



SHAKEY
JIMMY MCDONOUGH

Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Picture Credits

Dedication

Title Page

Epigraph

1. Innaresting Characters
2. Mr. Blue & Mr. Red
3. Leaving Things Behind
4. A Big Blur of Images
5. Mind Over Matter
6. The Red-Haired Guy
7. Growin' Up, Blowin' Up
8. The No Men
9. More Real
10. The Guy with the Balls
11. Cut to the Lizards
12. World on a String
13. Group Art
14. Shit Mary, I can't Dance
15. Harpoon Dodger
16. A Bigger Flash in the Sky
17. A Voice No One could Recognize
18. Meadow Dusk
19. The Velvet Cage
20. Big Business, Small Scale
21. Drain You
22. Vampire Blues

23. Have You Ever Been Lost?

24. A Solo Trip

Picture Section

Source Notes

Acknowledgments

Selected Bibliography

Index

Copyright

About the Book

Neil Young is one of rock and roll's most important, influential and enigmatic figures, an intensely reticent artist who has granted no writer access to his inner sanctum - until now. *Shakey* is the whole story of Young's incredible life and career: from his childhood in Canada to the founding of folk-rock pioneers Buffalo Springfield; the bleary conglomeration of Crazy Horse and the monstrous success of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; to the depths of the *Tonight's the Night* depravity and the Geffen years; and Young's unprecedented nineties 'comeback'.

Shakey (the title refers to one of Young's many aliases) is also the compelling human story of a lonely kid for whom music was the only outlet, a driven yet tortured figure who controlled his epilepsy via 'mind over matter', an oddly passionate model train mogul who, inspired by his own son's struggle with cerebral palsy, became a major activist in the quest to help those with the condition.

This long-awaited, unprecedented story of a rock 'n' roll legend is uniquely told through the interwoven voices of McDonough - biographer, critic, historian, obsessive fan - and the ever-cantankerous (but slyly funny) Young himself.

About the Author

JIMMY McDONOUGH is a journalist who has contributed to such publications as *Variety*, *Film Comment*, *Mojo*, *Spin* and *Juggs*. But he is perhaps best known for his intense, definitive *Village Voice* profiles of such artists as Jimmy Scott, Neil Young and Hubert Selby Jr. Jimmy is also the author of *The Ghastly One: The Sex-Gore Netherworld of Filmmaker Andy Milligan*. He lives in the Pacific Northwest.

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*for George "The Johnson" Hedges
for Carole Nicksin and her Razor Love*

Jimmy McDonough

SHAKEY

Neil Young's Biography

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

Just think of me as one you never figured.

—Neil Young, “Powderfinger”

innaresting characters

—Who gave you the Nixon mask?

I can't recall, as John Dean would say. I'll always tell ya if I remember, Jimmy. You talk about things and it comes back.

—Every question seems to stir up something in you.

Not the answers you were looking for ... but they're answers, heh heh. Hard to remember things. It's all there, though. Maybe we oughta go into hypnotherapy, fuckin' go right back. Take like, six months to get zoned in on the Tonight's the Night sessions—exactly what was happening?

"Okay, we're gonna go back a little further today, Neil. ..."

—I'm frustrated.

Hey, well, you've been frustrated since the beginning, heh heh. You're not frustrated because of this—we're doing it. You're asking questions and I'm answering them. What could be less frustrating than THAT?

—Maybe I should tell people in the intro you don't wanna do the book.

You can tell 'em if you want. The bottom line is if it went against the grain so hard, I wouldn't be doin' it. The thing is, it's not necessarily my first love. I think that's a subtle way of puttin' it. Heh heh.

THE FIRST TIME Jon McKeig really encountered Shakey he was under a car. Shakey's a nickname—from alter ego Bernard Shakey, sometime moviemaker. It's just one of many aliases: Joe Yankee, overdubber; Shakey Deal, blues

singer; Phil Perspective, producer. The world knows him as Neil Young.

