

Monuments, Monsters & Music

A trip to Moscow to see the Pogues

In August 2010, the famous English-Irish folk-punk band, the Pogues, played their very first gig in eastern Europe. The chance to see my favourite band play live and visit Moscow at the same time seemed irresistible.

Just when I was planning my trip, a disastrous heat wave hit Russia; the country battled with countless fires, and people were escaping from Moscow **shrouded**² in thick, unbreathable smog. Keeping my eyes on the unchanging weather forecast, I wondered if the gig would be cancelled and the whole adventure would turn into a fiasco. But then, just a few days before my departure, the tropical heat gave way to cold and wet. So I set out to enjoy a bit of late autumn in the middle of summer.

When it was not raining, it was at least dark grey with icy wind, but despite that, I headed out to explore the must-sees of the Red Square and Kremlin. I had been looking forward to the vast expanse of the famous square, but the space was totally **messed up**³ with **bleachers**⁴ and **fences**⁵. The reason? An upcoming international festival of military bands. The only thing sweetening it up was a photo of a Scottish **piper**⁶ on one of the promo posters – a guy in kilt on the background of Lenin’s mausoleum is not a sight you see every day. Almost as weird as seeing the **medieval**⁷ Kremlin towers topped by red stars.

To escape the rain, I went down to the Moscow metro as I had been told that some of the stations looked more like palaces than public transport. Indeed they do, with elaborate decorations, paintings and **chandeliers**⁸. And maybe even more unbelievable are the statues – a stony-faced workman with a hammer, a lady with a **pneumatic drill**⁹, a **border guard**¹⁰ with his dog and gun (the dog’s nose all shiny as people



Shane MacGowan singing – or shouting – his heart out in Moscow

keep touching it for good luck). A museum of communism in practice.

Similarly unreal is the 1990s monument to Peter the Great, rising almost 100 metres from the waters of the Moskva River. It is something like a monstrous tower **patched together**¹¹ from parts of ships, with Peter standing

triumphantly on the top. Rumour has it that the sculptor first designed a monument to Christopher Columbus and tried to sell it to the US. After several cities refused his project, he simply changed the statue’s head to look like the Russian **tsar**¹² and had it built in Moscow. A truly effective recycling.

An armed proletarian guarding the Moscow metro



Russian tsar... or the discoverer of America?



Tired by sightseeing, I **popped in**¹³ to a fast food restaurant for dinner. To my pleasant surprise, the menu included English translations. Well, translations... 'Soft drinks'¹⁴ announced one page and went on to list an impressive selection of vodka. Everything is possible in Russia – or some restaurants badly need better translators.

After the dinner, I headed to a big club, curiously named Milk, where the Pogues were supposed to play. In the 1980s, the band had a reputation as wild punks, shocking people with their name (a shortened form of Pogue Mahone, which means 'kiss my bottom' in Irish Gaelic) as well as their wild gigs. They were described as playing at the speed of 900 miles per hour, and traditionalists **gaped**¹⁵ at the way they mixed traditional Irish music with punk and rock. Even now, almost 30 years into their career, you cannot call their concerts **tame**¹⁶.

When photographers were **milling about**¹⁷ under the stage, the band's frontman Shane MacGowan enjoyed himself by **splashing**¹⁸

The band was described as playing at the speed of 900 miles per hour

a drink from his glass in the direction of the nearest cameras. (Mine managed to escape the showers.) The accordionist was running around the stage with his heavy accordion, jumping and landing on his knees as if trying to break his bones. The whistle player amused the audience with his trademark percussion instrument –



The Pogues

The Pogues were formed in 1982 around the singer-songwriter Shane MacGowan, an Irishman living in London. Comprising both Irish and British musicians, the band mixed various influences – traditional Irish folk, punk, rock and others. Their wild gigs became legendary, and their raw energy, catchy melodies and evocative lyrics, both rebellious and poetic, earned the Pogues a cult status. They toured intensively and recorded several critically acclaimed albums. The pressure from constant touring as well as MacGowan's problems with drinking resulted in his leaving the Pogues in 1991, and the band split up a few years later. Nevertheless, since their reunion in 2001, the Pogues have been playing to sold-out venues again. Their music style has influenced many other groups, often labelled as 'Celtic punk', such as Dropkick Murphys or Flogging Molly. *Website: www.pogues.com*

banging his head with a metal **tray**¹⁹. An hour and a half of great music and fun.

When the show was over, I returned to my hostel. Before going to bed, my friend went to pop in to the hostel's shared bathroom, but was back within a few seconds: "Will you believe me if I tell you there's a guy sleeping with his head in the **sink**²⁰?" I went to take a look. On a table next to the sink, a young guy was lying, naked except for black **briefs**²¹, his head inside the sink. But he didn't look like a victim of a crime – he seemed to be quite peacefully resting. Some people obviously get **overwhelmed**²² by the joys Moscow.

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VOCABULARY

- ¹ **irresistible** [ɪrɪ'zɪstɪb(ə)] – neodolatelný
² **shrouded** – zahalený
³ **messed up** – zaneřáděný
⁴ **bleachers** ['bli:tʃəz] – tribuny, sedačky
⁵ **fence** [fɛns] – plot

- ⁶ **piper** ['paɪpə] – dudák
⁷ **medieval** [mɛdɪ'ɪ:v(ə)] – středověký
⁸ **chandelier** [ʃændə'liə] – lustr
⁹ **pneumatic drill** [nju:'mætɪk] – sbíječka
¹⁰ **border guard** – pohraničník
¹¹ **patched together** [pætʃtʃt] – poslepovaný
¹² **tsar** [zɑ:, tsɑ:] – car

- ¹³ **to pop in** – zaskočit někam
¹⁴ **soft drinks** – nealkoholické nápoje
¹⁵ **to gape** [geɪp] – zírat
¹⁶ **tame** [teɪm] – krotký
¹⁷ **to mill about** – hemžít se

- ¹⁸ **to splash** [splæʃ] – cákat, šplíchat
¹⁹ **tray** [treɪ] – táč
²⁰ **sink** – umyvadlo
²¹ **briefs** ['brɪ:fz] – slipy
²² **overwhelmed** [əʊvə'welmd] – přemožený