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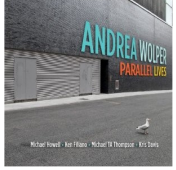
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[Rock music, uncategorized](#) — October 29, 2011 8:47 am

[Nils Lofgren – Old School \(2011\)](#)

Posted by [Nick DeRiso](#)

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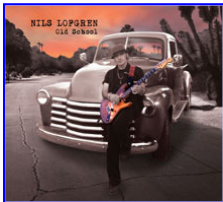
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You could forgive Nils Lofgren, best known these days as a 27-year member of Bruce Springsteen’s E Street Band, for issuing a contemplative record after such a difficult period. And there’s some of that here.

Yet, in the wake of losing both E Street saxophonist Clarence Clemons (who passed in June at age 69 from complications following a stroke) and organist/keyboard player Danny Federici (after a battle with cancer in 2008), Lofgren begins the forthcoming *Old School* embroiled in a vinegary rage.



He comes tearing out to open this project, set for release on Tuesday by Vision Records — making a bold statement of rock ‘n’ roll purpose on the title track: “Old School” is this crunchy, horn-driven kiss off to those who spend more time whining than they do working to accomplish something — made complete by a boisterous guest vocal turn by Lou Gramm of Foreigner fame. Lofgren then white knuckles it through the riffy “60 is the New 18,” a fleet little aside that owes no small debt to the Springsteen’s rangy late-period rockers — only updated with a crumpled new-wave guitar signature.

“Love Stumbles On” combines a rockabilly riff and a common-man storyline that might fit in well on one of his employer’s albums, too. Later, Lofgren unleashes an angry yawl on the slide-driven “Amy Joan Blues,” this bumpy ride through a Delta swamp with Free/Bad Company vocalist Paul Rodgers. The anthemic “Dream Big” thumps along with a toweringly processed beat, as Lofgren exhorts us all to “love like a work of art.”

This frisky sense of variety should come as no surprise to anyone who’s followed Lofgren’s non-Springsteen doings. After all, he has also recorded and toured with Neil Young (a stint that included *After The Gold Rush* and *Tonight’s The Night*, among others), Willie Nelson, David Crosby, Branford Marsalis (on the Buckshot LeFonque project), Lou Reed and Ringo Starr (during his original All-Starr Band tour, and then again in 1992). Along the way, the 60-year old Lofgren has also issued an astounding 36 previous solo projects, as well.

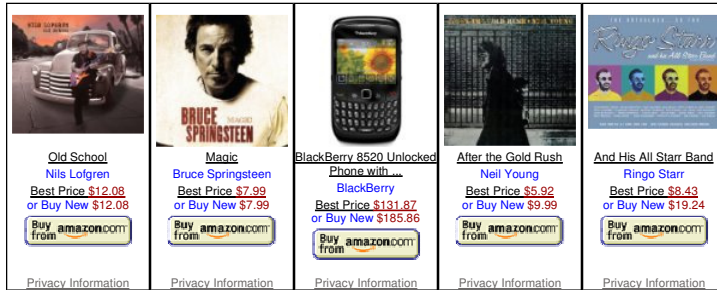
Of course, the backwash of anger — in particular when somebody has gone — is typically a deeper sorrow, and *Old School* is no different. As Lofgren makes his quietly effective tribute to Ray Charles on “Miss You Ray,” a song with the same kind of shambling emotional heft as Springsteen’s “Blood Brothers,” it’s hard not to think of the recently departed Clemons. (And, as it turns out, over more recent Lofgren shows, the track has become something of a tribute to the late saxist ...)



That Brother Ray namecheck, by the way, is not the last overt nod to the rhythm and blues influences that always run just beneath the surface of the music he makes with Springsteen — or the last frank discussion on mortality. “Ain’t Too Many of Us Left,” for instance, finds Lofgren working side by side with the great soul shouter Sam Moore, of Sam and Dave fame. The contemplative

“Irish Angel,” a Bruce McCabe song that Lofgren’s been performing during acoustic shows for years, underscores the difficulties in saying goodbye — while “When You Were Mine” seeks comfort after a devastating storm finally disappears over the horizon. “Let Her Get Away” begins the process of healing, even if it’s with a grizzled, world-weary perspective on what’s been lost.

It’s unclear where the E Street Band is right now in that regard. There are, as yet, no plans to reconvene. That’s left Nils Lofgren alone with his thoughts. The result is a well-conceived journey — not just through grief, and through anger, but also toward acceptance.



Old School is Nils Lofgren’s first studio album in five years, and follows 2008’s *The Loner: Nils Sings Neil*, a homage to Neil Young also issued on Vision Music. Work on this project actually began subsequent to Lofgren’s work with the E Street Band on Bruce Springsteen’s Dream Tour in November 2009. Lofgren produced *Old School*, with the exception “Why Me,” which was produced, recorded and mixed by Brian Christian (Alice Cooper/Kiss/The Babys).

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Author: [Nick DeRiso](#) Nick DeRiso, writing from various kudzu-covered locales across the Deep South, has explored jazz, blues, roots and rock music for Gannett News Service and USA Today, Blues Revue Magazine, AllAboutJazz.com, Rock.com, Popdose, Living Blues magazine, the Louisiana Folklife Program and NoDepression.com, among others. He’s also been programmer and host for a series of radio shows across the same genres. So, yeah, you could call it an obsession.

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[Thomas](#) October 31, 2011 6:43 pm

Been playing a lot Nils take on Neil – and just bought Bridge School Birthday Compilation which features Nils as well – with some very kind words about Billy Graham – very touching

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