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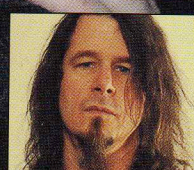
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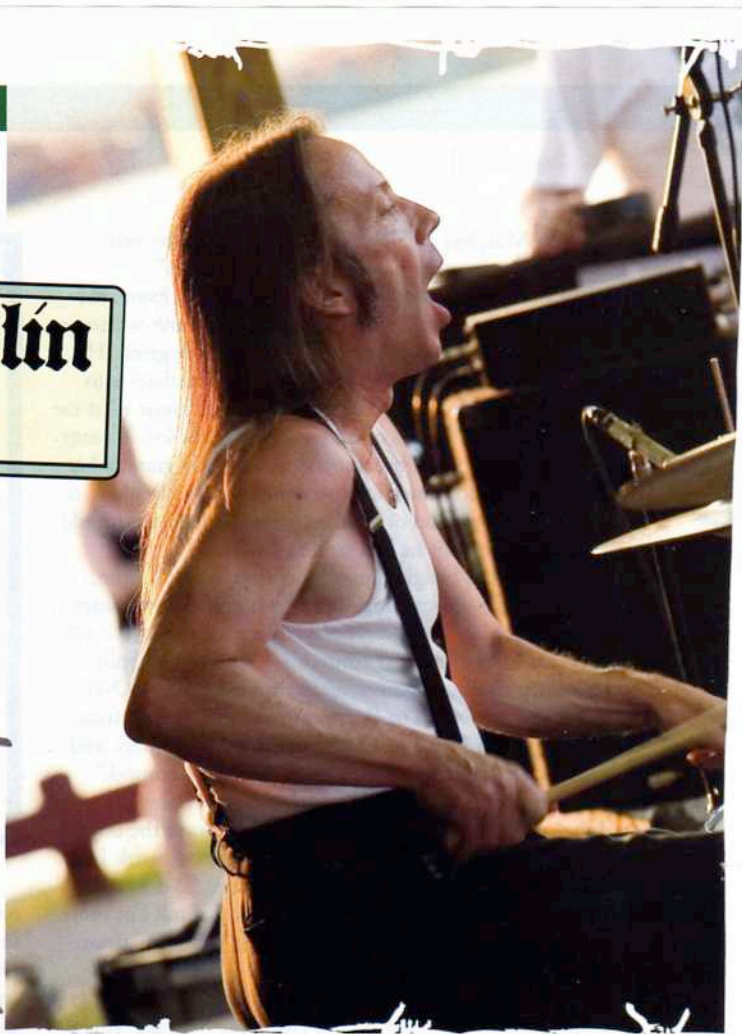


MAY 2008 DRUMMAGAZINE.COM



# Thomas Hamlin

## BLACK 47



ure, The Pogues paved the way, but Black 47 was still brash enough to introduce a healthy dose of Irish folk to the unsuspecting thrashers packing NYC hardcore clubs back when it wasn't exactly commonplace, and they've since become an NYC institution. Having crystallized, more or less, in the late '80s, the band is now

touring in support of its 12th album, *Iraq*. And though Black 47's particular brand of hardened Celtic traditional falls more into the rock than punk category, the band's 49-year-old drummer, Thomas Hamlin, explains that, back when they were starting out, punk was all about the mindset. "A lot of people, in a broader sense, just think of punk music as guitar, bass, drums, and a singer," says Hamlin, speaking over the occasional background wail of a siren passing beneath the window of his New York City apartment. "But in New York in those days you could have an all-female cello orchestra, and that would be considered punk, just because of the unusual lineup or approach."

By those standards, Black 47 was certainly punk enough. It began as a residency gig at a bar featuring only a pipe

**I ALWAYS thought THAT WHAT WE'RE DOING, IN THE CELTIC framework, WE'RE KIND OF LIKE A LOUD folk BAND**

player and lead singer Larry Kirwan. Then came Hamlin, who would sit at a table surrounded by djembes and other assorted percussion. Horns were added later, followed by a growing list of instrumental cameos as the experiment broadened. "For the first year and a half, there was no set lineup of the band," Hamlin says. "The whole thing sort of happened organically."

For a while, they even toured as a backing act to a poet calling himself Copernicus, improvising their way through Eastern Europe, and even passing through the Soviet Union in '89 just before the fall of the Iron Curtain. This was mainly Kirwan's doing. An Irish ex-pat, the singer has always given as much weight to political outspokenness

