

Morrissey: 'My whole life has relied on free speech – naturally, I'm gagged'

The forthright singer's 'masterpiece' *Bonfire of Teenagers* was finished in 2021. He reveals the 'idiot culture' blocking its release. *From the [Telegraph](#)*

"It is almost four years old now. The madly insane efforts to silence the album are somehow indications of its power," [Morrissey](#) tells me. "Otherwise, who would bother to get so overheated about an inconspicuous recluse?"

"The album" in question is *Bonfire of Teenagers*, the former Smiths singer's 14th solo album that he completed back in May 2021, when Britain was emerging from its third Covid lockdown, but has yet to see the light of day. *The song itself has been performed live and is [well viewed on Youtube](#).*

...“overheated”? Well, that's one word to describe the deeply controversial saga surrounding *Bonfire of Teenagers*' 1,200-day delay.

That we're communicating at all is a surprise. Morrissey hasn't engaged with the mainstream British press for years, and his disdain for print journalists is well-documented. But he has chosen to talk to me about what he has called “the best album of [his] life”.

The reason for *Bonfire of Teenagers*' delay is remarkably clear. The album's title track is about the [2017 Manchester Arena terror attack](#), when a suicide bomber killed 22 people and injured over a thousand more after a concert by American pop star Ariana Grande. Morrissey sings of a fan being “vapourised” and the song ends with an unsettling repeated coda to “Go easy on the killer”, which appears to be a comment

on the British justice system (the bomber Salman Abedi died on the night).

Manchester-born Morrissey has written contentious tracks about local tragedies before. . . But this song is dark and, to many, tasteless. Online debates over whether the ballad represents powerful-if-uncomfortable storytelling or crass sonic clickbait have been ongoing since its live debut, which was filmed, in 2022.

Morrissey, unsurprisingly, sits in the former camp. In a lengthy email sent from his Los Angeles home, he says he's being "gagged" and that what he calls "Idiot Culture" is preventing his album's release. Would he consider simply removing the controversial track and releasing a 10-song album under a different name? No, he says.

"Controversial means intelligent, doesn't it? We are still in the grip of Idiot Culture, it's everywhere you look. Naturally I'm one of the first to be gagged since my entire life has relied on free speech," he tells me. "No, I wouldn't remove the title song because I wouldn't abandon the murdered kids of Manchester. Their spirits cry out every single day for remembrance and recognition." Nor, he writes, would he consider self-releasing the album.

In the title track, he criticises Mancunians' adoption of Oasis's Don't Look Back in Anger as an anthem of solidarity as they mourned. "And the morons sing and sway: 'Don't Look Back in Anger', I can assure you I will look back in anger 'til the day I die," Morrissey sings. He suggests the song's use underplayed the severity of the event. "The Manchester Arena bombing was our 9/11. But, in this sad country of ours, to understand the full meaning of the attack is to be guilty, and this is why the 'don't look back in anger' command always struck me as derisive and not at all words of social harmony," he says.



Morrissey: 'The BeKind crew will smash your face in if you disagree with them'

But
Morrissey
seems
determined
not to
change
anything.
“Once you
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idiots
have won.
There is

no arts media anymore in England, therefore there’s no one to whom I can sit and talk about this. The fact is, genuine artists in England are now being held hostage by people who object to any manner of alternative opinion,” he says. “The biggest monsters are the #BeKind crew” – a social media movement promoting empathy – “who will smash your face in if you disagree with them.”

“Every major label in London has refused Bonfire of Teenagers whilst also admitting that it is a masterpiece,” Morrissey says. “And although there is nothing insulting or antagonistic in the title track, label bosses say they are worried that The Guardian would make their lives hell if they supported any such social awareness.” Ah, The Guardian, with whom [Morrissey has a long-running beef.](#) Morrissey then performed at the Hollywood Bowl in a vest saying “F___ the Guardian”. Little seems to have changed.

Morrissey’s successful solo career – 11 top five albums including three number ones – has been interspersed with prickly, provocative or inflammatory comments about everything

from immigration to the “shocking” treatment of far-right activist [Tommy Robinson](#). Hence the Guardian issue and disengagement with the press.

On announcing Bonfire of Teenagers in 2021, Morrissey admitted that he didn't have a record deal, having been dropped by BMG in 2020. The album, he wrote, was “available to the highest (or lowest) bidder”. It stepped Capitol Records, part of the world's biggest label Universal Music Group. Morrissey announced a February 2023 release date in all global territories bar the UK.

But in late 2022, Morrissey said Capitol was no longer scheduling a February 2023 release. Then, that Christmas, Morrissey announced that he'd “voluntarily” parted company with both Capitol and his management team.

Weeks later, Morrissey said that Capitol wouldn't be releasing Bonfire at all but was “holding on to” the album all the same. His website announced: “Morrissey has said that although he does not believe that Capitol Records in Los Angeles signed Bonfire of Teenagers in order to sabotage it, he is quickly coming around to that belief.”

Regarding the album, fans leapt on Morrissey's “sabotage” comment. Others noted that pop royalty Ariana Grande is signed to Universal-owned Republic Records, and wondered whether Universal was sitting on the album so as not to risk upsetting her due to the title track. Morrissey goes even further to me, claiming that a senior executive within Universal – his own record label – tried to quash the album.

With the album in limbo, things got surreal. Morrissey accused Capitol of prioritising label-mate Sam Smith's “satanism” over his own work after Smith wore devil horns during a Brit Awards performance. Then last October a light aircraft flew over Capitol's famous cylindrical LA head office pulling the banner: “Release Moz's ‘Bonfire of Teenagers’!” The plane was

hired by Georgia-based Morrissey superfan Travis Gravel at a cost of around \$2,000. "The purpose of the stunt was to draw awareness to the importance of the album being released," Gravel says.

[@officialmoz](#) How do you get someone's attention? You fly a plane over their building! [@capitolrecords](#) please release Moz's "Bonfire of Teenagers"! Day 3
pic.twitter.com/LQ0Cl3hzqL

– Terrance Stamp (@TerranceStamp) [October 14, 2023](#)

There are signs, however, of movement. In April, after what Morrissey called "a long, hard, bloody war", he bought Bonfire of Teenagers back off Capitol. In June he told fans: "For those of you 85 and over who are still waiting for Bonfire of Teenagers to be released, good news is finally within our grasp". I suspect it will come out eventually although, as yet, Morrissey remains unsigned.

The controversy will be colossal. Still, superfan Gravel can't wait: "I am holding out hope that Morrissey will use a plane photo for the album gatefold.