

# SPINNING AROUND

## *The Kylie Playlist*

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# The Kylie Playlist



- 7** **Kylie Q&A**  
Kirsten Krauth, Angela Savage
- 17** **I Should Be So Lucky**  
Angela Savage
- 33** **Put Yourself in My Place**  
Alice Pung
- 47** **Padam Padam**  
Chris Flynn
- 61** **Confide in Me**  
Nathan Curnow
- 65** **Come into My World**  
Carrie Tiffany
- 75** **Dreams**  
Jessica White
- 85** **Death Is Not the End**  
Kris Kneen
- 101** **Shocked**  
Thuy On
- 105** **Into the Blue**  
Lucy Treloar
- 121** **Your Disco Needs You**  
Holden Sheppard
- 137** **Dancing**  
Miriam Sved
- 151** **Spinning Around**  
Ellen van Neerven

- 155** **In Your Eyes**  
Grace Chan
- 165** **Made of Glass**  
Emma Viskic
- 177** **Everything Is Beautiful**  
Julie Koh
- 193** **Slow**  
Dmetri Kakmi
- 209** **Especially for You**  
Adam Ouston
- 227** **A Lifetime to Repair**  
Eileen Chong
- 231** **Can't Get You Out of My Head**  
Andrea Thompson
- 245** **Breathe**  
Jes Layton
- 259** **Tension**  
Patrick Marlborough
- 269** **GBI (German Bold Italic)**  
Nick Gadd
- 283** **Where the Wild Roses Grow**  
Kirsten Krauth
- 287** **All the Lovers**  
Christos Tsiolkas
- 303** **Songs and Albums Referenced**  
Various
- 309** **Contributor Biographies**  
Various



## **Kylie Q&A**

Kirsten Krauth, Angela Savage



How would you go about creating a Kylie playlist? When we were approached with this idea – a playlist of fiction, non-fiction and poetry responding to Kylie’s songs – we were excited about the possibilities. Kylie’s list of achievements and awards from the past five decades is phenomenal and her star continues to rise.

On top of her impressive music career, she has raised millions for various philanthropic causes and received an honorary Doctorate in Health Sciences for her work in raising awareness of breast cancer. In inducting her into the ARIA Hall of Fame in 2011, then prime minister Julia Gillard described Kylie not only as ‘the face of Australia’, but as a ‘woman of courage and compassion’, highlighting her decision to perform and fundraise in Japan in the wake of the devastating earthquake and tsunami earlier that year.

While we were both entrenched 80s pop fans, we found that as we approached some of our favourite Australian writers – and they joined in with gusto – their words and ideas gave new depth to our understanding of Kylie, debunking myths, opening up new worlds. Each discovery about Kylie prompted a flurry of excited texts between us – Have you seen this? Did you know that? – and we thought we’d continue the conversation here.

**Angela Savage:** I’ve never met Kylie in person but I think you have, Kirsten? I remember a story you told me about meeting her at Festival Hall.

**Kirsten Krauth:** Yes, I was about fourteen. I was small but Kylie was tiny, even littler than I'd imagined, diaphanous, all hair. They seemed like blond gods up there on the stage. Kylie. Jason. Craig. It was the early days of *Neighbours* and Kylie was the neatest mechanic ever.

I'd seen her duets with Danni on *Young Talent Time* and watched her in *The Henderson Kids* and now I was at Festival Hall in a dancing competition and the judge was Kylie. I was trying to channel Tania Lacy, doing the 'Locomotion', and I hit that zone you only reach rarely, you know, where your body becomes the music, and then I felt it – the gold sparkle of connecting with Kylie. I looked up and she was watching me.

When Molly Meldrum pointed me out in the crowd, I couldn't believe it. I was relayed by a sea of hands before the bouncers dumped me on the stage.

Kylie held out a signed t-shirt out to me, but before I received the prize, Molly announced that I'd have to dance on my own. I was suddenly very aware of the size of Festival Hall, standing in the place of all those I'd seen before – The Police, INXS, New Order.

I turned around and danced towards the back of the stage but then I looked across to Kylie who smiled back and started to move, too, the kindness shining on her face.

**AS:** Kindness is one of Kylie's striking qualities. In the course of researching this book, I scoured her resumé without turning up a single trace of scandal – not even prima donna behaviour. I got excited when I found a 1998 clip on YouTube, 'Kylie Minogue Gets Angry at Rude Reporter'. But the headline turned out to be misleading. As someone wrote in the comments, 'So that's what it's like to piss off Kylie. She just smiles harder at you.' I feel like I've grown up with Kylie. Do you?

