If you saw his name show up in the obituaries the other day it didn’t mean much, but if John McElrath had slipped into a pastel colored cashmere sweater and played a few riffs of “Double Shot Of My Baby’s Love” on a Fafisha organ you might remember him and the worst hangover you ever had.

McElrath was the last founding member of *The Swingin’* *Medallions*, a garage rock band composed of classmates who paid their way through Lander College by making music. They were one-hit wonders in the late 1960s — but what a hit it was, for at frat parties down South their signature song endures as a weekend anthem.

Years ago, the late *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* columnist Lewis Grizzard described this iconic party band in his own inimitable style:

*“Even today, when I hear the Swingin’ Medallions sing ‘Double Shot of My Baby’s Love,’ it makes me want to stand outside in the hot sun with a milkshake cup fuåll of beer in one hand and a slightly drenched 19-year-old coed in the other.”*

McElrath was absent from the stage for several years suffering from Parkinson’s Disease, but he remained the soul of a band that even with frequent personnel changes never left the road and never stopped making people get up and dance.

He died at home on the ninth of June in Greenwood, S.C. It was a Saturday, and the following night, in his honor, the latest incarnation of the group played in Sandy Springs, Ga. Hearts broken, they somehow managed to get through the song everyone came to hear.

That he was 77 years old when he died is sobering for a generation of partygoers who remember the wailing brass, matching outfits, saddle oxfords and signature moves that they used even when it was a reunion concert and the musicians were collecting Social Security.

The band organized in 1962, rehearsing at McElrath’s parent’s home in Greenwood. They needed extra money for school, and playing weekend gigs was more fun than pumping gas or sacking groceries. Their music was steeped in R&B. Some people referred to it as Beach Music, made popular around Myrtle Beach.

It was an eight-piece army of rockers built around that frolicking horn section. They didn’t need a bass player for McElrath filled in the bass line on the organ. Many bands of that era used a Vox or a Hammond B3 but McElrath preferred the sound of a Fafisha, a compact instrument from Italy. Its manufacturer originally made accordions.

Before long, The Medallions — as they were known in the beginning — were playing all over the region, becoming a fixture at fraternity parties at the University of Georgia and parties around Atlanta. They were on campus so often that it was assumed they were the house band for a frat house in Athens.

They were making good money, having fun and meeting lots of girls but they still stayed in school knowing if they dropped out of college Uncle Sam and his draft boards would become their biggest fans.

The band played a homecoming gig at Georgia State University in Atlanta about this time and there I was introduced to the group and to “Double Shot of My Baby’s Love.” I might have heard it before on an AM radio station, but radio didn’t do justice to the band or the song.

When the Swingin’ Medallions played it live, you had to dance. You had no choice. You joined arms with your friends in front of the stage and sang along whether you could sing or not. The experience was hypnotic. You never wanted the song to end and, really, it never did.

Over the years, I heard them at various venues: on the beach at Callaway Gardens, at Al’s Who on Buena Vista Road, at a Georgia-Auburn Beach Party one November and in a concert at the Columbus Convention and Trade Center. Whenever I heard them I was taken back to that night when I was young.

I was not the only one caught up in that moment. That’s why The Swingin’ Medallions have been mainstays on that same Southern party circuit. Musicians came and went in a revolving door, including the founder’s two sons.

Until now, I thought Double Shot was an original song with music and lyrics written by members of the band. Now I find it was written in the last 1940s by South Carolina musicians Don Smith and Cyril Vetter and was first recorded by a regional band known as Dick Heller and the Holidays. McElrath and friends kept hearing the song and adapted it to fit their style.

The Swingin’ Medallions version made it to No. 17 on the charts in 1966, sending the band on its only national tour. But insiders will tell you that the original version recorded in producer Bill Lowery’s studio in Atlanta better delivers the energy of a live performance.

Double Shot is included on a Hit Parade of recordings that became background music of a certain generation. Here’s a sample of that long list of favorites:

The Tams brought us “Be Young, Be Foolish Be Happy” and “What Kind of Fool Do You Think I Am?”

Maurice Williams & the Zodiacs implored us to “Stay.”

And, of course, there was The Kingsmen, singing the unknown lyrics of “Louie, Louie.”

South Carolina author Pat Conroy even wrote a novel in 2009 called “Beach Music,” in which his protagonist, Jack McCall, flees the south with his daughter and tries to reintroduce her to the region through its music.

Those old musicians are dying off but their music still grips another era. When we hear it, we smile and, without thinking, we start to sing. We feel good again. We feel young.

That was the gift and legacy of John McElrath, a name we never really got to know. He left us with a band that has never quit gigging and a song that never stops rocking.

Thanks, John — and will you sing it one more time.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/YDmvX8Vd4rM" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" allowfullscreen></iframe>