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TUE NOV 11, 2014 AT 02:14 PM PST

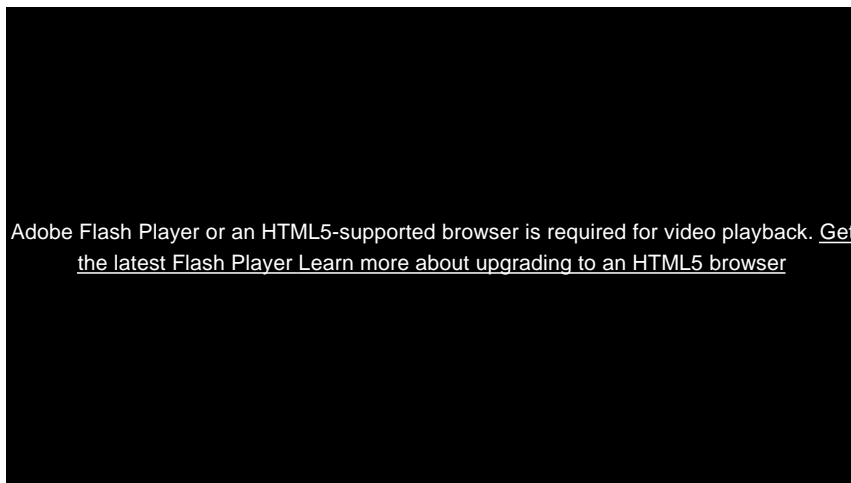
Joe Strummer: 'Black 47 is the only band that matters'

by devtob ♥

299 0 7 Comments

That's what The Clash's main man said in the 1990s, according to a [wonderful valedictory story](#) about the [unique Irish-American band Black 47](#) in the *New York Times* on Friday.

Why would Joe Strummer say that about a relatively obscure regional band? Perhaps because of songs like this, about socialist labor leader and [Easter Rising](#) martyr [James Connolly](#):



The chorus is:

My name is James Connolly
 I didn't come here to die
 but to fight for the rights of the working man
 small farmers too
 to protect the proletariat
 from the bosses and their screws
 so hold on to your rifles, boys
 don't give up your dream
 of a republic for the working class
 economic liberty

The occasion of the NYT story was Black 47's retirement. Band leader Larry Kirwan is 66 (though he doesn't look it) and other band members are somewhat likewise.

Even regional touring has, no doubt, become old for them.

More, below.



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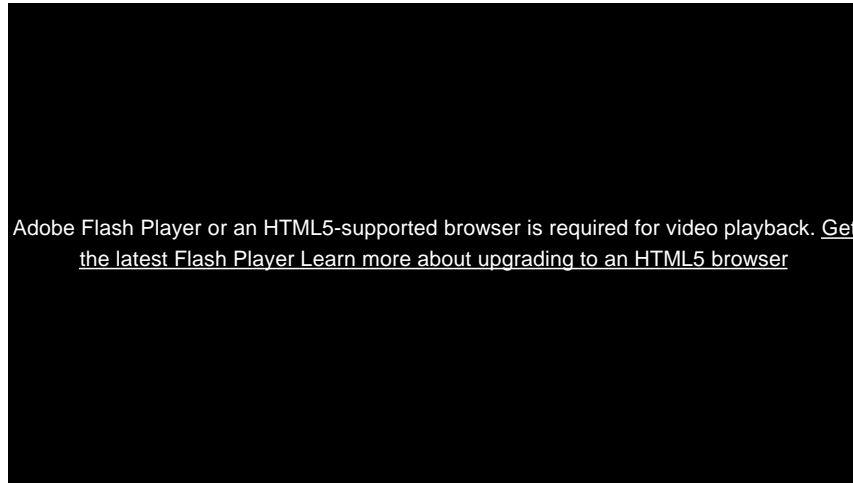
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Black 47 were great live; I saw them about a dozen times, mostly in and around Albany, NY, and once a Connolly's in Manhattan.

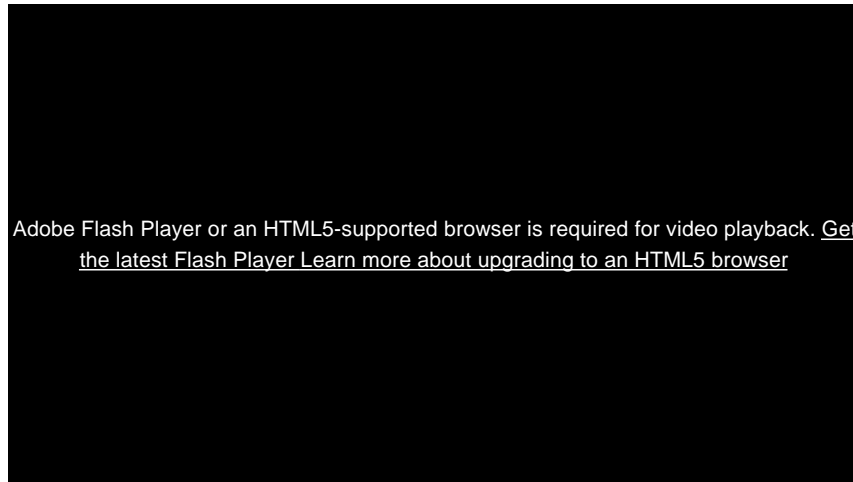
They were unique, with fierce original songs about Irish history and contemporary Irish-American life in New York City, backed by a wonderful mix of guitar, drums, clarinet, tin whistle, saxophone, trombone and uilleann pipes that made the songs rock.

