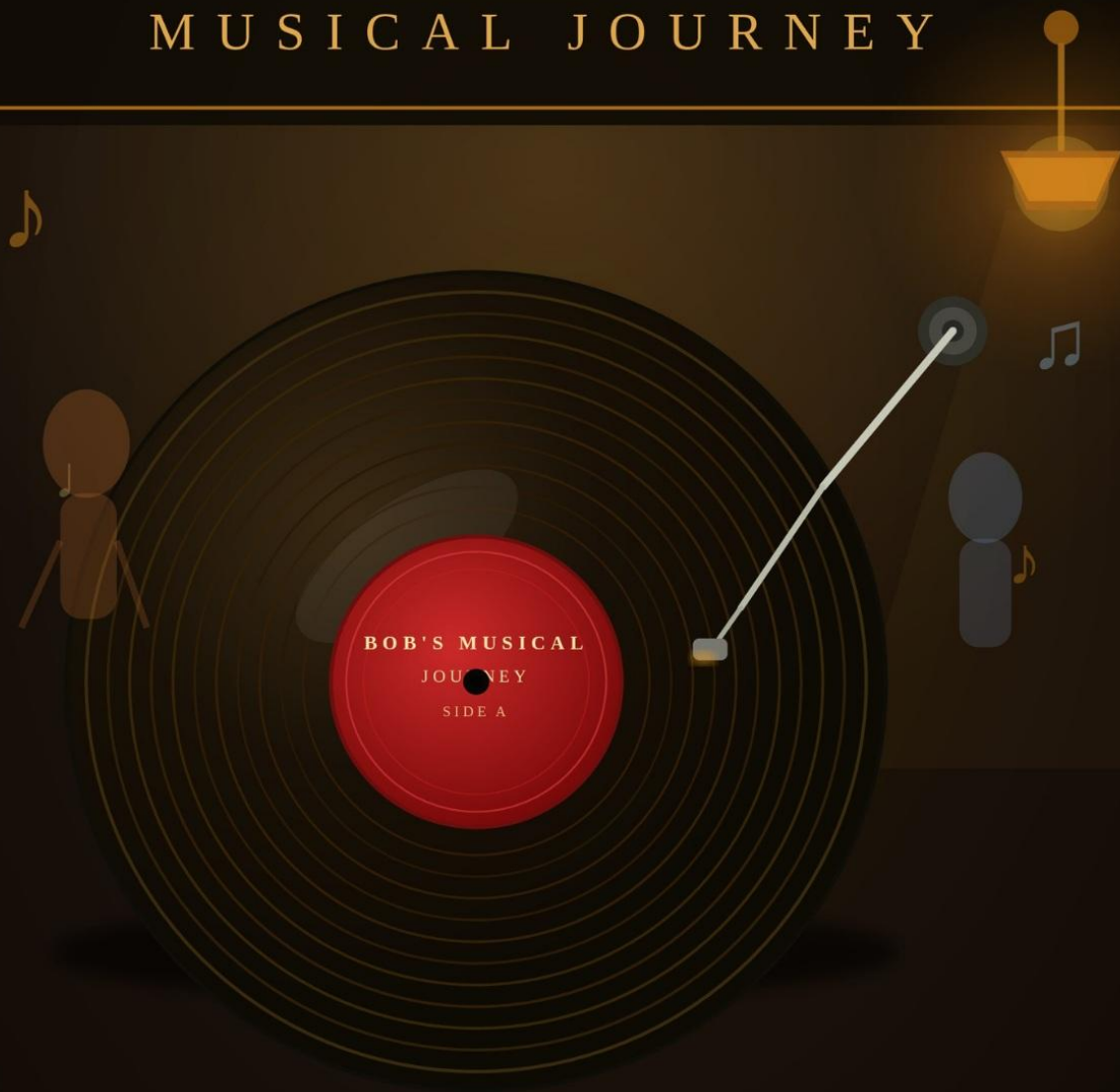


Bob's

MUSICAL JOURNEY



Michael Pinkus

A STORY OF MUSIC, MEMORY AND MYSTERY

Robert Arthur lived a quiet life. Grew up in Reginald, Maine, went to school, never married, and acquired his dream job in the music business. Bob had always loved numbers. His parents thought he'd be an accountant; and maybe that's how some see him. He became the Managing Budgeteer at Atom Records. He was the guy who told them what could be spent on artist acquisitions, an album, or run of CDs. But most of all, Bob got to listen to a lot of music, and that fed his soul.

