

## ADVANCED – READING – FAIRYTALE OF NEW YORK

Decades after its release, the duet about a couple who have fallen on hard times is still considered by many as one of the greatest christmas songs of all times

Once upon a time a band **set out** to make a Christmas song. Not about snow or sleigh rides or mistletoe or miracles, but lost youth and ruined dreams. A song in which Christmas is as much the problem as it is the solution. A kind of anti-Christmas song that **ended up** being, for a generation, *the* Christmas song.

That song, Fairytale of New York by the Pogues, has already re-entered the Top 20 every December since 2005, and shows no sign of losing its appeal. It is loved because it feels more emotionally "real" than the homesick sentimentality of White Christmas or the bullish bonhomie of Merry Xmas Everybody, but it contains elements of both and the story it tells is an unreal fantasy of 1940s New York **dreamed up** in 1980s London. The story of the song is a yarn in itself: how it took more than two years to get right and became, over time, far bigger than the people who made it. As Pogues accordion-player James Fearnley says: "It's like Fairytale of New York **went off** and inhabited its own planet."

Appropriately for a song that pivots on an argument, there is disagreement as to where the idea originated. Fearnley, who recently published a memoir, Here Comes Everybody: The Story of the Pogues, remembers manager Frank Murray suggesting that they cover the Band's 1977 song Christmas Must be Tonight. "It was an awful song. We probably said, \$%&@ that, we can do our own."

Singer Shane MacGowan maintains that Elvis Costello, who produced the Pogues' 1985 masterpiece Rum, Sodomy & the Lash, wagered the singer that he couldn't write a Christmas duet to sing with bass player (and Costello's future wife) Cait O'Riordan.

Either way, a Christmas song was a good idea. "For a band like the Pogues, very strongly rooted in all kinds of traditions rather than the present, it was a no-brainer," says banjo-player and co-writer Jem Finer. Not to mention the fact that MacGowan was born on Christmas Day 1957.

The Pogues had formed amid the grimy pubs and bedsits of London's King's Cross in 1982. Although their name ("Pogue mahone" means "kiss my arse" in Gaelic) and many of their influences were Irish, most of the band weren't, and their interest in folk songs and historical narratives roamed far and wide. They aspired to timelessness.

**1. Mark True or False, according to the article:**

- A. It's a typical Christmas song
- B. It's nothing at all like 'White Christmas' or 'Merry Xmas Everybody'
- C. The song was written in New York
- D. It was easy for the band to write.
- E. The song is about an argument
- F. Originally the band was going to do a coversong.
- G. The song was written as a bet between Costello and his wife.
- H. People agree about the origin of the song
- I. Rum, Sodomy and the Lash is the name of an album by the band
- J. Most of the band were Irish

**2. Use the phrasal verbs from the reading to complete these sentences.**

- 1. One day a woman \_\_\_\_\_ to become rich.
- 2. She \_\_\_\_\_ a very clever plan to make lots of money,
- 3. She \_\_\_\_\_ and followed her plan.
- 4. It worked, but then she \_\_\_\_\_ losing all the money by gambling.

**3. Find synonyms for these words in the text:**

- A. Destroyed (para 1)
- B. A long complicated story (para 2)
- C. To turn or balance on a centre point (para 3)
- D. To do another version of a song (para 3)
- E. To bet (para 4)
- F. An easy or obvious decision (para 5)
- G. Dirty (para 6)
- H. A rented room for living and sleeping in (para 6)
- I. To walk or travel around without a specific purpose (para 6)

1. Answers

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True
6. False
7. False
8. True
9. True
10. False

2. Answers

1. Went off
2. Dreamed up
3. Set out
4. Ended up

3. Answers

- A. Ruined
- B. Fairytail
- C. Pivots
- D. Cover
- E. Wager
- F. No-brainer
- G. Grimy
- H. Bedsits
- I. Roamed