

A SHARK ISLAND PRODUCTIONS FILM

PAUL KELLY

Stories of Me

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A **STUDY GUIDE** BY PAUL MITCHELL



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Paul Kelly – Stories of Me is a documentary about the life and career of the acclaimed Australian singer-songwriter, Paul Kelly. The film explores the relationship of Kelly's art to his life and personal journey, and the hurdles he faced along the way. It also shows the way that Kelly's work has been informed by Australian society and his work has in turn given voice to the experiences of many Australians, and at times the life of the nation.



AFI award-winning director Ian Darling (*The Oasis, Polly And Me, In The Company of Actors, Alone Across Australia, Woodstock for Capitalists*) and his Shark Island Productions team have created a multi-layered film that incorporates interviews, concert performance, rehearsal performance, archive footage, recreations and animation to tell a seamless story that covers Kelly's forty years in the music business.



While first and foremost a rock-and-roll musician, Paul Kelly has also acted, written prose and scored film. He is intimately involved, through practice and relationships, with the full spectrum of Australian culture. Kelly has also, perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, been involved in Australian cultural and political life. The film reflects these activities and so, as well as being about the life of Paul Kelly, it is also about our times.



The interview subjects include various members of Kelly's family, many of his fellow musicians and friends including novelists Richard Flanagan and Fiona McGregor, film director Rachel Perkins and musicians Megan Washington and Archie Roach.



SYNOPSIS

'He was the guy who wrote basically everything'
– songwriter Megan Washington

The name of the documentary comes from one of Kelly's songs, 'Stories of Me', and it acts as a frame for the film's focus, revealing both the stories Kelly tells about himself through his songs, and the stories others tell about him. The filmmakers adopt a non-linear, episodic approach to telling Kelly's overall story, highlighting historical periods in Kelly's work, themes within his work and other aspects of his personal life.

The portrait that emerges is of a deeply private man who has documented his life through song. In the film's interviews, Kelly seems reluctant to reveal much about his personal life, with the inference being that if people want to learn anything intimate about him they need to listen to his music. But, as musician and singer/songwriter Deborah Conway points out, even that is not a reliable approach because of the blurring of lines between fact and fiction in his songs. In contrast, his close friend John Kingsmill reveals how his songs have tracked his life closely, despite Kelly denying their autobiographical nature.

Kelly is shown to be a man of many facets. He used heroin for many years, was twice divorced and, in the great tradition of the romantic poet, is

a man continually in search of love in its multitude of guises. Both his former wives hint strongly in the film that Kelly's pursuit of love often went outside the boundaries of their relationship. These women – and many of Kelly's friends and contemporaries – portray him as a man who feels and senses deeply, and say this has contributed to the depth and breadth of his canon.

As well as touching millions of individual lives through his songs (in the credits, cast and crew nominate their favourite Paul Kelly songs as testament to this), Kelly's music has often taken the nation's pulse. 'From Little Things Big Things Grow', co-written with Kev Carmody, is a song that documents stockman Vincent Lingiari's battle for Aboriginal land rights in the 1960s. It is arguably the most famous of Kelly's small number of political tracks. Commentators in the film laud his effort to show Australians their own souls, but Kelly himself is revealed as never wanting to be a mouthpiece for any movement. Kelly explains that he does not intend to write issue-based, topical songs – although we see him at a reconciliation conference singing one. Kelly's political views come through more subtly by virtue of the stories he chooses to tell. Songs like 'Rally Round The Drum', co-written with Archie Roach, are an important part of preserving history.

'I want to be careful not to make him into a saint, because he ain't a saint,' says musical

CURRICULUM RELEVANCE

YEAR 11 AND 12 ENGLISH, LITERATURE, MEDIA, AUSTRALIAN HISTORY AND SOCIOLOGY.

YEAR 10 ENGLISH CORE (ESPECIALLY THEMES SUCH AS TEXTS IN CONTEXT AND RESPONDING TO LITERATURE), AND ENGLISH ELECTIVES SUCH AS TRUE STORIES, TALKING BACK AND INSIDE STORIES. HISTORY, ESPECIALLY THEMES SUCH AS POPULAR CULTURE AND RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS.

contemporary Renee Geyer. Paraphrasing author DH Lawrence, novelist Richard Flanagan says that '[Paul] would probably be the first to say "trust the art, not the artist"' as a way of commenting on how Kelly and his work should be judged.

