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, memories and former experiences reaching across the damaged abyss of his brain, we encounter a man intent on leaving the past behind and is determined to create a life from what he sees before him.

HUMAN REFLECTIONS IN THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE
Wide-open expanses shown in the film invite us to reflect on similarities between the human and natural worlds. Just as water ebbs and flows, so do we in our life cycles, reaching out over the shore as youngsters, retracting as we grow older. Just as tree bends to the power of wind, so do we retract when times are tough, lest we risk breaking our branches. By capturing the silent, wordless contours of nature, filmmakers Lovelace and Hall draw parallels between the human reality within and the natural one outside of our doors, so that our individual struggles - such as Collins putting the puzzle of his scattered brain back together - are mirrored in the mountains, valleys, fields, and coastlines we inhabit.

HUMILITY
When the focused and decisive Edwyn Collins experienced a stroke, his previous life formula 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, as well as faith when he could not see the road ahead. Only when Collins became humble and willing to let go of past assumptions could life begin anew.

LOVE, THE GUIDING LIGHT
THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS is undeniably romantic. Devoid of manufactured clichés about love, Grace Maxwell illustrates the power of devotion, companionship, 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, 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.

- 15 million people worldwide suffer a stroke each year, with 6 million deaths and 5 million individuals left with permanent disabilities from loss of vision and/or speech to paralysis and confusion. Globally, stroke is the 2nd leading cause of death for people over the age of 60, and the 5th leading cause of death for those between ages 15 and 59. The most common cause of stroke is high blood pressure.

- Edwyn Collins’ band, Nu-Sonic, formed in Glasgow, Scotland in 1976, changed its name to Orange Juice in 1979. Collins remained a member until it disbanded in 1985. He then embarked on a solo career, and in 1994, he built his own recording studio in West Hampstead, London, where he recorded his 3rd solo album, which included the global hit, “A Girl Like You.”

- After his stroke, Collins used 4 phrases: yes, no, Grace Maxwell, and the possibilities are endless.

- 87% of strokes are ischemic, when a blood vessel in the brain develops a clot, cutting off blood supply. 13% are hemorrhagic, when a weakened vessel ruptures and bleeds into the brain.

- When a stroke occurs, nerve cells in the brain that control functions such as memory, speech, and movement become injured. Nerve cells on the right side of the brain affect the left side of the body and vice versa, explaining why a stroke on one side of the brain can be visually seen on the opposite side of the body.

**WAYS TO INFLUENCE**

1. To learn more about Edwyn Collins and his journey back to his life, watch the BBC documentary “Edwyn Collins: Home Again,” which was filmed in 2007, soon after his stroke.

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.