

Column: Ghosts of rock 'n' roll past

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"Rock and roll will always be; I dig it to the end; it'll go down in history; just you watch my friend." -- Danny & The Juniors

Larry Kirwan, lead guitarist and leader of Black 47, a New York City-based [Celtic Rock Band](#), is on stage at Stage One in Fairfield, wearing a T-shirt that says "This is Bronx music." They start playing one of my favorite Black 47 tunes, "Rockin' the Bronx." "One o'clock, two o'clock, give us a chance; All we wanna do is be rockin' the Bronx," and this Bronx boy is

loving it. They also play one of their new tunes, "Salsa O'Keefe," about a Bronx, N.Y. girl who "goes steaming up the neighborhood."

It's an out-bloody-standing night of rock, reggae and hip-hop, played only the way Black 47 can; beautiful, magical, sweet rock 'n' roll for the soul. Kirwan, who formed the band in 1989 with [Chris Bryne](#), who has since left the band, is a marvelous songwriter and musician. In 1993, [Time Magazine](#) said it was, "the proletariat passion of Black 47 song's that make the group stand out." Black 47 has been together for 25 years -- their first gig was in the Bronx. Sadly, they'll be disbanding at the end of the year.

On my way out, I tell Kirwan they were brilliant as usual, and buy their latest CD, "Last Call." When I get to my car, I immediately put the CD into the player and start singing along with "Salsa O'Keefe."

One week before, I saw [Alejandro Escovedo](#) and the Sensitive Boys at Stage One. His music is heartfelt and it rocks: He's a master of writing songs about people, places and love that anyone can relate to. They did a killer version of [Neil Young's](#) "Like A Hurricane."

Escovedo comes from a family of professional musicians and has played in punk bands and roots rock alternative bands. Over the years, I've also seen him with [Rank & File](#) at [Madame Wong's](#) in Los Angeles and with a rock violinist and cellist at [The Acoustic Cafe](#) in Bridgeport. All his incarnations have been amazing.

Stage One, my favorite rock club, is a super cool and intimate 200-seat venue that is without a doubt the best place to hear live music in Connecticut.

Two weeks earlier, I'm standing with my wife, outside the [Emigrant Savings Bank](#) at 105 Second Avenue in Manhattan, remembering all the rock 'n' roll shows I saw there when it was The Fillmore East, my favorite rock venue of all time. It's the first stop on the guided tour I'm giving her of the rock 'n' roll landmarks of my youth, most of them now long gone.

[Bill Graham](#) knew what he was doing when he opened the Fillmore East in New York City on March 8, 1968. It was one of the landmark musical events of the late '60s along with Woodstock and the Monterey Pop Festival, and the Fillmore soon became the premier concert venue on the East Coast. Over the years it became known as the "Church of Rock 'n' Roll" where musical pilgrims saw three bands and a state of the art light show for only \$4.

My first show at the Fillmore East was on April 26, 1968, with Traffic, Blue Cheer and Iron

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Butterfly, who do a outrageous extended version of "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida." It's an experience not to be forgotten, and over the next three years I return 50 more times to see some of the most incredible rock bands of all time.

There was nothing better than a late show at the Fillmore, when the headliners, especially the [Grateful Dead](#), would play into the wee hours of the morning and my friends and I would hit the darkened East Village streets with songs playing in our head.

Next, we head over to 19-25 St. Marks Place, where the Electric Circus, a nightclub and discotheque, was located from 1967 to 1971. I was fortunate to see The Velvet Underground there.

Then we make our way over to Bleecker Street in the West Village; I point out where the Cafe Au Go Go, [Garrick Theater](#), Village Gate and Bleecker Bob's [Golden Oldies Record Store](#) once stood. I'm flooded with memories. It's a rock 'n' roll stroll down memory lane; the ghosts of my rock 'n' roll past are definitely out that night. Cafe Wha? is a landmark that is still alive and well at 115 MacDougal St.; I got to see both [Jimi Hendrix](#) and [Richard Pryor](#) perform there.

My rock and roll journey has taken me to some of the coolest clubs and venues: The Fillmore East; Cafe Au Go Go; the Garrick Theater; the Bottom Line; CBGB and Max's Kansas City in Manhattan; the Whiskey A Go Go in Los Angeles; the [Marquee Club](#) in London; and the Paradiso in Amsterdam. Nothing beats seeing live music, especially in small clubs. Thankfully, there is Stage One, in Fairfield, carrying on in the grand tradition of cool rock 'n' roll venues.

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