

BY TRACEY SARGENT

Sewing. Musical mysticism. Chickens. Sure they may seem like an unlikely combination, but in the world of talented Australian singer-songwriter Josh Pyke they all make perfect sense. The release of his debut album *Memories & Dust* sees Pyke weave such seemingly disparate elements together in musical form, assembling a recording that provides the perfect balance between catchy melodies, uncluttered arrangements, and impassioned vocal performance.

With his quiet confidence and uniquely honest lyrics, Pyke's music has achieved almost universal appeal, and it has seen him amass a loyal fan base that seems to grow by the day, particularly in the UK. "Instead of going over there and playing to nobody in a shit venue, I was supporting The Walkmen and Ben Kweller. So in that sense it has been awesome; playing in the right venues to the right people and it's not that different to Australia. It has been pretty easy for me, but I think that I am pretty lucky in the infrastructure I've got over there."

Any musician's life is about contrasts and competing priorities, none more so evident than when comparing the structure of the recording process with the spontaneity of time spent on tour, where all manner of strange events can unfold. "I got to play *Shepherds Bush Empire* on the Ben Kweller tour which is a legendary venue where the dressing room was three floors up, and initially there was one of those moments where we couldn't find the stage. We were going down the stairs and there was an arrow pointing towards the stage in a particular direction. We followed the arrow and it just led to a brick wall and we were like 'Oh god, this is crazy', but we eventually found the stage. That was pretty much as *Spinal Tap* as you can get."

In bringing the album together, Pyke once again worked with music producer extraordinaire Wayne Connolly which seems to have developed into a truly collaborative

partnership. "Because he is a songwriter himself he knows what it is like to write a song and how hard it is to relinquish creative control, so he is really sensitive to that kind of thing. If he has an idea he communicates it really well without saying something like, 'That's shit, you should do something like this'. He's also a really good multi-instrumentalist, so instead of trying to describe to me something to play on the guitar he'll say, 'How about you try something like this?' and he will play it. He is so generous with his knowledge and he is happy for me to write down what he does, and that is really, really rare. So I get a lot from working with Wayne every time."

However before getting to the recording stage, first comes that spark of inspiration which ignites the writing and melody-making process. Rather than following any hard and fast rules when songwriting, each artist finds their own unique path; "I generally start with a guitar bit or a vocal melody and I'll pretty much come up with the whole structure of the song and the melody, and then I will start trying to do the lyrics. Or usually some little lyric or line will be the basis of the rest of the vocal line or melody."

But what of that initial spark that leads to an ideal pattern of words and melodies? Some artists observe what goes on around them, drawing from their own experiences, while others seem to channel inspiration from some place else. Whatever approach is applied, it is clear that song ideas have to come from somewhere. "Well I don't know where it comes from, that's the thing. It's such a weird thing to explain. It's almost like songwriters are trained in some form of meditation where you train yourself day in and day out. If you are doing it every day like I do then you are training yourself to tap into some other level of consciousness I guess. It sounds very mystical but it's true." While it may sound quite abstract, the way to tap into that other level seems pretty straightforward for Pyke, "I usually lie down on my bed and play the guitar...that seems

to help."

Any album is the sum of its musical parts, and perhaps more so for Josh Pyke than other artists. The interwoven nature of his tracks have revealed this connectivity in a more direct way; "There is a recurring theme of keeping various fabrics of your life together, because obviously in the last two years my life has changed dramatically. I really enjoyed my life prior to this and I'm really enjoying this stage as well but I want to keep a balance; I don't want to lose one for the sake of the other. It's like trying to tell myself to keep all these disparate parts of my life stitched and connected somehow."

As for the visual component to music, it's pretty hard not to be impressed by the sheer number of chickens which co-star along with Pyke in his film clip for 'Memories & Dust'. But however cute they may be the long hours of filming takes its toll. "They love to clump together because they snuggle up to each other and that was really cute to see, but after fourteen hours of little things chirping all day it was really, really annoying. I had the flu as well so I had an awful headache and I hadn't slept much because I had been awake, coughing. It was probably the hardest film clip I have ever done."

After finishing his tour dates in the UK he'll be returning back home to Australia to do the rounds again for local audiences. But does Josh Pyke have a particular favourite song to perform live? "It changes all the time but at the moment it's 'Vibrations in Air' because I play the solo even if I am playing with the whole band, and there is just no feeling quite like it. When you really nail it and you are engaged with the crowd and it's just you and a guitar, it's a pretty special feeling" a sentiment with which his fans would no doubt agree.

The Republic Bar, April 26th + 27th
James Hotel, April 28th