**KK:** Yeah. Like many women now in their fifties, I can trace my life through the looks of Kylie. At the time I didn't even know it, but my photo albums have the cookie-cutter stamp of her hair and pose and make-up and outfits. She was reflecting cultural trends too; it was an interchange. The indie Kylie and the femme fatale Kylie and the perm Kylie in the bath blowing bubbles, her face free of the mask.

I wore the white-blond pixie haircut after Michael Hutchence led Kylie through the crowd at *The Delinquents* launch, the media clamouring, screaming, that Michael had brought out the sexy in her – as if Kylie had no sense of herself or agency at all.

And then Nick Cave the impresario pulling her into his dark murderous world. But I think it was really the other way round – Nick and Michael hitching a ride on Kylie's love train, moving at the speed of light.

**AS:** I love that image of Kylie's love train! Anyone who has worked with her has nothing but praise for Kylie, using words like 'charming', 'unassuming', 'endearing'. In a recent documentary on legendary record producers Stock Aitken Waterman, who recorded Kylie's first pop hits in the 1980s, Mike Stock describes Kylie as 'the ideal, perfect person. She dances. She sings. She's lovely.'

**KK:** That doco was so revealing, wasn't it? I had no idea how enormously successful both Kylie and Jason Donovan were in the UK at that time. From that early period, why do you think she became such a gay icon?

**AS:** I think that loveliness and her evolving sense of style played a big part. Kylie's affinity with the gay community is so deep that the collective noun for Sydney gay men is reputedly a 'Minogue of gays'. I also read that Rufus Wainwright, in listing Kylie among his Top 10 Gay Icons in 2006, described her as 'the gay shorthand for joy.'

**KK:** She also seems to bring out ambivalence and contradictory feelings in our authors as well ...

**AS:** That's why I found Dmetri Kakmi's essay 'Slow' so compelling, where he confesses that out of a contrariness born of internalised homophobia, for years he couldn't like Kylie because 'other gays idolise[d her]'. Similarly, in Holden Sheppard's 'Your Disco Needs You', Thomas, fearful of being outed, insists that 'a bloke going to a Kylie Minogue concert is a public declaration of homosexuality'.

Kylie has publicly expressed her gratitude to the gay community for sticking by her through the low points in her career, just as she's stuck by them.

**KK:** I remember you telling me about your friend who saw her at the Mardi Gras.

**AS:** Yes, a mate of mine saw Kylie perform at the showgrounds at the 1994 Mardi Gras parade after-party, sitting alongside a friend who was dying of AIDS. After finishing her set with 'Better the Devil You Know', Kylie turned to the 13,000-strong audience and said, 'Thank you for inviting me to your party.' My friend teared up as he recalled this story thirty years on, still moved by the pop icon's humility.

**KK:** What strikes me is the range of Kylie's career. Along with the hundreds of pop songs in various genres, there are the fashion statements and innovations, the awards, the films and TV appearances, even *Doctor Who*! Kylie's choices have always been bold (German, italic – see Nick Gadd's essay) and she is not afraid to make mistakes. She has a particular talent for comedy and irony. Her work with Kylie Mole and her guest turn as Epponnee-Raelene Charlene Kathleen Darleen Craig on *Kath and Kim* reveal this ability to send herself up to great effect. I really enjoyed watching those clips again.



**AS:** Me, too—and I love how Alice Pung’s ‘Put Yourself in My Place’ taps into Kylie’s sense of humour.

**KK:** One high point was when Nick Cave encouraged her to take part in The Poetry Olympics in the UK, where she got up on stage in her trackie daks and read out the lyrics to ‘I Should Be So Lucky’, clearly dedicating certain loving sections to Nick as she turned around to float the words his way. Very funny and empowering in its own way. She also loves collaborating ... What’s your favourite Kylie collaboration?

**AS:** There are so many! Along with Jason and Nick, she’s done duets with Bono, Robbie Williams, The Wiggles, Kermit the Frog, Pet Shop Boys, Sigala, Shaggy, Flight Facilities, Frank Sinatra, Dua Lipa, and her sister Dannii. My two personal favourites are her duet with Jimmy Little of ‘Bury Me Deep In Love’, and her performance with John Farnham of The Isley Brothers’ ‘Shout’ at the Tour of Duty concert for the troops in East Timor in 1999.

**KK:** It also seemed that she was often the person holding everyone else together, the glue, ever professional. Just watch the awkward live performance on MTV Most Wanted of ‘Death is Not the End’ in 1995, Kylie shepherding Nick and Shane McGowan, two lost tribesmen, towards the light.

