

Irish eyes were crying

39th annual Worst Irish Tenor contest lives up to its name

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What happened to Irish music Wednesday night was just plain wrong.

At Mancini's Char House on West Seventh Street in St. Paul, in front of scores of people, amateur crooners butchered the folk songs of the Emerald Isle.

Melody? Tone? Pitch?

Forget it. They were all given a beating that only an Irish cop could deliver.

And the cretins lining the bar loved it.

It was a competition for one of St. Paul's most dubious crowns — The Worst Irish Tenor — in a 39-year-old spoof that has become a pre-St. Patrick's Day tradition. For a trophy or a six-pack of Guinness and the misguided admi-

ration of a tone-deaf crowd, more than a dozen compete each year.

"It's just the frivolity of it — people giggling and laughing as they put themselves through mockery of their singing," said Glen Olson, the emcee and one of the contest's founders.

Yes, Olson. The fact that he's

IRISH CONTEST, 10A >



PIONEER PRESS: BRANDI JADE THOMAS

Ivy "Grandma Flash" Dickerson competes Wednesday to be the Worst Irish Tenor at Mancini's Char House and Lounge in St. Paul, with event co-founder Glen Olson along for the ride.



PIONEER PRESS: BRANDI JADE THOMAS

Mancini's might be an unlikely place to find good Irish music. Good thing patrons were looking for just the opposite at the 39-year-old pre-St. Patrick's Day event.

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a retired banker of Norwegian descent — and that the other founders have the names Perizo and Farmer — might say something about the intent of the contest.

This year's winner was Herb Robertson, a retired 3M machinist from Minneapolis, who performed his rendition of "Seven Nights of a Drunken Irishman." It the 68-year-old's first year competing.

The contest's focus has been on underachievers.

"It's just the frivolity of it — people giggling and laughing as they put themselves through mockery of their singing."

Emcee Glen Olson

In past years, they've been yanked off stage with a curved cane, vaudeville-style, for being *too good*.

"They have the mistaken thought that we're looking for someone with talent," said no-talent judge and Pioneer Press

columnist Don Boxmeyer.

The trick, however, is not to be *too bad*.

"You can tell when they try to be bad," he said. "There's sort of a natural screech to a person. If someone really forces a screech ... their voice sounds kind of fakey."

That wasn't the case for Ivy Dickerson, of St. Paul, also known as "Grandma Flash."

When she was done strangling the classic "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling," one of the band members said, "OK, put her back in her cage."

There are six judges involved in the contest as well as the backing band, Paddy Gallivan and the Gallivanter's.