

CAN ANYONE SAVE BASEBALL?

By Robert Lipsyte

Esquire

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

APRIL 1993 • \$2.50

Have You
Seen Your
Grandfather,
Baby,
Standing
in the
Shadow?

*Mick Jagger
Goes the Distance
By Kurt Loder*



MARK JACOBSON: *Off the Charts*

Straight Outta Dublin



BLACK 47 POWER: Front man Larry Kirwan and the rest of Black 47 rock your conscience.

Fire of Freedom, Black 47 (EMI): Crushed like a sardine amid the swillers in Paddy Reilly's pub, the fan fears that the great American heartland won't fully grasp the essentiality of Black 47 without the experience of having a pint of half-warm stout spilled down its great American shirt in the middle of the sad/mad chorus of "40 Shades of Blue." The fan further fears that a band whose rockinest number recounts the saga of "citizen leader" James Connolly—shot dead by the Brits in the midst of fighting "for the rights of the workingman, the small farmer too"—won't immediately seize the quicksilver imagination of mall rats prowling the CD bins.

Yet, even if Black 47, named for the potato blight/genocidal famine of 1847, comes out for "international revolution," dispenses leather homeboy pendants featur-

ing the map of Ireland instead of Africa, and disses the rest of rock for not opposing the Gulf War, ignoring the band would be downright unpatriotic. We may now be a country of desultory, irony-bound suburbanites, but once we were

fabulously alive, a humming, bustling Nation of Immigrants, and Black 47, proclaiming its neo-Yeatsian/commie rhetoric, is the most pungent invocation of Emma Lazarus's "give me your hungry, yearning to be hipsters" (it's written on the Statue of

Liberty, you donkey!) to rock the Bronx and other boroughs since who knows what pre-Nixonian day.

Larry Kirwan (singer/writer/sometime noise guitarist, late of Dublin) and his partner, Chris Byrne (resident of Brooklyn, player of the mournful uilleann pipes, currently on sabbatical from his day job with that noted Irish-American institution, the NYPD), indicate the Black 47 agenda. "We played the Irish working-class bars on Bainbridge Avenue, and they said we sucked. They wanted jukebox covers or 'Danny Boy,' complete with sad faces. We wanted something original and real, about being here today. Our lives. Their lives. Here. We see it as a battle of wills."

For two years, Black 47 has been the de facto house band at Paddy Reilly's on Second Avenue. Now the band's chronicle of 1990s immigrant life is available via

Cucamonga Years: The Early Works of Frank Zappa, 1962-1964

SINCE FRANK ZAPPA has spent much of his badbrain career perpetrating semibilibious parody attacks on the record biz, the arrival of these so-called Cucamonga sides, documenting his pre-Mothers activities, provides arcane continuity: He was always that way. Zappa, the white George Clinton, does not appear on the tracks, but his ethos pervades. Ostensibly regular radio fare, this Zappa-penned slag heap is chocked with the usual meanspiritedness and contempt—all of which make it exceedingly lovable, of course. The lyric sheet (mostly in Japanese) includes this Bob Guy song: "I am writing to you from Cucamonga," it says. "Ha-ha! Cucamonga? The weather is lovely. The nausea of noon." Tin Pan Alley in the San Berdoo desert must have been a trip.

FRANK'S YOUNG YEARS: Doo-wop/studio R&B/surf music from Zappa



TOP: SYLVIA OTTE

the aegis of that classic suburban ironist and producer Ric Ocasek. It is—dare I say it?—a Joycean kind of record, a sense-surrounding tumble of I-am-a-camera images, Byrne's ghost pipes sinewing around Kirwan's insistent, good-humored voice and Geoffrey Blythe's soul-rock reed work. In Kirwan's emotionally generous songs, white men make love to black women on "Banks of the Hudson," drunks who'll sell their "souls for a cigarette" walk the Bowery, and everyone has "a fanatic heart." Dense with arcane local references, *Fire of Freedom* bursts with jokes (in "Funky Céili" the father of our hero's pregnant girlfriend gives him "two choices, castration or a one-way ticket to New York"), blatant (but effective) heartstring tugging, and anachronistic yet still-rousing calls to arms.

The best song is "Living in America," sung by Kirwan and Mary Courtney. It's a story of a love affair between two young Irish immigrants, one a construction worker ("I knock down walls with big iron balls, and I mix cement by the ton"), the other a nanny ("oh, little dears, dry up your tears, your parents are too busy making money"). There is some whining, talk of "no sick days or benefits," but the recurring refrain, bitter-sweet but unmistakably hopeful—"we're all mad over here, living in America"—overrides all. Maybe they'll marry, have children. Whatever, they'll stay. It's enough to make you proud to be an American. 18

When Irish Eyes Are Bloodshot



CELTIC NAUSEA: Expatriate author Michael Collins is on the run from Irish myth.

THE IRELAND of Michael Collins's stories is green all right . . . green around the gills. His characters have been breathing the fetid air of Irish myth for so long they've become nauseated by their own psyches. These heroes of the Republic vomit on airplanes, lug around suitcases stuffed with dripping meat, sell themselves for coal, lock their children in cars with hungry dogs, and seek refuge from the Emerald Isle

anyplace they can, usually in endless bottles of Guinness stout. Day after bleary day, they put their shoulders to the wheel of Irish history with all the passion of employees punching a time clock. No wonder they're thirsty.

HIMSELF A VICTIM of the Irish diaspora he chronicles in passing, Collins finds himself cornered in his own life by precisely the sorts of clichés he lampoons so mercilessly in *The Man Who Dreamt of Lobsters*, his strong and brawling first collection, just out from Random House. His distant cousin and namesake was the hero of the Easter Rebellion. "The older people hear my name and give me a nod and a wink," says Collins. He came over to the States in 1983, courtesy of a track scholarship from Notre Dame. "Yes," he says, "it sometimes seems that the Irish in this country are either illegal aliens or distance runners."

Now Collins is living in Chicago, and unlike James Joyce, who chose a life of permanent exile, he would like to go home but doubts he could find a job. So he sits in

his apartment, cool, re- eastw- whet- write- or th- all, roo- Gui- on- gin-

of mod- GRIP- ernism. can't read.