



How to Make Gravy

Paul Kelly

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This extraordinary book has its genesis in a series of concerts first staged in 2004. Over four nights Paul Kelly performed, in alphabetical order, one hundred of his songs from the previous three decades. In between songs he told stories about them, and from those little tales grew *How to Make Gravy*, a memoir like no other. Each of its hundred chapters, also in alphabetical order by song title, consists of lyrics followed by a story, the nature of the latter taking its cue from the former. Some pieces are confessional, some tell Kelly's personal and family history, some take you on a road tour with the band, some form an idiosyncratic history of popular music, some are like small essays, some stand as a kind of how-to of the songwriter's art – from the point of inspiration to writing, honing, collaborating, performing, recording and reworking.

Paul Kelly is a born storyteller. Give him two verses with a chorus or 550 pages, but he won't waste a word. *How to Make Gravy* is a long volume that's as tight as a three-piece band. There isn't a topic this man can't turn his pen to – contemporary music and the people who play it, football, cricket, literature, opera, social issues, love, loss, poetry, the land and the history of Australia ... there are even quizzes. The writing is insightful, funny, honest, compassionate, intelligent, playful, erudite, warm, thought-provoking. Paul Kelly is a star with zero pretensions, an everyman who is also a renaissance man. He thinks and loves and travels and reads widely, and his musical memoir is destined to become a classic – it doesn't have a bum note on it.

How to Make Gravy Details

Date : Published October 1st 2010 by Penguin Books Australia (first published September 22nd 2010)

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From Reader Review How to Make Gravy for online ebook

Annie says

Enjoyable read.

It is ordered alphabetically by his songs with background information on how he came about to write it. Because the timeline jumps back and forth so much I was muddled all the way through. And maybe because he did it like that, the book is all the more memorable. You will get a sense of the type of person he is, and his family history and his values.

Also informative on the struggles of aboriginal Australians in the past few decades and how it influenced his songs.

John Horner says

Paul Kelly isn't as well known outside Australia as he ought to be.

But even if you don't know his songs, some of which are no-kidding National Treasures by now, this is a fascinating book about songs, about songwriting, and how works of art are born, grow and change and cast different shadows as time goes on.

Anyone who's ever tried to write a song or wondered how a song came to be written will find something here.

Anyone who knows Raymond Carver's "So Much Water, So Close To Home" will want to follow its journey from prose to song to a feature film, with Kelly following along with the journey.

Anyone who knows Kelly's songs—has sung along to "Dumb Things" or "To Her Door" or the bittersweet Christmas song "How To Make Gravy" which sneaks up on me every time and brings a tear to my eye, (and actually contains a creditable recipe for gravy), will be fascinated.

Kelly's life hasn't always been easy, or sober, and there are casualties along the way. I get the feeling he could have told a much darker version, and certainly that his loved ones could. But he's earned the right to tell his story the way he wants.

Cheyenne Blue says

I love Paul Kelly. I adore Paul Kelly. One of Australia's most beloved singer-songwriters, with lyrics you remember and tunes that stick. I enjoyed the chaotic structure of this memoir, which leaped and skittered over his career. I enjoyed the chance to read his lyrics as words only (although, of course, some of tunes won't be separated).

I was particularly interested in his enduring theme that nothing is truly original. Not the words, not the tunes. So much is borrowed and snatched, and then filtered and processed and something new emerges. I have a related post on this topic.

Kelly is easy to read, his writing flows much as his lyrics do. There's nothing in-depth about his personal life (relationships are mentioned almost in passing) but I didn't miss that in the book. His thoughts on songwriting, touring, and some enduring friendships and strangers met (Agamemnon the taxi driver) made this a delight to read.

Jody says

This book is a revelation.

Written lists, anecdotes, histories and stories give you such insight into Kelly's passions, his beliefs, his song-writing process.

Accompanied by Music (available on iTunes or CD's) the reading is enhanced by listening to versions of most of the songs hand picked by Kelly.

Be warned you will go looking for music and books referenced.

