

# Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

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Crosby, Stills & Nash (CSN) is a folk rock super group made up of David Crosby, Stephen Stills and Graham Nash. They became Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young (CSNY) when joined by occasional fourth member Neil Young. They are noted for their intricate vocal harmonies, often tumultuous interpersonal relationships, political activism, and lasting influence on American music and culture. All four members of CSNY have been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame twice, though Young's inductions were for work not involving the group.

Prior to the formation of CSN, each member of the band had belonged to another prominent group. David Crosby had performed rhythm guitar, vocals and songwriting with folk-rock group the Byrds; Stephen Stills had been a guitarist, vocalist and songwriter in the band Buffalo Springfield, which also featured Neil Young; and Graham Nash had been a guitarist, vocalist and songwriter with the Hollies, one of the British Invasion acts.

Friction existed between David Crosby and his bandmates in the Byrds, and he was dismissed from the band in late 1967. By early 1968, Buffalo Springfield had also disintegrated over personal issues, and after aiding in putting together the band's final album, Stephen Stills found himself unemployed. He and Crosby began meeting informally and jamming, and the result of one encounter in Florida on Crosby's schooner was the song "Wooden Ships", composed in collaboration with another guest, Jefferson Airplane's Paul Kantner.

Graham Nash had been introduced to Crosby when the Byrds had toured the United Kingdom in 1966, and when the Hollies ventured to California in 1968, Nash resumed his acquaintance with Crosby. At a party in July 1968 at Joni Mitchell's house, Nash asked Stills and Crosby to repeat their performance of a new song by Stills, "You Don't Have To Cry", with Nash improvising a third part harmony. The vocals jelled, and the three realized that they had a unique vocal chemistry.

Creatively frustrated with the Hollies, Nash decided to quit the band and work with Crosby and Stills. After failing an audition with the Beatles' Apple Records, they were signed to Atlantic Records by Ahmet Ertegun, who had been a fan of Buffalo Springfield and was disappointed by

that band's demise. From the outset, given their respective band histories, the trio decided not to be locked into a group structure, using their surnames as identification to ensure independence and a guarantee against the band's simply continuing without one of them, as had both the Byrds and the Hollies after the departures of Crosby and Nash. Their record contract with Atlantic reflected this, positioning CSN with a unique flexibility unheard of for an untested group. The trio also picked up a unique management team in Elliot Roberts and David Geffen, who had engineered their situation with Atlantic and would help to consolidate clout for the group in the industry. Roberts kept the band focused and dealt with egos, while Geffen handled the business deals, since, in Crosby's words, they needed a shark and Geffen was it. Roberts and Geffen would play key roles in securing the band's success during the early years.

When it was announced that the band was forming, they ran into a slight contractual problem. Nash was already signed to Epic Records, the North American distributor of records by the Hollies, while Crosby and Stills were signed to Atlantic. In order to resolve this problem, Geffen engineered a deal whereby Nash was essentially traded to Atlantic and Richie Furay moved to Epic; the label to which Poco (the band in which Furay was a member) was signed. Furay was signed to Atlantic as a result of his membership in Buffalo Springfield.

### Initial success

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The trio's first album, Crosby, Stills & Nash, was released in May 1969 and was a major hit, spawning two Top 40 hit singles and receiving key airplay on FM radio. With the exception of drummer Dallas Taylor, Stills had handled the lion's share of the instrumental parts himself, which left the band in need of additional personnel to be able to tour, now a necessity given the debut album's commercial impact.

### Neil Young



Retaining Taylor, the band decided initially to hire a keyboard player. Stills at one point approached Steve Winwood, who was already occupied with newly formed group Blind Faith. Atlantic label head Ahmet Ertegun suggested former Buffalo Springfield member Neil Young, also managed by Elliot Roberts, as a fairly obvious choice. Initial reservations were held by Stills and Nash, Stills owing to his history with Young in Buffalo Springfield, and Nash, due to his personal unfamiliarity with Young. But after several meetings, the trio expanded to a quartet with Young a full partner. The terms of the contract

allowed Young full freedom to maintain a parallel career with his new back-up band, Crazy Horse.

