

ATTUNE

Who's
crying now?

Film is critically acclaimed

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif. (AP) — A year and a half ago, every Hollywood door slammed in Neil Jordan's face. Now the Irish filmmaker can't keep actors, agents, producers and studio executives away.

The cause of both the icy and warm reception is the same thing: "The Crying Game." A strange odyssey encompassing both rejection and introduction, the making of "The Crying Game" proves again the movie business runs not on vision but hindsight.

When Jordan first called with his "Crying Game" script about Irish terrorists, race relations and sexual confusion, no one answered. "The all said," Jordan recalled recently, "You're insane. You'll never pull it off. If you do pull it off, it'll be so disastrous that nobody will go to see it. Get out of here."

He returned to the United Kingdom and, somehow, made the film on a shoestring-together budget with minimum-wage actors, working "under conditions of extreme poverty."

The finished film, however, was far more popular than its script, and Miramax Pictures bought it for release in the United States, where it has become an art-house blockbuster.

"The Crying Game" is a sleeper hit, collecting fat ticket sales on a thin marketing budget.

It received six Academy Award nominations: best picture, best actor, best supporting actor, best supporting actress, best director and best original screenplay.

It is dominating critics' Top 10 lists, audiences and critics alike are recommending the film without revealing its surprise underpinnings. "It's brilliant," Jordan says. "At least that's what people say — the same people who said not too long ago he was insane." "I totally

understand the reasons why people rejected this — I know where it was coming from. I know what kind of fear and self-censorship that's going on. I understand about some guy scared of losing his job."

If Jordan does not swoon from all the attention, it's because he's been through it before. After directing such acclaimed independent films as "The Company of Wolves" and "Mona Lisa," he came to Hollywood. And Hollywood sent him back to Dublin in a hurry.

Half of me loves America, because it's a place where extraordinary things can happen," Jordan said. "And half of me is terrified of America as this place where incredibly savage and dreadful things can happen."

Dreadful they once were.

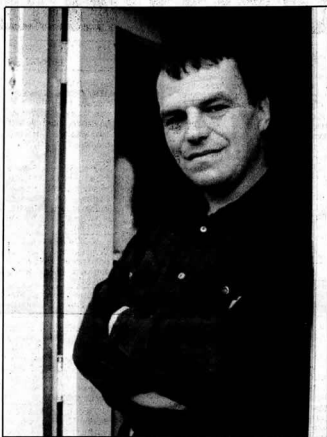
After "Mona Lisa," the 42-year-old Jordan directed 1988's "High Spirits," a comedy with Dan Hannah and Peter Onorati. Two film producers edited the movie without Jordan's consent, and the film bombed. A year later, he made "We're No Angels," starring Robert De Niro, mugging for the camera as never before. Jordan — pretty much by himself — liked it.

"I was actually considering giving up films for a while," Jordan said of the experience. "The studio system over here seems to be so intractable, so resistant to anything individual or interesting."

Since "The Crying Game," Jordan has changed his mind. The challenge is now to participate in the Hollywood dream without revisiting his "High Spirits" nightmare.

"There's a brief window of about three months where people say, 'Whatever you want to do, you do it,'" Jordan said. "You either strike home there, or you don't."

There are always avenues here. They're just not easy to



WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif. — Director Neil Jordan is being pursued by actors, agents, producers and studio executives in the wake of his success with the film "The Crying Game." (AP)



NEW YORK — Miranda Richardson garnered an Academy Award nomination for best supporting actress for her performance in "The Crying Game." (AP)



NEW YORK — Stephen Rea received an Oscar nomination for best actor for his performance in "The Crying Game." Pictured is a still from the film, in which Rea plays Fergus, an Irish Republican Army terrorist.

find...I think people in this business do want to see good



NEW YORK — Liam Neeson recently completed a widely-acclaimed 10-week

Irish writers
important

It's heard on both

BY HUGH A. MULLIGAN
AP Special Correspondent
Can it be that a new Celtic Twilight is illuminating the literary landscape on both sides of the ocean?

In the past few years, Irish-American and native Irish writers have made an extraordinary impact on the novel, theater, film, poetry, literary criticism and late-night television. Joyce and satire.

William Kennedy, the unsparring chronicler of three generations of a declining Irish Catholic clan in his native Albany, N.Y. With wit, compassion and a Joycean vocabulary, Kennedy records their failures and fallings out, their crises of faith along an inglorious path that often leads from the gutter to the grave. His novels have gained him a Pulitzer Prize, a MacArthur "genius" award and, in his writing den one floor below the bedroom where prohibition-era gangster "Legs" Diamond was rubbed out, a wall papered with honorary degrees.

Brian Friel, the Donegal playwright whose "Dancing at Lughnasa" won both the Olivier Award in London's West End and a Tony on Broadway as last season's best play and seems to be opening everywhere in the world from Oslo and Hamburg to Sydney and Wellington.

Since "My Left Foot" capped a pair of Oscars a few seasons back, a steady stream of Irish films has caught the attention of movie critics: "The Field," "The Field," "The Commitments," "The Playboys" and John Huston's swan song, "The Dead," the same John Huston he helmed 30 years to film.

