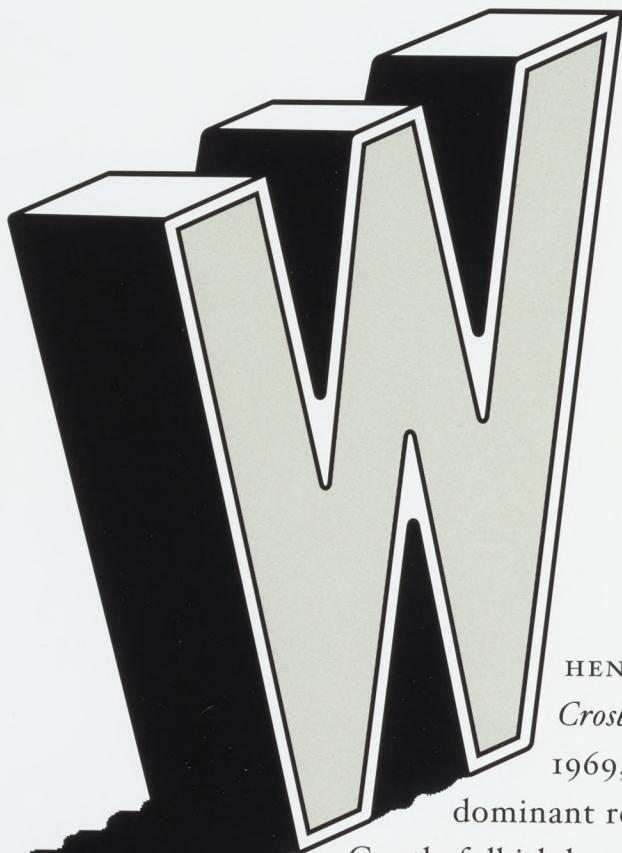


(((CROSBY, STILLS & NASH)))

