

# BLACK BACK FOR MORE

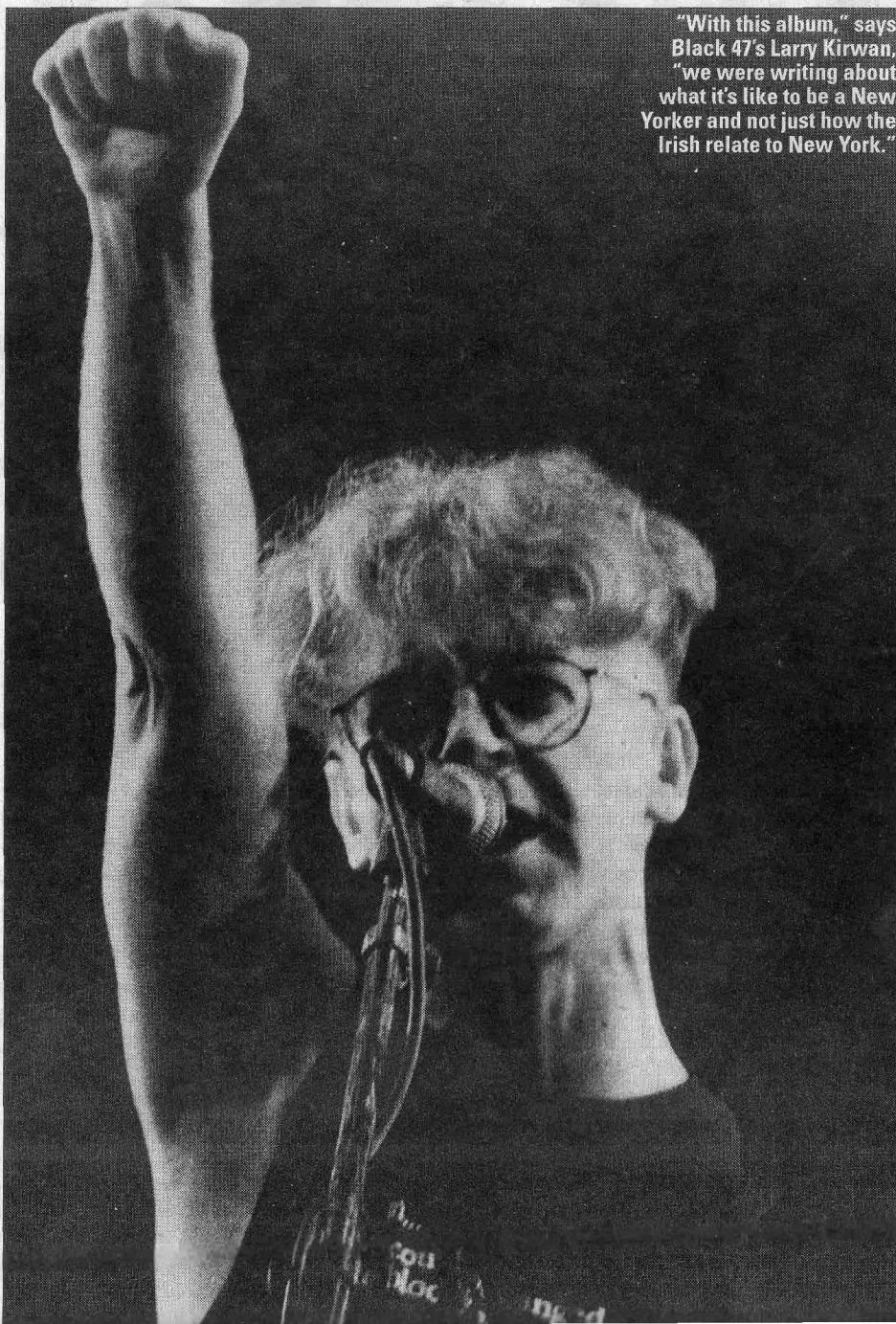
LIKE *Sex & The City*, the seeds of the Big Apple grew into international fame for another flavor that is uniquely New York: Black 47. The band has delivered their gratitude in the form of a stunning new album entitled *New York Town*.

"This band is known for uniquely expressing the core of the American Irish experience and then relating that back to the Irish culture," explains lead singer Larry Kirwan over eggs at an un-rock star-like hour of the morning in SoHo during an exclusive chat with the *Irish Voice*.

"With this album, we were writing about what it's like to be a New Yorker and not just how the Irish relate to New York. This is a picture of New York and the adventures I had in Manhattan and the different boroughs. Some of these pictures are before September 11 and some were after it."

The last artist who mined post-9/11 New York for material was Bruce Springsteen. His disc, *The Rising*, was a poignant abstract brush stroke of hurt and healing made at 30,000 feet above Ground Zero. It nabbed The Boss many a Grammy nod.

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many new ones that the timeframe ran out. The reason I did it is that I wanted to get the different areas of the city that I was involved in. I didn't think I could write a better Harlem song at this point than I did with 'Black Rose,' because I don't think I know Harlem anymore like I knew it when I wrote that song. The same goes for 'Blood Wedding.' That song is about the East Village and I couldn't come up with a better song about that area."

Geoffrey Blythe (saxophone), Joseph Mulvanerty (uilleann pipes), Fred Parcels (trombone), Thomas Hamlin (percussion), and Andrew Good sight (bass) are at the top of their game on *New York Town*, effortlessly making their way through Celtic-tinged rock, swing, and two-step.

"We're always trying to take Black 47 and stretch it musically to find different genres," says Kirwan.

Since this is a full frontal view of Manhattan, Kirwan has included both songs of mourning and joyful sounds that chronicle the unbreakable thirst for hope and penchant for merriment that persisted even in the darkest hours of 2001.

