



## What A Man's Got To Do: Brenn Hill.

Released 2007.



Brenn Hill is a name to mark out for the future though his latest album - "What A Man's Got To Do" - is his sixth release.

Quite why this talented singer-songwriter's name isn't up in big big lights all across the US is a mystery. His voice and his music would stand scrutiny alongside many much "bigger names"

One reason he hasn't "made it" - in quotes because this guy is hugely popular in his own patch - might be his gentle singing voice. It doesn't have the cut, the growling edge so many of today's male vocalists have. To us, that makes this guy stand out: he's different and his voice is absolutely right for HIS songs!

Another reason is that Brenn Hill is actually a troubadour (in the true sense). His songs tell stories - real stories. The truth might not fit so well on "candy-floss" (Country) radio.

Our favorite track on the album is "Into The Wind". This isn't a story song but it would have every chance of charting if radio picked it up, gritted it's teeth and rode into the wind.

It came about when someone suggested he write a song about recent events - 9/11, the Iraq War, Hurricane Katrina. So he did! But - in typical Brenn Hill style - he turned the whole thing into an allegorical tale of how cowboys cope in hard times.

That it works, lyrically, is tribute to Hill's skill. What fascinates us is that this could be taken as a simple Cowboy Country song and for most listeners would be happy with it. But listen to the lyrics while thinking about the awful events of recent years and it takes on a whole new life. Absolute perfection.

Hill doesn't just write Cowboy songs. And "Simple Things" shows that even a rough-edged, hard skinned cowboy can have a soft side. This is just Hill and piano and was written for young Taylor Oborn. She died from cancer, aged seven, soon after Hill met her and this song is the result.

It may SOUND over emotional, but I suspect it took a lot of work to sing it.

"Debt" is proof that Hill has a really wicked sense of humor.

"I make a lot of money, but I don't know where it goes."  
"I take my paycheck and I send it down the line"

As Hill says, debt's the modern day rage. Everyone seems to have everything, including a mountain of debt!

[Read More](#)

Humor is also in evidence on "She Loves Me Anyway" Written, says Hill, "for all the patient, long-suffering women who faithfully stand by their man", this is a real self-deprecating poke at selfish men. It's a moment of light hearted humor and I'll bet my hat it goes down superbly at live shows.

No Country album would be complete without memories of better times. Kenny Chesney repeatedly praises pick-up trucks and bikini-babes, others bemoan the passing of the old town's general store and the coming of the Mall while yet more look in vain for "the old dirt track" - all overworked clichés and all written to fit a formula. On "The Onyx Mine", Brenn Hill takes a real memory - a mine he and his brothers would ride out to as youngsters. He tells the mine's story, his father's stories about it, and how, these days, he'll take his family to camp there. Brilliant, and REAL!

He hits closer to the formula we mentioned on "Sweetwater Beach", but even here, where beautiful girls, cold blue lake water and teenage romance make up the "storyline", there's something of Hill's own youth in the lyrics which Hill wrote with Eddie Schwartz.

"What A Man's Got To Do" is a Country ballad which George Strait would be proud of. We're back in rodeo country here and realize that Strait could never carry this off. Hill sounds like he's been there and done that, where Strait would sound like he'd been on the set for the video.

Brenn Hill doesn't hesitate to use very personal events to fuel his songwriting - which is to his credit. It may be an old adage, but I believe that, if you haven't lived it, you can't sing it - at least not to it's full potential.

"Meet Me In McCall", in memory of his Uncle Ray, is about the wish that those who have passed on could be with us again.

"The Ballad Of Pogue And Elms" is a ballad in the true sense - the sort of song a troubadour writes. It tells of Conley Elms and Bill Pogue, two US Fish and Wildlife officers gunned down by an outlaw who was then freed by the courts. It's a tribute song, but it's sung with real feeling.

Hill steps outside of reality for an imaginary tale, "The Ballad Of Buffalo Brogan" and there's something of John Prine's style in the lyrics. Think "Paradise", and listen to this. The songs are completely unique, but the style's the same.

Brilliant fiddle and a real old-style beat give "Jeremiah's Last Ride" authenticity. This is the story of a young rodeo rider and Hill delivers it with the wonder the lyric demands. His vocal skills really shine here.

"The Gaping Jaws Of Hell" is a rocking Country song - based on a real person - and it's proof that Hill can move songs along.

"Oakbrush" is two minutes of delightful banjo-led country music while "Caffeine" - written while on a long featureless highway - bemoans the way caffeine keeps us going when we might be better stopping.

The only weak point in 15 tracks (there's HUGE value for money) is "Casa Blanca". It just feels right out of place. "Simple Things" would have been the same, but for it's placing as the album closer.

I don't know that Brenn will thank me for this, but there's something of John Denver at his very best in this collection. Like Denver, Hill can create images in your mind. They might not match the reality he writes of, but the magic is in the fact that you can run your own movie while you listen. That's songwriting brilliance!!

Coquet-Shack's view: **If you like Country music you MUST buy this one!**

9/12/07