

RUST NEVER SLEEPS



When asked recently in a rare interview what it was like at the top, Neil Young replied: "When I get there, I'll drop a line."

Young is a collection of paradoxes. He's never courted stardom and often openly ridicules it, yet he's the stuff legends are made of. He's an incurable cynic, but can still sing a line like "Hey, hey, my, my, rock n' roll will never die", without sounding naive. (I've argued that particular line with several people who say it's tongue in cheek. I maintain it's sincere, saying the music will outlast those who make it. History is on my side.)

Neil Young has become a winner at the art of losing. Music has cost him several friends, his health and a couple of marriages. Yet he keeps on keeping on.

Young knows full well the dangers of being complacent. He only needs to look at his former colleagues, Grumpy, Sneezy and Dopey, I mean, Steve, Graham and David. He could have continued re-writing *Harvest* the rest of his days and become the darling of the biodegradable set. Instead, in his own words, he left the middle of the road and veered towards the ditch, where the people were more interesting.

Essential Danger

Young is the man walking along the edge of a cliff, or sitting on a window ledge and wondering whether to jump. It's the hint of danger that he thrives on, even though it threatens to kill him. Maybe it will yet. All that is certain is that he's at his best when frightened, angry or distressed. Witness "Tonight's The Night", his harrowing evocation of his dead junkie friends, Danny Whitten and Bruce Berry. Far more effective than the twee "Needle And The Damage Done".

Young's recorded output has always been erratic because of the intensely personal nature of his songs and his private traumas. But just lately, he seems to have come to terms with himself. His anguish, from which he drives his strength, is undiminished. But he seems now to be able to view people and events more objectively, and with humour.

A sense of humour pervades his soon-to-be-released movie, *Rust Never Sleeps*. Long held up for lack of a distributor, it's Young's second venture into films. His first, *Journey Through The Past*, was a self-indulgent montage, filled with imagery significant only to the man himself. It bombed.

Rust, however, is totally without pretension. It is simply an excellent in-concert film, capturing the essence of a great gig, screwups and all, with a little window dressing that reflects Young's taste for the ludicrous.

Thus behind the band are huge mockups of Fender amps, stemming from an idea Young had in rehearsal one day. Crazy Horse use very small amps, though you wouldn't know from the fullness of their stage sound. Yet to Young it looked like a pile of junk. So why not show it up for what it is? The trappings of stardom.

"Roadeyes"

The roadies, or "Roadeyes" as they're known in the film, are robed, red-eyed copies of the Jawas, little gnome-like creatures who collected space junk in *Star Wars*. Another great American institution.

Young was left out of the *Woodstock* film, so he uses the soundtrack during intermissions on stage. Ten years after, and does anyone really care what happened there now? Certainly not Neil Young.

The first part of the film is introspective as Young, perched atop one of the huge fake amps, strums his way through a solo acoustic set that includes the nostalgia of "Sugar Moun-

tain" and "I Am A Child." He seems nervous and detached, unaware of the audience, playing to himself as he wanders the stage, re-creating the old image of the strolling troubador.

The rest is pure electricity, as Young is joined by Crazy Horse (Frank Sampedro, Billy Talbot and Ralph Molina) and tears into a breathtaking "When You Dance I Can Really Love." If you have *Live Rust* you'll know what else follows (only "Tonight's The Night" is omitted). Crazy Horse could never be called an elegant or technically brilliant band, but their muddy, distorted sound matches Young's shambling onstage persona. He wouldn't look or sound right with any other band. In their own way, they are superb.

Young has always had a casual approach towards his work, and *Rust Never Sleeps* is no exception. Like *The Last Waltz*, the film has a grainy quality, even though thousands were

spent on lighting the venue. But who wants studio conditions anyway? It's atmosphere we're after, and on that score, *Rust* knocks *The Last Waltz* into a cocked hat. The sound balance is a trifle awry, despite later attempts to tidy it up with studio overdubs.

Shakey Direction

Young directed the film himself under the pseudonym of Bernard Shakey. He now has his own studios for editing films and doing soundtracks, but what he'll do next, only he knows. He never bothers to tell anyone, and was last heard of aboard a yacht adrift in the Pacific. He'll doubtless re-emerge sometime, but it's likely he's already forgotten about *Rust Never Sleeps*. He keeps looking ahead, even though he does take time to put his thoughts into actions.

Neil Young has made many transitions in his career. He remains an essentially private per-

son, and *Rust Never Sleeps* gives little new insight into the man behind the cult. That's not his intention.

