

Homer, *the slut*



Issue Nine

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J.R. Stokes and Mark Carter write & draw for *Freewheelin'*, Bob Forryan writes for *Judas*. Both of these publications are privately circulated Dylan fanzines.

Photo Credits:

Generally these are credited in the text. The front and back covers are from Belfast 25/2/93 and Utrecht 16/2/93 respectively - both by the fabled John Hume. (Sorry for the mess-up on the Portland 1988 photo John - one of my favourites, too!)

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The Warmline:

On my home number, 071-385-1114, I update Dylan news and gossip about twice a week. You can also leave any Dylan news after my message. Special thanks are due here to (especially) Lambchop, Clive Barrett, Peter Vincent and Rod MacBeath who make the effort to 'phone in with news and rumours and often go weeks (or months, Clive?) without a proper response from me.

Apology & Dedication:

As Homer has grown so my sociability has dwindled; not only do calls go unanswered but all normal social meetings are at the mercy of publication pressures. People I perpetually let down are my family (remember me?); Joe, Rab, Buzby and what's-his-name? So, sorry - particularly about the cup final. I've never dedicated an issue to anyone before but I'd like to do it here - by dedicating it to my grandmother, (one of the few family members still to resist the charms of Mr. Dylan), who is recovering after a serious operation and now zipping about on a zimmerframe. (Yes, there's a joke in there, somewhere!)

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It's all Going By So Fast

Hi, we're about halfway through 1993 and it has been pretty much non-stop so far with no let up in sight. The last editorial I typed was a few weeks before Dylan played Britain - he obviously knows when **Homer** comes out because he's on his way back again to pick up a copy of this one. (It is also nice the way he keeps highlighting songs from either **Focus On** or **From Behind A Burning Bush**, don't you think? **Idiot Wind** and **Born In Time** being the most welcome!)

So much has happened it is impossible to take stock, I don't know about you, but I never really got properly into last autumn's shows before 1993 was upon us - and how! From January to June it has been fairly hectic stuff with no sign of any let-up. Presidential parties, European Tour, Collaborations, American Tour, an extraordinary list of name checks even by his standards - from Saturday morning kids' TV (twice!) to **The New Statesman** via **Eastenders**, **Hello** and countless Griffiths/Nelson interviews - and now he is about to embark on another European Leg then some dates in Israel and then it is back around the States for an extensive fall tour in the company of Santana. After that? Japan? Back here? A rest? Who knows? All I can guess is that the last option is the least likely!

This Note's For You

One thing this year that I do hope to spend some time writing about (goodness knows when, though) was the appearance at Clinton's inauguration. Aside from the fact that I really liked the performance - a fairly controversial view given some of your letters - the setting and what it meant to Dylan and the questions as to why he did it all need to be explored. (Make no mistake - this cannot be 'explained away' in terms of 'eccentricity'; it is an endorsement of a President and his policies. Politics was once the Devil's domain according to Dylan, but there he was, ridiculously attired as usual but looking great anyway, singing one of the songs that led Jack Nicholson to call him *one of America's great voices of freedom* before the Live Aid debacle, **Chimes Of Freedom**. Nearer transcendence than Philadelphia to be sure, but a performance that raises many questions. I liked the shots of him in front of the giant Lincoln statue, though, and cannot help but think that Americans will see the whole affair in a way that is well nigh incomprehensible to the rest of us.

On The Tracks

Hey, just what the world needs - another Dylan magazine! Bet you read that sarcastically, but when I sent out the first **Homer** - nearly three years ago, good grief - I hoped for encouragement from existing 'zines and I'm more than happy to give that to **On The Tracks**. For those who haven't been informed yet, mid-June sees the launch of this new magazine (along with optional monthly newsletter). The people behind it are those lovely folk at **Rolling Tones** and I wish them every success, the initial advertising campaign certainly bodes well as it all seems well thought out in advance and professional in approach. I'm not so sure some of the advertising slogans will be appreciated, indeed they may ruffle a few feathers here and there. ("The best Dylan writers"?!?!). Knowing the people involved, I'm confident this is just an aggressive approach to publicity (normal in US???) and I advise you to at least investigate what this is all about. If you are interested contact **Rolling Tones**, Inc., PO BOX 1943, Grand Junction Colorado 81502, USA. Tel: 303-245-4315 or Fax: 303-243-8025 and ask them to send you their info. - the flyer has some great colour photos!

