



**The Irish are plagued by ignorant stereotypes, but they know how to have a good time — I can personally recommend their funerals.**

**Sunday night is certain to be hoedown night at Neon Picnic, with the Pogues and Los Lobos on the same bill. Both bands have brought a contemporary edge and spirit to sounds that reach back over generations, and both bands know how to move the soul and the feet.**

The Pogues are currently in New York, filming a video for their new single 'Fairy Tale of New York.' Then they tour the East Coast and Canada, finishing up at the Hollywood Palladium as guests of their friends Los Lobos.

But one Pogue who has stayed home in London is guitarist Philip Chevron. "I've had to stay behind because I've had a recurring duodenal ulcer which I need treatment for. But I'm feeling a bit better now," he says.

Filling in for Chevron in North America is Joe Strummer. Last year the Clashman and the Pogues starred, together with Elvis Costello, Grace Jones and Dennis Hopper, in *Straight to Hell*, a spoof spaghetti western by Sid

and Nancy director Alex Cox. It received mixed reviews ...

"Well I liked it!" laughs Chevron. "It was great fun to make, basically our annual summer holiday which we filmed and then forced on people in cinemas ... no, it was a lot of hard work actually."

Chevron joined the Pogues temporarily in 1985 before *Rum Sodomy and the Lash* — when their banjo player Jem Finer needed a rest. "I liked it so much I stayed, well they invited me to." Prior to that, he was in the seminal punk combo Radiators from Space. "We were the only punk band in Ireland, so we were quite well known for a while." The Radiators, who had "terrible trouble" battling with an Australian outfit of

the same name, made two albums, and Chevron has made two solo LPs, one produced by Elvis Costello.

#### Quiet Revolution

A lot is made of the Pogues' punk origins, with Finer and million-dollar smile Shane MacGowan being part of the Nipple Erectors. But through the Pogues' concertinist Terry Woods, who helped form Steeleye Span, there are links back to an earlier era when traditional music was popular.

"There's a long gap between that folk rock and us," says Chevron. "Very early Steeleye Span were very good and adventurous, as were early Horslips and early Fairport Convention. But somewhere along the line something went wrong and it got more rock than folk, and the two elements didn't blend very well."

"I think it took another few years before the vital ingredient came along to make it work, and that was punk rock. That had the same sort of energy that Irish folk music has. It said, stop taking it seriously 'cause it's supposed to be fun. Stop sticking your finger in your ear."

And the respected Irish singer Christy Moore approves: he covered a song of the Radiators in the late 70s, and the Pogues' 'A Pair of Brown Eyes' on his latest album. "Christy always had a good ear for what's going on, it doesn't matter which strand of music of music it

**"People don't always give the Pogues credit for invention or musical know-how. We've never been as we're popularly imagined."**

comes from. It was quite a radical thing to do then for a performer like Christy Moore to record what on the surface looked like a punk rock song. And to have him record 'A Pair of Brown Eyes' was like a progression of that.

"Because the Radiators, although they never ended up sounding like the Pogues, their

attitude was similar in that they were using the long standing tradition of Irish ballad writing, and playing it a different way, with an upfront energy and force, but respecting the tradition."

Chevron says that when he grew up in Dublin, traditional Irish music was "shoved down my throat, and I hated it. It was part of the same misguided government policy which shoved the Irish language and sport down people's throats, to the point that all you could do was vomit it back up again. That's the wrong way to interest people."

"It took till that attitude cooled off a bit — for me it was a band called the Horslips, an Irish band in the 70s, who said, well fuck that, we're gonna make this music sound like fun again. That had a big influence

**"So much music on the radio sounds so loveless, as if the people who made it care more about their haircuts or bank balances."**

on me, it made it sound exciting again, and for my generation, kindled for the first time a love for Irish music."

"Now things are more relaxed, and they don't force music or the language on you, so it's easier to appreciate. Though there still purists who despise what we do. But there will always be those people, always."

#### Irish Lullaby

Along with U2, the Pogues are household words in Ireland. But Chevron stresses that only three members of the eight Pogues are actually Irish. "We're a London band, all based there except for Terry who still lives in Ireland. But in London, there's a very strong Irish music thing there in the Irish pubs. So that's where a lot of the Pogues' Irish music comes from, for the people who weren't actually born in Ireland."

"But we've been adopted as an Irish band in Ireland. Irish people are very proud of people who be-

come internationally successful, particularly if they wear their Irishness on their sleeves."

Irish pub bands play in the background, "they wouldn't have their jobs very long if they did what we do," says Chevron. "But a lot of what those bands play, country and Irish, has some bearing on the Pogues. 'A Pair of Brown Eyes' is in that sort of mode, an Irish waltz. The pub bands play in that spirit — only we play it with a great deal more feeling than they would!"

The Irish immigrants to America had a large influence on early country music. "And therefore rock 'n' roll, so it's very integral to the way rock music turned out," says Chevron. "It's amazing it's taken so long for Irish music to be this popular internationally."

Now the Pogues (particularly in their version of 'Jesse James' on *RSL*) reflect the way country has flowed back across the Atlantic. But the links go further: 'London Girl' thumps along with the zydeco rhythms of Louisiana. With Los Lobos, the Pogues have brought the accordion back into favour:

"Yeah — it's been a very underrated instrument until recently. Someone like William Schimmel who plays accordion with Tom Waits is brilliant. There are people who are using the accordion in an intelligent way these days. For a long time it had a justifiably terrible reputation."

#### Pogue Laureat

The "Irish ravers" image of the Pogues has tended to obscure the fact that the band is full of excellent musicians. Shane MacGowan has done the bulk of the writing, though on the new LP *If I Should Fall From Grace With God* various members of the band contribute. "Shane's songs are pretty hard to beat — they have to be pretty shit hot to better him."

"Songs are everything. That's one thing that unites us. With eight people in the band, there are lots of different influences and preferences. But we all have got great respect for the songs. The art is the songs, which I think has become grossly devalued and debased over the past few years."

We've got production and marketing and so on, and the songs seem to have got lost. I've always regretted that."

It's been two years since *Rum, Sodomy and the Lash*. "We've had a lot of problems with our record company, and it's taken this long to iron them out. We've had the album recorded for quite a while, but we weren't prepared to let them release it except on our terms. That's been a source of great frustration for us. We've been playing the stuff off the album for quite a while, but it helps if people know what you're playing. And the band is very prolific, we write a helluva lot of material, so it's frustrating not being able to record it and get on with the next one. However it's been worth the wait."

*Fall From Grace* has been produced by Steve Lillywhite, and Chevron is enthusiastic about his approach:

"Without knocking anyone else who has produce the band, they haven't really been producers but musicians. Steve Lillywhite's a real producer, and it's a different discipline from being a musician, you think differently. This time the album was pretty much recorded live in the studio. We added some colouring to it afterwards, but the essence of each track is live."

"Steve Lillywhite captured that, he didn't impose anything on us at all, he was brilliant. He's probably the best producer in the world — apart from his technical brilliance, he knows how to get the performance out of people. That's what a producer should do. He hasn't done anything to the sound that isn't us, he's listened very carefully to what we do and translated it onto vinyl. So it won't sound like a Steve Lillywhite record, but like a Pogues record. I was so full of admiration for the man, on every level. He was easy going, intelligent, imaginative."

#### Dealin' With Declan

Nevertheless, the production work Elvis Costello did on *RSL* and the sublime EP *Poguetry in Motion* seemed sympathetic to the band. **CONTINUES OVER PAGE**

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