Like a set of interlinking rings, the documentary circles to its conclusion, the final frames showing Paul Kelly as a man who embodies his art, driven daily by a fierce desire for excellence and the search for just one more song.

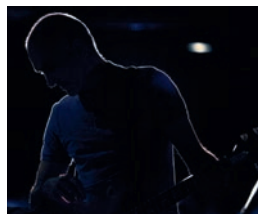
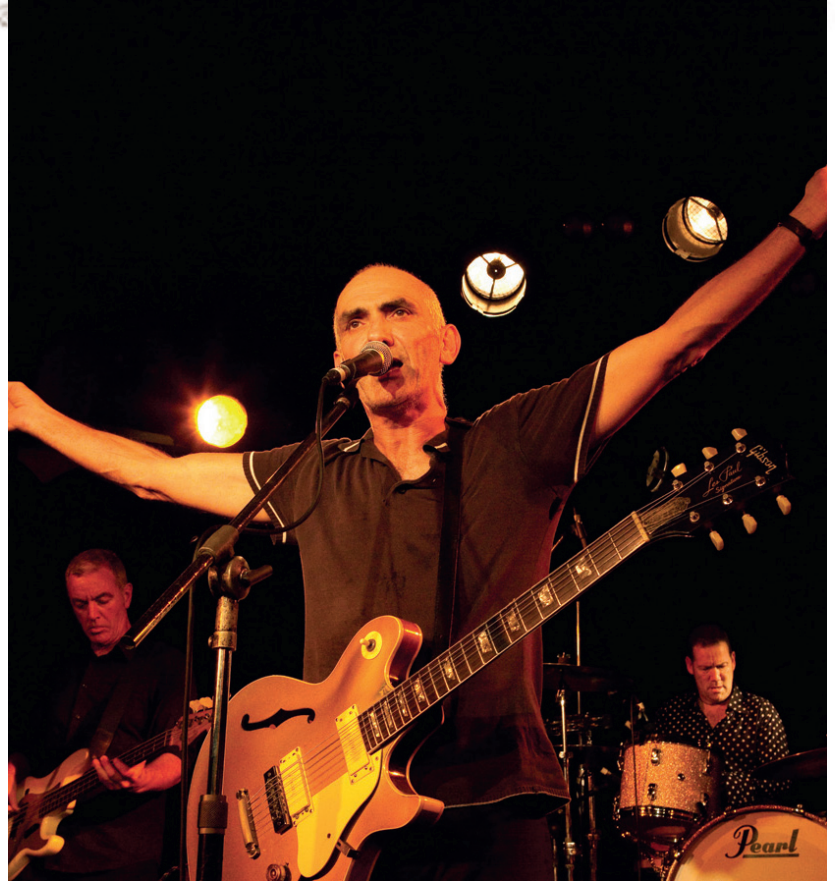
TELLING A MUSICAL STORY

The history of the music documentary

Broadly speaking, *Paul Kelly – Stories of Me* is a music documentary. That term usually implies a sanitised portrait of an artist's body of work. Most music documentaries are restricted to an artist's public work. So while *Paul Kelly – Stories of Me* in part accords with the formal shape of music films, its purview goes beyond Kelly's work to examine the social and political context in which the work lives and the personal struggle with which Kelly has grappled.

The first major documentary about a rock-and-roll musician was DA Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* (1967). This was a cinéma-vérité portrait of Bob Dylan around the time of his 1965 tour of the UK.

Pennebaker made a number of other important music films, notably *Monterey Pop* (1968) (about the Monterey Pop Festival). The Maysles Brothers documented the Rolling Stones' 1969 American tour with *Gimme Shelter* (1970). Likewise, German director Wim Wenders' *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999) and its exploration of guitarist Ry Cooder's



Stories of Me provides a social context to Kelly and his work.

musical journey with Cuban musicians was a film with wide audience appeal. These are essentially documents of an event. It wasn't until Martin Scorsese made *The Last Waltz* (1978) recording The Band's last concert (a group most famous for being Bob Dylan's backing band) that a filmmaker attempted, through interviews and archive, to get under an artist's skin. Scorsese's intimate and revealing interviews with band members and The Band's musical contemporaries, coupled with his revealing concert footage, make it a touchstone in the genre. Scorsese built on *The Last Waltz* with landmark films about Bob Dylan (*No Direction Home* [2005]) and the Beatle George Harrison (*Living In the Material World* [2011]).

Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's 2004 film *Some Kind of Monster* about the group Metallica was a watershed in music films. The group were uncommonly candid with the filmmakers and allowed the film to look at the personal issues that the musicians faced individually and collectively.

Paul Kelly – Stories of Me builds on this tradition of music films. It has the candour of *Some Kind of Monster* while providing the breadth and investigative reach of Scorsese's films. *Stories of Me* goes further than these films by providing a social context to Kelly and his work.

The filmmakers have utilised concert footage in a way that has not been done before. Kelly's concerts were filmed over a period of two years in very different circumstances – small pub shows with his band, music festivals, solo concerts, rehearsals and spontaneous jam sessions in his house. These different moments are used as a subtle narrative device that reveals important information about





Kelly himself, but also about his place in Australian culture. For example, the song 'Deeper Water' is shown performed in a number of different contexts, edited as a complete song from a number of recordings, culminating in Kelly's appearance at the Falls Festival where tens of thousands of young Australians sing along with the words. Young audiences are responding to his songs now as living things but the lyrics have become part of the national conversation.

The Australian music doco

Australian music documentaries that have received cinema releases have been too few and far between. Perhaps the first major film was *Three Directions In Australian Pop Music* (1972), directed by Peter Weir and featuring Captain Matchbox, Spectrum and Wendy Saddington. The film *Sunbury* (1972) directed by John Dixon, which documented the 1970 Sunbury music festival, emulated *Woodstock* and *Monterey Pop*. The other major Australian music film was *Australian Made* (1987) directed by Richard Lowenstein and documenting the music festival concert series featuring INXS, Jimmy Barnes, the Triffids, the Saints and other groups. In 2007, South Australian director Scott Hicks made *Glass: A Portrait of Philip in Twelve Parts*, which was very well received. Probably the most important Australian music film is *Wrong Side of the Road* (1981) directed by Ned Lander and featuring the groups Us Mob and No Fixed Address in a story that melded drama, documentary and live performance. One of the few feature-length Australian films about an individual musician is *Autoluminescent* (2011), directed by Richard Lowenstein, about the guitarist Rowland S Howard.

There are a number of interesting documentary projects about Australian music. *murundak – Songs of Freedom* (2011), directed by Natasha Gadd and Rhys Graham, follows the Black Arm Band on a journey from the city to the bush. Andy Nehl directed *Buried Country* (2000) which is a history

of indigenous popular music. There have been other documentaries such as the *Great Australian Albums* series (SBS 2008, 2009), which screened at film festivals domestically and abroad.

MAKING UP STORIES OF ME

Stories of love

*'Love like a bird flies away
you'll find out the only way...'*

– Paul Kelly ('When I First Met Your Ma')

Love is Paul Kelly's major subject matter and he writes about it in numerous ways. In the tradition of the bard or balladeer, Kelly tells musical stories about love – first love, love of partner, love of family, love of country, love of God, love gone bad, love filled with regret, love that starts all over again.

'I think it is the love songs that define him,' says writer David Leser, interviewed in the documentary. 'He is the romantic poet in song.'

The pop charts are always filled with love songs, but Paul Kelly's love songs, while attracting chart success in the 1980s, have never been disposable pop songs. Kelly's love songs have had, like Keats – who Kelly quotes in the film – a depth and complexity that belie their apparent simplicity.

An anthem like 'To Her Door' talks about break-up and reconciliation in stark and unsentimental terms; 'Before Too Long' addresses how a potential 'suitor' views the relationship of the woman he wants to be with; 'When I First Met Your Ma' speaks both poetically and directly about Kelly meeting his first wife Hilary; 'I Can't Believe We Were Married' looks at that former marriage from the distance that time offers; and 'Love is the Law' is a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13, the famous biblical verse often used at weddings: 'If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.'

