

# Neil Young Appears Singly

That the music Neil Young makes alone or with such comparatively obscure occasional associates as Crazy Horse is fully as potent as that made in the past by Buffalo Springfield or in the present by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young (the former for whom he wrote and sang an armful of exceptional and never-to-be-forgotten songs, the latter for whom he supplies a previously-missed modicum of guts) was vividly demonstrated in one of his rare separately-billed appearances last weekend at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium.

As is his custom, Young began his show by performing acoustically such universal favorites as "Nowadays Clancy Can't Even Sing" and "I Am a Child" (from the Springfield catalog to which he contributed so prolifically), "The Loner" (from the early days of his short-lived post-Springfield solo career), "Helpless, Helpless" and "Country Girl" (arguably the two loveliest selections from the new Crosby, etc. album), and beautiful new things like "We're All Alone."

## Trembling Voice

Nearly all of these are characterized by the gentle undercurrents of futility, desperation, and hopeless longing that pervade almost all of his work. His shy and quietly trembling half-voice (which more surrounds than actually hits a given note) renders each of them almost indescribably moving—in the presence of that awkward but perfect voice one can't help but realize that Young is singing of real, rather than vicarious, pain.

In his outsider's vision of a world that defies the intrusion of one it has labeled misfit he may be thought of as the North American counterpart of Ray Davies.

## Unbearable Tension

Young saves those songs in which he replaces quietly resentful acquiescence with aggression for the electric half of his performances, during which he is backed by the four-headed Crazy Horse. Exemplifying these latter songs is "Down By The River," in which the singer responds to the desperation imposed by his woman's rejection of him not with tearful nostalgia, but by murdering her.

Usually, the amplified songs are perceptibly more overtly sexual and terrifying/terrified than their acoustic precedes-



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sors. Neil's strategy on many of them is to almost recitatively sing the lyrics at the beginning and then create a feeling of almost unbearable tension before their final appearance by conducting endless vibrato-laden guitar rampages

while Crazy Horse keeps pounding away on one chord. Thus, what he plays during these solos becomes of secondary interest to how long he plays it while he and the band set up the listener for their vocal knockout punch.

Although this usually enormously effective tactic becomes tiring when over-used (as it was Saturday night—"Cowgirl In The Sand" and "Down By The River" should never appear in the same set, as one tends to nullify the other) and Neil apparently feels compelled to indulge Crazy Horse's proclivity for mundane "country-rock" stylizations, the electric portion of his show is generally as exhilarating as the acoustic portion is quietly exquisite.

To my mind, he's the best thing American rock 'n' roll has going for itself at the moment.

—JOHN MENDELSON