

Soho Square

A Kirstyfest fanzine

Kirsty MacColl
1959 - 2000

"One day I'll be Writing There,
No Emty Bench In Soho Square"

20 Years of Kirstyfest Told
By Those Who Made It
Happen



20 Years of Kirstyfest

This year marks 20 years of Kirstyfest, and since Kirsty MacColl's bench was unveiled in Soho Square. I have not been to Kirstyfest since 2005, I came with my Dad who introduced me to Kirsty's music. I don't remember much about it except seeing a fabulously tall goth woman, singing Don't Come The Cowboy as a group (even though I hadn't heard it before) and sadly being much too young to drink at the pub.

Kirsty for me has been an almost life long presence. Her songs taught me how to play the guitar, and helped me navigate heartbreak. As I got older I discovered other musical loves, and I credit Kirsty and her music with teaching me how to love music.

I regret not being involved with Kirstyfest again until now. I asked for memories of Kirstyfest to help me get a sense of what the event was like, so that I could plan it correctly. The enthusiasm of responses, along with help, donations, performers, came so easily. It showed me what a beautiful community has been built over the last 20 years. I am very glad to be back, but at the same time feel like I am experiencing the grief of never having known Kirsty all over again.

Thank you so much for being here and for keeping Kirstyfest alive. Long live Kirsty.

- Alex Thomas (Afon Piasecki) October 2021



When I arranged the bench in Soho Square, twenty years ago, I had no idea it would take on such a life of its own.

A number of Kirsty fans met at Kirsty's memorial service at St. Martin in the Fields and headed to the pub afterwards. Some of us had met before, arranged via the old kirstymaccoll@yahoo.com discussion group and the short-lived Electric Rentbook fanzine, but this was the first big Kirsty get together. In the pub, the idea struck us: A Bench in Soho Square.

I contacted Kirsty's management, they communicated with her family, and the idea got the go ahead very quickly. I was a bit amazed. Then it was all systems go. Westminster Council Parks Department were enthusiastic and supportive. Eddi Reader agreed to distribute flyers for the Bench on her 2001 tour. I opened a bank account in the name of The Kirsty Bench Fund. Money rolled in from across the world, along with CDs of obscure bootleg music. We raised enough for two benches.

The Bench unveiling was a weird experience. Standing in Soho Square in a rainy Sunday morning, I made smalltalk with Kirsty's mum and the Cuban Ambassador. It was hard to believe this was actually happening. There must have been 200 people in the Square. Amazing. It had never crossed my mind that we should do something afterwards, but people were up for drinks, so Kirsty's manager and I beetled off round pubs until The Pillars of Hercules on Greek Street said they would have us. There were guitars, there was singing. how we laughed. how wonderful to embrace Jean MacColl to us, and to have her know that Kirsty was loved.

There was an expectation that Kirstyfest would become an annual thing, and I took on organising the first two or three before handing over to the magnificent Claire Iden. I will be at this year's event and it's the first one I have attended in about fifteen years.

Kirsty was always so good to her fans, joking about fans needing to pay attention as she would go for years without releasing a record and then something would crop up on a label nobody had ever heard of. Kirsty sent personal responses to fan mail, chatted at stage doors, embraced her fans. And we have embraced her. Through her music, we feel we can get a bit of an image of the real woman: sharp, funny, sexy, thoughtful, political, environmental, a Londoner. I really do believe that we have helped keep Kirsty's name alive. She didn't have all that many big hits and could easily have drifted away from memory into a footnote of history, like Sandy Denny or other women who died too young. There have been biographies, tribute concerts, endless rereleases and repackagings of old music. The fans have played such an important part in making sure Kirsty lives on.

Kirstyfest is at the heart of it all.

