

ROBERT HILBURN

Half a Young Album Better Than Most

Ever since his days with the Buffalo Springfield, Neil Young has been one of our most gifted artists—a man with a distinctive, highly influential, even haunting vocal style and a strong sense of personal vision in his writing. His "After the Gold Rush" and "Harvest" are two of the best albums of the 1970s.

But only four of the songs in his new, live "Time Fades Away" album, to my mind, are up to Young's past standards. There is, however, an even deeper cause for concern than the album's limited quality—a concern that raises some question about Young's sense of responsibility to his audience.

Granted, the days of our receiving 12 songs on an album are largely gone, (recording artists and record companies have found they can get away with 10 or nine or eight songs on an album), so the fact that Young only has eight songs on the new album is, I suppose, fair enough. But when some of those songs are so marginal they can be viewed as little more than filler, it's a bit troubling.

Considering his status with the record industry (both, one presumes, in wealth and prestige), it would seem reasonable that Young would be more careful about what he offered his fans. Since he has another studio album completed (titled "Tonight's the Night"), he could have saved the best songs from this album for that one or, if he felt committed to all these songs, turned the next album into a two-record set at a reduced price.

As it is, Young leaves his fans with a dilemma. Do they buy it for the four or five good songs or ignore it as a sort of consumer protest? I guess you have to buy it any-



Neil Young

way. Even half a Young album is better than most of his competitors these days. Unfortunately.

The album's title track is one of the most infectious records of the year—a marvelous combination of a vigorous vocal, spirited instrumentation (a sort of updated Sun Records, country-rock) and some of Young's characteristically intriguing lyrics: *Fourteen junkies too weak to work/One sells diamonds for what they're worth/Down on pain street, disappointment lurks.*

The album (Reprise MS 2151) continues with a lovely, delicate "Journey Thru the Past," the simple, but equally pretty "Love in Mind" and, best of all, a stinging, forceful "Don't Be Denied."

In the latter song, clearly autobiographical, Young's intense delivery captures the frustrations of the struggle to achieve one's goal (a theme that runs through much of Young's work): *"Well, all that glitters isn't gold/I know you've heard that story told . . . I'm a pauper in a naked disguise/A millionaire through a businessman's eyes."*

Unfortunately, these four songs total only about 16 minutes. The remaining 18 minutes is divided between some almost acceptable songs and some clearly unacceptable ones. While "L.A." and "Yonder Stands the Sinner" have traces of Young's strengths, "The Bridge" is one of the weakest love songs Young has ever recorded ("The Bridge/We'll build it now/It may take a lot of time/And it may be lonely, but . . .") and "Last Dance" would be uneventful at three minutes, much less stretched to nearly nine. The songs lack the crisp definition of Young's best work. The execution is often sloppy.

David Crosby and Graham Nash guest on a couple of tracks but their contributions are minimal. The other musicians include Jack Nitzsche, Ben Keith, Tim Drummond and John Barbata. The album was recorded in various concert halls, including UCLA's Royce Hall.

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CONCERT/RECORDING NOTES — Good news: John Prine, whose new "Sweet Revenge" album is due this week, opens a six-day engagement tonight at the Troubadour. Make sure he sings "Dear Abby" . . . Bad

news: Slade, which returns to the Long Beach Arena Sunday night with the J. Geils Band, is still going through its annoying practice of repeatedly urging its audience to get behind the music, according to reports in New York . . . Lucky publicity break: The New York Dolls' lead singer David Johansen was arrested in Memphis after a fan jumped on stage and, gulp, kissed him. It seems the local police were keeping close tabs on the show for possible lewdness or obscenity. Johansen was released on bail .