Graham Nash
Feel the Dreams

by Mr. Bonzai

Sessions at the top can be pretty serious, what with the big meter running and careers forging on, but the mood today is relaxed, upbeat, and friendly as Graham Nash steps out of the control room and joins me in the Record Plant studio canteen. The pinball machine fires off a synth riff as the room fills with the aroma of freshly microwaved gourmet popcorn.

Like millions around the world I've been touched by this man's music for many, many years. He was a founding father of The Hollies, the only group in England to score more hits than The Beatles. Perhaps the most enduring soldier of the British Invasion, he pulled up his roots and changed his life at the Woodstock debut of Crosby, Stills and Nash.

It's appropriate that CSN is three names, three distinct musical personalities. What's remarkable is the harmonious blend that became a three-headed chimera, and sometimes four-headed. But this group has never been a "group" in the traditional musical sense.

"The individualism became a dominant part of what it was that we wanted to say," Nash explains. "We wanted to let people know that we were no longer going to be in a group; that we would be individuals that came together to make music and could make music with whomever and in whatever form we wanted. Consequently, when people say, 'They broke up, they reformed, they re-broke up, they re-formed,' it's all bullshit."

Nash has had great success as a solo artist, as a member of a group, and as a member of a non-group. He's the living proof of strong individuality working in harmony with others. When we look at the social activism, we might note that his first memories are of air raid sirens and the bombing of England in the final days of WWII.

BONZAI: How are things going with the new album?
NASH: I couldn't be happier. From what we've finished and roughly mixed I feel we are indeed able to move forward and take what it is we do best into the 90s. It's great as far as I'm concerned because it would be very easy, especially with a band like ours, to remain resting on our laurels and stay back there in the past. Not one of us has any interest in doing that.
BONZAI: Any particular departures from the past work?
NASH: We've been more open to being guided. We're working with Stanley Johnston, our engineer/producer, and Joe Vitale, our musician friend/producer, with myself, and David and Stephen as artists/producers. We're more open to

suggestions, to a different direction, more open to different songwriters and we've never done that in the past.
BONZAI: How do the songwriting credits break down on this album?
NASH: Hard to say right now because we've cut 19 tunes, but the way it looks, the single may be "Live it Up", written by Joe Vitale. Stephen wrote "Tomboy," and "Standing Alone" with Tony Beard. Tony wrote "Straight Line". David and Michael Hedges wrote "Arrows" and "Street to Lean On." I wrote "House of Broken Dreams" and "Dolphin" with Craig Doerge, and "Yours and Mine" with Greg and David. We've split up the songwriting tasks. The ten songs that we are concentrating on now seem to make the best album, the best balance between tempos, subject, melodic structure.
BONZAI: Wasn't Van Dyke Parks in conducting his orchestral arrangements for one of the songs?
NASH: That was for Stephen's song "Mystery". We're not sure if that will be on this album, but my feeling is that it's one of Stephen's best songs of late, and is a great solo Stephen Still's song. I'm not past helping with the vocals, and neither is David, but it's a difficult song because of the melodic structure to turn it into a CSN three-part song.

BONZAI: A friend of mine, Rand Bishop, and I were talking about the different identities within the group. He suggested that Stephen comes from a guitarist direction, David is more of an intuitive writer, and you are more of a writer in the structured sense of classic rock/popular songwriting. Does that make sense to you?
NASH: I think it makes perfect sense, although none of us likes to be pigeon-holed. But it is true — I came from a past of 21 Top Ten hits with The Hollies. The Hollies were great at the three-minute Pop song and I was trained from the late Fifties, early Sixties in that vein. Most of my favorite records are around three minutes long. I figure if you can't say it in that length of time, you can't say it, although I've obviously written songs that are longer than that.

David definitely comes from a more intuitive place. He's the more interesting writer of the three of us, to my ear.

