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Harry Nilsson • *Aerial Ballet*

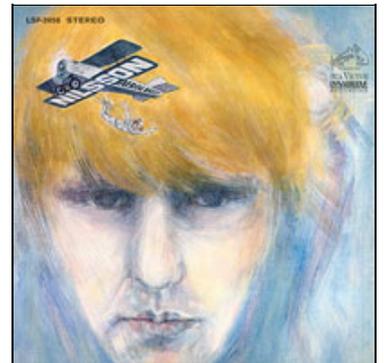
RCA/[Speakers Corner](#) LSP-3956
180-gram LP
1968/2017

Music 
Sound 

by [Vance Hiner](#) | October 17, 2017

Some people just don't get their historical due, and Harry Nilsson is a case in point. Even though his career was marked by gold records and Grammy Awards, and in spite of being cited as John Lennon and Paul McCartney's favorite American artist, Nilsson has *still* not been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. If you're a bona fide music nerd, you know that this is an utter travesty, but the majority of music fans in 2017 will ask "Who?" if you mention Nilsson's name.

To be fair, the Brooklyn-born singer/songwriter could be his own worst enemy. He rarely performed in public and insisted on handling much of his own eccentric publicity. But when you're as talented as Nilsson was, other people tend to get the word out for you. For example, the Beatles' publicist, Derek Taylor, actually bought a box of Nilsson's 1967 *Pandemonium Shadow Show* albums and went around the world distributing them to all of his friends. One of those records landed in the hands of John Lennon, who, after a 36-hour listening marathon, called up Nilsson and invited him to London. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship in which both musicians profoundly influenced the other. For those who want to understand more deeply just how important Nilsson was, the 2006 documentary *Who Is Harry Nilsson (And Why Is Everyone Talkin' About Him)?* is an excellent place to start.



Or you could simply put on side two of the Speakers Corner reissue of Nilsson's *Aerial Ballet* and let his genius speak for itself. As you listen to Nilsson's cover of Fred Neil's "Everybody's Talkin'," famous for its use in the movie *Midnight Cowboy*, it's worth checking out Neil's 1966 original on Tidal or Spotify to hear how Nilsson was able to turn this masterpiece of songwriting into something *even better*. But the shining diamond in this collection of ornate pop jewels is "One." While the song was made famous by Three Dog Night, Nilsson's evocative piano phrasing and poignant vocal delivery make the popular hit single sound frivolous by comparison. The lyric's inventive twists and emotional power place Nilsson firmly in the pantheon of great American songwriters. Songs like this demonstrate why Derek Taylor wrote in the album's liner notes, "He is the something else the Beatles are. He is it." Credit for some of the instrumental magic heard on this record should also go to composer George Tipton, who worked as Nilsson's arranger throughout his time at RCA.

The Speakers Corner reissue of this pop classic is simply perfect. The Pallas pressing is dead quiet and it captures the very highest peaks and lowest valleys of this very dynamic analog recording. My only complaint is one I have with all early Harry Nilsson recordings: I don't know which microphones engineers used and how they placed them during those sessions, but none of them could quite withstand the full force of Nilsson's amazing three-and-a-half-octave vocal range. Listeners with great systems will hear a bit of distortion during the singer's loudest passages, but that's not the fault of this reissue.

The best compliment I can pay to a reissued LP is to beg the folks responsible for it to find a way to go deeper into the artist's catalogue. I'll be first in line for a well-done version of *Pandemonium Shadow Show*. ☺

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