

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

Appeared in – The Adelaide Review

Recent Releases on CD

It has just been another outstanding year for Paul Kelly. He has released no less than four albums, each of them indicative of the rich variety of his gift. ...*Nothing But a Dream* (EMI) is his latest studio work, full of familiar Kelly riffs and trademarks. The opening track, *If I Could Start Today Again* has all the tender truth of a classic, also appealing is *Change Your Mind*. I 'm not much taken with the radio single, *Somewhere in the City*, and tracks like *Midnight Rain* and *I Close My Eyes and Think of You* are not among Kelly's stronger work. The repressed energy of *Just About to Break*, with ratbaggy guitar distortions from Shane O'Mara on guitar, is much closer to the mark, though, as are the epic White album repetitions of *Love is the Law*, guest vocals from Bic Runga and the Bull Sisters. And for something sublime, there is the sweetly lilting melody of *The Pretty Place*, featuring the estimable Bruce Haymes on keyboards.

For Kelly, 2001 was a year for film soundtracks. *Silent Partner*, (Gawdaggie) based on Daniel Keene's marvellous two-hander about a couple of blokes and their greyhound, is an SBS Independent venture featuring David Field and Syd Brisbane. Kelly has worked with Field before, and director Alkinos Tsilimidos, when he wrote the score for the 1996 prison feature *Everynight...Everynight*. With *Silent Partner* Paul Kelly is back in cahoots with Gerry Hale, leader of Uncle Bill, the backing band for Kelly's unplugged bluegrass project, *Smoke*. Mixing in existing songs like *Be Careful What You Pray For* and *Little Boy Don't Lose Your Balls*, Kelly and Hale have written some splendid instrumentals with Hale overdubbing on guitar, banjo, mandolin and fiddle. It is a delightfully airy sound, very reminiscent of Dylan's soundtrack for Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*.

Lantana (Gawdaggie) recently gathered up just about every AFI award, including a nomination for Paul Kelly's music. An outstanding film in every respect, it has given much deserved recognition to the writing talents of Andrew Bovell and restored Ray Lawrence to the very front line of Australian directors. The soundtrack was derived from several lengthy improvisation sessions with guitarist Shane O'Mara and members of Kelly's regular touring band - Haymes on keyboard, Steven Hadley on bass and drummer Peter Luscombe. From there O'Mara and Kelly cut and spliced a moody score that threads and insinuates like lantana itself.

Again, on this album, Paul Kelly shows both his confidence as a composer and his strong grasp of a wide range of musical styles.

Perhaps the most interesting project Kelly was involved in last year was the short feature film, *One Night the Moon*, directed by Rachel Perkins and co-written by Perkins and John Romeril. Paul Kelly has a central role along with Kaarin Fairfax, Kelton Pell, Ruby Hunter, Chris Haywood and David Field. Set in the 1930s, it tells of the disappearance of a young girl into the expanses of the outback. It is suggested that an Aboriginal tracker should help with the search but the father, played by Kelly, refuses to have Blacks on his land and the trail for his daughter soon runs cold. Performed as a kind of chamber opera the film uses the work of three composers - Paul Kelly, Kev Carmody and Mairead Hannan. Kelly's compositions include the title tune, performed by his young daughter Memphis in duet with her mother Kaarin Fairfax. Mairead Hannan's richly melodic Irish airs set to uilleann pipes and fiddle accompaniments beautifully counterpoint Kelly's work as well as Carmody's distinctive ballads.

Also among recent EMI releases is the double CD reissue of Maria Callas. *Romantic Callas* features many masterpiece performances from the 1950s and includes highlights from Puccini, Verdi, Bizet, Donizetti. It is accompanied by detailed sleeve notes from Tony Locantro and has been released to coincide with the East Coast restaging, by the Sydney Theatre Company, of Terrence McNally's *Master Class*. Featuring an excellent performance from Amanda Muggleton, we saw this production several years ago as part of the State season. An over-rated and curiously complacent play, *Master Class* nevertheless does us a service when it occasions such an extensive and accessible, digitally remastered compilation.

The Blue Note label has some justification in proclaiming itself "the finest jazz since 1939" when so many musicians recorded their best work under the regal eye of Alfred Lion. One wonders what he would have made of Marc Moulin, a Belgian composer/arranger who has masterminded *Top Secret* (Blue Note) a melange of lounge grooves, Miles trumpetisms and vocoded croonings, all driven by rippling bass lines and caffeinated funk percussion. The players - especially trumpeter Bert Joris and reedsperson Johan Vandendriessche - have plenty of flair and Monsieur Moulin's production is as bright as a button. It is a bit like Daft Punk plays Bitches Brew but I know it's going to be just the summer thing after a spark burg or two.

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Murray.Bramwell@flinders.edu.au