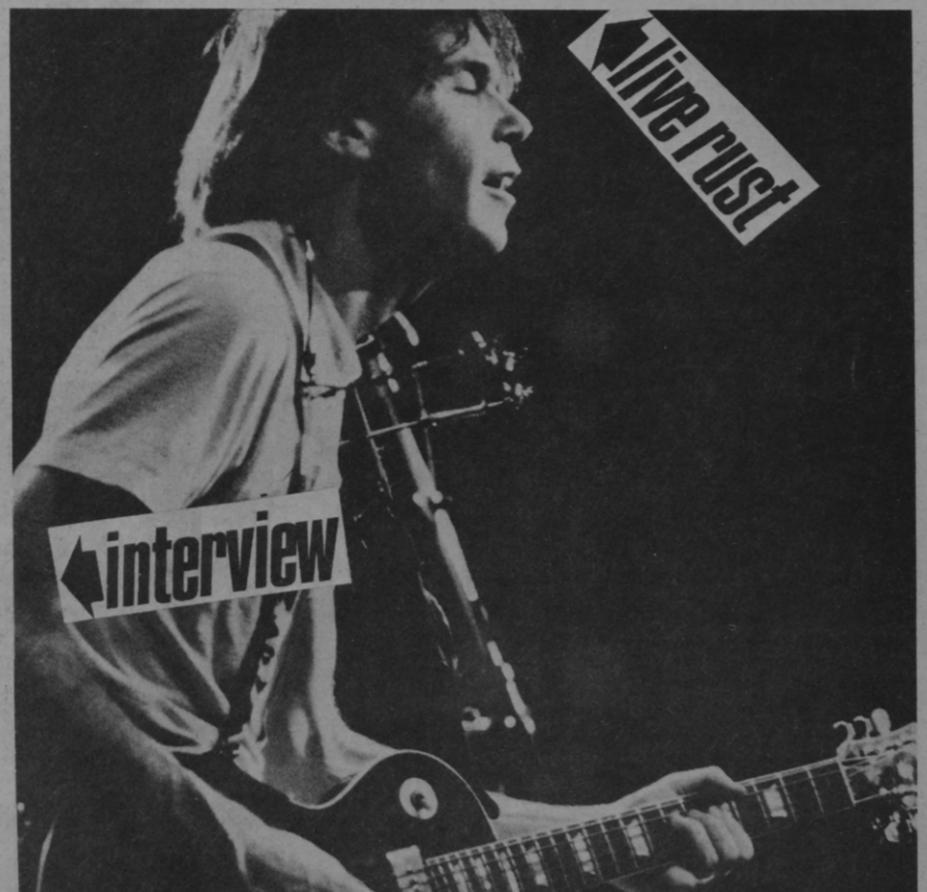
Rust Never Sleeps celebrates Young's enormous contribution to contemporary music. Some may be distracted by the bizarre visuals onstage. Young has been accused of belittling his music with this approach, but as he says, it's those who take themselves too seriously who are the first to go rusty.

Neil Young may well burn out before he reaches what he considers to be the top. Even so, the wealth of his talent will have touched many. *Rust Never Sleeps* is all the proof you need.

There was a band playin' in my head and I felt like gettin' high...

("After The Goldrush")

Duncan Campbell



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How did you end up in L.A.?

I knew that if I came down here, I would at least get a good shot at it, whereas, if I'd stayed in Canada, I would have probably still done really well, and nobody would know who I was. There just aren't enough people up there. If you're going to take a shot at it, it's got to be from the centre.

But did you know from an early age that you wanted to write songs?

Yes. From about nine, I think. There's a song, "Don't Cry No Tears", I wrote before I was fifteen, I know that.

Did you come to L.A. cold, or did you know people there?

No, I didn't know anybody there. I was lucky to run into Stephen Stills, who I had met in Canada, and I stuck around and things worked out.

How many years was Buffalo Springfield?

Eighteen months. The time between my last record and this one. It sort of blows my mind when I think of it now.

What was the next step for you after that?

I sort of dropped out of the group. I couldn't handle it — I don't know why, but something inside of me felt like I wasn't quite on the track. I think it was around the time of the Monterey Pop Festival.

So after that you took a vacation?

No. I started work on my own album straight away.

And then you got involved with Crosby, Stills and Nash?

When Stephen approached me, I thought they needed someone for the live part, where they didn't have enough electric guitars or something — rock and roll to maintain over the folk harmony thing. When I first joined the group, they didn't want to use my name. They just wanted to be Crosby, Stills and Nash. I thought, "Well, what's in it for me?" Eventually, they saw the point, that it should be "and

Young" on the end.

In that group I was always like an add-on. Even when we played live, I didn't come out at first. I came on later, which was good for me. It separated me. I didn't really want to be grouped in with another bunch of people — I wanted to be myself.

Do you think, in your wildest imagination, that there will ever be another C.S.N. & Y. concert?

Maybe in my wildest imagination, but that's about it. Any way, who still cares? It's better for them to remember how it was than to see what might happen.