The band initially completed the rhythm section with bassist Bruce Palmer, who had previously played with Young in the short-lived Mynah Birds (fronted by a young Rick James) and with both Young and Stills in Buffalo Springfield. However, whether due to Palmer's persistent personal problems or due to the fact that, with Stills, Young, and Palmer handling the instruments, the band looked and sounded like Buffalo Springfield with Crosby and Nash doing little more than some background vocals. Whatever the true reason, Palmer was forced out of the band, and, at Rick James' recommendation, nineteen-year-old Motown bassist Greg Reeves replaced him.

With Young on board, the restructured group went on tour in the late summer of 1969 through the following January. Their first gig was on August 16, 1969 at the Auditorium Theater in Chicago, with Joni Mitchell as their opening act. They mentioned they were going to someplace called Woodstock the next day, but they had no idea where that was. They began their second set that night with the same line they uttered at Woodstock, "This is only the second time we've performed in front of people. We're scared shitless." They opened with "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes" before launching into a harmony-drenched version of The Beatles' "Blackbird".

Their second show was a baptism by fire at the Woodstock Festival. CSNY's recording of the Joni Mitchell song memorializing Woodstock would later become a hit and the recording most associated with the festival. By contrast, little mention is made of the group's following appearance at the violence-plagued Altamont Free Concert, with CSNY's having escaped mostly unscathed from the show's fallout. The group's Altamont performance was not included in the subsequent film *Gimme Shelter* (1970), at the band's request. Two performances from the Big Sur Folk Festival, 13–14 September 1969, appear in the movie *Celebration at Big Sur*.

Great anticipation had built for the newly expanded super-group, and their first album with Young, *Déjà Vu*, arrived in stores in March 1970 to zealous enthusiasm, topping the charts and generating three hit singles. *Déjà Vu* was also the first release on the Atlantic Records SD-7200 "superstar" line, created by the label for its highest-profile artists; the subsequent solo albums by Crosby, Stills, and Nash would be the next releases in this series.

In April 1970, Greg Reeves began behaving erratically, and Stills fired him. Reeves was replaced by Calvin "Fuzzy" Samuels. Young and Crosby were staying at a house near San Francisco when reports of the Kent State shootings arrived, inspiring Young to write the protest song "Ohio", recorded and rush-released weeks later, providing another Top 20 hit for the group. However, the deliberately tenuous nature of the partnership was strained by its success, and the group imploded after their tour in the summer of 1970. Concert recordings from that tour ended up on the 1971 double album *Four Way Street*; years would pass between subsequent trio and quartet recordings.

### Shifting configurations

Between September 1970 and May 1971, each of the quartet released high-profile solo albums: Young's *After the Gold Rush* in September; Stills' eponymous debut in November; Crosby's *If I Could Only Remember My Name* in February, and Nash's *Songs for Beginners* in May. All four solo LPs placed in the top 15 on the *Billboard* 200, with Stills' entry peaking the highest at No. 3. Stills released an additional record in 1971, *Stephen Stills 2*, which also went top ten. Crosby and Nash embarked on a successful acoustic tour accompanied only by their own guitars and piano, captured for the 1998 documentary *Another Stoney Evening*. For a while, it seemed as if the group could simply not fail, either singly or in any permutation.

Though there were no official CSN or CSNY projects during the year, 1972 proved a fruitful year for all the band members in their solo efforts. Young achieved solo superstardom with the chart-topping *Harvest* and its attendant No. 1 single, "Heart of Gold". Stills joined with ex-Byrd Chris Hillman to form the country-tinged band *Manassas*, releasing a self-titled double album; counting the three CSN records, *Manassas* became Stills' sixth top ten album in a row. Nash also joined Young to record Young's single "War Song". On tour, Nash and Crosby rediscovered the joy they had originally felt with CSN, minus the egotistic in-fighting that had made the last CSNY shows so difficult. That enthusiasm led to their first album as a duo, *Graham Nash David Crosby*, which peaked at No. 4 on the pop album chart.

