

Pop-Kultur

31.8.–2.9.2016

»Kurt's Lighter« by Paul Kelly

Filmed and directed by Paul Kelly

Second camera and sound recordist Fred Burns

Produced by Moritz Schmall



On November 11, 1989, Nirvana played their first ever gig in Berlin. Nineteen-year-old Scott King, visiting the city for the first time, chanced upon this gig and had what he calls a 'semi-spiritual experience'. It was an incident part way through Nirvana's set that put him on the road to becoming an artist, and more importantly, a collector of rock memorabilia. Kurt's Lighter, which is based around an extended interview between King and Professor Matthew Worley, also sees King revisit Berlin in March 2016 – a full twenty-seven years after that fateful night of November 1989. His quest is to locate and revisit the venue in an attempt to understand how that extraordinary event shaped his entire adult life.

– Paul, why did you want to create this documentary?

Paul Kelly: I've been involved with music all my life, both by being in bands (East Village, Saint Etienne etc) then later by making promos and more recently feature films, all about music. I didn't really know Scott – but we have some mutual friends – so I knew that he owned the Kurt Lighter and I knew the story of how he acquired it; so when I was approached to make a film about this incredible story, I leapt at the chance.

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– Paul, what do you think about how the extraordinary event of catching »Kurt's Lighter« shaped Scott King's entire adult life? And has making this film changed your life in anyway?

Paul Kelly: I think it's amazing. A moment of sheer rock'n'roll poetry, if that's not too much of a pretentious thing to say? I've attended - and played - many gigs but I've never seen or heard of anything like this. Of course, you meet people who might have caught, I don't know, a drum stick that's been tossed into the audience by the drummer from Placebo or Green Day or someone - but to actually have Kurt Cobain throw his lighter straight at you and to catch it so effortlessly - THEN - for that moment to actually have an effect on your whole personality, is really quite extraordinary. Making this film has not re-shaped my life in anyway, no.

– Scott, can you tell us a bit more about your 'semi-spiritual experience' on November 11, 1989? What was it like?

Scott King: When it actually happened - when the lighter landed in the palm of my hand after Kurt had tossed it into the crowd - it seemed like the most natural thing in the world. I've thought about this a lot over the years, and I think the reason it seemed so natural was because this had happened to me once before. When I was 9 years old - Christmas 1979 - my parents took me to the Theatre Royal in York to see Dick Whittington - a pantomime. I was sitting high up on the balcony and the young woman playing Dick began to toss bags of sweets out to all the kids in the audience. All the kids were going crazy, running around, fighting over these bags of sweets that Dick was throwing towards us. Similarly to the Kurt situation, I did not move, I remained seated, but a bag of Rowntrees Tooty Frooties landed right in my lap. The other kids had no chance of grabbing them, these sweets had been thrown straight at me, almost as if Dick Whittington had picked me out of the audience and decided that I was a deserved recipient of a bag of Rowntrees Tooty Frooties. Strangely, I realised later, that the Kurt Cobain incident happened almost 10 years to the month after the Dick Whittington incident.

– Scott, from your point of view: how was Berlin like in 1989 and what were the biggest changes in terms of pop culture until today?

Scott King: I only have very hazy memories of Berlin in 1989. I really can't remember much about it. I remember the Nirvana gig as if it were yesterday, but the rest is something of a blur. Though, I do remember that the Berlin Wall came down while I was there. Pop culture has changed dramatically since 1989. It's much more corporate now.