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Laser Beam in My Dream

by [Dean Nelson](#) | January 26, 2017

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Courtesy Dean Nelson



It had been forty years since I had seen the Ozark Mountain Daredevils play. When I was in college in Kansas City in the early 1970s, my girlfriend and I would go to their shows at a converted roller-skating rink called Cowtown Ballroom.

My girlfriend and I got married, we moved to California, had kids who then grew up and moved away—one to Colorado, and the other to Columbia. Over the years, they heard me talk about the Cowtown shows with the Daredevils, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Brewer & Shipley, and a comedian no one had heard of who opened one night with an arrow through his head. The comedian's name was Steve Martin.

The song "If You Wanna Get To Heaven, You Gotta Raise A Little Hell" was a kind of anthem for me at the small, fundamentalist college I attended.

In the summer of 2015, my wife asked me if there was any band I wish I could see again. My mind ran through the groups I've seen over the years—The Who; Queen; U-2; Arlo Guthrie; Trans-Siberian Orchestra; The Eagles; Crosby, Stills & Nash; Bob Dylan; Mavis Staples; Green Day; Santana; Brian Setzer; Asleep at the Wheel; Three Dog Night (my first rock concert!); Eric Clapton; The Fabulous Thunderbirds; and dozens more. I finally said, "If I heard that the Ozark Mountain Daredevils were playing, I would go there in a heartbeat."

She did a little digging online and found the annual November show at Wildwood Springs Lodge in Steelville. For Christmas that year, she gave me Mike Granda's book about the band, *It Shined: The Saga of the Ozark Mountain Daredevils*, along with tickets and reservations at Wildwood. I read the excellent book over Christmas break and counted the days until the show.

"Your story is the same story as about 90 percent of the people who come to the show," says Bob Bell, who owns the lodge, runs other business ventures in Steelville, and directs the fall music series. "Hearing the Daredevils at the lodge has a deep meaning for the people who attend. It's like a pilgrimage to them."

My wife and I flew to St. Louis, rented a car, and drove to Steelville (population 1,600).

I hate to descend to the cliché, but when the show started it really did feel like forty years disappeared. I remembered lyrics to most of the songs and remembered how I felt when I first heard them in 1972. I was taken by the quality of the music, the variety of the styles, the joy the band portrayed, the spiritual depth of some of their lyrics, and the impact on the crowd. We were all True Believers.

It's unclear whether the band will play at Wildwood in 2017. Steve Cash has had some heart trouble. Just three weeks before the show last November, he had a heart valve replaced.

Even if that's the last time I see them play, I'll always be grateful for the chance to see them again. It gave me the opportunity to feel what I felt like as a college kid, remembering why this band was a better concert experience than all of the others.

Filled with joy and gratitude at the end of the show, I realized that I had just lived out one of the lines from their song, *It'll Shine When It Shines*.

After all these years, I was just a good old boy who'd learned to wait.

Dean Nelson, who did his graduate work at Mizzou's School of Journalism, is the founder and director of the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego.

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