Gonna Have Some Fun

As one of the letters in **Sweet Gift Of Gab** mentions, a Dylan fanzine is perhaps not the place for too many football references so I will try to keep these to minimum from next issue forwards. It is interesting to note, however, the splendid reference to **The Basement Tapes** in a Liverpool 'zine (**Homer 8**) being followed by the inventive use of the film sequence for **Subterranean Homesick Blues** in a Celtic fanzine. (See **Bits & Bobs** pp 22). The point behind the latter requires a knowledge of Celtic's board of directors, a group who make CBS's 'promotion' of Dylan through the seventies and eighties look like the apotheosis of business management and whose treatment of their fans is callous beyond even the most brutal of bouncers at Dylan's gigs.

I will continue to make occasional references to football in future issues because of the amazing response it evokes; I receive letters that contain as much football news/views as Dylan - and because I like it! Being a fan of football rather than a follower of one club, I become interested in a team's fortunes for a myriad of reasons. (Much to the annoyance of one Rab Bennet, a Morton/Celtic/Sheffield Wednesday fan). At the very moment I am typing this - (It is May the 19th) - I have one eye on San Marino v. Poland (from Holland and Norway's World Cup group) and I'm listening to West Brom (Stuart Batsford) and Leicester (Bob Forryan) fight their way through the first leg of the end of season play-offs. These last two teams I wish well because of connections that come directly from **Homer**, *the slut*.

A final point on this Dylan/football connection is that it can also work the other way - since my mention of his Liverpool fanzine¹ in the last issue Steve Kelly has been buying up Dylan CDs and listening to our man with fresh ears. That alone makes it worthwhile for me and I'd like to close this introduction with an excerpt from his first letter to me:

Your fanzine is extraordinary - it is like a book in itself. I'm not a great Dylan fan, but *Homer, the slut* made me want to buy the records. In fact, I went and dug out the only Dylan record in the house, *More Greatest Hits*, and the first line was *What's the matter with me, I don't have much to say*. Sounds like Souness after a defeat.

Reading *Homer* reminded me of two things:

1. Anne Nightingale recounted a tale of when she was at the February Dylan concerts. Bob Geldof sat near her and spoke constantly throughout the entire performance. She wasn't best pleased! It merely confirmed my feelings on Bob Geldof, frankly. Since it was on something as trivial as Radio One, you may have missed that.

2. Personal one. I was driving home from Hillsborough in 1989 (yes that one) and Radio Two was simply reciting the death toll (.39..53..70...). It was too painful, so we switched over to Radio One. U2's drummer was being interviewed, and at the end was asked to play a track. It was *With God On Our Side*, a version by the Neville Brothers. To say I freaked out is an understatement; to this day I just can't listen to Aaron Neville's voice at all. The bitter, sardonic, sarcastic (whatever) words made me feel all of these things. Incredibly, I've never thought about that until your mag dropped in the post...



Dublin - 5/2/93. From a colour original by our boy from Newtownabbey

¹Through The Wind & The Rain is available from: PO Box 23, Bootle, Merseyside, L30 2SA

General Ed's note:

Paula Radice has taken over the running of this section. As I was finding it impossible to include a *Focus On* in each issue - and as this section was the genesis of the whole 'zine - I'm delighted with this new arrangement. Bob Forryan's article prompted me to spotlight this particular song - from now on the selection will be down to Pauline, though I've informed her of your requests to date - and, upon hearing this, Carol Bedford sent in her deeply personal account of the song's special meaning for her.

Please note Paula's points at the end of this section, but for now, sit back, cue up the track and read on....

PAULA K. V. RADICE

WHERE ARE YOU TONIGHT? (JOURNEY THROUGH DARK HEAT)

Of those who have commented at length on **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)**, a number have agreed with Dylan's own assessment that the song - together with the album on which it appears, **Street-Legal** - demonstrates a completeness of creative control. Musicologists Wilfred Mellers (in, for example, **A Darker Shade of Pale**) and Elizabeth Thomson praise the emotional power behind the song's musical structure (see below). Patrick Humphries, in **Oh No! Not Another Bob Dylan Book** (1991), sees in **Street-Legal** "a Dylan back in full control".

