

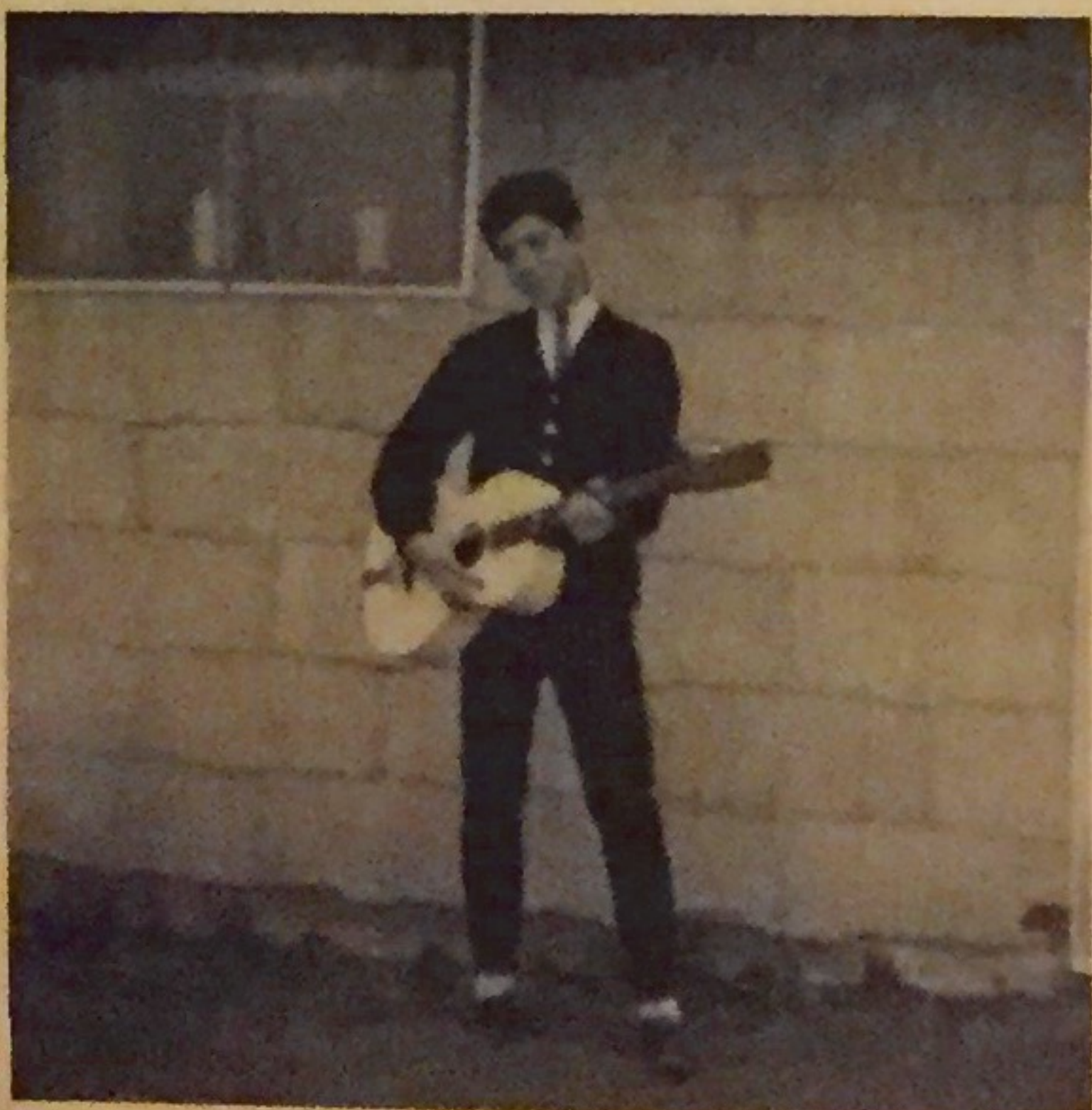
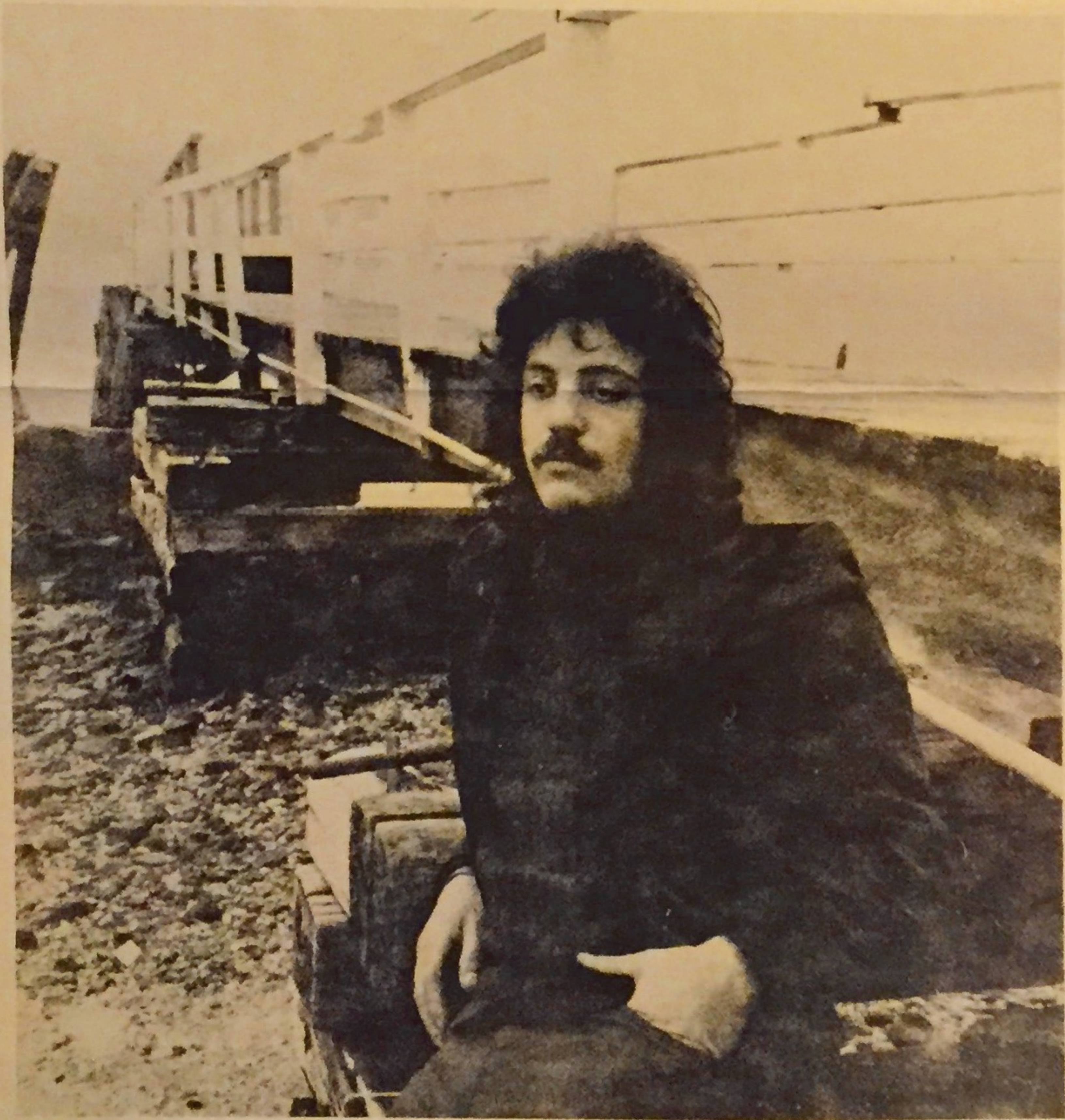


BILLY JOEL SONGS IN THE ATTIC



THE
ROOT BEER RAG

FALL 1981



BILLY JOEL



THE ROOT BEER RAG: Design/Brad Olsen-Ecker, Editorial/Merry Aronson



Album News

Billy Joel's long-awaited new album, *SONGS IN THE ATTIC*, will be released worldwide on September 10. The new LP—Billy's eighth—is a collection of eleven in-concert recordings taped during his 1980 U.S. summer tour. All of the selections are taken from Billy's first four albums: *COLD SPRING HARBOR* ('70), *PIANO MAN* ('73), *STREETLIFE SERENADE* ('74), and *TURNSTILES* ('75).

