

Supergroup With Survival Potential

BY ROBERT HILBURN

• It was a warm summer evening in Los Angeles as the nation's new supergroup—Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young—joined for some music and conversation.

As they sat around the living room of Stills' Laurel Canyon house, the mood was easy and relaxed. Things were going well. Their first album (recorded before Young joined them) was one of the nation's best-sellers and they were looking forward to a week at the Greek Theater (they open Monday night.)

But things had not always been so good. David Crosby, Steve Stills, Graham Nash and Neil Young—though all still in their 20s—are veterans of the rock scene. They came together after some frustrating, unhappy experiences as members of other major rock groups. They hope they learned from the past.

"Groups usually break up because they forget what counts after they become successful," said Crosby, who is much

more gentle and serious than his wildly unmanageable hair and drooping mustache would lead you to believe.

"Most of the bands get involved in side trips—the star trips, the money trips, the chick trips. They get farther and farther away from what made it all happen in the first place—the music," he continued.

"A second thing that happens to many young groups is that they get their first taste of success and they want to hold on to it. They want to play it safe. They become afraid to change their music. They want to keep playing the same thing over and over.

"But everything has to change if it is going to mean anything. You have to grow. How many times can I sing 'Tambourine Man' without getting sick?"

Crosby could go on and on about the difficulties in keeping a top rock group together: ego conflicts, financial disputes, philosophical differences, varying musical objectives

and more. The list of casualties in rock's still young history is sobering: Cream, the Lovin' Spoonful, Traffic, the Mamas and the Papas. And that's just the start. Several other groups have undergone major personnel changes.

In Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, the rock world has four strong personalities. Each is a fine writer, an accomplished musician and experienced lead vocalist. Each had reservations about joining another group. But each seems committed to making it work.

"We've all paid the same dues," said Crosby. "Everyone here knows that the music is the important thing. We want to play music together. I believe we can do it.

"They are the most talented, most creative, most straight ahead people I've ever worked with. On the new album, I'm having the best recording session of my life," he went on. "I've wanted to work with Stills ever since I first

heard him. I almost quit my band at one time to join him in Springfield."

It is a tribute to Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young that the group was booked into the Greek Theater before their first album was released and before they ever made a public appearance together.

But the Greek engagement and the numerous offers from promoters around the country are understandable in the context of recent rock history. Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young have some impressive credentials.

Crosby is a former member of the Byrds, one of the nation's most creative and most popular rock groups. He wrote many of the Byrds' songs, though the group used such Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger material as "Mr. Tambourine Man," "All I Really Want to Do" and "Turn, Turn, Turn" to gain initial attention.

Nash was one of the prime forces behind the Hollies, one of the many English groups that surfaced after the success of



From the left, Neil Young, David Crosby, Steve Stills, Graham Nash, known professionally as Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, open at Greek Monday.

the Beatles. He left the group last December after some differences over the future direction of the group. He had higher artistic sights than the other members of the Hollies.

Stills and Young were both members of the Buffalo Springfield, an American rock group that never achieved as much popular recognition as it did critical acclaim. The group disbanded after several economic and personal problems.

At the Greek, Stills said, the group will do most of the songs from the first Atlantic album and some of the songs from the new album that will be released this fall.

"We'll open up simple," he said. "We'll just have a guitar at first. Then we'll do a couple of songs, then add another guitar. Then we'll do a couple of more songs and keep adding instruments. Gradually, we'll bring it all together."

On their first album titled simply "Crosby,

Stills and Nash"), there is enough for each member of the group to take a bow. Though they have been together only a few months, the album features a closeness that makes one think they've been playing together for years.

The addition of Young, who already has two of his own albums out on Reprise, will add some country soul to a sound that is too "sweet" in spots.

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songs, including the excellent "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," were written by Stills. Three songs, including "Marrakesh Express" which received some top-40 radio play, were written by Nash. Crosby wrote two other songs and joined with Stills in writing another one.

The birth of CSNY was a casual, almost accidental thing. "Nobody said anything for days," Stills recalled. "We just played a lot and laughed a lot."

Nash said things began getting serious when, after returning to London, he caught the next plane back to Los Angeles to resume playing with Crosby and Stills.

The regular gatherings at Stills' house carry the same enthusiasm as those early sessions.

After a family style spaghetti dinner, the group, including Joni Mitchell, who will be with them at the Greek, went into a side room that had been converted

into a rehearsal area.

The walls of the room are covered with insulation while the floor space is taken up largely by a piano, organ, amplifiers, microphones and guitars.

Young picked up one of the electric guitars, smiled at Stills, who was sitting at the organ, and began picking on the strings. Crosby, playing a 12-string guitar, joined in. Nash, seated nearby, added some licks from an acoustic guitar. Because of a throat problem, he was under doctor's orders not to sing for a while. As the rhythm started, it was hard, clearly, for him to restrain from harmonizing with Stills.

"Each of us brings something to the group," Stills said. "We have a hundred different directions to go. We'll do some rock 'n' roll tunes, some jazz tunes, some country tunes. The thing we do together is much greater than any one of us. We've got to keep the 'we' more important than the 'I.'"