

LA Times interview discusses origin of Angry World

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Neil Young, 'Le Noise' and the threat of creativity

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During my recent interview with Neil Young and Daniel Lanois about their collaborative new album, "Le Noise," I asked Young about one of the thematic threads running through several songs. My question had to do with songs that address opposing forces and raise the prospect of balancing those forces.

In "Angry World," for instance, he sings, "Some see life as a broken promise/Some see life as an endless fight/They think we live in the age of darkness/They think we live in the age of light." In "Love and War," broad topics commonly thought of as mutually exclusive domains, he says, "When I sing about love and war, I don't really know what I'm saying/I've been in love and I've seen a lot of war/Seen a lot of people praying." "Someone's Gonna Rescue You" takes aim at people who focus on the negative -- "Somewhere in a ray of sunshine, you find the dark" -- then suggests a way out: "Someone's going to rescue you and bring you back."

So I asked him: Has the idea of balance become more pressing as time goes by?

"Who knows? These things just came out in the songs," he said, delving more into the creative process than directly analyzing songs' content. "I was just writing. I didn't really think about it. That's the weird thing about writing: They don't seem to be my ideas; they just don't seem to come off that way.

"And if they do seem like my ideas, then it's different, it's a totally different thing than this kind of writing," Young said. On "Le Noise," he said the eight songs came almost entirely by the method musicians often describe as channelling material from a higher source of creativity.

"The only one we were walking the line with, maybe transferring into the other zone, was 'Angry World.' We kind of skimmed the edge with that one," Young said. "It has more of a literal, now translation: 'the fisherman and the businessman.' But that's kind of vague." That led into a priceless story of the inspiration for that song.

"It's because of this guy in this bar," Young said. "Everybody knows me in this bar, and I'm on my way out one night and he yells, 'Hey, Neil!' and he sounds pissed off. He's a big guy -- a fisherman, who lives up in Alaska. He makes his living there and then comes down here, lives here and spends his money then he goes back up.

"He says, 'Write a song called 'It's an Angry World' -- it is an angry world!' You know, it's like if I don't write the song he's going to kill me." Young laughed as he recounted the incident. "I mean, he's a good guy. But that's the way it happened. So I felt like I could use 'the fisherman.' And now, there they are in the gulf, the fishermen and the oilmen." -- Randy Lewis

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