

## The Twelve Faces Of The Happy Hour

By Michelle Duffy Cheeky chappies in crew cuts and tank tops have never stunned the music audiences. What did we have before? Haircut 100 in their slightly cheesy, too clean approach probably came close around the early eighties but it wasn't until the Northern talents descended on us in the shape of The Housemartins that many sat up and took note. These people, who have now settled into their roller skates are gliding cheerfully towards middle age and are now perhaps, bashful at still owning London 0 Hull 4. This debut album still smells distinctly of those early local working man's club days. Paving the way, although modestly for Paul Heaton's re emerge in 1988 as the front man of The Beautiful South. This album is, however, lacking in no connection whatsoever for the future successful career of DJ Norman Cook. Taking on board the political stance of The Style Council, The Housemartins slotted into the genre of 'mod pop out spoken - ness' with great ease. These four young lads were the innovators of Brit Pop and marked a turning point in the way British bands were represented. This hadn't been achieved with such esteem since the invasion of Mersey Beat in the early sixties. Proud of their Northern roots, they claimed themselves as the forth best band to come from Hull, hence the title of their album; London 0 Hull 4. The only other band, perhaps known to us drippy Southerners from Hull was Everything But The Girl. Worming it's proud way to number three in the album chart in June 1986, it sat through the summer in the top ten and on our record decks and had proved to be a shift in genre in the music scene of that time. Where other opinionated bands of the mid eighties swung graciously towards New Romanticism, The Housemartins chose to bring their Northern brashness south rather than be allowed to be coated in London's finest commercialistic gloss. These lads, namely, Paul Heaton, Norman Cook, Stan Cullimore and Hugh Whitaker spread their mod like poses across the back cover of their album, tinged in a green hue. Like spotty, giggling youths let out on a Friday night, they appear, visually immature and mouthy. Perhaps more being at home with an Airfix kit in their hands was more their style than making a good record. We are, then, pleasantly surprised at their tight harmonies, clever production and talented song writing capabilities marked in this album. With feet firmly fixed together, we happily shake our knees this way and that to this first, 'catchy personified' track which has been since set in stone as a theme from the decade other genres forgot. 'Happy Hour,' for those who don't know, should speak for itself. It's jangly guitars and racy drums create a smoke filled, Northern high street pub scene on a Saturday night are coolly dissolved by Heaton's soulful, and almost angelic voice. A fast, jumpy record that was released as a single in May 1986 and also made it to number three. A feat that very few new bands achieved in those days. Still, in the same vein, we are introduced to 'Get Up Off Our Knees,' which it predominant in it's piano theme. Still the same strong lead is taken by Heaton whilst the other three provide harmonised cries. A stronger political thread appears from now on. It is a immense indication of the real spirit that was the band. It is obvious to see how the shallow mindedness of 'Happy Hour' became such a great hit. It was a song with a narrow subject which didn't need an audience to think about it. The sullen, sobering 'Flag Day,' perhaps sounds more of a strong musical number to end a mediocre student written play. The Housemartins do show us how they had learnt, so far, to use their own voices as the backbone of a track. Obviously a performance such as this appealed to them, hence the future single cover 'Caravan Of Love.' A definite resemblance to this single can be heard in 'Flag Day.' It was released as a single in February 1987, but failed to make any impression. Reflecting back to the new wave sound of the late seventies, this eighties band complete the first set of tracks here with a modish, jumpy number with fast lyrics and a chorus of all four flitting from the bottom of one octave to the top. 'Anxious,' is certainly a descriptive word that could be used for describing this track. It still holds the same catchiness as 'Happy Hour,' but somehow appears to be a better fusion of both voices and music that previously heard. However, on a flattening note, 'Reverends Revenge,' is a short piece that can only be described as a reflection of 'Happy Hour,' and also completely instrumental. It is a cute interlude within this album, although it will not stimulate any sense of the listener. Again,. The audience will be a touch disappointed with 'Sitting On A Fence,' as it also clings onto the theme of 'Happy Hour,' a little too close, structurally. Utilising their firmly established juddering timing of short bursts of guitar notes and soothing vocals, we embrace this album now like an old school friend. It may be seen as repetitive in each track, yet each song seems to offer something different from the next. 'Sheep,' may be an unimaginative title yet this track is still holding a joyful theme. A touch of guitar solo featured in this track offers the listener another talent of this band it its primitive stages. Short in its length, we find these tracks inoffensive and delightful. In the same vein again, 'Over There' feels like, as most of these songs, another extension of 'Happy Hour.' For those who adored the uniqueness of this particular track, will be delighted with this track. For the others who wish to strive for unfamiliar territory, please look elsewhere. 'Think For A Minute,' is a slower paced song that builds a sturdy base for Heaton's light, echoed vocal. A touch of the dreamy, mysterious side can be felt through the motion of this song. This track was the second best single release for the band. Sitting fairly pretty at number eighteen in September 1986, it appears to us now, that at the time, this band couldn't wait to get the album, with it's singles, over and done with as quickly as possible. This particular track is the most thoughtful of the album. It shows us the slightly serious side of the band and perhaps is the best feature when expressing the future impressions offered through Heaton's, The Beautiful South. It isn't long before we are subjected to the light air in 'We're Not Deep,' which is yet another branch off 'Happy Hour.' Filled with 'arrh's and shuddering 'bab bab ba's,' for it's chorus. We are transfixed by the abruptness of this tracks and their strong drift towards that depressing unemployed feeling. Perhaps we should feel lifted somewhat with 'Lean On Me,' and it's gospel like piano ridden anthem. It is a stage set for the thoughtful, deep filled apple pie lyrics. Heaton takes his position here to stand alone and give the track his tonsil threatening best performance. Bluesy tinkles of the piano send this rolling song into heights not yet experienced by the common or garden Housemartin listener. It shows us another side of this band who kept on giving us their unique brand of song pen ship. 'Freedom,' jumps into a chanting anthem with just a hint of 'Happy Hours.' Thumping and jolly, the mood has been lifted back into pint spilling mode and this makes us glad to have bought the album, although listening to it now, it appears, like all the best past albums, dated and a touch dusty. We are surprised to hear a rumbling, slightly heavy guitar which, naturally doesn't fit with their Dad's chunky cardigans. Since the making of this album, we perhaps, in hindsight, didn't need to be exposed anymore to the 'Happy Hour' variations that this album brought to us. Yet, we still scanned the

