



BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD: A TIGHT MUSICIANSHIP

The Buffalo Springfield Message

BY JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER

• "Just because I wrote a song doesn't mean I know anything. I don't know very much about all the things that are going on around here, all the scenes, all the questions. All I know is just what I'm writing about. And even then I don't really know. I'm just trying to convey a feeling. The only things that I really know very well are the things that are at my house, the people I work with."

These gentle and modest words come from Neil Young, lead guitarist and songwriter for a rock 'n' roll group named the Buffalo Springfield.

The Springfield ranks among the best of the West Coast groups. Its melodies are simple, almost commonplace, but its musicianship is tight, and they write lyrics with more wisdom and poetry than anyone else round.

Neil Young wrote its first hit song, "Nowadays Clancy Can't Even Sing," released in August, 1966. It tells, in a bewildered fashion, about the tension

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between living and loving freely and functioning with success in today's constrained society.

"Many people, I know, tell me they don't understand 'Clancy.' They can't figure out all the symbols and stuff. Well, I don't think it's possible at all for them to know who he really is. For listeners, Clancy is just an image, a guy who gets come down on all the time.

"He was a strange cat, beautiful. Kids in school called him a 'weirdo,' 'cause he would whistle and sing 'Valerie, Valera' in the halls. After a while, he got so self-conscious he couldn't do his thing anymore. When someone as beautiful as that and as different as that is actually killed by his fellow men—you know what I mean—he's taken and sorta chopped down—all the other things are nothing compared to this.

"In the song I'm just trying to communicate a feeling. Like the main part of 'Clancy' is about my hang-ups with an old girlfriend in Winnipeg. Now I don't really want people to know my whole scene with that girl and another guy in Winnipeg. That's not important, that's just a story. You can read a story in Time magazine. I want them to get a feeling like when you see something bad go down—when you see a mother hit a kid for doing nothing. Or a frustration you see—a girl at an airport watching her husband leave to go to war."

"Clancy" is an intimate song which made the Top 10 in Los Angeles but

gained little national popularity. "For What It's Worth" made the Springfield famous. Written about the Sunset Strip riots and released last December, the song vaulted to No. 1 here and stayed listed on the national charts for 18 weeks.

Steve Stills wrote the song. He is more urbane and outspoken than Young, with an equally deft lyric touch. Clearly, he has a different conception of his role as songwriter.

"When I write about something, like the Sunset riots, I'm separating myself from the whole thing. I'm an observer because I'm a songwriter and I'm here to spread the news like the minstrels of the 15th century.

"The news is that the straight world has been getting worse and worse ever since World War II. Those boys that won the world by fire were great, but now they're trying to do it again. Except they're going to lose this time 'cause the fire's too big.

"There's got to be an answer, we all think. I know there are rock 'n' roll groups who believe that maybe dope might be it. It's that they really believe this world is getting sicker and sicker, and if something ain't done about all the people with their silly pride and stuff, it's going to blow itself up.

"Pride kills, so they've found this drug that kills pride. They say, 'Let's lay it on everybody.' Maybe everybody will be crazy and maybe nothing will get done and maybe the whole place will fall apart. But at least we'll be alive."

Stills also wrote the group's third release, the double-sided hit "Bluebird" and "Mr. Soul." Both songs have been high on the charts most of this summer and are featured on the Springfield's second album which will be released soon.

"We want to make every song different. The Beatles did the same thing—did four or five in the same sound and then changed sounds. We're just doing a few in the same sound and then changing.

"After 'For What It's Worth' there was a six-month gap of nothing until 'Bluebird' came out at the beginning of this summer. We were hassling among ourselves as to what to do next because what to do next had suddenly become very important. We became scared—we didn't want to blow it. We didn't want to do another song like 'For What It's Worth.' We didn't want to be a protest group. That's really a cop-out, and I hate that. To sit there and say, 'I don't like this and I don't like that' is just stupid."