American singer-songwriter Billy Joel (b. 1949) has openly acknowledged that his 1982 album, The Nylon Curtain, was inspired by and patterned after The Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967). As the Grammy-winning artist told Rolling Stone magazine, he had hoped to “go back and pick up” where The Beatles left off. Indeed, several of the album’s tracks take musical cues from The Beatles and Joel’s efforts to fashion The Nylon Curtain as a concept album is, itself, indebted to The Beatles’ pioneering efforts on Sgt. Pepper’s. This talk examines the connections between the two albums by offering close literary and musical readings of selected tracks. Close attention is paid to features such as instrumentation, harmony, vocal setting, timbre, lyrical themes, and the use of studio effects such as delay, double-tracking, and additional non-musical sounds. Of course, despite their similarities, these two albums—separated by a mere fifteen years—also bear striking differences. Thus, the talk concludes with a discussion of the biographical, historical, and musical circumstances that help explain how The Nylon Curtain remains inspired by Sgt. Pepper’s without becoming a parody of it.

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