

Music Notes

Sunday, October 24, 2021

Country star of the 70s and 80s, Don Williams sang the songs, but Bob McDill, Roger Cook, and Dave Hanner wrote them with nuances not common in the cheating and forlorn love songs of the era. Do you recall, “Heaven’s Just a Sin Away”?

“I Believe in You” by Roger Cook sets up a long list of items that, “I don’t believe in...”. The singer/narrator does not “believe that heaven waits for only those who congregate.” But he believes in “babies” and “Mom and Dad.” The narrative voice is that of a true skeptic, but it also reveals one with a very human heart.

“Good Ole Boys Like Me” by Bob McDill has been labelled a song/novel. McDill says he tried to pour in “...alienation, class struggle, evangelical religion, race, lost cause mentality, self-destruction...”. The singer hears “Thomas Wolfe whispering in my head.” And the reference to Hank and Tennessee Williams is loaded with irony. Hank, country singer/writer, dies from an overdose of prescription drugs and alcohol. Tennessee, playwright, dies in a similar manner. Obviously, the singer is at odds within the world he lives. McDill places markers to explain that world: Uncle Remus, Stonewall Jackson, a drunken father, the Bible, and early rock-n-roll on the radio. One line always causes me to think. “But I was smarter than most, and I could choose.”

“Lord, I Hope This Day Is Good” by Dave Hanner can be performed in a praise and worship style, but a closer examination finds a sense of futility with prayer and even a sly indictment of any divine power. The last words of the last verse suggest that reducing crime would be “easy for you.”

“Miracles” by Roger Cook references the simple wonders of walking, running, and being in love. Simultaneously, the singer hails his ability to think with a free mind. Cook mentions no god, but some listeners want to imply the connection. Both Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein allowed for pondering miracles found in a describable universe, one they were sure is governed by laws of nature.