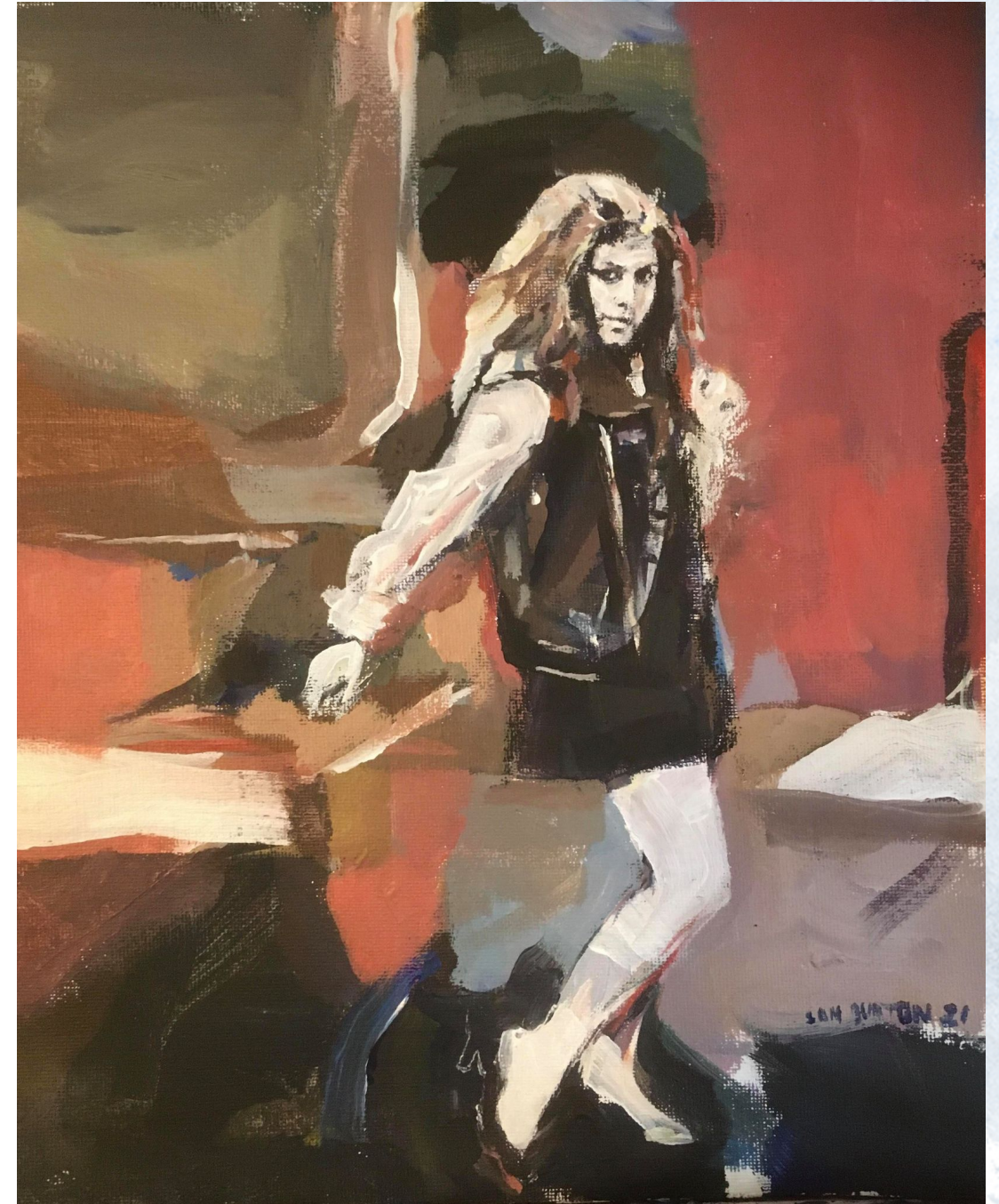
Chris Winwood



Kirstyfest 8 - a brilliant fest organised by the wonderful Claire Iden. The highlight was 'The KM Factor', a spoof of TV show 'The X Factor' with festival attendees stepping forward to sing Kirsty songs and be subjected to the reviews of our judges, four prominent members of the fan community playing the parts of the X Factor judges. Claire Iden's impersonation of Cheryl Cole was outstanding for its sparkling wit and charm.

