

The Other F-Word - A Queer Kirsty MacColl Fan's Perspective On Fairytale Of New York



T-Shirt I bought from Kirsty's memorial in 2005

I went to Kirsty MacColl's bench in Soho Square in October 2005 when I was 14 years old, along with my Dad who is also a fan. It was a meet up on Kirsty's birthday to honour her life, reflecting the lyrics from her song Soho Square 'one day I'll be waiting there an empty bench in Soho Square'. We stood around a bench dedicated to her and sang. Later at a pub with Kirsty's music playing in the background I sang along, a stranger commented 'They know all the words'. I did, it was my favourite album. I was by far the youngest person there, but despite hearing Kirsty's music years after it was released and after her death, her music spoke to me and shaped who I was growing up.

Kirsty is now mostly remembered for her collaboration with The Pogues on Fairytale of New York. Every year I hear her on repeat, in cars and shopping centres. I now have a tradition, where I try and run from the song or block it out, and play it on Christmas Eve at home, singing along with my Dad.

I am in a rare position of being under 30 (just), a dedicated Kirsty MacColl fan and an LGBTQ youth worker. This makes me feel particularly invested in a debate that has been cropping up around December for the last few years. Yes, the other F-word. Should Fairytale of New York be censored due to its use of the word 'faggot'? This is apparently more of an issue for the young (it's never been brought up in our youth groups), with Radio One opting to play an alternate version where Kirsty sings 'You're old and you're haggard'. I'm going to give you an answer, and I hope given my investment in the situation you will take it on board.

I don't care. All cultures have a long history of problematic art, and this is just an example of that. What I do care about to quote a tweet from [@harrisonbrock](#) that was endorsed by The Pogues 'Straight people being so angry and outraged at it's removal and literally fighting and arguing for the right to sing it bothers me deeply'. We can't act like the other F-word wasn't used as a slur for decades, or consider people who are offended by it to be unreasonable. You may or may not be offended by the word, but we need to have compassion and respect for people who are bothered by it. There is no denying that homophobia is still alive in our society, we are still [working in schools to stop 'gay' being used as an insult](#). So offense is a very reasonable reaction.

My fear is this song will be weaponised as censorship going too far, or an example of that meaningless phrase 'political correctness'. It is unkind to the LGBTQ community to make this song a controversial issue, portraying us like we are fragile or trying to control people's enjoyment of a song. I'm not asking for that, I'm asking for a respect and understanding of the history of homophobia in this country and support to eradicate it now.

We are in a year of picking sides, and showing which side we are on. Enjoying Fairytale of New York does not need to be one of these issues, and you can stop it becoming one by taking a strong stance against homophobia, no matter your view on the inclusion of the other F-word. Kirsty MacColl died at 41 years old, protecting her son from harm. She has large catalogue of music ranging from country to pop to samba. This year when you hear Fairytale of New York give a thought to Kirsty and all the people like me, whose lives she has touched.

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