



CHRIS CUFFARO

Black 47, led by Larry Kirwan (second from left), continues to blend traditional Irish sounds with rock, rap and reggae.

Black 47 bringing its fire to the TLA

By Nick Cristiano
INQUIRY STAFF WRITER

Back in 1989, Black 47 started out with the seemingly modest but in reality nervy ambition of "Rockin' the Bronx." As humorously chronicled in the song of that title, the attempt to infuse traditional Celtic music with rock, rap and reggae did not go over well in the New York borough's working-class Irish bars.

Black 47, however, persevered, and thank goodness. Growing from a duo to a rafter-rattling sextet, the band became one of rock's most brilliantly galvanic.

Still leading the way is singer-guitarist Larry Kirwan. An Ireland-born New Yorker who's also a playwright, he routinely pens substantive songs of cinematic color and sweep. Ranging from politically charged, rabble-rousing anthems — some focusing on historical figures such as Michael Collins and Bobby Kennedy — to bloody and boozy street sagas

and humorous, self-deprecating tales, Kirwan and his mates incorporate all the elements of great rock and roll. While anger and pain may fuel some of the songs, the ultimate spirit of the music is celebratory and liberating. Along the lines of a Celtic Springsteen.

Since the buzz-generating major-label debut, 1993's *Fire of Freedom*, Black 47 has lost none of its fervor, even if the masses have not exactly followed. Its new live album is aptly titled *On Fire* (Gadfly) and includes recharged versions of old favorites such as "Rockin' the Bronx"; newer material like "Those Saints," which adds Dixieland touches to the glorious, genre-bending cacophony; and two of Kirwan's most moving ballads, "Bobby Sands MP" and "American Wake."

Black 47, with Kenn Kweder, at 8 p.m. Sunday at the Theatre of Living Arts, 334 South St. Tickets: \$42, \$10 in advance. Phone: 215-922-1011.