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**Off The Record**  
 by Mike Farragher

**As he completes "Last Call" CD, Black 47's Larry Kirwan is busier than ever**

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Larry Kirwan.

Many of us, including this writer, got the inspiration to crack open an Irish history book after hearing a Black 47 lyric. Last Call, the band's final album, will have a bit of that as well.

This time, band leader Larry Kirwan shines the light on fellow author and playwright Brendan Behan on the track "The Ballad of Brendan Behan." Kirwan sings, "Born in the glory of Russell Street/you grew up humming Amhrán na Bhfian/your auld lad did time in a Free State jail/for Republican activities beyond the pale/you were your Granny's best boy, your Mammy's best chap/you loved to cheer all the old ladies up/your soul had been scorched with the Orange White and Green/you were the one and only Brendan Behan."

"I wrote nine of the 12 songs over a very compressed three week period and we recorded them soon after," Kirwan tells the Irish Voice.

"Although we've been together 24 years I was struck by the musical firepower and innovation of the members, particularly the horns and pipes. It's Black 47 at its best -- the perfect way to go out!" Speaking of playwriting, you won't be able to swing a cat in Chelsea without hitting a theater that's running a Kirwan musical this winter.

At the Cell (338 West 23rd Street), Hard Times will make a return appearance. The play takes place six months before Foster's death on July 13, 1863, days after the Battle of Gettysburg, when New York City exploded in the Civil War Draft Riots.

The show got rave reviews when it ran over the summer, inspiring The New York Times to write, "By the end of the evening, the audience is up, cheering and stamping. In "Hard Times," Mr. Kirwan has not only delivered a knockout entertainment, he's done a public service, reacquainting us with the Foster songbook and the striving, teeming America for which it was written."

For this encore performance, Kirwan has tinkered with some of the music and has added some Afro-centric influences to the score.

"I wanted to re-create the music of the Five Points through re-imagined versions of Stephen Foster's songs and some of my own. Though there were elements of rap and jazz in the first production, this time we've added African influences to the already strong Irish roots," Kirwan says.

The Irish Repertory Theater will stage Transport, a new musical Kirwan wrote based on the book by Thomas Keneally. Transport derives from the true story recalled by the grandmother of Keneally's wife, Judy, who journeyed in chains from Cork to Sydney, Australia in 1846.

Transport tells the story of the impoverished Irish women and young girls (the so-called "undesirables") who were deported on the Whisper, a prison ship, to the Australian penal colonies. The play's characters include members of the ship's crew, an exiled Irish priest, and four of the unfortunate female prisoners.

"Tom Keneally's story about the transport of Irish women prisoners to Australia was very inspiring," Kirwan says. "Tom and I hit it off right from the start and as a composer it was an opportunity to create a new hybrid -- Celtic and Broadway."

Kirwan's score is the usual mix of traditional Irish music mixed with a contemporary folk-rock and Broadway resonance. Transport transcends time, place and character with a hauntingly moving immediacy, intertwined with the indomitable Irish spirit and a shared and abiding humanity.

The play will run from February 7 through April 6. Visit [www.irishrep.org](http://www.irishrep.org).  
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