



Are you ready for the country again? Neil Young's new cd "Prairie Wind" is being billed as the third in a trilogy of albums recorded in Nashville beginning in 1972 with "Harvest" and twenty years later with "Harvest Moon". "Prairie Wind" has the warm acoustic sensibilities of the other two, but Young recorded this album after being diagnosed with a brain aneurysm last March. The songs are in chronological order as they were written and recorded during his recovery from brain surgery and reflect his feelings about God, the North American plains, the death of his father and Elvis Presley.

Songs like "The Painter", "No Wonder" and the title track immediately recall some of his older material like "Old Man", "Harvest Moon" and even CSNY's "Find the Cost of Freedom." Emmylou Harris joins Neil on background vocals for "This Old Guitar", an ode to the acoustic instrument that anchors each song on this album along with familiar sidemen Spooner Oldham (keyboards) and Ben Keith (steel guitar). The hilarious rave-up about Elvis on "He was the King" comes complete with the studio chatter before and after the song. Crazy Horse, his longtime electric backup band is nowhere to be found, but there are plenty of horn and string accompaniments to keep the acoustic arrangements lively.

"Prairie Wind" ends with the hymn-like "When God Made Me" which he premiered live in the Live 8 and Hurricane Katrina benefit concerts. The lyrics, which ask ten simple questions, are kind of a cross between "Imagine" by John Lennon and Bob Dylan's "Blowing in the Wind". It's not unlikely company for an artist who has written many a timeless composition over the course of 37 albums as a solo artist.