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If I Should Fall From Grace: The Shane Macgowan Story

(Docu -- Ireland) A Pop Twist Entertainment release of an Emdee 2000 production in association with TG4 and the Irish Film Board. Produced by Sarah Share. Executive producers, Cillian Fennell, Micheal O'Meallaigh, Rod Stoneman, Larry Masterson. A Pop Twist Entertainment release of an Emdee 2000 production in association with TG4 and the Irish Film Board. Produced by Sarah Share. Executive producers, Cillian Fennell, Micheal O'Meallaigh, Rod Stoneman, Larry Masterson. Directed by Sarah Share.

With: Shane MacGowan, Victoria Clarke, Maurice and Therese MacGowan, Aunty Monica, Philip Chevron, Nick Cave, Dierdre O'Mahony, Philip Gaston.

By [DENNIS HARVEY](#)

A staggering embodiment of the stereotypical Irish thirst for poetry and pints, musician Shane MacGowan earns artistic admiration and exerts a train-wreck fascination in the portrait "If I Should Fall From Grace." Hugely popular in the U.K. for their mix of traditional Irish folk strains with punk energy, his seminal band the Pogues achieved only cult status in the U.S. -- ditto current outfit Shane MacGowan and the Popes. Still, this well-mounted if sometimes meandering docu should find pockets of loyal interest in fringe theatrical distrib and ancillary sales.

MacGowan's parents (sharp, albeit tactful, interviewees here) emigrated from Dublin to London in the 1960s to find work. They hated their new environs, though not half so much as son Shane, who dropped out of school at age 12, and spent time as a teenager in a mental hospital.

Not surprisingly, this misfit found happiness in the emerging punk scene, first scoring modest success with poppish outfit the Nips.

It was with the formation of the Pogues, however, that MacGowan's love for all things Irish found a worthy outlet. His colorful yarn-spinning lyrics ("drinking, fucking and fighting songs," he calls them), yowling vocals and assured melodies as well as the vivid contrast between folk and electric instrumentation all made the Pogues a striking novelty especially beloved by a large expat Irish community.

Elvis Costello's exacting production on 1985 sophomore disc "Rum, Sodomy and the Lash" as well as an ever-shifting/expanding lineup of musicians abetted the band's rapid musical maturation.

But they were doomed to self-destruct -- MacGowan was only the most conspicuous member with overweening substance abuse problems. He's still bitter about (he claims) being thrown out of the band in the early '90s. Remaining members, who have their own version of that event, continued recording as Pogues through two little-noticed albums.

This stormy backstory is recounted at excessive length, given inclusion of too many Pogues musicvids in their entirety -- some later ones showcasing weaker songs, none of great filmic appeal (despite guest appearances by Johnny Depp, Kirsty MacColl and Matt Dillon). Fans will be far more interested in those days than MacGowan's lower-key current career. Still, it's curious the decade he's spent since with the Popes is basically ignored, apart from concert segs that bookend pic.

Between his heavy accent and boozy slurring, MacGowan is hard to understand in interviews -- not that he has much to say, given a stubborn insistence on evading/underplaying his various addictions. ("You can't be worried about t'ings like yer health," he shrugs at one point.) His stage presence, too, is pretty lethargic these days compared with the frenzy glimpsed in archival perfs. Fortunately, "If I Should Fall" offers a solid slate of other interviewees, from longtime girlfriend Victoria Clarke to musical peer (and recovered substance abuser) Nick Cave.

Good-looking package is well handled in all tech departments.

Camera (color), Colm Whelan; editor, Orla Daly; sound (Dolby SR), Joe O. Dubhghaill. Reviewed at Roxie Cinema, San Francisco, Aug. 13, 2003. Running time: 93 MIN.

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