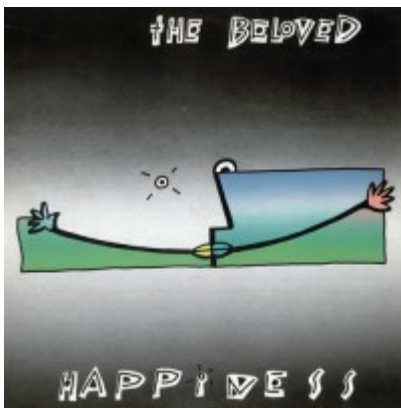


Bittles' Magazine

The rather wonderful album *Happiness* was released by UK band **The Beloved** way back when dinosaurs still roamed the earth (or 1990 if you don't wish to be facetious). The record came out at the very beginning of the new decade which promised a new start after the poverty and depression of Thatcher's 80s. Acid house, rap, and indie were all meshing together into a somewhat glorious aural mess. By **JOHN BITTLES**



Inclusion was finally being seen as cool again with people from all walks of life converging for what seemed like the first time in forever to experience the abandoned hedonism of raves. People were experimenting; with drugs, fashion, music and life in general. Oh, and some of the music being created was the best I've ever heard!

Happiness was one of the many records released at this time to fully embrace and epitomise the positivity and naivety that had sprung up out of nowhere to sweep over the nation's youth. It may not be as well-known as the likes of *Screamdelica*, *Pills N' Thrills*, *World Clique*, *Electribal Memories* or other celebrated records of that year, yet, for me at least, the record is one that is the perfect symbol of its time. Utilizing elements of house, indie and pop the record was, and still is, a bleep-filled melodic delight that contains enough catchy choruses and emotional depth to make it a lot more than just a postcard from the past.

Having downsized to a duo from a four-piece after discovering the machine-like funk of acid house the duo of **Jon Marsh** and **Steve Waddington** released their pop take on the electronic noise they were hearing in clubs and raves. *Happiness*, the band's second full-length came out to some well-deserved commercial success (it reached No.14 in the official UK album charts) and a smidgeon of critical acclaim. Previously a synth-pop band this record saw them move towards a more dance-focused sound, something that was taken to its natural conclusion on the majestic remix album *Blissed Out* which was released the very next year.

Blissed Out was an expanded remixed version of *Happiness* that took the dance influence the band had succumbed to and ran with it until a British acid house masterpiece had been created. In many ways the record is the equal, if not the superior, of the previous release. Containing 11 tracks on the CD version, or a staggering 16 on the tape, the record was one of the first remix albums that you could enjoy from beginning to end. The cassette version is also memorable for containing versions of the songs *Paradise* and *Acid Love* that are not only incredibly rare but are also exceptionally good. *Acid Love* in particular is a track that simply screams out for repeated plays.

My first introduction to the band was through the hit single *Hello*. With its nonsensical chorus that was merely a sung succession of semi-famous names the song instantly stood out after the shoegazers and indie

miserabilists that had previously dominated the alternative music scene. Both single and album were tracked down that very weekend with money that I had been saving for comics and beer. And thus a lifelong love affair was born! The cover was like a Pablo Picasso painting, and the LP fitted in perfectly with my twin loves of the likes of **The Stone Roses**, **Soup Dragons**, **Happy Mondays** and the alien-sounding bleeps of rave.

The album begins with a huge smile on its face in the shape of the single *Hello* which name-checks such personalities as Mork and Mindy (remember them?), Charlie Brown, Zippy, Bungle, Jeffrey Archer and many more. Furious bleeps abound in the background while **Jon Marsh's** voice has a sense of yearning that could win over even the coldest of hearts. *Hello* reached number 19 in the singles chart and proved to be the band's highest charting single from the album. It is also a glorious slice of electronic pop that has been unbelievably neglected by the idiots who compile the glut of 90s 'Best of' compilations which seem to have the same 40-60 songs on each and every one.

This is swiftly followed by *Your Love Takes Me Higher* which furthers the dance music elements with a lovely Chicago influence that is given a very British sounding synthpop sheen. Lyrics such as 'All this heartbreak is more than I can bear. It's still going no-where, no-where, no-where' betray a subtle melancholy and work as a sharp contrast to the songs French Kiss sex-tape style backing that was all the rage at the time. This also came out as a single reaching the heady heights of 39 in the charts.

The European hit *Time After Time* introduces a mournful Balearic feel with its lyrics of self analysis and contemplation. Lines such as 'I'm much too headstrong for my own good. I'm too involved to realise.' make it the perfect tune for moments of quiet reflection after the E'd up euphoria of the rave. Following track *Don't Worry* is a beautiful lament to friendship and love while *Scarlet Beautiful* ends side A in a euphoric rush bringing the sound of the club bursting straight back into your room.

Side B opens strongly with *The Sun Rising* which later became the band's most recognised track through its use in a plethora of adverts and inclusion on numerous chill-out compilations. It ushers in the second side with a pensive air utilising a sample of *Euchari* by **Emily Van Evera** to exquisite effect. This sample was also used by **Orbital** for the majestic ode to my home city Belfast.

This downbeat feel is continued with *I Love You More* and *Wake Up Soon* both of which have a sense of loss and innocence that always creates a slight tingle in my heart. *Wake Up Soon* with its chorus of 'Don't go telling me that everything must have a reason. Because you're wrong (Cause you're wrong, Cause you're wrong, Cause you're wrong). There's a whole world out there if you'll just stop dreaming' is a beautifully effective moment that is a bona fide highlight and is sure to bring a tear to the eye.

Up, Up and Away quickly comes along re-establishing the album's dance roots and uplifting air and is another highlight with its acid flourishes and lively rave piano. The lyrics may seem overly innocent today yet the backing track is so strong that it is a hard song to listen to without giving in to the urge to dance. Something backed up by the fact that the instrumental breakdown at the end of the song lifts the whole tune into the epic territory.

And just like that the record comes to an end with the heartfelt ode to the joys of love and companionship that is *Found*. Its guitar lines and mournful lyrics reference the likes of **Deacon Blue** or **Prefab Sprout** just as much as **Lil Louis** and **Frankie Knuckles**. Not the strongest track on the LP it is still a fittingly sombre end to the revelry that came before.

If all this sounds a little too wishy-washy for you then may I suggest listening to some **Suicidal Tendencies** or, perhaps, the sound of a drill. For those of us who were lucky enough to have been around in the early *90s* *Happiness* perfectly captures the wide-eyed euphoria of a time when musical cultures collided, flares and tie-dye were considered OK, and it really felt like we were about to change the world. The album works fantastically well as a whole, and while it does sound a little dated today, it is still an epic work of pop joy that succinctly reflects a certain time and feeling and is more than enough to get this cynical old sod all dewy-eyed.

Only a few years after the release of *Happiness* the band split up with **Steve** being replaced by **Jon Marsh's** wife **Helena Randall** (now that's nepotism for you). In this version of the group they released a further two albums and had a huge hit with the excellent and saucily videoed *Sweet Harmony*. The band have been fairly silent since 1996 though, with only a few guest vocals for **Jon Marsh** and a couple of greatest hits compilations to show for their time. Rumours have constantly circulated of a new album from the original duo, although, as of yet, there has been very little in the way of music to support them. This is a shame since I for one would love to hear what the band are gonna give us next.

| JOHN BITTLES