McKeig had been toiling away on Nanoo, a blue and white '59 Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz convertible of Young's, for months without actually seeing him. The car was a mess, but McKeig would soon realize that this was Shakey's M.O., buying beyond-dead wrecks for peanuts, then sparing no expense to bring them back to life. "I can name five automobiles he has that the parts cars were in better shape than the cars that were *restored*." McKeig shook his head. "That's extreme. I don't believe anybody *anywhere* goes to that length. If the car smells wrong, you're screwed; if it squeaks, it's not cool ... he's fanatical."

One day Neil happened in for a personal inspection. "Neil came right over to the car, looked at it and—I'll be damned—all of a sudden he went down to the concrete and slid right underneath. All you could see was his tennis shoes."

McKeig asked Young how far he wanted to go with the thrashed Cadillac. "Neil looked me straight in the eye and said calmly, 'As long as it's museum quality.'" McKeig shuddered. "I never heard it said like that—'museum quality.' Then he left. That's all that was said. I never saw him—for years after." Decades later, Nanoo still isn't finished.

Cars are a major part of Shakey's world. He's written countless songs in them and they figure into more than a few of his lyrics: "Trans Am," "Long May You Run," "Motor City," "Like an Inca (Hitchhiker)," "Drifter," "Roll Another Number (For the Road)," "Sedan Delivery," "Get Gone"; the list goes on.

Young would even advise me on touch-up paint and carburetor problems—until I flipped my '66 Falcon Futura twice off the side of a two-lane, nearly killing myself. Out on the road in his bus, Young called me a few days after. "See, Neil?" I said. "You tried to bump me off, but I'm still

here. Now I *gotta* finish the book.” Unnerved, he immediately called back after we hung up. “Jimmy,” he said, his voice awash in cellular static, “just want ya to know I’m *glad* ya didn’t *die* in the wreck.” Shakey and I had a colorful relationship. But that was all in the future.

Right now it was April 1991, and I was in Los Angeles, watching McKeig—now Young’s live-in auto restorer and maintenance man—pilot members of Neil’s family through the service areas of the L.A. Sports Arena in a sleek black ’54 Caddy that Young called Pearl: He nicknames everything. It was a stunning vehicle. He had paid \$400 for the car in 1974 and spent years and a fortune restoring it. Legend has it that some rich Arab saw Young tooling Pearl through Hollywood and offered him a pile of loot on the spot.

Out of the Caddy’s backseat emerged Neil’s wife, Pegi, a striking blonde and a powerful force in her own right. She and Neil have two children, Ben and Amber. Family is a priority to both of them. Ben, born spastic, nonoral and quadriplegic, went everywhere with his mom and pop. It wasn’t unusual to see him at the side of the stage in his wheelchair, watching his father work.

“Spud,” Ben’s nickname, graced the door of Pocahontas, which was parked not far from Pearl. A huge, Belgian-made ’70 Silver Eagle, forty feet long and sporting a souped-up mill, the bus had been Young’s home on the road since 1976. Young had gone to outlandish lengths in customizing it. Down one side was an extravagant stained-glass comet circling the earth; the roof was domed with vintage Hudson Hornet/Studebaker Starlight Coupe cartops that acted as skylights. The interior of the bus—designed under Young’s supervision to resemble the skeletal structure of a giant bird—was lavish with hand-carved wood, down to the door handle of the microwave. Above the big front windows hung a large brass eagle’s eye. “This bus is so fucked up

and over the top,” Young would tell me with a grin. “Which is just how I was back in the mid-seventies when I built it.”

Bus driver Joe McKenna was making sure Pocahontas was shipshape for Neil’s arrival. An Irishman with a low-slung belly, a silver pompadour and a voice lower than a frog’s, Joe loved the golf course and let little faze him. He seemed to have a calming effect on Young, who once dubbed him “The Lucky Leprechaun.” McKenna would beat cancer after Young helped him get alternative medical help. “Neil Young saved my life,” he told me. “Put that in your book.”

Next to the steering wheel hung a sign that read in bold block letters, DON’T SPILL THE SOUP. I wouldn’t have driven that bus for love, money or drugs. When it came to Pocahontas, Shakey was like a hawk. He knew every ding and dimple and wanted the ones he didn’t know explained immediately.

