



TEENAGE FANCLUB ♦ YOUR LOVE IS THE PLACE THAT I COME FROM

So we were doing this thing, this launch party, for *Speaking with the Angel*, a book of short stories I put together to raise money for my son's school, and we—the school, the publishers of the book, me and my partner—were nervous about it. We didn't know if people would turn up, we didn't know whether the mix of readings and live music would work, we didn't know whether anyone would enjoy themselves. I arrived at the Hammersmith Palais early, and when I walked in, I noticed two things simultaneously. One was that the venue looked

great: there had been some big office party the night before, and there was all this glitter and tinsel everywhere; at the time, it seemed like a cheesy but effective way to symbolise magic. The other was that Teenage Fanclub, who had agreed to play an acoustic set (and had postponed a gig in Europe so that they could do so), were going through a soundcheck. They were playing "Your Love Is the Place that I Come From," one of the loveliest songs on one of my favourite-ever albums, *Songs From Northern Britain*. It sounded great, a perfect musical expression of the tinsel; and I knew the moment I heard it that the evening, far from being a flop, would be special. And it was—it turned into one of the most memorable events with which I have been professionally connected.

Now, whenever I hear "Your Love Is the Place that I Come From," I think about that night, of course—how could it be otherwise? And initially, when I

decided that I wanted to write a little book of essays about songs I loved (and that in itself was a tough discipline, because one has so many more opinions about what has gone wrong than about what is perfect), I presumed that the essays might be full of straightforward time-and-place connections like this, but they're not, not really. In fact, "Your Love Is the Place that I Come From" is just about the only one. And when I thought about why this should be so, why so few of the songs that are important to me come burdened with associative feelings or sensations, it occurred to me that the answer was obvious: if you love a song, love it enough for it to accompany you throughout the different stages of your life, then any specific memory is rubbed away by use. If I'd heard "Thunder Road" in some girl's bedroom in 1975, decided that it was okay, and had never seen the girl or listened to the song much again, then hearing it now would

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probably bring back the smell of her underarm deodorant. But that isn't what happened; what happened was that I heard "Thunder Road" and loved it, and I've listened to it at (alarmingly) frequent intervals ever since. "Thunder Road" only really reminds me of itself, and, I suppose, of my life since I was eighteen—that is to say, of nothing much and too much.

There's this horrible song called (I think) "Mummy, I Want a Drink of Water" that they used to play on a BBC children's radio show on Saturday morning; I don't think I've heard it since, but if I did it would remind me overwhelmingly of being a child and listening to the Saturday morning children's radio show. There's a Gipsy Kings song that reminds me of being bombarded with plastic beer bottles at a football match in Lisbon, and several songs that remind me of college, or ex-girlfriends, or a summer job, but I don't own any of them—none of them means

anything to me as music, just as memories, and I didn't want to write about memories. That wasn't the point. One can only presume that the people who say that their very favourite record of all time reminds them of their honeymoon in Corsica, or of their family chihuahua, don't actually like music very much. I wanted mostly to write about what it was in these songs (some of which are included on the CD attached to this book) that made me love them, not what I brought to the songs.

Songs are what I listen to, almost to the exclusion of everything else. I don't listen to classical music or jazz very often, and when people ask me what music I like, I find it very difficult to reply, because they usually want names of people, and I can only give them song titles. And mostly all I have to say about these songs is that I love them, and want to sing along to them, and force other people to listen to them, and get cross when these other people don't

like them as much as I do. I'm sorry that I have nothing to say about "Trampoline" by Joe Henry, or "Stay" by Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs, or "Help Me" by Sonny Boy Williamson, or "Ms. Jackson" by Outkast, or anything by Lucinda Williams, or Mariah, or Smokey Robinson, or Olu Dara, or the Pernice Brothers, or Ron Sexsmith, or about a thousand other people, including Marvin Gaye, for God's sake, nothing to say other than that they're all great and you should really hear them if you haven't already... I mean, I'm sure I could squeeze something out, and bump this book up to something like a regulation length in the process, but that wasn't the point either. Writers are always squeezing things out because books and articles are supposed to be a certain number of words, so you have in your hand the actual (i.e., natural, unforced, unpadded) shape of this particular book; it is, if you like, an organ-

ic book, raised without force-feeding or the assistance of steroids. And with organic stuff, you always have to pay more for less. Anyway...