

Robin Gibb - A songwriter and singer

Bio for the album: "'50 ST. CATHERINE'S DRIVE'"

"Ours is such a long story, but when we were young the only risk was not taking the risk. We always knew we'd win it if we were in it..." Robin Gibb, 2009

A songwriter and singer of rare and naked talent, Robin - usually alongside his brothers Barry and Maurice Gibb as the Bee Gees, but also on his own - created some of the most potent and memorable landmarks in the history of popular music.

From the late 60s to the early 70s, on albums like *Idea*, *Trafalgar*, *Horizontal* and the mighty *Odessa* ("our madness" as Robin described it), the Bee Gees proved they could do exquisite and expansive melancholia as well as anyone, but, of course, there was so much more to follow. In 1973, in the space between their late 60s psychedelic pop glory and their spectacular R&B rebirth of the mid-70s, the brothers wrote a beautiful piece called, 'My Life Has Been A Song' and it's Robin's voice that dominates it. The ache of regret and the pleasure of success all wrapped up in one utterly unmistakable sound. After a string of perfectly pitched R&B albums in the mid-70s, among the highlights of which were Robin's brilliant 'Nights On Broadway', the band released the soundtrack to *Saturday Night Fever*, an album which made the Bee Gees as famous as it's possible for human beings to be.

"There have only ever been three albums that have truly affected the culture," Robin told me back in 2009. "That's *Sgt Pepper*, *Saturday Night Fever* and *Thriller*. There's not many people who know what that feels like. We're like the guys who've been to the moon."

As products of a show-business home - their father, Hugh, was a band-leader who met their mother, Barbara, at one of his own gigs - Barry, Robin and Maurice, began singing together in cinemas while growing up in Manchester. In 1958, when Robin was just 9, the family emigrated to Australia, and the three boys began performing professionally, playing pubs and speedways, singing on TV, even doing pantomime. It took thirteen attempts for the Gibbs to have a hit, but in late 1966, as the brothers were sailing back to England to launch themselves in the UK, their single 'Spicks And Specks' went to Number One in Australia, so when The Bee Gees arrived in Southampton in February 1967, they were already pop stars. Three weeks later, they'd signed a five-year management deal with Robert Stigwood, the director of NEMS Enterprises, a company owned by the manager of the Beatles, Brian Epstein.

From the start Robin was fiercely and rightly proud of the music he and his brothers made. When he said, "We made some of the best records of all time," he was simply stating a fact. The Bee Gees, he always insisted, had never been afraid of trying new things - and back when they themselves were new there were still so many new things to try. In the summer of 1967, with 'All You Need Is Love' at Number One, 'Light My Fire' at Two and Stevie, Aretha and James Brown all in the Top Ten, Robin - then just 17-years-old - and his brothers were being launched in the U.S. *Billboard*, that most revered of music magazines, took a long look at these "Australian" teenagers, listened to songs like the soft and sparse 'New York Mining Disaster - 1941', 'To Love Somebody' and 'Holiday' and declared this most impressive young band were, "brimming with the new poetry of pop." This was a significant arrival on a scene already top-heavy with world-beating talent.

"We had a blind belief in ourselves," Robin said five years ago. "Luckily, we were also blind to the immense amount of competition there was."

In March 1969, aged only 20, Robin announced he was leaving the band and released the huge, hushed, almost ecclesiastical transatlantic hit single 'Saved By The Bell'. He would go on to record a pair of wonderfully inventive albums, the famous Robin's Reign, from December 1969, and the still unreleased Sing Slowly Sisters. In late 1970 Robin reconciled with Barry and Maurice and re-joined the band as they scored monster hits like 'How Can You Mend A Broken Heart', 'My World' and 'Lonely Days'. Over the next 40 years these new poets of the human condition would have Number Ones in each decade. Five songs in the U.S. Top 10 at the same time, six consecutive U.S. Number Ones, seven Grammy Awards, inductions to the Songwriters' Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and they'd sell well in excess of 100m albums while they did it.

