

# MOJO

## The daily Grinderman

Nick Cave's life and work examined in reality-blurring documentary.  
By Victoria Segal.

### 20,000 Days On Earth



DRAFT-HOUSE/DIRECTORS IAIN FORSYTH, JANE POLLARD © RELEASED SEPTEMBER 19

IN 1987, Nick Cave wrote a Last Will And Testament, leaving any money to the foundation of a Nick Cave Memorial Museum. "I was always an ostentatious bastard," he smirks, unabashed to be on the set of an imagined archive dedicated to his life. Tape reels spool, "assistants" open cabinets and Cave, pointer in hand, analyses photographs of someone urinating on-stage during a Birthday Party gig.

The gap between the riotous old ways and Cave's current professorial status is vivid and deliberate. Earlier in Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's documentary, he says "counterpoint is the key" to songwriting and the film follows the same rule: there's reality and artifice, hilarity and high seriousness, the comforts of marriage and friendship and the blazing, life-changing power of the self-made artist. The results are deeply affecting, a meditation on how to give your time on Earth weight and meaning as it flies by. Cave's museum obsession

makes sense when he admits his greatest fear is losing his memory. ("87 was a difficult year to remember," he says. "80-anything was a difficult year...") Accordingly, this film looks like an act of preservation, recording what is supposed to be Cave's 20,000th day alive, along with his thoughts on performance, remembrance and creation. Aware that acting is not their subject's forte, the directors placed him in staged yet unscripted situations to encourage a natural response. There's an artificial sheen to the film, then, but even its fabrications are revealing.

"I wake, I write, I eat, I write, I watch TV," he says in the voiceover, but it's not that simple. He meets real psychoanalyst Darian Leader in a fake office and discusses his early sexual experiences and his relationship with his late father. He

visits Bad Seed Warren Ellis at a cliff-side house where Ellis doesn't actually live,

for a lunch of eel pasta and Nina Simone reminiscences, the affection between them one of the film's highlights. He steers his Jaguar around Brighton like a cabbie-undertaker hybrid, mentally summoning Ray Winstone, Kylie Minogue and Blixa Bargeld into the back seat for unrehearsed conversations about aging, loneliness, work-life balance. It's self-regarding, inevitably, but for those with any interest in Cave, it's a gaze worth following.

Through it all runs the Bad Seeds' music, the study of them developing songs from *Push The Sky Away* in the studio bursting into colour, light and heat with remarkable live footage. The final show at the Sydney Opera House is genuinely moving. Jubilee Street's cry of "I'm transforming, I'm vibrating" intercut with earlier film of Cave on stage, going backwards, getting younger, spikier-haired. His life flashes before his audience's eyes, a reminder of their own shrinking time. It might not be "real", but 20,000 Days On Earth still feels like something true.



Cave man at the wheel: Kylie Minogue takes a ride she might regret.