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Mike Bloomfield, Al Kooper, Steve Stills - *Super Session*

Speakers Corner/Columbia Records CS 9701
 Format: LP
 Originally Released: 1968
 Reissue Released: 2008

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Musical Performance ■■■■□
Recording Quality ■■■■□
Overall Enjoyment ■■■■□

In 1968, Al Kooper had just left Blood Sweat & Tears, the horn band he had started, and was an A&R man at Columbia Records. Guitarist Mike Bloomfield, whom Kooper had played with on *Highway 61 Revisited*, was also between bands, so Kooper called him up and suggested they jam in the recording studio. Two other musicians, bassist Harvey Brooks and drummer Eddie Hoh, joined them for a marathon nine-hour session (pianist Barry Goldberg sat in on a couple of tracks). The next day, Bloomfield was a no show and Kooper, in a panic, cast about for another guitarist. He was lucky enough to track down Steven Stills, whose band, Buffalo Springfield, had just split up. After another long session, Kooper had enough material to create an album.

Super Session, co-credited to Bloomfield, Kooper, and Stills, cost \$13,000 to record and became a gold record. Kooper had horn arrangements dubbed onto some of the tunes, but otherwise they were released as originally recorded, except for some editing on a version of Donovan's "Season of the Witch." Bloomfield is the reason to own the record. His searing guitar work is astonishing, some of the best of his brief career. He plays with focused intensity and a powerful grasp of blues tradition. The session with Stills has some good moments, such as an enjoyable country arrangement of "It Takes a lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry," and some excellent work by Kooper on "Season of the Witch." It just had the misfortune of following nearly 30 minutes of white-hot inspiration from Bloomfield.

This Speakers Corner pressing is better in every way than my Columbia 360 copy, which admittedly has some mileage on it. There's much more space around the instruments, and Hoh's kick drum moves more air. He and Brooks, who are consistently brilliant, are more focused in the mix, which brings forth subtle details, such as the reverb on Hoh's snare drum. The vocals and horns on the original are somewhat bright, while on the Speakers Corner pressing they sound more natural.

Super Session is a great slice of late-'60s improvised rock, and this pressing is the one to own.

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