record shop shelves for the next instalment which was to come in the form of 'The People Who Grinned Themselves To Death,' in September 1987, which gave us the political edge we had been looking for. Knowing that there was more to the lives of The Housemartins, we felt strained, experimentally with London 0 Hull 4. It was certainly the safety net that the band had wanted as a first album; use the best track and use it to death in an many ways possible. This was what happened here, but it is with the better albums and The Beautiful South , with all it's working class glory and socialist issues, to come, along with the mixings of Norman 'Fatboy Slim' Cook, that makes us appreciate this album a lot better now, that when it was first with us. The band split in 1988. Paul Heaton - Vocals

Stan Cullimore - Guitar and vocals

Hugh Whitaker - Drums and vocals

Norman Cook - Bass and vocals. Produced by John Williams

Go! Discs. 1986.

Bought on vinyl at a record fair, Sussex, two pounds.

Available of CD in all record shops for around the five pound mark. ©Michelle Duffy (sam1942 on dooyoo & Ciao) 2006

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Michelle is a freelance writer in the South of England and owner of the websites, <http://www.generationsounds.co.uk>, <http://nevermindthebloggers.bravehost.com> and their successful sister, 'Never Mind The Bloggers' at <http://paperback-writer29.tripod.com>. She has been writing over the last year, for five major consumer websites across the world and is one of the only two music category advisors for one website in the U.K. Her websites promote young, amateur and professional bands/artists and their fan clubs whilst also reviewing them for local and world wide promotion. She has also recently launched the blogs; 'The Ramblings Of An Old Rocker,' 'Bohemian Waffle,' 'The Rhythm Rock And Blues Machine' and 'The Moped's Musings' and 'Generation Sound Suite.' She is currently working on two shops selling her music styled artwork and now sells on Ebay. Article Source: [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Michelle\\_Duffy](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Michelle_Duffy)

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