

Show Bell a Little Respect

Every good pop song starts somewhere, and Erasure's track '*A Little Respect*' starts with a plea for respect and understanding. It is the sound of one man, at his most exposed, opening up to an imagined lover. It carries a strain of hope, as singer Andy Bell (now 58) asks '*would you open your arms out to me*', and it carries a thread of sadness, as he adds '*you're making me work so hard*'.

Andy Bell was one of the first openly gay pop stars, and according to *Spin* magazine (February 1989), he would sometimes introduce this song on stage by saying: "*When I was a little girl, I asked my mummy, 'Can I be gay when I grow up?' She replied, 'Yes, if you show a little respect.'*"

Released in 1988, '*A Little Respect*' is a song which deals with the conflict and pain of love. Full of beautiful beats, there's a wonderful exchange throughout between Vince Clarke's ecstatic music and Bell's vocals which are effortless, perfectly capturing feelings of loving someone who doesn't always love you back '*What religion or reason, could drive a man to forsake his lover?*'

It's a song with a life that's lived on well beyond its release, at one point reaching number four in the UK chart. But a little known fact is that before this dance classic broke the mainstream, it was (and still is) a huge anthem in LGBT+ clubs. It has since become a karaoke classic with plenty of singalongs. '*A Little Respect*' is simply a fantastic pop song with a lasting message, one that is only more relevant with the passage of time.

Openly out front-man Andy Bell was a trailblazer in the 80s, singing in celebration of love, in a society that still hadn't fully accepted homosexuality, or even embraced the fact that gay men have lovers too. "*That's just how society was.*" Bell told *The Guardian*.

According to the *NME* (*New Musical Express*) '*A Little Respect*' was voted the '*Ultimate Pride Anthem*' in June last year (2021) in a poll to launch new radio station *Virgin Radio Pride UK* (to coincide with LGBT+ Pride Month). The track beat Lady Gaga, Kylie Minogue, Cher and Madonna to the number one spot.

"*I had forgotten all about the song and was glad to be reminded.*" says Graham Edmonds (61), from South East London and added "*It made me think of the late 80's - a one year old daughter! New job and a new future in computing. - I thought the lyrics were about relationships (any kind!) A good, well composed song.*"

Some remain critical, especially after listening to the lyrics. Dom, 44, from Slough had a change of heart: "*I like it and am motivated through the beat. I actually like the rhythm and the refrain.*" she writes, but adds; "*The lyrics seem really depressing when you actually listen to them – sounds like someone completely besotted who's partner is taking the mick out of them by not showing them respect.*"

A cover version is performed successfully by the acoustic duo, *The Jet Fighters*, a London based duo consisting of two highly talented and experienced performers. The *London Gay Men's Chorus* also perform '*A Little Respect*' amongst their repertoire, but it doesn't do justice to Erasure's performance.

One 'choral' rendition, according to the *Daily Mail* (Dec 2014) was when an Erasure fan led an impromptu version of '*A Little Respect*' while he was waiting for a tube at Kentish Town. After breaking into song in what started as a solo performance, dozens of passengers decided to join in. The leader of the singalong was revealed as Erasure fan and busker Neil Francis, on his way home from an Erasure concert. Later, he told the *BBC*: "*I love the sound of the acoustics in the tube station, so I thought 'give it some!'.*"

This, some argue, is perhaps one of the most empowering pop songs ever recorded and released. It is helped by the fact that Bell is gay, and the song was written in the 1980's, when fear of the HIV virus was at its height. Only 24 when he wrote it, one can assume that Bell was very aware of the worries of the gay community at the time, especially as he himself was later diagnosed with HIV, and made music to raise money for AIDS research.

'*A Little Respect*' is a pop song; it can be danced to, it can be sung along to, and it can be cried along to. It can be as dark or as light as you want it to be, and that is the mark of a truly great song. Which this is.

-ENDS-

780 words