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An Interview with Victor Zimet and Stephanie Silber, Directors of *Fanatic Heart: The Story so Far of Black 47*

by **Mike Haberfelner**
August 2016

Victor Zimet on (re)Search my Trash
Stephanie Silber on (re)Search my Trash

Your upcoming movie *Fanatic Heart: The Story so Far of Black 47* - in a few words, what's it going to be about?

This is a project we've been working on for seventeen years, documenting *Black 47*. We see it as passion, politics, and poetry, mashed up into a giant dance party. Themes of the film deal with creation, immigration, and staying true to ideals.

Frontman Larry Kirwan had this to say about the film: "It's a brutally honest depiction. Laid bare are the excitement, tedium, musicianship, boozing, triumphs, and disasters."

Do give a little insight to the uninitiated: Who is *Black 47*, and why would one want to see a documentary about them? And what caught your interest in *Black 47* in the first place?

Black 47 is affectionately known as "the house band of New York City." In the late 80s, they played bars in the Irish neighborhoods of the Bronx. And everyone hated their music. But unwavering self-belief transformed them into the darlings of New York City. Their home base was an Irish pub, *Paddy Reilly's*, and when they performed there every Saturday night, the joint would be overflowing with cops, firemen, and stars: Matt Dillon, Brooke Shields, Neil Young and Bob Dylan were just a few of the celebs who were regularly spotted in the crowd. From there the rest is history, and you'd have to see the film because there is so much more to the story.

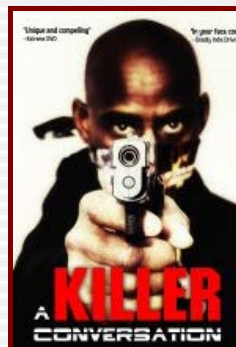
We first became interested in *Black 47* when Stephanie and our son Jake heard the band's hit, *Funky Celli*, on the radio. Our family was hooked. In 1999, we thought we'd just shoot some material with the band and see where it would take us. Unbeknownst to us, that journey would take us through many iconic moments in time, including the troubles in the North of Ireland, the attacks on September 11th, the Iraq war and beyond. They were a political band, and it was said that they were "the voice of the voiceless."

From what I know, you've been following *Black 47* for over 15



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years for the making of *Fanatic Heart* - so how has the band as well as the documentary evolved over that time, and how did you manage to remain focused over all those years?

The band's co-founder, Larry Kirwan, always had a steady focus. He understood the pulse of New York City at any given time. His sense of

history and current events in the world informed the music. As filmmakers, we would follow his lead. During this time, Stephanie and I were also producing a variety of other indies about artists such as Cyndi Lauper, Robert Duvall, Rory Gallagher, Nenad Bach, and The Flying NeutrinOs. We got pretty good at juggling stories. As we continued to shoot over the course of time, we never really worried about where the story was taking us. We were confident it would find its own essence.

What can you tell us about your overall directorial approach to your story at hand?

The overall directing approach is to be a fly on the wall. We don't make shit up, we just try to capture the truth and get the hell out of the way. Consciously and unconsciously, we have themes that we see emerge, and in the edit process those themes crystallize.



What was your collaboration with *Black 47* actually like?

Larry was always cooperative, as were the other artists in the band. As time passed, friendships were developed. With that said, Larry was very respectful of the band and their process of creation. It was always foremost in his mind. It was never "Come on in and have at it!" The truth about the band is, unlike a lot of other performers



- Cub
- Maciste
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- Miss Marple
- Mr. Moto
- Mister Wong
- Mothra
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- Wolf Man
- Wonder Woman
- Yojimbo
- Zatoichi
- Zorro

who are ego-driven and eager to be in the spotlight, is definitely not the ethos of *Black 47*. To a man, they didn't seem to care about being in a film. They were working musicians, road dogs dedicated to their music, and that was what it was always about for them. In 2014, after twenty-five years, the band called it quits, at the top of their game. It's our hope now that they will be proud of our efforts to create an artifact of their time as *Black 47*. The CDs will always be there, and so the music will live on. You'd have to see the band live to appreciate the alchemy.

Do talk about the shoots as such for a bit?

(Vic) I did worry a lot about being a one man band shooting-wise, as I feared that a lot of what I shot would be really crappy sounding performance, and indeed there was quite a bit of that. Editing is my strength, and being around the band over such a long period of time, ultimately you get to sift out the golden nuggets to construct a compelling story.



As far as I know, you're currently running a fundraiser for the finalization of *Fanatic Heart* - so do talk about your campaign for a bit?

We're thrilled to talk about the crowdfunding campaign! When this interview goes online, there will probably be less than a week to raise funds. Because the doc covers such a long period of time, with a wide array of world events, we need quite a few bucks to license footage to cover the story, plus a host of other post-production and marketing fees. It's an anxiety-inducing process. We really need the help and support of the fans to make this film a reality.

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/fanatic-heart-the-story-so-far-of-black-47-music#/>

So once the funds are raised, what's the schedule, and any idea yet when and where

the film might come out?

We're trying to finish the film in order to have a digital cut to send to *Sundance* by their deadline at the end of September. Now, the odds are near impossible, and normally we wouldn't waste the \$110 entry fee, but because of our deep belief in the story, we will take that gamble. At this point we will survey the terrain and submit to other festivals we think would be a good fit, i.e. *Slamdance*. We hope the film will debut in early 2017.

Any future projects beyond *Fanatic Heart*?

The last film, **Everything is Forever**, took 14 years to produce, and this one, **Fanatic Heart**, will be finished in its 17th year since its conception. At that rate, if we start something new now, we MAY finish the next film as we approach our eighties. Now that is scary. All kidding aside, the heavy lifting on the films is really done by just two people, and that is really taxing. At the moment, all we have the strength for is to bring **Fanatic Heart** to fruition.

Your/your movie's website, Facebook, IndieGoGo, whatever else?

IndieGoGo crowdfunding site:

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/fanatic-heart-the-story-so-far-of-black-47-music#/>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/B47MOVIE/>

Anything else you're dying to mention and I have merely forgotten to ask?

It is important for people to know the outstanding musicians of *Black 47*. They are as follows:

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Thanks for the interview!

We thank YOU, Michael, for giving us a voice.


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