An intense relationship with his bus drivers, I mused, but tour manager Bob Sterne set me straight. “In all honesty, I think the intense relationship is with the bus,” said Sterne, a big, bearded, no-nonsense monolith with a constantly peeling nose and sporting a Cruex jock itch ointment T-shirt. Sterne and Joe McKenna weren’t exactly the best of pals. Sterne was forever seeking info on Young’s elusive doings and one of McKenna’s jobs was to keep the world away.

Bob was no stranger to that task—his makeshift office inside the sports arena was plastered with signs like IF YOU WANT A BACKSTAGE PASS, GET LOST. Sterne was hard-core. It came with the territory. “Neil’s not gonna do what you think he’s gonna do or what he said last week—it’s not a good place for the average person to be. The people who are looking for a paycheck don’t last long.”

Young likes to keep everyone on their toes. “Neil’s come to me and said, ‘Go get all the set lists and throw ’em in the trash can’—and he said this to me fifteen minutes before

the show,” said Sterne. “He’s not just talking about the band’s set list, he’s talking about the lighting guys, the sound guys—every single set list *in the building*.”

Sitting in the office not far from Sterne was Tim Foster, Young’s stage manager and primary roadie. Foster had worked for Young off and on—mostly on—since 1973. With a Dick Tracy chin, a mustache and a baseball cap pulled down to his eyes, Foster saw everything and said little. “Tim never gets flustered,” said Sterne. “He understands Neil has no schedule.”

Making his way through the backstage maze out to the arena’s mixing station was Tim Mulligan, his long hair, mustache and shades making him look like the world’s most sullen Doobie Brother. Nothing impresses Mulligan. He’s been working on Young’s albums and mixing his live sound for decades. “Producers, engineers come and go,” said Sterne. “Mulligan hangs in there. He doesn’t have an opinion.” Tim lives alone on Young’s ranch, without a phone. “Mulligan has this incredible allegiance,” said longtime Young associate “Ranger Dave” Cline. “He lives and breathes Neil. It’s his whole life.”

It took years for Mulligan to warm to me, and even then he wouldn’t give me an interview, just tersely answered a few questions. Getting any one of Young’s crew to talk was like breaking into the Mafia. They were fiercely devoted, and although they’d all been subject to the ferocious twists and turns of Neil’s psyche, most had been around for decades. And every one of them was an individual. “Innaresting characters,” as Young would put it. “They’re all Neil,” said Graham Nash. “They all represent a slice of Neil’s personality.”

“Neil likes quirky people around him,” said Elliot Roberts, Young’s manager since the late sixties. “I think having quirky people around him lessens—in his mind—his own quiriness. ‘Yes, I am standing on my head, but look at these two other guys *nude* standing on their head.’”

His mane of gray hair flying, Roberts was on his ninety-sixth phone call of the day, either chewing out some record-company underling or closing a million-dollar deal. Not far away, a bearded, sunglassed David Briggs—Young’s producer—prowled the stage, palming a cigarette J.D.-style and looking like the devil himself. Briggs and Roberts were the twin engines that powered the Neil Young hot rod. Feared, at times hated, both men possessed killer instincts and had been with Neil almost from the beginning. Roberts was a genius at pushing Young’s career, Briggs at pushing his art. It’s an understatement to say the two didn’t always see eye to eye.

Roberts and Briggs were two of the quirkiest characters around—difficult, complicated men—but then so was just about everybody and everything in Young’s world. “Let’s look at Neil’s whole trip—the ranch, the people he plays with,” said computer wizard Bryan Bell, who worked extensively with Young in the late eighties. “‘Easy’ isn’t in the vocabulary.”

“Neil is wonderful to work for in many ways and very difficult to work with in many ways,” said Roger Katz, former captain of Young’s boat. “He’s able to control most everything.” As David Briggs put it, “It’s not fun at all working with Neil—fun’s not part of the deal—but it’s very fulfilling.”

I asked Young’s guitar tech Larry Cragg what the hardest tour had been. “*All* of ‘em,” he said. “They’ve all been rough—every one of ‘em made workin’ for anybody else real easy. The tours are out of the ordinary, the music, the movies—everything’s out of the ordinary. We do things differently around here. That’s just the way it is.”