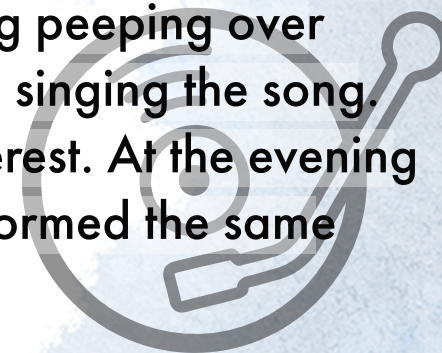
Also that year, a Norwegian girl band called Halvsostra came over, and impressed us with their beautiful renditions of some Kirsty classics. Fittingly, their lead singer is called Kjærsti - the Norwegian equivalent of Kirsty.

Jess Cully



My favourite memory is the 10.10.10 day where we celebrated the Kirsty day and then went on to the tribute concert at the Shepherds Bush Empire. I was playing Soho Square (the song) at the bench at 12 noon and saw Ellie Goulding peeping over someone's shoulder looking at me playing and singing the song. I wondered why she was paying particular interest. At the evening concert at the Shepherds Bush Empire she performed the same song herself! My version was far superior!

Terry Hurley



I have been a huge Kirsty fan for over 12 years. 'Fairytale Of New York' was how I first heard, saw and made me become a fan of her. She had a lovely voice with great lyrics. Kirsty was also a brilliant person and a mother to her two wonderful sons.

I first discovered Kirstyfest while I was browsing through the brilliant Free World website. Originally, there was going to be a weekend event to celebrate what would have been Kirsty's 50th birthday in 2009, but it was decided that it should just be on a Sunday. I asked my Dad to take me. In August that year, I signed up on the Free World forum. My username was 'Kirsty's Little Fan'. I was 13 and it was the first time I corresponded with her fans. They were all friendly and welcoming and some were delighted that Kirsty had younger fans. I wrote that I was coming to Kirstyfest from Oxford.

On the day, My Dad and I travelled to Soho Square. I saw her friends and family as well as her fans. The organiser, Claire gave an introduction at the bench before we sang 'Soho Square' and 'Don't Come The Cowboy With Me Sonny Jim!'. Afterwards, we went to The Phoenix Artist Club. We had to pay to get in and we were given two Kirsty photo cards. I liked the venue and the owner Maurice was a great host. Jean gave an update about the Justice For Kirsty campaign and Claire also gave a talk before John Meranda performed a few songs on his 12-string guitar. I also saw Steve Lillywhite. One of the fans asked if I was going to perform and I said yes. I spoke to Steve, Jamie and Louis before the performance. I was originally going to perform 'Terry', but I decided to sing 'Chip Shop' because it's a song that everyone knows. I also dedicated it to my Nanna and Gransha. My performance was filmed by a fan and he sent it to me so I could share it. My Dad also filmed it on his old phone. Everyone including Steve, Jean, Jamie and Louis loved my performance. My Dad said it was a perfect day.

On 10th October 2010, My Dad took me again along with My Auntie and Uncle. It was the only year I didn't perform, but I still enjoyed it. It was also the night of the tribute concert at The Shepherd's Bush Empire where Kirsty performed her final gig on 28th October 2000. Unfortunately, I couldn't go because I had school the next day.

My Mum took me in 2011 and I performed 'They Don't Know' on the guitar. My Auntie filmed it and everyone enjoyed it. My Grandparents and my cousin went in 2012 with me. I sang a couple of songs before we took part in a quiz about Kirsty's music videos. It was fun. We won a set of Kirsty's first 4 studio albums, which were reissued by Salvo that year. We all enjoyed the day.



My Auntie, my cousin and their friends went with me in 2013. It was raining in Soho Square, but I didn't mind. I sang 'A New England', 'Patrick', 'Days' and 'Walking Down Madison' with some other fans. It was a great day.

In 2014, I travelled to Kirstyfest by myself. I was lost on the way, but I got there. In Soho Square, a camera crew was filming for a documentary about Christmas songs. A few fans including myself, were interviewed. Unfortunately, none of the footage was used when it was shown on Channel 4 in December that year. I had a photo with Jamie and Louis. They were lovely.

My Grandma took me in 2015 and it was the last time Jean attended before she passed away in May 2017. Jean signed my copy of 'Sun On The Water'. It was also the last time we went to the Phoenix Artist Club. I had another photo, wearing my red Kirsty t-shirt, with Jamie.

