

## Murray Bramwell's Reviews

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**Paul Kelly**  
Her Majesty's

I like Paul Kelly to stay the same and tend to get tetchy when he changes things around, especially when he tinkers with his band line-up. I couldn't see why he had to shoot the Messengers or why he would hire hotshot American guitarist Randy Jacobs. Was the Professor Ratbaggy project just a scratch band, and what about that bluegrass *Smoke* thing? And, these days, what is he doing with his nephew Dan and where are Hadley and Haymes, his bass and keyboard henchmen? Clearly, if it was up to me, Paul Kelly would still be back at the year dot.

Now, of course, the *Live at the Continental* CD is one of my favourites, especially with Jacobs belting it out on *Dumb Things*, and I have definitely got the hang of the esoteric dub funk of Ratbaggy. And so, comes Kelly's current double CD, *Ways and Means*, with all its confident accomplishment. Showcasing yet another new line-up, Paul Kelly has got it right once again.

The band is not all new - the staunch Peter Luscombe is still on drums, joined now by brother Dan on guitar and keyboards, Bill McDonald on bass and the young Dan Kelly, also guitar, and co-writing songs with his uncle Paul. The result both in the studio and on stage is impressive. They are touring a very strong set and they know it.

It is impressive how well Paul Kelly steers and shapes, not only his music, but the way he presents it. A live show is never just knocked together, Kelly is good on the micro-management, and the details are always careful - whether it is his choice of support act, the pre-show incidental music (selections from Harry Smith Americana to Sinatra) or even the band's outfits. And, of course, this extends to the order of service. Kelly takes the art of the setlist almost to the point of curation.

The show at Her Majesty's, midway through a national tour and following on from the international circuit, sees Kelly returning to the hometown faithful and a venue that very much suits him. After a raggedy but likeable set from Dan Kelly and his (not very) Alpha Males, Kelly and the band start out with the Morricone styled instrumental *Gunnamatta*, the overture to *Ways and Means*, followed by the strong country rock number *Oldest*

*Story in the Book*. The new songs are sprinkled through the show and they scrub up well - *Big Fine Girl*, the slow, bluesy *Curly Red* and *Beautiful Feeling*.

It is a mix of Kelly ancient and modern here - as far back as *Don't Harm the Messenger*,

*Before Too Long* and the silvertop favourite, *To Her Door*. Highpoints include a strong reading of *Cities of Texas*, and the outstanding *Wintercoat*, Kelly on guitar with Dan Luscombe at the piano. The band is in fine form - McDonald playing a vibrant, sinewy bass and Dan Luscombe splendid in his fluid, understated guitar work. They are valuable inclusions and with guitar garnishes from Dan Kelly and the deft, unobtrusive drumming of Peter Luscombe, the unit has that nimble string band sound which has served Bob Dylan so well lately.

Paul Kelly is in high spirit. In a snug black suit with an open necked white shirt, he and the band are dressed in what might be called SP bookie 1963. At one point he asks the audience whether anyone knows what Andrew McLeod is doing running about on the half back line. But mostly it is the business of business - twenty four songs with a few solos and plenty of full throttle country rock. Whether veering towards Tex Morton with *Young Lovers* or the more modish grooves of Ratbaggy's *Love Letter*, Paul Kelly is in open stride, proud of his accomplishment and, with his present band, not only has the ways but the means, to keep it very much alive.