Dylan himself, in a much-quoted interview with Matt Damsker in September 1978, explained how **Street-Legal** represented for him his writing talents operating at their most explicit:

... never until I got to **Blood On The Tracks** did I finally get a hold of what I needed to get a hold of and once I got hold of it, **Blood On The Tracks** wasn't it either, and neither was **Desire**. **Street-Legal** comes the closest to where my music is going for the rest of the time. It has to do with an illusion of time, I mean what the songs are necessarily about is the illusions of time. Now in the old days they used to do it automatically, but it's like I had amnesia, all of a sudden in 1966, I couldn't remember how to do it ... To do it consciously is a trick ...

Bert Cartwright has established the link between Dylan's perception of this new song-writing approach and his exposure in the mid-seventies to the art teacher Norman Raebe (see "The Mysterious Norman Raebe", in J. Bauldie (ed.), **Wanted Man: In Search of Bob Dylan** (1990)). In interviews given at the time, Dylan shielded Raebe's identity, but was keen to acknowledge publicly, in the context of his writing-as-conscious-effort and the effects of time-diffraction that it achieved, that "I actually had a teacher for it ... It was an old man who ... knew about that, and I picked up what I could". For Dylan, **Street-Legal** was (as Cartwright puts it), "the culmination of the insights into the nature of time as no-time", insights communicated consciously.

Many commentators have stressed the pain apparent throughout **Street-Legal**, and nowhere more strikingly than in **Where Are You Tonight?** A conclusion that the songs had been written and performed by an artist in "neurotic distress" (Mellers) seemed unavoidable: John Herdman (in **Voice Without Restraint. Bob Dylan's Lyrics and Their Background** (1982)) felt that **Where Are You Tonight?** revealed a man "physically exhausted and worn out by internal strife." Inevitably, the causes were sought in Dylan's personal life - not, it must be said, that the reasons seemed at all obscure: the break-up of Dylan's marriage, with all its emotional, familial and financial traumas, and the (completely undeserved) critical failure of his pet project, **Renaldo and Clara**, were very visible crises. **Street-Legal** was, however, much more than a mid-life crisis set to music. **Where Are You Tonight?**, in particular, was real "singing the blues", as was underlined by the frequency of phrases borrowed or adapted from Robert Johnson - "killing me by degrees" from **Preachin' Blues**, "juice runnin' down my leg" from **Travelling Riverside Blues** (for further discussion of Johnson's influence on Dylan, see Rob Whitehouse's "'Is Your Love In Vain?' Robert Johnson Part II", in **Look Back** No.16 and Robert Shelton's "'I Can Change, I Swear'", in E. Thomson (ed.), **Conclusions On The Wall. New Essays On Bob Dylan** (1980)).

The "sense of breakdown" (Herdman) in the words of **Where Are You Tonight?**, although apparently mitigated by the final promise of "a new day at dawn" and a seemingly triumphant exclamation of survival, is reflected ultimately in the essence of the song, its *feel*. Even if Dylan regarded himself as consciously controlling its form, the impression given off (by which, of course, I can only mean, the impression I get of the song) is rather different. The powerful and inchoate emotions seem to me to blur definition and to act

somehow to compromise the integrity of the lyrics. My own response to the song is very similar to Paul Williams' (as described in the second volume of *Performing Artist* (1992) and in *Dylan - What Happened?* (1980) - see below). The ingredients of a classic Dylan song are all apparently here - a complex, metaphysical lyric complete with an internalized dialectic and a host of familiar Dylan metaphors and symbols, not to mention a strong tune and a committed vocal and musical treatment. The writing in places is as breath-catchingly vivid as perhaps anything Dylan has done, its compression and internal rhyming especially impressive:

*There's a long-distance train rolling through the rain,
Tears on the letter I write.
There's a woman I long to touch and I'm missing her so much,*
But she's drifting like a satellite.*

(* in *Lyrics*, incidentally, this is given as "I miss her so much" - a much less immediate image.)