My Nanna took me in 2016 and it was the first time I went to the Spice Of Life. Kirsty's unreleased demo of 'You Broke My Heart In 17 Places' was played. It was brilliant and I hope it gets released one day.

Rock journalist, John Tobler was a guest speaker and recorded an hour long interview with Kirsty in 1989. Copies of the interview were sold and it captures Kirsty at her personal best.



In 2017, I went with My Nanna and My Grandma. I took part in a quiz about Kirsty and won the Kirstyfest cup for the first time. I got 15 out of 15.

In 2018, I went to Kirstyfest with My Mum and her friend. I performed 'They Don't Know' and 'Chip Shop'. I created a Kirsty quiz and read the questions to the fans. They found it challenging, but fun. Louis and Kirsty's partner, James were there. They did an auction on the Galore Gold disc which Kirsty owned. They also gave out copies of a rare 'In These Shoes?' 12" white label vinyl. I got Louis and James to sign it for me.

On 12th October 2018, I took part in Midnight Mastermind with OJ Borg on BBC Radio 2. My specialist subject was Kirsty. I asked him 3 questions about her and I answered 1 question from him. I have sent an attachment of the recording.

In 2019, I gave out a 5 minute speech about my Kirstyfest experiences before I performed 'They Don't Know'. I won the quiz and received the cup for the second time.

I wrote a blog post about my Virtual Kirstyfest experience in 2020
Ruby Pepper



Having heard about Kirsty's tragic death in the news and subsequently the wonderful news of being able to contribute to her bench in Soho Square and the fan tributes that followed, I knew I wanted to be part of that celebration of her life and music. As it turned out, I didn't get to my first Kirstyfest until 2006, where I met such great people, many who became good friends. Not least getting to know Jean, Louis, Jamie and James.

I helped with and then took on the organisation of Kirstyfest for a few years which was an absolute honour, for which I'd like to share my favourite memories:

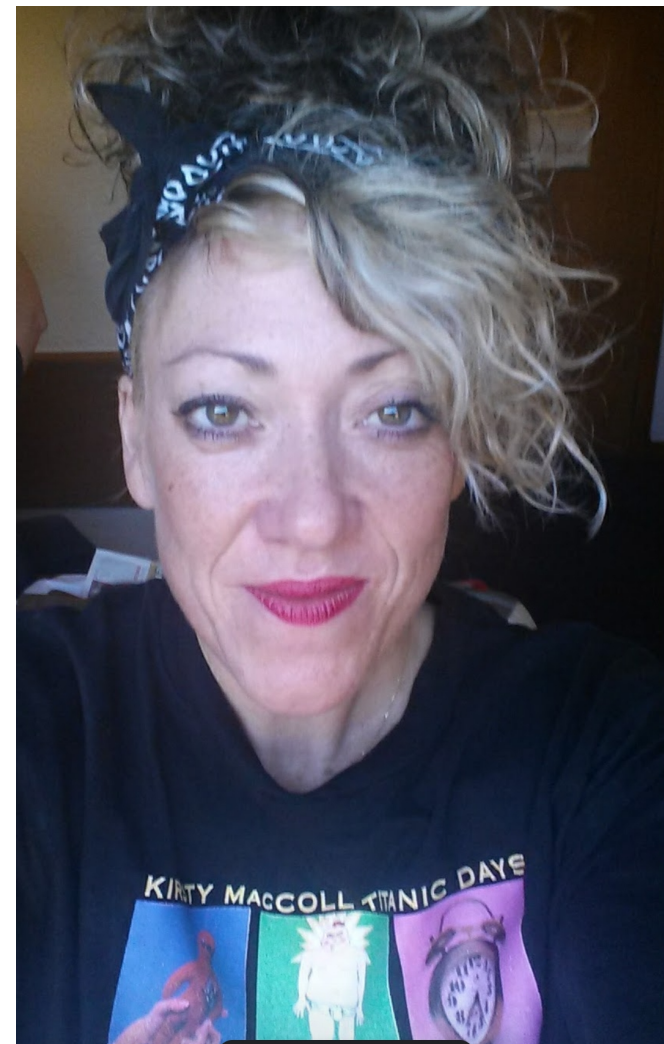
Creating a post card of which copies could be taken home for what would have been Kirsty's 50th alongside no less than Charlie Dickens' own prints! I believe a copy is still attached to the wonderful picture of Kirsty that graces our Kirstyfest get-togethers (it is my favourite photo of her).