I cannot recommend this enough. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

Kathe James says

I listened to the Audio Book and it was fantastic.

Tristan Alaba says

Great read, great memoir. You can love Paul without loving all his music. As an Australian songwriter this is an amazing inspiration and resource for guidance which I'll be returning to it again and again.

Benito says

If ever you wanted to write a song, or wonder what it's like to write a song then have to live in a bus rolling across snow playing it every night, then this book is full of invaluable insight.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

'A book that sings and talks and plays.'

Back in 2013, I went to the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra and saw an exhibition entitled 'Paul Kelly and The Portraits'. While I was wandering around, checking out the portraits, I realised that there was a lot I didn't know about Paul Kelly and his music. On the way out of the Gallery, I saw copies of 'How to Make

Gravy'. I borrowed a copy a few weeks later, then bought a copy of the book and a copy of the CD boxed set 'The A to Z Recordings'.

I've only read the book twice, but I play the music frequently. It's my 'go to' music for driving and for writing book reviews.

So, what can I tell you about the book (or the music)? The book grew as a result of a series of concerts first staged in 2004. Over four nights Paul Kelly performed, in alphabetical order, one hundred of his songs. In between the songs he told stories about the songs, and together the stories and the songs became 'How to Make Gravy'. If you are a fan of Paul Kelly's songs, then this book will give you some insights into how he writes.

'Writing songs is a magpie business. You build your nest and fetch and carry to it the bright shiny things that catch your eye. You don't care where they come from just so long as they fit just so.'

It's a fascinating memoir: there's a bit of family history, some personal reminiscences, life on the road while touring with the band, some of the things that matter to Paul Kelly. I learned a little about the man behind the musician, about sources of inspiration. And along the way, I was listening to the songs, making my own connections.

'When you're young you think everything's possible. All of a sudden you're past the middle of your life, you've done only a fraction of the things you could have, and the field of possibility grows smaller each year.'

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Anita says

If you are looking for a linear biography, stay away. Paul Kelly keeps his private life private, even in this memoir. An understandable decision, but it limits the storyline. If you are a fan of Paul's, as I am, it's worth a read. We get snippets of life, focussed more on songwriting and his work life, including touring, than his personal life. If you want a potted history, you can get a better one on Wikipedia.

Amanda says

Loving every second of this book.

Sean Lee says

History, sport, politics, weather, love, family, music, art, considered opinion, witty observation - you get it all with this book. Couple that with some cracking tales about life on the road as a musician and some insight into how the author came up with the ideas for his songs, and you have a captivating story that is both

informative and entertaining all in one go. A must for fans of Paul Kelly and Australian music, and a damn good read for anyone else who feels they would like to dip in.

Theresa says

I loved listening to this audiobook alongside Paul Kelly's AtoZ album. Each chapter starts with song lyrics, and then tells some kind of story. Kelly talks about: growing up in Adelaide, growing old, his family, his lovers, coffee, heroin, touring, song writing, other musicians, and other poets. In news that will surprise no one, Kelly is an excellent storyteller, and he narrates the audiobook which makes it extra ??

Peter says

I don't think you can read this book quickly.

Not because it's badly written or dull or anything. It's just so dense, if that's the right word. Each chapter, and there's a hundred of them, is a tightly written story in itself somehow relating to one of a hundred Paul Kelly songs:-

Anastasia Changes Her Mind

"Anastasia left a kiss on the mirror
And a couple of condoms by the bed
I tried to find her on her old number
But I just got her boyfriend instead
Oh it's hard, so hard
When Anastasia changes her mind"

My second wife Kaarin once had to leave early in the morning on a work trip. She left a lipstick kiss on the mirror in our daughters' bedroom, which stayed there for months until it gradually faded away. It didn't fade from my mind, though. A year later I was talking to my friend Stella about her daughter's upcoming trip to Greece. The girl she'd planned to travel with had fallen in love with a sailor and cancelled at the last moment. "Anastasia always changes her mind," sighed Stella. I put down the phone and picked up a pen.