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said to me recently, 'If you've lasted this long, people will take another look at you to see why.' I think that is true," says Kirwan with a laugh. "I think we are reaping the benefit of that with this album. Black 47 mainly exists for one reason: there is still a lot you can do with it. It's a really talented band with a huge amount of experience, so as a songwriter the band offers a lot of room to experiment that you couldn't do with a straight guitar/drum/bass setup. At this point, it's hard to do anything new with that style of music after the Who and U2. With Black 47, this group can take music to different places."

You would think that writing the album of your career would allow a man to slow down and celebrate his success? Not Larry Kirwan. In the last twelve months, he released *Liverpool Fantasy*, a fictional novel about the Beatles that met with critical raves and commercial success. He has also written a new play that centers on the myths that build around a man lost on September 11 and how the family left behind processes it. He hopes to begin readings in March. Then there's the new novel rattling around his head, a semi-autobiographical account of his time in the Bronx during the

Larry Kirwan, a successful novelist and playwright who happens to sling a mean guitar, takes a different approach. He mines the cobblestone streets of lower Manhattan which he knows like the liturgy of the Mass, finding stories, broken dreams, and cracked hopes amidst the shards of glass from the horrific national tragedy. If the songs and stories on *New York Town* do not move you, check your pulse.

"Being a playwright, I think you create these songs through characters' eyes," says Kirwan. "So, these songs on this album tended not to be so abstract."

"They blew you to sweet Jesus/ on that grand September day/not a cloud on your horizon/your heart finally okay/they couldn't take your dreams away/on the shattered streets of New York City/this orphan has finally come home," Kirwan



## OFF THE RECORD

BY MIKE FARRAGHER  
irishwriter@optonline.net

sings on "Orphan of the Storm."

The disc is brimming with heart, although at times you can hear the ventricles cracking.

"Mychal" is a solemn track with a mournful uilleann pipe slithering through a grave acoustic guitar riff. Kirwan pays

tribute to Father Mychal Judge, a person who many believe to be a modern day Manhattan saint.

"We all have sorrows/our share of trials/we all are sinners in each other's eyes/God bestows love in so many ways," he sings.

There are a number of old friends who Kirwan

drops in on during his walk through *New York Town*. He has reworked "Black Rose," a reggaefied track last heard on the immortal *Home of The Brave*. For the 2004 version, he enlists Rozz Moorhead, who adds an urban Broadway vibe to the venerable track. He also updates "Livin' In America," with a postscript "11 Years On." Kirwan and Mary Courtney update the bittersweet relationship of a couple who first met in a bar on Fordham Road in the early 90's.

"Aw, you want me now/despite the frozen tears/but there's more to life than making love to a drunk reekin' of beer," howls Courtney. A crumbling marriage never rocked so hard or hurt so good.

"The original idea behind the album was to take six old Black 47 tunes that had to do with New York and then write six new ones," explains Kirwan. "Then it changed as it went along because I was writing so

darkest hours of 2001. "Staten Island Baby" is a delicious big band romp that brims with the wit and style of New York Doll and resident rascal David Johansen.

"Being in the studio with David is a riot because he is a comedian on top of everything else," recalls Kirwan. "We've known one another for years, since the days of hanging around the musician's scene that was Tramp's on 15th Street. It was fun, but it was also a real education. He embodies New York music for me - first with the Dolls, then just as David, and then in his Buster Pointdexter character, now with the Harry Smiths. When you see him in the studio, you really see that he's come from Jagger, especially his movements."

This disc just might be one of the crowning achievements of a force of nature that has provided the soundtrack of all things Irish American. Larry and the band continue to thrive by combining lyrics rich in character profiles and engaging sounds that encompass different musical genres without veering far from their Irish roots. Is it any wonder that the band shows no sign of stopping after 15 years?

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hopes to begin readings in March. Then there's the new novel rattling around his head, a semi-autobiographical account of his time in the Bronx during the 1980s.

For those of you thinking that this writing stuff will be getting in the way of Black 47, fear not! Kirwan had been working on an album's worth of tunes that were interrupted by 9/11 and the *New York Town* project, and he intends on getting the band cracking on them in short order.

*New York Town* is making its way onto the shelves of some finer retailers and is available at [www.cdbaby.com](http://www.cdbaby.com). You can also preview some of the tracks at <http://www.black47.com/newyorktown>

Black 47 tour dates:

2/27 John Boyle O'Reilly Club, Springfield MA; 3/4 Ned Devine's, Boston; 3/5 The Call, Providence RI; 3/6 Toad's Place, New Haven CT; 3/11 Four Green Fields, Tampa FL; 3/12 Palm Beach Irish Festival; 3/13 House of Blues, Chicago; 3/16 Westbury Music Fair, Westbury LI (with The Prodigals); 3/17 BB King Blues Club & Grill, New York, NY; 3/20 Guinness Presents the Holyoke Fleadh, Holyoke MA; 3/21 The State Theatre, Falls Church, VA.

## Irish Music Fests Update

YOU may remember in last week's issue I announced that The Undertones would be making a return to the stage after a 20 year break.

Now there comes word that New York Irish punk legends Rogue's March will

be sharing the stage at the Knitting Factory when the Undertones make their triumphant return on March 4 and 5. In other Rogue's March news, Joe Hurley will be staging the 5th Annual All-Star Irish Rock Revue, which will take place

on Saturday March 6 and Friday March 12. Thirty acts will be performing the best of Irish music, from Thin Lizzy to The Pogues to U2.

For more information, log onto <http://www.rogues-march.com/irishrevue>.