Like "The Fire of Freedom", which has a great chorus too:

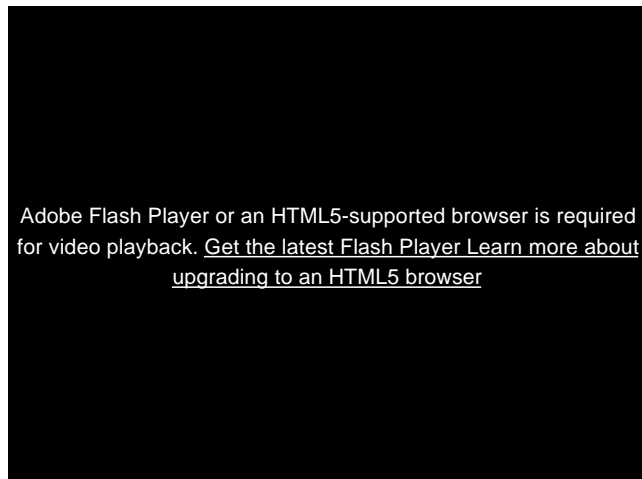
You can break down my door
you can even strip-search me
never gonna take away my human dignity
beat me, shoot me
flame keep on burnin'
never gonna put out the fire of freedom



And the hilarious coming-to-America tale "Funky Ceili":



Here's one about their beginnings, "Rockin' the Bronx":



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The NYT story is pretty comprehensive, for a newspaper feature, and has several appreciations of Black 47's specialness, besides Strummer's.

Legendary NYC radio DJ Vin Scelsa: "I was just blown away. And I'd never had Irish cider like that before."

Record company executive Pete Ganbarg: "It was as if Springsteen and Shane MacGowan (lead singer of The Pogues) had this illegitimate love child. This combination of uilleann pipes and bodhran and the stench of Avenue B — it was something I'd never heard before. ... The more I listened, the more mesmerized I became."

Singer/songwriter Billy Bragg: "If you wanted to listen to the voice of your generation, you listened to music. Now you go to Twitter, you go to Facebook. I salute Black 47; I'm sorry to see them go."

Brandy Kish, a 20-year fan at a recent upstate gig: "I fell in love with the band's energy. Seeing them tonight brings back the feeling of friends and family and everything is good."

And Himself, Larry Kirwan: "I wasn't real impressed by the fame thing. I knew it for what it was. You enjoy it, and it moves on to someone else. It was always about the music for us — music and politics."

Yes, the politics -- from the name that references 1847, the darkest year of the Great Hunger, to rousing songs about Irish revolutionary heroes like Connolly and Michael Collins and others about recent immigrants struggling to get by in the metropolis and the problems faced by veterans of the Iraq War -- Black 47 was always about the music and the politics.

In **their final album "Last Call,"** politics are still important, especially in "US of A 2014":

Hey kid, got a job for you, now you're finally out of graduate school
Here's your desk your computer, excel sheet, roto roter
You be workin' 9 to seven, occasionally past eleven
But that's okay, me oh my, jobs these days so hard to find
What you talkin' about, cash in the hand, think this is a rock & roll band
You're my intern, get with the program, your Daddy pay for your health care & your futon

Welcome to the new republic
Say hello to your American dream
And you better know who you're talking to
You better be born with a silver spoon
In the US of A Twenty Fourteen

CDS and other Black 47 merch, plus lots more about the band, are available at their website --

<http://www.black47.com/>

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▼ Tip jar (21+ / 0-)

Fare well and slainte, Black 47.

A public option for health insurance is a national priority.

by **devtob** on **Tue Nov 11, 2014 at 02:14:16 PM PST**

▼ Yep, great band. (2+ / 0-)

Another fan was Ric Ocasek (Cars, a band that has aged sorta well IMO, though the songs from this distance sound more like bubblegum than they did then).

Believe he produced an album of theirs. Maybe two?

Thump! Bang. Whack-boing. It's dub!

by [dadadata](#) on [Tue Nov 11, 2014 at 05:26:45 PM PST](#)

[[Parent](#)]

▼ **He produced the Fire of Freedom (1+ / 0-)**

album, which is full of hits like "Funky Ceali," "Maria's Wedding," "Rockin' the Bronx," etc.

A public option for health insurance is a national priority.

by [devtob](#) on [Tue Nov 11, 2014 at 07:08:37 PM PST](#)

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▼ **A great band. Here's another gem. (1+ / 0-)**

You show a little grit and you lands in jail.

by [cal2010](#) on [Tue Nov 11, 2014 at 02:35:45 PM PST](#)

▼ **Kirwan wrote several songs (1+ / 0-)**

about the drink.

Audience participation for this one invariably included tossing cigarettes onstage at "sell your soul for a cigarette."

A public option for health insurance is a national priority.

by [devtob](#) on [Tue Nov 11, 2014 at 02:54:09 PM PST](#)

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▼ **Damn it (1+ / 0-)**

I always wanted to go to one of those Connolly's shows for St. Pat's, never got around to it. If they are really retiring now I'm bummed.

"And, once again, the forces of niceness and goodness have triumphed over the forces of evil and rottenness." --Maxwell Smart

by [emobile](#) on [Tue Nov 11, 2014 at 02:55:17 PM PST](#)

▼ **I used to see Black 47 at Paddy Reilly's (2+ / 0-)**

in NYC on a somewhat regular basis. That bar was one of my roommate's and my "living rooms" - NY apartments are small :)

They were great. I am pretty sure that I either have a CD or a 45 from those days and we used to get special dispensation from the owners when we would dance on the bar there even though it wasn't normally allowed.

How funny. They were awesome.

by [inclusiveheart](#) on [Tue Nov 11, 2014 at 03:14:15 PM PST](#)

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