

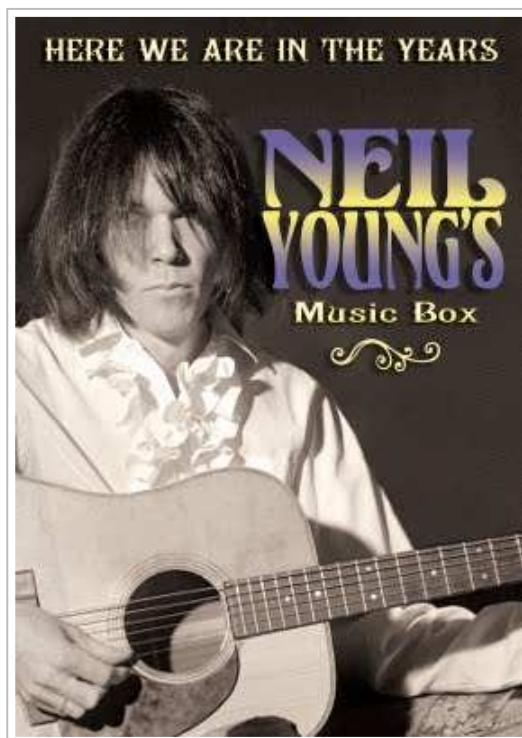
FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 2011

DVD Review: Here We Are in the Years: Neil Young's Music Box

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Images from the Internet*



Here We Are in the Years: Neil Young's Music Box

Produced and directed by Alex Westbrook

Narrated by Thomas Arnold

Sexy Intellectual

120 minutes, USD \$19.95

Chromedream.co.uk

MVDvisual.com

I can't remember now, as it's been years, if I read it or some musician told me directly that when someone wants to interview him/her, first the reporter gets asked what they think of Neil Young. If the potential

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About Me

[Robert Barry Francos](#)

Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the

interviewer is not a fan, the Q&A doesn't happen because obviously they are just not knowledgeable, or *cool* enough.

To be honest, before the mid-1980s, I would not have been on the interviewer list. All I knew of Young, essentially, was Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, and I put them in the same category of boring as Kansas, Rush, and any of those other guitar-meandering Classic Rockers. Hey, I was a punk, and I liked my music short and brash, with some exceptions (usually produced by Phil Spector, Brian Wilson or George Martin). Then someone at work gave me a copy of CSNY's Greatest Hits. While I still found the first couple of songs *meh*, starting with "Teach Your Children," I found that I selectively liked them. Of course, from there, the trail led to Buffalo Springfield and Crazy Horse, and I found myself a Young fan. It's true, rust never sleeps.

To the casual listener, Neil Young may seem like an auteur, but the man has been changing to different styles and genres every decade or so, along the lines of a Frank Zappa, the Who to some extent, or, if you'll pardon the connection, Madonna. His career has been multi-faceted, to say the least, and this British documentary is out to show his path.

From Toronto, Neil Young (not to be confused with Yonge St.) was born in 1945, being just the right age of around 10 at the birth of rock and roll. Clips of Chuck, Little R and Elvis (singing "Tutti Frutti"!) are used as examples of what Young was seeing. But it was Roy Orbison's pure vocals and style that touched Young. Later Young would write "The Birds," which has an Orbison-esque tone, and contains the lyrics, "It's over / It's over."

Having moved to Winnipeg when he was 16, he started being influenced by the surf instrumentals of the likes of the Ventures, Link Wray, and the Tornados, as he became more and more obsessed with the guitar. Around this time, he started his first band, the Squires. And then Mersey Beat hit. Being Canadian, he probably had better access to the early British sounds than those in the US, and like everyone else, he drawn into the new variations, especially the double guitar attack of The Stones' Brian Jones and Keef.

And that is just the start of this two-hour look at Young's life and career (mostly the latter). As usual in this series, there is more focus of thoughts, beliefs and opinions by music writers and historians than the actual musicians who played with Young, though two of his early band mates tell some tales: Ken Smyth (The Squires) and George Tomsco (The Fireballs). Along with this series' usual suspects and critics, the likes of Anthony Curtis (*Rolling Stone* mag), Johnny Rogan (*Neil Young: Zero to Sixty*), and the ever present Nigel Williamson (*Neil Young: Stories Behind the Songs*), joining them is one of my favorite musicologists, Richie Unterberger, who wrote amazing books about the Velvet Underground and The Who, among others. It is so good to see him get his own thoughts in.

wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at jerseybeat (dot) com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

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The subtitle of the DVD is accurate, as there are many great points about Young's music and especially influences, sometimes played right after each other. Among those people and styles who had sway in his styles presented here include Randy Bachman (pre-Guess Who / BTO), Bob Dylan / Ian & Sylvia / Joni Mitchell, punk, Devo's electronic bent, and neo-punk like Pearl Jam, who appeared with him on MTV Video Music Awards in 1993.

Of course, he also had an even larger influence on others, mostly good, but occasionally icky, such as Kurt Cobain's suicide note quoting one of his lyrics. But that is all part of the mythos that is Neil Young.

Young, as Anthony Curtis states, "Can't be written off." He is still touring, still writing, and still recording. And possibly grumpy as ever.

The extras include a seven-minute-plus interview with one of his earliest band members, Ken Smyth, in a piece titled, "A Brief History of the Squires." This includes a number of rare still photos of the band, shown under Smyth's narration. His story of how they broke up gave me a smile.

There is also a collection of contributor bios, giving some back-up to the many critics and historians who appear within the DVD, but as with most of the series, the text is too small to read on the small screen (I have a 19"); not everyone has a large plasma, y'know.

If you're a die-hard Young fan, odds are there may not be much new information, other than opinions and conjecture that you haven't heard before, but I find it positive, because for casual fans there is a lot of new material and insights, presented in a measured yet enjoyable way.

Most of this series concerns British music (next up for me is about Robert Plant), and a slice of American rockers, but this is one of the few Canadian acts I've seen them cover. Nice. Meanwhile, I've heard that there is a town in north Ontario...

Bonus Videos:







Posted by Robert Barry Francos at [12:01 AM](#)

Labels: [1960s](#), [1970s](#), [1980s](#), [Beatles](#), [Bob Dylan](#), [CSNY](#), [DVD review](#), [FFanzeen](#), [Johnny Rotten](#), [Neil Young](#), [punk rock](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [Rolling Stones](#)

Reactions: interesting (0) cool (0) informative (0)

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