But "in the final end" (as the man says), the finished product doesn't match the high expectations: there is something essential missing, its **absence** the more critically lamentable because of the nearness of the song to greatness. I know this opinion will not meet with universal agreement. **Where Are You Tonight?** is an excellent song - easily for me the best on *Street-Legal* and rivalled only by *Señor* (at this point, I can hear cries of "*New Pony!*" emanating from certain quarters in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, but I stand by this assessment) - but for me its ultimate failure has to be faced. As Paul Williams so articulately expounds, the song is at its heart a fake - not blatantly or deliberately, but its flaws can be too clearly *felt* for it to be acknowledged a triumph of sincerity.

The crucial missing component is a consistent emotional honesty. I can hear it coming through hot and strong in certain places: just listen, for example, to what Dylan's voice expresses when he sings

*There's a lion in the road, there's a demon escaped,
There's a million dreams gone, there's a landscape being raped.*

and

*If you don't believe there's a price for this sweet paradise,
Just remind me to show you the scars.*

The concluding stanza - "I may have survived but it doesn't make sense if you're not here" - can't fail but hit home, especially given the rawness of the emotion in Dylan's voice singing it. Taken as a whole, however, the overall tone of the song doesn't quite ring true. Despite the quality of the writing, singing, and arrangement, the clarity of the vision is blurred, the timbre hollow. This is highly ironic, in the light of the insight that Dylan displays elsewhere in his work when his feelings are most strongly engaged, for example throughout *Blood On The Tracks*, the other album most frequently linked to developments in the artist's personal life. It seems to me that in **Where Are You Tonight?**, as in the rest of *Street-Legal*, Dylan is simply *too* close, too confused by the enormity of the hurt he's feeling, to draw himself (and therefore us) an honest picture of it. True, he avoids in **Where Are You Tonight?** the worst of the defects that mar the rest of the album, for example the utter egocentrism of *Is Your Love In Vain?* (undoubtedly at least partially tongue-in-cheek, and motivated by the defensiveness of a wounded man, but cringe-makingly selfish and sexist nonetheless), the hollow almost formulaic imagery of *Changing Of The Guards*. The song does, however, suffer from its setting. It can't be approached in isolation from what has gone before on *Street-Legal*; the bitterness saturating the rest of the album inevitably colours the impact of its last statement. This needn't have been fatal - witness how completely Dylan later effected the catharsis of the relentless world-weary anguish of *Shot Of Love* with *Every Grain Of Sand* - but **Where Are You Tonight?** shares the whole album's strange sense of alienation and inhibition, rendered the more perverse by its apparent commitment to soul-searching. Again, for me Paul Williams gets closest: "... there's an enemy within working overtime on this album to prevent too much truth escaping ..." (*Performing Artist: The Middle Years*). A full empathy is denied us. Under the guise of catharsis (and John Herdman is not alone in seeing **Where Are You Tonight?** as "conceived as a journey from despair to hope"), Dylan appears to have constructed only another defensive facade, albeit one which offers glimpses of undeniably real emotion and tantalizes with sporadically electrifying language. From another artist, one less associated with the revealing of truths, **Where Are You Tonight?** would be a brilliant achievement: from Dylan, it has to be recognized as a frustrating near-miss.

Author: Robert Shelton	First Published: Beech Tree Books, (William Morrow) 1986.
Title: No Direction Home	Currently available

Street-Legal is one of Dylan's most overtly autobiographical albums, telling of loss, searching, estrangement, and exile. It also clearly foreshadows the Christian conversion ahead, but who among us could perceive it at the time? It is peopled by a group of narrators who are oppressed, wandering, and lonely, traveling in a foreign country of the spirit ... But the masterwork is the final song of anguish and prophesy, a song with the sweep of **Like A Rolling Stone**, **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)**. Here we can discern the move toward Christianity, the foreshadowing of major changes after the hellish personal disorder that the narrator has gone through. This is catharsis and resolution as he steals off into a troubled night with such companions as St. John of the **Book of Revelation**. There are technical raw spots on the album, but Dylan clearly wanted to tape it red-hot and from the heart, and he had allowed himself only a week to do it before hitting the road again ...

