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Bullitt - Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

Warner Bros./[Speakers Corner](#) 1777
180-gram LP
1968/2018

Music ●●●●●
Sound ●●●●●

by [Dennis Davis](#) | March 17, 2018

I'm not a great fan of movie soundtracks. I've purchased many of them over the years, based on recommendations that have singled out those that are worth owning. These include a handful of Bernard Herrmann compilations, *Chinatown*, *The Missouri Breaks*, *Glory* and Henry Mancini's *Combo!* That's really about it. On the other hand, I'm a film buff, and there are certain films I can't live without. *Blade Runner* is among them, but I have no interest in listening to the soundtrack, except with the movie running.

So it was with very low expectations that I greeted the recent Speakers Corner reissue of the soundtrack from *Bullitt*, a showcase for Steve McQueen and San Francisco. There are few movies more talismanic to me than *Bullitt*. In 1968, I had purchased my first new car, a Mustang, and was plotting a way to move from the Midwest to San Francisco. A few years later, having driven my then-aging Mustang to San Francisco, each time I moved from one apartment or house to another, I always kept in the back of my mind how close McQueen's race through town came to my new abode.



I queued up the new LP and sat back to read the liner notes. And then I just sat there, riveted. After the first play, I played it a second time. When I came to, I did a little checking and discovered why this soundtrack is so engaging. The players are the famous Wrecking Crew, a loose grouping of Los Angeles session musicians that played on countless pop hits, on *Pet Sounds*, on the Byrds' first album, and on LPs by everyone from the Monkees to the 5th Dimension, as well as most everything Phil Spector recorded. On the *Bullitt* soundtrack, the legendary assemblage played their instruments like Steve McQueen drove his Mustang -- like bats out of hell. The jazz wing of the crew, including Bud Shank, Bill Perkins, Ray Brown, Stan Levey and Larry Bunker, joined mainstay Carol Kaye. Most of the titles describe a scene in the movie (e.g., "Hotel Daniels," "Music To Interrogate By" or "On The Way To San Mateo"). The Lalo Schifrin-composed and -conducted music is not high art, but as descriptive programmatic pop music, it is second to none.

Recording engineer Lee Herschberg taped the sessions at Western Recorders in Hollywood, one of the legendary temples of sound, where countless albums from the Beach Boys, Ray Charles, Sam Cooke and Frank Sinatra came to life. So many great hits were recorded there in the late 1960s that you can pick up virtually any Warner Bros. green-label LP (with orange crest!) from the era and be assured of impressive sound. The *Bullitt* soundtrack is no exception. There's great tonal accuracy, and the soundstage is spot on. You know where each instrument is located, even if its placement is largely a function of microphone placement or mixing. Even more impressive is the dynamic range. When the horns, organ or percussion kick in, you won't have to strain to hear it.

This new reissue by Speakers Corner received a first-class remastering from Kevin Gray, and it has earned a permanent slot in my slim soundtrack collection. Steve McQueen's "missing" Mustang, not seen in decades, was recently unveiled at the Detroit Auto Show and put up for auction. Few of us can spare the millions needed to buy such a treasure, but for chump change you can get a lot of the *Bullitt* mileage each time you replay this splendid reissue. ☺

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