composition is a tightness that can be heard in the rhythm section. This is an element that hasn't been much of a focal point of a Black 47 album since *Home of the Brave* 20 years ago. Frontman Larry Kirwan encouraged Joe Burcaw to be more upfront with his bass lines on the recording something that's particularly noticeable on "Let the People In" featuring a short slap-bass breakdown in the middle of the song. "Just go for it Bearclaw!" was Kirwan's attitude on it. On each song, it is hard to miss how much this element adds to the overall experience of listening to the album, filling out a rich and round sound. In fact, it makes listening to the album with the volume dial turned up one more notch rather fun.

It is worth mentioning one of the key elements that has defined Black 47's sound over the years. On *Last Call*, the trombone, sax, uilleann pipes, and flute line are not shy in defining their role in the arrangements. Whether fast-paced technical licks that weave in and out of each other or subtle harmonies that compliment the core of the band, this section is playing a vital role in the sound of the album.



Black 47 has always been open about their music, encouraging recording and photography without restriction. Furthermore, they share their lyric and chord sheets.



online along with other notes and commentary on their own music. Kirwan has written a few of his own remarks and stories on each track of *Last Call* which c found [here](#). While you can check out the song stories, here are a few of our thoughts on the tracks here at UpstateLIVE:

1. **Salsa O'Keefe**: A Latin-inspired tune that gives a fun tale of a Puerto Rican/Irish woman living in the Bronx who "steams up the neighborhood" with her half. Nice and smooth it's a great song to break the *Last Call* ice on a first listen.
2. **Culchie Prince**: From Burcaw's punching groove bass intro, we're quickly lead into a jig with Joe Mulvanerty's pipes that sets the scene for the story of a chap from the outskirts of Dublin (a "culchie") and a working class girl from Dublin.
3. **Dublin Days**: A fairly simple straight-ahead rock tune, "Dublin Days" plays along the lighthearted theme as a follow-up to "Culchie Prince" by talking about nighttime college scene there. It makes you want to spend some time hanging out in Dublin.
4. **US of A 2014**: What's not to want about the American Dream? A longer-than-typical day of work at a desk job fresh out of grad school? Black 47 make their political/social statement about the younger generation entering the workforce and state of affairs surrounding it with the lyrics presented mostly in a spoken word/rap style.
5. **The Night The Showbands Died**: The most profound song on the album, it tells of the Irish Showband scene in the 1970's before diving into the tragic e of the **Miami Showband Massacre** on July 31, 1975. The arrangement of the song, musically and lyrically, makes it ring far. The ascending guitar riffs accented with trombone, sax, and pipes create a solemn tone overlain with lyrics about the innocence of the showband music scene. A faster break in t song gives a feeling of chaos as we hear a frantic exchange between the Miami showband and UVF members before returning to the chorus from earlie the song.
6. **Johnny Comes A Courtin'**: How about some Irish reggae? Taking a stab back at Cromwell's dealings with Ireland in the 1600's, Black 47 gives us a stor a young Irish woman sold off as a slave to harvest sugar cane in Jamaica, only to find love with an African slave and unable to consult her father back h for advice. This is a clear nod to the early days of reggae/ska.
7. **Let The People In**: Let's call this one flute-funk, driven by a funky bass line and featuring a breakdown of slap-bass and a flute solo.
8. **Lament for John Kuhlman**: This one is a short instrumental, but a curious mind would question the meaning behind it. A pretty little tune introduced by a music box, this one is short tribute to a collaborator and friend of Fred Parcells (trombone). Its placement before "St. Patrick's Day" makes it feel like an introduction to that song.
9. **St. Patrick's Day**: This one drives fast with half-time feel choruses that will make you want to get up and dance like it's St. Patty's Day in the Bronx.
10. **Queen of Coney Island**: This is one of the musically easier listening tracks on the album featuring some jazz-rock overtones, melodies driven by the hor and a brief soprano sax solo from Geoff Blythe at the peak of the song. It fits well in telling the story of the "queen."
11. **Shanty Irish Baby**: Syncopated rhythms and a simple bass line give a dash of slow/relaxed rockabilly that fits well with the lyrics that express the love fo simpler woman than the uptown champagne-sippers.
12. **Ballad of Brendan Behan**: Black 47's final recorded tribute to a notable Irish figure, this time writer, poet, and Irish Republican Brendan Behan. You'll wa raise a pint in Brendan's honor as you listen to this one.
13. **Hard Times**: A song that has stood the test of time since first written for the middle class by Stephen Foster in 1854 and recorded by many, Black 47 lea us with "Hard Times" as their last ever recorded studio track. Perhaps a phrase Black 47 wants to ring on their legacy, *hard times come again no more*. 47's take on this tune makes it rank amongst the many great versions out there.

*Last Call* is an album with its heart as much in New York as it is in Ireland – a testament to a pond-spanning musical bridge Black 47 has created in the rock genre between Ireland and the States. It is an album Black 47 fans are thankful for – one more genuine collection of new songs before they part ways. Black 47 may soon be a thing of the past, but *Last Call* is a bastion of music and prose that will help carry on their legacy.

**Key Tracks:** The Night the Showbands Died, Culchie Prince, Johnny Comes A Courtin'

Black 47 wraps everything up on November 15<sup>th</sup> at the **B.B. King Blues Club** in Manhattan with less than two dozen scheduled shows before then, including c the **Irish 2000 Festival** in Ballston Spa, NY this Saturday September 13, one at **Connolly's** 45th Street location in Manhattan on September 27 and at the **Town Crier** in Beacon on October 26.

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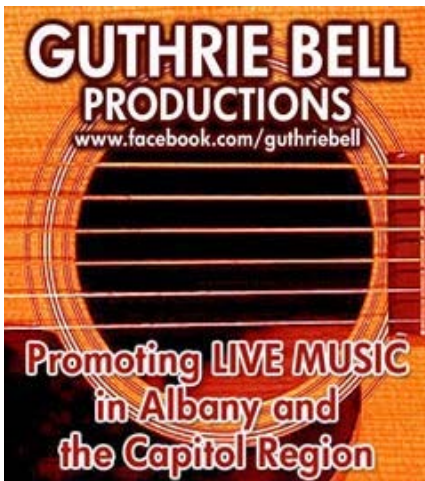
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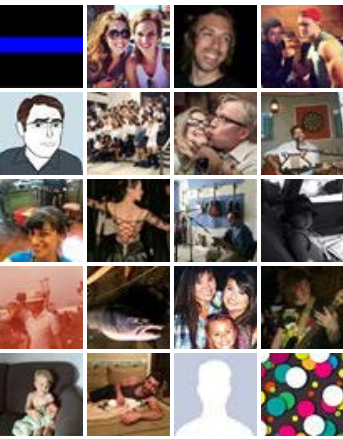


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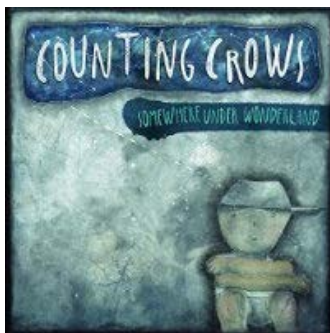
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