"*SONGS IN THE ATTIC* is not the definitive live album, which would represent the shows we have been performing in recent years," Billy says in his liner notes. "...But it is a sampling of the earlier stuff played the right way with honest road muscle."

Taped at fifteen different shows, from huge arenas to 300-seat clubs, *ATTIC* is the first live album ever to be recorded on a 32-track digital system. The Columbia LP is produced by Phil Ramone; Brian Ruggles produced the concert recordings.

Crossword Answers

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Editor's Note

THE ROOT BEER RAG is a newsletter designed to keep you up to date on news and other information concerning Billy Joel and his band.

It's one way Billy tries to stay in touch and respond to all the letters and inquiries he receives. From time to time, these pages also carry poster and T-shirt offerings that are authorized by Billy, not bootleg rip-offs.

For this issue, our sixth, I talked with Billy about his new LP, *SONGS IN THE ATTIC*, and interviewed Brian Ruggles, Billy's long-time concert sound engineer, who produced the album's live recordings.

Also featured in this edition is the conclusion of the series, "Odyssey of a Billy Joel Record." *THE ROOT BEER RAG* went behind the scenes to learn how Billy writes his music; how Phil Ramone produces it; and how Columbia Records manufactures and promotes it. And as always, Billy personally answers some of your mail in *RAG BAG*.

THE ROOT BEER RAG will continue to inform you of any upcoming tour plans, as well as Billy's notes from the road. And it's important that you keep in touch, too. Our goal has always been to make *THE ROOT BEER RAG* informative and entertaining—and above all, reflective of your interest in one of the most talented and versatile musicians of our time.

—Merry Aronson
Editor



Q. You've always said that the album you've just finished is your favorite, but which is your least favorite?
—Tanya Holmes, Lynden, WA

A. My least favorite is the album I'm farthest away from, which will always be *COLD SPRING HARBOR*.

Q. What's it like when you're riding in your car and your own music comes on the radio?
—Valerie Halesworth, Oyster Bay, NY

A. It's great! It's the real litmus test if the record sounds good hearing it on the radio station. It goes through limiters and there can be all kinds of transmission problems and atmospheric conditions to contend with.

And if it comes through pretty close to what you were hoping to get, it's a thrill. I get an emotional charge out of it.

Q. Do you ever get tired of your own music?
—Jay R. Massey, Philadelphia, PA

A. I don't play my own music at home. And I only hear it intermittently, so I don't hear enough of it on the radio to get sick of it. But when you're on the road for too long, you can get sick of doing a tune over and over again. Sometimes we drop songs, even though the audience wants to hear them. We'll stop playing them because I don't think it's fair to give just a robot rendition. You have to have an emotional feeling to play it right. So it does happen every once in a while.

Q. How long did it take you to make the short film for the song, Sometimes A Fantasy?
—Wesley Aldrich, Oklahoma City, OK

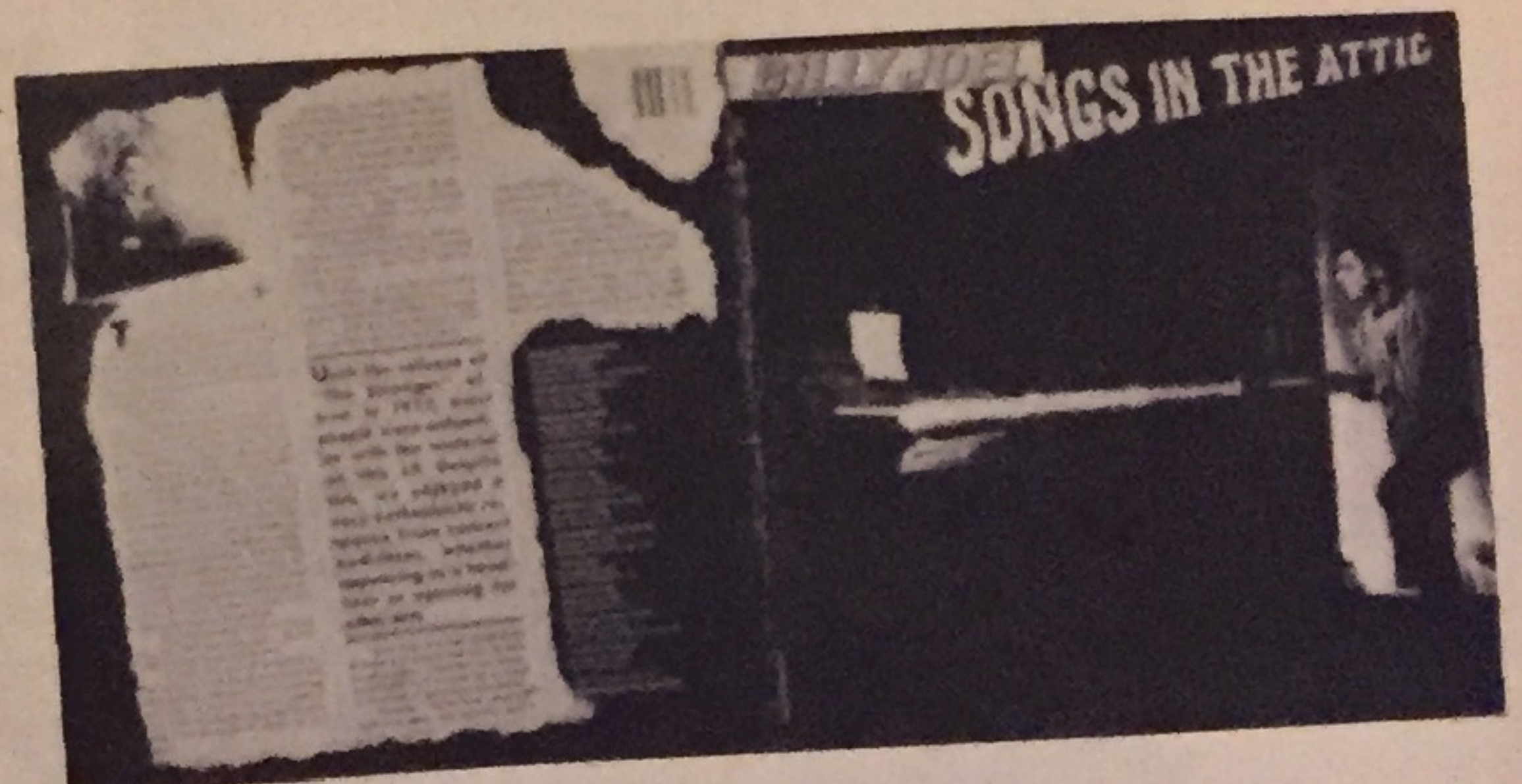
A. Pre-production took about a week; that was all scripting and lighting and set-ups and discussions. Then the actual filming took two different days. And the editing process was another week.