... "It's true", Bob said [in a conversation with the author in London in June 1978], "that a man is his own worst enemy, just as he is his own best friend. If you deal with the enemy within, then no enemy without can stand a chance". What was his enemy within? "Suspicion", he replied, as if he could answer all those allegations of paranoia in one word. Could he put his finger on the enemy within? Dylan laughed at my question. He pointed his index finger toward his heart. Cautiously, he continued: "It's all in those two verses of that last song". He directed me toward the mortal battle with his alter ego in **Where Are You Tonight?**

Typical of his ambiguity, the twin Dylans have so many paired faces: the Gemini polarities of strength versus weakness, kindness versus cruelty, optimism versus pessimism, life versus death, suspicion versus friendliness. It has been said by psychologists in the 1980s that the forward motion of creative people uses wide mood swings as its motor. This dialectic of internal contradiction was really a pair of matched twins locked in struggle. If any word can be found to characterize the contradictions in Bob Dylan, it would have to be *ambivalence* ...

Author: Rober Shelton	First Published: Conclusions On The Wall, Manchester, Thin Man 1980
Title: I Can Change, I Swear	Edited by : Elizabeth M Thomson

With his order and balance, Dylan often previews his next album with the last song of a current album. From **Street-Legal**, **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)** made it very clear how Dylan was heading to avoid his personal Armageddon of domestic strife, a creative void and a vacuum in his soul:

*In that last hour of need, we entirely agreed
sacrifice was the code of the road.
I left town at dawn with Marcel and St. John,
strong men belittled by doubt.*

In the grand old American tradition, the narrator splits, not "down the road to ecstasy" but to Sacrifice, Search and Salvation. His companions? St. John the Divine, of **The Revelations**, whose vision of the future triumph of the Messianic kingdom concludes the New Testament. It could be sheer coincidence, but is "Marcel" perhaps philosopher Gabriel Marcel, French convert to Catholicism, one of the leading theorists of Christian existentialism? Gather what you can from coincidence, Dylan and Jung's introduction to the **I Ching**, tell us.

The study of Dylan's work can be a threshold. Studying him can teach you a lot about life and literature and myth and religion and society and just about anything you want. He *does* contain multitudes. As "I wind back the clock and turn back the page of a book that no one can write", we can ask Dylan: where will you be *tomorrow* night? Does Orpheus always have to descend in a journey through dark heat for a season in hell, before ascending to the gates of Eden?

Author: Alexander/Gross	First Published: Elm Tree Books, 1978
Title: An Illustrated History	Out of print

The other standout cuts on the disc were **No Time To Think**, the strongest song and **Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)**, continuing Bob's well-established tradition of using extended metaphors for him, us, America and mankind. **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)**, and the single, **Baby Stop Crying**, were comparatively fluff.

Author: Paul Williams	First Published: and books & Entwistle Books, 1980
Title: What Happened?	Currently out of print

... What the man needed to save himself from, I surmise, was guilt, unendurable restlessness, alcohol, self-hatred.

This story is told to me by a fascinating sequence of songs and images beginning with **Wedding Song and Going, Going, Gone** on *Planet Waves*, climaxing in the movie *Renaldo and Clara* and anticlimaxing gracefully in the scary but hopeful triplet on *Street-Legal*, **True Love Tends To Forget/We Better Talk This Over/Where Are You Tonight?**

... **Where Are You Tonight?** shows how far you can go just faking it - Dylan puts together an impressive string of words and images with a catchy, involving arrangement - and also shows that ultimately you can't go far enough, in the end the song doesn't really make it because it's not really about anything. There is no real woman in the song or behind the song, or at least he doesn't convince me there is. His great skill is mixing reality with fantasy, as in **Tangled Up In Blue**, but this time there's not enough reality - "Where are you tonight?" is a good concept for a song but he doesn't follow through...he's lonely but it's not the penetrating, all-inclusive hunger that would be appropriate here. Two lines are prophetic: "The truth was obscure, too profound and too pure, to live it you had to explode"; and "I fought with my twin, that enemy within, till both of us fell by the way." But the search for love really is no more than vanity when you get hung up searching for what you think you want, instead of simply expressing your need.

These last three *Street-Legal* songs are Dylan's final word on marriage and lovers before *Slow Train Coming* and the shocking renunciation of it all in *Trouble In Mind*. They are hopeful songs in that they're upbeat, they show insight, Dylan sees himself as a survivor and wants to survive and go on with the show. But they're also a little scary in that there's what you might call a lack of emotional affect [sic], the further he gets from actually feeling love the more confident he seems to be that he knows all about it, something's out of step here ...

