
Posted on Wed, Apr. 19, 2006

Young's anti-war album a growing drumbeat

NEKESA MUMBI MOODY
Associated Press

NEW YORK - If the snippets Neil Young is posting on his Web site are any indication, his upcoming album, "Living With War," will be a serious musical broadside against the Bush administration and the Iraq war.

Young isn't alone in his feelings of discontent.

Pink, known more for her slams against bubble-headed pop stars than political figures, assails President Bush in the searing attack "Dear Mr. President" on her album "I'm Not Dead Yet," released this month. And the new single from Pearl Jam - always politically minded - is titled "World Wide Suicide," about a soldier's death.

All represent a steady, if not increasing anti-war sentiment since the war began in 2003. Whereas even superstar acts like the Dixie Chicks and Madonna faced backlash when they uttered opposition to the war in comments or song, more mainstream acts are more comfortable these days expressing critical thoughts.

"People were, certainly in the first couple of months, very cautious, and they are less so now," said Sean Ross at Edison Media Research, which conducts research for radio stations and others. "So it took people time to get past whether they were willing to say things."

After the 9/11 attacks, Young released the song "Let's Roll," about the passengers who helped prevent United flight 93 from reaching its target that day. It was embraced as a patriotic message during a time of crisis.

The few songs that did touch the topic at that time were also patriotic - Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White & Blue (The Angry American)" and Paul McCartney's "Freedom."

But Young was also an early opponent of the war. And on "Living in War," the rock legend expresses his frustration in blunt songs such as "Let's Impeach the President."

Justin Sane from the rock group Anti-Flag, which has been active in its opposition to the war and President Bush, said artists have always been at the forefront of social change, and expressing political views in song is a way to bring attention to issues being overlooked in the mainstream media.

"It's left to artists to make the statements that should be getting put into the public discourse that are not," he said.

If there's a growing number of artists expressing their opinions about the war, Sane said, it's because "people who may have ignored it before can no longer ignore it, and artists who ignored it before can no longer ignore it. ... It just becomes something that is this white elephant in the country and I don't think artists can ignore it any longer."

Still, songs with a political context remain in the minority, and there hasn't been an overwhelming indictment of the war or Bush in a multitude of songs.

"The acid test will be when there is some anti-war commentary on country radio," he said. "That hasn't happened yet."

ON THE NET

<http://www.neilyoung.com>