



Michael Giltz, Contributor BookFilter creator

## BingeListening #1: Billy Joel Is World's First BingeListening Artist Of The Month!

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Ok, what the heck is BingeListening? Well, you've heard of binge-watching, the ever-increasing trend of people consuming an entire season or even the entire run of a TV series in one fell swoop? It's fun, it's addictive and it reveals strengths and weaknesses of a show that you might miss when watching just one episode a week over a period of years. Binge-watch and you'll love some TV shows more, you'll like others less, you might discover a favorite you enjoyed as a kid doesn't hold up and you'll realize, "Yeah, *Freaks & Geeks* really is terrific."

So why should TV fans have all the fun? Let's do the same with music — find an artist, listen to all their albums in order from start to finish and see what we think about them. Maybe it's someone you never really listened to before. Maybe it's a favorite you loved in high school or college but it's been a while since you heard their newer stuff. Maybe it's a legendary artist you know you really *should* give a listen to, just like you keep meaning to watch *The Wire* or *Arrested Development* or read *War and Peace* or *Middlemarch*...but you just haven't made the time.

One more reason to BingeListen to an artist's body of work: the album. Maybe you're listening to more music than ever. But thanks to playlists and YouTube and the suggestions of friends and the constant allure of something shiny and new (did you really have to leap when you heard Taylor Swift had a new single out?), chances are it's been a while since you paid attention to an honest to goodness album. And the artists you love have been putting a lot of care into crafting each album they put out, ever since it came into prominence in the early 1940s or so. Just ask those hipsters who've rediscovered the joy of vinyl.

Got it? BingeListening keeps you from jumping around from song to song to song. BingeListening uses the latest technology of streaming to go old school and focus on the crowning artistic achievement of popular music — the album. BingeListening is a meal, rather than an endless stream of snacks. And BingeListening puts an artist under the spotlight. Just like a TV series gulped down all at once, listening to an artist's albums back to back will show how much they grew and changed...or how they kept repeating themselves.



Our first artist: Billy Joel. Start listening to his albums this weekend. On Monday, September 18, we'll share our thoughts on his first two LPs, the debacle that was *Cold Spring Harbor* (which almost ended his career before it began) and *Piano Man*, the work that gave Joel his first taste of success and kept him going until album #5 put him over the top for good. On Tuesday, we'll tackle *Streetlife Serenade* and *Turnstiles*, on Wednesday we hit the biggies starting with *The Stranger*, then *52nd Street* on Thursday and so on until we hit his final pop album, *River Of Dreams*. You can listen at your own pace: gallop ahead and binge to your heart's content over the weekend or fall behind and plan to catch up (maybe you play the album *Piano Man* and then find yourself playing it again and again for a few days. It's happened to me.) Just have fun, follow the conversation every day on HuffPost or Facebook and join in when you can.

Why Billy Joel? The guy gets no respect! He's one of the best-selling artists of all time, he's in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, he won the Grammy for Album Of The Year with *52nd Street* and he's been selling out shows at Madison Square Garden every month for years now. It's not like the guy isn't loved by his fans and enjoying all the perks after decades of commercial and artistic success. He's got an enduring legacy. Yet it's always felt like his acceptance by the establishment was a little...grudging, kind of a "yeah, what are you gonna do?" sort of approval.

Other acts have fallen out of favor and then enthusiastically rediscovered. Neil Diamond has been reclaimed by cool people almost every year since the mid-Seventies. (Hey, we're not supposed to like the awesome pop singles this guy turns out with ease, but God help us, he's great!) Same with other acts like ABBA. The Monkees. The Carpenters. Led Zeppelin. Barry Manilow. Michael McDonald. Hang around long enough and craftsmanship will out — people will slowly accept that an artist once seen as uncool or too successful actually had great melodies and/or lyrics or pioneered Americana or *something*. Others of course have always enjoyed acclaim, like the biggies — Beatles, Ray Charles, Joni Mitchell, etc. — and evergreens like the Rolling Stones and James Taylor.

And Billy Joel? He clawed his way to success and stayed on top for some 15 years. Then in the most badass, punk-ish and mature decision of his career, Joel walked away from recording new music. He felt he'd said everything he had to say and that recording more music would just be...redundant, pointless, an exercise

in producing product rather than creating music he was burning to deliver. It's a decision that still freaks out fans and shows a self-awareness few acts have ever managed. That's pretty damn cool.

But where's the appreciation from critics, the honest reappraisal? The love from fellow acts? (I know, I know. He duetted with Ray Charles and brought everyone from Cyndi Lauper to Steve Winwood onto *The Bridge*. And he and Elton John had one of the best touring double acts in history. But you know what I mean.) For some mysterious reason, his hits almost always feel like Billy Joel songs, no matter who sings them. (The exceptions proving the rule: "New York State Of Mind" and "She's Got A Way.") I assumed Joel would be best remembered not for his own albums but for a body of songs that other acts would sing for generations (like a rock n roll Gershwin). Instead he has flourished as a recording artist with one of the best-selling greatest hits sets of all time *and* a string of albums his fans can sing along to track by track, word by word.