List of Interviewees

- Martin Armiger (musician/songwriter)
- Michael Barclay (musician)
- Kev Carmody (singer/songwriter)
- Lee Cass (musician)
- Kasey Chambers (singer/songwriter)
- Deborah Conway (singer/songwriter)
- Stuart Coupe (music journalist)
- Kutcha Edwards (singer/songwriter)
- Kaarin Fairfax (former wife)
- Richard Flanagan (author)
- Robert Forster (singer/songwriter)
- Renee Geyer (singer)
- Richard Guilliat (author/journalist)
- Spencer P. Jones (musician/songwriter)
- Anne Kelly (sister)
- Dan Kelly (nephew/musician)
- David Kelly (brother)
- Declan Kelly (son)
- Hilary Kelly (former wife)
- Martin Kelly (brother)
- Mary Jo Kelly (sister)
- Sheila Kelly (sister)
- Tony Kelly (brother)
- John Kelly (brother)
- John Kingsmill (friend)
- Chris Langman (musician)
- David Leser (writer)
- Peter Luscombe (musician)
- Alex McGregor (cousin)
- Fiona McGregor (cousin/author)
- John O'Donnell (journalist)
- Rachel Perkins (filmmaker)
- Archie Roach (singer/songwriter)
- Jon Schofield (musician)
- Nicholas Tonti-Filippini (cousin/ethicist)
- Megan Washington (singer/songwriter)



Both his former wives are interviewed in the film, and they suggest that Kelly's desire to dig into what he sees as the fullness of love was difficult at times for them to handle. As Kelly's first wife, Hilary, told the filmmakers, Kelly seems to have a song for every girl. But as filmmaker Rachel Perkins says, it is only through Kelly's experiences of loss, love and suffering that he has been able to get inside the heads of the characters he sings about, including himself.

Stories of Australia

'I'm high on the hill, looking over the bridge, to the MCG'

– Paul Kelly, 'Leaps and Bounds'

Paul Kelly is portrayed in the documentary as a songwriter who has been able to show Australians who they are. Along with bands such as Skyhooks, the Dingoes, Midnight Oil, Goanna and Australian Crawl, Paul Kelly (first with the Dots and then the Coloured Girls/Messengers) was one of the first popular musicians to reference Australian places and culture (even to the point of local landmarks such as the clock on the silo near Melbourne's MCG) so clearly. This depiction of Australia in straightforward, non-jingoistic ways has been a consistent theme in Kelly's work since his third album *Post*, which opens with the line 'From St Kilda to Kings Cross, is thirteen hours on a bus.'

Shark Island Productions Key Crew:

Ian Darling
(director/producer)

Sally Fryer (editor)

Susan MacKinnon
(producer)

Mary Macrae
(producer/production
manager)

Toby Creswell
(executive producer)

David Leser
(executive producer)

Simon Smith
(director of
photography)

Paul Charlier
(sound design
and music mixer)

Richard Grant
(graphics design)

Ruth Johnstone
(education and
outreach manager)

As well as portraying the nation's landscape and cultural 'iconography' (e.g. the MCG, Sydney Harbour, the lights of Sydney from a plane, Queensland's cane fields and Adelaide) he has at times delved into its political heart. 'From Little Things, Big Things Grow', which appeared on Kelly's 1991 album, *Comedy*, tells the story of Aboriginal stockman Vincent Lingiari's battle for land rights in the 1960s. Kelly recounts in *Stories of Me* how he went camping with Aboriginal singer/songwriter Kev Carmody who told the story of the Northern Territory Wave Hill Station Strike, during which Lingiari and other stockmen walked off the Station in protest at their working conditions.

'It quickly turned into a land rights claim,' Kelly says in the documentary, 'one of the first.' Kev Carmody explains how the song's lyrics go beyond simple retelling of history, saying that it taps into the ancient practice of the oral tradition, keeping history alive in people's consciousness via song, story and poetry. The Aboriginal community has adopted the song as an anthem, perhaps one of Kelly's highest ever songwriting honours.

Kelly has written a number of songs over the years about Aboriginal identities and events. They include co-writes such as 'Treaty' (with Mandawuy Yunupingu), 'The Land Is Mine' (with Kev Carmody) and 'Rally Round the Drum' (with Archie Roach), and on his own, 'Maralinga', 'Pigeon/Jundamurra',

'Smoke Under the Bridge', 'The Ballad of Queenie and Rover', 'Nukkanya' 'Bicentennial' and 'Special Treatment'.

