



THE FILMS OF SAINT ETIENNE

How We Used to Live

+ Q&A with Pete Wiggs and Travis Elborough

How We Used to Live is a celebration of post-war London by director Paul Kelly, created through a compelling use of rare footage drawn from the BFI National Archive. With a narration by Ian McShane and an original score composed by Pete Wiggs of Saint Etienne, the film is impressionistic, poetic and political. This is perhaps the most joyful, creative and entertaining offering to come from this unique filmmaking collective. A love letter to London.

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How We Used to Live borrows its title from the late-1960s Yorkshire Television series that followed a Northern English family through changing social circumstances from the Victorian era to the 1960s. Along with an associated series of books, the programme featured in the history classes of many British children for years after its initial transmission.

The use of the title here refers to its previous appropriation for a track on the 2000 album *Sound of Water* by Saint Etienne, whose members Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs here provide script and score respectively; but also to the fact that the childhood memories of the generation that watched the original series at school are now themselves the stuff of history. Drawing on a vast range of footage from the BFI Archive, this essay-collage pays light, affectionate tribute to London's post-war evolution. Uncredited snatches of archive audio comment on or provide context for the visuals – or are included just for laughs – while a sparse, sporadic voiceover offers gently ironic contributions by an anonymous Londoner played by Ian McShane.

Like director Paul Kelly's previous collaborations with Saint Etienne – *Finisterre* (2003), *What Have You Done Today Mervyn Day?* (2005) and *This Is Tomorrow* (2007) – *How We Used to Live* has a clear progenitor in Patrick Keiller's *London* (1994). But while the stylistic debt is evident, this is lighter and more upbeat, with a tendency towards gently poetic, open-ended musings on the life of the capital ('The endless city, with its cars driving ceaselessly down concrete roads to unknown destinations'), rather than Keiller's more pointed political and cultural observations. That said, hints of a backstory for McShane's character ('I gave a song to the Rolling Stones,' he notes as the 1960s kick off. 'They gave it back') seem expressly to pay homage to Keiller's pensive, irascible, unreliable version of the recurring psychogeographic anti-hero Robinson.

Other audio comes in the form of music, including new Saint Etienne compositions on a retro-pop theme; and archive scraps, which offer vaguely heart-warming, apolitical kitsch, and indicators of how certain attitudes have changed. A survivor of World War II intones that 'you were part of the war even before you were born – we were fighting for you'; Mrs Elsie Allen requests a 'gay tune' from *Housewives' Choice* for her hospital-bound sister Mabel and any others who 'can't get about very much'. Members of Parliament are congratulated for living on 'a modest wage', while the prime minister, we hear, 'lives like a professional man in a plain house on the side of

a narrow cul-de-sac'. Gap-toothed moppets doing cute things feature heavily, as do gyrating dolly-birds and gauche celebrities of the time; Twiggy romping around with her frail limbs and hunched shoulders; record producer Mickie Most going for a supremely self-conscious jog, dressed in brown nylon shirt and slacks.

Though change is emphasised in parts of the voiceover – economic and political forces are 'at work behind the landscape, shaping it, forever changing it'; London is 'continually flickering and fluctuating' – the film's closing note emphasises continuity. 'I came back the other day,' says our narrator, lightly. 'Nothing had changed.' Don't worry about whatever decay, corruption or silliness you seem to see around you, would seem to be the undercurrent – it will all wash by, like the grubbily lovable Thames, and one day we will look back on it all with loving smiles.

Hannah McGill, *Sight & Sound*, August 2014

HOW WE USED TO LIVE

Directed by: Paul Kelly
Production Company: Heavenly Films
In association with: Bedlam Productions, BFI National Archive
Made in association with: BFI National Archive, Peter Werth London Limited
Presented by: Heavenly Films, Bedlam Productions
In association with: Peter Werth, BFI National Archive
Executive Producer: Simon Egan
Produced by: Martin Kelly
Associate Producers: Olwyn Silvester, Julie Samuel
Post Producer: Ben McGuire
Archive Supervisor: John Carino
Archive Research: Paul Kelly, Bob Stanley, Travis Elborough
Written by: Bob Stanley, Travis Elborough
Edited by: Paul Kelly
Colourist: Andy Lee
Original Soundtrack Written and Produced by: Pete Wiggs
Vocals: Sarah Cracknell, Debsey Wykes, Sean Read
Vocals recorded by: Sean Read
Dubbing Mixer: Andy Coles
Narration recorded by: Gergo Dorozsmai, Nick Moorbath
Press and PR: Emma Pettit, Sarah Bemand
With special thanks to: *At the BFI:* Jane Giles, Peter Fydler, Sam Dunn, Tony Dykes, Stuart Brown; *At Peter Werth:* Peter Lynes, Phil Jones, Andrew Ward
Special thanks to: Michael Hayden, Sukhdev Sandhu
Narrated by: Ian McShane

UK 2013
70 mins

THE FILMS OF SAINT ETIENNE

Saint Etienne: Shorts Programme + intro by Paul Kelly and Pete Wiggs
Sun 5 Sep 13:00
Lawrence of Belgravia + Q&A with Paul Kelly and Lawrence
Sun 5 Sep 15:30
What Have You Done Today Mervyn Day? + Q&A with Pete Wiggs and Paul Kelly
Sun 5 Sep 18:30

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