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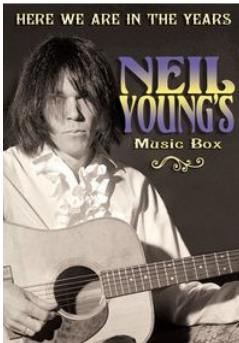
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Opening Neil Young's Music Box



by [Gary Pig Gold](#)

Although it's already spent a good two years here in the ol' sty, I'm hardly surprised to find I'm *still* discovering, hearing, and even seeing fresh goodies galore buried within that great big *Neil Young Archives* box of mine. Yet it is something else entirely which has me going Metric today about The Greatest Living Canucklehead This Side of Dr. Stompin' Tom Connors.



Now, while some may take offense a mere three-minutes-twelve into the show at the comment Toronto, Canada is, and I quote, "a city not noted for its musical invention" (plus, if you look *real* close, note photos of Buddy Holly and Sonny & Cher appearing later are actually of impersonators, NOT the real deals), Sexy Intellectual's *Here We Are In The Years: Neil Young's Music Box* does present quite the journey through the past. And, as The Man himself would approve, this is one documentary which seldom finds itself in the middle of the cinematic road; it does indeed prefer a somewhat rougher ride, and we sure *do* see more interesting people there as a result.

For example, young Neil's original drummer Ken Smyth of The Squires, who right off the bat drives clear home that all-important point of how Elvis Presley especially shook to its very foundation the hitherto genteel teenaged population of Winnipeg circa 1956 (and, putting our eyes where Ken's mouth is, we're treated to a vintage clip of Elvis, Scotty, DJ and Bill mauling Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" all across the Dorsey Brothers' televised *Stage Show*: One can't help but draw the obvious socio-musical connections with those Shocking Pinks to come ...to say nothing of *Live Rust*). Similarly, footage of a live "Birds," complete with its "over, it's over"s, draw undeniable parallels with and to another unmistakable early influence: That "fucking opera singer with a backbeat" (as Neil once called him) Roy Orbison.

Next up, no less an authority as George Tomsco of The Fireballs explains precisely how such torchy instrumental combos as his provided the foundation upon which the Squires were built along with, need anyone add, The Shadows from Britain and their brilliant guitarist Hank Marvin. Luckily, our hero soon found his very own hometown, hometown tutor of the electrified six strings in Randy Bachman, whose own baby bands were at this point already filling the Winnipeg community clubs with sounds until then only heard deep within Neil's head.

But as it did countless others across the universe in 1964, the "smart, interesting music" (as Anthony DeCurtis calls it in the *Music Box*) of The Beatles abruptly pointed Neil, the hitherto self-confessed guitar nerd, in a bold and new direction. Choosing the opening and closing numbers off Capitol Canada's brand new *Beatlemania!* album, "It Won't Be Long" and "Money," to make his vocal debut in Squires performances – and stubbornly ignoring catcalls from the audience to "stick to the instrumentals" – Neil the singer/songwriter was duly born (and a years-later clip of "When You Dance I Can Really Love" draws that fab line clear back to "I'm Happy Just To Dance With You" by Neil's fave Beatle George).

"Mr. Soul" for starters was soon to demonstrate as well Neil's admiration for those *anti*-Beatles, the Rolling Stones (and their "Satisfaction" in particular). Plus, of course, we can all hear just how much "Lady Jane" still inhabits that admittedly "Borrowed Tune" of his too. Funny, then, how Neil's career would later straddle similarly opposing camps while doing time in both his *own* Beatles alongside Messrs. Crosby, Stills and Nash whilst simultaneously taking rougher rides atop that wholly Stone-headed Crazy Horse (...one guess as to which affiliation Neil preferred).

This musical duality is even more pronounced when in 1965 Neil returns to his birthplace Toronto, enthralled and active within that city's hard-knocking Yonge Street Strip as well as the burgeoning, comparatively refined Yorkville Avenue coffeehouse scene. All of which prepares him perfectly for a subsequent escape to Los Angeles and his first major successes with the one and only Buffalo Springfield. Here, finally, was a band which allowed Neil to vent the entire gamut of his myriad musical upbringings: clear back to Elvis and the Big O via Beatles, Stones and Yorkville's resident Dylan disciples.

Many musicians, documentary makers and viewers alike would be happy to rest upon the many laurels and adventures 21-year-old Neil had already racked up so far. But as we all know, this story is *far* from over, and *Here We Are In The Years* enters the Seventies with *Neil Young: Stories Behind the Songs* author Nigel Williamson making quite the compelling case for Neil the *pioneer*, as opposed to mere practitioner of country-rock. Yet no sooner are we lulled into such *Old Ways* with a Willie Nelson duet than we're bolted into the midst of a much younger Pistol-poppin' "Pretty Vacant" clip as, oh dear, Neil the Punk rears its recently-shorn head. Warning: check out the footage below.

None other than Kraftwerk enter the *Music Box* at this critical juncture as well: I never realized just how well *Trans* worked on stage until I was reminded with the vocoder-drenched performance footage appearing right about here. Then, come the Nineties, Neil Young – or at least his wardrobe – finds itself in perfect sync with what the *Seattle Weekly*'s Ned Raggett calls "lumberjacks in flannel playing huge heavy riffs." Or grunge, to the uninitiated. But in case you forgot, Neil joined no less than Pearl Jam with a benedictorial "Rockin' In The Free World" at the 1993 MTV Video Music Awards. Enough said. At least until Neil's own *Archives, Vol. 4* materializes, that is.

While we all wait on that one though, *Here We Are In The Years* provides a splendid audio/visual overview – at least as much as can be crammed into 117 minutes with a career as big and boxset(s)-worthy as Neil's. And, as its subtitle states, this is one production that clearly and completely focuses on the man's MUSIC ...even to the point that the Bonus featurette "A Brief History of the Squires" explains in heartbreaking detail just how Neil's first bandmates doomed themselves forever to the Where Are They Now drawer by not showing up for a planned week-long gig many summers ago on Falcon Lake, Manitoba.

Such are the tall rock tales only good docs are made of. [Here We Are In The Years: Neil Young's Music Box](#) is one of them.





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