



The 'Big Mouth Billy Bass' is described as an "animatronic singing prop, representing a largemouth bass". Invented in the late 90's - its inherent novelty appeal amassed huge commercial success, peaking during the opening years of the twenty first century. Today, the idea of an animatronic mounted singing fish becoming something like a hot commodity might seem far-off, although Big Mouth Billy Bass Fish is still remembered due to its cult-like status, however niché it might be.

I was first introduced to the legendary fish in 2001 - I was eight years-old at the time. The fish had yet to be popularized in Sweden, however my uncle who lives in the United States bought one of the original models to my family as a gift. As such, Billy was mounted on the wall by the staircase in our house. I was very happy to welcome the singing fish into my life - the widespread appeal was not lost on me.

To clarify, Billy is a machine; a lifeless mechanical thing draped in latex skin disguised as a freshwater fish. In regards to his singing, one can either opt to manually activate it through the press of a button - or, if one prefers, Billy also comes equipped with a motion sensor, allowing him to "come alive" should he detect any form of presence in his vicinity. The latter option is preferable in terms of his allusion to liveliness. The sensor allows Billy to be constantly alert. In a sense, Billy "Big Mouth" is always watching, ready to take the stage with his pre-recorded hymns. The original model came with two tracks, which were renditions of "*Don't Worry, Be Happy*" by Bobby McFerrin and "*Take Me To The River*" by Al Green. Two perfectly innocent songs, however, given the context of Billy, the lyrics to both of these classic tunes become vaguely cerebral. Big Mouth Billy Bass is permanently mounted on a plaque, suggesting the narrative that he is indeed deceased and stuffed - in essence, he is a re-animated hunting trophy. As such, Billy could never be "taken to the river", nor could he arguably ever "be happy" as it were.

Maybe the situational absurdity is part of the attraction, but beneath the novelty lies an inescapable hint of deep melancholia. Despite, this I recall finding solace in the songs. As an eight year-old boy, I was very easily scared. The prospect being alone in my house would often lead me to generate completely irrational thoughts and scenarios - none of which were directly threatening, but more-so suggestively dreadful. Wall mounted portraits could turn every so slightly uncanny as it seemed like their eyes were following me around the room, common domestic noise like the static hum of a kitchen appliance would seem out-of-place and as if it was purposely performed with some ambiguous intent. The silence and emptiness of my family home was inadvertently filled with disembodied presence. During these brief moments of detachment, Big Mouth Billy Bass was more than an animatronic novelty fish; he became a bastion of normalcy. Although I very well knew that the songs were pre-recorded, the familiarity of his voice would drown out the noise of any other imagined entity in the house. As such, when Billy sang to me, "don't worry, be happy", I truly believed it.