

Harry Nilsson: rediscovered and rebooted.

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# Comeback schmomeback

The final abandoned works of Harry Nilsson, now exhumed and restored. By Jim Irvin.

**N**OT STRICTLY A reissue this month, but an album abandoned through circumstance and completed a quarter of a century later. *Lost & Found* ★★★ (Omnivore) resurrects the final sessions of Harry Nilsson, who succumbed to a heart attack in January 1994 aged only 52, while recording an album with friends such as Van Dyke Parks, Jim Keltner and Jimmy Webb, all of whom returned this year to help original producer Mark Hudson finish the record. Hudson recalls sitting with Nilsson in the singer's car – “the beast” – making copious notes while juggling dozens of cassettes, auditioning the songs Harry had in mind for this record, his first in many years. It is those notes he's drawn on to sensitively complete the album.

If you're a longtime fan there's definitely stuff to be enjoyed, but one is also reminded that, latterly, Nilsson tended to make spotty records featuring songs that amused himself and his cohorts but didn't always merit the weight they were given. Also, by this time, his somewhat ravaged voice was incapable of all the things that had made his stronger material so extraordinary. So you're left with music that's well-intentioned but not always satisfying. Highlights: Woman Oh

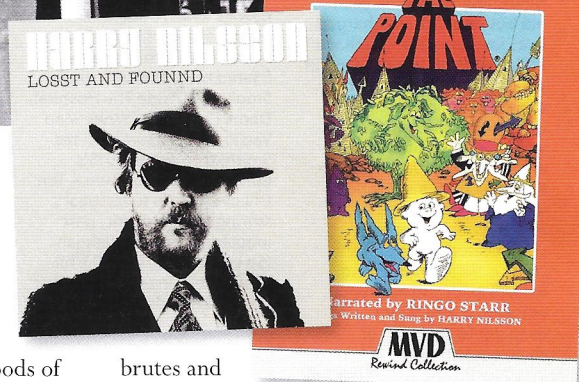
Woman, a lovely melding of the moods of Wilson and Lennon; Lullaby, a sentimental but affecting parent's love song to a child, and a curiously moving cover of Yoko Ono's Listen, The Snow is Falling, though we probably could have done without the cheesy synthesised koto sound. Less successful: Yo Dodger Blue, an irony-free, sing-in-the-bleachers love song to the LA Dodgers, should you want one, and Try, a rum-ti-tum All You Need Is Love-borrowing flag-waver.

Though stronger than several of his lifetime releases, it's unlikely this album will make Nilsson any more relevant to modern ears. The success of 1971's Richard Perry-produced *Nilsson Schmilsson* meant he stuck with that thicker, FM rock sound in later years, when perhaps the sparer feel of his earlier albums better suited the kind of songs he defaulted to, and his voice. A cover of Hi-Heel Sneakers, presented as a medley with a song called Rescue Boy, is overlaid with backing vocals and musical hooks while Harry's voice, particularly battered that day, might have benefited more from being exposed than papered over. The album closes with an impassioned take on Jimmy Webb's What Does A Woman See In A Man, the central conceit of which – ‘men are feckless, belching

brutes and women are coolly refined creatures that smell of jasmine’ – may have felt enlightened 25 years ago (though wasn't) and now sounds, at best, well-meaning but some way off-message. The simplicity of the arrangement, though, is most welcome. It made us wonder if Nilsson could have made the kind of record Johnny Cash cut with Rick Rubin, something that took advantage of the vulnerability and wear and tear in his voice, which had taken on a different kind of beauty. It's a shame he didn't get the chance to recalibrate and take himself into a rich, third age, operating as a more twinkly Cohen, Newman or Waits.

While we're on the subject, we've just heard that a newly restored 50th anniversary DVD of Nilsson's animated film, *The Point*, is due for release in February 2020. The tale of round-headed Oblio, banished from the land of the pointy-headed and setting off

with his dog to discover himself in a pointless place, inspired some of Harry's most charming tunes – Me And My Arrow, Think About Your Troubles – back when he understood that his brand of whimsy didn't need too much to support it.



**“It's a shame he didn't have the chance to take himself into a rich third age.”**