

'Deja Vu' Example of Quality Rock

BY ROBERT HILBURN

● The release this month of the new Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young album provides an excellent opportunity to reflect upon the current course of rock music. The album, "Deja Vu" (Atlantic SD 7200), is an important step in that course.

Throughout its history, rock music has been based almost exclusively on individual or collective enjoyment. It has rarely reached anywhere near the level of artistic achievement as its competitive musical fields.

Despite their enormous popularity and importance, no one really felt such early rock figures as Fats Domino, Little Richard, Bill Haley or the Platters were accomplished musicians. Their music was fun and exciting, but their mistakes were applauded as fiercely as whatever ability they demonstrated.

Similarly, most of the rock successors—even such excellent groups as the Rolling Stones and Creedence Clearwater Revival—have depended more on audience enjoyment than musical admiration.

But rock, slowly, is beginning to develop groups that can be admired for their musical abilities as much as for the entertainment they bring to an audience. This is important if rock is to survive as a valid form of musical expression.

The Beatles, of course, were the first group to advance the basic forms of rock. Several other groups tried to do the same, but the Band and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young are, to my mind, the only ones that have done it successfully.

In some ways, these two groups have surpassed even the Beatles, at present, in such areas as creative use of harmony, matching instrumentation with theme and in lyric sophistication.

An example of this high level of ability is present in Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's "Deja Vu," easily the best rock album of the new year.

The group's talents, as shown in its first album and in its string of personal appearances, are varied. Because each member of the group came from other major rock outfits, each is an experienced performer. More important, each is a respected singer, writer and musician.

The group includes David Crosby (from the Byrds), Stephen Stills (from the Buffalo Springfield), Graham Nash (from the Hollies) and Neil Young (also from the Springfield). In addition, Dallas Taylor is on drums and Gregg Reeves is on bass.

"Deja Vu" opens with "Carry On," a Stills composition that features harmony very much like that found throughout the group's first album. It is a nice selection, but little advance over the first album.

The second selection, Nash's "Teach Your Children," is one of three remarkably fine cuts on the album. The song features a masterful country instrumentation (including Jerry Garcia's steel guitar) around a plea for understanding between the generations.

The song, approaching the same subject matter from the young people's viewpoint and the parents' viewpoint, stresses the need to set examples and then let the other party choose his own way without demanding reasons:

*Don't you ever ask them why.
If they ever told you, you would cry.
So just look at them and sigh.
And know they love you.*

Nash's other major contribution to the album is "Our House," a beautiful love tale that underscores the importance of economy in music. Stills' "4 and 20," another highlight, speaks of various forms of poverty (from material goods to the absence of love).

On Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock" (which is receiving much radio play) and Stills-Young's "Everybody Loves You," the group shows its full range of talent. Both the vocal and instrumental efforts are of the highest order.

The album also features Young's "Helpless" and "Country Girl" plus Crosby's "Almost Cut My Hair" and "Deja Vu."

While there are some weak spots, it is one of the best rock albums ever.