

DIFFERENT DRUMMER

I spent some of my happiest nights playing with Pierce Turner in Tomorrow's Lounge, a neighborhood bar in Brooklyn. We had been gigging in a "Nufie" joint down 4th avenue and had gone to Tomorrows for a nightcap. Around six in the morning, drunk to the gills, we sang a couple of rebel songs and got hired. For the next year we played 3 nights a week, six sets a night for 200 a man and all you could drink.

Tomorrow's was a cop hangout with a piano bar down the back. It was run by two Donegal rogues - Tony Harkins and Jimmy Morrow. One disappeared, the other died: I loved them both. Within weeks, we were attracting a diffuse crowd of local ne'er-do-wells. By coincidence, a consignment of high grade acid hit Bay Ridge and became the drug of choice for our new following.

Amazingly, cops "with drink taken" and wasted freaks co-existed; probably, because this particularly robust acid gave one a whore of a thirst. Things did get a little hairy when the freaks started dosing cops' drinks. There's nothing quite like seeing one of the boys in blue up on the bar, gun in hand/acid in brain, belting out Danny Boy.

Music, as ever, was the catalyst. Six sets a night makes you as tight as a drum and guarantees eclecticism. Anything went, literally; and after some months a hybrid was born - Irish Acid Rock. It had little to do with Jefferson Airplane, Hendrix or their ilk. No, more like John Lennon, Luke Kelly and Van Der Graf Generator drunkenly gangbanging Buddy Holly, The Chieftains and Simon & Garfunkel. It was wild, woolly, absolutely uncommercial and doomed to obscurity. But who gave a fuck!

I lived for those long lusty nights and, years later, when Chris Byrne and I formed BLACK 47, we knew exactly where to go. Not to showcase rooms like CB's or white slave clubs on Bleecker Street, but up to the Bronx and out to Bay Ridge and Sunnyside. Conditions had improved. Black 47 never played more than 4 sets a night. Still, in those bruising first years, we had to stretch ourselves to the limit. Reggae, cefli, rock, rap, folk, improv! You name it, we tried it and then stirred that cocktail with drum machines, feedback, pipes on fire and lots of "leave me the fuck alone, pal, we're the ones with the legal gun."

As the poet might say, "its been a long strange trip," but it began in back in Bay Ridge on those brain-splitting nights. Let's go back, Pierce, and have another nightcap.