The documentary also shines a spotlight on a lesser known political song, 'Little Kings', from Kelly's 1998 album, *Words and Music*. Written during the height of the nation's concerns about Mabo, the Wik Ten-Point Plan and unfettered capitalism, the song highlights Kelly's love for Australia with one of his most poignant barbs:

'I'm so afraid for my country ... In the land of the little kings, justice don't mean a thing. And everywhere the little kings are getting away with murder.'

Kelly is adamant that his political songs emerge unconsciously, unbidden, like any other of his songs. They come out of his attention to the world around him. Kutcha Edwards explains in the film, 'Aboriginal people don't like white people speaking for them'. He believes that Kelly is one of the few white Australians who can deal sensitively with Indigenous issues and that the Indigenous community in Australia holds Kelly in particularly high regard.

Less controversially, Kelly has also written about Australia's surrogate religion, sport. His most famous track is his ode to Australian batsman Sir Donald Bradman, the man who still holds the record for the highest ever Test cricket average:

'More than just a batsman, he was something like a tide. More than just one man, he could take on any side.'

Kelly was a high ranking junior sportsman, and his competitive nature was obvious to all who watched him or played against him. He took that same intensity and ambition into his chosen art of songwriting.

Stories of suffering and inspiration

'Well I look so fine, but I feel so low'

– Paul Kelly ('Look So Fine, Feel So Low')

The composer Stephen Sondheim once said that art is an attempt to make order out of chaos. And while Paul Kelly's outer world remained ordered after his father's death when he was thirteen, it is clear from interviews with him in the documentary that the event had a significant impact on his life, and it is revealed in several of his songs.

Kelly's first wife, Hilary Kelly, says she once found him at his piano weeping over his father's death. Here was an adult man finally dealing with the loss of his father, a loss that second wife Kaarin Fairfax suggests Paul was never given time to properly grieve. Fairfax says that Kelly has a very strong, single-mined focus and a stoicism that probably came from the trauma of his father's death.

If great art comes from suffering, then Kelly's suffering has produced its own unique contribution. The death of his father, the drug-related deaths of several close friends and his marriage break-ups, have all contributed to Kelly's prolific outpouring.

Fairfax says Kelly is 'not an open book' and that the way to him is through his songs. Kelly affirms this, but, as fellow songwriter Deborah Conway says, that's difficult when he has taken only small kernels of truth from his life and grown them into fiction. But Kelly's friend John Kingsmill has a different perspective, saying that Kelly's songs have tracked his life so closely that it's hard for him – or, he says, anyone – to believe that they're just made up stories.

Kelly himself says little about this issue in the documentary, remaining mostly the closed book that Fairfax says he is. But he speaks openly and at length about his songwriting influences and inspirations. Bob Dylan, The Beatles, Shakespeare ('Anything you come up with in a song seems to have been in Shakespeare first', Kelly says), numerous authors, especially the 'bad boys' of American literature, the poet Keats, and many of his Australian songwriting contemporaries (including Grant McLennan from The Go-Betweens and David McComb from The Triffids, both songwriters steeped in 'place') are said to fire his imagination.

Kelly, apparently a lapsed Catholic, also admits how much the Bible has influenced his songwriting, with passages and phrases regularly appearing in songs like, 'Love is the Law' and 'Meet Me in the Middle of the Air', both of which borrow heavily from 1 Corinthians 13 and Psalm 23 respectively.

Early in the documentary, his first wife Hilary quotes a young Kelly as saying that he didn't care if he wasn't well known for his work when he was alive, as long as he was recognised after his death. *Paul Kelly – Stories of Me* celebrates an Australian music legend who is much loved and respected now, and will be an influence on Australian songwriters for generations to come.

The death of his father, the drug-related deaths of several close friends and his marriage break-ups have all contributed to Kelly's prolific outpouring.

PAUL KELLY SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

POST – 1985

Kelly's first solo album after his time with the Dots. Acoustic for the most part, it is full of intimate portraits and yearning. Key tracks:

'From St Kilda to Kings Cross' – an anthem for the cross-country traveller and a love song for Melbourne.

'Adelaide' – Kelly's coming-of-age song about leaving Adelaide. Acerbic and funny, it also speaks about his father's death.

'Blues For Skip' – Kelly's song about writer's block which utilises the metaphor of drug use while also borrowing an old blues melody from Skip James. Note also the use of falsetto which was to become a significant part of Kelly's repertoire in the future.