Author: Paul Williams	First Published: Underwood-Miller, 1992
Title: Performing Artist: The Middle Years	Currently available

Where Are You Tonight? is another song that promises a tremendous amount and, like **Señor**, partially delivers. I'm very fond of this song, I can listen to it a lot, it gives me much pleasure...and it frustrates me, because I have to swallow its phoniness with its honesty. The arrangement, the ensemble performance, is wonderful. (So's the tune.) This is where Dylan sings "I fought with my twin/That enemy within/Till both of us fell by the way." He also says (it's possible to hear a lot of regret for his lost soulmate on this album, if one chooses to; and impossible to know whether that's what one actually is hearing), "I couldn't tell her/What my private thoughts were/But she had some way of finding them out." And maybe, just maybe, the last words of *Street-Legal* are its secret message, a secret especially (or only?) from its creator: "I can't believe it, I can't believe I'm alive/But without you it doesn't seem right/Oh, where are you tonight?"

Author: John Herdman	First Published: by Paul Harris Publishing, 1982
Title: Voice Without Restraint	Out of print

The last song on the record is an exception to the rule of simplicity and austere statement. **Where Are You Tonight (Journey Through Dark Heat)** is impressionistic, allusive, difficult, full of striking and colourful imagery. With **Changing of the Guards**, **Senor**, and to some extent **No Time To Think**, it belongs to a group of songs on *Street Legal* which stand up as very impressive poetry when seen on the page, to a degree equalled in Dylan's earlier work perhaps only by **Visions of Johanna**; and which look almost as if they might have been written as poems, which 'Johanna' doesn't. **Where Are You Tonight?** is also one of Dylan's most powerful songs, with a musical pattern which works *with* the words - which is not entirely true of **Changing Of The Guards** ... In general type it is similar to **Visions of Johanna** and **Idiot Wind**, centering on the vicissitudes of a love relation but sending its shock waves far out beyond that centre; and like them its structure is a mosaic, building up a complex mood out of a series of separate impressions which often have little overt connection with each other, but which in some way fit together as part of a schematic whole. They do so, I suppose, because they all arise out of a single nucleus of feelings in Dylan himself; the images act

as intermediaries between him and us, working on our senses until we begin to "feel" the situation as he feels it. More than feeling is communicated, though; while much remains obscure, enough factual information is thrown out here and there to provide us with a frame onto which, like plants, the feelings can attach themselves, and thus assume body, form and shape.

The pieces of the mosaic are formed by four-line units of meaning which also correspond to musical units. This pattern is adhered to pretty consistently throughout the song, with, at the most, tenuous observable connections between the consecutive elements, and more often none. This can be illustrated by the opening of the song, which illuminates the subtitle, **Journey Through Dark Heat**. The song is conceived as a journey from despair to hope:

*There's a long-distance train rolling through the rain,
Tears on the letter I write.
There's a woman I long to touch, and I miss her so much
But she's drifting like a satellite.*

The railroad imagery is of course one of Dylan's staple resources but it never seems to lose its fascination for him or its serviceableness in his hands. His talent for building up a vivid picture with a few strokes is characteristically effective here: we can see the rain on the train window and perhaps the tears - which, thanks to the solid external context in which they are set, don't seem histrionic this time - making the ink run on the paper; then Dylan (or whoever it is) looking out at the darkening landscape, watching the moon drifting through the clouds, and visualising the woman he misses as just such a drifting satellite. We wonder, too, whether we are also to read its metaphorical meaning into the word "satellite": is the woman now the satellite of some other man? With the next lines there is a swift change of scene; the unit that follows is this time subdivided, its two sets of images together building up the sense of that "dark heat" through which the singer journeys.

*There's a neon light ablaze in this green smoky haze,
Laughter down on Elizabeth Street,
And a lonesome bell tone in that valley of stone
Where she bathed in a stream of pure heat.*

The first two lines evoke vividly a hot, claustrophobic, typically urban scene which stands in potent contrast to the melancholy austerity of the train journey, and introduces through a physical image a suggestion of confusion and foginess which has to do with the *emotional* background of the story. That laughter, while it may not necessarily be hostile, strikes us as having an excluding, almost mocking ring to it; Dylan (and with him ourselves) is looking in on a scene to which he is not admitted. The final lines contribute a further element to the total ground of feeling which Dylan wants to spread out and build upon: the sense of sterile passion. The chosen image, though not realistic, is again strongly visualised: the naked woman is there before our eyes, bathing in the steaming water of that valley of unyielding stone. The "lonesome bell tone" which sounds in the distance associates this passion with a feeling of sadness and doom.