The group members fared less well in the following year. Young embarked on a solo tour noted for its dark tone, with Crosby and Nash joining in mid-tour for recordings that would be issued on *Time Fades Away*; his Crazy Horse bandmate Danny Whitten had died of a heroin overdose before the tour. Crosby spearheaded a reunion album of the original Byrds quintet which sold only marginally well. Nash delivered his second solo album, and Stills released a second *Manassas* record; neither disc sold to expectations.

In June and July of that year, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young met at Young's ranch and recording studio in Hawaii for a working vacation, ostensibly to record a new album, tentatively titled *Human Highway*. However, the bickering that had sunk the band in 1970 quickly resumed, scattering the group again.

## Reconciliation

Roberts finally prevailed upon the group to realize their commercial potential. The quartet reassembled once again in the summer of 1974, with sidemen Tim Drummond on bass, Russ Kunkel on drums, and Joe Lala on percussion, to embark on the first-ever outdoor stadium tour, arranged by San Francisco impresario Bill Graham, fresh off the large-scale indoor arena tour he had developed for Dylan's return to the spotlight earlier in the year. The band typically played three and a half hours of old favorites and new songs, many of which never appeared in a definitive CSN or CSNY studio format. Graham Nash's unreleased film of the Wembley Stadium show highlights the scope and quality of these performances; the four principals would often switch instruments within the context of the same song. They opted at the time not to release any recordings of the tour for an album; long-bootlegged, cherry-picked versions of songs from several different shows compiled by Nash would finally see official issue for the tour's 40th anniversary in 2014.

While the foursome would have the press believe that their characteristic arguments were a thing of the past, excesses typical to the era took their toll. Stills—who claimed to have served in the Vietnam War as a member of the United States Marine Corps during his tenure in Buffalo Springfield—began supplementing his trademark wardrobe of football jerseys with military fatigues. Having embraced a polyamorous lifestyle following the death of companion Christine Hinton in 1969, Crosby was accompanied by two girlfriends. This chagrined several employees and band members; according to Nash, "Often I would knock on his hotel door, which he kept propped open with a security jamb, and he'd be getting blown by both of those girls, all while he was talking and doing business on the phone and rolling joints and smoking and having a drink. Crosby had incredible sexual energy. It got to be such a routine scene in his room, I'd stop by with someone and go, 'Aw, fuck, he's getting blown again. Oh, dear, let's give him a minute.'" Young—who would premiere over a dozen songs on the tour in what would prove to be one of the most creatively fertile phases of his career — was vexed by the diminished prolificacy of his bandmates

and isolated himself from the group, traveling in an RV with his son and entourage. He would later assert to biographer Jimmy McDonough that "the tour was disappointing to me. I think CSN really blew it... they hadn't made an album, and they didn't have any songs. How could they just stop like that?" An attempt at a new CSNY studio album in the fall was scrapped, the label having compiled *So Far* to have something to promote during the tour. Nash viewed the re-shuffling of items from only two albums and one single as absurd; it topped the charts anyway. Songs first performed on the 1974 tour later reappeared on various studio releases, including Stills' *Stills*; Young's *On The Beach*, *Zuma*, *American Stars 'n Bars*, *Comes a Time*, and *Hawks & Doves*; Crosby & Nash's *Wind on the Water* and *Whistling Down the Wire*; the Stills-Young Band's *Long May You Run*; and Nash's *Earth and Sky*.

Reaching an impasse with the parent band, Crosby & Nash signed a separate contract with ABC Records and began to tour regularly again; during this period, they produced two additional studio albums, *Wind on the Water* (1975) and *Whistling Down the Wire* (1976). They continued to use the sidemen known as *The Section* from their first LP. This crack session group (rechristened as *The Mighty Jitters* by Crosby) contributed to records by many others of similar idiom in the seventies, such as Carole King, James Taylor, and Jackson Browne, in addition to the C&N concert album released in 1977, *Crosby-Nash Live*. Throughout the mid-70s, Crosby and Nash also became a cottage industry themselves as in-demand session musicians on hits like Taylor's "Mexico" and Joni Mitchell's "Free Man in Paris."