Cragg was tinkering with Young’s guitar rig, which sat in a little area to the rear of the stage. A gaggle of amps—a Magnatone, a huge transistorized Baldwin Exterminator, a Fender Reverb unit and the heart of it all: a small, weather-beaten box covered in worn-out tweed, 1959 vintage. “The

Deluxe,” muttered amp tech Sal Trentino with awe. “Neil’s got four hundred and fifty-six identical Deluxes. They sound *nothing* like this one.” Young runs the amp with oversized tubes, and Cragg has to keep portable fans trained on the back so it doesn’t melt down. “It really is ready to just go up in smoke, and it sounds that way—flat-out, overdriven, ready to self-destruct.”

Young has a personal relationship with electricity. In Europe, where the electrical current is sixty cycles, not fifty, he can pinpoint the fluctuation—by degrees. It dumbfounded Cragg. “He’ll say, ‘Larry, there’s a hundred and seventeen volts coming out of the wall, isn’t there?’ I’ll go measure it, and yeah, sure—he can hear the difference.”

Shakey’s innovations are everywhere. Intent on controlling amp volume from his guitar instead of the amp, Young had a remote device designed called the Whizzer. Guitarists marvel at the stomp box that lies onstage at Young’s feet: a byzantine gang of effects that can be utilized without any degradation to the original signal. Just constructing the box’s angular red wooden housing to Young’s extreme specifications had craftsmen pulling their hair out.

Cradled in a stand in front of the amps is the fuse for the dynamite, Young’s trademark ax—Old Black, a ’53 Gold Top Les Paul some knot-head daubed with black paint eons ago. Old Black’s features include a Bigsby wang bar, which pulls strings and bends notes, and a Firebird pickup so sensitive you can talk through it. It’s a demonic instrument. “Old Black doesn’t sound like any other guitar,” said Cragg, shaking his head.

For Cragg, Old Black is a nightmare. Young won’t permit the ancient frets to be changed, likes his strings old and used, and the Bigsby causes the guitar to go out of tune constantly. “At sound check, everything will work great. Neil picks up the guitar, and for some reason that’s when things go wrong.”

. . .

Meanwhile, things were starting to pick up backstage. The usual music-biz ninnies and nincompoops were filtering in—a record exec here, a rock critic there—along with the requisite local celebrities, among them such actual friends of Young’s as actors Russ Tamblyn and Dennis Hopper. After the show, most would’ve given up waiting by the time Young would finally emerge from the dressing room.

Show time was fast approaching. I saw no sign of Shakey, but everybody seemed to be walking a bit straighter backstage. I figured he must be holed up in his bus. Zeke Young, the product of Neil’s troubled, long-ago liaison with actress Carrie Snodgrass, confirmed it. Zeke’s furrowed brow, crooked grin and lonesome, lost-in-a-dream look made him a dirty-blond ringer for his father circa 1971. Looking toward Pocahontas, Zeke clued me in to the meaning of the California state flag draped inside the big front window: “The flag with the bear means chill. Nobody goes on the bus.”

Which meant Shakey would come out when he felt like it. Out in the house, Joel Bernstein—a baby-faced longhair who made the leap from fan to Young’s primary archivist—put it succinctly: “Neil does what he wants to do when he wants to do it and doesn’t do what he doesn’t want to do when he doesn’t want to do it.”

Here in the summer of 1991, Bernstein was deep into a career retrospective of Young’s work, and he was excited. Little did Bernstein know that it still wouldn’t be finished ten years later and he’d have a few new gray hairs to show for his trouble.

The Neil Young Archives, a projected multi-CD set of Young’s entire recorded output—released and unreleased—is emblematic of his tenaciousness and perversity. Numerous tentative release dates have come and gone since the project began in 1989. Exhaustively seeking CD

technology refinements, Young has transferred his mammoth analog tape vault to digital not once but three times—so far. He's blocked any attempts to corral Archives into a practical size and driven everybody crazy by repeatedly abandoning the project to create new music. A booklet mock-up was designed only to be immediately rejected; Young wanted a four-hundred-page book. His vision encompasses every aspect of the project down to the box cover, and rest assured, one way or another it will be carried out. Like everything else, it'll be the way Neil Young wants it, or it won't be done at all.

