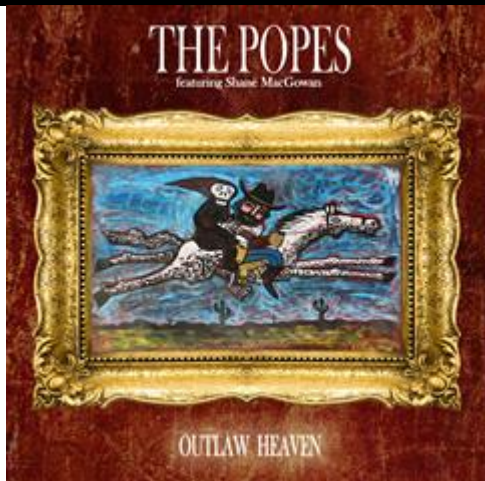


## THE POPES - "OUTLAW HEAVEN"



"Shane MacGowan initially started the Popes in 1994 when The Pogues could no longer tolerate his erratic behaviour caused by his recreational pursuits, but MacGowan's work ethic was never particularly focused, and though he appears on three particular tracks here (strictly in the background), the promotion of Paul McGuinness to frontman, suggests they do not need him. McGuinness is a man with Demons of his own (Drink, Drugs, Prison) and his voice, like Tom Waits in a particularly bad mood, is compelling: the opening 'Black is the Colour' is a vigourously ominous Sea Shanty, while much else rouses like only the very best of Irish Folk

can..." Nick Duerden - Q Review.



'...Bands who try to sell you their "outlaw" credentials usually turn out to be trust-fund poseurs, but Popes mainman Paul McGuinness drew on his four-month spell in Pentonville prison to write a batch of songs dripping with rage and exploding with the need to be heard. It's a chaotic, red-blooded mix of punk, rockabilly, Celtic and country, surging to ferocious peaks in Let The Bells Ring Out or the tormented Crucified, or laying back to haunting effect in Angels Are Coming or Outlaw Heaven itself...' [Adam Sweetings - Uncut.](#)



THE GUARDIAN- Our music team pick the songs or albums, old or new, they just can't turn off;

### THE POPES

#### ***Angels Are Coming***

They are best known as Shane MacGowan's other band (now fronted by the equally gravel-voiced Paul "Mad Dog" McGuinness), and this strings-led cut from The Popes' excellent Outlaw Heaven album is what The Waterboys would have sounded like had Mike Scott sipped from the streams of whiskey. A true rough diamond. *Dave Simpson - The Guardian*



"You'd imagine that surely Shane MacGowan's brains have melted by now - but no! Stick the mad bastard in The Popes and watch the fireworks start flying again. McGowan is ready to meet his maker on 'Outlaw Heaven', a lusty barnstormer that toasts the great dead rebel-poets. Elsewhere, he lustily advises us "Don't let the bastards grind you down!" on 'Bastards'. When Shane's not about, the LP is guided by the cozy and wise burr of Paul McGuinness. This isn't just an Irish party album with fire in its belly, it's also the most warm, celebratory and downright mortal LP you're likely to hear in 2009. 8/10".... [Rick Rawlins - Clash Magazine.](#)



*Shane's old charges send love from HMP Pentonville*

The Popes, the band Shane MacGowan assembled in the early '90s after walking The Pogues' plank, would always suffer by comparison to their near-namesakes and fellow ex-pats, but comparisons are misguided. Now led by Paul 'Mad Dog' McGuinness and with a lineup bearing little resemblance to its original incarnation, theirs isn't a potty-mouthed take on Irish traditionalism - *Outlaw Heaven* is a rough, tough rock record. Occasionally the meaty sound offers up a little gristle - McGuinness's strident voice isn't the best vehicle for nuance and his lyrics don't quite offer the romance and poetry of MacGowan's pen - but there's no lack of fire and conviction here. After all, these are songs the chief Pope wrote while doing a stretch in HMP Pentonville ("the mother of all creativity", McGuinness notes of his alma matter). Other plusses include the reappearance of MacGowan on three numbers and the title track, which carries the distinction of being the first song to name-check all of these names and more - Bobby Sands, Robert Johnson, James Joyce, John Dillinger, and "Lord Fucking Nelson". NIGE TASSELL THE WORD



## JAILHOUSE ROCK

[Elaine Sheridan \( from 'The Irish Post' \)](#) talks to The Popes' Paul McGuinness on how a spell behind bars inspired him to clean up his act and led to new album, *Outlaw Heaven*....