later in this same chapter

*Triangles. Rosie is my ex-girlfriend too. We got together not long after she and John split up. Pieces of her appeared in my early songs and pieces of me in her poetry. She gave me *To the Lighthouse* to read. She was more Virginia Woolf than Simone de Beauvoir. Some days I imagined us being married and living in the country, writing in rooms of our own. Other days she spoke in voices and didn't know who I was, as if her mind had completely changed. My mind kept changing too. I was in awe of her one minute, irritated the next. Then amazed at the difference in my feelings. Isn't that the story of love?*

I've been reading this on and off for several months now, and the end is still a ways off. I like to relish each chapter, sometimes referring backwards and forwards between the story and the song, sometimes not. I'm reading it in order, just so I don't miss anything, but I guess you could just dip into it anywhere, to a favourite

song maybe, and read that song's story. Paul Kelly is a keen observer of the people and the world around him, and writes easily and naturally. But if I tried to read more than a few chapters at a time I think they would start to jumble up and seep out my ears.

Just take your time and enjoy it.

PattyMacDotComma says

I really enjoyed the mixture of memoir, music, poetry, travel and personal insight into his world. Paul comes across as a fair-minded, old-fashioned Aussie bloke (cricket tragic) who also led a wild, colourful, vagabond life full of parties, drinks, drugs and friends from every walk of life. Kind of a rough, very talented, sensitive boy-next-door (depending where you live).

His 100 song concert is a novel idea and led to a novel novel. He chose 100 songs and sings them from A-Z, 25 each of 4 nights. Apparently a mix of old favourites and more recent stuff.

You can check him out on paulkelly.com.au - interesting, talented man.

Terri says

Well it didn't surprise me in the least that I'm giving 5 stars to a book penned by one of my favourite songwriters but damn, this was better than I'd hoped.

I'm disappointed that it's finished. I started reading it back in October and even though it weighted about a kilo I've been carrying it around the country wherever I've gone. It was easy to pick up and read a few chapters then pick up something else knowing I could go back to it. I'm going to miss having it there.

One thing this books makes clear - I screwed up, I should've been a rock star. What an amazing life.

I can't remember ever having read a book like this. Each chapter is titled by one of the hundreds of songs that he's written. And every chapter is a surprise. Some called up experiences of life on the road, others retelling his family history and recalling stories from summers of old in 1960's Australia, incredible stories about Aboriginals and refugees he's met during his travels, letters, lists, chapters about love, cricket, seasons, drugs, sadness, friends, authors and books and so much music. No chapter is the same. You may turn to a chapter hoping to get insight on the roots of one of your favourite songs, only to find something completely different.

This book proves that once an artist releases an album the songs are no longer theirs. Kelly tries telling me that Leaps and Bounds is a song about nothing. (Untrue. It sums up the 4 bracing cold winters I spent in Melbourne). He passes off How To Make Gravy as a joke song. (Wrong again, I play it every christmas when I can't be home with family and wet-eyed I identify with the prisoner who will miss his dysfunctional family on that particular day.)

The one biggest surprise for me in this book was about one of my favourite songs, Sweet Guy, which I've listened to countless times. How had I ever missed the fact that it's written from a woman's perspective?

I don't want to think about how much this book has cost me. After the initial purchase I simply had to cough up for the companion A-Z recording. Then there were so many songs referenced throughout the book that I hardly knew or didn't know at all which I had to immediately download. Quite a few books and authors were mentioned too, many of whom are now on my to-be-read list. So be warned, it will probably cost you much more than the cover price.

I've toted this book around and read it in so many places with the accompanying album playing in the background; a cold rainy Saturday afternoon in a Melbourne hotel, various flights and Qantas club lounges, a hot Andamooka night when the sandman didn't drop by, in my old bedroom at my folks place in Sydney and in the shade of the gum trees on the banks of the Murray river at Yarrawonga to name a few. Now those days will be firmly entrenched in my memory whenever I hear the corresponding songs.
