

I'm not a robot

































When Neil Young was asked about his seminal fourth album on its 40th anniversary, he said: "I think Harvest was probably the finest record that I've made, but that's really a restricting adjective for me. It's really fine, but that's it." The album, released through the Reprise label on 14 February 1972, provided Young with two hits – Heart Of Gold and Old Man – and became the best-selling album in the US for the entire year. Listen to 'Harvest' here. Eight of Harvest's ten tracks are acoustic, something that came out of necessity because Young, then just 25, was struggling with a debilitating back injury that would ultimately require complicated surgery. The album, which took nine months to complete, was recorded in spurts in Nashville, London and California, in between tours, hospital consultations and a romance that would produce Young's first child. "He's really got an uncanny instinct to go for the throat" When Young recorded his masterful live album at Toronto's Massey Hall in January 1971, he road-tested, in stirring stripped-down versions, three of the songs that would appear on Harvest: Heart Of Gold, Old Man and The Needle And The Damage Done. Two of the best Neil Young songs of the era, Heart Of Gold and A Man Needs A Maid, were written in tribute to his new lover, actress Carrie Snodgrass, who had starred in the film *Diary Of A Mad Housewife*. The latter song was recorded at Barking Town Hall in London, with Young on piano and with backing from the London Symphony Orchestra. (The acclaimed classical orchestra also featured on the album track There's A World.) At the time of Harvest, Snodgrass recalled that Young was smoking a lot of "strong pot". Though *A Man Needs A Maid* was clearly not a feminist anthem – Young included lyrics about desiring "someone to keep my house clean, fix my meals and go away" – Snodgrass said she had happy memories of the time she fell "madly and immediately" in love with the Canadian-born singer-songwriter. It was no coincidence that Harvest was released on Valentine's Day. Young also recorded parts of Harvest at Elliot Mazer's Quadrafonic Sound Studios, a converted two-storey house in Nashville's Music Row. Mazer was instrumental in bringing four local backing musicians to the sessions: Ben Keith (pedal steel guitar), Tim Drummond (bass), Kenny Buttrey (drums) and Jack Nitzsche (piano), a quartet who became known as The Stray Gators. The musicians brought a fine country-rock backing sound to songs such as Are You Ready For The Country? Young also convinced his bandmates from Crosby, Stills, Nash and & Young to appear on the record. Though David Crosby drolly commented, "Neil needs us about as much as a stag needs a coat rack," he, Stephen Stills and Graham Nash provided deft backing vocals on Alabama, Are You Ready For The Country? and Words (Between The Lines Of Age). Young also brought in the brilliant Linda Ronstadt and James Taylor to provide backing vocals to both Heart Of Gold and Old Man. Heart Of Gold was cut in just two takes. "The way Neil makes records, oh my gosh. I have a very, very meticulous way of working. I am an oil painter. I take a long time to get all the parts in tune," Ronstadt recalled. "With Neil you don't get the chance. You're lucky if you've figured the part out, he does things so fast... It's done and it's brilliant. He's really got an uncanny instinct to go for the throat." Pianist John Harris, who played with Nashville band Barefoot Jerry, was brought in to play keyboards on the slow dance classic that became Harvest's title track. "Harvest is one of my best songs," Young said. "That's the best thing on Harvest." Young later told his biographer Jimmy McDonough that the ten songs on the album were written when he "was in love with Carrie and feeling on top of the world". "How about planting instead of harvesting?" The most mordant song on the record is The Needle And The Damage Done, an evocating composition about the perils of heroin addiction. It features Young's superb flatpicking guitar playing, and the version on Harvest was taken from a live recording made at University Of California, Los Angeles the day after the Massey Hall concert. In 2015, Harvest, which opens with the country ballad Out On The Weekend, was inducted into the Grammy Hall Of Fame. Four years later, in an interview with the American Association Of Retired People's official magazine, the then 74-year-old Young revealed that he had been asked to reprise Harvest for a world tour. "I was just offered millions of dollars for a tour to do Harvest," he said. "Everyone who played on Harvest is dead. I don't want to do that. How about planting instead of harvesting?" Though there was no 21st-century Harvest live festival, there is no doubt that Young's masterpiece remains one of the finest records of its time. Check out our best Neil Young songs to find out which "Harvest" songs still reap rewards. In *Deptha's* iconic as it gets, the promo video for Madonna's Vogue single proved that the "Queen Of Pop" was all about making high art. In *Deptha* true 80s mega-hit, What's Love Got To Do With It defined Tina Turner's career, if not her outlook on life... In 1972, Neil Young released his fourth and what became his highest-charting album: Harvest. Acoustic – except for two tracks – out of necessity, because of a back injury that required surgery, it took him an entire year to finish, recorded piecemeal in between tours, hospital stays, surgery recuperations and a high-profile romance that would lead to his first child. At one point Young called Harvest his "finest album"; then, in 