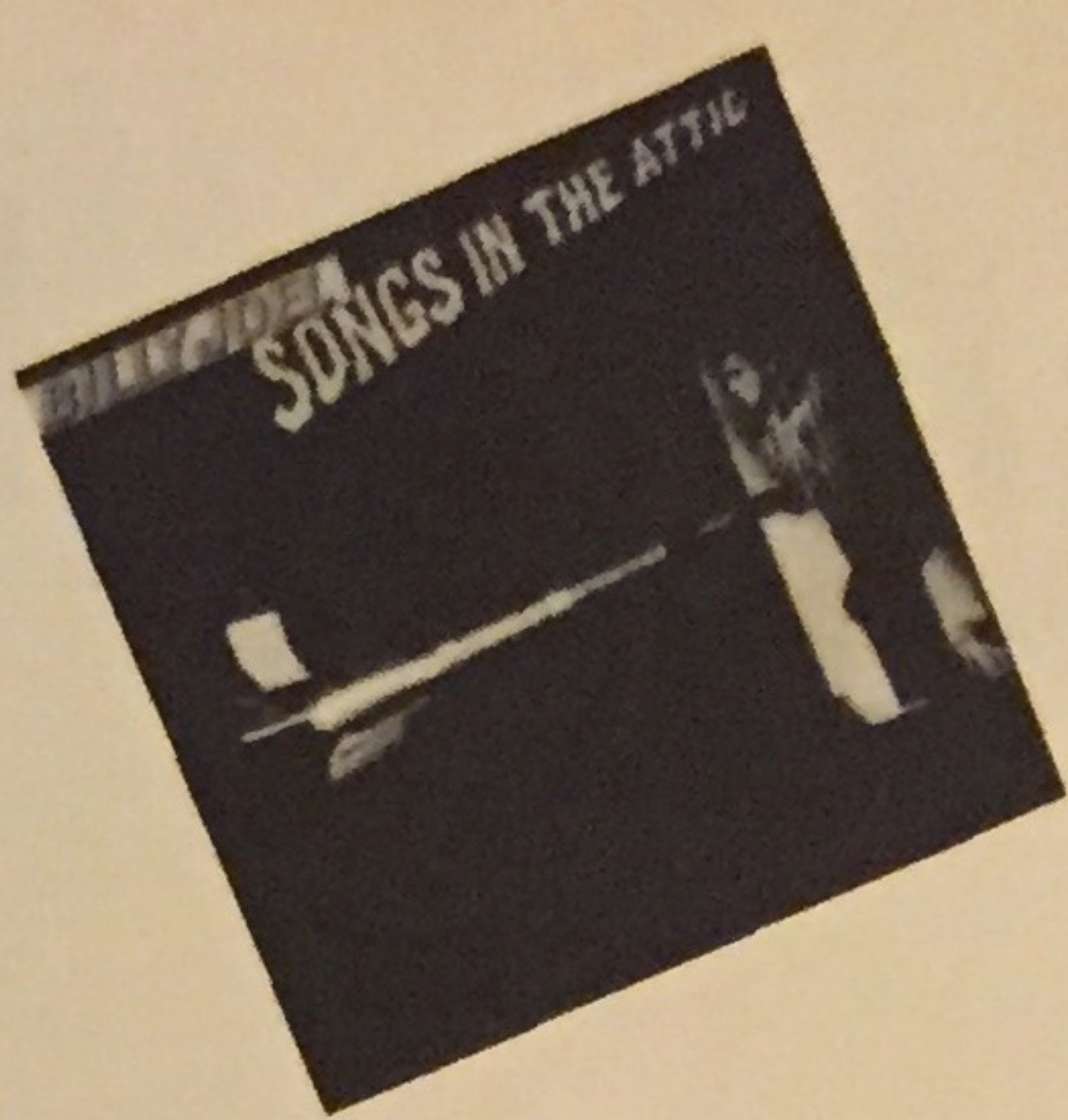
Q. What religion are you, and are you Italian?
—John Sole, Athens, OH

A. I'm not Italian. The name Joel is actually French, originally spelled Joël, like Noël, from the Alsace section of France, which is close to the border of Germany. My mother was Jewish, but in fact, I have no religion. For years I went to Catholic churches and to Protestant churches with my friends. The reason people think I'm Italian is because I grew up in an Italian neighborhood. And when you're from New York, you're Jewish and Italian by assimilation.

Q. In *It's Still Rock And Roll To Me*, you write about "cruising the Miracle Mile." Please settle a debate I'm having with a friend as to the whereabouts of that Miracle Mile. He insists it is in California, and I bet that it's in Massapequa, Long Island. Are either of us right? I have a lot riding on this one!
—Lisa Silverman, Arlington, VA

A. You're both wrong, it's in Manhasset, Long Island. But I meant to use it in a universal sense...every area does have a Miracle Mile. So, send me the money...ha, ha!





INTERVIEW

WITH BILLY JOEL BY MERRY ARONSON

RBR: Let's talk about your new album. You recorded more than 30 songs. How did you go about choosing only 11?

BILLY: The 11 we ended up choosing all pre-dated *THE STRANGER* album. In listening to all the stuff we recorded, we found we're still too close to the last three albums. The newer songs that were done live don't sound that much more exciting than the records—yet. But the older stuff jumped out, so that narrowed it down to the first four albums. Then we culled through the old material and listened for what was so much better and different from the original record. *Piano Man* sounds pretty much the same live as it does on the record, so, as I say on the liner notes, I wasn't interested in making carbon copies. That's why we automatically excluded *The Entertainer* and *Piano Man*.

RBR: Is that also why you didn't include *New York State Of Mind* and *James*?

BILLY: *James* is a better record than it is live. It just kind of sits there live. Some things don't translate well live. We had to choose between *New York State Of Mind* and *Captain Jack*, since we wanted to keep *SONGS IN THE ATTIC* down to a single record. We had to narrow it down to 10 or 11 songs. Everybody comes out with a live double album of a whole show that retails for 15 dollars. Who can afford it? So, our time was limited as far as how much we could fit in. The more time that is on one disc, the less quality the disc has. Usually records are 18 to 20 minutes a side, and this record is close to an hour all together.

RBR: Are the selections on *ATTIC* reflective of your best performances or your own favorites?

BILLY: It's kind of a combination between the two. It may be arbitrary.

RBR: Where did the title *SONGS IN THE ATTIC* come from?

BILLY: A lot of people who bought *THE STRANGER* or *52nd STREET* or *GLASS HOUSES* aren't aware that we do *Captain Jack* or *I've Loved These Days* or *Say Goodbye To Hollywood*. And when we do them live the audience is always surprised. I've always called them "songs in the attic" since *THE STRANGER* album. They've been put away; we take them out and dust them off once in a while.

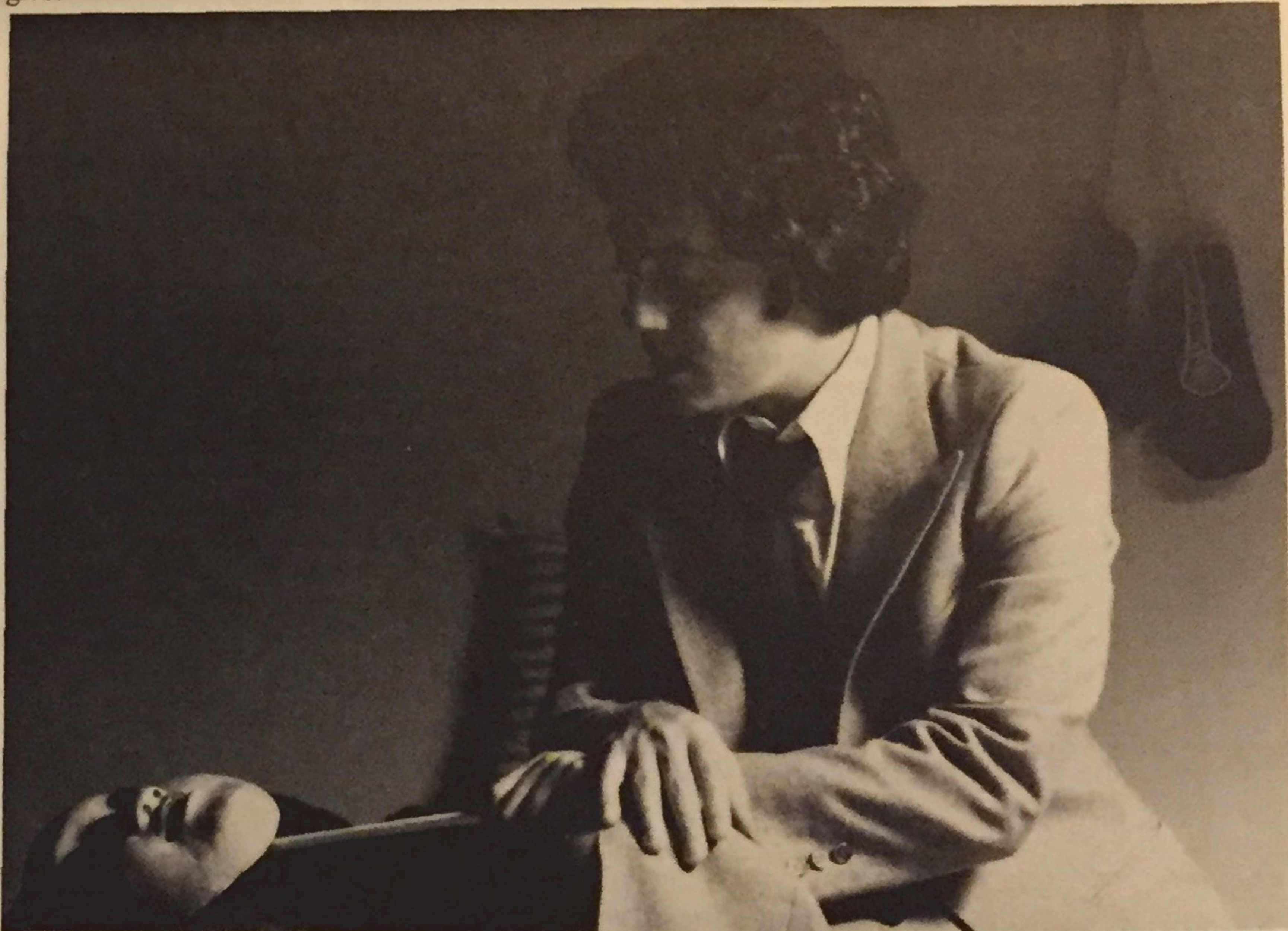
RBR: In your liner notes, you say, "Summer, Highland Falls is about 'the futility of introspective adventurism and the symmetry of surrender.' What do you mean by that? Isn't surrender asymmetrical, when one side gives in more than the other?"

