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BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Billy Joel Smackdown

Priv8pete and I got into words over Billy Joel. They ran so long, I decided to liberate them from the comments section. It was all sparked by a passing reference I made to Billy Joel's *An Innocent Man* as "his best album."

PRIV8PETE: You are daft. *Innocent Man* is not Billy's best album. That would have to be *The Stranger*, although I prefer *Turnstiles* or *Cold Spring Harbor* (I know, his voice is all screwed up, but I like the songs).

ME: I'm daft? YOU'RE daft! I think Billy Joel is primarily a songwriter more than a performer, which he would probably happily agree with. I think many of his tunes will be covered for many years to come. So though he's had huge success in album sales, I don't really approach him that way. It's more one big body of work. That said, most people would agree with you that "*The Stranger*" is his best album. (Rolling Stone gives two Joel albums -- and his *Greatest Hits* -- four stars. "*The Stranger*" and of all things "*Storm Front*." Huh?) I like *The Stranger* a lot. I probably blasted out "*Glass Houses*" even more. And maybe the most-played -- thanks to a massive early lead -- is "*Piano Man*." Of course, *Cold Spring Harbor* has some good songs but for many obvious reasons doesn't even come close as far as being a satisfying album. But song for song, "*An Innocent Man*" is the most complete and cohesive album. We know them so well that obviously it would be jarring --but honestly, couldn't you take the songs from "*Stranger*" and "*52nd Street*" and "*Glass Houses*" and put them in a bowl, mix them up and then put them randomly on three CDs and hardly tell the difference? It's not a knock on the songs; just pointing out the fact that they're not really ALBUMS so much as collections of individual songs. Not so with "*An Innocent Man*," which obviously harkens back to doo-wop stylistically. Those songs could ONLY appear on that album and that cohesiveness makes it hold together as a single album better than any other. And yeah, I love "*Turnstiles*" too.

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