Running a video quiz where Kirsty's DVD was played during the 'fest so we could delight in her music and watch her with us as we enjoyed the evening

Being (maybe reluctantly) part of the 'KM Factor' having to play the Simon Cowell role and being particularly nasty to the praiseworthy contestants!

So many other great memories, but in short, my favourite ones are always of spending time with our fellow Kirsty family and just having a damned great time toasting to her legacy and enjoying our friendships. Many a great day/evening has been enjoyed by us all which I'll never forget. Long may Kirstyfest last!

Barry Smith



Andrea Randall

Links

Ruby Pepper's Kirtsyfest2020
Blog - rubyreflections.home.blog

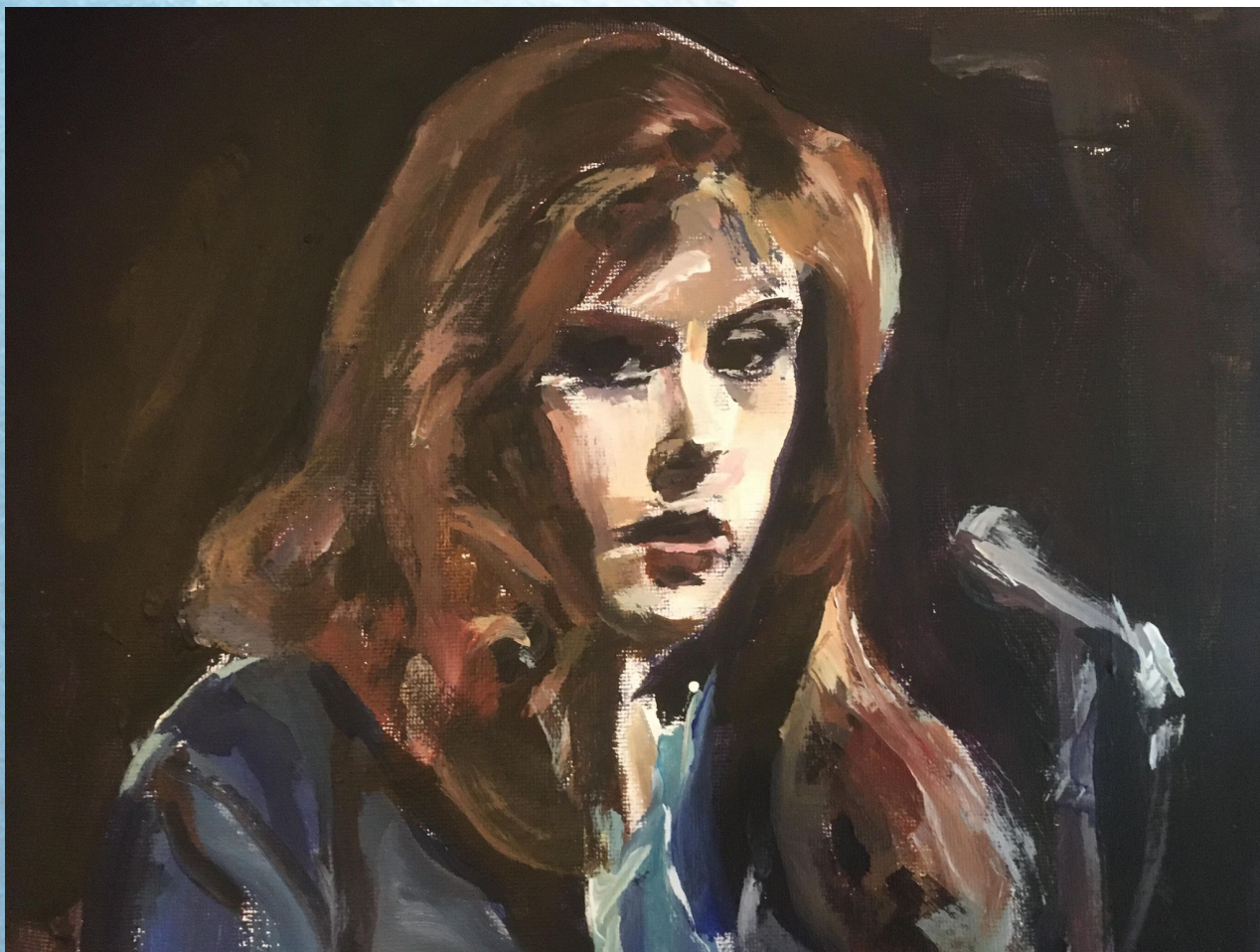
Ruby Pepper Performing at 13 -
Youtube Channel