BILLY: Everything has a symmetry. It's not a surrender in a negative way. It's an acceptance; a surrender to fate. And

there is a certain peace in accepting the way things are. There is always a certain pattern. There's a yin and a yang. There's bad in the fact that I have to submit. But there's the peace of acceptance. There's an up and there's a down, there's a back and there's a forth, symbolizing the patterns in that song. But those liner notes about each song are kind of a stream of consciousness. I'm not sure they clear up anything. I just looked at the song and remembered what my thoughts were as I was writing it. I'm not sure how much more detail I can give.

ness about I've Loved These Days, you say, "...It was fun growing up in the spoiled bratdom of America." Your modest Hicksville roots have been well-publicized. But still, you think you were spoiled?

BILLY: Sure. What was a lower-class blue-collar lifestyle in America is rich in Africa or Asia. When I grew up, we didn't have a TV, but that didn't mean we were poor. We didn't always have as much money as we needed or wanted—but Davy Crockett and hoola-hoops and rock and roll and T-birds and Pepsi-Cola were all available to us. It was a great spoiled bratdom. But



RBR: But your liner notes raise as many questions as they answer. For instance, I wasn't sure if you are being serious or sarcastic on Los Angelenos when you say, "...L.A. is still paradise." Do you really mean that?

BILLY: Oh yeah. Definitely. You don't have to go to Disneyland to see this incredible place. Disneyland pales in comparison to the actuality of Los Angeles.

RBR: Do you spend much time there now?

BILLY: No. You can't stay in Disneyland all the time. You got to get out of the amusement park once in a while.... But I'm not trying to be sarcastic. Every time I say something about L.A., it gets taken the wrong way. People seem to be defensive. It's a beautiful place, the weather's great, the native California people are nice, there's plenty of things to do. It is a paradise.

RBR: In your stream of conscious-

it was a lot of fun. The fifties, when I was a little kid, was a boom time. In the sixties, we were a rich enough country to be able to look at ourselves and go: "Hey, we can change the establishment and promote peace and love." Most countries don't have the opportunity to take a look at themselves like that. And now it's time to join the world community in terms of energy and economics. We can't separate ourselves anymore, and that's what happened in the mid-seventies. So *I've Loved These Days* was a goodbye to the America I used to know.

RBR: Your liner notes also refer to Carter and gasoline and Reagan and El Salvador. Are you a political person?

BILLY: I have my own politics. I'm not overtly, as a performer, someone who gets up on a soap box and preaches. I think that's an abuse of power. People have asked me to join in all kinds of campaigns.



I did work for McGovern in '72, not as a performer though, just as a campaign worker—knocking on doors and making phone calls. When he was landslided by Nixon, that was it for me as far as getting involved in a political campaign.... I always fall to the left, whenever I fall! But who the hell am I to push my politics on anybody? I'm just a dumb musician.

RBR: Why do you call Streetlife Serenader "the most emotionally satisfying tune you've ever attempted"?

BILLY: I don't know why. It's an emotionally satisfying chord progression that you wouldn't normally come up with on a piano. It's a major, and then a descending major chord progression in whole steps—and it's more a pedal steel or guitar kind of song to have written. So it was an adventure to use the piano to write something it isn't suited for.

RBR: Do you ever write on an instrument other than a keyboard?

BILLY: Yes, I write on the guitar every once in a while. I don't really know how to play it, and a certain amount of innocence in writing is good. To a keyboard player an E chord on the guitar is very profound!

RBR: Which tunes were written on the guitar?

BILLY: *The Entertainer*, *Close To The Borderline*, *Everybody Has A Dream*, and some others I can't remember.

RBR: Lyrically, what's the most satisfying song you've ever attempted?

BILLY: I don't know. I don't get as much emotional satisfaction out of lyrics as I do out of music. Lyrically, I get relief. I always write the music first, so the lyrics have to be fitted into a pattern that's there already—which is the backwards way of songwriting. The lyrics are like a Chinese puzzle for me. It's a very meticulous placement of words.

RBR: On the *STREETLIFE* album, you wrote two instrumental songs, *Root Beer Rag* and *The Mexican Connection*. Why do you suppose you haven't recorded any other instrumentals since?

BILLY: There's sort of an instrumental on *TURNSTILES*. There's a thing called the *Prelude* which comes before *Angry Young Man*. I probably will do another instrumental. They come in cycles.

RBR: On the new album, *Miami 2017* is a very hard rock song. Is that the way you heard it when you wrote it?

BILLY: Yes, and that's the way the band and I have always played it. But who knew about producing records back then?

RBR: After ten years of being on the road, do you still prefer the touring side to the studio recording time?

BILLY: No. Since I've been working with Phil, it's as much fun to record as it is to play. If I had to record all year long, it would be a drag, but we only spend a month or two months in the studio laying down tracks.

RBR: Do you ever think about producing other artists?

BILLY: No. The amount of concentrated studio time you have to spend would drive me right up the wall. I don't have the patience for it. And people always ask: "When are you gonna make a movie?" I don't feel compelled to be a movie star. Although it seems to be a natural transition for a lot of people in my profession.

RBR: You did make that film short for *Sometimes A Fantasy*.

BILLY: Yes, but I'm not comfortable in front of a camera. I don't like taking pictures, and I don't really enjoy looking at myself. I always think I look kind of weird and stupid. And one of the requisites for being an actor is to be comfortable in front of a camera.

RBR: How do you feel about being the first artist to release a 32-track live digital recording?

BILLY: I'm not an audiophile, to tell you the truth. I don't even hear stereo a lot

of times, unless it's a Jimi Hendrix album and it goes from speaker to speaker. When we're doing the final mixes, Phil works with these little car radio speakers, and I can't hear anything on them. He can hear bass EQs and all these different things—and I have to leave the room. That stuff drives me crazy. Phil has engineer's ears that I don't have. As far as digital goes, I can hear a difference, but I can't explain it to you. I'm like most people—I drive around and listen to a car radio.

RBR: Besides being Ron Guidry, what professional fantasies are left for you to fulfill? Do you ever think about writing for Broadway or films?

BILLY: Yeah, I'm gonna do that eventually. Film writing is more appealing, I suppose, because all you're writing is pure melodic structure and chord patterns and thematic things, which I really like. I like the way John Williams writes. For me, the music is what made the movie *Superman*.



Every character had a different musical theme. As a composer, I tune into that.... In Broadway musicals, usually, you're working in collaboration with somebody, and it's less of an expressionistic form. In a movie score, you watch the film and write according to how that scene hits you. You create your own texture, your own tapestry. In a musical, you have a book, or a script, that you have to follow, and that's more like songwriting. You're writing individual songs depending on the situation. But that's something I want to try eventually too. I don't know how long I'm going to be able to be a performer. I don't know how long I'm going to be vital in a rock and roll way. But I'm going to keep going as a composer, so I will move into other mediums, which



will mean writing for other people, and writing more symphonic things and maybe even jazz. But I will always write songs, I think.