Throughout the song, an almost cinematic clarity is maintained: though the little scenes are often surreal the imagery points towards meaning, it does not appear to be exhibiting itself for its own sake as did, on occasions, the imagery of the **Bringing It All Back Home/Blonde on Blonde** era. The "babe in the arms of a woman in a rage"; the sight of someone climbing up a girl's hair to discover "her invisible self"; the "foot in the face" of "the guy you were lovin'"; the "juice running down my leg" after Dylan has bitten "into the root of forbidden fruit"; the "white diamond gloom on the dark side of this room": all, as well as presenting us with sharply realised pictures, move the story forward, inform us and help us to "realise" what the song is about, not so much in our minds as through our senses. There is also the more specific information that serves as the story's frame. We learn that the couple have parted and that "I" has left town; the "long-time golden-haired stripper" who appears on the stage and "winds back the clock and ... turns back the page/ Of a book that nobody can write" suggests a triangular situation; but the figure becomes quadrilateral with the arrival on the scene of the "guy you were lovin'"; there has been conflict, acrimony and ill-feeling. As we have become used to expecting in this type of song, identities are not always clearly defined. The main female character is sometimes "she" and sometimes "you". It is not apparent whether "Her father" is the same as the "full-blooded Cherokee" of verse two, or whether the "He" who "took good center-aim but ... missed just the same" is to be confounded with "the guy you were lovin'". "Marcel and St. John", those "two strong men belittled by doubt" with whom Dylan leaves town, are also uncertain quantities, though probably they are fragments of his own personality. These characteristic unclarities are part of Dylan's design on us: he is setting out not to make us understand but to make us feel, and we are more likely to feel when our

minds are not in control, when the "meddling instinct", as Wordsworth called it, has not pre-empted our responses.

The feeling, of course, comes also from the music. There is a largeness about it, almost an exaltation, a sense of heights and depths, which matches the lyrics and Dylan's whole-spirited delivery. The theme of spiritual struggle in the song - "I fought with my twin, that enemy within,/ Till both of us fell by the way" - is enacted, not merely declaimed, so that we sense that the promise that is held out at the end by that "pathway to the stars" is not a conventional postulate but something that has indeed been paid for with Dylan's scars. Moreover the phrase "sweet paradise" is not, I think, meant to be taken quite straight. The words are coloured with an irony whose force is brought out by the final words of the song:

*There's a new day at dawn, and I've finally arrived,
If I'm there in the morning, baby, you'll know I've survived
I can't believe it; I can't believe I'm alive.
But without you, it just doesn't seem right.
Oh, Where Are You Tonight?*

Author: Stephen Scobie	First Published: by Red Deer College Press, 1991
Title: Alias Bob Dylan	Currently available

... the pain returns in the final song, the epic **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)**. Again, this song interweaves autobiographical references (the "nickels and dimes" of the divorce settlement) with openly fictional elements (no one has ever suggested that Sara's father was "A full-blooded Cherokee"). The singer is now definitely alone: "There's a woman I long to touch and I miss her so much but she's drifting like a satellite". The situation is abnormal, a disruption of how things should be. A "satellite" does not normally "drift", but moves in a regular orbit around a fixed center. The woman is something that has strayed from its appointed course around the central point traditionally occupied by the man. At the very moment that the song laments the woman's departure, the image reinstates the imbalance between the two lovers which may have contributed to that departure in the first place.

At other points the singer recognizes that this conflict is also, as always, an internal one: "I fought with my twin, that enemy within, 'til both of us fell by the way". Before, this recognition reinforced the lovers' reciprocity, but in this song it begins to lead in a different direction. The language of **Where Are You Tonight?** is more generalized and symbolic than in most of Dylan's love songs of the 1970s; the internal conflict again takes on a social dimension. The "long-distance train" of the first line already looks forward to the "slow train coming" of the following album.

