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THE VERVE MUSIC GROUP

Aaron Neville *Nature Boy*

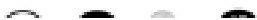
In the long and distinguished career of **Aaron Neville**, *Nature Boy* is unique. A deeply satisfying suite of standards sung with remarkable sensitivity, *Nature Boy* is both a hallmark and a revelation: Aaron's feel for sweetly swinging jazz is pitch-perfect. He reinvents the Great American Songbook with a sure, soft touch; he lavishes his remarkable gifts on a project he calls "precious." *Nature Boy* is a classic—and classy—in every respect.

Born January 24, 1941, Aaron is the third of the four famous **Neville Brothers** of New Orleans. A product of that city's richly complex musical culture, his first vocal model was older brother **Art**, keyboardist and founder of the **Meters**. Brother **Charles** played sax with **B.B. King** while brother **Cyril** became Aaron's partner in a funk band they called the **Soul Machine**.

Throughout the sixties Aaron recorded for local Louisiana labels, but it wasn't until 1966 that he broke onto the national scene with "Tell It Like It Is," the plaintive ballad that went #1 on the pop charts, a song still considered a classic in the annals of American music. Issued on the obscure Par-Lo Records, the hit unfortunately coincided with the label's demise. With no follow-up and few royalties, Aaron's career stalled. Beset by demons both professional and personal, he struggled for the next ten years.

Aaron, Charles and Cyril gigged as **The Wild Tchoupitoulas** in New York before returning to New Orleans in 1976 to record the landmark album of the same name. *The Wild Tchoupitoulas* album celebrated the Indian tribe whose leader, **George (Big Chief Jolly) Landry**, was the brothers' beloved uncle and prime musical/spiritual inspiration. For the first time, all four Neville brothers recorded together.

The Neville Brothers began their string of successful albums in 1977, beginning on Capitol and moving to A&M. The high point came in 1989 with "Yellow Moon," written and sung by Aaron, whose solo career was revived in 1991 with *Warm Your Heart*, the acclaimed album produced by **George Massenburg** and **Linda Ronstadt**.



Aaron Neville biography – page 2

"Linda," says Aaron, "is the real reason my solo career found new life."

It was Ronstadt who, in 1989, had featured Aaron on her ***Cry Like a Rainstorm, Howl Like the Wind***, resulting in the #2 pop hit duet "Don't Know Much."

Aaron has won four Grammys: in 1989 for Best Pop Duo with Linda Ronstadt for "Don't Know Much"; in 1989 for Best Pop Instrumental Performance with the Neville Brothers for "Healing Chant,"; in 1990 for Best Pop Duo with Linda Ronstadt for "All My Life"; and for Best Country Collaboration with Vocals with Trisha Yearwood for "I Fall to Pieces" in 1994.

He was named "Best Male Singer" two straight years in the Rolling Stone critics' poll.

Aaron has recorded a dozen solo albums ranging in genre from gospel to country.

Now jazz.

"Jazz," says Aaron, "was as much a part of my musical education as blues or funk. Brother Charles, who plays great tenor on this record, hipped me to modern jazz when I was a kid. He's always been an inspiration. I call him the Horn Man. He's my favorite sax player. He makes the thing talk. Charles is not only a founding member of the Neville Brothers, but he's the musical director of the **Aaron Neville Quintet**. When I sing, I love having him beside me. He's a gentle, beautiful man."

"My dad, Big Arthur, was our first inspiration. He had a big voice like Arthur Prysock. Dad loved Nat Cole's brand of jazz. Nat was his favorite singer and 'Nature Boy' his favorite song. I sing it in tribute to him.

"**Rob Mounsey**, who produced these sessions, initially brought me most of the material for ***Nature Boy***. He had a vision for this project. In addition to the songs, Rob inspired me with his clean charts and selection of musicians. **Roy Hargrove, Grady Tate, Ron Carter, Michael Brecker, Ry Cooder, Anthony Wilson**—these are some bad cats. They got the mood just right. For me, jazz is all about mood. Jazz is all about standards that are connected to your soul, connected to your life.

"'The Shadow of Your Smile,' for example, was something I used to sing at a little jazz club back home called Gloria's Living Room. During that same period, I was loving **Julie London's** version of 'Cry Me A River.' Loved it so much, in fact,

Aaron Neville biography – page 3

one day I sang it joking around the studio for a little label who actually released it. Never did get paid.

“As a kid, I heard **Annie Laurie** sing ‘Since I Fell For You’ with **Paul Gayten**. **Lenny Welch** also tore up that tune. I had to sing it here. It’s one of those ballads that blurs the line between blues and jazz. I also had to sing ‘Our Love Is Here to Stay’ with **Ella** ringing in my ear. Ella’s voice has haunted me for years. Ella was an instrument.

“That’s what I was aiming for in ***Nature Boy***: using my voice as a jazz instrument, letting that free jazz feeling flow through me. You wouldn’t call **Jackie Wilson** a jazz singer, but his ‘Danny Boy’ was far out. I didn’t take it that far. I loved Jackie’s version, but I just tried to do me. **Ron Goldstein**, the executive producer, suggested the song. Thanks, Ron.

“Everyone knows the way **Ray Charles** worried ‘Come Rain or Come Shine.’ Back in the day, I met Ray along the way. No one’s more soulful. Ray has an approach to jazz—he has an approach for all music—that stays true to his own style. He bends but never breaks. I hope the true is same of me.

“Of all the lady singers out there, Ronstadt is in a category of her own. There’s no one I’d rather sing with. It’s especially cool to be doing a classic like ‘The Very Thought of You’ with Linda. Like Ray and **Aretha**, Linda crosses over to any material that strikes her fancy. I love how we blend.

“To be singing these chestnuts — **George Gershwin**’s ‘Summertime,’ **Cole Porter**’s ‘In the Still of the Night’—brings me back to my parents. These were the songs they danced to. These were a few of the songs of my youth. That’s why I love ‘Blame It On My Youth’ and the line that says, ‘I believe in everything...like a child of three.’ I always say that my voice is a mixture of the strength and wisdom of my father, the love and tenderness of my mother, and the innocence of my childhood. My folks taught me that music, love and God are all one thing. So in singing these standards—these romantic songs that get prettier with each passing year—I feel more than an earthly love. I feel the force of God, the spirit of all love.”

Nature Boy [440 065 633-2] available August 26th on CD.

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