

## I SWEAR I HEARD THIS... *I DREAM OF KELLY*

Chris Mapp

I swear I heard this unbelievable version of the song *I Will Always Love You*, the one written by Dolly Parton and covered by Whitney Houston for *The Bodyguard*. I might describe something as “unbelievable” after seeing an incredible performance or hearing an extraordinarily talented musician doing something goosebump-inducing. “Man, that gig was unbelievable!” Or maybe as a way of expressing my dislike of a particular musical endeavour, “that was unbelievably bad”. Whether the moment I’m describing here was unbelievably good or unbelievably bad I’m not sure. I could probably argue it either way. However, the fact that this particular version happened was somewhat improbable to say the least. But it did happen.

“Do you do any singing yourself?” someone, maybe me, asked.

Sometimes when I’m dreaming, I’m not sure that I ever see anyone’s face. The person I’m dreaming about is definitely there in the dream. Their presence is unmistakable, but I don’t always see them as I would in consciousness. I can have interactions with people in dreams but not face-to-face conversations. I’m not someone who reads too much into what dreams might mean. But it does help me to distinguish between dreams and reality knowing that, if I can see someone’s face then they (and I) must really be there.

Looking around, I can see everyone’s face. There’s our singer in one corner of the tent. A plain white mini-marquee which has been erected on the banks of the river Thames in support of the event we’re performing at. A makeshift dressing room space behind the makeshift stage. In a few days time we’ll be standing on that stage as countless police vehicles stream along the north bank, responding to the riots sparked by the killing of Mark Duggan. We’ll travel back on the train through South London, scarcely believing what we see as stations, buildings and cars burn. But it did happen.

Our percussionist is over there, I can look over and recognise his face pretty readily having spent the last few weeks together. The guitarist is easy to spot as he’s holding his instrument, trying to play his part in this unbelievable moment. He attempts to play the role of accompanist, his face looks attentive, confused and amused all at once. Like the rest of us he can’t quite believe it. And over there is TV presenter and model Kelly Brook, singing *I Will Always Love You* by Dolly Parton which was covered by Whitney Houston for *The Bodyguard*. It feels important to mention that as

it was probably the version on the minds of everyone in the tent as we were all of a similar vintage. Including Kelly Brook from off of the telly. Kelly Brook, who presented *The Big Breakfast*. Kelly Brook, who graced countless magazine covers in peak late-90s-lads-mag-era when I was a teenager. Kelly Brook, who is still, on the afternoon I'm describing, being trailed by a group of tabloid photographers. Kelly Brook, whose life is so far away from my own it would probably be easier to imagine that this performance unfolding in front of me was all a dream. But it did happen.

It was an unbelievable performance. Only the fact that I could see the disbelief on everyone's faces tells me that it was real, as bizarre as it all seems. Later in the evening, an older white man dressed in a bedraggled suit and tie will play a ludicrously deep reggae set from a briefcase full of MiniDiscs, toasting the crowd in his unique, gruff Jamaican Patois. It all sounds unbelievable, but if you knew DJ Derek then you know that it did happen.

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