BONZAI: Let's jump back to your early days. You're from Manchester, aren't you?
NASH: Yes, in the north of England.
BONZAI: Were you musically inclined as a child?
NASH: Yes, I was. Allan Clarke and I met when I was five years old and we started to sing together immediately. I don't know why, but we were singing school prayers, and harmonized in school choirs, minstrel shows. Then in the late Fifties, Skiffle music came to England via Lonnie Donegan from America. Skiffle was a simple form of folk music, basically three chords. And it was fast, and easy, and it was fun. We got into Skiffle in a big way.

Then with the coming into our lives of The Everly Brothers, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Buddy Holly, Fats Domino and The Platters, Gene Vincent, etc., we began to really realize that, A — we needed drums and bass, B — that this two-part singing which we had been doing for many years was coming of age. So we

found ourselves in the early 60s forming a band called The Hollies, with basically Allan and myself singing lead, occasionally three-part with Tony Hicks. We cut our first hit record in 1963 and I haven't looked back since.

I left the Hollies in 1968 because of several musical differences and personality conflicts. We had been coming to America since1965 and this was an entirely different environment for me. It was one in which I thrived, one which I loved. I got turned onto smoking marijuana, hashish, to LSD, expanding my consciousness. I gradually grew apart from the rest of The Hollies, who were basically more interested in the drug of their choice — beer.

At that time I had been hanging out with David and Stephen, so I knew that we had something tremendously vital. I was writing songs that The Hollies were not interested in recording, songs that I felt were deeper, more meaningful than what we had done earlier. All those factors came together in late1968 and I decided to live here.

BONZAI: So, 1968 — Hollies behind you, CSN ahead of you. Singles had been the style of the record business and your forming CSN was around the time of album domination, FM radio.

NASH: Well, Sergeant Pepper had helped changed that a lot. But it began to be obvious that the art form of albums was much more interesting than singles. The singles were like ads for the albums. I knew when I sang with David and Stephen what it was I wanted to do. We also knew we had tremendous song potential because we were three reasonably strong writers, young — naive maybe — but interesting.

Our first record was brought out in a time of pre-heavy metal, stacks of Marshalls. We come out with this acoustic feeling album and it threaded right the way through everything and made its mark. We knew when we left the studio with that two-track master that we had a hit record.

BONZAI: You've also had solo success, such as "Songs for Beginners", which still sounds so fresh and alive.

NASH: I was very pleased with that record. I think I'm most pleased over its longevity. I get kind comments from people all the time about it being one of their favorite albums. I've tried to think what it was about that album that was so attractive and I can't really figure it out. I think it was very simple, very straightforward, and it had a very live feeling. There are some good songs, but I've never been really able to pin what it was about that album. I'm kinda glad, because I certainly don't want to repeat it. But I do wonder what it was that made it so attractive.

BONZAI: So much of your music, and with your compadres, captures a period. It's been said that if you want to go back and feel the Woodstock time, you listen to CSN and The Grateful Dead.

NASH: Kind of an awful place to be stuck, isn't it? [laughs]

BONZAI: But let's talk about your music as historic anthems in times of social upheaval.

NASH: One of the things that was upsetting me during my association with The Hollies was that there were social things happening that were far more relevant

than the kinds of singles we got into — the "moon, June, spoon" in the back of the car, summer days types of songs. I'm not against that but there is certainly more to be concerned with.

So when I joined David and Stephen, I knew that we had three writers that felt similar to the way I felt. Things were happening sociologically that were extremely important from our point of view, as artists, to make comments upon. I think it's been the role of the artist throughout history to bring news from one village to another, to spread tales of what's happening. In many ways, you're not getting the real truth from the mass media. You're only getting a part of the truth. What we have always tried to do as artists is to reflect what is going on around us, reveal what is going on inside us, and express how we feel about certain subjects.

I'm not so sure that we are a political group. When you shoot four kids down at Kent State — is that political or is that just a tragedy? When you jail the Chicago Eight for allegedly trying to wipe Chicago off the map, is that political or is that a tragedy? And when we talk about the nuclear power industry, are these political issues or are they human condition issues? As artists we've always wanted to be our own psychiatrists in a way. We have the ability, because we are writers, to internalize situations and then bring them out as music. I'm not sure what enables us to do that, but I guess that's what an artist is.

