

“KIND AND GENEROUS”

By: Annie

If there is one song above all others in Natalie Merchant's musical compendium that could be singled out as the most ripe for taunts, insults, and eye rolls, it surely is *Kind and Generous*. There are a couple of obvious reasons for this:

1) There are many, many la la las. Like, hundreds of them. And some people just can't take la la las. It's as if these innocuous syllables serve as some sort of musical kryptonite, threatening to send them to their death by cuteness. I have no opinion of la la las. I'm not pro- or anti-. And, actually, I only realized a few years ago that they were la la las. I thought they were na na nas. And that's a whole other story. No time to get into that.

2) The words "thank you" are repeated. A lot. Most people have no idea the song is even called *Kind and Generous*. If you found this page through Google, I'm going to bet you searched the words "Natalie Merchant Thank You." Am I right? Anyways, repeating the same phrase over and over again also has a kryptonite-like effect on the listener, namely in that it forces the phrase into their head and they have no choice but to have it playing in a loop in their brain all day long and perhaps even through the night. This is a dreadful thing when it happens, even when you love the song. On this count, *Kind and Generous* can only be judged as guilty, guilty, guilty.

There is also a less obvious reason why some people, I believe, might be inclined to make fun of this song. A quote from Natalie:

*"I think a lot of people have become accustomed to women artists being less sensitive, a bit more harsh, a bit more confrontational. This...is a bit sensitive so maybe it seems outmoded, but I think what is being discovered is that a lot of people really still desire that in their music."**

Kind and Generous is completely open-hearted and genuine. There is no irony, no skepticism, and absolutely no edge. And this is something

that is increasingly rare in any form of art anymore. Have you ever watched a movie or a rerun of a TV show you liked from the 70s or 80s and found yourself wondering, "Why did I ever like this or think it was funny?" The answer is that our taste in entertainment has changed with time and this is due, in large part, to the fact that dark, caustic humor is what pretty much ALL comedy offers now. That's what we're used to. Irony-free statements are hard to stomach.

This is not me talking about some attitude I've observed only in others. This is something I completely identify with. Except when it comes to music. Music can touch you in a way that is wholly unique. It is protected from our modern demands for cynicism and irony. It can just be itself; lyrics can be nakedly candid. Our reactions to music are generally private and in our own headspace we can allow ourselves to still be blissfully cheesy - and by cheesy, I mean honest.

So I can now confess to all of you with wild abandon - I love *Kind and Generous*. I appreciate the simple beauty of the words, the gentleness and genuineness. I don't care if it has become the go-to cliché song for expressing gratitude and love. It's become that song for a reason - it's really beautiful and really good.

Every time I've seen Natalie in concert, she's closed the performance with this song. It's the obvious - and right - choice. It's a transcendent experience, in fact. Because, as you can imagine, a person can't sing this song without accessing the emotions being expressed in the words. Natalie is alive and electric when she sings this song and everyone singing along in the crowd gets in on a piece of that emotion. Gratitude feels really good, in both directions.

Another quote from Natalie:

*"When I play and people sing along, it makes me cry. It makes me so happy to know somehow this thing that started so small as me sitting at my piano and having this idea could spread all over the country and all over the world."***

And darn it all if I don't cry too.

And then I hide it by pretending that it's a contact lens problem. So...I guess I'm not quite as honest as I want to be. But I am getting closer. Songs like this one really help.

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Fig. 1. Label and source information. Trenz Pruca, drawing, Lorem Ipsum 27 June 2005:A2 I

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