Neil Young’s Old Comments About AIDS

February 2, 2022 By Shawn Decker

A lot of people are canceling their Spotify accounts in protest of the platform given to Joe Rogan’s podcast. Rogan is the meat-waddy blowhard that says at least one thing out of ten that any human could relate to and support. I don’t listen to his podcast, but the waves of the noise he generates do reach my toes as I nap on the beach, rudely awakened to the world I’d effortlessly just retreated from...

Rogan has been very vocal about the COVID-19 pandemic, the vaccine and experimental treatments. And apparently he is so influential that people are following his advice over their physician. In an already confusing climate with regard to the pandemic, Rogan’s input hasn’t helped clear any of an-increasingly putrid air.

But it took a legendary musician in Neil Young to draw attention to Spotify’s role. Young, worried about how Rogan’s views were putting in danger, pulled his entire catalogue from Spotify. Joni Mitchell has followed suit, and many independent musicians are using this as way to draw attention to how little Spotify pays musician for the number of plays a song generates. Cheap plug but a viewpoint worth sharing, I have my music on Spotify. There’s no way I’m disrupting the lives of the 70 Monthly Listeners I have by not having the sweet sounds of Synthetic Division there for them when needed.

As a user of the platform, which I retreated to because Pandora was annoying as hell AND they turned down hosting a couple of legit Synthetic Division BANGERS, I really enjoy Spotify. It’s the first time I’ve made Playlists since the days when I made mix-tapes in junior high and high school. Yeah, if a song of mine did catch some random fire, I surely don’t expect to make my monthly fees back as a subscriber with any of the money I could realistically generate as a musician.

And I’m fine with that. Music’s role in my life is the same, whether I’m listening to it or creating the songs I want to hear. It gives me energy- there’s a section of my brain that opens up when I give my ears a melody that conjures up happiness. Right now, my favorite playlist includes a ton of songs from the first year or so of my diagnosis. I was 12, diagnosed with HIV and beginning to lose interest in my old action figures, which were being replaced by cassette tapes and posters of my favorite bands. “Your Wildest Dreams” by The Moodly Blues was released the year before I tested positive for HIV, but the bobby optimism of tune and the bittersweet “when the music plays, when the words are touched with sorrow” encapsulates a reaction to my circumstances that cannot be put into words. “I’m Still Standing” came out before, it was one of Ryan White’s favorite Elton John songs.

I’m still standing because I’ve been able to stand on the shoulders of heroes like Ryan White, who remains with us in spirit. The great songs remind of us who we were and can also help us connect with people we never got the chance to meet.

So to make a long story short, I’m probably not canceling my Spotify just yet. I don’t listen to Joe Rogan or Neil Young. I admire people that do protest capitalism at the expense of their own loss of a minor convenience and/or privilege. I’m obsessive/compulsive at times, so I have to pick my spots where these things are concerned. If I canceled my Spotify over this I’d probably look into more things that I support with my dollar… if not careful, I could up in the woods living off of the land and defending myself from the animals with a machete made of toenail clippings. I also believe that anyone that is susceptible to following Rogan’s medical advice because they look up to him would find that same advice from the shoddy sources that Joe Rogan likely gets his information from.

Joe Rogan isn’t being responsible. Spotify isn’t being responsible. I’m not being a responsible consumer by putting my own convenience over principal…

Well, people are very heated on all sides of the above debate. And as a result of Neil Young’s participation in this boycott, some of his own reprehensible views from the past have come to light. In a 1985 interview with Melody Maker, the then-Reagan supporter shared his view on AIDS, which he blamed on gay people, even opining that he didn’t want “faggots” behind the cash register handling his potatoes at the supermarket. To me, it sounds like he was perhaps a little potato-handling curious?

In all seriousness, of course Neil Young’s comments from back then are indefensible. He was 40-years old at the time and I don’t know why he was broken and vulnerable to such vile messaging and so very eager to amplify it. And 1985 was a really fucking shitty time to be someone with AIDS, and my heart breaks for any fan of his music who was dealing with everything a diagnosis throws at you… imagine being a Neil Young fan and coming across those words?

I’m pretty confidant that Neil Young’s attitude on things changed in the years that followed, and I won’t be surprised if he’s already apologized for his hateful words. I’m too lazy to look it up and I want to be respectful of the time of anyone that is slogging their way through this blog post. Young’s words coming to light from the past are views that some still carry today. In my way of thinking, they’ve always been the sick ones, not us.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

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