BONZAI: Are we voicing global awareness more than in the past?

NASH: It may appear that way, but on the sheet music of "Immigration Man" from 20 years ago I had the Earth on the cover and the moon on the back. Even then, and for the last 20 years, I've often thought that maybe the solution to the global problems would be a global government. One government that controlled and ran the world with the finest computers and the most compassionate men and women. How can we avoid situations like paying farmers not to grow food while people are starving. A lot of the world's problems are logistical and not necessarily emotional. I think that even though they are catching up to global concepts, most of the artists that I've been involved with have felt globally for many years.

BONZAI: With the great effect you have on your audience throughout the world, where are you putting your energies in the 90s?

NASH: After thinking about it for many years, I've come to believe that the only true currency is time. Given that I believe that, to prioritize my time I have to find what is more important to me as a person. What's most important to me is the health and well-being of my wife and family, my music, and everything else follows.

Obviously there is a great demand on our time from people who want us to help. There are causes which at first might seem trivial, such as the problem of broken glass on the beach, which we were asked to do a benefit for. I realized as a parent, what a drag it was that you couldn't let your children run on the beach for fear of slicing a foot open. Everything is important to somebody, but I have to figure what is most important to me right now, apart from the personal wants of my wife and family.

We need to unlock the paralysis of children's minds, to instill in them a sense of hope for the future, to overcome the vast damage that we have done to

this planet in terms of the storage of nuclear waste, to try and combat environmental problems that run from the ozone layer, to acid rain, to fouling of the water and the soil. And that should take me a few lifetimes.
BONZAI: Are you an optimist?
NASH: I have to be. If I wasn't an optimist I wouldn't bother being here making a record. I'd just be watching TV with a beer. It's easy to do, because the problems that face us are overwhelming. But I look in the faces of my kids and I get a sense of hope.

BONZAI: Let's talk about the chemistry of collaboration within the band. How has that evolved? Is it an extension of what it was in the past? How does it work?
NASH: The chemistry of CSN, of CSNY, has been an ever-evolving, changing, chemical equation. In the early days, a certain member of the band would be stronger and would be the guiding influence. In the middle period, that role was taken over by somebody else, and now in this later period the role has been taken over by somebody else. It's a constantly evolving partnership that works. Our egos are such that we don't care who runs this as long as it's moving forward. And so the chemistry is always volatile; always explosive, and always — Crosby put it best when he said it's like juggling four bottles of nitroglycerine. It's OK to do that until you drop one. But you don't just drop one, you drop all of them.
BONZAI: We're talking about a lot of energy to deal with...
NASH: A tremendous amount. Four very strong people with very divergent programs and different ways of looking at things. But we all collectively know that the most important part of our existence as musicians is the *music*. There is nothing more important. Not the amount that we love each other; not the amount that we hate each other. Not the amount of fighting we've done in the past, or maybe in the future. The most important thing is the music and that will far outlive us.
BONZAI: Looks like it'll be around long after all of us are gone.
NASH: I hope so. I can see it in the faces of fourteen year old kids at our concerts who are singing the words to "Teach Your Children." They are singing songs that were conceived before they were. I can only come to the assumption that the music has longevity, has lasting and staying power. As a musician, I can't ask for anything more than writing music that will outlive myself.

BONZAI: You've also been getting a lot of recognition lately because of your interest in photography and your collection being sold. Did your interest start as an observer and an appreciator, or were you a photographer first and compared your work with others?
NASH: I come from a poor family and my father was an amateur photographer. He first turned me onto the magic of photography, watching in my bedroom, as images appeared from a white sheet of paper in what looked like water. My dad would say, "Watch, just watch..." And all of a sudden, images floating into reality from nowhere. It was magic to me. That sense of wonderment has remained with me all my life.

