

Reviews

Black 47

Album: Last Call
 Label: Self Released
 Tracks: 13
 Website: <http://www.black47.com>



Firstly, let me declare an interest here. I have known Larry Kirwan, lynchpin of Black 47, for more than 40 years, since meeting him in a New York bound airline queue, at the end of which we were bussed to Pennsylvania to non-existent jobs. Much water has passed under bridges for both of us since, as Last Call closes one circle for him and his compadres, and for me, brings memories-too numerous to detail here-rushing to mind. Black 47 have been hugely significant in the Irish cultural genome of New York and farther beyond since their formation in 1989, so it is fitting that with Last Call, they have kept the good wine till the last.

What then, of the music? Thirteen songs, all but one composed by the Wexford native, the exception being a version of Hard Times. The curtain call demonstrates a band at the peak of their powers, the writing throughout mature and incisive, the songs populated by a cross section of characters, scenarios and opinions worthy of New York itself. We are introduced at the outset to Salsa O'Keeffe, a brassier of mixed race, appropriately made known to us by the band's brass section, and, having started thus, things just get better and better. The Culchie Prince is a back-of-the-van, cider laden travelogue, where our hero is asked by a young lady to "Sweet Jaysus, do it again"! He does, replete with diddly-eye chorus!

For me, two songs-oddly enough in sequence- stand out especially. USA 2014 shows just how skewed the American Dream has really become, the lopsided nature of society there-replicated elsewhere too, it must be said-laid bare in searing lyrics and music. The Night the Showbands Died, which has as its core the Miami Showband murders in 1975, is a lament not only for those who died, but also for the death of our innocence, in an era when we hung like limpets to the words of journalists travelling in the back of the Transits the length and breadth of Ireland and -during Lent, the U.K.

I've just finished reading a book called The Governor's Wife, where the plight of undocumented Mexicans in the colonias along the Rio Grande is the core of a complex storyline. Let The People In mines a similar theme, a plea for inclusion denied to many hundreds of thousands of undocumented, and with great force. It is a live issue in these times, one which needs the application of political will, thus far not in evidence.

In sum, Last Call is a comprehensive reminder of just how damn good a band Black 47 have been over the last quarter century. Many, though not all of the songs here, could, and should, be sung in bars, on acoustic instruments. That, truly, is how well they translate. If this album was a piece of meat, it would be classed as prime rib, or, maybe, flaming young steak! Yep, it's that good!

Oliver P. Sweeney

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