

Mp3 Bascom Hill - Maybe



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An album about a band at a crossroads, whose music taps into the lives we all lead and whose songs are shaped to endure beyond the passing fads. 11 MP3 Songs ROCK: Modern Rock, POP: Beatles-pop
Details: Charlie Victor, lead vocals Jason Sheridan, acoustic/electric guitar, vocals Joe Sheehan, rhythm electric guitar Quin Stickler, bass, vocals There's a hill on the University of Wisconsin campus at Madison. The administration building sits on top of it, and in the dead of winter you can get there only by climbing over slippery patches of snow and ice, sliding a bit but then moving ahead. No matter how cold it gets, the determined ones make it -they have to, in order to reach their goal, whatever it may be. That building is Bascom Hall. The hill beneath it is, of course, called Bascom Hill. And so is the band whose history in this community makes its story as inspiring as its music. Bascom Hill -- the band -- is itself a landmark now. Throughout the Midwest, from intimate coffeehouses to sprawling outdoor festivals, they've chiseled a unique niche for themselves, with a sound that nods toward Jack Johnson but with more aggressive vocals and Dave Mathews but with a tighter pop focus, plus a shot of Radiohead's willingness to take chances. Fans that range literally from six into their sixties connect with their songs, each of which bristles with catchy hooks and rides on a rush of melody. All this is clear throughout Maybe, the band's debut release on Arrival Records. "Day After Day," with its soaring invitation to "open my eyes"; "Stained," a swirl of exotic riffs and unanswered questions about love's illusions; "Angels Weep," whose searching lyric and ringing harmonies won it a perfect 5.0 rating among listeners on garageband-- these and all the other tracks on Maybe capture the sound and spirit that Bascom Hill have built through years of work, going back to their blue-collar roots as kids in Kenosha. But this album is also about a band at the crossroads, sequestered in a Texas studio, with just four days to strip everything they've done down to its essence and build it up again. Most artists would have dodged that challenge, but these guys met it

head-on, ate it up, and emerged as a band reborn and ready for everything the future has to offer. That moment of truth in Austin actually began years ago in Kenosha, days before a battle of regional bands. Charlie Victor was eager to join the competition; he already knew his way around a tune, having sung with one of the barbershop quartets for which this GermanAmerican town was widely known. But while he could assemble a group in time for the event, he knew he needed someone whose drive and chops could match his own. And so he asked Jason Sheridan to join up with him. They already knew each as members of the same high school choir, so when it turned out that Jason, the son of a music storeowner, also played guitar -- a lot of guitar -- the deal was sealed. At their first practice they wrote a song together; with some friends of Jason's recruited to fill out the lineup, they worked it up and at their showdown against more experience acts, they killed. The first original tune, "Five Voices," won top honors in the song competition. And Jason won first prize in the guitarist competition: a Fender Strat. More important, they walked away with a commitment to stick together and take their partnership as far as they could. "That first song we wrote took us two hours, but with every new song we kept getting better" Jason recalls. "Charlie always sounded so good that I knew I could write terrible lyrics and he'd still make them sound fabulous." Quin Stickler, who worked with Jason at a local music store, was the next piece of the puzzle. Once Jason and Charlie began building their song list, they invited him onboard to lay down the bass lines. They began working around the area as a trio, but even at this early stage they were experimenting with their sound. Which is why Jason decided to put down his electric and switch to acoustic guitar -- a change that allowed him to apply more of his classical training to each tune. To fill the gap left when Jason unplugged, the band asked Joe Sheehan, a friend of Quin's, to take over on electric. A strong rhythm player with a knack for creating atmospheric parts, he was the final ingredient in their core sound: discreet but compelling textures and grooves, acoustic lines that both whispered and burned, rock-solid solo and harmony vocals, and songs that audiences couldn't help but hum. Known in those days as Tasty Wanton, they built a following through shows at all the major stops in their area: Shank Hall in Milwaukee, the Great Dane in Madison, the Sturgis Harley Fest, where they opened for Survivor, and back in their hometown, Kenosha's Legendary Brat Stop. In 2001 they went to Nashville to cut a five-track EP, produced by Monty Powell (Keith Urban, Diamond Rio) and mixed by David Fortman (Evanescence, Mudvayne), which spread from one radio playlist to another and opened the door toward showcases in New York and Nashville. Eventually, as momentum built, as demand for product started to swell, the time

