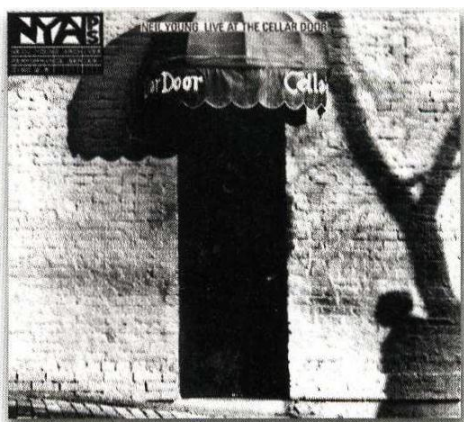


stereophile

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NEIL YOUNG *Live at the Cellar Door*

Reprise 535854-1 (LP) 2014. Neil Young, prod.; Henry Lewy, eng.; John Nowland, Tim Millgan, mix; Chris Bellman, vinyl mastering. ADA? TT: 45:06

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

The steady drip of archival releases from Bob Dylan, Miles Davis, and Neil Young is a breathtaking ride that hopefully will not end anytime soon. This latest glimpse into Young's past focuses on a series of solo shows performed November 30 through December 2, 1970, at the Cellar Door in Washington, DC, and leans heavily on material from the then-just-released *After the Gold Rush*. While there are no big surprises here—with the possible exception of “Cinnamon Girl,” performed, as Young admits, for “the first time” on piano—the plaintive

vocals and unadorned acoustic guitar accompaniment in the opening trio of “Tell Me Why,” “Only Love Can Break Your Heart,” and “After the Gold Rush” show Young the singer at his poignant best. Engaged and emotive throughout, Young dips into the Buffalo Springfield catalog for “I Am a Child” and “Expecting to Fly.” Assembled from the best takes from six live sets, the album sounds close enough to a single contiguous set to be believable, and the stylistic opposite of the bigger sound and greater ambitions of the *Live at Massey Hall 1971* archival release, recorded just a few weeks later. The vibe here is one of a spare beauty, as Young lingers over clear, unhurried versions of “Only Love,” “Down By the River,” and the then-unrecorded “Old Man.” Considering the age of these tapes, the sound is fairly remarkable: fresh, detailed, clear, and bright, with very little hiss, and very agreeable ambience throughout—including the finale, “Flying on the Ground Is Wrong,” in which, during his spoken intro, Young continually reaches inside the piano to run his hands across the strings. —Robert Baird