

HICKEY

POINTING out she's lived on the same London street all her life – only moving from number 31 to 30 – Dame Emma Thompson, pictured, believes regularly mixing with local residents has kept her feet on the ground during decades of success.



“You can't suddenly turn into some monstrous egotist, can you?” says the Oscar-winning actress, 61. “Living on the same street was a help. Up the road is a garage run by a Greek Cypriot man. Whenever I did anything in the papers that he disapproved of, he'd follow me down the street and say, ‘What do you do?...you're a very stupid girl!’”

VOICE of golf, Peter Alliss, who has died aged 89, enjoyed observing competitive sporting clashes between celebrity pals on the fairways.
Alliss noted Sir Bruce Forsyth's golfing battles with Sir Sean Connery could turn particularly fiery...

HAVING achieved global stardom in the 1970s courtesy of his role as mafia boss Michael Corleone in the first two Godfather films, Al Pacino is heartened to see the panned third and final movie – originally released in 1990 – now getting a warmer critical reception.
Re-released this week in much altered form after being re-edited by director Francis Ford Coppola, 80-year-old Al enthuses: “I breathed a sigh of relief because I knew it was better.”

COLLABORATING with booming thespian Brian Blessed on his new Christmas album for a recording of Silent Night, Aled Jones mischievously claims the veteran actor wasn't prepared to turn his trademark volume down.
“We went to record at Brian's house and someone said, ‘Brian, do you think you should maybe use less voice for Silent Night?’” Aled recalls on ITV's This Morning. Unimpressed Brian bellowed: “Rubbish!”

SHE may be the proud co-owner of the Dollywood amusement park in her native Tennessee, but Dolly Parton, pictured, rules out ever going on a roller coaster. Having made no secret of the fact her glamorous looks owe more than a little to artificial enhancement down the years, Dolly, 74, insists: “I've too much to lose...like my hair, my boobs might fall out.”



FORTY years after the world was gripped by the ‘Who Shot JR?’ mystery, Dallas star Patrick Duffy, who memorably played JR's heart-throb brother Bobby, reflects on current acting roles. ‘I used to be on the receiving end of the love,’ says Patrick, 71. ‘Now I'm the grandpa.’

FRISKY socialite and author Kathy Lette, 62, who split from lawyer husband Geoffrey Robertson in 2017, now warns: “After a year of social distancing and lockdowns, if you hear of the police arresting a woman who refuses to get off Santa's lap, I'll admit to you now, it's going to be me.”
Surely Santa will be delighted?

The real-life fairytale that saved Pogues star Shane

By Alex Lloyd

... and how his ever popular Christmas hit was inspired by a roller coaster 34-year love story

THE MOST-PLAYED Christmas song of the 21st century is Fairytale of New York and its poignant lyrics are familiar to all who sing along to it every December. But few know the tragic parallels between the warring couple portrayed in the song by Shane MacGowan and the late Kirsty MacColl and The Pogues' frontman's turbulent private life.

With his drunken drawl, knack for a poetic lyric and face that has seen more than its fair share of life, MacGowan is one of the music business's most compelling and controversial characters.

And now his life story is being told in a documentary called Crock of Gold, which charts his formative years in a dysfunctional, God-fearing family in Tipperary – where he was fed stout like milk – through to being anointed the saviour of Irish music, with spells in mental hospitals and rehab.

The film, which contains colourful interviews with the notoriously contrary star plus an assorted collection of characters from his sister to former Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, has been directed by Julien Temple, who first met Shane in his punk days. And one of the producers is Shane's fairly new wife, but long-suffering partner and muse, Victoria Mary Clarke.

The Irish-born couple met in a London pub when she was 16 and he was 24, and began dating four years later, just as The Pogues were taking off.



WORTH THE WAIT: Victoria and MacGowan finally married in 2018

against the England he was forced to call home from the age of six; she was an Anglophile from a hippy family who had no interest in traditional Irish music or politics.

But Victoria found herself drawn to this “compelling and charismatic” character with an “arrogance” who was so different to anyone else she knew.

The resulting 34-year love affair has inspired many of the hellraising rocker's songs, as Victoria stood by him through drug binges, alcohol addiction, dalliances with other women, and more recently, a shattered pelvis that has left him in a wheelchair.

Her tales of coming home to find him bloody-mouthed and eating a Beach Boys record while out of his head on drugs make the sparring duo in Fairytale of New York seem tame by comparison.

