

Future Film Festival preview: The Possibilities Are Endless

The road to recovery for a much-loved singer is the subject of this intensely moving documentary.

By Lewis Rymond

Edward Lovelace and James Hall's documentary *The Possibilities are Endless* follows the recovery of former Orange Juice singer Edwyn Collins from two strokes. It would have been very easy for the directors to have made a nostalgic film, but the pair have created something altogether tougher. They cleverly blend the past with the present, mixing archive footage from earlier in Collins' musical career with scenes from his current life. Such was the debilitating effect of the two haemorrhages that Collins had to relearn everything he knew, but as we see the struggles of the musician and his wife Grace Maxwell, we're also treated to the sense of joy that Collins refers to frequently throughout the film.

The opening scene is a clip from Collins' 1995 appearance on the Conan O'Brien Show, during which he performed his hit single 'A Girl Like You'. We see a snapshot of his interview with the host, who jokily mentions how "ideas just come to" Collins - before the film cuts to black. This abrupt transition expertly evokes how a way of life was brutally snatched from Collins. The ensuing darkness is accompanied by an ethereal, ambient soundtrack as well as the sounds of an interview with Collins, in which he asks searching, rhetorical questions ("What's happened to me?")

While we see and continue to hear from a post-stroke Collins, we're treated to shots of scenic Scottish village Helmsdale — it's a place beloved by Collins; he spent time there as a child, and now resides there with his wife when not in London. After these tranquil scenes, the tone of the film changes. Collins repeatedly utters the title's phrase "the possibilities are endless": an expression that was one of the few he could say upon waking in hospital. As the film continues we learn that the phrase is hugely fitting given the sense of triumph in the life of Collins and his wife. There is, though, an uncertainty to these early moments. The sound of Collins repeating the phrase hints at the film's optimism, but without seeing Collins we feel oddly disconnected, mirroring the feelings of the singer early on in his recovery. As well as the scenic footage we see the dark water of the ocean, beautiful yet imposing, complementing Collins' later reflections on how in awe he is of nature and its power.

Despite the ultimate positivity of *The Possibilities are Endless* the film also features a number of genuinely tragic moments. We hear of how Collins struggled to recall his studio as he, his wife and a group of friends finally visited his favourite place of

work, and such sadness is further demonstrated by a heartbreaking shot of the empty facility. A sense of poignancy is communicated when we learn of an album Collins' recorded before his strokes, entitled Home Again. The title track includes the lyrics "I'm home again, but I've been here before": the words take on an eerie relevance.

The juxtaposition of footage both old and new might appear sentimental but the singer himself discredits the concept. One scene shows us a variety of footage of performances when Collins' musical career was at its peak, but there is no sound, and the moments seem like faded memories. Collins reveals how he looks to the future rather than the past and this sense is superbly executed by the filmmakers, with the comparison of footage from both eras serving to celebrate the strength of Collins' character.

As we see in the concluding performance by Collins, which is watched by an enthusiastic crowd as well as a beaming Grace, the title's phrase really is true for the couple. The documentary encompasses various emotions ranging from tragic to jubilant, with the theme of nature and its overwhelming power serving as a philosophical framework that compliments the story of the central couple. Their positivity in the face of adversity is the film's key focus, and due to the engaging stories of Collins' post-stroke life, the singer's stated wish to avoid nostalgia is granted. While the film's early moments bring us into the frightening world of the Collins' struggles, it's impossible not to smile when the credits roll.

The Possibilities are Endless [screens at 1pm in NFT3 on Sunday 22 Feb.](#)

Lewis Rymond was a successful applicant for the IdeasTap and BFI Film Journalism Workshop and Mentoring brief.