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True Faith – 1987 hit was a shot in the arm for New Order

The track was a much-needed boost for the Manchester band — and no cover version has since matched its mix of melancholy and euphoria



Bernard Sumner on stage with New Order in 1987 © Boston Globe via Getty Images

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In 1987, seven years after New Order had risen from the ashes of Joy Division, the Manchester band found themselves needing another [▶️ “Blue Monday”](#). Their 1983 track had been a global hit and became the best-selling 12-inch of all time, albeit one that lost money with every copy sold thanks to its extravagant sleeve design.

Of the five singles New Order had released in 1985 and ’86, only one had charted higher than number 30, and that was thanks to having appeared on the soundtrack for the 1986 teen movie *Pretty in Pink* (“Shellshock”). So, facing a huge tax bill and losses accrued by the Hacienda nightclub co-owned by the band and their label, Factory Records, they were given 10 days by the label to come up with another hit to be released on, and alongside, their first singles compilation: *Substance*.

They hired American producer Stephen Hague and that 10-day studio session produced two new songs: “1963” and [▶️ “True Faith”](#), with the latter selected as the single and the former its B-side. Hiring Hague was a masterstroke: the producer had helped conceive the Pet Shop Boys’ chartbusting synth-pop sound on their debut album *Please*, melding uplifting pop hooks with melancholy, and here he did something similar for New Order.

The song was recorded on pioneering digital equipment at London’s Advision Studios. Despite there being little in the way of real drums in the recording, drummer Stephen Morris had brought into the studio his hi-hat and cymbals to be integrated into the programmed beats. And while the main bassline was also synthesised, Peter Hook played some of his signature high-neck bass phrasings in the intro and outro, and in the [▶️ instrumental break](#) enlivened by frontman Bernard Sumner’s Nile Rodgers-style guitar part.

The song finally fell into place with Sumner’s compelling lyric — written under pressure towards the end of the session, when the band locked him into the top-floor flat they’d rented near the studio until he produced the goods — delivered on a melody that similarly undulates between blissful and despondent, mirroring its subject matter of drug dependency, from the

imagined viewpoint of a heroin addict. (The original lyric, “Now that we’ve grown up together/They’re all taking drugs with me”, was rewritten on Hague’s advice so that it wouldn’t jeopardise airplay, becoming instead: “Now that we’ve grown up together/They’re afraid of what they see.”)

Released in July 1987, the track was a hit. Its epic, cinematic scope encompassed the lingering posthumous shadow of former Joy Division singer Ian Curtis’s lyrical darkness as well as the euphoria of dance music, and was enhanced in no small part by an award-winning outré video featuring bouncing balloon-suited men, rhythmic face-slapping, ferocious wrestling moves and a woman dressed in what looks like an oversized tortoise-shell teetering on a plinth while hand-signing the song in French sign language.



While it brought a new audience to the band’s music, and still tops critics’ lists of best New Order tracks, bassist Peter Hook wasn’t quite as laudatory: “I didn’t think ‘True Faith’ was that much better than anything we’d done in the past,” he wrote in his 2016 book, *Substance: Inside New Order*. “But it certainly eclipsed our previous work in terms of sales and international exposure on *Substance*.”

The song’s legacy has been somewhat tainted by its association with two psychopaths, one fictional, one real-life: “True Faith” opens 2000’s *American Psycho* movie soundtrack, playing in a nightclub as Christian Bale’s Patrick Bateman verbally abuses a barmaid. And in 2012 a notorious video was leaked online of depraved Canadian murderer Luka Magnotta filming himself dismembering his victim with the song playing in the background.

Of the various covers, none comes close to rivalling the timeless strength of the source material. [George Michael’s](#) 2011 balladising of the track slows it to an unpalatable crawl and autotune-murders the melody, while [The Wombats’](#) 2012 indie-rock rendering manages to sound more like The Killers than The Killers’ own [unremarkable live version](#) which they shoehorned into their setlist while playing Manchester last year. [Sophie Ellis-Bextor’s](#) 2020 effort most closely mirrors the original’s arrangement but still reduces it to insipid karaoke. [The Boo Radleys’](#) raucous Pixies-style interpretation, retitled “Boo! Faith”, is the best of a bad bunch.

“True Faith” lifted New Order to new heights of success, both critically and commercially, triggering a three-year run of single releases that culminated in their only number one (1990’s [“World in Motion”](#)). [The track](#) remains one of New Order’s most recognisable tunes and a live staple. Its success gave the band the sudden sense of liberty they needed, when they needed it most.

Let us know your memories of ‘True Faith’ in the comments section below

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— Foxy_par_four 1 DAY AGO

Released in July 1987, the track was a

staple in the soundtracks at gatherings and parties with my high school chums, before we all headed to university. Four cans of McEwan’s Export was my refreshment, while my mates went for Red Stripe or Castlemaine XXXX lager. A gathering was a good one when we all were walking home to our respective houses after sunrise.

I think I bought the single, maybe even the 12” version (but no longer have it). It’s still on one of my cassettes that I compiled for my Walkman. It’s accompanied me on n many a journey, including many road trips in North America, to the canyons of Utah and the mountains of Alberta and British Columbia.