

# Maverick Neil Young returns to sing happier tune on 'Stars 'n Bars'

Review by Andy Riggs

Neil Young is a maverick. When he was with Crosby, Stills, and Nash, he was the one that added the slashing guitar, the roughness to their sound.

Since the falling out with CSN, Neil Young has been through drunkenness and despair, as well as death and drugs in his music. Now, with CSN back together, Neil Young is still on his own. But, he seems happier these days.

## music

With the release of his latest album, *American Stars 'n Bars*, Young is back to his old self as we knew him during the Crazy Horse days.

The album contains a collection of music by Young from as far back as 1974. The first side contains the newest material with Crazy Horse, a band that Young has worked with for a long time. They may be the only band to successfully get along with Young. *American Stars 'n Bars* is a classic Young/Crazy Horse composition.

Side one is enhanced by the presence of new sound additions to the band. Ben Keith is a new member of Crazy Horse, playing the steel guitar. Linda Ronstadt and Nicolette Larson back Young with strong vocals, and Carole Mayedo dances on the violin so well you think you're at a hoedown.

Young plays acoustic guitar on three of five songs, leaving the electric to Frank Sampedro, who does an adequate job. The side expresses Young's moodiness, ranging from balladish love songs (*Hey Babe*) to classic rockers (*Bite the Bullet*).

*The Old Country Waltz* is a country tune aided heavily by violin and pedal steel guitar, but the vocal by Young is

easily recognizable. This song could probably be found on juke boxes in Texas.

*Saddle Up The Palomino* is one of those songs that can make you laugh at a hangover, no matter how bad it is.

"Saddle up the Palomino, the sun is goin' down, the way I feel, this must be real...ooooohh...."  
"It's a cold bowl of chili, when love lets you down, but it's the neighbor's wife I'm after...."

Young writes well. The lyrics throughout the first side reveal a happier Young. Even on *Hold Back the Tears*, a supposedly sad song, the melody is catching and almost merry. Linda Ronstadt adds the lightness to the cut, backing up on the vocals. Young is emotionally strong.

"Hold back the tears, and keep on tryin', push off the fears, when they come around, Hold back the tears, and keep on tryin' just around the next corner may be waiting your true love"

*Bite the Bullet* is the last of the 1977 Young tunes. It rocks. Young switches to electric guitar on this one and shows he still has it in tune.

Side two begins with the oldest song on the album, written in 1974. *Star of Bethlehem* is a song about dreams, hope, and an ideal. Young's harmonica adds a touch of mystique. The only bad thing about these songs is that they might make you think too much. This song is a good one, one that Young saved for three years.

The two most noticeable songs on side two are songs written in 1975; about the time Neil Young released *Zuma*. These two, *Like a Hurricane*, and *Homegrown*, could have easily been on the *Zuma* album.

*Homegrown* is Young's personal tribute to the evil weed. If you get off on rockin' electric guitar, or if you are




pro-weed, the song will stir you. It is a good one to end the album.

*American Stars 'n Bars* is classic Neil Young. It seems that he is finally getting away from the things that haunted him for a few years. There is more spirit on this than any since *Everyone Knows This is Nowhere*. The Crazy Horse addition of Ben Keith solidified the country sound of Young.

Young saved some of his best from the past three years and included them with some done three months ago. An odd collection, but a pleasurable one. If this is any indication of coming work by Young, the future looks bright.

Some say Neil Young should have been included with the CSN reunion. The CSN album was a great one. But Young has shown us that he is also a great individual musician, he can stand on his own feet now. *American Stars 'n Bars* has variety and depth, and it's been a long time coming.

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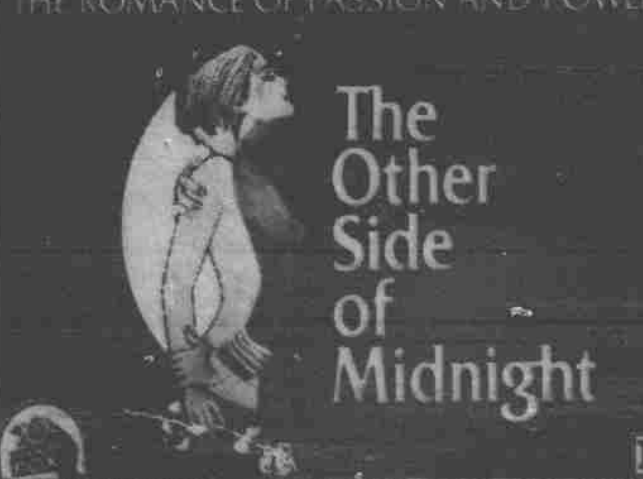
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