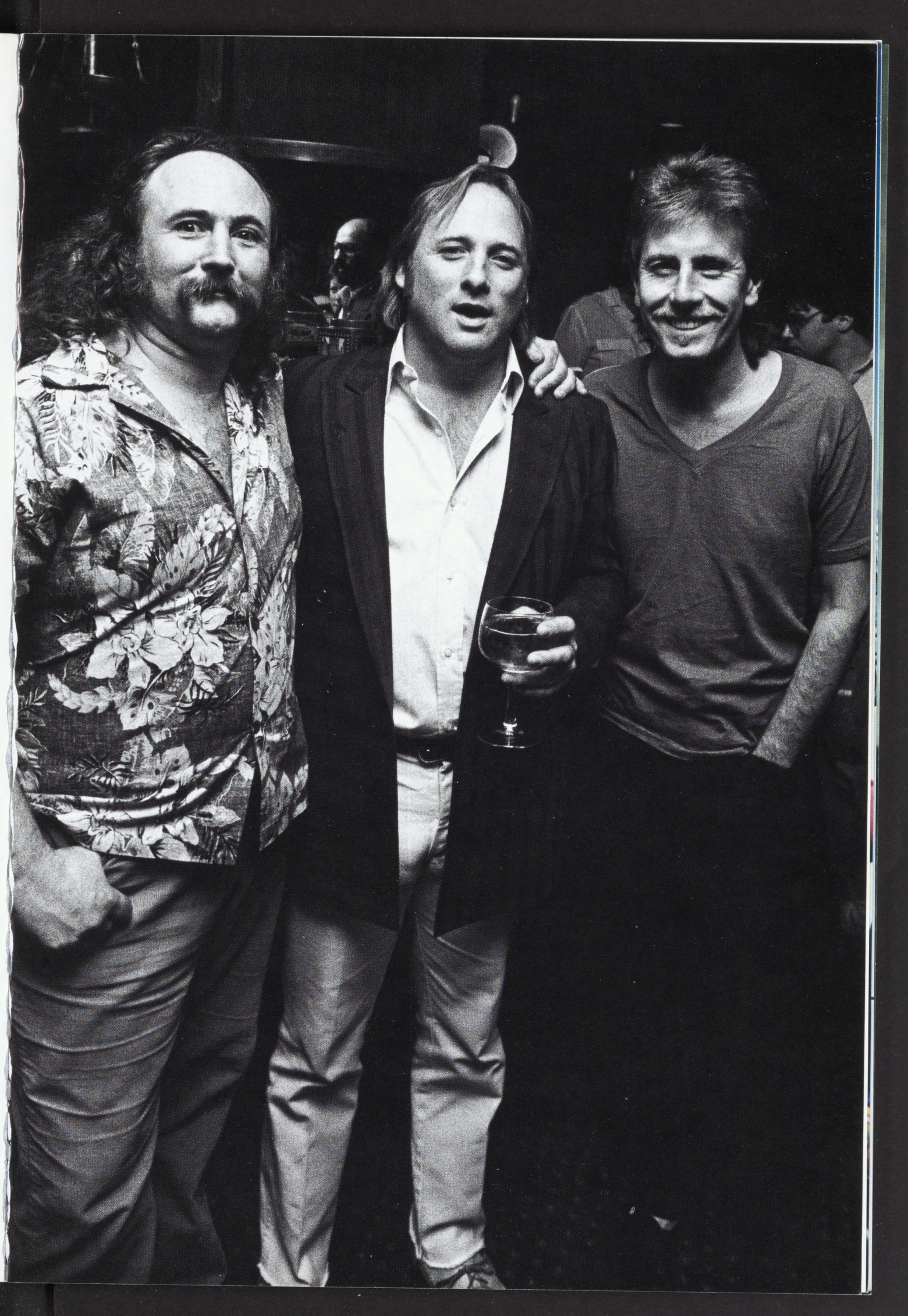


WHEN THE unprepossessing album *Crosby, Stills & Nash* was released in 1969, it flew in the face of the predominant rock & roll wisdom of the day.

Gentle folkish harmonies going up against megawattage Telecasters and Strats? Forget it. Wistful fairy tales about wooden ships on the water competing with smash-your-head-against-the-wall full-blown rock & roll? Not gonna happen, man. No way.

Get those wimps outta here! ♪ THEN A FUNNY thing happened. CS&N *happened*, and happened in a big way. ♪ TO GET BACK to 1969 in the rock & roll world, that year began as the War of the Guitar Giants. Led by Jimi Hendrix's blistering attack, decibels were crashing through the ceiling. Eric Clapton had just debuted the much-ballyhooed supergroup Blind Faith with a free concert for 100,000 in London's Hyde Park. The Who were just unleashing *Tommy*. And, even as the Beatles were breaking up, rock was beginning to discover and test its emerging political

David Crosby, Stephen
Stills, Graham Nash:
CS&N reunited, 1982





and economic power. In the midst of all this Sturm und Drang, a quiet revolution was waiting in the wings. In June 1969, CS&N unleashed upon the rock world three-part harmony with an attitude (and a conscience).

The album had an immediate and lasting impact on both its audience and the musical community at large. *Rolling Stone*, which would develop a tempestuous relationship with the group CS&N, noticed the album *CS&N* (although the lead review in that issue was of the Bonzo Dog Band). "The combination of talents creates a great sound," *Rolling Stone* opined, "and it is a new sound, not merely music derived from the styles of previous groups. The vocals are warm and full, with a kind of built-in kineticism produced by three good voices emerging asynchronously on the same phrase, with rich, complementary harmonies reminiscent of Moby Grape's '8:05.'"

Well. That CS&N emerged from the considerable shadow cast by the late Moby Grape is testament indeed to the group's staying power. At any rate, CS&N quickly became rock royalty. Their acoustic music and soaring harmonies effected a permanent shift in American popular music. Before you could say "Eagles," there were a hundred clone bands flourishing.

The fact that CS&N defied convention and went against the grain of hip rock & roll only served to endear them to their fans. They also, their fans learned to their eternal appreciation and delight, were determined to be a fiercely democratic group, as opposed to the aristocratic bands that rock was breeding. CS&N played and sang *people's music* that they were writing and performing and, by God, they would act as a people's band, never rising above their peers and—above all—living out their professional and personal lives in public, in sheer view of everyone.

