



NASHVILLE SKYLINE

WHEN DAVID KILGOUR RECORDED IN NASHVILLE WITH THE BAND LAMBCHOP, DOCUMENTARY MAKER BRIDGET SUTHERLAND WAS THERE TO FILM IT.

By Gavin Bertram

Nashville, Tennessee. Music City, the spiritual home of country music, and a town that Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Tammy Wynette and Emmylou Harris all called home at some point. It's a long way from the penguins, and um, kilts of Dunedin, another town renowned for its music heritage.

Far Off Town - From Dunedin to Nashville bridges that divide. It's a fitting title for New Zealand filmmaker Bridget Sutherland's new documentary, which charts David Kilgour's 2003 recording sessions in Nashville. The Dunedin musician, known for both The Clean and his solo work, was invited to record in the studio of that town's alt-country act Lambchop. The result, *Frozen Orange*, won much praise both here and in the States, where Kilgour has long been renowned in alternative music circles.

"What was really amazing was how those guys over there know New Zealand music," relates Sutherland. "And the influence it's had on bands who are now really big over there. They want David to come and play over there. Lambchop just absolutely adore David and his music."

Far Off Town came about after Sutherland was told of Kilgour's plans. Both then applied for and were awarded Creative New Zealand funding for the project. Kilgour says he was a bit reticent about the idea of having a camera constantly on him, but agreed to it as long as he had final veto.

"You don't perhaps want a camera around when you're making a record," he says. "And I'd thrown myself into the hot seat going over there, because there wasn't a lot of preparation. So no one really

knew what it was going to turn out like. I even went there not even thinking I'd make an album, I just thought I'd go there and if I cut two or three songs that I was happy with then I'd be pleased."

Kilgour says he'd also agreed with Sutherland that if he felt uncomfortable with the camera, then he'd tell her to stop. And he did. But because it was only her in the studio, things were generally fine.

"She was good at being a fly on the wall and she was good at connecting with everybody on a personal level so they got to know her. If it'd been her and a soundman and a lighting person I don't think I'd have been able to do it."

Sutherland chose not to create a standard issue music documentary, instead telling the story of the making of *Frozen Orange* in a more ethereal frame. There's none of the harsh editing and in-your-face camera work of MTV-style documentaries here. Instead it's a lot more observational, interspersed with candid interviews, and dreamlike sequences that evoke Kilgour's music. Also, the director works in some effective allegories about the state of the Nashville music business. In particular, a church being demolished just down the road from Lambchop producer Mark Nevers' studio marks the change from a respect for heritage, and the new, crass commercial approach. It's something that's evident in the music industry everywhere, but more so in Nashville.

"I was intrigued by the way that Nashville has this image," notes Sutherland. "And the way Lambchop were operating there in a more underground sense. So in a way Lambchop are far more Nashville than the stuff you're getting out of Music Row at the moment, simply because of their attitude and how they are, just real artists."

Kilgour slotted seamlessly into this, and it's clear from the studio footage that the recording sessions were generally enjoyable. For Sutherland, what made *Far Off Town* such an interesting film to make were the personalities of the musicians, and producer Nevers in particular.

"It just turned out that it grew because of the type of people that they were and the situation we were in," she says. "So it was quite poetic in the way it grew really, and the music itself sort of drew the story out. I was thinking about it today, how amazingly gracious of Kurt (Wagner, Lambchop front man) it was to allow me to film in that context. I was filming in their world, but that's the respect they have for David."

While Kilgour hates seeing himself on film (or in photos, or hearing his voice on tape...), he reckons the documentary will be a 'great thing to look at' in years to come.

As with any independent documentary maker in New Zealand, Sutherland says she didn't make *Far Off Town* to make money. After thinking about it, she suggests a far more worthwhile outcome if the film draws a large audience.

"I would love that it made people more aware of [Kilgour's] talent," she says. "That would mean a lot."

Far Off Town - From Dunedin to Nashville appears at the DOCNZ Festival on 8 September at 9.30 pm at the Academy in Auckland, and there's a second screening at the Rialto in Newmarket on 12 September at 5pm. **RG**

Here are some of the other Documentaries screening at this year's DOCNZ Film Festival.

