



Larry Jaffee

Rock

Neil Young
Sugar Mountain: Live at Canterbury House, 1968
 Reprise 516758

Neil Young has been such a music staple in our collective consciousness for so many years that it's nearly impossible to remember that he was once young (pun very much intended).

Thanks to a welcomed revelatory unearthing of a recently discovered concert tape, we can now relive how Neil sounded five days short of his 23rd birthday when he was about to embark on a solo career. Fresh from the demise of the democratic collective that was the Buffalo Springfield, which broke up six months earlier, Young was full of optimism.

At the time of this November 1968 show recorded at a speakeasy off the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, his solo

debut, self-titled album on Reprise was to be released in a few days. It should be noted here that *Canterbury House* is another prelude to the massive archival set that Young had been promising for years, and which finally was released last spring. But fans are not holding their breath because we have heard it all before. And in the interim, Young's camp in recent years has released worthy, previously unavailable live shows, such as *Massey Hall* (also solo, 1971) and *Fillmore East* (with Crazy Horse, 1970).

At the 1968 *Canterbury* guitar and vocal performance, Young is found practicing his on-stage banter, demonstrating a self-deprecating wit as a storyteller between songs.

We find out about Neil's vintage car hobby, his short-lived job working at a Toronto bookstore (he was fired for being unreliable after he took a "little red diet pill" given to him by a girlfriend), and how his hair had never been longer. Ah, the hippie years.

A performer/audience intimacy is obvious 40 years later, thanks to this impeccable recording, which makes it sound like Neil is standing in your living room. The show was recorded on a TEAC two-track tape recorder, and the tapes kept in storage over the intervening years. It's unclear from the liner notes how much restoration work was required on the original magnetic tape, but this CD is a perfect analog/digital marriage.

Photo: Linda McCartney



Musically, Young borrows from the Buffalo Springfield songbook giving us incendiary, acoustic renditions of some of the tunes on which he sang lead (“Mr. Soul,” “Expecting to Fly” and a few he didn’t (“On the Way Home,” “Nowadays Clancy Can’t Even Sing”). He plays the Springfield’s “Out of My Mind” after a request from an audience member.

More importantly, Young was eager to showcase the tunes he had been writing that were to show up on his first few LPs. These include “The Last Trip to Tulsa,” “The Loner,” “Birds,” “The Old Laughing Lady,” and “I’ve Been Waiting for You.” Also included in the set was “Sugar Mountain,” which was originally released as a single and didn’t make it onto an album until his 1977 retrospective *Decade*. On *Canterbury* he says that he wrote it originally in 1963 and hadn’t played it publicly since 1964.

Neil also listened to the radio of the day, as evidenced by his impromptu six-string workout of the pop instrumental hit “Classical Gas,” which emerged after fiddling around the fret board trying to figure out what to play next.

His unique guitar tuning and strumming demonstrates how adept he was/remains on acoustic or electric. He explains de-modal tuning, the stories behind the songs, and tales about touring with his old band. Basically, it’s Neil, circa ‘68, doing an audio version of the MTV Unplugged concept. He’d get to do it for real in 1993. Here’s the same guy who told us nearly four decades ago about the “Old man take a look at my life/I’m a lot like you...”

At 63, he’s still plugging away on the road and in the studio. Long may you run.



Rogue