

High Bias *audio-visuals*

IF I SHOULD FALL FROM GRACE

Directed by Sarah Share

(Sundance Channel)

If I Should Fall From Grace is a feature-length documentary about Shane MacGowan, the now-legendary Irish singer/songwriter, erstwhile leader of the Pogues (probably the single greatest Irish rock band of all time—sorry, Thin Lizzy fans) and poster boy for preventive dentistry. Director Sarah Share filmed MacGowan, his family and his longtime companion Victoria Clarke giving interviews, loafing at home, participating in family gatherings, wandering the streets of London and, of course, hitting the pubs. This makes up the bulk of the doc, providing a fascinating and depressing glimpse into the life of a dissolute gutter poet. MacGowan lives up to his alcoholic reputation, rarely seen without a drink in his hand; between his constant inebriation and the appalling state of his teeth (he's lost a few more since his days in the limelight), his speech is almost completely unintelligible. It's particularly painful watching his uncontrollable trembling as he attempts to light a cigarette. He doesn't seem interested in talking about his art much, and he'd probably not make much sense if he did. He does discuss the founding of the Pogues, and still seems somewhat bitter about being booted from the band (this was filmed before that band's reunion), but he doesn't dwell on it. In fact, he apparently doesn't dwell on much of anything but the next drink and crowd of friendly faces—his deterioration is all the more crushing in the face of his blithe indifference to it. (The attitude of "He's a genius, let him do what he likes," taken by both his longtime road manager/enabler and his colleague Nick Cave, doesn't help.) His crusty father is a wise old ruffian and the long-suffering Victoria should be nominated for sainthood, but the portrait of MacGowan that emerges here doesn't exactly give one hope for his artistic future, or even the prospect of a long life.

MacGowan's behavior isn't Share's fault, of course, and the director makes up for the bleak interview scenes with plenty of footage from the man's glory days. Share drops in a ton of film of the Pogues in action, both from music videos and live performances, and it's all a testament to the power of that band's music, concert presence and overall legacy. Even better, Share has somehow dug up footage from MacGowan's pre-Pogues band the Nips. The group's R&B-inflected rock & roll is utterly delightful, not to mention a million miles away from the Pogues; the tantalizing tastes here practically beg for a comprehensive reissue of any existing Nips music.

Not that MacGowan probably cares one way or the other. It has to be said: fans of the man and his music will find this film difficult to sit through. Yet it's impossible to imagine those same fans being able to turn away. Diehard MacGowan fanatics, and there aren't really any other kind, will find this to be a must-see.

If I Should Fall From Grace airs, naturally, on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, on the Sundance Channel.

Michael Toland

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