CROSSING THE BRIDGE: THE SOUND OF ISTANBUL

Director: Fatih Akin

Istanbul is described as a bridge that has been crossed by seventy two nations: hence the title. Bass player Alexander Hacke recorded songs there for Turkish/German director Akin's controversial film *Head On (Gegen die Wand)* – lead actress Sevil Kekilli was porn star Dilara – and was captivated by the traditional and fusion music. He recorded, documented, and jammed with psychedelic underground band Baba Zula, rapper Ceza, rockers Duman, Erkin Koray (the father of Istanbul rock), Sezen Aksu (Turkey's most famous singer), traditional musician Orhan Gencebay (who brought Saz to the cities), 86 year old singer Müzzeyen Senar (who could sing but didn't speak until she was ten because of stuttering), and traditional Kurdish and Romany musicians; whose music was banned for ten years following the coup of 1980. While *Ceza* states "We're not Gangstas, we're political," Turkish youths returning from the US are importing Gangsta rap and there are also the ubiquitous tattoos, piercing, bling, graffiti, and outrageous hair musicians sport everywhere.

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Director: David Bradbury

Bradbury (*Frontline* – 1981 Oscar Nominee and multiple award winner) gives a chilling insight into the ongoing hazards of depleted uranium (DU) weaponry used by the US in Afghanistan and Iraq; and now suspected of being tested in US/Australian 'facilities' (US spin doctor and propagandists re-branding from 'bases' to sound less threatening and permanent). These include the weapons range at Shoalwater Bay near Rockhampton, Queensland: where families have already experienced birth defects.

Bradbury's interviews include: Dr. Doug Rokke (US Airforce/Army – retired and now dying of cancer – who says 250,000 Gulf War veterans are on permanent disability pensions and thousands of medical records shifted to a secure facility are now missing), Aussie Gulf War 1 veteran Ed Grant (sick after being exposed and worried DU will effecting his children and grandchildren), and Dr Chris Busby (University of Liverpool UK – who measured high levels of alpha activity in the Iraq deserts 10 years after GW1).

Alexander Downer, Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated: "Australia exporting uranium

is helping combat global warming" while proudly proclaimed Australia [with over a third of the world's uranium] will be the Saudi Arabia of the twenty first century. Perhaps, before getting too smug about cosying up to Uncle Sam, he should take a second look at what is happening in oil-rich Iraq.

DU could be twenty first century Agent Orange and with America still in denial about that – apart from compensating their own veterans who were affected – similar reassurances for DU are somehow not, well, reassuring.

Blowin' in the Wind follows Bradbury's *Shoalwater: Up for Grabs* made with Peter Garrett who, with Midnight Oil, supplies music for *Blowin' in the Wind* but unlike the Bob Dylan song 'the answer isn't 'Blowin' in the Wind' the problem is; and New Zealand's Nuclear Free policy won't protect us as westerly winds could already be carrying airborne radiation from Australia: potentially much more dangerous than Pacific nuclear testing.

WEB

www.frontlinefilms.com.au/videos.htm

LOMAX "THE SONGHUNTER"

Director: Rogier Kappers

Folk legend Pete Seeger said: "In 1937 Alan [Lomax] was 22 years old and his father [John] was in his 60's. He wanted to retire and he told the library [The Columbia Library of Folk and Primitive Music] 'I'm appointing my son to be acting curator.'" Two lifetimes of folk music were compiled by Alan (31 Jan. 1915 – 19 July 2002) from the collection his father began in the early 30's and during the 1950's Lomax travelled to Ireland, remote Scottish islands, and Sicilian and Spanish villages toting a heavy reel-to-reel tape recorder documenting folk songs that would otherwise be lost forever.

In this excellent film documenting his life and work Kappers interviewed Lomax at his home in the year prior to his death and intercut this with interviews (including surviving original artists Lomax recorded) and excellent archival footage including a clips of 'Leadbelly' singing *Goodnight Irene*, Charles Korvin's film *To Hear Our Banjo Play* – with folk and blues greats Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Sonny Terry, and Brownie McGee – plus *Blues and Ballads: the emergence of folk music in Greenwich Village*.

WEB

www.lomaxthesonghunter.vom

DOCNZ opens in Academy and Rialto Cinemas Auckland 7 September, before heading out into the other main centres. For further information check: www.docnzfestival.com

By Rod Johns