Robert loved music from an early age; he loved music almost as much as he hated the nickname: B. Arthur. For him, music meant vinyl; the digital age could go to hell. He'd put a record on, listen to the hiss and crackle of the lead-in groove, and knew it was the precursor to something special: 15 to 20 minutes of pure bliss; and Bob liked it all: new music, classic rock, classical, the jazz greats: Miles, Chet, John, Sonny—music was his addiction. It spoke to him. Music could set his toes a-tappin' or the tear ducts a-flowin', depending on the vibe, the mood. Robert always felt the music. It was his first and only love.

Then came that fateful day, in December 2022, when Lil' Bo Jackson walked into the studio and changed everything.

Lil' Bo had been upset about the budget restraints being put on his new album: "Lil' Bo's Style". First, Bob insisted on a title change. It was too close to another rapper's famous album, one Lil' Bo needed to distance himself from, considering Lil' Bo current situation. The rapper was out on bail for an assault charge for slapping around his mistress; it was caught on camera. This infuriated both his wife and his record label. But Lil' Bo "had a right to make a living," said his high-priced lawyer. So, Lil' Bo got to come into the studio and make his album. The only power the label had was the same power as Congress: the power of the purse, and Robert was

there to enforce it. Lil' Bo wanted an orchestra, Lil' Bo got a violin; Lil' Bo wanted a horn section, Lil' Bo got a trumpet - this did not make Lil' Bo happy - so Lil' Bo did something about it. He came in with a .45 and shot up the studio, the producer, the engineer and the budgeteer - Bob.

Bob was the lucky one; he survived, though he'd need to learn to walk again. But Lil' Bo had done something even worse: he'd stolen Bob's love of the studio, where music was made and magic happened.

Rehab went well for Bob. It took place in a sterile room, in a quiet part of the hospital, where weights and pulleys shared space with a two-bar eight-foot walking path. Bob faithfully attended; no complaining—Bob felt lucky to be alive.

One day, in early May, his rehab coach, Pam had the idea to add music to their daily routine—see if Bob could concentrate with something else happening in the background. Bob had not heard music in almost six months; he realized how much he missed it. He needed a beat, and not just the ones from his nightly heart monitor and breathing machine.

Pam had talked with Bob about his record collection back home and how he couldn't wait to get back to his listening room, where his more than 10,000 albums awaited him. Bob called it, "his sanctuary."

"What's the first song you'll listen to?" Pam asked.

"Rock n Roll Never Forgets, Bob Seger," Robert answered, without hesitation.

Pam looked at Bob quizzically, and Bob sang a few bars in his scratchy, out of tune voice. Bob might have been blessed with an ear for music and a mind for numbers; but he couldn't sing for shit.

Today, Pam put on something by Madonna, *Cherish*—her favorite song by the pop star. She told Bob it had a mid-tempo beat, Bob could walk, or at least hobble to.

Bob sat in his seat as the needle touched down on the record. He heard the hiss and crackle of the vinyl. His heart swelled. The beat hit. Bob froze in place. Eyes wide. He envisioned the life of the artist: A little girl growing up in rural Michigan, an abusive father, a scared mother, a drive to leave, rebel, using sex as a cudgel. It was all so vivid. Apparitions floating in front of him, telling a narrative ... It lasted 4 minutes and 3 seconds.

The song ended. Bob blinked the real world back into focus. It was quiet again. Pam was standing over Bob, a concerned look on her face. A doctor rushed into the room; two nurses followed.

Bob wondered what the hysterics were about.

“You froze in place. You looked possessed ... and creepy,” Pam explained.

The doctor found nothing out of the ordinary: heart rate, blood pressure, all within normal levels. They ran tests over the next few days, ruling out a stroke or seizure. Doctors called it an anomaly. Pam was told to watch for a recurrence.

And so, back to rehab Bob went, never mentioning the visions. Why would he?

During their next rehab session, Pam asked Bob if he’d like to try again with the music. Bob agreed. Pam picked another of her favorites.

“This one,” she said, with a sly smile. “Has a real sick beat.” She played Taylor Swift’s *Shake It Off*.

Once again, the needle touched the record. The familiar hiss and crackle. The first note hit, Bob was gone. Visions of a little Pennsylvania town, a girl growing up poor, making it big, making mistakes, heartbreak, dating the football star. Fame and fortune hiding loneliness and

fear. He was seeing Taylor Swift like no one else ever had; flipping through the scrapbook of her life. The music stopped. Bob blinked the world back. The apparitions faded. He found Pam once again standing over him. No doctors this time. Pam said she slapped him a few times; he could feel the sting on his face. But Bob hadn't moved a muscle for the 3 minutes and 39 seconds; not a twitch.

"Bob, are you okay?" Pam asked.

Bob told her what he'd experienced. Pam told him he needed to see someone in psychiatric services. Bob said he'd think about it.