Everybody keeps putting their own concept on this Archives thing—what songs should be in it, shortening it, doing all this shit that has nothing to do with what I'm going to do, y'know? So what I've done is, I've just stopped all that from happening—no one can complete anything.

—They, uh, noticed, Neil.

They did?

—Oh, yeah. They noticed big-time.

It was a helluva try. Real good. But it's not what I want. I don't mind the suggestions about what are good songs ... But the pieces of shit should be there, too.

—Why?

So you know the difference. Some of it is good, some of it is crap that wasn't released—there's a reason. Take a look, see what it is. That's what a fuckin' archive is about, not "Here's Neil Young in all his wonderfulness—the great, phenomenal fucking wonderfulness." That's not what I want.

I want people to know how fuckin' terrible I was. How scared I was and how great I was. The real picture—that's what I'm looking for. Not a product. And I think that's what the die-hard fans want—the whole fuckin' thing.

And when I've done the Archives, selected everything and it's all finished, I'm gonna destroy everything else.

—Really?

I'm gonna bury it.

—You're not being glib? This is a decision you've made?

Definitely. I'm gonna dig a big fuckin' hole, dump it all in there, cover it all up. And it's gonna go away.

—But people have shovels. People close to you.

People close to me have shovels?!

—Are you the right guy to put the Archives together?

Hey—it's already together. All you have to do is make sure it's in chronological order, pick the art that goes with it, pick the packaging, put it out.

Y'know, I don't give a shit whether anybody BUYS it or not. I just wanna do it. And there may only be two hundred copies, signed by me. But it's gonna fuckin' exist. When it's done, people can do whatever the fuck they want, make any fuckin' order they want out of it. But they're gonna have the whole fuckin' thing to choose from. They're not gonna get part of it. Everything—the good, the bad, the ugly.

—Should I approach the book the same way?

No—music's different. If you put everything in the fuckin' book ... First of all, the book would be fuckin' twenty volumes long and you'd never finish it. Second of all, it'd have all kinds of shit in it that might hurt people.

At the same time, it shouldn't be a book that makes me look like I'm great and that everything I did is perfect and that the whole book is contrived and put together to justify every fuckin' thing I ever did.

—YEAH, RIGHT.

So obviously it's not gonna be that kinda book. But that's the one thing—I really don't want to hurt people. There are ways to say things where the reader can put things together. Draw their own conclusions.

The weakness of an autobiography is the lack of perspective of the person who's writing it. So, for that reason, I'll never write an autobiography. Never. I told Pegi, "Never let me do it." There's no reason.

People keep telling me that my music has helped them through periods of their life, and I've never understood how that happens, but it must happen because of the way I do it. The way I do things is I give enough facts to make people get a feeling—and then they can associate their own lives with these images that make it seem to apply directly to them. Like the song was written for them. They can't believe it's so directly and obviously about their life. That's because it's not so specific that it eliminates them.

To write an autobiography would go against the grain of all that. Plus it would be too hard. I'd rather make records. That's where my thing is. Now you say something.

—I'm gonna be institutionalized.

Fuck, we can make a lifetime outta this. This could be worse than the Archives, heh heh. We'll make an art project out of it if it fuckin' kills us. It's a book. As far as what's in it—that's up to you. I'm not gonna read it.

The show at the L.A. Sports Arena opened just like the other fifty-two on the tour—with the gut-crunching chords of “Hey Hey, My My (Into the Black).” A lean look at the demon that sometimes is rock and roll, it sports that infamous line “It's better to burn out than to fade away.” Some take it as an anthem, while others are outraged. I thought it was funny, beyond cliché. Like many Young songs, it means different things to different people.

The number had the crowd bouncing off the walls. And Shakey wasn't just preaching to the choir. There were kids, lots of them—mere babies when the song was first released—all totally lost in the moment. Young's surname is to the point: Neil Young, perhaps more than any of his peers, understands what rock is. “Rock and roll is just a name for the music of the young spirit—of what is happening right in front of us,” he said. “Something you can't plan for. Something that you didn't expect.”, ¹

Tonight Young was onstage with his greatest rock band, Crazy Horse: Frank “Poncho” Sampedro, Ralph Molina, Billy Talbot. Three musical misfits, and a band only Young could love. At any given moment, they’re capable of flubbing notes, speeding up, slowing down and generally stumbling through songs they’ve been playing for twenty years. The Horse are far from virtuosos, and so-called professional musicians have snickered at them for years. But I’d take ten hours of Crazy Horse at their absolute worst over the complete solo works of Clapton or Sting—at least it’s rarely dull. Will the song take off like a rocket or collapse before it starts? Anything’s possible with the Horse. That’s the thrill.

