

= Nilsson Sings Newman =

Nilsson Sings Newman is an album of Randy Newman compositions sung by Harry Nilsson , with Newman on piano . The record was not a great commercial success , but it was critically praised , and helped Newman gain notice . It won a 1970 " Record of the Year " award from Stereo Review magazine , and remains a fan favorite .

Recorded over six weeks in 1969 , the album showcases Nilsson 's voice multi @-@ tracked in layers of tone and harmony . Its arrangements are otherwise spare and graceful . The LP record cover art is by Dean Torrence .

Re @-@ released on compact disc in 1995 , followed by a 30th anniversary CD in 2000 , the album has been called a studio masterpiece , and " the best exposition of the ballad in rock . "

= = Background = =

In 1969 , Nilsson 's album Harry ended with one of Newman 's songs : " Simon Smith and the Amazing Dancing Bear " . Years later , Nilsson told Paul Zollo that he was in awe of Newman writing so many songs , ones he thought were better than his own .

In 1968 , Ricky Nelson released his concept album Perspective , a move to expand his musical horizons . The album included songs by Newman , Nilsson and others woven together to tell the story of the interactions of a famous family ; author Kevin Courrier writes that this album may have been part of the inspiration for Nilsson Sings Newman .

= = Recording = =

On August 20 , 1969 , Nilsson and Newman began to record the album . After basic tracks were laid down , Nilsson spent six weeks overdubbing his voice to create layers and harmonies , line by line . As many as 118 overdubs were laid down for a single song .

Nilsson often reminds the listener that he is listening to the recording of a studio album . Nilsson 's voice in the control room is heard on several songs , instructing the recording engineer to add more echo or remove a voice . On the album 's final song " So Long Dad " , amid a multi @-@ Nilsson chorus of voices , Nilsson softly asks for " more first voice . " Louder , he counters himself by saying " actually I need more current voice . Forget the one that 's saying ' more first voice . ' "

Besides piano , other instruments were sometimes used in the studio , including bass drum , tambourine and various electronic keyboards . On the song " Cowboy " , Nilsson used electronic harpsichord to bring in a different concluding theme , quoting John Barry 's theme from the film Midnight Cowboy , an inside joke that referenced Fred Neil 's " Everybody 's Talkin ' " from the same film , a major success for Nilsson earlier that year .

Newman was , according to Nilsson , " tired of the album when we were finished making it . " " For him it was just doing piano and voice ... over and over . " Nilsson explained " once I got the take down , I knew what I was going to do with it later . He didn 't . " Newman said of his experience that he " was honored that a writer with Harry 's talent would choose to do an album of someone else 's songs . " Newman continued , " he was such a great singer , a virtuoso singer , really , and he could do so many things as a vocalist that I couldn 't do ? like hold a note . "

A number of alternate takes and songs were recorded but left off the 1970 album . Two such songs were " Snow " and " Linda " . Newman wrote one song specifically for the album : " Caroline " , a straightforward love song .

= = Release and response = =

In February 1970 , the album was released by RCA Records . The cover art was completed by Dean Torrence , known for his teaming with Jan Berry to create the rock and roll duo Jan and Dean . Since Berry 's near @-@ fatal auto accident in 1966 , Torrence had become a graphic artist ; his sepia tone scene depicted Nilsson driving an old American car through the countryside with

Newman in the back seat . The car is a 1938 Graham @-@ Paige four @-@ door sedan , rusty but working .

The audio equipment and record review magazine Stereo Review named Nilsson Sings Newman their album of the year . Even so , the album did not sell well , possibly because of the " idiosyncratic quality " of its ballads and the paucity of reviews . Newman said in an interview how he personally went to assess the sales of the album at a record store in Los Angeles . He asked a clerk (who did not recognize him) " do you have any Nilsson albums ? " and the clerk guided him through each one , describing its sales and whether he recommended it . He came to Nilsson Sings Newman and said , " this is the one that nearly finished him off . " In one of the few reviews , the weekly magazine Cue in New York praised the artistry saying that " Nilsson was dealing with material as powerful as his own , but was free to concentrate entirely on his gifts as a performer . " Cue said that this album was free of the " overwhelmingly complex " personal expressions that came earlier from " Nilsson singing Nilsson , and Newman singing Newman " .

In April 1970 , Newman released his second album , 12 Songs , a collection featuring spare arrangements with simple instrumental parts underneath Newman 's vocals , Ry Cooder providing an economical backdrop of slide guitar . The song " Mama Told Me Not to Come " , written four years earlier for Eric Burdon , was delivered in stripped @-@ down form , and helped Newman establish himself as a composer of note . Newman appeared in solo engagements beginning in June 1970 on an NBC TV special hosted by Liza Minnelli . " Mama Told Me Not to Come " yielded a # 1 chart topper for Three Dog Night in July 1970 . Newman 's career was in high gear .

Nilsson 's next recording project was the soundtrack for a children 's fantasy film he conceived , titled The Point ! , finished in 1971 . His next popular release was Nilsson Schmilsson with its hit single " Without You " composed earlier by Badfinger .

= = Legacy = =

In 1993 , Newman prepared to record an entire album of Nilsson songs , a returning of the favor 25 years later . Newman had never before recorded a Nilsson song . After Nilsson 's death in January 1994 , the intended homage became a memorial , titled For The Love of Harry : Everybody Sings Nilsson . To leave room for participation by other artists , Newman sang only one song , " Remember (Christmas) " , a sad and dreamy tune which opened the album . Newman said , " I just hope Harry knew how great he was . He was always putting himself down , making fun of himself . "

Nilsson Sings Newman was re @-@ released as a CD in 1995 . In 2000 , the 30th anniversary release was padded with five additional tracks . One was " Snow " , unreleased in 1970 for lack of room on the LP , and four were alternate versions of songs that were on the original album . In 2000 , Ben Wener of The Orange County Register wrote that " Newman 's sly , dramatically structured impressionistic pop was ideally suited for Nilsson 's theatrical tone ... It 's not so much that Nilsson 's takes are better than Newman 's ... just refreshingly different ? less wicked and vicious , more melancholy . "

Artists who have expressed a fondness for the album include Rufus Wainwright , Ron Sexsmith , Jellyfish , Adrian Belew and Shane Tutmarc . The exhaustive All Music Guide says of Nilsson Sings Newman that it is " a subtle , graceful masterpiece where the pleasure is in the grace notes , small gestures , and in @-@ jokes . " Once a listener has acquired a taste for Newman 's idiosyncratic songs , " this is as sweet as honey . "

= = Track listing = =

All music and lyrics by Randy Newman .

" Vine St. " ? 2 : 50

" Love Story " ? 3 : 39

" Yellow Man " ? 2 : 16

" Caroline " ? 2 : 05

" Cowboy " ? 2 : 48

" The Beehive State " ? 2 : 04

" I 'll Be Home " ? 2 : 35

" Living Without You " ? 2 : 35

" Dayton , Ohio 1903 " ? 1 : 50

" So Long Dad " ? 2 : 35

BMG 's 2000 CD re @-@ issue contains the following bonus tracks :

" Snow " ? 2 : 29

" Love Story " (alternate take) ? 3 : 24

" Cowboy " (alternate take) ? 2 : 22

" I 'll Be Home " (alternate take) ? 2 : 41

" Living Without You " (alternate take) ? 2 : 40

= = Personnel = =

Harry Nilsson ? vocals , additional instruments

Randy Newman ? piano , electronic keyboards