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Surreal Neil and his Super band give the 'Solitary Man' a rockier edge  
Foto: Kris Leifur

## Diamond in the rough

### Surreal Neil and his Super band give the 'Solitary Man' a rockier edge

**There was a time when Randy Cordero distanced himself from Neil Diamond.**

"I was getting into KISS and Van Halen," says the man who for more than 15 years has professionally gone by the name The Surreal Neil. "I remember thinking to myself, 'None of my friends are listening to Neil Diamond, so it's not cool.'"

There is a trace of remorse in his voice, as he shares the shameful details.

"I remember the feeling I had, pushing Neil back into the tapes I didn't listen to, and I was thinking, 'I hate to do this, but. ...'"

But Cordero's hard rock diet came in handy when he transformed his original alt-country band into Super Diamond, who specialize in what they call "The Alternative Neil Diamond Experience." He has atoned for the rift he once created between himself and Neil's music, and a few years ago got even closer to the man to whom he pays tribute nightly.

"The first time he sang with us, we didn't know he would, until he came back and met us," recalls Cordero. "I asked him if he'd like to sing and he said yes, so then he came out for the encore and sang 'I Am I Said' towards the end of the show."

Surreal Neil singing with real Neil must have been, er, um surreal: "Yeah, I just played guitar; I didn't sing. 'I Am I Said' doesn't have background vocals," says Cordero.

From this response, it may seem that Cordero's approach to Diamond's work is very technical. Not so.

"It's kind of tongue-in-cheek and light hearted," he insists. "We like to do things that make ourselves laugh. ... like when we play 'Sweet Child O' Mine' after 'Sweet Caroline.'"

So, is there a chance that the real Neil will join Surreal Neil again onstage this weekend, since the band is playing here the day before the man who gave them their career?

"I doubt it," says Cordero, plaintively. "He just had a No. 1 album, the first No. 1 album of his career, and I'm sure he's gotta be busy."

#### COVER STORY

**What does a Neil Diamond cover band think of other Neil Diamond covers?**

"'Red Red Wine' by UB40 was great," says Cordero. "I think The Monkees 'I'm a Believer' is good, too. Not many people heard Neil's version of it, but it isn't much different. I can name some bad ones: Sonny and Cher doing 'Brother Love's Traveling Salvation Show.' It's terrible."