RBR: How did you feel about Frank Sinatra's recording of *Just The Way You Are*?

BILLY: I thought it was great...I was thrilled. And I did get a kick out of him doing one of my songs. The arrangement, which is a real Vegas-Tahoe swing-type, is the way we used to fool around with that song at soundchecks to make the crew laugh—just the way Sinatra did it!

RBR: It always comes as a surprise to me that you leave him off your list of early influences.

BILLY: Well, I don't think of myself as a singer first. I've always been primarily a piano player and a musician before I think of myself as a singer. When I was a kid, I didn't like Frank Sinatra. Only in the last couple of years have I really gotten into him. I've got a jukebox now—he sounds great on a jukebox.

RBR: How about Bruce Springsteen? Do you enjoy his music?

BILLY: Definitely, sure.

RBR: Do you ever feel that he's the favored child of the rock establishment, and that you might not get as fair a shake?

BILLY: Yeah. I don't know why that is. I don't know why I'm so disfavored. I don't spend a lot of time thinking about that. It doesn't mean anything. I like Bruce Springsteen. I like his music, and I like his shows. He's great. But I can read a review of Bruce and it can be totally different from what I've seen. I don't see the ten commandments of Moses coming down! Reviews don't really affect me. They don't mean anything. They have no impact on what I do. The review comes from the audience.

RBR: In your 32 years, you've accomplished a lot. You've proven a lot to the world, and, one assumes, to yourself. Why is it still Billy Joel the rebel, Billy Joel the

instigator, suggesting that we invite our cranky neighbors over and play *SONGS IN THE ATTIC* as loud as we can?

BILLY: I think that's an American trait. I don't think that's particularly rebellious. What I do is probably what everybody else feels like doing. What I'm doing is not Jim Morrison, leader of the rebellion movement. If a press person says something creepy, I'm gonna say something creepy back.

RBR: On your liner notes, you say that playing *Captain Jack* is like committing an act of "pure brutality." Isn't that a rebel talking?

BILLY: That's just part of aggressions everybody feels. Our therapy, our exorcism of aggression is playing music. Liberty goes up on stage and really beats the living hell out of his drums. It's close to being in a fight with somebody. I go up on stage for two-and-a-half hours and act like a crazy man. When I come off the stage I'm one of the most dull people you could meet! I say, "I'm okay now, I'm fine. I've gotten it out of my system." I don't think about putting out an image. The most important thing is the music—not me. You don't have to like me, but hopefully the music is going to last.

RBR: Where does all your aggression come from?

BILLY: Life. I don't always like what's going on. I don't like hunger in the world; I don't like injustice; I don't like being a consumer and getting ripped off; I don't like the baseball strike. Life in general is going to keep knockin' at you. The only way to survive is to knock back at it. You gotta kick and flail around and keep swimming.

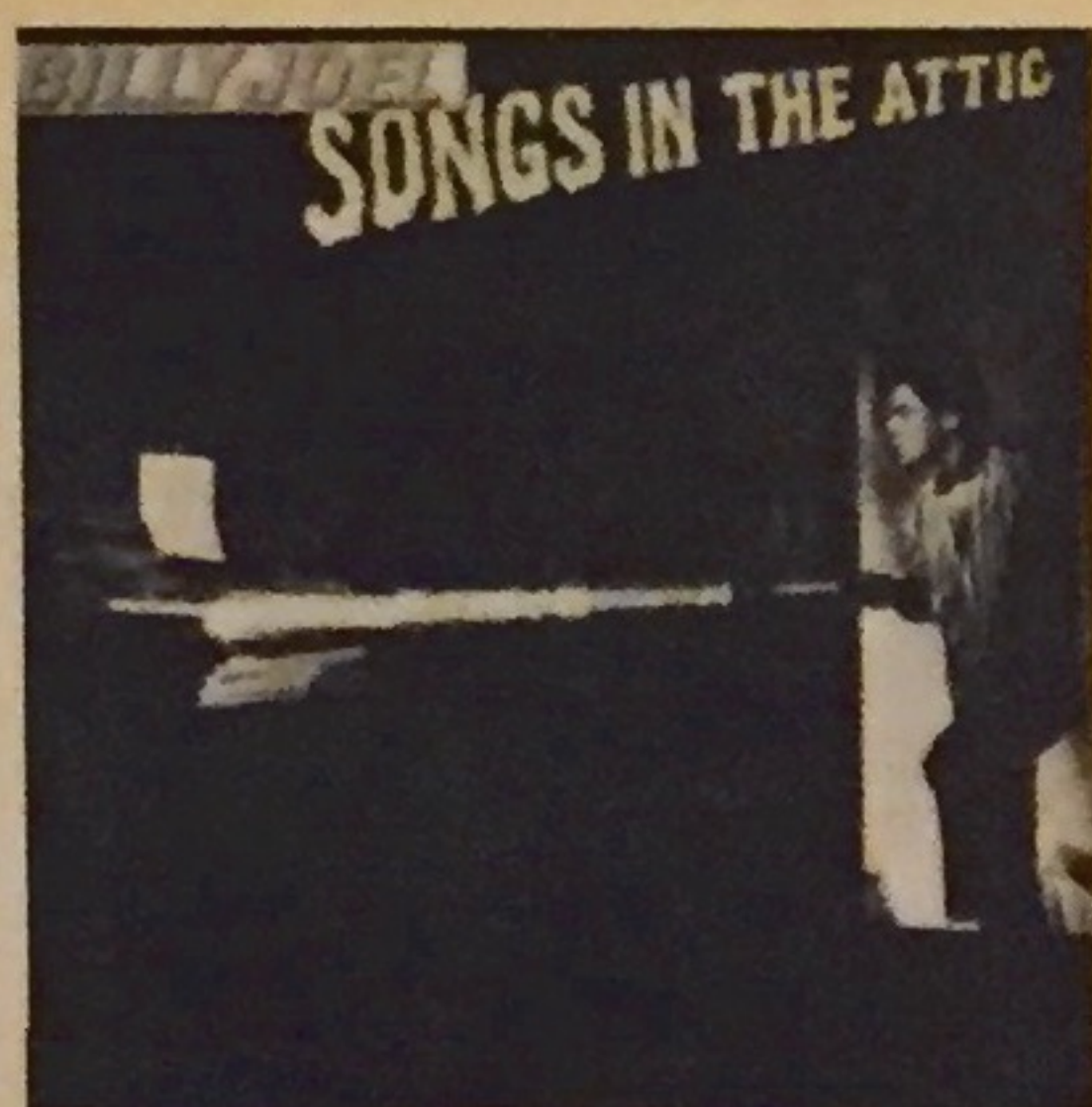


PART THREE

Odyssey

OF A BILLY JOEL RECORD BY MARTIN TORGOFF

The final stages of record production—from pressing plant to cover design—are chronicled here by music journalist Martin Torgoff in this last installment of his three-part series detailing the odyssey of a Billy Joel album.

