



THE FILMS OF SAINT ETIENNE

# Lawrence of Belgravia

+ Q&A with Paul Kelly and Lawrence

By turns funny and bleak, *Lawrence of Belgravia* is a finally moving portrait of an artist who has combined an unabashed but theoretical desire to achieve fame with an eccentric kind of integrity that has kept success out of reach. Lawrence (he doesn't use a surname) founded his first band Felt in 1979, but failed to capitalise on their 1985 indie hit 'Primitive Painters', and when he returned it was in the guise of fake comeback glam-rock band Denim, which acted 'as if the 1980s never happened'. Sharing a retro sensibility with bands such as Saint Etienne and Pulp, Denim were conscripted by the music press into the Britpop movement in its early and arty phase; but Lawrence's avowed ambition – 'I'll make a million: my generation's slow' – went unfulfilled. Their second album, *Denim on Ice*, led off with 'The Great Pub Rock Revival', an attack on what Britpop had become by 1996 that didn't catch the public imagination in the way the likes of Ocean Colour Scene apparently did.

Paul Kelly's film joins Lawrence in 2005, around the time of the release of *Tearing up the Album Charts*, his second album as Go Kart Mozart, and leaves him in 2011 on the completion of its follow-up, *On the Hot Dog Streets*. He lives hand-to-mouth in temporary accommodation – initially in Belgravia – and contends with mental health and drug problems. Though the recording of the new long-player – and for Lawrence a record doesn't really exist unless it's on vinyl – provides the film with a frame, there isn't much direction within it, and nor are the histories of Lawrence's bands explored in depth.

Instead, *Lawrence of Belgravia* is a character study in the present tense, partly realised through Kelly's cityscapes, rather less romantic here than in his Saint Etienne film *Finisterre* (2003) – and appropriately so, given the tenor of Lawrence tracks such as 'City Centre'. Lawrence's current band dominates the soundtrack, but Kelly's use of Denim's brilliant, nostalgia-skewering 'The Osmonds', over shots of Lawrence's Birmingham, stands out. Information about the past comes through indirectly, as in a quick montage of press cuttings and posters in which we see that at one point in the 1980s Felt were billed above Primal Scream, or when Lawrence reads an article about the band, probably based on an interview with its gifted guitarist Maurice Deebank, alternately scoffing and reminiscing. Then again, much about the present is conveyed quite obliquely too, as in an echoing montage of threatening letters from various social care and housing authorities. A voicemail lets Kelly know that his quarry is in hospital for reasons undisclosed.

Though 'completely obsessed with being famous' and convinced that his music is highly commercial – he affects bafflement at the idea of internet journalists writing for free – Lawrence is unwilling to make concessions even to his devotees. Early on he recounts telling a Parisian concert promoter that under no circumstances would he play any Denim songs; later he tells Kelly that unlike every other band with surviving members and the slightest claim on posterity, he will never reform Felt ('I wouldn't do it: I'm stronger than Lou Reed'). Of course, this self-denial only burnishes his cult laurels, but there comes a point when even the cultists can see that the myth is sustaining an

unhappy reality, and what keeps the film from indulgence is Lawrence’s recognition that he has gone past it. ‘There must be something wrong with me,’ he reflects at the end, without self-pity (or pride). ‘There’s no one that’s gone this far and failed.’

In an age when no band ever seems to split up, all pop careers end in creative failure; Lawrence’s isn’t that. But there’s a brief glimpse of him presenting a radio show that hints at a reasonable compromise with the rest of the world. No one would blame him if he made it.

Henry K. Miller, *Sight & Sound*, July 2012

LAWRENCE OF BELGRAVIA

Directed by: Paul Kelly  
©: Heavenly Films Limited  
Production Company: Heavenly Films  
Presented by: Heavenly Films  
Executive Producer: Martin Kelly  
Produced by: Paul Kelly  
Director of Photography: Paul Kelly  
Additional Camera: Fred Burns, Andrew Hinton  
Stills Photography: Donna Ranieri, Renaud Monfourny  
Edited by: Paul Kelly  
On-line Editor: Paul Jones  
Assistant Editor: Nick Webb  
Audio Post-production: Salty Sea  
Music: Go-Kart Mozart  
Re-recording Mixer: Dennis Wheatley

With

Lawrence  
Terry Miles  
Gary Ainge  
Johnny Male  
Dave Caplin  
Tony Barber  
Bushy  
Patrick Hagen  
Sean Read  
Sadie Kelly  
Ian Button  
Aicha Djidjelli  
Malcolm Doherty  
Lisa Lore  
James Endeacott

Philippe Lebruman  
Zoe Miller  
Vic Godard  
Leigh Curtis  
Nancy Marmalade  
Otto Gonzales  
Eve Gonzales  
Wes Gonzales  
Darkus Bishop  
Mike Lightning  
Ben Rayner  
Audrey Lees  
Lora Findlay  
Pete Astor  
Andy Hackett  
Noah Kelly  
Martin Duffy  
Andrew Peppiatt  
John McCormack  
Pete Wiggs  
Sarah Cracknell  
Rebecca Waters  
Ralph Phillips  
Phil King  
Andrew Sclanders  
Bridget Duffy  
Adam Velasco  
Brian O’Shaughnessy  
John A. Rivers

UK 2011©  
86 mins

THE FILMS OF SAINT ETIENNE

**This Is Tomorrow + intro by Bob Stanley and Paul Kelly**  
Fri 3 Sep 14:30  
**Asunder + intro by Esther Johnson and Bob Stanley**  
Sat 4 Sep 12:00  
**Finisterre + Q&A with Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs**  
Sat 4 Sep 15:00  
**How We Used to Live + Q&A with Pete Wiggs and Travis Elborough**  
Sat 4 Sep 17:20  
**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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