Within the space of six short months, the pattern had pretty much been set for their lives and careers. They immediately

added a fourth member—Neil Young—although his permanence was up to debate (as was the group's, at different times). They were the stellar attraction at the stellar festival, Woodstock (as only their *second* gig), and they played the other big peoples' gatherings at Altamont and Big Sur. They played an unprecedented seven-night, sold-out engagement at Los Angeles's Greek Theatre as their hometown debut. They blew audiences away at the Fillmore East and in the process began an internecine warfare that continued in the group for years. They proved that CS&N (&Y) was a group of equals with no leader or even leaders. They almost broke up and then set off to begin a second album. And they continued to make beautiful music that struck a chord deep in the hearts of a huge number of listeners.

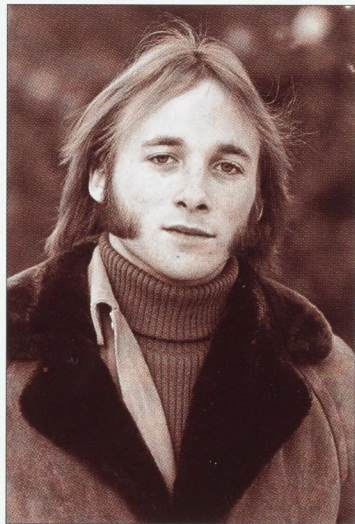
David Crosby, Stephen Stills and Graham Nash brought with them a considerable body of work, an impressive list of songs and a simmering anger at the nature of groups in rock & roll and at earlier group experiences that had soured them. The fierce sense of independence that drove each of them was strong enough to nullify the possibility of a group effort—had it not been for the fact that each of them knew straightaway that they needed each other to create a music that was so much more than the sum of its parts. Personally, I will never forget taking a friend to her first CS&N concert and hearing her ecstatic reaction to what she heard and saw. The band was extremely visual then: Crosby resembled a swaggering Buffalo Bill, Stills was a virtual Beach Boy and Nash came straight out of Dickens. But what most impressed my friend was the almost mystical allure of the group. She told me the reason CS&N was so good was that they represented the elements: Crosby was water, Stills was fire and Nash, earth. United, she said, they could not fail.

Stills, Crosby, Nash
unleashing three-part
harmonies with atti-
tude, June 10, 1977

They initially seemed unlikely allies. David Crosby had been fired from the Byrds, mainly because of attitudinal clashes with the group. Things built to a head over the Byrds' rejection of Crosby's song "Triad" (later recorded by both the Jefferson Airplane and by CSN&Y, its threesome-romance theme was unusual even by rock standards). Stephen Stills had carried the group Buffalo Springfield along by the sheer force of his will, long after that brilliant but doomed band should have faltered. He also clashed frequently with fellow Springfielder Neil Young. Graham Nash had become miserable in the Hollies in England and finally left over musical differences, the chief one being that he didn't want to record a Vegas-style album of Dylan songs. His breaking point came when the group spurned his "Sleep Song" as being too realistic in its depiction of sex.

There is no agreement among the group members as to the exact time and place when and where CSN&Y discovered their own peculiar brand of three-part harmony. Crosby remembered that it was either at Joni Mitchell's or Cass Elliot's place. "Cass was the one who introduced me to Graham," he recalled. "Joni had been romantically involved with me and then fell in love with Graham. It could've happened either place."

Stills insists that "the first song was sung in Cass's dining room, looking out at the pool John Sebastian was swimming in. We went to Joni's from there."



