

Brainwashed - I Would Be Nothing Be Without Bob Braun

Written by Justin Patrick

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On my shelf of vinyl records, the playful ditties of Charles Manson sit comfortably alongside the exotica of Martin Denny and the schmaltzy waltzes of Lawrence Welk. The esoteric jazz of Alice Coltrane commingles with the Gnostic revelations of Current 93. The Moog sounds of Debussy and maudlin reflections of Tom Clay peacefully exist with the full on feedback provided by Flying Saucer Attack and the warped surrealism of Nurse With Wound. While I bought some of these LPs and 45s new, I acquired the bulk of my collection in second hand thrift stores, flea markets, yard sales, or saved them from the trash. But even if I had enough records to make a mountain, and had not one by Bob Braun I would be as nothing; Bob Braun brings the love. Thanks to thrifts stores I have many of his albums.

To a certain generation of Cincinnatians he is an icon of that bygone era when local media still had some chutzpa. I know it may be hard to believe, but local flavor on the airwaves and television screens was once as palatable as goetta and chili seasoned with cinnamon, cloves, and chocolate. Now the congloms are in charge and all they serve is government cheese.

Bob's career in the entertainment industry began when he was just a wee lad of 13 years old, on WSAI hosting a Saturday morning baseball program. In 1957 he came in first place on Arthur Godfrey's *Talent Scouts* show, winning a clean grand, and getting hired by WLWT to boot. His success in showbiz was nearly sealed. It was also around this time that he frequently appeared on Ruth Lyons' *50-50 Club* TV program, which he eventually replaced in 1967 with *The Bob Braun Show*. It lasted 17 years. In my opinion, it was prematurely aborted in 1984—a truly Orwellian event. He left Cincinnati behind to try and make it in the big time and the world was never the same. Sadly, when he moved to California he starred only in commercials, as a guest on talk shows, and had small, inconsequential movie roles. You can catch his cameo as a news anchorman in the movie *Die*

Hard 2: Die Harder

. My wife remembers an infomercial where he was hawking medical adjustable beds to the elderly, hurt, and sick. Meanwhile, local television and radio shows in the city he called his home became increasingly relegated to the cable access ghetto and the slums that exist at the far left frequencies of the dial.

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It was while listening to the *Art Damage* show on one of those far left stations, WAIF 88.3 FM, that I had my first exposure to his singing voice. It was "I Write the Songs" originally popularized by Barry Manilow. Hearing Bob mutilate it was just one of the many things that enamored me to the *Art Damage* radio program. His voice fit in perfectly with their usual fare –cut-up tape experiments, drones, dirges, and the manic art music of the Cincinnati underground. I hope to always remember that stoned, late night listening experience. Now, whenever the words to "I Write the Songs" come into my mind, in moments when I am struck with an expansive mood and all the world seems mine, it is not Barry Manilow's voice whom I hear singing but Bob's. Having his voice in my head keeps me happy (and sane).

My taste for his strange take on popular tunes had been whetted, and I eagerly kept my eyes and ears peeled for the vinyl artifacts I knew must be around. Thankfully, there were many.

His career as a singer had started well before his big move to television, in the early 1960s. Like many other TV and radio personalities of the time he had been encouraged to expand and capitalize on the parameters of his celebrity by putting out 45s and LPs. I can only wonder at what the engineers in the studio thought of his dulcet tones. To start he cut a rough batch of unsuccessful recordings for the Fraternity and Torch labels, among others. Somehow, perhaps through his own willpower and charisma, he was able to get signed to Decca Records. Maybe the record executives had stuffed cotton balls in their ears, but certainly they had a better marketing plan than the other labels he had been with, because it was in 1962 that he charted his only Top 40 hit, "'Til Death Do Us Part."

It is a song I now share a history with. I work in a big library with over 160,000 audio-visual items. My coworkers and I come across a lot of different material in the course of each shift. One day while at work, my friend Jeff pointed out a WSAI CD compilation with the song "'Til Death Do Us Part" on it. We listened to it at work, and with other great songs by the likes of Paul Anka and Rosemary Clooney it cheered my heart, which was discouraged and melancholy at the time. When I got home that day, my girlfriend Audrey wanted to go up the street to the St. Vincent de Paul thrift store and I eagerly agreed. While she sifted through the clothes I started digging through the vinyl, as is my habit. Amidst the preponderance of wretched Christmas albums, I found the sleeve for Bob Braun's "'Til Death Do Us Part" album. But there was no record in it! I was vastly disappointed, yet kept on looking. Then, a few rows over, I came across it again, and this time with the 33 1/3;. I was absolutely delighted to buy it. I was struck and overcome by the powerfully resonating coincidence of coming across the same song by Bob Braun three times in one day. It is said that three times makes the charm, and later that spring I asked Audrey for her hand in marriage. When we got married I made sure the song was played at our reception.

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Besides my luck in having what Bob calls "one love for one heart" I have also been extremely fortunate in randomly finding other Braun albums. After his hit with Decca most of his albums were released as vanity pressings or on small labels. One of my favorites is *Easy River Ridin'*. It has a fabulous track called "Daddy, Meet A Man." It's about his son Rob Braun as is especially funny as I have seen Rob staring from the news anchor desk of Cincinnati's Channel 12 ever since I was a kid (and maybe why I no longer watch the news). In the song he talks—little of what could be termed "singing" is involved, accept by the back up choir—of how Rob is growing up, wanting to borrow the car and take girls out on dates. The elder Bob laments on how he used to sit young Rob down on his knee, but now Daddy must "meet a man who used to be your little boy."

Bob's albums are littered with down home family values, which besides the awful singing is partially why I like them. And since he didn't write any of the material himself, he also winds up taking on a number of standards and classics. Playing his rendition of "Feelings" for my friends is like telling them a bad one-line joke. All they do is look at me and shake their heads. I wish his version of "Unforgettable" was forgettable but for some sick reason it lodges its way into the folds of my brain, repeating endlessly on a nauseating loop. "He's not heavy, he's my brother" does likewise. During the holidays it's nice to dust off his album *Christmas in Your Heart* though my family threatens to break my stereo. So I put on

Tiny Tim's Christmas Album

or

Beautiful Memories of Christmas with Brook Benton

(also found while thrifting) in an attempt to placate them, but that usually doesn't seem to work either and we end up unwrapping our gifts without Bob.

Still, I'm thankful for the memories.

*This essay originally appeared in the book **1st Hand Stories from 2nd Hand Stores** published by [Auror](#)
[e Press](#)*

samples:

- ['Til Death Do Us Part](#)
- [Feelings](#)
- [I'll Be Home For Christmas](#)

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