In the nineties, touring behind a critically acclaimed “comeback” record—*Ragged Glory*—Crazy Horse suddenly found themselves the most unlikely institution in rock. Not that it’s been a big picnic. Young has kept the Horse alive the only way he knows how: by leaving to play with other musicians, then returning when things are fresh and the urge hits. It keeps the band relevant, keeps the edge. But the toll on the Horse has been heavy. Married, then divorced, then married again.

The 1991 tour was particularly grueling, with everybody at one another’s throats by the end. But tonight Shakey was giving his all, blasting notes from Old Black that hurt—some of the best, most extreme music of his life. Not bad for a forty-five-year-old. “You can feel he surrenders,” said James Taylor. “Neil surrenders.”

Being real: This is what Young constantly strives for. Few other musicians of his stature have gone to such lengths to keep things real. He’s never put out a greatest-hits package, unless you count 1977’s *Decade*, an eccentric three-record career retrospective that didn’t even have his picture on the front cover. Young has abandoned entire albums, dumped bands and tours in a heartbeat, walked away from massive success to release drunk, out-of-tune

albums guaranteed to sell three copies, all to follow his muse. You know those one-hit wonders from days yonder, cherished because their thrown-together cacophonies somehow capture a moment in time? Nearly *all* of Young's work contains that crazy spark. And as rock has gotten bigger and slicker to the point of absurdity, Young's tried to remain as defiantly raw as ever.

"Neil's run by his art," said Elliot Roberts. "If Neil perceives he's being jive, he can't do it."

You have to be ready to give everything you have, and you have to make sure you've really got a lot to give. Because if you go out there and you're not ready to give everything you have—and you're not strong enough to give as much as you possibly can—to go right to the end of the candle, to right where it's gonna melt and be gone, then you're nothin'. You shouldn't even be there. You're just markin' time. ...²

—Interview with Laura Gross, 1988

Ten months later, Young was out on the road again, playing a six-day solo stand at the Beacon Theatre in New York City. Watching him alone on the stage, encircled by acoustic instruments, I found it hard to believe that this was the same guy who'd been thrashing bent notes and noise out of Old Black. "Neil likes playing in groups, but basically he's a solo artist,"³ the late Horse guitarist, Danny Whitten, had said. "Deep down he knows he has to do the gig by himself."

The Beacon shows were as tranquil as the Horse shows were deafening, a completely different animal. "I get into each thing I do—to the point where nothing else matters. I guess I'm an extremist,"⁴ said Young in 1989.

A chameleon, Young has thrown himself whole hog into everything he's done, from fifties rock and country to R&B and techno pop, but it all spirals out of two extremes: raw,

rampaging four-piece rock and roll or lonesome, naked solo acoustic. “Neil can captivate an audience and hold ‘em there for two hours—just him and his guitar,” said Willie Nelson.

But here he faced your typical New York City crowd—hungry for blood. They wanted the hits, they wanted Old Black and they wanted anything but what Young was giving them—a bunch of tender new songs they’d never heard before. He sparred with the audience, yelled at them, cajoled them, but most of all he kept right on playing. “What a fuckin’ horror show,” Young said later. “They sure didn’t wanna hear any of those songs—but they did anyway, didn’t they?” Young would have the last laugh, as usual. *Harvest Moon*, consisting of the songs the audience had been so impatient with, would be one of the biggest hits of his career.

Compared to the *Ragged Glory* extravaganza, the *Harvest Moon* tour was bare bones—a handful of crew guys, Shakey and his bus. Golfing would take the place of rehearsals, and Young seemed to revel in the unpredictability of the shows. I went skulking around backstage, hoping to nab an interview. Little did I know I’d have to chase Young for another year and a half. The usual celebrity flotsam milled about—tired hipster comedians and the latest rock nonentities, all groveling. But one guest was being mentioned only in reverential whispers: Bob Dylan.