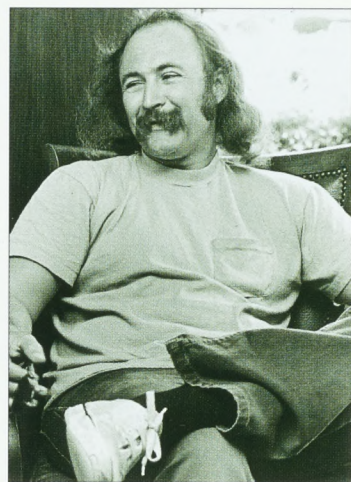
Stephen Stills

Says Nash, "To this day I believe that it was in Joni's living room. Cass is the very reason why all of this took place in the first place. It was Cass who befriended me when I came to Hollywood, it was Cass who introduced me to Crosby, and Crosby and Cass introduced me to Stephen. Me being a harmony freak and being the high harmony in the Hollies, when David and Stephen were singing 'You Don't Have to Cry,' they were singing the two parts and they started to show off because they wanted to show me that they had worked on it very diligently. It sounded *great*, and I asked them to sing it a second time. They looked at each other and sang it a second time. Then I asked them to sing it again, and I had by then a rough idea of what my part would be. It turned out to be nothing short of musical magic. When we heard ourselves for the first time, it was truly astounding to us as musicians that these three people from such diverse backgrounds can meld and come together with that sound."

After the first album and the heady rush of success, they were rehearsing for a four-night gig at Winterland. One afternoon, Crosby's love, Christine Gale Hinton, took the cats out to the vet. She was killed in a head-on collision, and Crosby was never the same. Their album went gold that day.

They carried on, finishing the *Déjà Vu* album, which was full of brilliant songs, including Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock," Stills's "Carry On" and Nash's "Teach Your Children." Even so, the album had been difficult to finish, given three entirely different sensibilities and different work modes. The Carry

On Tour, which wound through America and Europe in 1970, pioneered the use of self-contained massive light and sound equipment. Then, the group broke up in Chicago after backstage bickering. They had all agreed at the start that the group was something they shared but was not all that they were or would be. Says Nash, "We wanted to let people know that we weren't a band in the traditional sense, that we were individuals who would come together in a group dynamic whenever and with whomever we felt like."

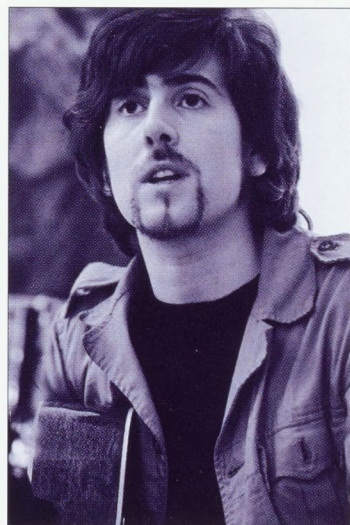


David Crosby

Déjà Vu shipped two million copies, and "Teach Your Children" was a hit in addition to becoming a hippie anthem. Then came the Kent State University incident, in which National Guardsmen opened fire on protesters, killing four. CSN&Y responded with the song "Ohio," and that was done, says Nash, for their audience. "I think the listeners felt less alone," he recalled, "and less crazy and less isolated, because I think they recognized that in speaking for ourselves we were speaking for them too. Now, what other band would have a song like 'Teach Your Children' racing up the charts and then immediately kill it stone dead when four students were killed? Neil wrote 'Ohio,' and we recorded it and put it out within ten days. People in the business thought we were absolutely crazy."

That sort of commitment will remain a major part of the group's continuing legacy of what Nash from the beginning called making "beautiful and meaningful music." The meaningful or activist or politically aware side of the group now amounts to a considerable list of songs (as well as movements to which they were allied): "Long Time Gone," "Southern Man," "49 Bye-Byes," "Military Madness," "Barrel of Pain," "Soldiers of Peace," "After the Dolphin," "Find the Cost of Freedom," "To the Last Whale."

"We've just tried to be true to ourselves," Nash says. "I think one reason people love this band is that they see three people up there who are going through the same changes its audience is going through and doing it publicly, and that takes a certain amount of courage. We could have dodged it, could have hidden behind smoke bombs and naked girls running around onstage and slow motion and all that shit. But we never wanted it. Because that's not important. What's important is the emotional connection between us and our audience." ◀



Graham Nash