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POP & HISS

Young plays up his PonoMusic

BY RANDY LEWIS

Neil Young has long groused about the way music he and other artists make ends up sounding in the digital age. Now he is introducing his solution: PonoMusic, a combination online music store and playback system that gives listeners access to audiophile-quality recordings.

"It's about the music, real music," the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member said in a statement released Monday, a day before he formally introduces PonoMusic at the South by Southwest Music Conference in Austin. "We want to move digital music into the 21st century and PonoMusic does exactly that."

The complaint about the way most music is experienced by consumers today is that highly compressed MP3 files that make it convenient to store on phones and share over the Internet compromise the quality of sound, since MP3 files typically contain 5% or less of the sonic information in the original master recordings.

"Apple has made music into wallpaper, so what can I tell you?" Young told the Los Angeles Times in 2009.

PonoMusic will give consumers a convenient way to

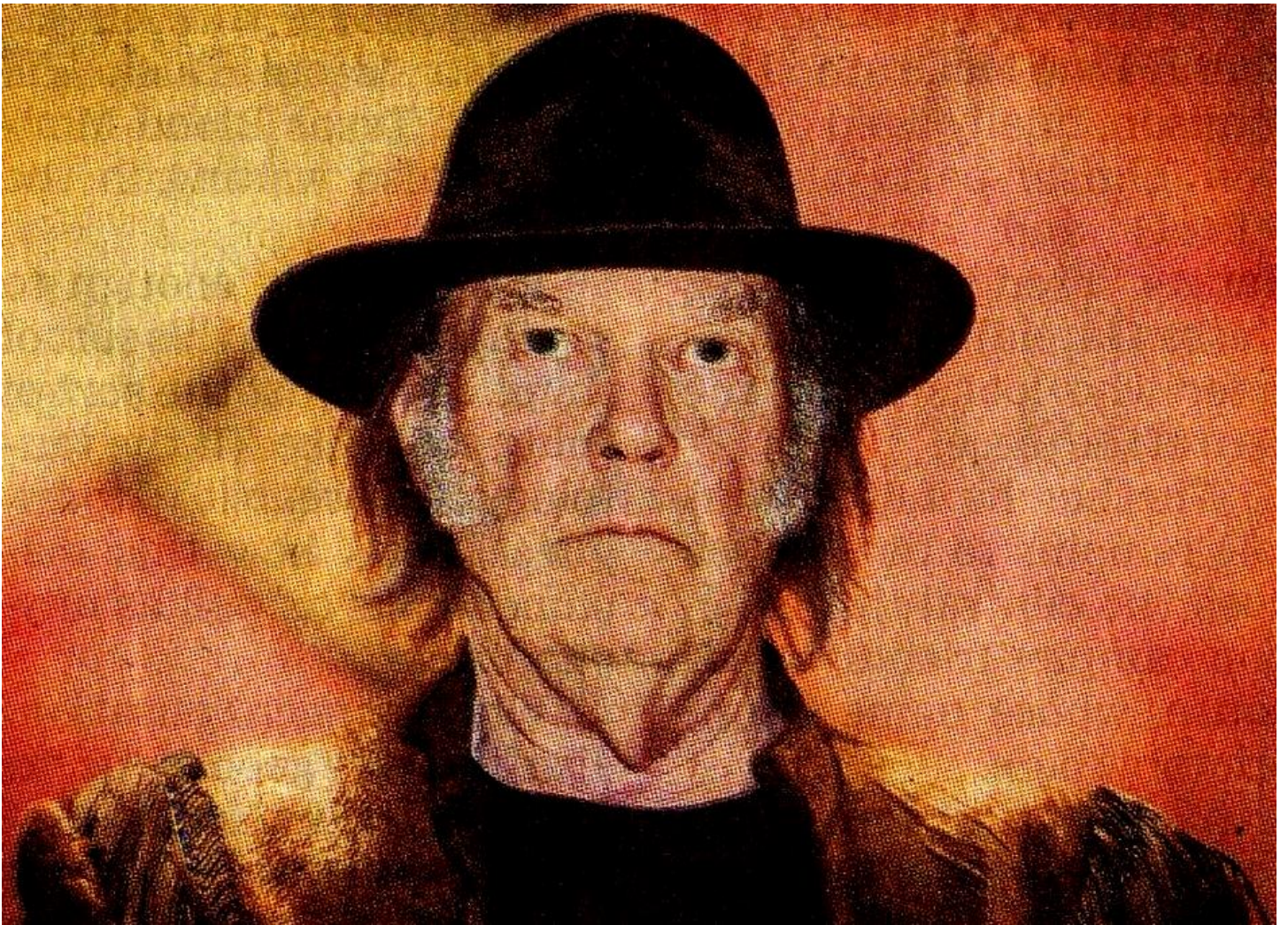
download and play back full-resolution files. Young has said the Pono system would give consumers a choice on the quality level they prefer to download, and that prices of downloads are expected to be tiered accordingly, but the price ranges have not been listed yet.

Young has noted that all three major music groups — Warner Bros., Universal and Sony — are participating in the PonoMusic online music store. The PonoPlayer will have a list price of \$399 and be capable of storing 1,000 to 2,000 high-resolution digital albums, according to the PonoMusic statement. Players will become available to reserve on the fundraising site Kickstarter as of Saturday.

"Our goal was to offer the highest quality digital music available from all the major labels with the world's greatest sounding, user friendly portable music player," said John Ham, CEO of PonoMusic in the same statement. "We've achieved our goal."

Charlie Hansen, CEO of Colorado-based Ayre Acoustics, which developed the PonoPlayer in conjunction with Young, said: "We will always be grateful to Neil Young for changing the landscape of recorded music."

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Associated Press

AT SXSW, Neil Young will introduce a way to purchase audiophile-quality recordings online.