

Featured Artist for January 2008

Kirsty MacColl

FVM34

Kirsty MacColl was born in England in 1959, and grew up surrounded by music. Her father was **Ewan MacColl**, the celebrated folk singer, and her mother, **Jean** was a choreographer.

She was best known for her country and pop songs with sharp and witty insights into contemporary British life. Once described by **U2**'s lead singer **Bono** as "the Noel Coward of her generation", her talent was also likened to "the wit of **Ray Davies** and the harmonic invention of the **Beach Boys**" by former **Smiths** guitarist **Johnny Marr**.

MacColl started her career young - by 16 her first song *They Don't Know* hit No 2 in the UK charts by being featured in the **Tracey Ullman** show of the time. Her rendition of *There's A Guy Works Down the Chip Shop Swears He's Elvis* made the Top 20 and she returned to the charts with a memorable version of **Billy Bragg**'s *A New England*. **Billy Bragg** now includes the two verses written especially for **Kirsty** in his own live performances of the song and performed it at her memorial concert. But her chart peak came in 1987 with her duet with **Pogues** singer **Shane MacGowan**. Their poignant rendition of *Fairytale of New York* is still a Christmas favourite and has reached the Top 10 on three separate occasions [plus, of course, 2007 as well, Valda]. **MacGowan**, who was in awe of her talent, once asked "Why is she not massively successful?"

She went on to record *Kite*, a critically acclaimed album which included the accomplished cover of the **Kinks**' song *Days*, which hit the Top 20. Perhaps because of these chart successes, she became known as a covers artist. This unjustly masked her ability as a unique songwriter and a sharp lyricist as best displayed on *Kite* in such songs as *Fifteen Minutes* and *Free World* and the 'chip shop' reminiscent *Don't Come The Cowboy with Me Sonny Jim!*

In March 2000, her last album *Tropical Brainstorm*, a Latin-influenced album, was released. Later that same year, **Kirsty** was killed whilst scuba diving in Mexico and the campaign for justice over her death continues to this day fronted by her family.

On the **Best Of** compilation, once past the well-known covers of *New England* and *Perfect Day*, the lyrical bite of *Freeworld* and *Innocence* point to what an often overlooked and original songwriter **Kirsty** was. The bittersweet *England 2 Columbia 0* is typical **MacColl** and not in the least bit about football!

Paul Sawtell
2 January 2008