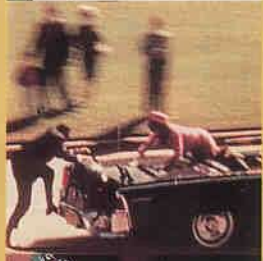


TIME



THE GENERATION THAT FORGOT GOD

The Baby Boom goes back to church, and church will never be the same



Rock Me, I'm Irish

Influenced by Bono and Sinéad, malt liquor and hip-hop, a new wave of Irish rockers has arrived

By CHRISTOPHER JOHN FARLEY

IN THE CRAMPED CONFINES OF MANHATTAN'S Paddy Reilly's Music Bar, where signs such as PARKING FOR IRISH ONLY adorn the wall, patrons are lifting their glasses and raising their fists. On stage, the Irish-American rock band Black 47 is launching into a combustible version of the title song of their debut album *Fire of Freedom*. "Let's get this place moving," bellows lead singer Larry Kirwan. "These are songs of freedom, revolution."

Finally. Rock 'n' roll that means something again. What's Duran Duran doing back on the charts anyway? Throw those pretty boys back into the junkyard of pop, along with disco, the lambada and the funky chicken. Here comes Irish rock, with Guinness on its breath and a union slogan on the tip of its tongue.

In the '60s, Ireland gave the world Van Morrison; in the '70s, Bob Geldof and the Boomtown Rats; in the '80s, U2 and Sinéad O'Connor. Now there's Black 47. The group's new album deals with such subjects as class warfare and potato famine, and their new video *Funky Céilí* is getting heavy play on MTV. Then there's the Irish band Hothouse Flowers, whose new album *Songs from the Rain* is both intelligent and evocative, full of the kind of arena-size emotions that are likely to seduce large audiences. And the new compilation *Straight Outta Ireland*—whose title plays off a hardcore rap album named *Straight Outta Compton*—showcases other promising Irish musicians.

It's the support of successful Irish groups, directly and indirectly, that helped the new trend develop. Several of the groups on *Straight Outta Ireland* got career boosts by having singles released on labels sponsored by U2. "Bands like U2 and Sinéad helped give people a sense of pride and potential," says Niall Stokes, editor of *Hot Press*, a Dublin music magazine. "U2 is revered, but the Irish are cynical by nature. They see [U2 lead singer] Bono and think, if that ridiculous idiot can do it, then so can I."

This wave of Irish artists is also finding ideological inspiration in the anti-Establishment attitudes of rap and reggae; in addition, these musicians are reaching back into their country's heritage, using traditional instruments and singing about Irish political themes. Irish pop music ex-

perts point out that in the past few years the genre has diversified. There's House of Pain, an Irish-American rap group that features b-boy bravado and beer-soaked rhymes ("Coming with the style of a Celtic rebel/ Those that ain't on my level call me the blue-eyed devil"), and the Belfast grunge band Therapy?, whose debut album

Nurse wallows in pounding metal rhythms and anarchistic attitude ("I don't need you/I don't want you/I don't want to feel anymore"). Earlier this year Stokes tried to put together an issue of *Hot Press* listing the hottest 100 Irish bands but found he couldn't do it; he had to expand the list to 140. Says Stokes: "There's not a chance that would have happened five years ago."

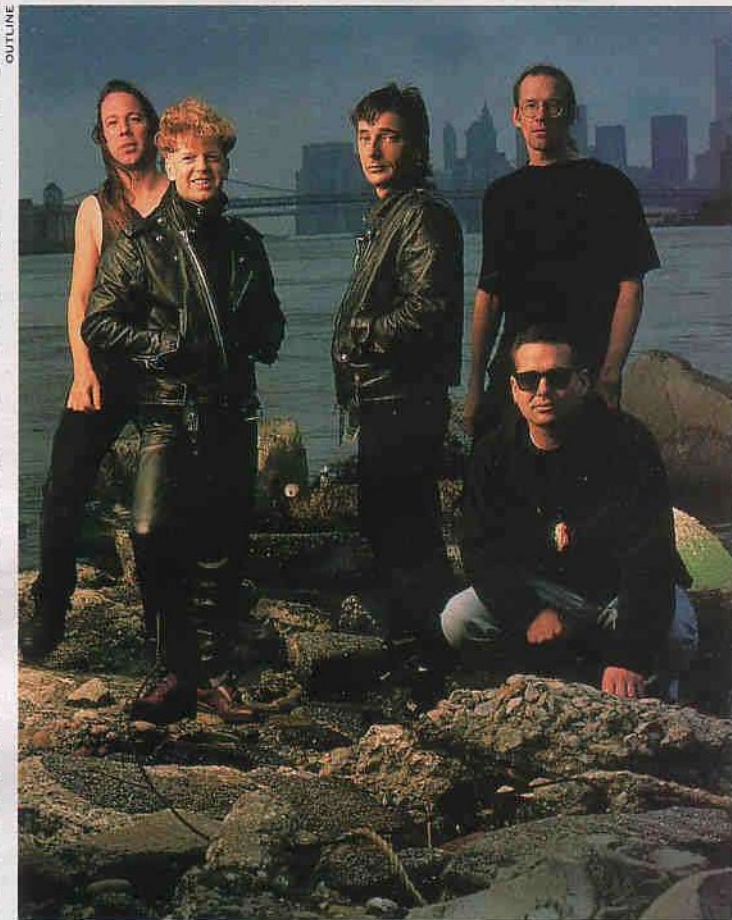
In the U.S., clubs like Paddy Reilly's and Sin-é, also in New York, have helped break in many of these new acts, giving them a supportive place to develop an audience. At Sin-é (which means "that's it"), Sinéad O'Connor has been seen helping clean up. Black 47, which combines traditional Irish instruments such as the uilleann pipe (a bellows-blown bagpipe) with reggae beats and straight-ahead rock, spent several years being heckled at pubs in the Bronx and Queens before settling in at Reilly's. The band's seasoning is apparent on their debut album; with assurance and maturity, the album covers such topics as interracial sex and James Connolly, a revolutionary union leader in Ireland executed by the British in 1916.

It's the proletariat passion of Black 47's songs that make the group stand out. "So hold on to your rifles, boys, don't give up your dream/ Of a Republic for the workin' class, economic liberty," Kirwan sings on the cut *James Connolly*. There's morbid humor too, as on the semiautobiographical song *Maria's Wedding*, about a drunk, frustrated suitor who crashes an

ex-girlfriend's nuptials, promising the bride he'll quit his band and "even go out and get a job for you."

Band leader Kirwan was born in Wexford, Ireland, and immigrated to the States in the '70s; he began to form Black 47 in 1989. He writes all the group's songs, mixing in events from his life, including those early rejections from New York clubs. Says Kirwan: "By playing in those Irish places where we had to play for people who didn't care about us one way or another, or hated us, we couldn't help but get better."

Straight Outta Ireland features Irish bands that are still on that road to recognition. One of the brightest artists on the album is Katell Keineg, a vocalist with a clear, pure voice. Another act with strong poten-



Today New York, tomorrow the world. Kirwan, second from left, and Black 47 lead the Irish invasion.

tial is the Chanting House, with their neo-traditional flute and fiddle sound. These are the groups that will help link Ireland's musical past with its future. "We write the songs using the rhythms of jigs and reels, but at the same time they are unmistakably rock songs," says Chanting House lead singer Susan McKeown. "Traditional music is dear to me, but it's up to the new generation to see how it's carried down."

With Black 47 leading the way, those traditions are in good hands. —Reported by Lisa McLaughlin/New York