came to cut their first full-length album. Ready to take this next step, Jason and Charlie cooked up some new material, scouted for the right producer, and found two: Jimmy Messer, who doubles as guitarist in Kelly Clarkson's band, and Dwight Baker, an up-and-coming soundcrafter who presided over Matchbox Studios in Austin. They made the contact, checked out his work, sent their stuff to him, and then packed up and headed south. What they found caught them all by surprise. "My goal was to make the best record we could make," Jason explains. "So we just started throwing our best songs at Dwight. His response was, 'I love what you're doing ... but you can do better.' He pulled out this red pen and began drawing lines through our lyrics: 'This bridge could be better. I really like this line, but fill these two out. See this verse here? It's not there anymore.'" Rather than discourage the guys, Baker's comments proved exhilarating. "We loved it," Charlie insists, "because it challenged us to be more creative than we'd ever been. In the end we were left with exactly four days to basically write the whole album." They spent those four days inside Matchbox Studios, hatching ideas and bringing them to life faster than they ever had. When the tape started rolling they began with the rhythm tracks, provided by Austin drummer Rafael Gayol, who works regularly with Bob Schneider and toured extensively with the Bo-Deans. As the tape rolled, Messer's role as co-producer became more crucial. "He helped pull the best performance out of us," Jason says. "He had a laid-back attitude but would not settle for anything but the best. He was instrumental, too, in getting our guitar sounds and keeping a chill vibe in the studio. We benefited immensely from his vision." Even as Gayol laid down the beats Jason and Charlie kept finessing their songs. The more the clock wound down, the more focused they got and the happier they were with the results. "Before, when Charlie and I wrote together, we'd throw down some dummy lyrics, just to get the song out on a piece of paper," Jason explains. "A lot of times we just got used to those lyrics. We stopped doing that in Austin. We became extraordinarily critical of ourselves. We didn't have the time to polish a lyric; we had to get it close to perfect the first time. And that was one of the greatest experiences we'd ever had as writers." That intensity transferred right into the band's performance. "We took chances," Jason continues. "As much as possible, we tried to write and play the parts like a performance. Every instrument changes and grows throughout the song, without a bunch of editing and looping. It was great to record in the traditional way, with old guitars going through old amps and a great old console -- and then," he smiles, "run it all into Pro Tools." "We were able to record music that really represents us," Charlie adds. "You hear Jason and me, as if we were singing to you in a room. A lot of that has to do with

Dwight and how he was able to bring out the best from us. But I also felt that our writing had zeroed in on something that all of us could understand. Everything on Maybe is about relationships, from love to business to friendship. Fleshed out by Gayol's drums and B-3 textures from Jason Halbert, taking leave from his gig as music director for American Idol, the songs of Maybe reflect Bascom Hill's wide emotional range. "My Way Home," for instance, with its deep ambient texture and Charlie's dreamy delivery, seems to rise from each listener's inner dance of hope and doubt. But then, on the reggae-inflected "For a Moment," a brighter image beckons - an invitation to escape the pressures of life, even if only for a moment in our own imaginations. Maybe, in other words, confirms what Bascom Hill's fans This is the rare kind of band that can speak across demographic and generational lines, that knows how to tear it up for thousands of bikers at Sturgis and then deliver for a handful of rapt listeners at a living room concert. There are great bands that speak to one or another group; there are headliners that work best before a sea of screaming fans and others that spin magic in a candlelit caf. have known all along: But there's just one Bascom Hill, whose music taps into the lives we all lead, whose songs are shaped to endure beyond the passing fads. All it takes is one stroll through Maybe and you'll know: These guys are for real. And there's no maybe about that. -Bob Doerschuk

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