The Popes are back with a brand new album and music maestro Shane MacGowan features on three of the tracks.

The long-awaited and highly-anticipated *Outlaw Heaven* features some of their most exciting and credible tracks to date with a real hint of rough and raw emotion. Also on the guest list is Shane's fellow Pogue, Spider Stacey, who adds his own twist to the title track *Outlaw Heaven*.

This stonking new offering was inspired by the time lead singer Paul 'Mad Dog' McGuinness spent recently on remand in Pentonville prison for perverting the course of justice. Also battling with drink and drugs Paul says his experience on the inside not only made him a better person but

helped him to explore and expand his lyrical talents.

The 50-something-year-old said: "I hated being stuck in a cockroach, mice-infested 8x6ft cell for 23 hours a day, but once I got over the bad food and cramped conditions I began to realise it was the best thing to happen to me in a long time.

"I imagined I was in a luxury hotel getting the rest, detox and seclusion I needed to sort my life out. I also met some of the kindest, straightest, upfront people ever, and that was only the murderers!

"Prison is however the mother of creativity and before you could say Outlaw Heaven I was off writing and singing songs to my cellmate. I didn't have a guitar so I wrote the lyrics down on three pieces of paper I was allowed every fortnight, the music I composed in my head. If I was able to get to church on Sunday I was able to borrow the priest's guitar. Thank God for the folk Mass - I never thought I'd say that!"

After the London Irishman was released from prison and following the sad death of banjo god Tommy McManaman at the end of 2006, he reformed The Popes with a new and exciting line-up in the shape of drummer Will Morrison, guitarist and producer Charlie Hoskyns, Laurie Norwood on bass, Fiachra Shanks on banjo and Ben Gunnery on fiddle. The end result is this fine offering from a bunch of tenacious and talented artists.

Paul says: "There is an Irishness about the songs on this new album as opposed to it being Irish music. The feel is more Thin Lizzy-Van Morrison than it is Shane MacGowan or The Pogues.

"When we began this project I took a bunch of half-written songs to Will and Charlie and it came together slowly but surely."

Reflecting on the chain of events that led to the eventual release of this long awaited album, Paul added: "It's been three years since I walked down the Caledonian Road with a plastic bag full of Her Majesty's notepaper containing the ideas and half-written songs for Outlaw Heaven and with some amazing help and support along the way I've got a band to die for, music I care for and an album hopefully people will pay for."



## **THE POPES FEATURING SHANE MacGOWAN**

### **Outlaw Heaven \*\*\***

Those waiting the annual Pogues live outings to produce a new album may be in for a long one. Meanwhile, tin whistling co-vocalist Spider Stacy and his ole pal, the indestructible Shane MacGowan, assist Paul McGuinness' crew on an album which is a rowdy blend of crude metal and broken-bottle folk rock.

Gavin Martin The Daily Mirror May 8th 2009



Is it really nine years since *Holloway Boulevard*? Apparently so and the intervening years have seen the death of Tommy McManamon, and Paul (Mad Dog) McGuinness spending a few months as guest of Her Majesty. Emerging from those experiences, *Outlaw Heaven* is big and loud but not in a last-one-in-the-bar's-a-wuss style. You might hesitate to call it thoughtful but it's close. The opening track is 'Black Is The Colour' and you can forget Donovan and folky girls with long blonde hair; this is a McGuinness original and it starts with the biggest crashing chords you'll hear this side of Metallica just so you're in no doubt. That's followed by 'Let The Bells Ring Out' and 'Angels Are Coming', two songs with the anthemic qualities of great rock music. Fiachra Shanks and Ben Gunnery provide banjo, mandolin and fiddle to contrast with the wild electric guitars of McGuinness and Charlie Hoskyns. Old mates Shane MacGowan and Spider Stacy guest on the title track and Shane appears on three more numbers, taking the lead on the closing 'Loneliness Of A Long Distance Drinker'. There's pain and hope on this album and some fine music.

