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Music: The Pogues For St. Patrick's Day? Brilliant

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THE POGUES ** 1/2 out of ****
TERMINAL 5

In the first of what I hope and believe will be many farewell tours, the Pogues are playing in New York City for their annual lead-up to St. Patrick's Day. They also perform March 16 and 17. They're older now - and as everyone is wont to point out, still alive! -- so it's not quite the same as seeing them in their heyday in the 80s. A band that once seemed dangerous is now a beloved institution, if not downright huggable. [Shane MacGowan's](#) indecipherable comments between songs are teased by fellow bandmates with friendly jokes.

Nothing made this clearer than the fact that the people

standing next to me said they'd just heard that MacGowan was still in his hotel room and at least half an hour away... just as the lights dimmed and the show began on time. On time! I was almost disappointed, which proves you just can't please some people.

I last saw them some 25 years ago when the band was at their peak. My friend Denise drove us to Atlanta (an eight hour car ride) for the show pegged to the *Peace & Love* album. They roared through their set recklessly and you felt certain the wheels might come off at any moment. Now back together and taking a victory lap, they continue to deliver musically, from the opener "Streams of Whiskey" to "Boat Train" and "Sunny Side Of The Street" (not that one) and "If I Should Fall From Grace With God"

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The crowd was rowdy at times, especially the ones grouped towards the front on center right. They pushed and shoved with happy abandon and one burly fellow (at least) was ejected. Thank God! This isn't the Clancy Brothers in their matching sweaters and you do want a little hint of abandon.

MacGowan is the beating heart of the band, of course, so when he was offstage for a breather, the energy level dipped, though an excellent instrumental showed they're a fiercesome group of musicians. Never a master of elocution (Julie Andrews, he ain't), MacGowan's voice is pure bleat now. It would be lovely to report that like Chet Baker or Billie Holiday he has exploited his voice's limitations to break your heart. No, it's just a raspy, Waits-ian roar, more of an instrument than a source for lyrics. But he knows that and sings with commitment, even if he totters a bit from one part of the stage to another during and between numbers.

Through sheer will, the words come clear now and again, as on the old folk classic "**Dirty Old Town**" (a song about a town in England, by the way, not Ireland). That song was written by Ewan MacColl, the father of Kirsty MacColl, who of course dueted with the Pogues on that unlikeliest of holiday classics, "Fairytale of New York." If I needed any further proof they'd be back in town some day, it was the simple fact that they didn't sing this gem, my favorite of theirs and a tune that often jumps back onto the Top 10 in the UK every December. That didn't stop the fans, however: two semi-drunk fellows started belting it out on their own after the lights were up and people were streaming out.

So tell me, what music will you be spinning for St. Patrick's Day? I start with Bing Crosby because that's how my mother raised me. You?

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of Showbiz Sandbox, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website and his daily blog. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called Popsurfing and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

NOTE: Michael Giltz was provided with free tickets to this concert with the understanding that he would be writing a review.

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