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TO HERE KNOWS WHEN - GREAT IRISH ALBUMS REVISITED

Heartworm by Whipping Boy

Echo & the Bunnymen played three gigs in Dublin's SFX in the first week of December, 1985. At one of those gigs were two inner city Dublin teenagers, first cousins Paul Page and Myles McDonnell.

"We went to see Echo & the Bunnymen at the SFX," recalls Page. "It was a door open to another world for both of us. We just couldn't believe the actual power, they had this mystique when they came on stage, shrouded in dry ice, lights, music, the whole thing, it just absolutely overwhelmed us. We walked away from the gig saying that one day we'll play in a band and we'll play on that stage."

It's a lovely origin story. Page went on to pick up a guitar, McDonnell picked up the bass and along with Kildare natives Feargal McKee on vocals and Colm Hassett on drums they formed **Whipping Boy**. In 1992 *Submarine* their debut album was released and they finally got to play the famed venue. "We were supporting Nick Cave and just before we went on, I turned and said, do you remember that? It was a nice moment, we got to play and I suppose, fulfilled that dream."

The band signed to Sony and were adamant that the next record would move away from their shoegaze/MBV/Sonic Youth influences. "It wasn't just about trying to move away from that really generic sound that was there," says Page. "I think a big part of what made *Heartworm* such a good album is that we changed our approach, and we started to write about things that were more personal, so it was a mental shift."

Warne Livesey was brought in to produce the album and according to Page it was his work on The House of Love's *Babe Rainbow* that got him the job: "I think the record company were probably thinking he's done some big records with Deacon Blue, they really liked his work on The The's albums as well, but The House of Love were the band he produced that probably piqued our interest."

Page has only good memories of recording *Heartworm*: "It was a pretty harmonious time, the recording went really well. We were well prepared. There were no fights in the studio, and by the end we were really happy with what we were leaving the studio with."

Heartworm got some astonishing reviews upon release in 1995. Melody Maker's Michael Bonner wrote: "If you want a comparison that does Whipping Boy justice, think of James Joyce and Martin Scorsese-pissed up angry and morose, ready to hit the confessional with all they have got. The Dubliners via Mean Streets. Scary. Uncompromising. Magnificent".

A high profile tour across Europe with Lou Reed followed. Sales of *Heartworm* were disappointing and the record deal with Sony ended. The band broke up in 1998. *Heartworm* got a beautiful reissue by Needle Mythology in 2021 and the Fontaines DC's Grian Chatten has been photographed sporting a Whipping Boy t-shirt. It's great to see the band finally getting their dues.

For the last 12 months Paul Page has been writing the history of Whipping Boy on his Substack newsletter, *When We Were Young*. An essential read.



Paul Page revisits *Heartworm* by Whipping Boy on To Here Knows When - Great Irish Albums Revisited,

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