Dylan attended all six of the Beacon shows, hanging out in Young’s tour bus between performances. Two of rock’s greatest iconoclasts sitting around shooting the shit. They’ve been friends for decades and, since the mid-seventies, have played the occasional benefit together, with Young also showing up at a few Dylan shows, guitar in hand. Young has covered Dylan songs, most notably “All Along the Watchtower”; Dylan, to my knowledge, has never returned the favor (outside of singing along on a ragged “Helpless” during a 1974 benefit). Four years older than

Young, Dylan had done it all first and best, and without him you'd have no Neil, who has no illusions of where he stands in comparison. "I'm, like, a B student of this fuckin' guy—he's the real thing." But these days, who was there after Dylan?

Elliot Roberts has managed both Dylan and Young. "They're both very flighty. They have the exact same road habits, they prep the same way. They're very, very similar in what satisfies them—good shows, bad shows. There's some huge dissimilarities. Bob likes to have his families in place and go to them. He's on the move, doesn't like to stay in one place long. Neil will stay in one place forever, given the opportunity."

"Neil's eccentric with a purpose—Bob's eccentric with a purpose, but I'm not quite sure what that purpose is, and the only person who knows what that purpose is may be Bob," said tour manager Richard Fernandez, who's worked for both of them. "Everybody else is speculating."

The difference in their art? Neil's longtime friend Sandy Mazzeo saw it this way: "Dylan's songs are what's happening all around him. Neil writes about inside."

The quintessential Dylan/Young interaction occurred in June 1988. Dylan was on tour in California when Neil decided to sit in for a couple of shows. "Neil drove up in his Cadillac convertible, his Silvertone amp in the back," recalls Fernandez. Was Young ever intimidated to be joining one of his heroes onstage? "I've never seen him be intimidated by *anyone* musically," said David Briggs. "If Willie is playin' with Neil, Willie follows Neil. If Neil is playin' with Waylon, Waylon follows Neil. When he's got his ax in hand, his aura becomes solid. He's the gun."

Even with Dylan, Young was the gun, and as much as Bob loves Neil, he quickly found himself in the line of fire. "Neil took over the whole show," said Elliot Roberts, who was listening to Dylan's postshow apprehension over Young playing the next night when Neil bounded over. "Great

show! See ya tomorrow night, Bob?” “Yeah, Neil,” said Bob wearily. Even Dylan can’t say no.

At the Beacon, an extra guitar was set up at the end of the final show, and the buzz was that Dylan was going to step out for a number or two. He never showed.

...

“The other day I was thinking about Neil Young’s voice,”⁵ Rickie Lee Jones writes. “Hesitant, whiny, masculine and feminine. ... all the sadness and the unresolved [in his voice conveys] what it’s like to be a teenager. You are saying goodbye to childhood in those years.” For Jones, Young is the sound of that goodbye, a voice that speaks freely and immediately, unhampered by “adult” restraints. The impromptu, unedited nature of Young’s art only adds to the reality, and what’s left off the canvas is just as important as the paint sloshed on.

“His songs were never finished pictures. He’d look at this, he’d say this, he’d feel this. But things usually didn’t have a clear moral meaning at the end, there was no punch line, no reason for the lyrical journey. ...” In these unfrivolous sentences Jones conjures up much of what’s special about this guy. For her, as for so many others, Neil Young possesses an “unquestioned integrity.”

Although it’s mellowed into melancholy over the years, Young’s voice is one of pain. A Canadian, he’s written a cockeyed history of America as evocative and spare as any Walker Evans photograph. His songs don’t provide any answers, they just underline the questions.

Young’s output is overwhelming. From 1967 to 2001, forty-six albums, seven certified platinum, nine gold (as of 1997). Over four hundred songs. First-person confessional songs, time-travel songs, character songs, hallucinatory songs, one-joke songs—*every* kind of song, yet all instantly identifiable as Neil Young. “Expecting to Fly,” “Mr. Soul,”

“Cowgirl in the Sand,” “Helpless,” “I Believe in You,” “Harvest,” “Tired Eyes,” “On the Beach,” “Star of Bethlehem,” “Will to Love,” “Like a Hurricane,” “Danger Bird,” “Powderfinger,” “Transformer Man,” “Depression Blues,” “Rockin’ in the Free World,” “Fuckin’ Up,” “Unknown Legend,” “My Heart,” “I’m the Ocean.”