Dai Jeffries - Rock n Reel magazine.



## Top of the Popes

London-Irish Celtic noise fiends The Popes are back with a new album (released March 11th) and a European tour – and it's about time. By Shelley Marsden - 28/04/09

The ferocious *Outlaw Heaven*, which features ex-member Shane MacGowan on three tracks, is a storming showcase of their exciting new material – and the music may be Irish, but it's decidedly more Thin Lizzy than The Dubliners! Shane MacGowan formed The Popes to record his album 'The Snake' in 1994 after leaving The Pogues, with McGuinness in the original line-up.

Two hit singles, 'Are You Looking At Me' and 'Holloway Boulevard' led to the band's signing to Snapper Records, and an acclaimed debut album 'Holloway Boulevard' (which was accompanied by an impressive six venue musical pub crawl along the Holloway Road). The Popes recorded another live album in New York, *Across the Broad Atlantic*, before McGuinness sat down to write songs for the new album. And as he explains, it wasn't all plain-sailing...

### Can you describe your sound in one sentence?

Er, if I could do that, I'd give up music and become a journalist! It's rock music with lots of Celtic influence weaving through it. From Van 'The Man', Thin Lizzy, and even touches of The Pogues.

### **It's been a while since you released anything. Why?**

I needed to do some serious attitude adjustment and it took a considerable time. The last album we put out was 'Release The Beast', and since that time a lot of stuff has happened. Tom McManamon, one of the founder members sadly passed away, I took a few years out to kick a heroin habit amongst other things. I knew I wanted to do something new and fresh and it took a while to meet the right people who I could collaborate with. To find people who had the right personalities to fuel the chemistry took some time. If I'd known it would have taken so long I'm not sure I would have started the project, but now I'm glad I did.

***For the full interview, buy this week's Irish World at your local newsagents, or pick up a copy [HERE](#) for only 50p!***

The Popes play The Borderline, Manette St, London, Tel: 020 7734 2095 on May 14th. Tickets available from [www.ticketweb.co.uk](http://www.ticketweb.co.uk). The new album 'Outlaw Heaven' is out May 11th. Check out [www.thepopes.uk.com](http://www.thepopes.uk.com).



THE POPES FEATURING SHANE MacGOWAN

### **Blokey from chokey cooks up storm**

Paul McGuinness drew on his four month spell in Pentonville prison to write a batch of songs dripping with rage and exploding with the need to be heard. It's a chaotic, red-blooded mix of punk, rockabilly, Celtic and country, surging to ferocious peaks in 'Let The Bells Ring Out' or the tormented 'Crucified', or 'Outlaw Heaven' (the latter featuring Shane MacGowan). MacGowan also excels in 'Bastards', but then succumbs to his own myth in 'Loneliness Of A Long Distance Drinker'. **ADAM SWEETING - UNCUT Magazine**

## **The Popes interview for new album Outlaw Heaven**

**Paul 'Mad Dog' McGuinness talks about Outlaw Heaven, the second studio album by Shane MacGowan's former backing band The Popes.**



Review: Adam Sweeting

Stirring and cathartic collection of songs: The Popes Photo: MARTIN POPE

Chaos has surrounded The Popes, ever since Shane MacGowan created them as his backing band in 1994 after he'd been thrown out of The Pogues for "unprofessional" behaviour. They made a couple of studio albums with MacGowan in the Nineties before the singer wandered off into drink-sodden limbo. The Shane-less Popes then scored a critical triumph with their 2000 debut album, *Holloway Boulevard*, but since then fans have had only a live album and the reissue, *Release The Beast*, to sustain them.

But at last a second studio album is wrapped and ready to go. *Outlaw Heaven* is a stirring and cathartic collection of songs which run the gamut from punk to country, delivered by a new band assembled by original Pope-in-chief Paul "Mad Dog" McGuinness. The disc resonates with echoes of The Clash, Bo Diddley and a whole history of Irish balladry, but thanks to the influence of new collaborators Charlie Hoskyns and Will Morrison, there's a punchy experimental edge to it too.