Stills and Young returned to their own careers. The non-aligned pair briefly united for a one-off tour and album credited to *The Stills-Young Band*, *Long May You Run* (1976). Initially envisaged as the third attempt at a CSNY reunion album, Stills and Young wiped the vocal contributions of the other pair off the master tape when Crosby & Nash were obligated to leave the sessions to finish their own *Whistling Down the Wire* in Los Angeles. As Stills and Young embarked on a tour to promote the album in the summer of 1976, the old tensions between the pair resurfaced, exacerbated by Stills' choice of professional studio musicians to back them rather than Young's preferred *Crazy Horse*.

After a July 20, 1976 show in Columbia, South Carolina, Young's tour bus took a different direction from Stills'. Waiting at their next stop in Atlanta, Stills received a laconic telegram: "Dear Stephen, funny how things that start spontaneously end that way. Eat a peach. Neil." Young's management claimed that he was under doctor's orders to rest and recover from an apparent throat infection. Stills was contractually bound to finish the tour alone, though Young would make up dates with *Crazy Horse* later in the year.

Crosby & Nash's *Wind on the Water* — which reached #6 in *Billboard* in 1975—was the only disc by any member of the quartet to fare well in the marketplace during the band's 1974-1976 interregnum. Later in 1976, Stills approached the pair at one of their concerts in Los Angeles, setting the stage for the return of the trio.

## CSN Redux

A year after reforming, Crosby, Stills & Nash released *CSN*. Recorded at *Criteria Studios* in Miami, Florida throughout late 1976 and early 1977, the album exemplified the meticulously stylized soft rock production ethos of the epoch and contained a hit single from Nash in "Just a Song Before I Go". Forestalled from reaching the top slot on the *Billboard* chart by the rapturous success of one of the best-selling LPs of all time, *Fleetwood Mac's Rumours*, the album peaked at #2 on the *Billboard* chart in the summer of 1977.

After a five-year lay-off between releases bridged by a solo album apiece by Stills and Nash and group tours in 1977 and 1978, they hit the American top ten one more time with *Daylight Again*, which momentarily counterpoised the success of more vanguard styles (including the New Wave insurgency) by reaching #8 in 1982. Complications were brewing due to Crosby's increasing dependence on freebase cocaine, making his participation problematic. The Nash record of 1980, *Earth & Sky*, was to be another Crosby-Nash project, but Crosby's participation discontinued due to excessive drug use. *Daylight Again* was initially undertaken by Stills and Nash alone owing to Crosby's subsequent decline in productivity; however, Atlantic Record executives refused to release the latter LP until Crosby was reinstated. Crosby joined his partners for the tracks "Delta" and "Might as Well Have a Good Time", and the album contained two hits, Nash's "Wasted on the Way" and Stills' "Southern Cross," the latter accompanied by a popular video on the nascent MTV network.

But the group now relied on outside composers and singers to augment their material and had thus all but ceased to be the force they had been ten years past. The trio continued to tour, but the bottom fell out for Crosby, arrested and jailed on drug and weapons charges in Texas in May 1982. Having recorded a potential title song for the film *WarGames* that was never used, the band released it as a single and hastily assembled concert recordings around two studio tracks for the album *Allies*, their lowest-charting record to date. Crosby was sentenced to two terms, but the conviction was overturned; arrested several more times, he finally turned himself in to the authorities in December 1985. He would spend eight months in prison, and Nash and Stills released another round of solo albums in the mid-1980s.

Based on a promise he made to Crosby should he clean himself up, Young agreed to rejoin the trio in the studio upon Crosby's release from prison for *American Dream* in 1988. Stills (then battling his own incipient addiction to freebase cocaine) and Crosby (enfeebled by myriad health problems from his fallow period, eventually necessitating a 1994 liver transplant) were barely functioning for the making of the album, and the late eighties production completely swamped the band. It did make it to #16 on the Billboard chart, but the record received poor critical notices, and Young refused to support it with a CSNY tour. The band did produce a video for Young's title-song single, wherein each member played a character loosely based on certain aspects of their personalities and public image. CSNY also reunited to play the Bill Graham memorial concert called "Laughter, Love and Music" on November 3, 1991.

