

Psychedelic Pill, by Neil Young and Crazy Horse

reviewed by [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [January 9, 2013](#) issue

In Review



Psychedelic Pill

by Neil Young and Crazy Horse

Reprise

While many of his contemporaries have ossified, Neil Young claws at the marrow like a deranged miner, digging deep in ways that confound expectation. He launches his new double album with a track that's almost 28 minutes long—and that largely

revolves around two chords. It's one of three songs on this nine-track effort that top 16 minutes. That's hardly the sort of stuff that warms a radio programmer's heart.

Even when Young goes short, he refuses to play nice. The three-and-a-half minute title track, which recalls Young's much-beloved "Cinnamon Girl," uses a flanging effect that makes it sound like it's doused in a jet engine vapor trail. (An alternate mix removes the flanging; while more accessible, it's less compelling for the lack of sonic vertigo.)

Yet for all the barriers it puts up, *Psychedelic Pill* shows off Young's guts and skill. His tremulous tenor remains untouched by time, and many of his lyrics riff on personal subject matter.

In assessing this disc, *Rolling Stone's* David Fricke remarked that "for Neil Young, the Sixties never ended." That's a shallow read. Young reviews his sixties ideologies afresh through the lens of experience. He doesn't so much invoke the Age of Aquarius as he yearns—even mourns—for lost time, idealism and power.

Still, Young's shambling hard-rock sound remains a constant, and he refuses to tread gently into that good night. On "Walk Like a Giant" (another long one, accented with strange, spaghetti Western whistling) he laments: "Me and some of my friends / We were going to save the world / We were tryin' to make it better . . . Think about how close we came." Not ready to bury his idealism, he declares, "I want to walk like a giant on the land." Then, when the song seems to be over, Crazy Horse crash-dives into four-plus minutes of feedback, guitar noise and Jurassic-sized drum hits. Is this the sound of Young's dream dissolving or being reanimated? Listen and decide for yourself.

There are many more autobiographical glimpses. The country-fried "Twisted Road" celebrates Young's influences and contemporaries. On "Driftin' Back" (the epic-length opener), we see his insecurity emerge: "Dreaming 'bout the way things sound now / Write about them in my book / Worry that you can't hear me now / Or feel the time I took."

Given its stormy sprawl, *Pill* has no shortage of imperfections. Drum fills stumble, guitar solos curdle into sour pools, and some songs teeter between moving and meandering (such as "For the Love of Man," an older composition written for Young's son Ben, who has cerebral palsy). This one probably isn't for fans of Young's acoustic work. But those who risk a listen may find themselves buoyed by this

masterwork. At 67, Neil Young rocks hard, risks all and lets the warts show like no one else.