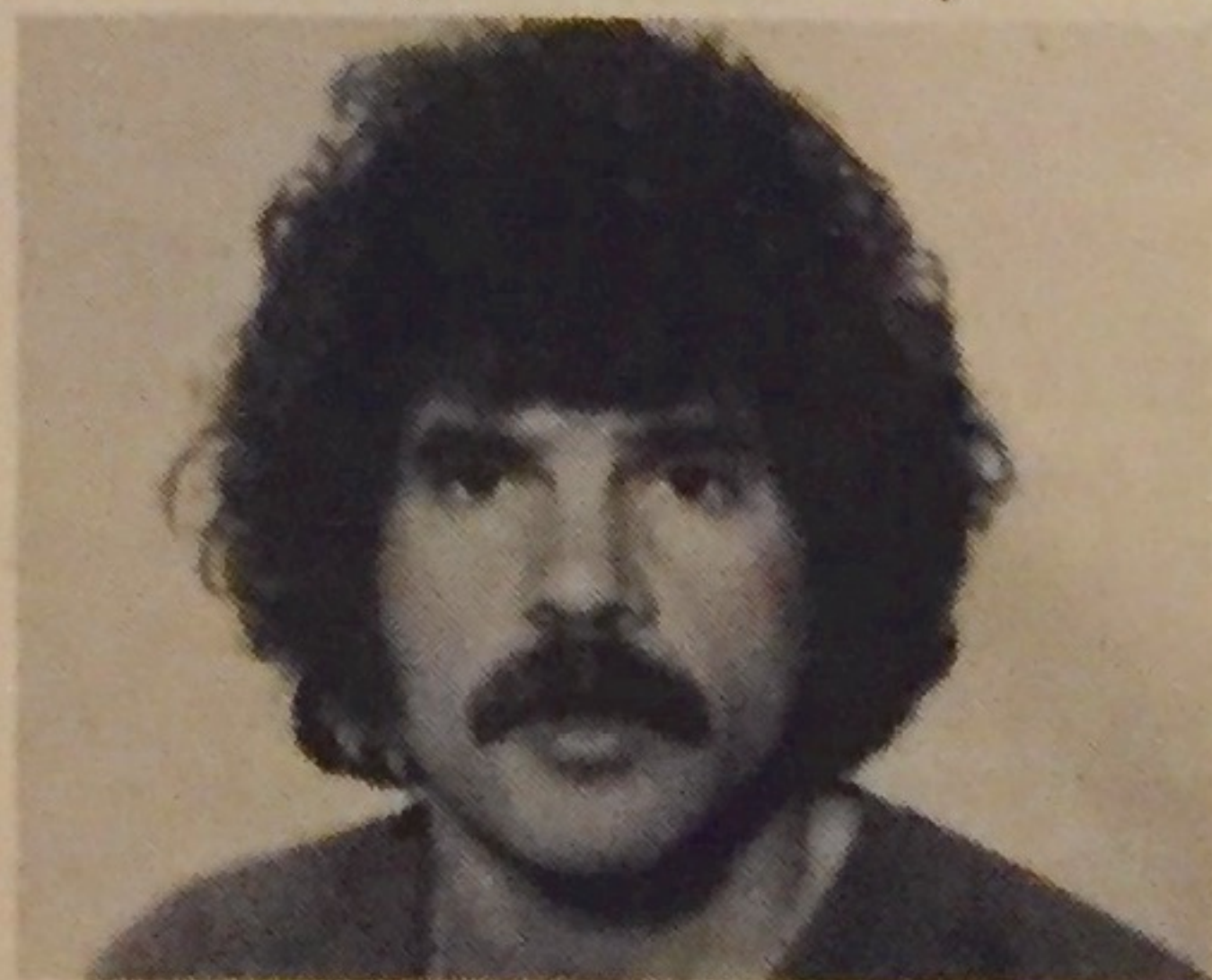


From the moment master tapes are delivered to the sound studio, production of an album takes two paths which later converge at the pressing plant. In one process, the actual record is manufactured; in the other, the album is packaged, and marketed and promoted on an international scale.

In the production process, the most important task is to ensure that the finished record best reflects the sound quality of the master tapes without distortions or stray noises. The tapes are then “disc-mastered” or “cut”—a process that transforms music on the master tape into grooves on a lacquer-coated aluminum disc. A technician plays the tape through a console containing a sound-sensitive instrument that cuts corresponding grooves into the disc. How the “master lacquer” is cut—the grooves’ width and depth—determines how the finished album plays. In the next stage, duplicate molds are made from the master lacquer,



and are sent to the record pressing plants. In the case of *GLASS HOUSES*, the molds were sent to three CBS plants—in Pittman, New Jersey, Terre Haute, Indiana, and Santa Maria, California. CBS had instructed that a total of one million records be pressed initially.



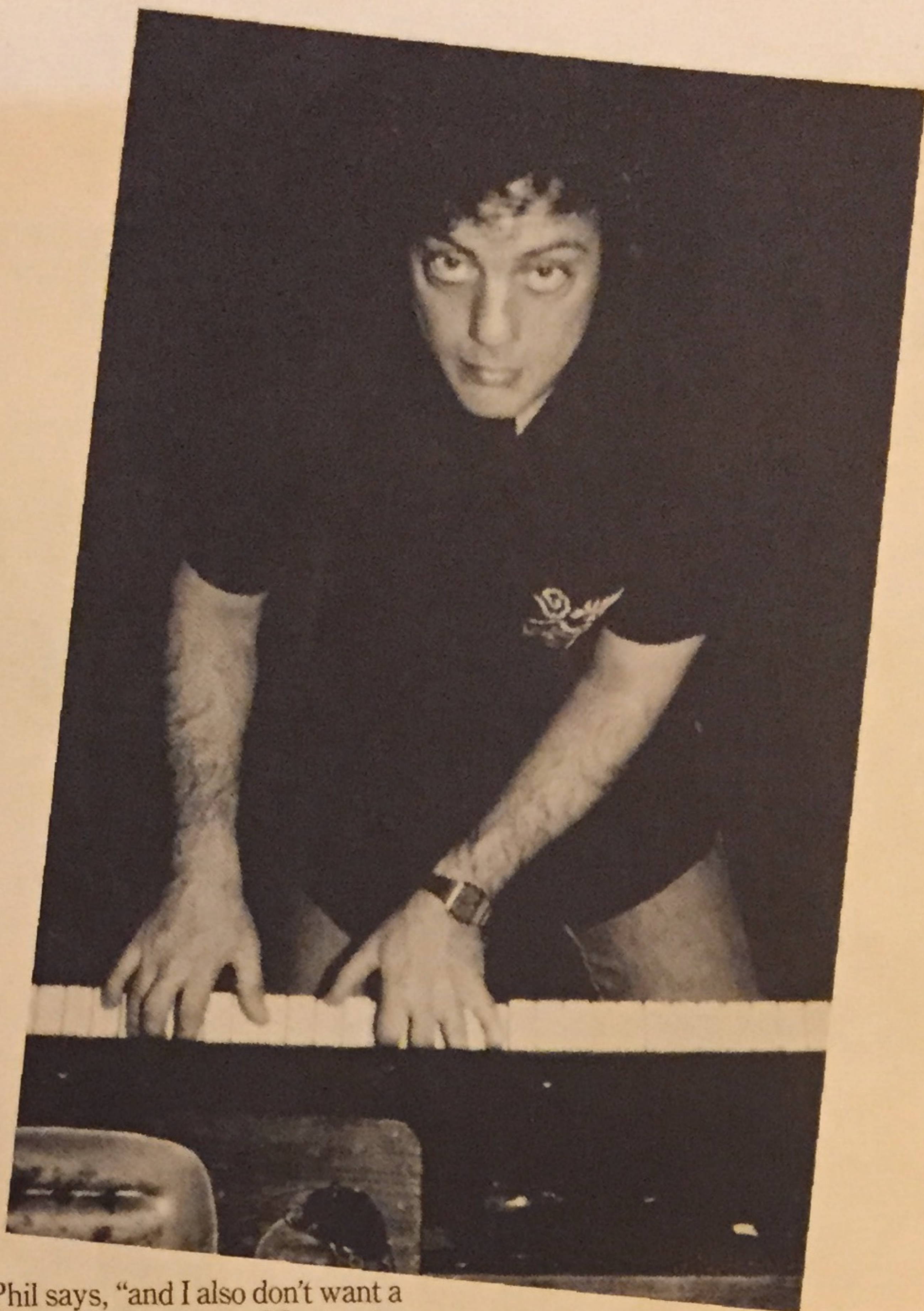
Don DeVito

“With the kind of volume we do with Billy,” says Columbia Records’ Don DeVito, “we usually need three to four weeks lead time for pressing, but because of the way we had it set up, we were able

to put *GLASS HOUSES* out two weeks from the time Phil had it mastered.”

Even with Billy’s history of multi-platinum albums, Columbia doesn’t decide how many records to press until its sales force gets a feel for what the market will take,” according to Don. Since 1978, the record industry has experienced a number of over-shipments of follow-up albums by various “superstars” and “supergroups.” CBS carefully reviewed Billy’s previous album sales and began to take pre-orders for *GLASS HOUSES* from retail accounts. The market indicated it could absorb at least one million albums upon release.