**AS:** You and I have mused on the number of stories and poems in this anthology that touch on themes of reinvention, and also the scope of genres – crime, speculative fiction, romance, even a ghost story – inspired by Kylie’s songs. This diversity in the writing isn’t surprising, given Kylie’s career. But I wonder to what extent her collaborators shaped that career, when I’ve heard her say, ‘I have so many characters lurking in my body, it’s frightening!’

**KK:** I love that line – probably why I find her video clips so entertaining!

**AS:** You said earlier that you used to watch *Neighbours* in the early days. You know, when Charlene married her beau, Scott, played by Kylie's then-boyfriend Jason Donovan, nearly twenty million viewers in the UK tuned in to watch – more people than the entire population of Australia at the time. In 1988, she became the first person to win four Logie Awards in one year, including the coveted Gold Logie as Australia's Most Popular Television Performer.

**KK:** Her rise to fame was incredibly quick, but in my memory she wasn't taken very seriously in Australia at the time. She said that Mushroom Records didn't know how to spell 'pop'.

**AS:** Yes, she enjoyed earlier and greater critical acclaim for her music in Britain than in Australia, where local critics dismissively dubbed her 'the singing budgie'.

**KK:** There's some fantastic footage of Molly mentioning this and Kylie flapping her wings in response.

**AS:** She has called out tall poppy syndrome and its influence on her decision to relocate from Melbourne to the UK in 1990. And the barbs clearly hurt: inducted into the ARIA Hall of Fame, Kylie teared up, telling reporters, 'To finally be here and be acknowledged is very nice.' At that stage, she had released eleven albums, sold sixty-three million records and been awarded an OBE. She remains the highest selling solo Australian artist of all time.

She remains the highest selling solo Australian artist of all time. The Princess of Pop.

**KK:** I did a tour of the Kylie collection at the Arts Centre Melbourne and saw Charlene's King Gee overalls. It's a treasure trove of her costumes, tracing a history of performance and textiles. But I was really there for the hot pants! Small, gold and now too fragile to touch, they've become strangely iconic. They were sitting in a drawer and pulled out for me to inspect, the feeling almost like being in

a morgue. Bought at a flea market, they can no longer be exhibited or moved as they are on the edge of disintegration. It's interesting though. I didn't respond really to the clothes displayed, perhaps because they are lifeless without Kylie inhabiting them, spinning around and shimmying on the dance floor.

The amazing thing about working on this book is that when we began it was relatively quiet on the Kylie front. And then 'Padam Padam' came out. As this single soars around the world, I've come to see Kylie as a tour de force in the longevity of her songmaking, her willingness to experiment, her fierce ambition and curation of the world around her. It's taken a long time for this to be fully recognised (five decades), an attempt made to move beyond the façade.

**AS:** I agree. I have so much respect for Kylie. At an age when most performers are releasing greatest hits compilations and – to paraphrase art critic Robert Hughes – hibernating on the bear fat of their youth, Kylie keeps working on new material and with stunning results.

As we were putting the finishing touches on this anthology, she won the 2024 Grammy Award for best pop dance recording for 'Padam Padam'. She'd won her first Grammy twenty years earlier, for best dance recording for 'Come Into My World'. The Grammy came in the wake of breaking the record for the longest time between appearances on Triple J Radio's Hottest 100: 'Padam Padam' coming in at number forty-eight, twenty-seven years after she last appeared on the list with 'Did It Again'.

In a red-carpet interview on the way to the Grammy Awards ceremony, I was shocked by the power of Kylie's work ethic. Talking about the evolution of her career, she told *Rolling Stone's* Delisa

Shannon, 'I use a surfing analogy a lot – a surfer I am not – but you paddle. You're never going to catch a wave unless you're paddling. And I paddle.'

She's truly an inspiration to creatives everywhere.

Speaking of inspiration, Kirsten, did you ever wear the t-shirt you won in the dance competition?

**KK:** Sadly, no. It's been sitting at the bottom of my band t-shirt pile for nearly forty years as I've moved around the country. The names – Kylie. Jason. Craig – have faded in red pen the way pop stars and hits blur into obscurity. The t-shirt has a slogan to warn teenagers about the perils of drinking. I think about getting it framed, safe behind glass.

But Kylie, in red, she doesn't fade. Kylie sits astride a car wreck, aflame in billowing red. Small, blonde, smiling, malleable. Always underestimated.

**AS:** And radiant. Always radiant.

Our heartfelt thanks to all the writers who jumped on board Kylie's love train with us. You, too, are radiant.

And to all the readers, it's time to press play. We recommend listening to the songs as you read each story – and feel free to dance!