

## FAME Review: Harry Nilsson / Fred Wolf - The Point (DVD)

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## The Point

[Harry Nilsson](#) / [Fred Wolf](#)

*MVD Visual* - MVD5367D (DVD)

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange  
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Harry Nilsson's *The Point* is one of those films that's either known and loved by those who've chanced across it or else draws a complete blank with everyone else, the largest part of society. After a number of TV re-showings and several re-issues, it's still a cult item and shouldn't be. The film's premise is of a father reading a night-time story to his young son, the sotto voce of which is "Does everything need to have a point??", a rather Vonnegut-ish sentiment (bear in mind Kurt's overriding baseline about human beings: we were put here just to "fart around"). Conceived and written by Nilsson, the Beatles' favorite American musician (later serving as Lennon's bawdy drinking partner post-Ono), and animated by Fred Wolf (actually: Murakami/Wolf, with Fred directing), the visual element is a cross between George Plympton's animatics and *Yellow Submarine* (which had appeared 3 years earlier), with a bit of Chwast and Steinberg tossed in.

The history of the film is, as I kinda hinted, a bit curious. It's first telecast saw Dustin Hoffman as the narrator/narrator-father, but the second cathode version dubbed Alan Barzman in place of the much more famed actor. The third run-through substituted Alan Thicke, but the home video release settled on Ringo Starr. Any more and we would have gotten dizzy, but that last is the gent featured in this re-re-release as well. The revival couldn't have come a moment too soon, this time in the so-far definitive version (frankly, I think it and *Yellow Submarine* both deserve Criterion treatment), now with four—count 'em: 4!—featurettes. Not only does Dave Pyles, editor at FAME, dig the film in a big way, not only was I smiling from ear to ear when I opened the mailer and saw what it was, but a visiting friend espied it as well and blurted "Oh man! I love that film!", and I practically had to flee my own house, clutching it to bosom lest the gem find its way into his spasmodically clutching hands.

Oblio, the protagonist, a kid, is born without a point on his head in a world where everything and everyone has one. The implication, coming from the sardonic Nilsson, I trust is not too elusive? Yes, it's basically a Realm of Dreaded Republicans. The most remembered song, *Me and my Arrow*, about Oblio's pet, "the greatest dog in the world: Arrow", occurs early in the film, but all the tunes are by Harry, and he was up to his usual eccentric wonderfulness. There's very good reason why Lennon & Co. were so taken with the guy, who has yet to be properly recognized in his birthplace, and I'm hoping this re-issue will spark at least small general revisitation of the man's oeuvre. The storyline is of course moral, oriented around orthodoxy and prejudice, the malignancy of adults, and the usual welter of narrative devices. Famed voice actor Paul Frees carries several parts, including that of the gentle king and of Oblio's story-father. Opposite the king is The Count, an archetypal yattering scheming Republican, and of course the antagonist. What could be more natural?

Arrow is guilty of non-pointery by association and co-suffers Oblio's penalty for inadvertent transgressions against a law demanding point-possession: banishment!!! Thus, he and Oblio travel the vast Pointless Forest outside the kingdom, and story proceeds to unload on conservatives, aery-faery "liberals", fake hipsters, and the implacability of The Law. Everything comes under fire in true 60s fashion. In the mindset of the era's underground comix (God bless'em!), the Establishment is the true philosophical whipping post, and the entire idea for the flick came to Nilsson during an, you guessed it, LSD trip. Talk about appropos. There's the Miles Davis-y voiced Rock Man (William E. Martin), giant killer bees, decomposing whales, and a wealth of clever interludes as Oblio makes his way in the outer world, eventually returning home to become an inadvertent change-agent (I won't quite give away the surprise ending). In the final analysis, everything comes down to what the Rock Man conveyed to Oblio: you don't have to have a point to have a point.

Or do you?

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