

So how did *your* great love affair with music begin? Each issue we give **RNR**'s writers a chance to share *their* version of an age-old story...

It started with a Disc

In 1969, I'd persuaded my parents to buy a stereo record player. It only had one speaker but I didn't care. I'd been listening to Radio Luxembourg and Radio Caroline. Now I could choose my own music. I claimed the front room of the house as my listening booth. Virgin Records did mail order. The first album I bought was the recently released *Crosby, Stills & Nash*. I don't remember what made me order that particular one but I do remember playing it over and over, captivated by the harmonies. In particular, Stephen Stills contributed 'Helplessly Hoping', a song that I initially heard as being about unrequited love and beautifully sung with their three voices harmonising. Later, I saw the chorus as being about harmony itself:

*'They are one person [Stills]
They are two alone [Nash]
They are three together [Crosby]
They are for each other'*

By October 1972, I was at college in West London and my school friend was at the NE London Poly so I travelled over there many a weekend. He saw that Steven Stills had a band called Manassas that was playing at the Sundown in Edmonton, north London. The Sundown was a converted Regal Cinema with the seats taken out downstairs and some crash barriers put in for crowd control. This remains one of the best live gigs I've ever attended. By coincidence a few years ago, I was talking to Alan Surtees (co-founder of the Shrewsbury Folk Festival who, sadly, died in 2017) and discovered that he too was there and he agreed that the music and the atmosphere made it one of the best he'd attended, too – a mixture of good tunes, long solos and (again) harmonies. They finished with the whole band singing 'Cost Of Freedom', a cappella.

After that, I lost touch with CSN and with music in general. In 1988, I was living in New England when Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young reunited and recorded a new album, *American Dream*. The album was dedicated to their wives (Jan, Anne, Susan and Pegi respectively). With songs such as Young's

'American Dream', Crosby's 'Nighttime For The Generals', and Nash's 'Soldiers Of Peace', it criticised the America of 1988, which resonated with me as at the time I had to decide whether to stay and get a Green Card or return to the U.K. and Europe. I returned.

Shortly before leaving New England, I saw that David Crosby was doing a solo show in Boston. He was on tour having gone clean after years of alcohol and drug abuse and a spell in a Texan jail. The concert started with a couple of solo songs, including 'Compass' about his own turnaround: *'I have wasted ten years in a blindfold... But like a compass seeking North/There lives in me a still sure spirit part... Shining from the compass of my heart'*.



These were followed by rock numbers with a band. The only thing it lacked was the harmonies. In 1989, Crosby released *Oh Yes I Can*, the title seeming to refer to his comeback.

Much later, Crosby, Stills & Nash toured the U.K. I went to shows at the Hammersmith Odeon and the Royal Albert Hall. As I walked to the Odeon, I passed the side of the venue and saw all three of the band standing talking in the yard. I was struck by how much older Stills and Crosby looked. With a full band behind them, they played to full houses. Nash talked about taking the underground across London and not being recognised.

In 2011, Crosby and Nash did a duo tour of the U.K. I saw them twice: in Bristol and Birmingham within two days of each other. By now, the band included James Raymond who is Crosby's biological son, a relationship that Raymond knew but did not declare until he had established himself as a respected musician. As Crosby and Nash sang, it was clear the relationship that each had with their music: Nash expresses himself when he sings; Crosby seems effortless when singing but clearly takes pleasure in both solo and duo voices. They played the introduction for 'To The Last Whale' over the PA with video behind the band. Rather than just wait for their part, Crosby moved in front of the foldback speakers to listen to the front-of-house sound and was clearly satisfied by it. The pleasure in these concerts came from seeing and hearing their instinctive ability to sing together.

In recent years, the public acrimony between first Crosby and Young, and then Nash and Crosby, seems to have put an end to ever hearing those harmonies live again.

Both Crosby and Nash have now established their own solo careers. Crosby with a group of previously unknown musicians but not just supporting his songs; rather also contributing songs of their own to the show. With a new lease of musical life, Crosby has now released four albums in the past five years. Nash too is having a renaissance. Touring almost solo (with British guitarist Shane Fontayne in support), he sings his CSN classics as well as new songs. He too has discovered a new life having moved from Hawaii and California to New York.

Even singing solo, I still find their songs and voices captivating. Last year, I went over to Bristol to see Graham Nash play in the lovely St. George's Hall and then up to Manchester to see David Crosby on his *Sky Trails* tour. My love of listening to harmonies can be traced back to that first album by Crosby, Stills & Nash. It started fifty years ago with that stereo disc on a record player with one speaker.

Tom Povey