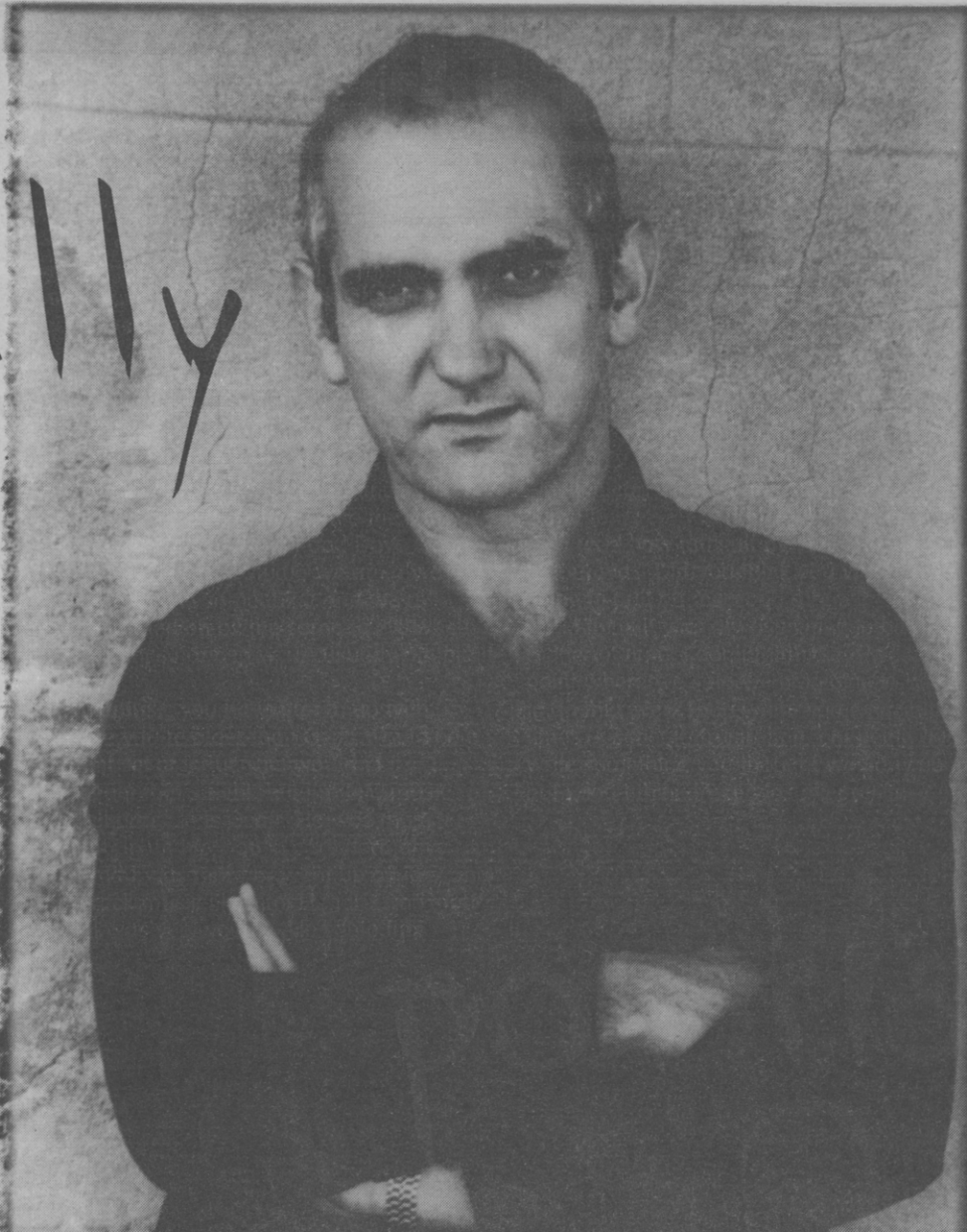


paul kelly

Paul Kelly's
new album,
modestly
entitled *Words*

And *Music*, sees our favourite South Pacific troubadour back on form after some recent disappointing outings (name one song off *Deeper Water*, go on!). Back are the simple, sprightly ballads that gently break one's heart (see 'I'll Be Your Lover Now' a close cousin to 'Song From The 16th Floor', songs with balls (the crouchy, knowing 'Little Kings'), songs that look in the mirror and fail to dissemble ('Gutless Wonder').

Even a version of the Hot Chocolate 'It Started With A Kiss' turns up trumps (a song which according to Kelly gave much unnatural trouble until he stopped singing the thing and started talking it!)



SEEING TOO MANY SIDES

Indeed, talking with Kelly one gets a sense of only the nice guy side of the split. He's personable, funny, direct.

At present residing in Melbourne in the family house "which represents all the ages" and from whose open windows drifts Wu Tang Clan, Radiohead, Finley Quaye, Hanson and when he can sneak it on Buck Owens.