### HAMLIN'S SETUP

INFOGRAPHIC BY JOSH SUKOV



**DRUMS** Gretsch Catalina Maple (Gloss finish)

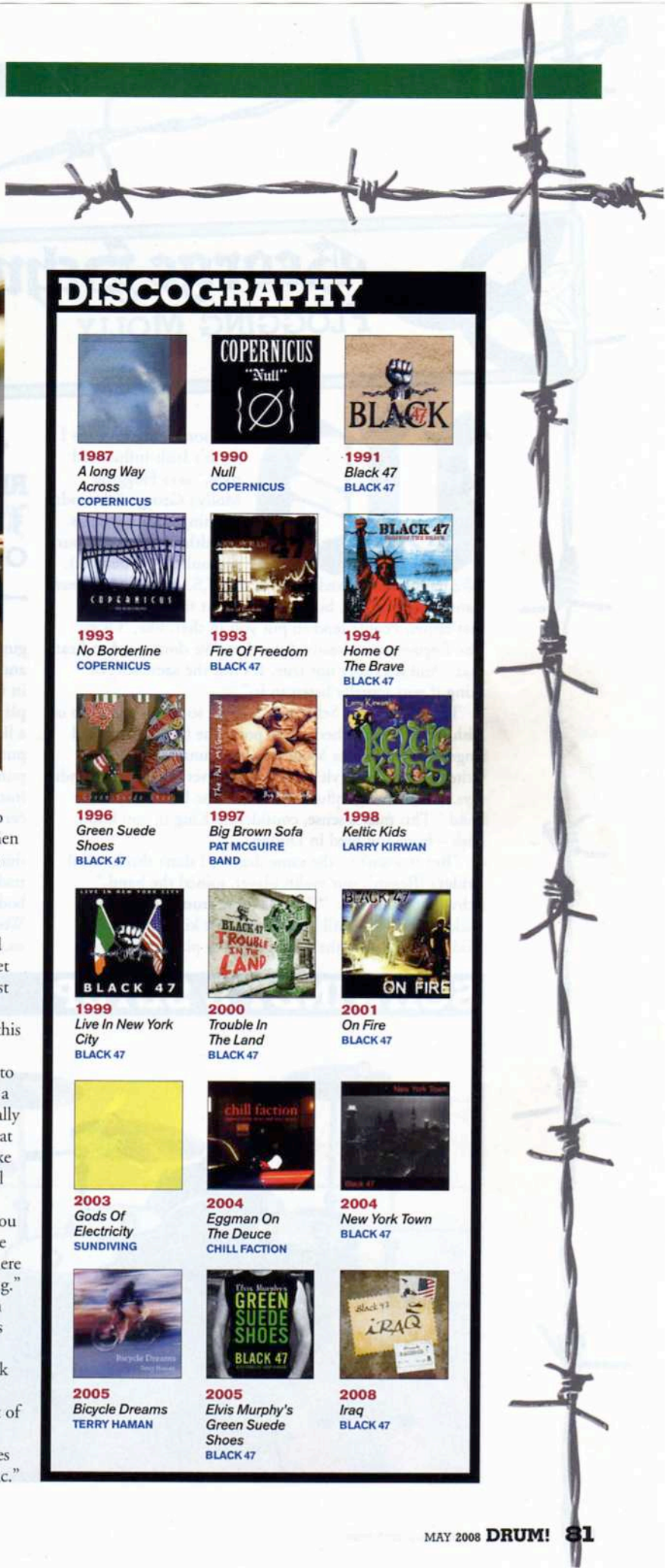
- 1 22" x 18" Bass Drum
- 2 14" x 5" Snare
- 3 12" x 9" Rack Tom
- 4 16" x 16" Floor Tom

**CYMBALS** Zildjian

- A 14" K Dark Custom Hi-Hats
- B 16" A Medium Thin Crash
- C 18" A Rock Crash
- D 20" "Vintage" Ride (brand unknown)

Thomas Hamlin also uses Tama hardware, Remo heads, and Vic Firth sticks.

PHOTO BY GEORGE KOPP



## DISCOGRAPHY



**1987**  
*A Long Way Across*  
COPERNICUS



**1990**  
*Null*  
COPERNICUS



**1991**  
*Black 47*  
BLACK 47



**1993**  
*No Borderline*  
COPERNICUS



**1993**  
*Fire Of Freedom*  
BLACK 47



**1994**  
*Home Of The Brave*  
BLACK 47



**1996**  
*Green Suede Shoes*  
BLACK 47



**1997**  
*Big Brown Sofa*  
PAT MCGUIRE BAND



**1998**  
*Keltic Kids*  
LARRY KIRWAN



**1999**  
*Live In New York City*  
BLACK 47



**2000**  
*Trouble In The Land*  
BLACK 47



**2001**  
*On Fire*  
BLACK 47



**2003**  
*Gods Of Electricity*  
SUNDIVING



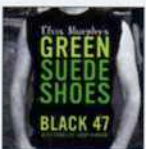
**2004**  
*Eggman On The Deuce*  
CHILL FACTION



**2004**  
*New York Town*  
BLACK 47



**2005**  
*Bicycle Dreams*  
TERRY HAMAN



**2005**  
*Elvis Murphy's Green Suede Shoes*  
BLACK 47



**2008**  
*Iraq*  
BLACK 47

(note the blatant anti-war propaganda of *Iraq*) as he has to his own Irish heritage (Black 47 is a reference to 1847, when the Great Irish Famine was at its nastiest). But politics has never much appealed to Hamlin.

"I look at it as a musical contribution on my part," he says. "I'm not really interested in getting involved in the politics of the whole thing. It's not that I'm not interested one way or another. It's just that I would choose not to get involved putting myself on one side or the other – I'm just not politically oriented ... let's put it that way."

And what of the band's strong Celtic flavor? How does this non-Irish, self-described "wild Colonial boy" feel about having devoted his career to what most people are content to simply refer to as an "Irish band." "I don't think that that's a really good description of it," he says. "But then, I don't really have an alternative description to offer. I always thought that what we're doing, in the Celtic framework, we're kind of like a loud folk band. A lot of the tunes are based on traditional tunes, and we're sort of doing a modern interpretation of that. And the only thing I find that that brings with it is, you know, a lot of folk tunes, they have the uneven bars of three and five, an extra beat here and there, or a beat taken out here and there. But other than that, I just try to play for the song."

Back in the early days, that meant playing the djembe in place of the bodhran. These days, Hamlin tends to keep his beats within the confines of rock – a better fit for the Springsteen-esque anthems that dominate *Iraq*. "With Black 47, there's a lot going on up there on stage," he says. "So I have to sort of pick and choose my spots. And there is a lot of improvising going on. That's not really apparent on the records, but the live shows, it's a lot looser. But a lot of times I'm playing referee up there. Or more or less directing traffic."