At one point in the manufacturing of *GLASS HOUSES*, a problem cropped up—a skip in the record. Producer Phil Ramone weighed the pros and cons of re-mastering the record. “Billy takes tremendous pride in the sound of his records,”



Phil says, "and I also don't want a disgruntled customer. Most customers don't know that any record that doesn't play well or skips could have become defective in the many processes the lacquer goes through to become the metal master. If you've ever walked through a pressing plant, it's frightening! So, to take no chances, it was re-mastered." Test pressings of the record then were approved by Billy and Phil, in time to meet shipping and release dates.



Barbara Cooke

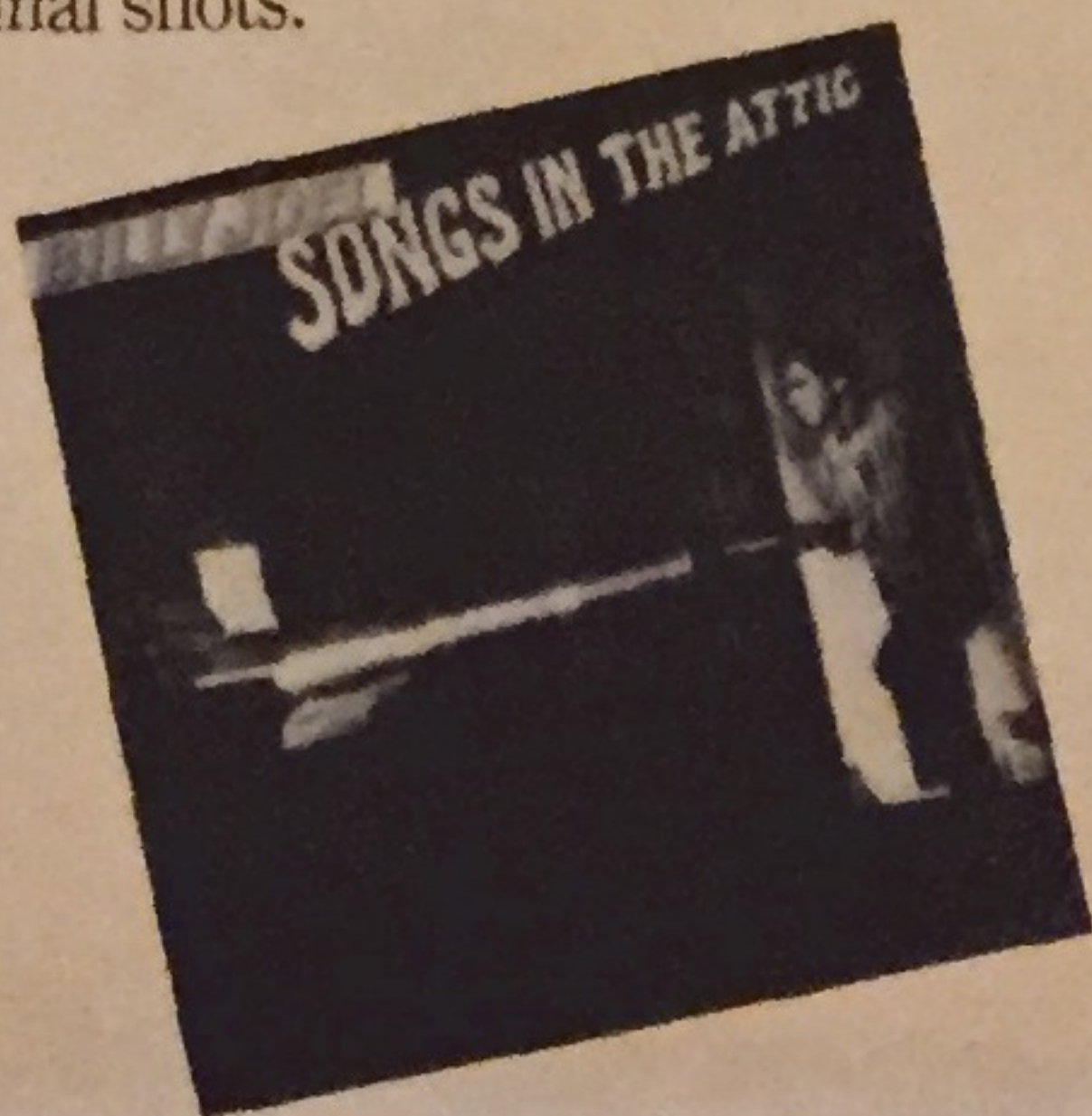
As head of East Coast Merchandising for CBS, Barbara Cooke plays an important role in the company's Product Management Department. Weeks before an album is completed in the studio, Barbara, Jeff Schock, Director of Marketing and Promotion for Billy, and others work with CBS's art department to develop the album's "package." Among other activities, Barbara coordinates the marketing strategy for an LP, which includes everything from the imagery used on the album package to store displays and development of media campaigns.

Billy suggests the concept and design for all his albums. The flash-

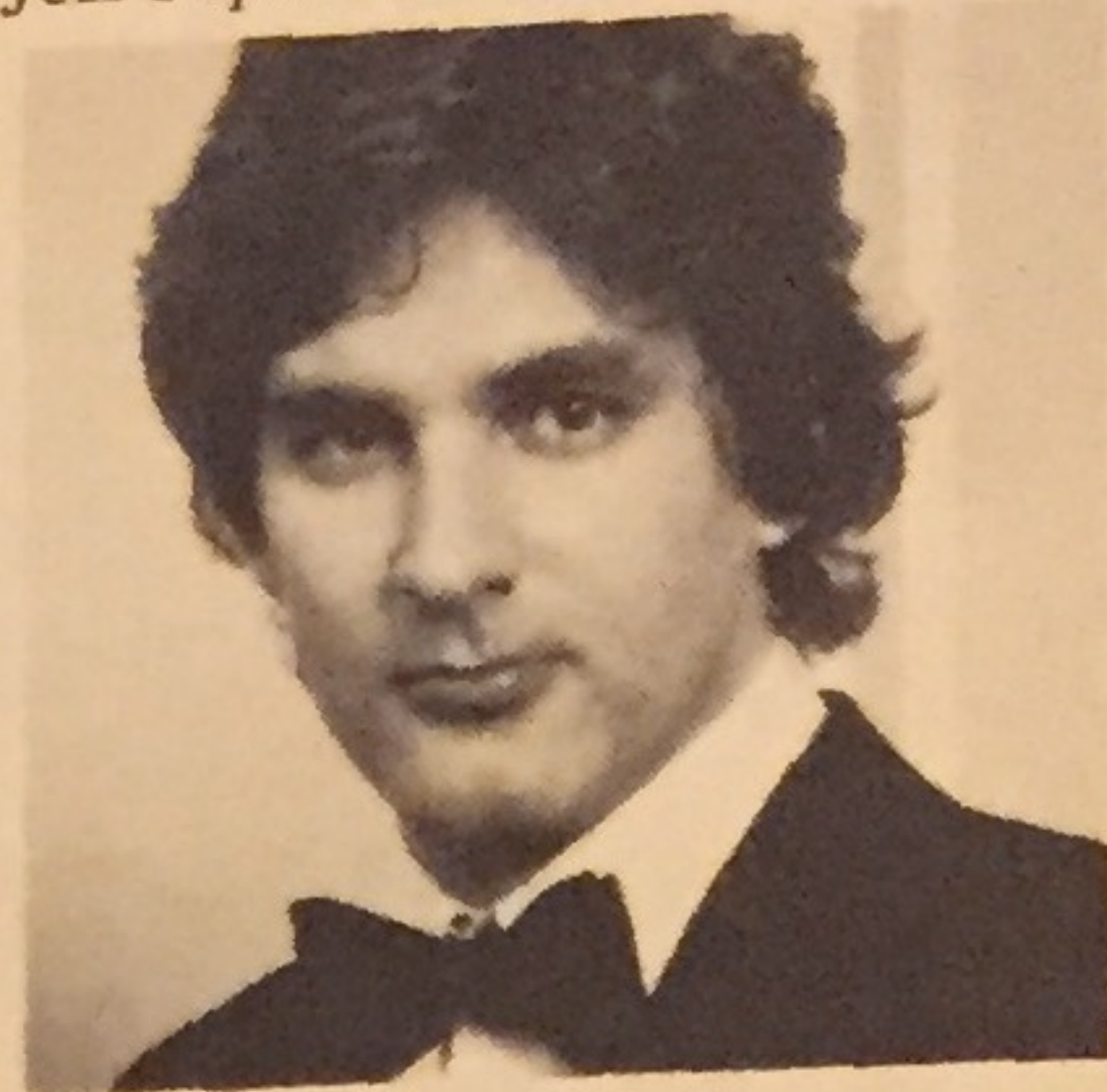
light on the piano was his idea for *SONGS IN THE ATTIC*. Having the cover photograph for *GLASS HOUSES* shot at his own home, with Billy throwing a rock at his own window, was also his idea. That was shot by veteran photographer Jim Houghton on a frigid, blustery day at Billy's house in Oyster Bay, New York.