"We were only ever afraid of losing an idea," Robin once said. Happily, that very rarely seemed to happen - together Robin, Barry and Maurice wrote some of the biggest country and soul and pop and R&B songs of all time. Throughout it all, Robin was always right there at the heart of the storm, the fighter of fights and the righter of wrongs.

And now we have 50 St. Catherine's Drive, Robin's last ever collection of songs. Largely recorded between 2006 and 2008 and named after the address the Gibbs all lived at on the Isle of Man in 1949 and the early 1950s, it includes some songs written by Robin alone, several co-written with the album's producer Peter-John Vettese, three co-written with his son RJ, one of which was also co-written with former Radio One DJ, Mike Read. The album closes with a delicate, moving piece called 'Sydney', Robin's last ever creation, demoed on an iPad in August 2011. Robin's widow Dwina notes how much he missed his twin brother Maurice who had passed away; "but when he closed his eyes, the three young brothers were back in Sydney, happy together with their dreams and hopes for the future. He cried when he wrote it, and I wept when I heard it."

Album opener, the richly melodic 'Days Of Wine And Roses', looks back to the blissful, carefree days of childhood. "Time and tide will wait for no one," Robin sings as a skirl of pipes billows around him, "count the cost of losing you, now you're gone..." The warm embrace of 'Cherish' was initially to be a Robin and Barry song for Barbra Streisand, but when that project stalled it was the younger brother who was the one to bring the song to fruition. 'Alan Freeman Days' celebrates the famous British radio DJ, forever known as "Fluff", who was a great friend of Robin's. At the end of the 60s Freeman was the first DJ to champion 'Saved By The Bell', playing it before it was a hit and Robin never forgot this support. 'Instant Love' was co-written by Robin and his son Robin-John - RJ - and features a father and son duet on the choruses.

The new version of 'I Am The World' included here (which also includes some new lyrics) re-imagines the song that was Robin's first ever solo composition and originally the B-side to that breakthrough Bee Gees' 1966 hit, 'Spicks And Specks', just as the explosive pop landline 'Avalanche' dates from the Sing Slowly Sisters era; on both occasions Robin's bright new versions lose none of the originals' charm. 'Mother Of Love' is a haunting ballad written for Robin's own mother - for all mothers, the Universal Mother - after the death of Maurice, while the thumping kick drums and wide-screen joy of 'Sanctuary' celebrate the holiday home Dwina and Robin bought back on the Isle of Man. One of the most striking songs is the rationalist, humanist ballad 'All We Have Is Now', a call for sense and reason, for a chance to

recognise that, as we spin through deep and endless space, "We're only visitors and nothing's by design..."

The monumental 'Don't Cry Alone' features a classically elegant and distinctive vocal from Robin, beautifully recorded by Peter-John Vettese, who also co-wrote the song with Robin and RJ. Originally written as part of Robin and RJ's Titanic Requiem the symphonic tribute commemorating the centenary of RMS Titanic's disastrous voyage - this song is a great illustration of a father and son working closely to bring a dream to spectacular life.

What's clear from listening to 50 St. Catherine's Drive is how much more Robin had to give, how his innate way with words and harmony was as finely tuned in his sixties as it was in his teens and twenties. Again and again you're struck by just how good Robin sounds, how his voice is as strong and vibrant as it ever was - this sounds more like a new beginning than a full stop, a fact which makes his untimely death even sadder. While all the Gibb brothers chose to live in America at times, it was Robin who always loved lush, green England and Robin who was time and again drawn back to his old monastery in Oxfordshire. A voracious reader with a deep love of history, Robin was a link to every era of pop, from the pre-Elvis dance bands of his father's youth, to the groove-driven electronic dance tracks of today. As fans, consumers and lovers of pop music, Robin's music enriched all our lives - and his last ever collection of music is a testament to a life devoted to the mystery and mastery of song. (Rob Fitzpatrick, UK journalist)