In truth, Bob loved this new immersive music experience: the delving into someone else's life. A true look Behind the Music, a completely new sensation. Bob began to see it as his new superpower; the blessing he took from the shooting? Maybe he was luckier than he thought.

Pam played a few more tracks, all with the same result. Instead of Bob moving, he sat transfixed, experiencing the life of the artist in four minutes or less.

Some weeks later, Pam pulled out a version of La Bamba by Ritchie Valens. Pam said she preferred the Los Lobos version, but could not find a copy on vinyl. She played the song, and once again Bob sat unmoving. Bob was in Pacoima, California, growing up poor in a Chicano family, a quick rise to stardom - but then Bob boarded a plane. Not saw Ritchie board a plane, Bob, as Ritchie, boarded a plane. The song ended. Bob's mind remembered the Ritchie Valens tragedy - he shuddered. He did not want to experience a musician's death. He told Pam about Don McLean's song, *American Pie*. She brought the record in the next day.

For eight and a half minutes, as the song played, Bob experienced Don's life; as Don McLean—struggling to make ends meet, the drug culture of the '70s, the failure of future albums, the lows and highs of a recording artist. This was a new level of experience for Bob;

before Pam's choices had been big names with big careers. Now he was living the life of a middling folk-rock entertainer, a one-hit wonder. Fascinating.

After that, Pam stopped using music in their sessions; it was counterproductive. Bob's rehab continued in silence until he left the hospital. Bob was given an iPod and a pair of headphones to listen to music in his room—but he didn't get the same effect.

Thinking at night, Bob realized the experiences were growing in intensity. He was no longer seeing pictures and snapshots - but really living these lives; the last two songs convinced him.

Back home, Bob entered his sanctuary. Pulled out his copy of Bob Seger's 'Night Moves', track one, side one—*Rock 'n' Roll Never Forgets*—as he'd promised himself.

He put the record player on auto, and as it went through its motions, Bob sat in his La-Z-Boy, pushed the seat back, leg rest up. As the first guitar strummed, Bob was whisked back to Detroit, Michigan, 1945, a move to Ann Arbor, buying a Little Richard album, being inspired, fronting a band called The Decibels, more bands followed; finally, national and global stardom. By the time the last note of *Starburst* played, ending side one—Bob had lived the life of another Bob in just over 20 minutes, and yet he'd heard only two musical notes. Magical.

This was like nothing Bob had ever experienced in the rehab room. Here, playing the full side of an album, he could go deeper, experience the artist's entire world: their thoughts, dreams, desires. The longer he listened, the more he experienced. Incredible.

He tried again. This time, he touched the needle to U2's *The Joshua Tree*, wondering how he would experience a band. By the time *Where the Streets Have No Name* was in full swing, Bob was lost in 1970's Ireland, where Bono grew up. Experiencing a place he'd never been and yet seemed so vivid. Meeting his mates. Forming the band. Superstardom. The

backlash of an album giveaway on iTunes. By the time *Running to Stand Still* hit its last note, and the music faded, so too did the ghostly apparitions that had filled the room – melting back from where they came.

Bob was exhausted, but also exhilarated, he'd just lived two of his idols' lives in less than an hour. He had never felt more alive, more connected to the music. Bob loved it. He decided to do one more today and a few more each subsequent day. He had the rest of his life to experience the greats.

Bob pulled his copy of the 1971 masterpiece, *What's Going On* from the shelf. Bob needed to experience *Mercy, Mercy Me* and *Flying High* in his new way.

The needle touched down as Bob settled into his seat. The song *What's Going On?* filled the room; but Bob was already in Washington DC, a poor black child, experiencing the pains of growing up colored in the '40s and the '50s, seeing Motown Records for the first time, meeting Berry Gordy Junior. The success of *Sexual Healing*. Then visiting "his" parents, watching them fight, getting in the middle of it. "Daddy, don't". Shots rang out, and for the first time during his experiences, Bob felt something physically; his body convulsed. As *Mercy, Mercy Me* played its last note, Bob blinked back reality. The ghosts of the past scattered. A haunting voice lamented, "Son, I'm sorry." He was in a great deal of pain: his chest, his shoulder. He looked down; he was bleeding, he could not breathe.

Bob looked around. He was alone. He tried to stand, but fell sideways out of his chair, sprawled on the floor, gasping for breath.

Pam found Bob three days later. She had promised to look in on him occasionally; maybe have a drink and listen to some music. She called 9-11. Paramedics arrived and pronounced

Robert “Bob” Arthur dead at the scene from two gunshot wounds of unknown origin: one to his chest, another to his shoulder; the Marvin Gaye album still spinning on the turntable.