lucypepperazzi - Video
Kirstyfest2009 - Kirsty's Little
Fan

Painting's By Sam Burton, find
him on Instagram @wblack16

Sam's work is for sale on his
Etsy shop samburt1



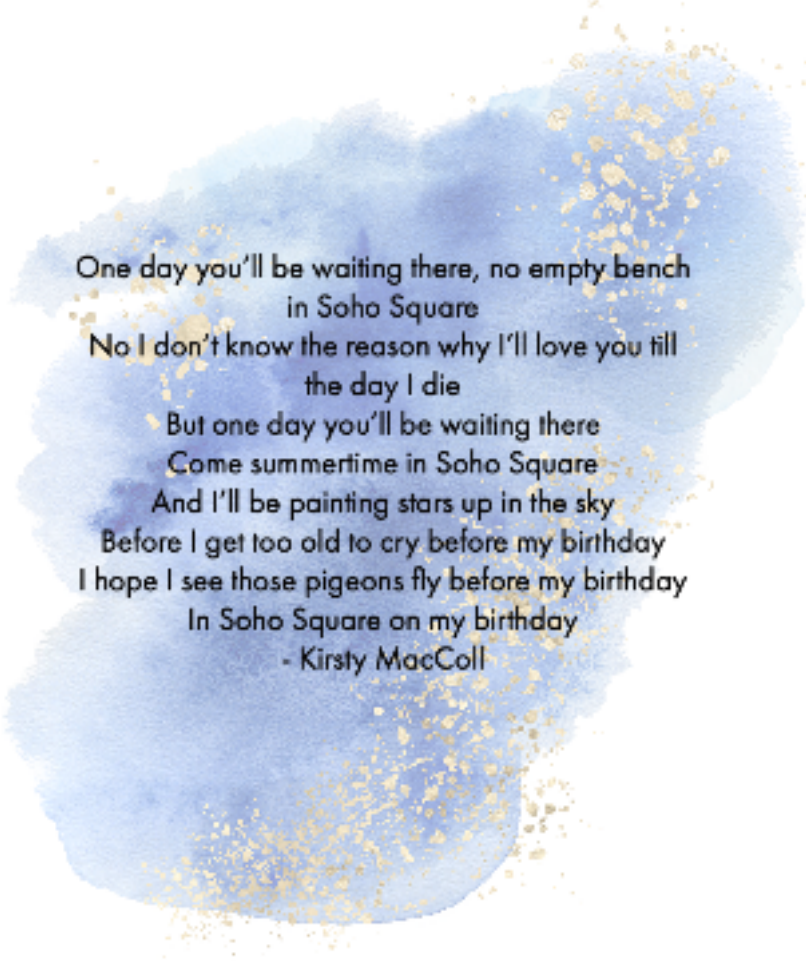


With Thanks To

Ruby Pepper, Jess Cully, Terry Hurley, Barry Smith, Andrea Randall, Chris Winwood, Sam Burton

I would also like to thank Paul Chinniah, Joanne Davis, Richard Parker, The Spice of Life, Stewart Webb, David McCauley, and Alan Officer for making Kirstyfest happen this year and through out the last 20 years.





One day you'll be waiting there, no empty bench
in Soho Square

No I don't know the reason why I'll love you till
the day I die

But one day you'll be waiting there

Come summertime in Soho Square

And I'll be painting stars up in the sky

Before I get too old to cry before my birthday

I hope I see those pigeons fly before my birthday

In Soho Square on my birthday

- Kirsty MacColl