I've always been an observer; I've always tried to widen my sense of perception to 360 degrees. In 1971, after I had been collecting Escher prints, German Expressionism, woodcuts — I saw a photograph by Diane Arbus called "Boy in Central Park with Hand Grenade." That was the first photograph I ever bought. It spoke to me of the struggle that I was personally going through, as was my band. Crosby, Stills and Nash were heavily involved in trying to stop the Vietnam war, supporting anti-war rallies, and when I saw that photograph, I thought of a song I'd written, "Teach Your Children" and thought, how many children out there are like this little kid in the photograph? How many kids were trained in our John Wayne, Audie Murphy, Hollywood-movie militaristic way of thinking? Surely we should teach them a better way of dealing with their fellow human beings. I learned that certain still photographs have a tremendous power to move us, as it moved me. There was no way I could leave the gallery without that photograph.

Being on the road for all those many years and visiting cities throughout the world, I ended up in 1978 with about 1500 images. I put 160 of them on the road as a traveling exhibition, a free exhibit which toured the world for 12 years. It cost a reasonable amount of money, but it was worth it to me. I wanted people to see, witness, and feel what these photographs had done to me personally. Which is what I am trying to do with my music — I'm trying to tell you how I feel about situations that are facing me in my life. I figure that if I can reach into my own feelings, I stand a good chance of reaching you, because we are all a common genetic pool of mankind. Now it's 1990 and the collection has grown to 2200 images and I have gotten so much from them. It's up for sale.

BONZAI: And much of the income is going to support our art museum here in L.A.?

NASH: After costs, I will split the proceeds with the L.A. County Art Museum to establish a fund for the purchase of non-traditional photography, such as digitally and computer altered images. I've also donated a number of contemporary photographs to the museum's permanent collection. And I will continue collecting. I find it hard to not want to own beautiful things. I'm very human in that respect.

BONZAI: What is your strongest human trait?

NASH: I think it is the incessant drive for people to be comfortable around me, and my appreciation of beauty.

BONZAI: In your long and varied career, what was the most exciting and heartfelt moment on stage?

NASH: There are many of them, going back to the trepidation we felt at Woodstock to the 70,000 fans in Atlantic City in the stadium who had waited for four hours in the pouring rain. I remember our determination, against the advice of our crew, to play in a rainstorm with the hazard of lightning — and the way that we felt playing for those people, and their appreciation.

BONZAI: No trouble?

NASH: No, a lot of rain and lightning, but nobody got fried. At least not on stage. Recently, I'm reminded of the Bridge Concert we played in San Francisco for the school for handicapped children that is run by Neil and his wife Peggy, and seeing

kids in wheelchairs, and this 10 year old girl starting to cry and a little boy slowly moving to help her. It inspired a new song, called "Try to Find Me." There are many memories — I've had a fantastic life. I feel extremely lucky, and I will get away with it as long as the gods let me.
BONZAI: Were there any dangerous moments in your touring?
NASH: A few. One of them involved a helicopter when I was in The Hollies. The fans were so crazy that they had pushed to the helicopter to get to us with the rotor blades spinning. Another time I had my tie grabbed by an ardent fan and tightened so much that I was choking. The tail rotor of the helicopter that took us into Woodstock failed and slammed into the ground — pretty hairy. The helicopter ride to Atlantic City in the thunderstorm was not one of my favorite experiences.

BONZAI: Do you have any thoughts for young people thinking about a career in music?
NASH: The only thing that kept me alive, that kept me moving forward, that kept me on the ball, is a love for what I do. I don't want to get heavy handed, but there is a great responsibility as a musician to write true music, meaning that it comes from within your soul, something that you truly feel. I spent many years not doing that and I love those years, but regret them at the same time. I realize it was part of the growth process that brought me to the point where I am right now. For the last 20 years, I've tried to write music that is truthful, that comes from within me, and which is not manufactured. When you do that, I've found, you change people's lives. You give them a different perspective to view and judge everything from.

It helps tremendously in realizing several things: 1 — that they are not alone; 2 — that they are not crazy, and 3 — that they are one of a race we laughingly refer to as human beings, with all its inherent problems and all its inherent greatness. We are all together in this incredible ride on this spinning ball of mud in space, and we better get on with it and make the best of it.

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