



BOO HEWERDINE by Nick Hornby

A friend came round one evening in 1983 or 1984 with a new single by a local band (We were all living in Cambridge at the time) which he liked and wanted to play me. I wouldn't have minded, but I knew the lead singer in the band-a guy called Boo-with whom he worked with in a record shop, and I felt that the potential for embarrassment and awkwardness was enormous. The record was sure to be crap (when did friends, or friends of friends, ever make anything but crap records?), and yet I would feel obliged to say something positive to Boo next time I saw him, and he'd know I was being insincere, and.....

But the record was terrific, a slinky, spacey, dance-pop thing called "Money and Time" that was both catchy and literate, and there was no need for insincerity. The band, The Great Divide, broke up after a couple of singles, but I started taking a serious interest in Boo Hewerdine's career: I saw him supporting the Roaring Boys; I saw him at an almost empty Marquee (in a band then named Georgia Peach) supporting the Roaring Boys; after I moved to London, I saw Georgia Peach's next incarnation, The Bible, as often as I could-at first in Student Union concert halls (back then, Deacon Blue were the perennial Bible support act), as support at the Town & Country Club and finally, as the band started to take off, headlining there.

By that stage, my tangential personal connection with the gawky lead singer was no longer an issue -I was a fan of The Bible (the band), pure and simple.

In fact, if you liked pop music with guitars, verses, choruses and lyrics, pop music that recognized the primacy of the song and the endless gut-wrenching potential of the right chord change, it was hard not to be a Bible fan. Their two albums, Walking The Ghost Back Home (1986) and Eureka (1988) are minor

classics, chock full of tunes that everyone, not just the chosen few, should have spent their summers whistling.

"Graceland", from the first album, was their biggest no-hit-fifty-something with a bullet, and I remember having to sit through "Wogan" to see them play "Honey Be Good" from the second album. But commercial success - even the modest commercial success that kindred Brit-pop spirits Prefab Sprout, Aztec Camera and Danny Wilson managed every now and again-was sadly elusive, and in the end things fell apart.

Boo kept himself busy. He made an album with Texan folkie Darden Smith; he played live with Clive Gregson and Eddi Reader, and wrote a couple of songs, including 'The Patience of Angels', for Reader's second solo album; he made his own solo album, Ignorance, in 1992; The Bible reformed at the end of 1994 and made an EP. Bits and bobs, but never enough, especially when Roddy Frame, Paddy McAloon and all the other pop classicists seemed to disappear at the same time. Until now, the 90's have not been kind to those who prefer to have their hearts broken in their living rooms, rather than their toes broken on the dance floor.

Produced by John Wood (known for his work with Nick Drake, Richard Thompson, John Martyn and The McGarrigles), Baptist Hospital is Boo Hewerdine's quietest-and therefore his best-album to date. It aches, and that ache is probably pop music's rarest, most valuable commodity: it takes real nerve to prize regret over rage, and tenderness over threat. Someone once said that all art aspires to the state of music; well, if I would write book that sounded like this, I'd be....maybe not happy, but very, very fulfilled.

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