

I'll Wear It Proudly

Paul Kelly, Standing Tall



The art of cricket doesn't change. Wear coloured pyjamas or white flannels, use the latest gimmicks, but it all comes back to playing skills.

Likewise with making good music — it all comes down to the songs. Without decent songs, you don't get past the first ball, no matter what fancy tricks are pulled. The songwriting talent of Australian Paul Kelly is a case in point.

Kelly pulled off a rare feat last year. For *Gossip* he produced so many strong songs that the album deserved its double album length. Two dozen haunting melodies, two dozen evocative, literate lyrics. And in the Coloured Girls, a no-bullshit band that could play with skill and spirit — like Hunters and Collectors or the Go-Betweens, the intelligent, creative end of Australian music. Later this month we get to see Kelly and his Coloured Girls in action.

Gossip is the second stage in Paul Kelly's return to form since the demise of his band the Dots in the

early 80s. With no band or record contract, he came back from the musical wilderness by recording *Post*, a solo acoustic album, financing the \$3500 cost himself. It was dedicated to Paul Hewson of Dragon, who just before he died helped Kelly get the album underway.

The bare bones sound of *Post* fitted perfectly the simple, powerful melodies and emotional, tangible images. The album was critically acclaimed, and gave Kelly the confidence to record his backlog of songs with his new band the Coloured Girls.

Atmosphere

"I always wanted to be a writer," he says. "When I left school I didn't play music for a while, I was writing short stories, atmospheric prose pieces. Then a few years later I picked up the guitar which I'd never learned, and I figured out how to write songs. That's about all I've done since then."

"I came from a big family, of nine children. I played a lot of sport as a kid, but also did music, learning the piano. It was a musical family, my parents listened to a lot of classical music, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and my grandparents were opera singers, so there was a bit of that around. As a kid I learned trumpet at school, so some of the first things I heard was Herb Alpert and Louis Armstrong, things like that."

Kelly's songs reflect the cultural and musical influences of someone growing up in Australia during the 60s, a world of backyard cricket, Ron Clarke and Rod Laver, the Seekers to the Saints Easybeats. "Australia's the only place I've lived, so it's quite natural for places and that to crop up in a song," he says. "I guess you could say that Chuck Berry was an influence — the way he mentions places. I wanted to map out our places."

On *Gossip* Kelly and the Coloured Girls wear their influences proudly. The hit single 'Before too Long' is the Beatles of *Help* and *Rubber Soul*, the album cover portrays Hank Williams, Howling Wolf and Buddy Holly. With so many reference points, is it hard for your own personality to come out?

"I don't think so. I've never really worried about trying to be original, that just comes of its own accord. I tend to write a wide variety of songs, a lot of songs you get from other songs, I guess. I think it's always a fine line between being derivative and having respect for the people who have come before."

"I don't believe in concealing your influences, or trying to pretend that you've come up with something totally new. When Elvis Presley first came out in the 50s, a lot of white people wouldn't have been aware of black music or hillbilly country music. They thought he was something

completely new, but he wasn't, he put things together in an original way. The Beatles seemed to come out of nowhere, but they were listening to Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly ..."

Vocabulary

Like learning a musical language, you pick up the words, then piece them together to form your own vocabulary. "That's right, you build a language. But the main thing is to keep yourself open to all types of language and influences. It'll eventually sort itself out in your own work. It's no good listening to one particular thing and that's it, you'll find yourself becoming narrow in your music. Keep yourself open to a wide range, once things filter through — the way I write songs and the band puts them together — it's gonna come out sounding like us in the long run."

After growing up in Adelaide, Kelly moved to Melbourne in 1977, playing in the cult band the High Rise Bombers and then the Dots. In 1984, just before *Post*, he moved to Sydney. What are the differences between the music scenes of the cities?

"I think the difference between Melbourne and Sydney is played up a bit. There's rivalry between the two, but not a huge difference. You could say Sydney is a bit more open to trends and influences, while Melbourne bands are probably a bit more idiosyncratic. They work on their own thing and stick to it. There are good points and bad about both scenes — Melbourne's not so open to outside influences."

How do the Coloured Girls differ from the Dots?

"They've probably got more colour in their sound, there's more range live — soft stuff, louder stuff. The keyboards would be the big difference, they feature a lot on *Gossip* [played by New Zealander Peter Bull]."

Some of the Coloured Girls' concerts here this month will be double-billed with the Johnnys. The two bands are quite matey, says Kelly. "They used to do 'White Train' before I ever recorded it. I wrote it, but

they used to play it twice as fast."

Following the success of *Gossip*'s 'Before too Long' and 'Darling it Hurts' (both of which even received radio play here) the next single will be a double-A side: 'Leaps and Bounds' off the album with 'Don Bradman'.

"That's a song about Bradman, in the folk tradition I guess, it's about seven minutes long. I sent him the song, and he wrote back. I just wanted to check that I had my facts right."

He still stands tall. I still follow cricket, the tests, I don't like one-day stuff much. I like Alan Border a lot."

Paul Kelly's style doesn't have the attention-seeking antics of Greg Matthews or the cynical ruthlessness of Greg Chappell, but the craftsmanship and flair of Bradman, who knew the difference between showmanship and showing off — and had a most impressive batting average.

Chris Bourke

The Return of The Damned



The cancellation of China Crisis' planned appearance at Palmerston North's Rheineck rock festival this month could have left the organisers in a nasty spot. But fortunately the Damned have stepped in to headline the show, as well as playing one night at Auckland's Galaxy.

The Damned haven't played many festivals, but drummer Rat Scabies is looking forward to this one:

"The good thing about doing festivals is that you get to see lots of other groups perform. We've just done a tour of Europe and there wasn't any support bands as such and you get a bit of a taste for seeing other bands performing and seeing what's going on. Especially it'll be good cos in Europe you don't get to hear much about bands in New Zealand."

One act he looks forward to seeing again is Australian band The Johnnys. "A swell bunch of guys. We

met them the last time we were in the Antipodes, they're really good fun."

The Damned have just released their seventh album *Anything* and this year marks their tenth in the business. How do they explain the fact that a band born out of punk has far outlived its era?

"We never made lots of money so there's always been that reason to carry on. Plus if we'd have stopped, all the critics, and the cynics and the people who said 'Oh the Damned are just a joke band, they'll never last' would have been proved right. But also we never really saw a reason to stop. We were always busy having a good time and still are. As soon as it becomes boring, then we'll give it up."

Last year's rash of "ten years on" punk retrospectives had good reason to include the Damned, who were after all, the first punk band to record. Did looking back on those days engender any sort of nostalgic pride?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

B & W LOUDSPEAKERS



Acoustix
BECAUSE PEOPLE LIKE MUSIC

Auckland
7 Lorne St. City
Phone (09) 371-667

Wellington
273b Tinakori Rd. Thorndon
Phone (04) 724-874

Nelson
95 Trafalgar Street
Phone (054) 88-130

Christchurch
172 Hereford St
Phone (03) 66-122

Dunedin
6 George St. Dunedin
Phone (024) 777-071