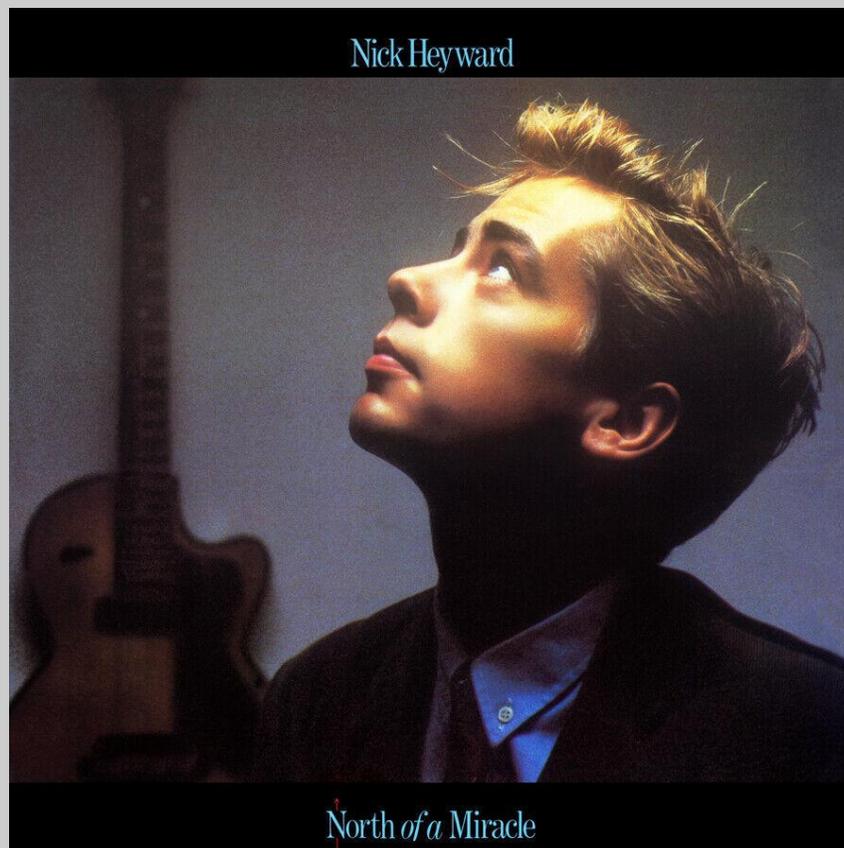


North of a Miracle by Nick Heyward

Nick Heyward's *North of a Miracle* was originally released in 1983 following his success with British band Haircut 100. It epitomized the resurgence of that time using real orchestral instruments instead of synthesizers, so prevalent in years previous.

The album was produced by Heyward and Geoff Emerick of Beatles fame as George Martin's engineer on their later albums. The production quality is brilliant with a full orchestra on every track and a good deal of percussion. The vocal harmonies, guitars, bass, drums, piano, organ and other instruments jump out of the speakers with crisp sonic precision to be appreciated across the audio spectrum.



Most importantly, the songs are great. The CD version includes a few extra tracks as noted and as usual, the extra tracks are forgettable with the exception of Stolen Tears, a bright tune with fine acoustic guitar work.

Listeners of college radio or English radio in the early 80s may have heard "When It Started to Begin," "Atlantic Monday" or other tracks but American pop radio listeners

surely heard Whistle Down the Wind, which cracked Billboard's top 20 in late 1983. Opening with piano and a droning fretless bass (Pino Palladino), this breezy tune grows in energy with each measure and finishes with a beautiful orchestral climax. A pop tune with class.

Every other one of the 10 original songs are exceptional although "The Day It Rained Forever," the last song on the original album, always made me hit the stop button on my turntable.

Speaking of which, I still have the original vinyl LP in mint condition and a good turntable with an Ortofon cartridge and it sounds much better than the CD, which sounds fine. I realize not everyone wants to bother with all the old stuff but the LP does sound better. That's another story for another day.

As for the songs, "Atlantic Monday" and "When It Started To Begin" are so good and so high energy that one could only wish they were playing in that band, if only as a percussionist or background vocalist.

"Blue Hat For a Blue Day" has a wonderful organ part providing the base for a lead vocal and the song contains one of the sweetest refrains imaginable. Mandolin and accordion are featured with a sentimental violin, marimba, saxophones and the fretless bass carrying the rhythm. It doesn't get much better than this. As with many of the albums' tracks, guitar virtuoso Tim Renwick plays guitar (and mandolin on this one). As for the words, one might decipher the meaning of the song by the title but I've always been too consumed with the sounds to bother. Doesn't sound like it was recorded on a blue day.

"Club Boy At Sea" is spectacular in its subtle build to a climax with an irresistible rhythm guitar throughout, backed by an aggressive orchestral arrangement and yet another outstanding lead vocal performance. What club he's talking about, who the boy is or what sea he is sailing I don't care. I'm too consumed with the performances. Just listen to the last two minutes of the song and you won't care either.

"Two Make It True" and "On a Sunday" are classics themselves - Sunday for the great spoken verse-in-rhythm at the end and True for quality guitar tracks and a fine bass/guitar/percussion break near the end. "The Kick of Love" is a jazz tune featuring a Spanish guitar solo with piano. It faces stiff competition with the rest of the tracks on the album, which means it's only a very good song.



Nick Heyward, Geoff Emerick and everyone else involved should be as proud of making it as I am for having found it so long ago.

Heyward plays guitars on most if not all of the tracks but Renwick takes ordinary parts and makes them spectacular, as he's always done (See Al Stewart, Alan Parsons, Gilbert O'Sullivan and others).

"Atlantic Monday" and "The Day it Rained Forever" were recorded live. The album was recorded and mixed at Air Studios and Abbey Road Studios in London and the album is undeniably English. Orchestral arrangements are credited to Andrew Powell and Paul Buckmaster and Heyward is credited with the brass arrangements. He wrote all of the songs.

Nothing about this album seems contrived other than creating great tracks. Nick Heyward, Geoff Emerick and everyone else involved should be as proud of making it as I am for having found it so long ago. One of the best albums in the last forty years if I'm keeping score. I give it four stars out of five. If you like the Style Council or XTC you may like this. Spend the money.

P.S. If I give five stars we're talking *Abbey Road*, *Pet Sounds*, *Dark Side of the Moon* and a select few in that stratosphere.