“When I listen to it, all of that argument between the couple is entirely us,” says Victoria, 54, a journalist, artist and life coach.

“I used to see us like them – a man and a woman who are hating each other and loving each other at the same time, unable to be apart. We all have

that thing of, ‘I could have been someone. Well so could anyone. You took my dreams from me, when I first found you’.

“I think the song is really magical because it has a life of its own and it is very universal.”

What's clear is that the song's most tender line – “Can't make it all alone, I've built my dreams around you” – were also written by MacGowan about Victoria, even though it took her decades to understand how much he loved and needed her.

“I was working in the Sock Shop when we first dated, which was not my dream job. I'd be at home while he would tour,” she says.

“He asked me to quit and go with him, so I thought, why not? And for years and years, I was always travelling the world and partying.”

BUT as MacGowan's star ascended, with hit albums Rum Sodomy & the Lash and If I Should Fall From Grace With God, Victoria gradually began to feel eclipsed and worthless.

She says: “My life became secondary to his. No one was interested in me at all. They just thought I was the girlfriend who carries stuff and would physically push me aside to get to him.”

“I felt very inadequate because we met a lot of people who were at the top of their game, like David Bowie, Robert de Niro and Jude Law. I was just starting out writing for newspapers, but I hadn't achieved any level of success.”

“I felt I wasn't good enough, because I wasn't as good as these people. I never, ever measured up. That was tough, because Shane measured up, but he wasn't interested in fame. He was only motivated by the music and sharing it with a wider audience.”

Even being the protagonist in her lauded lover's songs like A Rainy Night In Soho did not make Victoria feel better about herself and their relationship.

“When he wrote about me, I had no control over what he said,” she explains. “I also did all of the worrying. I would have tried to



TRICKY: Shane and Victoria's relationship inspired song lyrics



FESTIVE HIT: Shane with Kirsty MacColl, and, right, as a boy



stop him behaving the way he did to make the both of us safer but he just wasn't going to go that way.

“He had a number of accidents and it was a real source of annoyance for me, because I felt he wasn't taking me into account, just doing his own thing regardless.”

Desperate to find a purpose, Victoria started to meditate on the tour bus, read self-help books and even called in tarot readers.

Meanwhile MacGowan's erratic behaviour – which he claimed was a result of playing 363 gigs in one year – saw him kicked out of The Pogues in 1991 and join a new band called The Popes.

Their lives had spiralled so out of control that by 2000 they both ended up in the Priory – MacGowan

for his addictions and Victoria for depression.

Her route out of the darkness was to leave him and, she says, what saved her was seeking spiritual guidance. She believes she has managed to tap into a force she feels are angels and she has written a book on the subject. Victoria took up painting them and has her own range of silk scarves featuring their images, earning famous fans like Paul Simon, Nick Cave and Imelda May.

“I didn't like the look of my future, it looked very bleak. I had to make a change,” she says. “Luckily the angels made it easy for me. Hopelessness was no longer my default setting.

“Becoming empowered took me a really long time, maybe longer than most people. But when it happened, I realised that was what had been missing.”

After finally stepping out of MacGowan's shadow, Victoria felt able to restart their rela-



HELLRAISER: Shane's life was dominated by drink and drugs

tions. Yet for someone so central to his story, Victoria and their love affair are but a footnote in the documentary.

MacGowan's Irish heritage, mental health issues and musical contribution take centre stage, while Victoria was happy to step into the role of interviewer, drawing out anecdotes from the soulmate who still calls her ‘beautiful’ every day.

“I love it when his star shines, I think it is really good for him, especially now,” she says.

“After his accident things slowed down for him, creatively too. He didn't write as much, he got really winded by it. And his mum died – that hit him really hard. He needed a boost and I didn't.”

WITH Crock of Gold winning the special jury prize at the San Sebastian Film Festival in September and Fairytale of New York back in the UK Top 30 for the 16th consecutive year, the couple have plenty to celebrate this Christmas – also MacGowan's birthday.

As he says at the start of the film: “I'm sure it's because I was born on Christmas Day that I was born lucky. I thank Christ for that.” He should no doubt thank his very own guardian angel too.

● *Crock of Gold: A Few Rounds With Shane MacGowan is in cinemas now and can be viewed on-demand or on DVD. Victoria's range of angel scarves and accessories are available at victoriarmaryclarkeangels.com*