GOSSIP – 1986

Recorded with his band the Coloured Girls, this double album/CD put Kelly on the Australian music map. Key tracks:

'Leaps and Bounds' – Kelly's love song to the MCG and its surrounds, and Melbourne in autumn

'Before Too Long' – a pop hit that sees a potential suitor waiting on the edge of a relationship to snare the woman he wants.

'Maralinga' – about the nuclear testing in the 1950s. This is the first song Kelly sings in another character, also the first song that deals with indigenous issues and his first political song.

UNDER THE SUN – 1987

His second outing with the Coloured Girls, *Under the Sun* was a more focused recording than his previous album. Key tracks:

'To Her Door' – the Australian national anthem of love and loss. This is Kelly perfecting his writing in character. It's a perfect example of the way in which he uses some personal experience (drug problems and family crisis) but makes a new story.

'Dumb Things' – a big hit, to which anyone who has made a mess of a job or a relationship can relate.

SO MUCH WATER SO CLOSE TO HOME – 1989

'Everything's Turning to White' – based on a Raymond Carver short story, it is a dramatic leap in Kelly's narrative ability. It's interesting to look at the way in which Kelly has utilised Carver's original story.

'Sweet Guy' – the first song Kelly wrote from a female character of Kelly's devising.

'Careless' – A 'circle song' partly conceived by adjusting chords from the Go-Betweens song 'Apology Accepted'.

COMEDY – 1991

The fourth album with the Messengers, the album is something of a forgotten gem in his catalogue. Key tracks:

'From Little Things Big Things Grow' – co-written with Kev Carmody, a political anthem for Aboriginal land rights that has taken on an even larger cultural life in the past decade.

'Don't Start Me Talking' – a shining example of Kelly's gift for catchy pop songs, the lyrics of which make them anything but disposable. The title is from blues classic by Sonny Boy Williamson, a good example of the way in which Kelly draws from different genres.

WANTED MAN – 1994

'God's Hotel' – Paul Kelly putting music to Nick Cave's lyrics. Two atheists writing about God, salvation and grace.

DEEPER WATER – 1995

'Deeper Water' – Kelly now without the Coloured Girls/Messengers takes a different approach to song construction and sonics, working in the US with a US guitarist/producer Randy Jacobs. Again Kelly turning the facts of his youth into song. Compare and contrast this with 'Adelaide', another song about his childhood, and the language and emotions are much richer and more nuanced, as is the music.

WORDS & MUSIC – 1998

'Words & Music' – The song is treated with squalls of feedback and ambient noise rather than as a nostalgia exercise. The words and music go together and inform each other both sympathetically and by contrast and irony.

'Nothing On My Mind' – a song that is autobiographical but not complimentary to its subject. Again the use of noise and abstract music and modern beats challenges Kelly's musical palette.

SMOKE – 1999

'Stories of Me' – Kelly takes an old song of his and reinvents it. What had been a pop/rock song is given a bluegrass/country treatment.

STOLEN APPLES – 2007

'God Told Me To' – a searing critique of religious fundamentalism and its violent consequences.

'You're 39, You're Beautiful and You're Mine' – an example of a mature Kelly love song, and a humorous (but perhaps more appropriate) paraphrase of the Sherman Brothers' lyric 'You're sixteen, you're beautiful and you're mine'. (This song was originally given to Don Walker for the group Tex Don and Charlie and may also reference the Cold Chisel record 'You're 13 You're Beautiful and You're Mine')



ACTIVITY ONE

Before the story

Paul Kelly – *Stories of Me* is a music documentary. This activity asks us to consider our preconceptions about the genre and our expectations of the film before viewing.

- Paul Kelly has been a part of the Australian music industry for almost forty years. He's well known to some people, but others might know little about him. Before watching the film, think about what you know about Paul Kelly. How does your knowledge, or lack of it, affect how you approach watching the film?
- Does the title *Paul Kelly – Stories of Me* make you expect an autobiographical or biographical film?
- Have you seen other music documentaries? If so, which were your favourites and why?
- What do you hope to see/hear in a music documentary? Would you be disappointed if there was an absence of live concert footage or interviews with the subject?
- Think of your favourite singer or musical act. How would you approach making a documentary on their life and career?

