

SPOTLIGHT



Leon Morris

PAUL KELLY

America gets a chance to discover a revered artist from Down Under

IT MAY SEEM PAUL KELLY'S BEEN especially prolific lately. Or it might seem the Australian singer-songwriter has simply been playing up his past. But in fact, it's been a bit of both. Recently there's been a deluge of all things Kelly—from the stateside release of two career-spanning compilations (*Songs from the South Volumes 1 & 2* and *The A to Z Recordings*, a live eight-CD box set), to a memoir (*How to Make Gravy*), to his first studio album in five years, *Spring and Fall*. "Actually, both *Songs of the South* and *The A to Z Recordings* have been out in Australia for some time. They're just new to the States," Kelly says from his home in Melbourne.

For now, Kelly is focusing on *Spring and Fall*, which traces the ups and downs of a relationship. "Love is certainly the most common theme for songwriters," he says. "But I was interested in exploring the emotional and psychological effects of a breakup and rebound." He cites *Phases and Stages*—Willie Nelson's landmark 1974 concept album detailing the aftermath of a divorce from both a man and a woman's point of view—as his primary inspiration.

The impetus for the album grew out of Kelly's commission by an Australian music academy to adapt some poetry to orchestration composed by students. "I hadn't written a new song in four years," he

recalls. "I was seriously wondering what I had gotten myself into." It was authoring the memoir that helped acclimate him to the idea of setting up a theme for the album. "Once I had the theme, I only needed to put the meat between the ribs," he says. "The songs sort of flowed from that."

Kelly's songs have been flowing nonstop for the better part of 30 years, the product of such permutations as Paul Kelly and the Dots, Paul Kelly and the Coloured Girls, and Paul Kelly and the Messengers. His songs capture the intimate details of everyday life and shared aspirations, featuring a revolving cast of ordinary individuals whose emotions are tempered by hope and humility.

Kelly has released more than 20 albums, not counting various compilations, live recordings, soundtracks and efforts with other Aussie artists. He's also recorded under a variety of guises that often diverged from his usual introspective yet accessible style—from techno-groove experimenter Professor Ratbaggy to bluegrass combo Uncle Bill. "Songwriting can get pretty boring sometimes," Kelly says. "Not in the creative sense, of course, but in the process itself. So when I'm able to do something different, it takes me out of my world."

—Lee Zimmerman

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