And that’s just a few highlights from released material. In the Archives lurk songs and performances that stand among his absolute greatest, yet have never been heard. Entire albums that were hidden away because Neil changed his mind. Add to that three feature-length films, two soundtracks, scores of video projects and countless tours. Everything Young touches bears his unmistakable stamp, whether it’s a song, an album cover, car or guitar. Neil Young is a visionary, and for many he’s one of the few reminders outside of Dylan that anything happened at all in the sixties.

RANDY NEWMAN: Most people did their best work when they were younger. Neil Young is as good as he ever was, which is quite an accomplishment. ... It seems like there’s no tricks to him. I don’t know if you could name anybody better who came out of rock and roll.

LINK WRAY: Neil’s a superstar, but he don’t let it get in the way. If he wanted to be a phony, he could. Not this guy. He chooses not to. Neil’s always been real.

LINDA RONSTADT: Most of us only get a year to top the charts, then you’re out of style. Neil has had an *astounding* career.

ELTON JOHN: Neil has remained on top of his game on all counts—there’s not many people you can say that about. He can move me whether he’s playing loud music, soft music or country music. There’s so many different facets to

Neil, and I think that's why he has so much respect from everybody, whether they're older musicians like myself or the younger generation like the Pearl Jams. He just goes out there and gives it his all.

JAMES TAYLOR: I love his attitude. It's meant a lot to me. His clear stand on things like sponsorship and the sort of corporate takeover of music ... Neil's always resisted that. It's good to have someone like him out there talk the way he talks—and walk the walk, too.

DAVID BOWIE: I have an incredible admiration for Neil. There's a youthful redemption in everything he does, a joyfulness about being an independent thinker in America.⁶

WILLIE NELSON: What can you say? The guy knows how to write a song. He's more than a writer, more than a singer, he's an entertainer. To be a triple threat like that is very rare.

BRYAN FERRY: I like Neil Young. Very much.

J. J. CALE: There's nobody that sounds like Neil Young. A very, very original sound. If he has influences, they don't show.

DEAN STOCKWELL: I can't think of anyone I respect more than Neil Young. I think he's one of the greatest—if not the greatest—living artists.

PETER BUCK: I'm always inspired when I look at Neil Young and realize he's doing whatever the fuck he wants. Some of his messages are positive, some are negative, some don't make any sense at all.⁷

EDDIE VEDDER: I don't know if there's been another artist inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame that is still as

vital as he is today. Some of his best songs were on his last record.⁸

EMMYLOU HARRIS: He's timeless, his music is almost mystical. Neil makes brilliant records and they're easily identifiable. You don't have to be told who it is. He's an original. I can't think of anybody who's even close to him.

THURSTON MOORE: Neil's the real thing. He's Hank Williams.

TOWNES VAN ZANDT: I can read auras—pale green is trouble, boy. I know a lotta cats with green ones—most of them are dead. And there's one that's more golden, glowing, approaching fulfilled—that has fulfilled other people. Neil has that. Neil's is gold. Gold.

Despite the platitudes, Neil Young remains a lonesome figure. He is reclusive and mysterious even to those closest to him. His friendships are all based on his work, which never seems to end. And while Young has played with many bands—Buffalo Springfield; Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; Crazy Horse; the Stray Gators; Booker T. and the MGs; Pearl Jam—he would tell the audience at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995, “It's a solo trip.”

And, though he'd never admit it, it's not an easy journey. From the beginning, Young faced ridiculous odds. He was told he couldn't sing, couldn't play guitar, couldn't write. But he's let nothing stop him. Young has not only succeeded, he's prevailed.

He's a model-train mogul, actor, rancher and, although he'd probably be loath to admit it, a humanitarian. He's raised millions for the American farmer as a founding member of Farm Aid and, with Pegi, done the same for children through the Bridge School. Young shoots from the hip. He's been a cantankerous critic of the music business,