


 FILM
OF THE WEEK

He should be so lucky Nick Cave can't get Kylie out of his Jag

20,000 Days on Earth

★★★★★

Dir Jane Pollard, Iain Forsyth, GB
(15) 97 mins

'This is my 20,000th day on Earth,' says Australian rock musician and writer Nick Cave as we see him waking up in a luxurious bed, baring his chest in the mirror. What is this? 'At Home with Nick Cave – The Royalties Years'? Far from it. Like much in this smart, deliriously strange film, the opening scene embraces a familiar tic of the music doc but reworks it in inspiring ways. Put it this way: we don't then see Cave boil an egg or take a crap. The film preserves his public face, even reinforces it, while managing to offer a no-nonsense, revealing take on living and working as an artist.

The idea is that we spend one day with Nick Cave, from dawn till dusk, via family, friends, a recording

session and a gig. It's just a conceit, a device, and much of the film plays out like drama. Artifice co-exists with honesty. Witness a great scene where the psychoanalyst Darian Leader interrogates Cave about his childhood. The set-up is theatrical – the answers not. Nor do artists-turned-directors Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard shoot their film like a fly-on-the-wall doc. There's no sense of the camera following or invading: everything feels planned, formal, collaborative. If that sounds arch or irritating, it's not. They let scenes run and breathe. They don't ignore what we want to know.

Cave talks about the past: his childhood, Berlin, drugs, marriage, work. Yet '20,000 Days on Earth' lives firmly in the present, relegating most old footage to a frenzied collage at the start. There are just four interviewees – Ray Winstone (star of 'The Proposition', which

Cave wrote), ex-Bad Seed Blixa Bargeld, Kylie Minogue (with whom Cave had a hit with 'Where The Wild Roses Grow') and collaborator and friend Warren Ellis. Winstone and Bargeld sit in the passenger seat of Cave's Jag as they drive round Brighton; later, Minogue sits in the back, talking freely about Michael Hutchence.

There's no pretence that we've breached the defences of someone's life. There's a sweet shot of Cave watching a film with his sons – but the cuteness disappears when we clock that the film is 'Scarface'. It's a typically playful moment. And in the end, '20,000 Days on Earth' conceals as much as it reveals, and its beauty is that doesn't pretend to do anything else. It's thrilling to behold. *Dave Calhoun*

THE BOTTOM LINE A beguiling music doc with a difference.