

albums with the Pogues. Of particular interest was the studio footage of Elvis Costello producing the band as they made the classic *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash*. Watching those early videos and the wide-eyed exuberance at discovering a new side of the traditional Irish tunes was a treat, reminding you why you fell in love with the man in the first place.

"Seeing the Sex Pistols did it for me," says Shane of the early days that he spent rattling around England. "They would sing about how boring England was, and I could totally identify with that. I wouldn't have been interested in them if it wasn't for the fact that Johnny Lydon was so bloody Irish. The way he'd rail against the British, it was just great."

The commentary of longtime girlfriend Victoria Clarke, author of the fantastic *A Drink with Shane MacGowan* published a couple of years ago, is the most interesting part of the movie. She answers the question that's on everyone's mind: How does one fall in love with such a man?

"He has a sensitive side, and that made me fall in love with him," she says. "He's an idealist at heart, not the realist he thinks he is. He romanticizes me in song the same way he idealizes things like Ireland. He lives his life

with nerves and exuberance, and is able to go up there onstage and do things that most of us wouldn't dream of doing. That's what makes him so appealing."

The tape is hard to turn your eyes away from; I don't think I blinked once in the entire 90 minutes that it aired. There is a tinge of sadness in the film as well. A subtle, "family intervention vibe" runs through the interviews of his relatives, and they coolly acknowledge the artist's self-destructive streak and their inability to do much about it. Watching Shane stumble through the streets and slur his words during conversations with fans and bar patrons is at times painful to watch, but Victoria Clarke justifies this foggy demeanor.

"He doesn't approach writing songs the way most people do. He gets in this state where he can't write. When he's like that, he's able to allow the music to come through him."

Let's hope the music finds its way through this patron saint of modern Irish rock. "I'm the only thing that stands in the way of the death of Irish culture," he says as he stumbles through the streets of Dublin. Coming from anyone else, that would be a bold, eye-rolling boast. From the jagged mouth of MacGowan, it carries the weight of gospel.