

D047 HARD TO HANDLE

The ten tracks on **D047** were recorded on 24/5 February in Sydney, Australia, during the Down Under leg of Bob's 1986 True Confessions tour with Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers. Since 30 different songs were played during these two shows, the offer here of just ten, in a set running under 55 minutes, seems a tad miserly. The choice of titles is also disappointingly conservative. Before H2H, we'd previously had official live material from '74 (*Flood*), '76 (*Hard Rain*), '78 (*Budokan*) and '84 (*Real Live*). With the admirable exception of *Hard Rain*, these titles were equally cautious in their choice of song - thus Bleeding, LARS, JLaw and Heaven's Door all receive a third live re-release here with Thin Man notching its fourth. Meanwhile, 4th Street, Lucky Old Sun, I Forgot More, Lonesome Town, Borderline, even *Hard Rain* (maybe especially *Hard Rain*) - mouth-watering prospects all - are passed over and denied us. Whatever you may think of what's on H2H, it's hard not to regret what isn't.



But ten great songs beat 25 shabby ones - so is that what we get? Sadly not. Some of the songs we're offered - Lenny Bruce, Night Comes Falling, I'll Remember You - while lacquered with a more or less plausible veneer of import, remain, at core, imposters - bluster and cod emotion aplenty, but hollow within. Thin Man, though competently delivered, is withered by the memory of its incandescent live '66 ancestor. LARS ought to be good, for it offers Campbell a heaven-sent opportunity to rip it up Bloomfield-style - but, having just carried JLaw nicely home with some commendably fine guitar work, he then unaccountably disappears - in fact, is notable for much of this set by his failure to deliver the trademark melodic Heartbreakers sound he's normally good for. Though left-stage bristles with guitars (with, to the right, the four Queens of Rhythm looking uncannily like a squad of cybermen), this band (tonight, at least) is musically dull.

Even the running order, allegedly insisted on by D himself, is odd. We kick off with a rap (recorded the night after the song it introduces) in which he tells his audience he

doesn't care nothing about Mel Gibson, Springsteen or Michael Jackson* - he has his own hero. A turgid Garden follows and things are off to a down-beat start. While on the subject of raps, I suspect fans like to hear D speak almost as much as sing and on this tour he was (for him) positively gabby. Why, then, are raps nearly always cut from official releases (with the "hero" one here a pointed exception)? *BS7* gives us fine live '63 versions of Masters, Hard Rain and Ship Comes In. Check the tapes (Town Hall / Carnegie Hall) and you'll find that all, in performance, were introduced with a pithy little rap - on the CD, though, nothing. Here in Sydney, It's Alright Ma was preceded by this:

I just read another concert review the other day. It said

Bob's sounding like a parody of himself. He sounds just exactly like he's imitating himself.

I should like to know who I'm supposed to sound like, y'know? I know it's hard when so many people sound like me these days, but someday, somebody got to tell these people that I'm still here. Well, I can't sound like anybody else. I don't know how to. If I did, I would.



Why cut that? And before Bruce:

Here's a song I wrote a while back about one of America's greatest forgotten men. This man was just a little bit before his time. He said some things which got him into trouble with the wrong people. But there's a lot of people right now saying a lot of things much worse than he ever could have dreamed of, and, of course, they're making millions of dollars and they've got nice houses and drive fast cars. And they got lots of pretty women. He didn't have none of that stuff at all.

Again it's cut, so depriving us of an intriguing extra glimpse into the artist's state of mind. But there are high spots too - the first being D's acoustic solo set. He begins singing Bleeding in a mannered hyper-rhythmic way that detracts from the song. This goes on until the end of the second verse (where falls, to inevitable cheers, the naked President line). Once this distraction is out of the way, an eerie transformation occurs - you can see D taken over, almost possessed by the song. He forgets his former archness and begins, almost in spite of himself, to sing naturally. His delivery quickens into an astounding machine-gun vocal performance in which every syllable of every word is clearly and distinctly uttered - a truly wonderful, *tour-de-force* final three verses of this most potent but demanding of songs. (To be fair, he's vocally on top of his game all evening.) NC Girl is another sparkling gem, complete with rich ringing guitar and choice harp. And, in comparison to what's gone before, Heaven's Door to finish is also fine, with Petty (for much of the evening a spare part) adding pleasing harmony to D's keening vocal.



Sound is A1, pictures too (though dark throughout). Performance: more lows than highs. D047 serves up a moderately entertaining hour that might have been - could have been, *should* have been - so much more.

THANKS V

STARS Three

* On other nights he name-checks Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Albert Einstein, Muhammad Ali, Clark Gable, Boris Karloff, Rudolph Valentino, John Wayne, Sly Stallone, Al Pacino, Jane Fonda, Henry Winkler, Mr Woody Woodpecker - even, once, Tom Petty. He also cites as "heroes" that mean nothing to him *women, money* and *success*.