



The Irish-rock band Black 47 can play everything from traditional Irish to hip-hop, but with its pugnacious attitude, it all screams New York.

The sounds of New York

9/11-inspired album is like a tour of the 5 boroughs

POP

Black 47

Where and when: 11 p.m. Saturday and Feb. 14 at Connolly's Pub and Restaurant, 121 W. 45th St., New York; 9 p.m. Feb. 21 at the Stone Pony, 913 Ocean Ave., Asbury Park; 7 and 10 p.m. March 17 at the B.B. King Blues Club and Grill, 237 W. 42nd St., New York

How much: \$10 at Connolly's, call (212) 597-5126; \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door at the Pony, call (732) 502-0600; \$22 at B.B. King's, call (212) 997-4144.

BY JAY LUSTIG
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Irish expatriate Larry Kirwan, resident in New York since 1975, has come to personify the city as much as anyone.

As the leader of the Irish-rock band Black 47 (the name refers to the peak year of the Irish potato famine), Kirwan, 48, has written songs like "Rockin' the Bronx" and "Brooklyn Girls." He has set countless other tunes in the city, and in New Jersey, too. "Green Suede Shoes" (1996) was about an ill-fated show in Hoboken.

This band's restlessly mutating music — it can stretch to include everything from traditional Irish to hip-hop — screams New York. So does its pugnacious attitude.

"I don't care about the money, you can keep the fame/I just want to beat this city at its own dumb game," Kirwan sings in "New York, NY 10009" (1993).

The band, which performs most Saturday nights at Connolly's Pub and Restaurant in Manhattan (and has upcoming shows at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park and the B.B. King Blues Club & Grill in Times Square), takes its New York obsession to the next level in "New York Town." To be released Tuesday on the Burlington, Vt.-based Gadfly label, the album is a virtual tour of the five boroughs, packed with colorful characters and larger-than-life emotion.

The title track is a nightmarish 9/11 song; "Staten Island Baby" is a romp with a touch of big-band swing. "Livin' in America — 11 Years On" catches up with more than a decade of "drinking and fighting and kissing and crying" by the immigrant couple Kirwan first sang about in "Livin' in America" (1992).

Kirwan, who sings and plays guitar — the other band members are saxophonist Geoffrey Blythe, bassist Andrew Goodright, drummer Thomas Hamlin, *uilleann* piper Joseph Mulvanerty and trombonist Fred Parcells — says he first thought about making a New York-themed album on the first anniversary of 9/11.

"It just came to me that we should do something that shows the spirit of New York," he says. The band scrapped the album they were working on and started preparing this one, collaborating with singers Rosanne Cash, David Johansen and Suzy Roche, and fiddler Eileen Ivers. Mary Courtney of the band Morning Star, who sang with Kirwan on "Livin' in America," reprises her role.

"There was a huge outpouring from artists wanting to do something, and there was no forum for them," Kirwan says of the aftermath of 9/11. "We played a lot of benefits and everything, but I was getting so many calls from other singers and bands, saying, 'Can you fit us on your bill?' So that was where the idea about getting the other people came in."

The album's emotional peak is "Mychal," a ballad about the Rev. Mychal Judge, the New York City Fire Department chaplain who died at the World Trade Center. Kirwan says Judge frequently came to Black 47 shows, and they became friends.

In "Mychal," Kirwan imagines Judge's thoughts on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001 before disaster struck. "The trick of it was to keep it unsentimental," Kirwan says. "Just to get him up and leaving the house on 9/11 in his usual way."

"New York Town" is not an album of laments. Most of the songs are upbeat, and should get rowdier at the band's unpredictable shows.

"Within the songs, there's a lot of room to take them in different directions," Kirwan says. "We all came from improv backgrounds, so it's just natural to everyone to play different, depending on the way you're feeling."

"I've always felt as a songwriter that good songs are like footballs. You can kick them any way you want, and if it's a good song, it will hold its shape. But the bad songs, they'll fall apart if you kick them too hard."