



Catch Black 47 on final tour when it performs at FTC

Christina Hennessy

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StageOne at Fairfield Theatre Company, 70 Sandford St., Fairfield. Saturday, April 19, 7:45 p.m. \$32. 203-259-1036, fairfieldtheatre.org.

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Even in this, their final stretch, the band members of Black 47 are showing no signs of slacking.

"There is this tone from the six of us," said Joseph "Bearclaw" Burcaw, who has been playing bass with the band since 2006. "We always give 110 percent, but this time around we are giving 120 percent. We know this is it and we have to give a kick-ass show."

In November, the band will disperse after 25 years. Until then, it has been traversing the country, hitting old haunts and new venues on its farewell tour. "It's been a bit of a whirlwind," said Burcaw, who grew up in New Milford. "But it's been great."

Black 47, whose name was inspired by the Irish Potato Famine, formed in late 1989 behind frontman Larry Kirwan, but made its first splash in 1993 with the song "Funky Ceili" from the album "Fire of Freedom." These modern Celtic rockers offer up songs strong on political and social issues that are teamed with energetic play and an eclectic mix of styles -- rock, traditional Irish music, reggae, folk, jazz and the blues.

Last month, the band released "Last Call," its last album of original material. Burcaw said the band pulled the record together quickly, which gives it a great energy and the feeling of a live album. "I'm really happy with the way it sounds," he said.

Among the fans coming out to the shows, he said there has been a "tremendous response" to the album, particularly the single "Salsa O'Keefe."

The new hits and the classics of the past quarter-century will be on display when the band swings through Fairfield on Saturday, April 19. The group returns to the Fairfield Theatre Company, where it performed for the first time in March 2013. In addition to Burcaw and Kirwan, the other members of the band are Fred Parcels on trombone and pennywhistle; Joseph Mulvanerty on uilleann pipes and flute; Geoffrey Blythe on saxophone; and Thomas Hamlin on drums.

Even if you saw them last year, don't expect the same show, Burcaw said. None of the band's more than 2,500 shows has been the same.



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It will be a chance to catch them before they head out to gigs throughout the Midwest, and then return to the East in November for their final show at B.B. King Blues Club & Grill in New York City.

Earlier this year, the band played its coldest gig so far during an outdoor St. Patrick's Day festival at Empire City Casino in Yonkers, N.Y. Prior to the event, Kirwan spoke about the decision to disband.

"It is bittersweet, but it is something we all decided six months ago," he said, according to a statement. "We wanted to go out our way. We were always in control, never letting anyone tell us how we should play or anything. We wanted to be the ones to choose when we called it quits. We are playing our last show exactly 25 years after we started. This is an achievement for us."

Burcaw said the break-up had been a "very organic" process -- a matter of people moving on to their next chapters.

Burcaw, an accomplished musician who has performed or recorded with the Black Crowes, The Roots, Ron McLure, the Neville Brothers and fellow Black 47 bandmate saxophonist Blythe, has been lining up new projects. Recently, he got together with Mascot's Distance, a band he had been working with before being tapped by Black 47. He described the sound as "Ben Folds Five meets Steely Dan." He also teaches at the School of Rock in Boston.

"I have some really good things in the works," he said, but added that he is spending most of his time with Black 47, performing in venues of all sizes and settings. "There has been a bittersweet feel, but people have been so receptive and are having a great time."

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