

# Kennedy the eclectic

Revolver  
Noel Mengel



WHEN John Kennedy (pictured) started his band John Kennedy's Love Gone Wrong in 1984, the worlds of inner-city rock music and country music did not cross with the frequency they do now.

But the Liverpool-born, Brisbane-raised songwriter always had an affinity with country sounds, even before he knew it was a genre of its own.

"Growing up in Brisbane in the late '60s and early '70s listening to 4IP and 4BC, anything could be on the radio," Kennedy says.

"The stuff that attracted me had this country thread running through it, *LA International Airport*, the Susan Raye hit, *A Boy Named Sue* by Johnny Cash."

He's currently collecting 20 *Happening Hits* and the other greatest-hits packages in that series. "I'm reliving that cusp of '68 to '72 when my tastes were formed," he says.

But other music came calling for Kennedy. Inspired by Elvis Costello's mix of punk-inspired energy and intelligent lyrics, in 1980 he formed JFK and the Cuban Crisis — he couldn't let the famous name he shared go without a pun — and headed for Sydney.

Those country roots were coming through strongly by the time the band covered Nancy Sinatra and Lee Hazlewood's hit *Jackson*, a path Kennedy followed when the Cuban Crisis folded and *Love Gone Wrong* came through.

Memphis as much as Nashville was a spiritual home for Kennedy's music, as you can tell by the nod to Elvis Presley in the title of his new band, John Kennedy's '68 Comeback Special.

After a long period overseas, Kennedy has settled back in Sydney's inner-west, the same streets that inspired *Love Gone Wrong* favourites *King Street* and *Miracle in Marrickville*. In fact, he lives around the corner from Newtown's King St.

The new '68 Comeback Special album, *Is This Not Paris?*, shows Kennedy's talents as singer and writer are as sharp as ever, with the band nicely complemented by the instrumental talents of Jeff Hope on



guitar, dobro, pedal steel and lap steel. The album mixes new country-rock tunes and instrumentals with surf and spaghetti western flavours.

There are also covers of classics. They find the country heart of Nancy Sinatra's James Bond film hit *You Only Live Twice*, and discover there are not many degrees of separation between Harry Nilsson's big hits *Everybody's Talkin'* and *I Guess The Lord Must Be In New York City*, blending the tunes into one song.

There is also a nod to Kennedy's

Liverpool beginnings with a version of The Beatles' *This Boy*.

"We were having a lot of fun changing things around, like putting *You Only Live Twice* into waltz time. We had a sense of liberty. Who is going to buy the record? We don't know, we are doing it for the love of music and we'll see what happens."

***Is This Not Paris?* is on Foghorn Records through Black Market Music. Kennedy plays Brisbane's Queen Street Mall on Saturday from noon and the Brisbane Powerhouse, New Farm, on Sunday from 3pm.**