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Boz Scaggs • *Boz Scaggs*

Atlantic/[Speakers Corner](#) 19166
180-gram LP
1978/2019

Music ●●●●●
Sound ●●●●●

by [Vance Hiner](#) | November 25, 2019

For a lot of people, the music of Boz Scaggs begins and ends with his multi-platinum-selling album *Silk Degrees*. Songs like "Lowdown" and "Lido Shuffle" have become musical shorthand for *yacht rock*, so it's easy to overlook Scaggs's pre-Grammy career, which was marked by some pretty wide-ranging musical experimentation. After trying to break into London's emerging blues-revival scene in the mid-1960s and a psychedelic-tinged two-album stint with the Steve Miller Band (*Children of the Future* and *Sailor*), Scaggs released this album, his first American solo record, in 1969. Co-produced by longtime friend and *Rolling Stone* editor Jan Wenner, *Boz Scaggs* is a somewhat haphazard hodgepodge of American roots music that eventually garnered a critical following because it also contains some outstanding blue-eyed soul.



Throughout the album's nine tracks, which were engineered by Martin Greene at Alabama's Muscle Shoals studio, Scaggs's soft, upper-register voice fits hand-in-glove with the sultry southern steam of the studio's legendary rhythm section and the impressive fret work of an unassuming young session guitarist named Duane Allman. Just 24 years old at the time, Allman laid down an emotionally charged solo on the Fenton Robinson cover "Loan Me a Dime," the perfect complement to Scaggs's urgent and mournful reading of Robinson's elegantly simple lyrics. While that track alone is worth the effort of seeking the album out, there are several other cuts that deserve mention. For example, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better slice of southern-flavored heartache than Scaggs's composition "I'll Be Long Gone." From its bluesy opening organ fills and mournful trumpet, which call to the lonesome harmonies of Joyce Dunn, Tracy Nelson and Imma Routen, this is a breakup song for the ages. It's followed by another plaintive masterpiece by Scaggs called "Another Day (Another Letter)" that had me checking credits because it has all the church-meets-dancehall sway that Stax legends William Bell and Booker T. Jones might've put into an Otis Redding classic. But interspersed between these strong compositions are several forgettable folk ballads like "Now You're Gone" and "Look What I Got."

As engaging as some of the music on this album can be, it struggles to break free of the recording's thin and lackluster sonics. A quick sample of any digital stream of the album will confirm those shortcomings. While I've never heard one of the rare existing copies of the album's original 20,000 press run, it speaks volumes that Scaggs demanded that the album be remixed in 1978 when chart success began to draw attention to his back catalogue. To Speaker Corners' credit, this all-analog reissue of that 1978 remix has more flesh on its bones than any digital version I've heard, but the album still lacks the midrange thrust and bottom end that a decent soul or R&B record has got to have if it's going to get anyone on the dance floor or in the bedroom. The bass and drum kit are oddly stuck in a distant corner from the proceedings on "Loan me a Dime." To make matter's worse, Duane Allman's electric guitar sounds like it's emanating from a small practice amp. And when Scaggs's voice comes in on the lonesome first lines, attention is immediately drawn to its thin, nasal qualities as opposed to the chestier projections that can be heard on his latter-day recordings. Whether this was a function of microphone placement or console settings back in 1969, I'm not qualified to speculate. Suffice it to say, every other recording I have of Boz Scaggs's voice and Duane Allman's guitar sounds more sonically alive and naturally balanced.

As a measure of due diligence, I auditioned this reissue on three separate systems. The results with Koetsu Black Goldline and Denon DL-103R cartridges were equally flat and uninspiring, but I was able get some warmth and pizzazz

from an Audio-Technica AT81CP played through a vintage Philips receiver by boosting the bass and midrange with the tone controls. Speakers Corner certainly can't be faulted for producing a perfectly quiet, ruler-flat version of this interesting title and distributing it in a luxurious, tip-on gatefold sleeve. If you're looking for the best-sounding version of this very challenged recording, the Speakers Corner reissue is a no-brainer. But if you're an audiophile who is hoping for dramatically rewarding sonics, this is a title best left off of your wish list. ☺

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