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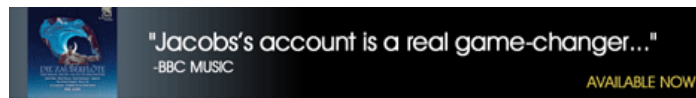
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Mike Bloomfield/Al Kooper/Stephen Stills – Super Session – Columbia Records/Speaker Corner Records (vinyl)

The first super group takes a cool leap of faith.

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Mike Bloomfield/Al Kooper/Stephen Stills – Super Session – Columbia Records/Speaker Corner Records (180 gram audiophile vinyl) CS 9701, **½:**

(Mike Bloomfield – electric guitar; Stephen Stills – electric guitar; Al Kooper – piano, organ, guitars, ondioline, vocals; Barry Goldberg – electric piano; Harvey Brooks – bass; Eddie Hoh – drums)

Shortly after his expedited departure from Blood, Sweat and Tears, Al Kooper was interested in arranging an impromptu session with Mike Bloomfield. The duo worked on the Bob Dylan album *Highway 61 Revisited*. They also toured with Dylan on the infamous "Electric Tour". Both musicians firmly rooted in blues music, were experiencing affiliation shifts (Bloomfield was in the process of leaving the Electric Flag). With Kooper as artistic director, a solid group of supporting musicians was rounded up for the studio. The session (May 1968) produced five cuts, as Bloomfield packed his things and left. It was widely known that he battled insomnia and heroin addiction. With studio time already booked, Kooper contacted Stephen Stills to complete this project. Stills was contemplating an exit from Buffalo Springfield, and decided to join the gathering. The atypical rock format was forever altered by this "Super Session" A blueprint for Supergroups of rock music was established.

Super Session became a twin project out of logistical necessity. Side One features the band with Bloomfield in the forefront. From the opening blistering guitar licks of "Albert's Blues", it is obvious that the focus is on the raw, explosive Chicago-based blues music inhabited by Bloomfield. Kooper adds nimble organ solos that mesh with the intensity on guitar. Overdubbed horns bring an R&B rumbling sound to the mixture. A cooler groove inhabits Howard Tate's "Stop". Kooper's organ riffs are funky and atmospheric in tone. The chemistry with the harder edged guitar lines is evident. The group breaks out of stereotype on the idiosyncratic, "His Holy Modal Majesty". Kooper utilizes a French ondioline (a precursor to the synthesizer and a more compact, less expensive and more versatile instrument modeled on the Ondes Martenot) in an extended improvisational number that features jazzy up tempo rhythms. The spontaneity of the players is animated by the looser idiomatic structure. Returning to a blues arrangement, "Really" slows things down to late night melancholy (reminiscent of "Stormy Monday"). Despite the languid pace, Bloomfield never lets up, and demonstrates why he renowned among his peers.

Side Two feels more like an Al Kooper album. An electric rockabilly version of Dylan's "It Takes A Lot To Laugh. It Takes A Train To Cry" introduces Stills to the ensemble. His twanging chords add folk-rock spirit to this reworked blues opus. Kooper's high-

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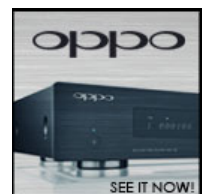
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pitched vocals are peculiar but effective in a psychedelic/country way. Stills breaks out serious wah-wah pedal runs on a smoking rendition of the Donovan classic, "Season Of The Witch". Kooper cuts loose with intriguing voice/organ interplay. He seems most comfortable with the jazzy vocal inflections and verbal nuance ("stone beatniks out to make it rich..."). For someone who bluffed his way into playing organ on *Highway 61 Revisited*, he is very expressive. Sustained crescendos and syncopated notation emanate with natural fluidity. A horn chorus was added after the session to fill out the resonance. Another version of the song without the horns has sparked debate over which cover is more effective. The momentum is slowed by a dated, sound effects-laden "You Don't Love Me" and a contemporary jazz piece, "Harvey's Tune". Considering that the session was flying by the seat of its pants, *Super Session* works.

The 180-gram vinyl reissue by Speakers Corner reinvigorates this spur of the moment project. The jaggedness of the electric guitars, and shimmering finesse of the organ are preserved with precision and subtlety. The original liner notes by Michael Thomas are written in a stream of consciousness prose that speaks to the very nature of Super Session.

TrackList: Albert's Shuffle; Stop; Man's Temptation; His Holy Modal Majesty; Really; It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry; Season Of The Witch; You Don't Love Me; Harvey's Tune

-- Robbie Gerson

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