CSN recorded two more studio albums in the 1990s, *Live It Up* and *After the Storm*, both low-sellers by previous standards. A box set arrived in 1991, four discs of expected group highlights amidst unexpected better tracks from various solo projects. Owing to certain difficulties, manager Roberts, no longer with the trio but still representing Young, pulled most of Neil's material earmarked for the box; only seven CSNY songs in total remained to be included. However, the CSNY version of "Human Highway" did leak to the internet.

In 1994, CSN collaborated with Suzy Bogguss, Alison Krauss, and Kathy Mattea to contribute "Teach Your Children" to the AIDS benefit album *Red Hot + Country* produced by the Red Hot Organization. After the *Storm* barely made the top 100 on the album chart, and by the late nineties CSN found themselves without a record contract. They began financing recordings themselves, and in 1999 Stills invited Young to guest on a few tracks. Impressed by their gumption, Young increased his level of input, turning the album into a CSNY project, *Looking Forward*, released on Young's label Reprise Records. With writing credits mostly limited to band

members, the disc was better received than the previous three albums, and the ensuing CSNY2K tour in 2000 and the CSNY Tour of America of 2002 were major money-makers.

CSN was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997; CSNY is the only band to have all its members inducted into the Hall twice. Crosby has also been inducted as a member of the Byrds (1991), and Stills as a member of Buffalo Springfield (1997). In 2010, Nash was inducted as a member of the Hollies. Young has been inducted for his solo work (1995) and for Buffalo Springfield (1997), but has not been inducted with CSN. The CSN logo that Crosby, Stills and Nash have used since the mid-1970s was designed by comedian Phil Hartman when he worked as a graphic designer.

Various compilations of the band's configurations have arrived over the years, the box set being the most comprehensive, and *So Far* being the most commercially successful. Individual retrospective sets have either been released or are still in progress. In 2007, David Crosby's well received box - *Voyage* - chronicled his work with various bands and as a solo artist. Graham Nash's *Reflections* appeared in early 2009 under the same auspices, quite near his 67th birthday. The box set for Stephen Stills, *Carry On*, was released in February 2013. Compilation and oversight of these releases has largely been managed by Nash.

In 2006, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young set off on their "Freedom of Speech" tour in support of Young's album *Living with War*. The long setlists included the bulk of the new protest album as well as material from Stills' long delayed solo album *Man Alive!* and newer material from Crosby and Nash. On May 16, 2006, Crosby, Stills & Nash were honored as a BMI Icon at the 54th annual BMI Pop Awards. They were honored for their "unique and indelible influence on generations of music makers." In February 2007, CSN were forced to postpone a tour of Australia and New Zealand due to David Crosby's illness. Also in 2006, long-time manager Gerry Tolman died in a car accident.

The popular song, "Teach Your Children" was performed by Crosby, Stills and Nash on *The Colbert Report* on July 30, 2008 with host Stephen Colbert filling in the fourth harmony (Neil Young's portion) and wearing a Young-mocking outfit and being referred to by Nash as "Neil." In 2009, Crosby, Stills & Nash released *Demos*, an album made up of demos recordings of popular group and solo songs. In June 2009 Crosby, Stills and Nash performed at the Glastonbury Festival, England. Stephen Stills was praised for his exceptional guitar playing. Neil Young did not appear onstage with them but did perform as a solo artist. In July 2009, they headlined the 14th annual *Gathering of the Vibes* festival. Halfway through their set, they enthusiastically announced to the crowd that they would be back next year.

CSN convened with producer Rick Rubin to record a projected covers album (tentatively titled *Songs We Wish We'd Written*) under the aegis of Sony Music Entertainment in 2010; seven songs were completed before the dissolution of the sessions due to the increasingly acrimonious relationship between Rubin and Crosby, who perceived the former as a disruptive and autocratic figure in the creative process. By 2012, CSN had completed five self-produced re-recordings in anticipation of a potential rights dispute over the Rubin sessions with Sony. The band will finish the project following their 2014 tour.

