

Billy Joel – Piano Man (1973)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Travelin' Prayer* – 4:10 02. *Piano Man* – 5:36 03. *Ain't No Crime* – 3:15 04. *You're My Home* – 3:08 05. *The Ballad Of Billy The Kid* – 5:39 06. *Worse Comes To Worst* – 3:12 07. *Stop In Nevada* – 3:50 08. *If I Only Had The Words (To Tell You)* – 3:29 09. *Somewhere Along The Line* – 3:19 10. *Captain Jack* – 7:15 Personnel: - Billy Joel – harmonica, keyboards, vocals - Laura Creamer, Mark Creamer, Susan Steward – vocals - Dean Parks, Larry Carlton, Richard Bennett – guitar - Eric Weissberg, Fred Heilbrun – banjo - Billy Armstrong – fiddle - Wilton Felder, Emory Gordy Jr. – bass - Michael Omartian – accordion, arranger - Ronnie Tutt – drums (01-09) - Rhys Clark – drums (10) - Michael Stewart – producer

Embittered by legal disputes with his label and an endless tour to support a debut that was dead in the water, Billy Joel hunkered down in his adopted hometown of Los Angeles, spending six months as a lounge singer at a club. He didn't abandon his dreams -- he continued to write songs, including "Piano Man," a fictionalized account of his weeks as a lounge singer. Through a combination of touring and constant hustling, he landed a contract with Columbia and recorded his second album in 1973. Clearly inspired by Elton John's *Tumbleweed Connection*, not only musically but lyrically, as well as James Taylor, Joel expands the vision and sound of *Cold Spring Harbor*, abandoning introspective numbers (apart from "You're My Home," a love letter to his wife) for character sketches and epics. Even the title track, a breakthrough hit based on his weeks as a saloon singer, focuses on the colorful patrons, not the singer. If his narratives are occasionally awkward or incomplete, he compensates with music that gives the songs a sweeping sense of purpose -- they feel complete, thanks to his indelible melodies and savvy stylistic repurposing. He may have borrowed his basic blueprint from *Tumbleweed Connection*, particularly with its Western imagery and bluesy gospel flourishes, but he makes it his own, largely due to his melodic flair, which is in greater evidence than on *Cold Spring Harbor*. *Piano Man* is where he suggests his potential as a musical craftsman. He may have weaknesses as a lyricist -- such mishaps as the "instant pleasuredome" line in "You're My Home" illustrate that he doesn't have an ear for words -- but *Piano Man* makes it clear that his skills as a melodicist can dazzle. --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, allmusic.com

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