Irish eyes are smiling out from bookstore windows throughout the English-speaking world.

Dublin novelist Maeve Binchy ("Light in the Piazza") already has sold more books than any other writer in Irish history.

Irish-Americans Tom Clancy ("The Hunt for Red October") and Mary Higgins Clark

Irish actor is blend
of native land and LA

NEW YORK (AP) — If you wanted to discover where the heart of Liam Neeson really lies, you'd probably have to look somewhere between the green fields of Northern Ireland and the swimming pools of Southern California.

At one point, he's a soft-spoken, 6-foot-4 native of rural Ballymena, a former truck driver and forklift operator. Now he's here just by looking at his long, oak-leaf legs and hulking shoulders, the thick hands that look as if they could rip a fence out of the ground.

Then there's the sexy leading man of stage and screen, the Los Angeles resident who's

solier in the Eugene O'Neill play "Anna Christie." On film, he stars in an American Playhouse production of Edith Wharton's "Ethan Frome" playing the strong, self-effacing type of character Gary Cooper or Walter Huston might have played 50 years ago.

Ethan Frome is a poor farmer from the aptly named town of Stratfield, Mass. Unhappily married to his sickly cousin (Joan Allen), Frome falls in love with the young woman (Patricia Arquette) who has hired as a housekeeper. He and the woman long to run away, but fate proves as unforbearing as the

BLACK '47

Band mixes rock 'n' roll, Irish music

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Larry Kirwan is quick to smile as the locks of the faces. He can remember days when he and other members of the band Black '47 were tossed out of similar working-class pubs.

"I'd say we were thrown out of the first dozen," Kirwan said of the Irish bars in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens where the group got its start. That's not likely anymore.

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He met a New York City cop, Chris Byrne, who played the traditional Irish instrument, uilleann pipes.

"I had this idea of creating sounds, of using the purity of the Irish banjo and Geoff Blythe and mix that with a drum machine and see what would happen," Kirwan said.

The band eventually expanded to five members. Percussionist Thomas Hamlin complements the drum machine and Geoff Blythe and Fred Parcells play an assortment of horns.

During their formative years

BLACK '47:

Band mixes rock 'n' roll, Irish music for unique sound

NEW YORK (AP) — Fans arrive early at the Manhattan Irish pub Paddy Reilly's on Wednesday and Saturday nights, or they'll be caught on the wrong side of a crowd so tight they can't squeeze their way to the bar.

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"I'd say we were thrown out of the first dozen," Kirwan said of the Irish bars in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens where the group got its start.

That's not likely anymore. Heroes of both New York's immigrant Irish community and trendy rock fans, Black '47 appears ready to take its music to a national stage.

The band has forged a unique sound from what appears to be a train wreck of mismatched instruments — a drum machine, uilleann pipes, electric guitar, trombone and tin whistle.

Add a Springsteenlike appeal to the working class and fondness for the broad musical gesture, and you've got the ingredients for the band that named itself after the Irish potato famine of 1847.

Kirwan came to New York as an illegal Irish immigrant during the 1970s. He wrote plays, performed music and

traveled before starting Black '47 in 1989.

He met a New York City cop, Chris Byrne, who played the traditional Irish instrument, uilleann pipes.

"I had this idea of crossing sounds, of using the purity of the uilleann pipes and the distortion of downtown guitar and mix that with a drum machine and see what would happen," Kirwan said.

The band eventually expanded to five members. Percussionist Thomas Hamlin complements the drum machine, and Geoff Blythe and Fred Parcells play an assortment of horns.

During their formative years, Kirwan said many bar owners frowned on the mix of Irish music and rock 'n' roll. But it was just before the recession set in, and new bars were opening up that were willing to try anything to lure customers.

"We had to play four sets a night, so to play original stuff I wrote like a demon the first couple of years," Kirwan said. "People got the songs they liked and they came along to hear them."

After getting a following across the city, they looked for a regular place to play in Manhattan. Paddy Reilly's, a failing pub that the owner was looking to sell, was the only place to take a chance.

Kirwan's band takes a left-wing, populist perspective that tries to reflect and educate its audience. The song, "James Connolly" is about the Irish union organizer who was executed in 1916.

"Black '47's core audience came from, not just working-class but lower middle-class — cops and firemen and nannies and construction workers," he said. "For the first time, they're hearing their points of view, which even they may have forgotten about."

"I didn't sit down and say it's a good way to get an image," he said. "But you're playing to these people, and as a writer you're looking for some way to make a connection with them."

Kirwan recently had the unnerving — although happy — experience of bringing his band to Belfast and having audience members shout out the lyrics to his songs. At the time, Black '47's CD was only available at Paddy Reilly's and other New York bars where they played.

The band recently had a five-song CD released nationally and this month, they're releasing a full-length album. Both were produced by former Cars leader Ric Ocasek, who wandered into Paddy Reilly's one night and liked what he heard.