

stripped-down pop

Miracle cure

Kevin Hearn's non-Barenaked truth **By BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI**

KEVIN HEARN AND THIN BUCKLE with **JOSHUA BARTHOLOMEW** at the Drake Hotel (1150 Queen West), Wednesday (August 9), 9 pm. \$10. 416-531-5042.

KEVIN HEARN DIDN'T MEAN TO WRITE an album about cancer. The Barenaked Ladies multi-instrumentalist already did that on *H-Wing*, the first album he wrote after successfully battling leukemia, and revisiting that time wasn't high on his agenda.

But with hospitals and viruses infecting the songs on his latest disc, *The Miracle Mile* (Celery Music/Warner), it's hard to argue that the album's about anything else.

"Maybe it is about cancer and I don't even realize it," admits Hearn over the phone from his cottage in the Muskokas. According to Hearn, *The Miracle Mile's* supposed to be about "disappointment, disillusionment, hope, wonder" and life's challenges. All ideas, I point out, that sound very much related to his fight with cancer.

"Yeah, I can see that," he says. "[Having cancer] was an intensely life-changing experience, and I think those experiences have a dark underbelly that takes years to figure out. I didn't consciously focus on those things, but they're part of my life."

Hearn's fourth solo effort comes from a place of deep emotion, and it shows in soul-baring lyrics like "If you want to pray for a miracle, it helps to believe in something" and "There's no

getting out of this, just seeing it through."

Though Hearn allows the writing is therapeutic, he insists that "it's easy for me to write about cancer because I went through it. I can sing a song best when I really feel it."

A healthy dose of Flaming Lips-style songwriting helps ensure that a lot of other people are going to feel this record, too. But if you expect Hearn to showcase his catchy, heartfelt tunes across the country, you're out of luck. Too bad he can't quit his day job.

"It's frustrating sometimes," confesses Hearn, who's been a permanent fixture in the Barenaked Ladies since 1995. "I don't have time to go out and do long promo tours, and it's difficult to even plan shows. If something comes up with BNL I have to be there."

Though he has toyed with the idea of leaving the band to pursue a solo career, Hearn says being a Barenaked Lady has plenty of perks, like getting Van Dyke Parks, the legendary Beach Boys collaborator, to arrange strings for the *The Miracle Mile's* title track, or hiring Tom Petty's producer, Jim Scott, to help record the album.

Paradoxically, the biggest benefit of being in a major touring band is the same as the biggest drawback: time. Hearn may not be able to focus on his solo career as much as he'd like, but if he weren't in the Barenaked Ladies he might not have a solo career at all.

"I do have the luxury of periods of time off to do these things. And during



He'd love to go solo, but Kevin Hearn can't give up being a Barenaked Lady.

that time I'm able to afford to make records the way I need to and want to."

That meant writing and recording some of his new record in Los Angeles on the *Miracle Mile* (hence the disc's title), a stretch of Wilshire Boulevard that was developed in the 1920s. It's also where Hearn lived for a year while BNL recorded their new album.

"While I was walking the dog one day, I saw a sign that said *Miracle Mile*. I was trying to find a lyric for the last song and started thinking about where the songs came from. I started singing 'Miracle Mile,' and it just fit."

Though titling the album *The Miracle Mile* probably wasn't the best strategy if Hearn didn't want to provoke associations with his illness, he won't make that mistake again.

"What I want to do next is a really off-the-wall record," he says. "Something that can definitely not be misconstrued as a cancer record." ©

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