ACTIVITY TWO

Making a musical story

To tell Paul Kelly's story, the filmmakers use concert, rehearsal and personal footage, along

with interviews with Kelly, close friends, relatives, cultural commentators, music critics, authors and fellow musicians.

This activity studies the film in the context of the music documentary genre and asks whether or not it is successful.

- The opening of the film features a dramatised re-creation which the documentary returns to and explains twenty minutes later. What did you think of this approach to starting the film and was it successful in setting the mood? Is there another scene in the film that reminds you, metaphorically, of the opening sequence?
- Did you find the lyrics on screen helpful in understanding the songs' messages when listening to and watching Kelly's concert footage? Do you normally listen to song lyrics closely? What strikes you about the style of font used in each sequence?
- Which interview subjects did you think were the most interesting in the film? Why? When we watch someone answer a question we often see them thinking about the answer as well, how does this affect the screen presence of the interviewees? Does it affect whether you believe them?
- Do you feel like you know Paul Kelly after watching the film? What about understanding his place in Australian culture?
- If you break down the film into background, family, peers and his own comments, how is Paul Kelly represented by the filmmakers? Why did the filmmakers start with the question 'Who is Paul Kelly?'
- What did you feel, if anything, was missing from the documentary? What would you do to change it/edit it/add to it?

ACTIVITY THREE

Songwriters and poets

Although he has made his career as a songwriter, Paul Kelly has often also been called a poet; publisher Angus and Robertson even put out a book of his lyrics as part of a poetry series. In the documentary, he recites from memory one of his favourite poems, 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819) by John Keats. Kelly talks about studying poetry in school and enjoying it, then writing his own poetry in his early teens. Far from thinking that was strange, he thought all his peers would be doing it.

This activity asks us why a songwriter such as Paul Kelly might also be dubbed a poet.

- What are the differences and similarities between songwriters and poets?
- Can a song lyric be a poem or a poem be a song lyric? Try reading a Keats poem and one of Paul Kelly's song lyrics aloud. What did you discover?
- Before he wrote songs, Paul Kelly originally wrote poetry. Why do you think he changed direction?
- Is he more of a storyteller rather than poet?
- Which of the Paul Kelly songs you heard in the film do you think is most poetic?
- Can you recite an entire poem or sing an entire song from memory? What might be an advantage, in your personal life, of being able to do that?
- Pick your favourite Paul Kelly song from the film. Look at the lyrics to that song and write your own song lyric or poem on the same subject matter. For example, the subject matter of 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' is Aboriginal land rights.



Although he has made his career as a songwriter, Paul Kelly has often also been called a poet.

- Paul incorporates lyrics and phrases he has heard in other songs or seen in books or plays. Can you find twenty lines or titles in Paul Kelly's work that may have come from other writers (i.e. 'Don't Start Me Talking' and 'I'd Rather Go Blind' are old songs – find more)?
- Paul works in many different musical styles, from bluegrass to electronica. Why do you think he does that?

ACTIVITY FOUR

Music and politics

It isn't his major subject matter, but Paul Kelly has written a number of political songs, especially concerning issues facing Aboriginal people. This activity looks at political songwriting and asks us about its place in Australian and world music culture.

- What makes a song political? Does it have to be about current issues?
- Can you name political songwriters from the past, either Australian or international?
- What political songs do you know and why are they important to you?
- Do you normally listen to songs with a political focus? Why or why not?
- Is it important that political songs exist? What effects do you think they can have on people?
- Which of the political songs in the film did you find most interesting or moving? Why?
- How would you describe Paul Kelly's political outlook and views?
- Kelly has a strong association with Aboriginal people. Why do you think they've embraced him and his songs? What are the reasons given in the film for his friendships?
- What other songs about Indigenous people, issues or events has he written about?
- Democracy requires participation, how do musicians participate in our democracy? Do you think they have influence? Why?
- Issues of race, identity, citizenship, violence are common in political writing. What current issue would you write about?





From left: Alana Scott, Simon Smith and Ian Darling on location

ACTIVITY FIVE

Love and loss

Paul Kelly – *Stories of Me* suggests that love is Kelly's major songwriting subject. In the film, Kelly's voice narrates the many different permutations of love he's written about, including love in intimate relationships, break-ups, love for country and love for friends.

