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OBITUARIES LOCAL

Pegi Young, musician and co-founder of Bridge School with ex-husband Neil Young, dies at 66

By RANDY LEWIS

JAN 03, 2019 | 4:25 PM



Pegi Young started her solo career late in life after her death on Jan. 2 after a yearlong fight with cancer (Jay Blakesberg)

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inger, songwriter and activist Pegi Young, who co-founded the Bridge School in Northern California for severely disabled students and their families with her ex-husband, rock musician Neil Young, and went on to help create the annual fundraising concerts that became one of pop music's most respected benefit shows, died Tuesday after a year-long fight with cancer. She was 66.

Her death was announced Wednesday on her official [Facebook](#) page.

For most of their 36-year marriage, Young devoted much of her time and energy to raising their two children, Ben and Amber Jean. After Ben was diagnosed with severe cerebral palsy, she could not find a school that could provide the kind of services they wanted for their son, which led her to co-found the Bridge School.

To help fund and sustain it, Neil Young headlined annual Bridge School benefit shows that attracted a who's who of rock, pop, country, folk, R&B and hip-hop artists year in and year out.

In recent years, however, Young, who had sometimes sung backup for her husband, began devoting more attention to her own musical endeavors. In 2007, at age 55, she released her debut album, "Pegi Young."

Her fifth album, "Raw," was issued in 2017, and it largely tracked the brutal emotions she experienced with the breakup of her marriage after Neil Young filed for divorce in 2014. He had telegraphed their troubled relationship on his 2010 album, "Le Noise," in the song "Love and War": "The saddest thing in the whole wide world is to break the heart of your lover/I made a mistake and I did it again and we struggle to recover."

He started a new relationship with actress and activist Daryl Hannah, whom [he married last year](#). Pegi Young kept the Northern California ranch they'd shared since the late 1970s, and Neil Young moved back to Southern California. In the wake of their split, the Bridge School benefit concerts went on hiatus.

Pegi Young & The By continuing to use our site, you agree to our [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). You can learn more about how we use cookies by reviewing our [Privacy Policy](#). [Close](#)



First video from Pegi Young & The Survivors 'Raw' album..

“At the time I wrote [‘Raw’], my life had been turned upside down,” [she told The Times](#) when the album was released. “I didn't want to mince words.... ‘Rollercoaster’ would be the operative word.

“In the immediate aftermath of the separation I just wrote and wrote and wrote,” Young said. “And wrote and wrote and wrote. Thank God I had that as an outlet.”

Other song titles carried the theme through: “A Thousand Tears,” “Trying to Live My Life Without You” and “Too Little, Too Late.”

She teamed with some of Neil Young’s longtime collaborators, including steel guitarist Ben Keith, who died in 2010, and bassist Rick Rosas, who died in 2014.

[During a show she played in Los Angeles](#) a few months after the divorce filing, Young told an audience at the Mint, “What do you do when you get dumped after 36 years? You just start over.”

In fact, with other players including esteemed Muscle Shoals, Ala., keyboardist Spooner Oldham, Young named her band the Survivors and continued recording and touring periodically.

Although she was not a formally schooled singer or instrumentalist, Young prized authentic emotion in her music.

“Be authentic, be true, sing what’s in your heart,” she said after “Raw” was released. “It’s not about making it perfect, it’s about letting it be real, sometimes raw and flawed, as long as it’s true.”

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Neil and Pegi Young perform during the Bridge School Benefit concert in 2010. (Tony Avelar / AP)

The split was an unexpected turn of events for the California native, who met Neil Young in the mid 1970s and became his second wife in 1978. He'd previously been married to restaurant owner Susan Acevedo from 1968 to 1970, and then had a longer relationship with actress Carrie Snodgrass from 1970 to 1975, with whom he had a son, Zeke, who also has cerebral palsy.

“One woman captivated Neil Young like no other,” biographer Jimmy McDonough wrote in his 2002 book “Shakey.”

“Pegi is the inspiration for some of Young’s most intense ballads,” McDonough wrote, citing “Such a Woman,” “Once an Angel” and “Unknown Legend,” “which is perhaps the most empathetic portrait of a woman he’s ever created.”

Neil Young lauded her to McDonough during their interviews for the book, saying “I got a great wife. She’s just a beautiful, beautiful woman.”

In a memoriam on its web page, the Bridge School praised Young for her vision and dedication.

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“The Bridge School family is saddened by the loss of our friend and co-founder, Pegi Young. Her vision has changed the lives of children worldwide and we will do our

best to continue her mission. Please keep us and her family in your thoughts and prayers as we keep the dream alive.”

Young is survived by her two children and a grandson, Ronan. Her daughter, Amber Jean, periodically shared photos of her son with her mother and father on her Instagram page.

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FOR THE RECORD

JAN 4, 2019 | 10:45 AM

An earlier version of this post identified actress Carrie Snodgrass as Young's first wife. His first wife was Susan Acevedo, whom he divorced in 1970. He and Snodgrass had a relationship from 1970 to 1975 but did not marry.

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