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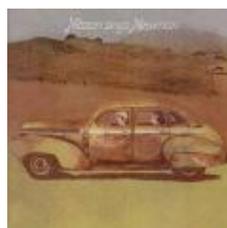


## Harry Nilsson – Nilsson Sings Newman – Speakers Corner

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by Audiophile Audition | Sep 5, 2019 | Jazz CD Reviews, SACD & Other Hi-Res Reviews | 0 comments

**Harry Nilsson – Nilsson Sings Newman – RCA Victor RCA LSP-4289 (1970)/Speakers Corner Records (2013) 180-gram stereo vinyl, 25:17 \*\*\*\*\*:**

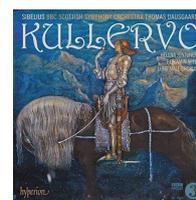


(Harry Nilsson -guitar, tambourine, keyboards, vocals; Randy Newman – piano, keyboards)

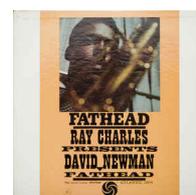
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It seemed inevitable that Harry Nilsson and Randy Newman would record a song together, but an entire album?. In 1969, they were fellow songwriters in the rapidly changing West Coast music scene. Newman was embarking on a career that saw the release of a self-titled first album, and he did the orchestral arrangement for Peggy Lee's hit "Is That All There Is?". Nilsson had enjoyed success from *Midnight Cowboy*, getting on the charts with "Everybody's Talkin'" and "I Guess The Lord Must Be in New York City" He had recorded two albums of original material. The song "One" was a huge commercial hit for Three Dog Night. In 1969, Nilsson and Newman elected to do an album of all Randy Newman originals. Newman had expressed his admiration for Harry's voice (or in the vernacular of Randy, "His voice does things then mine can't...like hold a note!") Both musicians must have seen this project as something that would expand their roots of vintage (Tin Pan Alley, Brill Building) influences and compete with pop stars like The Beatles.

Speakers Corner has released a 180-gram re-mastered vinyl of *Nilsson Sings Newman*. The ten-song session (barely over 25 minutes) is an evocative collection of a quirky singer covering a quirky songwriter. Side 1 opens up with the dual-motif "Vine Street". Originally written for Van Dyke Parks (another idiosyncratic performer), a sixties-like country guitar and piano frame Nilsson's peculiar high-register vocals (lead and background). At 0:46, the song shifts to a maudlin vaudeville resonance that has whimsy and emotional depth. From Newman's first album, "Love Song" is full of romantic nostalgia and comic intonation ("We'll have a kid or maybe we'll rent one, He's got to be straight, we don't want a bent one!..."). The simple chorus refrain of "You and me, you and me baby" might sound banal by others, but here with Nilsson's compelling pop vocals it is warmly assuring. On "Yellow Man", the vocal multi-tracking process of Nilsson and Newman's underrated (in concert he likes to make self-deprecating remarks about his instrumental prowess) stride piano augment the melody in easy rolling blues and pop structures. Granted, the satirical lyrics might be misunderstood in the present societal environment. But these guys could probably pull it off anyway. "Caroline" is a mesmerizing slow waltz, that Newman has never recorded. A touch of bells and lush harmony vocals mesh perfectly. In stark contrast, Nilsson sings the first verse of "Cowboy" with just a wind effect. Newman joins on piano adding his distinctive *Americana* resonance. Harry manages to ratchet up the vocals from melancholy to anguish seamlessly. The ending is a nod to the John Barry's "Midnight Cowboy Theme" with piano and harpsichord (Nilsson).

In a humorous political statement, "The Beehive State" is a jaunty ditty lamenting Utah's cultural obscurity ("And we got to tell this country



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about Utah, 'cause nobody seems to know"). "I'll Be Home" is a simple, achingly beautiful melody with a hymnal feel. Nilsson's heartfelt delivery is supplemented with a dreamy organ run. Well-timed backup vocals and an unexpected soul growl are catchy. There is a reassuring message ("Remember baby you can always count on me") that is reflected in the earnest vocals. The arrangements on this album are impeccable. On "It's So Hard", Nilsson inhabits the hopelessness of lost love. His voice manipulations are subtle with delicate inflections. Backing harmonies are fluid and striking with a big finish. Small town America is at the core of "Dayton Ohio 1903". The quiet dignity is delivered with vocal restraint. Harry draws the listener into the halcyon flow of a lazy Sunday afternoon. Newman's understated flowing piano is exquisite and steady. This may be among the finest "under two minutes" song ever written. Injecting a note of quaintness and near-maudlin sentiment, "So Long Dad" is a fitting conclusion to this unique album of musical expression. With a deft ragtime feel, Newman surrounds Nilsson's toasty voice inflection, layered backup) and phrasing. The air of nostalgia is palpable.

Perhaps the most amazing feature of *Nilsson Sings Newman* is the vast complicated musical tapestry rendered in under half hour. Nilsson and Newman recorded exhaustingly for six studio sessions in Hollywood (RCA's Music Center Of The World), before the singer took the tapes to San Francisco (Wally Heider Studios). There he worked on overdubbed vocals (in one case an additional 100 on a single track) for another six weeks. Speakers Corner has done a superb job in re-mastering this album to 180-gram vinyl. Nilsson's tenor voice is captured with crystalline specificity. The glowing backing harmonies (listening to them with good earphones will be mind-blowing) are extraordinary. The listener can hear studio instructions from the intrepid Nilsson. Even the album art by Dean Torrance is kooky. On the front, the Los Angeles duo are sitting in a vintage car, Harry in the front and Randy in the back. On the back, four smiling faces (all engineers as it took four to mix this album) are plastered behind a car window.

This vinyl belongs in everyone's collection, regardless of musical preferences!

### TrackList:

*Side 1:*

Vine Street  
 Love Story  
 Yellow Man  
 Caroline  
 Cowboy



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*Side 2:*

The Beehive State  
I'll Be Home  
Living Without You  
Dayton, Ohio 1903  
So Long Dad

—Robbie Gerson

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