One interviewee describes him as the 'romantic poet' and Paul Kelly talks about how he equates love with freedom. His friends and former wives talk about his passion to explore every element of love, in his personal life and in his songs.

This activity looks at how love is defined in the film, and asks us to consider the idea of love in our own lives.

- From *Paul Kelly – Stories of Me*, how would you describe Kelly's definition of love?
- Is his definition different from yours?
- Think of your favourite love songs. What similarities and differences exist between them and Kelly's love songs? Are they songs about love or about desire?
- Describe the different love you have for relatives, friends and a favourite hobby or sport.
- When the screen fills with all the different kinds of love Kelly has written about (and his voice narrates them), he names 'love of pain' and 'love of oblivion'. What does he mean by this?
- The Paul Kelly song 'Love is the Law' is featured in the film. What does that song title – and its lyrics – mean to you?

ACTIVITY SIX

Story of his

Paul Kelly has written several songs that have taken their inspiration from other artists (e.g. 'Everything's

Turning to White is based on the Raymond Carver short story 'So Much Water, So Close to Home' – see DVD extras. It's also worth looking at how other artists have approached the same raw material – Ray Lawrence in the film *Jindabyne* [2006] and Robert Altman in the film *Short Cuts* [1993].

This activity asks you to make Paul Kelly an inspiration for your own creativity.

- Paul Kelly has written hundreds of songs. Visit his website (paulkelly.com.au) and look through the catalogue of song titles you find there. Pick out a title that appeals to you and then look at the lyrics for that song.
- Write a 500-1000 word short story – or long poem – that uses those lyrics as an inspiration.

ACTIVITY SEVEN

The documentary

Techniques of film, structure and construction of the film

- The filmmakers break a few filmmaking conventions – for example the interview subjects are often seated centre or toward frame right. Why have they done this? How would you describe the interview set-ups? What other filmmaking conventions do you know?
- Several of Paul Kelly's songs are used in "mashes" through the film. Which can you identify as having used more than one recording of the song? Why do you think the songs are edited in this way?
- This documentary uses neither narration nor the interviewer's voice (after the first question) to inform the audience what question the interviewee is answering. How have the director and editor constructed the film to keep the subjects clear? What other devices are used in lieu of narration?
- Graphic images and text are used extensively in the film. Describe how the filmmakers have used photos and text to tell the story. Have graphics been used effectively?
- How important is the role of the interviewer in making a documentary? Do you think it would be difficult or easy to meet someone and have them be open and honest with you about their life? Why?
- The film has been constructed in a non-linear fashion. What does this mean? Why did the filmmakers edit the film this way?
- This film was shot entirely on the Canon 5Dii (a stills camera) with a variety of different lenses. Can you identify the differences in length of lens?

His friends and former wives talk about his passion to explore every element of love, in his personal life and in his songs.

- Some footage is archival from video, film, 16mm film and still images. Investigate how the images and footage need to be digitized for use in the edit suite (edited using Final Cut). What types of treatments do you think have been made to the footage?

Helpful Links

- <http://paulkellythemovie.com.au>
- <http://paulkelly.com.au>
- <http://sharkisland.com.au> (production company)
- <http://www.documentaryaustralia.com.au>
- <http://indigenoustrights.net.au>
- <http://songlyricist.com/lyricorpoem.htm>
- <http://musicfilmweb.com>
- <http://john-keats.com>
- Songwriter Robert Forster's review of Paul Kelly's *Songs from the South* (a wide-reaching essay available on *The Monthly's* website)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Write a review of *Paul Kelly – Stories of Me*, comparing it to other music documentaries you've seen.
- Pretend you're a journalist and prepare a list of at least five questions you would like to ask Paul Kelly *after* watching the documentary.
- Write a rhyming poem – that could become a song lyric – that celebrates the part of Australia you love the most.
- Create a timeline – including images and two key songs – that places Paul Kelly amongst, in your opinion, the top ten Australian musicians. Make sure each artist on the timeline has a fifty-word explanation of why he/she/they are represented.
- Form groups of three or four. Each group must create an argument in either the affirmative or negative for the following statement: Paul Kelly is Australia's most important songwriter.



MADMAN

Madman is distributing *Paul Kelly: Stories of Me* in Australia and New Zealand.

<http://www.madman.com.au>



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