One more reason: I love Billy Joel. The first concert I ever went to was when he toured behind *An Innocent Man* and did a show at the rickety, swamp-like Sportatorium in South Florida. (Thanks for taking me, fellow Cardinal Gibbons high schooler Carolyn Bracht!) Some of the first albums I bought were *Piano Man* and *Glass Houses* et al, which I played over and over and over on the cassette deck of the family car. (My sister Libet preferred *Glass Houses* — no slow tracks! She was not one for ballads, even ballads by Billy Joel.) Still, I'm well aware the music of our youth doesn't always hold up. And the last few albums — *The Bridge*, *Storm Front*, *River Of Dreams* — oh sure, I bought them and played them but did I really give them a chance? What would they sound like today? Is *Turnstiles* still the best collection of songs he ever recorded? If I listen to Billy Joel all at once, will I become a fan all over again, discover an album I ignored is a lot better than I thought...or will I sheepishly admit maybe it's not so awesome as I thought it was when I was just 15 years old. Let's find out. Start binging!

Come back Monday September 18 to share what you think about *Cold Spring Harbor* and *Piano Man*!





BingeListening continues on Tuesday Sept 19 with two more albums *Streetlife Serenade* and *Turnstiles*:



Wednesday Sept 20, we tackle his commercial breakthrough *The Stranger*:



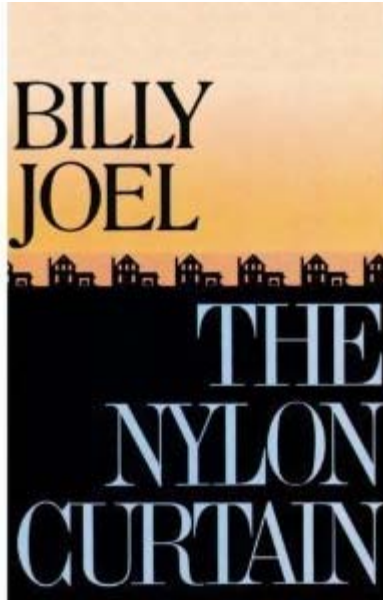
On Thursday, Sept 21, we hit the Grammy winning Album Of The Year *52nd Street*:



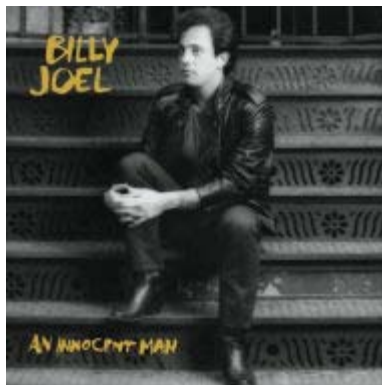
On Friday, Sept 22, Joel proved he had rock n roll chops (and has the Rock Vocal Grammy to show for it) with *Glass Houses*:



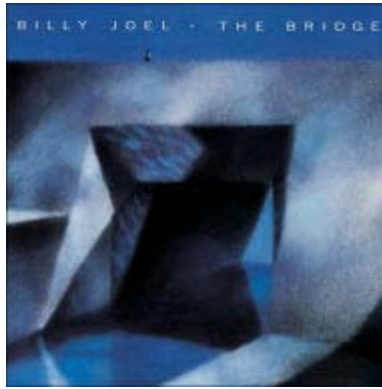
On Monday, Sept. 25, we've got two more albums on tap, his live album *Songs In The Attic* and *Nylon Curtain*:



On Tuesday, September 26, it's Joel's tribute to his roots, *An Innocent Man*:



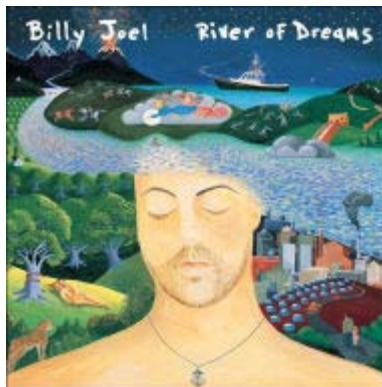
On Wednesday, September 27, *The Bridge*, filled with celeb guest stars:



On Thursday, September 28, we'll brave *Storm Front*:



And on Friday, September 29, we finish with Joel's last studio album (to date!), *River Of Dreams*:



Start your BingeListening...NOW!

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*Michael Giltz is the founder and CEO of the website BookFilter, a book lover's best friend. Trying to decide what to read next? Head to BookFilter! Need a smart and easy gift? Head to BookFilter? Wondering what new*

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