Crosby, Stills & Nash toured the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil in 2012 and released a 2CD/DVD entitled *CSN 2012* on July 17, 2012. Further tours of the United States and Europe followed in 2013 and 2014.

Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young performed an acoustic set at the 27th Bridge School Benefit on October 27, 2013. CSNY 1974, an anthology culled from hitherto unreleased recordings of the 1974 tour by Nash and longtime band archivist Joel Bernstein, was released by Rhino Records on July 8, 2014 to widespread critical acclaim. In a September 2014 interview with the Idaho Statesman, Crosby dispelled rumors of another CSNY tour (citing Young's general unwillingness and lack of financial incentive to perform with the ensemble) before addressing the recent dissolution of Young's marriage, opining that his bandmate is "hanging out with somebody that's a purely poisonous predator..." While introducing a song during a solo performance at the Philadelphia Academy of Music on October 8, 2014, Young announced that "CSNY will never tour again, ever... I love those guys." Two days later, Crosby confirmed that "[Young] is very angry with me" and likened Young's remarks to "saying there are mountains in Tibet" before further disparaging his guitar style on Twitter.

### Political activism

CSNY's music unerringly reflected the tastes and viewpoints of the counterculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s. With protest against the Vietnam War gearing up in 1970, the group (Crosby in particular) made no secret of their political leanings.

The group recorded two songs in response to political events. The first was "Chicago." The reference here is the trial of the "Chicago 7," seven anti-war activists indicted for their role in the demonstrations and police riots in downtown Chicago during the Democratic National Convention of 1968. One of the defendants, Bobby Seale, was disruptive in the court room and, as a result, was gagged and bound to his chair during the trial. The second song, "Ohio," was written in response to the deaths of four students at Kent State University. The students were shot by Ohio National Guardsmen during an anti-war protest on the campus in May 1970.

The release of "Ohio" marked the boldest musical statement made to that date regarding the Vietnam War, calling out Richard Nixon by name and voicing the counter-culture's rage and despair at the events. Between "Ohio", their appearance in both the festival and movie of Woodstock, and the runaway success of their two albums, the group found themselves in the position of enjoying a level of adulation far greater than experienced with their previous bands, as evidenced by the 27 Platinum certifications they received across 7 albums.

The band has been continuously associated with political causes throughout its existence, the latest example being the song "Almost Gone (The Ballad Of Bradley Manning)" which focuses on the length and conditions of Chelsea Manning's pre-trial confinement.

### Influence

The collective abilities allowed CSNY to straddle all the flavors of popular music eminent at the time, from country rock to confessional balladry, from acoustic guitars and voice to electric guitar, and three-part harmony. With The Beatles break-up made public by April 1970, and with Bob Dylan in reclusive low-key activity since mid-1966, CSNY found itself as the adopted standard bearers for the Woodstock Nation, serving an importance in society as counterculture figureheads equaled at the time in rock and roll only by The Rolling Stones, The Who, or the ascending Led Zeppelin. CSNY was originally commissioned to create the soundtrack for Easy Rider, but Stills' offering, "Find the Cost of Freedom" (on the flip side of "Ohio"), was also rejected.

An entire sub-industry of singer-songwriters in California either had their careers boosted or came to prominence in the wake of CSNY. In part, many musicians lived in or near Laurel Canyon, in California. They included Laura Nyro, Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne, and The Eagles.

## Discography

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### Studio albums

- 1969 *Crosby, Stills & Nash* (CSN)
- 1970 *Déjà Vu* (CSNY)
- 1977 *CSN* (CSN)
- 1982 *Daylight Again* (CSN)
- 1988 *American Dream* (CSNY)
- 1990 *Live It Up* (CSN)
- 1994 *After the Storm* (CSN)
- 1999 *Looking Forward* (CSNY)

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