



NEIL YOUNG
... from satire to romance.

Times photo by Harry Chase

POP MUSIC REVIEW

Neil Young at Pavilion

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Times Pop Music Critic

Though rock stars often complain about the tediousness of having to do the same old songs year after year in concert, most succumb to the commercial considerations involved and end up doing exactly that. After all, it's the hits that audiences usually want to hear. What better way to keep the customer satisfied?

Thus, even our most respected pop figures—Bob Dylan, the Band, Joni Mitchell, Randy Newman—devote most of their time on stage to familiar works. They may include three or four tunes from their latest album to demonstrate continued growth, but rarely do they offer more than one or two unrecorded compositions.

Not so with Neil Young. Excluding encore numbers, 9 of

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his 16 songs Monday night at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion were tunes that haven't yet appeared on record. It was at once a daring and disappointing move.

While one can salute Young's independent spirit and applaud the quality of many of the new tunes, some of the impact of the new material was lost, no doubt, on those who kept waiting—in vain—for more of their favorites.

The percentage of new songs might not have been too high if Young—who has always tended to introduce new material in live shows—toured here regularly and his earlier work had grown a touch stale. But this was his first local appearance in more than three years and his recent albums have been widely acclaimed.

Because both "Zuma" and "Tonight's the Night"—two of the most powerful and evocative albums of the 1970s—have been released since his last concert, it would have been valuable, for instance, to have heard live versions of several tunes from those albums, including "Roll Another Number," "Borrowed Tune," "Dangerbird."

But Young didn't do any songs from "Tonight's the Night"—a haunting, deeply personal look at despair that was recorded shortly after the deaths of two of Young's friends—and only three tracks from "Zuma," another striking exploration of disillusionment.

Young is an exceptionally gifted songwriter who deals primarily in agonizingly intense, deeply introspective music. Both his arrangements and themes reflect a search for understanding and emotional balance that includes noticeable shifts in emphasis from album to album. Thus, it may seem invalid artistically and emotionally for him to go back to a particular period—e.g., the depression of "Tonight's the Night"—for a portion of the audience.

Still, it seems possible that Young could find some suitable material in his large, attractive body of work. Because his Monday concert was relatively short (only 95 min-

utes), he could easily add some songs without eliminating any of the new works. The result would be a compromise that could make the concert a more satisfying and representative sample of Young's music.

The level of the new songs Monday was quite impressive. They ranged from two somewhat satiric works (one of which referred by name to former President Nixon) to several lovely, engaging romantic tunes.

One of the compelling trademarks of Young's work is that he mixes a certain gentle, delicate lyric/vocal stance with vigorous, sometimes tenacious instrumental shading. The result is that Young can spark a wide range of emotional responses with a single song.

Young's vocals—while not strong in terms of purity and control—do convey quite convincingly the sense of struggle and discovery in his lyrics. There seemed to be no troublesome traces of the throat ailment that caused him to drop off the recent Steve Stills tour.

But the most dynamic part of Monday's performance was Young's guitar work. Though extended instrumental passages can be one of rock's more tiresome elements, Young engaged in some long, blistering solos that gave the evening much of its character. Young also seemed more relaxed on stage than in some of his appearances here.

The Pavilion concert opened with a 40-minute acoustic set in which Young—accompanied only by his own guitar or piano—mixed "Old Man," "After the Gold Rush," "A Man Needs a Maid" and "Sugar Mountain" with five new songs. After intermission, he returned with the Crazy Horse band (Ralph Molina on drums, Billy Talbot on bass, Frank Sampedro on guitar) for an electric set that included "Don't Cry No Tears," "Cowgirl in the Sand," "Cinnamon Girl," "Cortez the Killer" and five new songs.

The tone of the concert—regardless of whether Young was playing old material or new at a particular moment—was one of urgency, strength and commitment. The electric segment, especially, was among the most dynamic offerings of the year in rock. What some may have missed Monday in terms of not hearing their favorite Young tunes will apparently be more than compensated for in noteworthy songs on the next Young album. Young and Crazy Horse will also be at the Inglewood Forum Thursday night.