Much of the success of *Words and Music* lies with the band. It seems Kelly has finally latched upon the dream team.

"The first time we recorded with this lineup was about a year and a half ago when we were asked to do a Xmas song - 'How To Make Gravy' (a career highlight - check it out on the recent *Greatest Hits*). There was something about the sound that I liked. That was the first time we recorded as a 6-piece, with Spencer Jones (ex Kiwi, Beasts Of Bourbon guitarist) on guitar. In that same session we recorded 'I'd Rather Go Blind' and that was interesting... you know, I knew we'd got something special and it's sort of gone from there. Everyone's really busy doing their own thing but when everyone's free we get together, usually on Wednesday nights in the practice room."

Kelly suffers regularly from writer's block. "I have long periods when I don't write anything. In fact with one exception we used up all my material with this latest album."

"Certain tracks on *Words and Music* are an attempt at new ways of writing. 'Melting', 'Lazybones' and 'Gutless Wonder' - yeah all those are non-chordal, meaning there's not a different set of chords for the bridge or change into the chorus. Two chord songs essentially. That's certainly been a development trying to write from the bottom up. Those particular songs started with us playing them over and over in the practise room. I hadn't brought them to the band all finished - we just started with a groove and tried to put something on top. We'd tape all the sessions and then I'd try and come up with lyrics at home and then finally some sort of melody. Definitely a new way to work for me."

Much impetus was had from the phenomenal success of last year's *Greatest Hits* package - something which Kelly had to be talked into.

"The guy at the local bottle-shop every time I went in for a bottle of wine he'd ask when I was going to get round to putting out a *Greatest Hits*. So I finally decided to do it."

A move which turned out to be a wise one for it has since gone triple platinum in Australia, and that despite leaving off some of his best songs!

Recent sojourns to America have established a small following, especially among the critics. *Rolling Stone* scribe David Fricke champions Kelly as one of the best songwriters working anywhere today (check his liner notes to *Greatest Hits*).

"I met David when I first went to the States years back and I see him whenever I go over or else when he comes over this way. I've got a small following in America and even a small following over there is something you can make a living out of so I'm quite happy."

A songwriter's night in New York evokes the best memories.

"It was me, Michelle Shocked, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Joe Ely and Allen Toussaint. We finished up with 'Everything I do Is Gonna Be Funky From Now On' and I played harmonica on that. It was fantastic. Toussaint hss been one of my heroes from way back!"

A long way from Kelly's beginnings when he borrowed three thousand dollars from friends and despite drug problems and the

death of friends, recorded the largely acoustic *Post* in 1985 which many still see as Kelly's finest moment.

"I consider it my first record (Kelly's earlier band the Dots made two albums before splitting). It was there I found my voice. I remember thinking that now I'm writing something that nobody else is I don't know whether it's good or bad just that it's mine. I'd found my patch if you like. The funniest thing of all is that it is still selling."

As always *Words and Music* contains the sort of plain-spoken yet rich-in-detail imagery which belies Kelly's interest in literature and poetry.

"I often think that a lot of the stuff I write as comedy. I remember when I first took 'When I First Met Your Ma' to the Messengers. As a song I thought it was kind of funny but Steve (the late Steve Connolly, long-time Kelly guitarist) listened to it and said 'Man, that is the saddest song I've ever heard. The saddest song!' People have written to me and said 'oh I had to stop the car after hearing this or that song. I was weeping all over the place' and these are songs which I think are hilariously funny. Stuff like 'How To Make Gravy' and 'When I First Met Your Ma'."

Perhaps the best song on *Words* ... is the opener 'Little Kings' - "I'm so afraid for my country / There's an ill wind blowing no good / So many lies in the name of history ..." sings Kelly in an almost unrecognisable voice - slightly higher than usual, closer to the "white soul" singers of the American South. A stunner.

"That song's about a lot of things. It's about the Howard Government's handling of the land title, it's about the Victorian Government's ramming the casinos through and giving them special privileges, it's about

Pauline Hanson and all that ugliness ... just stuff that's in the air."

And the politics is going to be kept personal. Kelly has no interest in standing for office of any kind.

"No. No way. What's that line - 'The best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity'. That's why I stay out of politics. I see too many sides at the same time."

Finally it's that multiplicity that makes his best work the equal of his contemporaries. Talking of which ...

"I fell in love with the Radiohead album for a while and I realised that after listening to it for three weeks I didn't know any of the lyrics apart from a phrase here and there. And that Wilco album *Being Here* - you think you're going to hear a great song but it doesn't ever quite get there. Something there that's a little superficial."

As he says in 'Nothing On My Mind' the atypical co-write which resembles latter day U2 in its claustrophobic fury - 'Fighting a Bull's one thing but fighting bullshit's another / and around here the bullshit just never seems to die.'

Catch Kelly and his bullshit detector in a store near you.

Greg Fleming

winterland

new ep 'ceremony'
released may 18th 1998

release party
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k'rd ballroom



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