1977, he derided it in the liner notes of Decades, his retrospective collection, all but dismissing it as an MOR aberration. Forty years later, Harvest continues to confound critics and fans alike. It earned Young his only No.1 record, with the single Heart Of Gold, a song that continues to live on, sung at countless weddings and funerals, and covered by artists as diverse as Zack Wylde, Boney M, Johnny Cash, Jimmy Buffett and even Young's Farm Aid partners Willie Nelson and Dave Matthews. You may like Heart Of Gold was on the soundtrack of the 2010 film Eat Love Pray, and was even referenced by Lady Gaga in You And I, in the deathless line "On my birthday you sang me A Heart Of Gold/With a guitar humming and no clothes." No matter what you think of Neil Young, or of Harvest, you can't deny that there has always been something a little prescient and otherworldly about the musician. How else can you explain how Buffalo Springfield came into being – all the members just happened to be stuck in the same LA traffic jam – in a moment that seemed to momentarily subvert the law of physics and geography to make musical history. Continuing along those same kinetic fly lines, it's conceivable to blame Harvest on Neil Young's former roadie Guillermo Giachetti. In fact, it wouldn't even be a stretch to say that if Giachetti hadn't been such a movie buff, Harvest might not have been made. After being awestruck by Carrie Snodgrass's performance in *Diary Of A Mad Housewife*, the roadie convinced his boss to see it with him while they were on the road in Washington, DC in December 1970. Carrie Snodgrass in a publicity shot for *Diary Of A Housewife* (Image credit: Evening Standard / Getty Images) In the darkened theatre, Young was equally taken with the slight, winsome actress with the throaty voice, and upon his return to California he did some fact finding. As providence would have it – always a big force in Young's life – Snodgrass happened to be performing in a stage production of Rosebloom at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. Sign up below to get the latest from Classic Rock, plus exclusive special offers, direct to your inbox!Young dispatched Giachetti and his roadie compatriot Bruce Berry to go backstage at the theatre and check her out. She passed their high scrutiny and they left her a note. The next day, the Academy Award-nominal actress saw a note on her dressing room table that simply read: "Call Neil Young". The ironic thing was that she didn't even know who Young was, which certainly had to be of no small appeal to the soon-to-be-iconic singer-songwriter. After her roommate looked her in, Snodgrass called Young and arranged to meet him the next month. That fateful first date took place in Young's room at the Chateau Marmont, one of Hollywood's more infamous hotels, as renowned for its posh European hospitality as for the rolloccall of long-time residents like Johnny Depp and Keanu Reeves. John Frusciante lived there after ghosts told him to quit the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and several of the members of Led Zeppelin rode their motorcycles through the lobby to the sound of cheering guests. But it wasn't the quaintly appointed lobby, the high tea or the exalted guests – after all, Snodgrass was a two-time Golden Globe winner and an Academy Award nominee – or even the fact that Young was wearing a neck brace and confined to a hospital bed that the late actress recalled. Rather, it was the drugs they smoked. This might help to explain their relationship, being that it truly was founded on his illusion of her on the big screen, and perhaps the pills that he was taking to alleviate the pain of his debilitating back injury."That Panama Red! Jesus, that was strong pot. I got about halfway home and had to pull over and go to sleep. I got lost going home," Snodgrass told Young biographer Jimmy McDonough. As for Neil, he fell in love with the actress, arranging for a second date before the evening was over, then checking himself into a hospital the next morning for the excruciating back pain that would require surgery just eight months later. But not before he began sketching out ideas for a suite of songs inspired by Snodgrass. Within the month he had already written *A Man Needs A Maid* and Heart Of Gold, playing them on piano as one conjoined piece for the first time on January 10, 1971, at the University Of Oregon; and then again at Toronto's Massey Hall, the performance that's captured on the Live At Massey Hall 1971 CD.Harvey through his solo tour, Young decided to separate the two songs, and began to play them on guitar, cutting one single line: 'Afraid/A man is afraid' when the two songs became standalones. But to be completely accurate, while it was released on February 14, 1972, the album was much more than a Valentine to Carrie Snodgrass. It's an album that deals with love of all stripes, chronicling his budding romance with Snodgrass, his affection for the ranch hand Louis Avila, his sad regret over Danny Whitten's dependence on heroin, his own search for self-love. More so, Harvest is the result of a confluence of serendip, and Young had to have thought hard about where he wanted to place Heart Of Gold in respect to the rest of the songs. Was the placement, the juxtaposition, a message to Snodgrass, or to himself? Young once described his music as being about "the frustrations of not being able to attain what you want". When it appears that he had gotten what he wanted, if the love songs on Harvest are to be believed, he's not completely comfortable with it. 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