"He didn't know exactly what he wanted to do at first, but we worked it out gradually," explains Jim, who also shot the covers for *THE STRANGER* and *52nd STREET*. "Billy's committed, he gets more done in the least amount of time than anybody I've ever encountered," the photographer continues. "It's such a pleasure working with him because he's such an inventive guy, and not just in his music—he works hard when I photograph him."

After that photo session, Jim worked out several ideas with CBS and Billy's managers for stylized, indoor studio shots for sales posters. Each shot was carefully directed, and color-coordinated. Later, Jim photographed Billy's band in his studio for the inner sleeve of the album. He later submitted the photos directly to Billy, who selects the final shots.



Meanwhile, CBS art director Paula Schere works with Billy on designing the record's sleeve and jacket. Billy hand-wrote his song lyrics and other information for the album cover, and Paula and Billy's management team decided which paper to use for the cover—a factor affecting the quality of the reproduced image. They chose a glossy paper for the front cover and a softer, muted finish for the back. Paula and Jeff supervised the printing of the



Jeff Schock

covers at a Long Island printing shop, and the covers then were sent to the pressing plants. Finally, pressed albums were collated with covers and sleeves, shrink-wrapped in cellophane, boxed, crated, and loaded onto delivery trucks.

Radio deejays across America received the single, *You May Be Right*, the same day *GLASS HOUSES* was released from the three plants to department and record stores everywhere.

The CBS marketing staff perceives Billy Joel as unique because of his unprecedented success. According to Barbara Cooke, nobody else on the CBS roster has "sold more than four million records consecutively over a span of several albums." In fact, one out of every eighteen households in America owns a Billy Joel record, constituting a vast popular audience.

For Billy Joel, Phil Ramone, Jim Boyer, the band members, and everyone else involved in its creation, the album's release was like an explosion. "No matter how many times you do it, you just never get over the thrill of first hearing it on the radio," says Phil. "There's an innocent kind of child-like enthusiasm that you always feel."

Almost one million copies were initially released; the following month, half a million records were sold. When *It's Still Rock And Roll To Me* was distributed as a single several months later, the album and the single reached number one on the charts simultaneously.



Martin Torgoff is author of a book about Elvis Presley, entitled *Elvis, We Love You Tender*.



BRIAN RUGGLES



Recently credited as producer of the live recordings on *SONGS IN THE ATTIC*, Brian Ruggles has been Billy Joel's concert sound engineer for the past ten years. *ROOT BEER RAG* went backstage to talk with Brian about his early years with Billy, and his role in the new album.

RBR: You've been working with Billy from the very beginning—probably longer than anyone else in his troupe. Do you remember what your first professional gig together was?

BRIAN: The first one that I remember was at the Gaslight in Greenwich Village. That was in '71, just after the *COLD SPRING HARBOR* album was released.

RBR: How did you first meet Billy?

BRIAN: I first met Billy when he was with the Hassles, and then we started hanging out together when he was in the group Attila. A while later, he asked me if I wanted to work for him. And that's how it all began.

RBR: How did you become a live sound engineer?

BRIAN: It all happened almost by accident. I started out as a roadie for Billy...driving trucks, hauling equipment around, and setting it up on stage. Then the guy who was both road manager and doing sound left, and I fell into it myself.

RBR: Were you a musician yourself, or simply a music lover?

BRIAN: I was always a music lover. I was in a couple of bands in high school—nothing too serious—I played the drums.

RBR: Phil Ramone is widely known as a perfectionist. How

would you describe your approach to concert production?

BRIAN: I would say the same way. I believe in everything being done right. I never throw things together when it comes to doing live shows or recordings. Everything has to work—no excuses, no mistakes...I guess that makes me a perfectionist, too.

RBR: Do you think your live concert sound engineering influenced Phil's production on Billy's albums?

BRIAN: Well, Phil has mentioned that it was after seeing Billy at Carnegie Hall that he wanted to work with him...he knew he wanted to try and capture that live energy on record. It was Billy's live performance that convinced him.

RBR: Has Phil's production of Billy's songs changed your ways of concert engineering?

BRIAN: A little bit, yes. I pick up things from a lot of people. I watch other people and the sounds they get, and that has some influence on the sound I want to get in concert. I've learned a lot of things from Phil in general engineering. The live situation is real different. You can't do what's done in the studio. Mixing live is totally different. You only get one shot to do it—you don't have different takes and different ways to try it. In concert you have to get it right the first time. When Jim Boyer or one of the studio engineers comes out on the road, they sit next to me and say "How do you do that—I don't understand." And sometimes I don't understand what they're doing in the studio.

RBR: Are you in the studio much when Billy records?

BRIAN: No, I don't get involved in that much.

RBR: Billy is an enormously versatile writer and performer, and in his shows, he moves from mellow ballads to hard-hitting rock with great ease. Do you have to make any special considerations to accommodate that?

BRIAN: Billy can go from *Just The Way You Are* to *Television and Fantasy* and *Lenya*, and I do have to make a few changes. Basically, I just have to move fast, in terms of equalizing and adding special effects. I do a lot of running around.

RBR: How often does the sequencing of songs change on tour?

BRIAN: We always sit down and discuss the set in a meeting around the piano with Steve Cohen, the lighting designer, and the band. In the beginning of a tour we change it quite often, but once we find a set that feels good, we go with it night after night, with a few changes here and there.

RBR: Let's talk about the new album. *SONGS IN THE ATTIC* is



the first live LP recorded on a 32-track digital system. Were you part of that decision to use digital?

BRIAN: Yes. Phil Ramone wanted to try it out, and he was approached by the 3M Company. We discussed it and both thought it would be a great idea to be the first to release a live digital album.

RBR: Did it require a more complicated set-up on your part?

BRIAN: No, not really. It's more expensive than the old analogue recording method, but the digital machines plug right into my regular console.

RBR: A lot of sound experts claim that digital is much better suited to recording jazz and classical music rather than rock and roll.

BRIAN: That could be true.

RBR: How do you think it worked for Billy?

BRIAN: What I notice in digital is that the sound is much brighter, much crisper—there's much more clarity. So with a symphony orchestra, you could probably notice it more than for some of the cruder rock bands. But for Billy's recordings, it works real well.

RBR: Do you think the average listener, as opposed to the trained technician, will be able to hear the advantage?

BRIAN: I think an engineer would appreciate the difference a lot more. If you played an analogue recording right next to a digital, there's only a slight difference. I'm not even sure Billy heard the difference. But for my own ears, I like it a lot.

RBR: How did you go about choosing the songs that are on the new album?

BRIAN: It was Billy's concept to go with "songs in the attic," so that narrowed it down right there. We picked the best performances of those old classics. And we wanted to get as many great songs on one album as we could.

RBR: After all these years, do you have your own personal favorite Billy Joel tunes, and did that influence your choices for the album?

BRIAN: One of my all-time favorite Billy Joel songs is *Streetlife Serenader*, and I kept pulling for that to be on the album.

RBR: Do you have your eye on any other producing projects?

BRIAN: Not right now. But I'd like to do more live albums. I'm always looking around for local bands starting out. I hire bands to play at a club I own on Long Island.

RBR: Unlike a lot of superstar acts, Billy has kept the same team together for a long time. How do you account for that?

BRIAN: He's a good person to work for. He's real fair, and he doesn't act like a "star." People who work for him love him—he's a lot of fun to be around. We have a good time!