FILM SUMMARY

The brain is the organ that controls identity and purpose, serving as a gauge for fluctuations in emotions, sensations, and understandings. The brain tells us to put one foot in front of the other, constructs feelings into comprehensible sounds, and keeps us functioning. In February 2005, Edwyn Collins’ brain suffered two hemorrhages following a stroke. Suddenly, the world as he had known it was incomprehensible.

Frontman of Scottish post-punk act, Orange Juice, and composer of global hit, “A Girl Like You,” Collins was a strong, driven character, certain of his purpose and desire to create music. But in the months following his stroke, the once vibrant pop star was left with a host of physical disabilities and a mere four phrases that he repeated over and over: “yes,” “no,” “Grace Maxwell” (his wife’s name), and “the possibilities are endless.”

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS offers an atmospheric rendering of Collins’ and Maxwell’s struggle to put the pieces of life back together. A solitary tree bending in a fog-swept field, the ripple of water on a wide beach, a herd of cows lazing in the mud, a gray sky settling on London rooftops ... slow, deliberate, natural imagery allows us to contemplate the confusion caused by losing one’s facilities, and the terrifying road to recovery. Beyond Collins’ journey, the film contemplates the miraculous power of love between two people. Complete with a sparse, moody soundtrack composed by Collins himself, this gorgeous filmic ride takes a slow road to understanding, reminding us that, with love, the possibilities truly are endless.
FILM THEMES

Following a stroke, one man becomes distressingly altered. All that remains are questions and nebulous confusion. What is memory and identity? How will I find my way back? Love proves to be the guiding light.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

As Edwyn Collins struggled to reconstruct some semblance of a functioning life after his stroke, he faced the ultimate dilemma: “I’m struggling to come to terms with who I am.” With so many past memories eroded, the notion of self and personal identity was profoundly challenged. What are we comprised of? Are we the sum of what we have experienced, or is there something greater and deeper at work? As fragments of his previous life re-surface, we encounter a man intent on leaving the past behind, determined to create a life from what he sees before him.

HUMAN REFLECTIONS IN THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE

The sense of place and importance of nature is significantly captured with wide-open expanses shown in the film from Helmsdale, a town in the north of Scotland where Edwyn Collins’ family have lived for many years. There is a juxtaposition between the representation of human nature and of nature itself; water ebbs and flows mirroring life cycles; storms brew mirroring a sense of foreboding. By capturing the silent, wordless contours of nature, filmmakers Lovelace and Hall draw parallels of individual struggles in the mountains, valleys, fields, and coastlines.

HUMILITY

When the focused and decisive Edwyn Collins experienced a stroke, his way of life no longer worked. The computations didn’t add up. As a 45-year-old man, he learned to read, write, speak, sing, and walk all over again. The road back to himself was treacherous, with signposts provided only by his wife. “I’m a little bit frightened with the world. It’s too much. It’s too difficult for me,” he admits at one point. The process of attaining logic and understanding required an enormous amount of humility and faith when he could not see the road ahead.

LOVE, THE GUIDING LIGHT

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS is undeniably romantic. Devoid of manufactured clichés about love, Grace Maxwell illustrates the power of devotion and companionship; she is a partner that remains loyal in sickness and health, in good and bad, through thick and thin. It is possible that Collins would not have regained his footing or returned to the stage without Maxwell’s guiding light. In THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS, the meaning and capacity of love becomes tangible and true.

“I want to get on with life. Looking back is nostalgic. I want to get on with what possibilities are ahead of me. Looking back is not for me. Looking forward is the way.”
Edwyn Collins

“Grace helped me a lot through the dark days. She set me free.”
Edwyn Collins
FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Edwyn Collins could only state four phrases after suffering a stroke. Can you describe THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS in four short phrases?

2. Have you ever been close to someone who has suffered a stroke?

3. Were you a fan of Orange Juice or Edwyn Collins’ music before watching the film? If not, are you more interested in listening to his old albums now?

4. How instrumental was Grace Maxwell to Collins’ recovery? Do you think he would have survived without her?

5. Why do you think that certain memories remain with us forever, while others disappear?

6. What are some of the greatest memories from your life? Do you feel your life would altered if you were to “lose” those memories to a stroke?

7. What is an activity that you consider therapeutic, something you turn to in times of recovery?

8. How do you explain identity? What defines an individual?

9. Do strokes alter the essence of a person? If someone experiences a stroke and loses their memory bank, are they the same person?

10. What role did music play in Edwyn’s recovery? Does music play a special role in your life?
FILM FACTS:

- Directors Lovelace and Hall approached Edwyn Collins and Grace Maxwell to discuss making a film after listening to Collins' 2010 album "Losing Sleep." Both directors are long-time fans of Orange Juice and of Collins' music in general.

- After running an errand on a Sunday afternoon in 2005, Maxwell returned home to find Collins collapsed on the floor, having suffered a stroke at the age of 45 due to high blood pressure. Collins was rushed to hospital, and after six days, he fell into a coma. Upon awakening from the coma, it became clear that he was suffering from acute aphasia, a condition affecting the brain and causing problems with language usage. Collins was hospitalized for 6 months.

- “A Girl Like You,” the 1995 single written by Edwyn Collins and released on his album "Gorgeous George," was an international hit and paid for Collins’ and Maxwell’s London home. Two separate music videos were made for the single – a U.S. and an international version.

- The “actor” playing a younger Edwyn Collins’ in THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS is William Collins, Ed and Grace’s 23-year-old son. When his father first suffered the stroke, Will had not been very interested in his father’s talents, but as Collins recovered and William started his own band, he began to appreciate his father’s music.

- The film’s entire instrumental original score was written by Edwyn Collins, Carwyn Ellis and Sebastian Lewsley.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the chance to be touched and inspired by it.

2. Become involved with Power To End Stroke, founded by the American Stroke Association.

3. Educate yourself on factors that can prevent stroke from affecting your life. The National Stroke Association provides a list of the leading lifestyle risk factors, including smoking, alcohol use, and obesity.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkerks, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It’s as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.