Raw, for instance, is a ferocious bellow of rage lifted by a throbbing electronic groove, while McGuinness' lurid tale of self-martyrdom in *Crucified* is buttressed by a sonic cathedral of crunching powerchords, gospel voices and horns. The title track's exuberant singalong is led by Shane MacGowan himself, making one of three guest appearances on the album.

"I've never seen Shane in better shape or more enthusiastic," reports McGuinness, in a Dublin accent thick enough to steamroller tarmac. "I always had a great time with Shane, but this time it's been great to meet some very fine new musicians and work with a different kind of person. "

HM Prison Pentonville deserves a generous sleeve credit, because it was here that McGuinness began writing the *Outlaw Blues* songs. He spent four and a half months on remand for perverting the course of justice, locked in an 8ft by 6ft cell. He'd been a heroin addict for more than decade, topping up with cocaine and alcohol on the side, and on top of everything else had been struggling with writer's block.

"You were locked up for 23 hours a day, and if it was a good day you might get outside for half an hour," McGuinness recalls. "I had a serious drug habit when I went into Pentonville, and I went through a whole detox in there, so I have to thank Her Majesty for the holiday and for the inspiration. They talk about [bluesman] Robert Johnson doing a deal with the devil - I've done a deal with God. I got myself together and cleaned myself up a little bit."

Paradoxically, the primitive conditions in prison acted as a spur. He was only allowed three pieces of writing paper per fortnight, so he developed the habit of preserving his lyrics in tiny handwriting. The only way he could get access to a guitar was to attend the Sunday folk-mass and borrow one from the priest.

"I'd work the tunes out in my head, then I'd turn up early for mass, grab the priest's guitar and try out the ideas. He was very annoyed because I could play better than him, but it was nice of him to lend me his guitar.

I wouldn't recommend prison to anyone, but I knew it was the right place for me and that realisation was a big thing."

McGuinness was eventually acquitted of all charges, but found surviving drug-free outside prison so terrifying that "as soon as I got out the first thing I did was run to a dealer". He learned to lean on valium and methadone instead of the harder stuff, and first teamed up with Hoskins and Morrison, musical partners for 15 years, at a St Patrick's Day gig organised by friends ("when we first met Paul he was off his face, he literally couldn't stand up," Hoskins remembers). Undeterred, they set about recording an album at Hoskyns' studio in East Dulwich, gradually knocking McGuinness' skeletal songs into shape while recruiting new bandmembers (bassist Laurie Norwood, fiddler Ben Gunnery, Fiachra Shanks on banjo and mandolin).

"We experimented with the songs, which is why it took a bit of time," says Morrison. "Charlie's and my influence isn't Irish at all -we don't understand it. It all sounds the same to us! What we brought to the sound was more of a contemporary twist, but still retaining the Irishness. Every song has its own environment, but they all hang together next to each other."

The next step is taking the band on tour, which McGuinness views with excitement mixed with apprehension.

"I love playing live most of all, but it used to be back to the dressing room and snorting lines off mirrors and all of that. What am I gonna do now?

It's something I'm still trying to learn. I'm not at the finish line yet."

DAILY TELEGRAPH 2ND JUNE 2009



# The Popes Featuring Shane MacGowan - Outlaw Heaven

MacGowan's name on the sleeve may mislead some fans, as this is not the long-awaited new project The Pogues' frontman is rumoured to be unveiling at some point this year. Instead, it's an offering by his other old band, on which Shane weighs in for just three songs, with less than satisfying results.

Guitarist and latterly lead singer Paul McGuinness has regrouped with different personnel from 2000's Holloway Boulevard and, while there are still strong Celtic motifs throughout, the dominant sound owes more to another group of Irish legends, Thin Lizzy. Songs such as the title track, Bastards and Loneliness Of A Long Distance Drinker (coincidentally the three featuring Shane's now near incomprehensible vocals) are inspired by MacGuinness's own battles with drink and drugs and a short spell in prison.

The banjo-led country of Back In Your Heart owes a debt to Van Morrison and provides welcome respite from the ramshackle noise of most of the album, which may well be better suited to a live setting. What MacGowan himself can deliver, supposedly in tandem with erstwhile Pogues bassist Cait O'Riordan, remains to be seen.

Shake The Tree / out July 13th

Reviewed by Terry Staunton

<http://www.recordcollectormag.com>