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## Black 47: BB Kings, NYC – Nov 15, 2015

One Last Jig with Black 47

(New York City) – Twenty five years ago, Larry Kirwan sat in Paddy Reilly's with Chris Byrne and launched a different kind of Irish band, with a sound that drew in not just Irish music, but funk, soul, punk, reggae, folk, and blues, all tinged with Kirwan's Irish Republican rebel point of view. It was a formula that attracted thousands to their now legendary gigs at Reilly's (and later Connolly's) on Saturday nights, and led them to major label deals, festivals like Farm Aid, appearances on Letterman, Conan and the Tonight Show, and a reputation as "the house band of New York City." Eventually, Byrne moved on to his own musical projects, Joseph Mulvanerty stepped in on the pipes, and but for a few changes on bass, the band lineup of Kirwan, sax player Geoffrey Blythe, trombone and whistle player Fred Parcels, and drummer Thomas Hamlin has

stayed more or less in tact over their lifetime.

Last Saturday, they put their final coda on it and played their last show at BB King's in Times Square, and fans and friends from all over came out of the woodwork to send them off. The two and a half hour show featured all of their biggest hits, some fan favorites, and guest appearances for nearly every song. It was an Irish wake for a band that, up until the very end, made every show a scorcher.

The room was absolutely packed, and the night kicked off right at eight with "Green Suede Shoes," and the band didn't look back from there. Kirwan was in rare form, telling stories about the early days, relating the inspiration for some of the band's most popular songs, and beaming with pride as his son Rory joined them on stage for the toasting rap in Fire of Freedom. Other guests like Mary Courtney ("Livin' in America") and Christine Ohlman ("Blood Wedding") added a special touch to the evening. The highlight for this particular writer was seeing Byrne join them one last time for "Walk All the Days."

As you'd expect, all the big hits were aired out – "Big Fella," "Rockin' the Bronx," "Fanatic Heart," "40 Shades of Blue," and a particularly stirring version of "James Connolly." They ended their regular set with "Funky Ceili," before coming back out for an encore of "Maria's Wedding," a medley of "Gloria/I Fought the Law (with Byrne once again coming out to join in, along with longtime tour manager P2, superfan Tom Marlow, and former bass player Rob Graziano)," and an impromptu a capella version of "Happy Trails."

While it was bittersweet to think that this was the last time we'd all be together for a Black 47 show, there were very few tears at the end of the night. We all knew we'd been part of an amazing ride with one of the best live bands in rock 'n' roll. There's no doubt they'll be missed, but as cliché as it sounds, the musical legacy they've left behind will be around for a very long time. As the song goes, and it was said that night, "That's the story so far of Black 47."

Review & photos John Curtin







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