But it *is* a farewell to Sara, and the song rises to a great emotional climax of cathartic release. The final chorus sums up and puts an end to the narrative that all the love songs of the 1970s had told...

Author: Alan Rinzler	First Published: Harmony Books 1978
Title: The Illustrated Record	Out of print

The overall effect [of **Street-Legal**] is of someone kind of grim and depressed, forcing these songs out with a fatalistic attitude like: well here's the way it is for me now, not so hot, but still plugging ... **Where Are You Tonight?** concludes this album with another depressing anthem about a woman he longs to touch. The music is sad as hell; the words are candid:

*In that last hour of need, we entirely agreed
Sacrifice was the code of the road ...*

And Dylan, the Gemini, tells us how:

*I fought with my twin. That enemy within
'Til both of us fell by the way ...*

Despite the cooking instrumental backing, we leave Dylan there, fallen.

Author: Elizabeth M Thomson	First Published: <i>Conclusions On The Wall</i> , Manchester, Thin Man 1980
Title: Dylan As Composer	Printed In : <i>Conclusions On The Wall</i>

It is a unique facet of Dylan's genius that certain songs possess an inherent cumulative power (especially noticeable in live performance) that does not seem to be related to the arrangements or dynamics, as it must be in Springsteen's **Born to Run** or Spector's **River Deep, Mountain High**. **Like A Rolling Stone** and **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)** exemplify this point, and interestingly, the two are linked by certain common musical elements.

Both songs are in the same key, C major, and both use rather high, narrow vocal range (or *tessitura*) - factors that produce a particular musical flavour or *timbre*. In both, the chords of C, F and G predominate and the opening of **Like A Rolling Stone** is given momentum by the use of a strong rising sequence:

Once upon a time you dressed so fine

C Dm

You threw the burns a dime in your prime, Didn't you?

Em F G7

This is later reversed as "Now, you don't talk so loud ...", reflecting an inverted mirror-image. Then, as Dylan's questions pound out, the vocal is punctured by another short rising sequence:

How does it feel?

How does it feel?

(G7) C F G F C F G

This continues to pervade the music until the close of the song and is also used, albeit less powerfully, in **Where Are You Tonight?** The latter song also uses the falling sequence of **Like A Rolling Stone**, here augmented:

And she winds back the clock and she turns back the page

(F) Em Dm C

This time, the vocal line drops with it, rather than diverging as is often the case with Dylan, and the whole depicts brilliantly a sense of desperation and isolation.

Thus, in both songs, relatively static vocal lines that oscillate around the key-note are off-set by comparatively fluid harmony. Both songs make use of the dramatic pause at the climax, and both descend forcefully to the final cadence.

Of course, none of these features are, in themselves, rare strokes of genius: the C - F - G chord sequence is about the first thing any self-respecting guitarist learns. (In fact, such a formulation is the foundation of Western harmony!) But Dylan, in these two songs, has fused the elements in such a way as to gain maximum effect from seemingly minimal resources. Despite their apparent technical simplicity, they succeed as well-structured musical entities.

Author: Wilfrid Mellers	First Published: Faber and Faber Limited, 1984
Title: A darker shade of pale	Out of print (I think)

....**Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)** works verbally through a richly allusive technique related to the cinematic clip, juxtaposing snippets of story without chronological sequence and at various levels of reality and myth. In the first stanza he is travelling in the familiar lonesome long-distance train, through the dark night; the rain on the window-pane merges into the tears he sheds for a woman apparently lost. But in the second stanza he is in a neon-lit bar of some seedy town, listening to "laughter down in Elizabeth Street" in which he cannot share, and to a "lonesome bell" in a "valley of stone". Into the hallucinatory haze flit sundry characters - a woman with a "full-blooded Cherokee father", a "golden-haired stripper", "the guy you were loving", two "strong men belittled by doubt", not to mention a lion and a demon. The triangular or quadrilateral relationships between humans and the mythic creatures remain, and are meant to remain, obscure: the separations of lover from beloved prove to be also a separation of self from self. The action is within the mind, precipitated from memory; probably the poet never leaves the railway train he occupies in the first stanza. That the song concerns a longing for the undivided whole, a fundamental religious experience, validates the ecclesiastical flavour of the music. The vocal line, at first primitive in speech rhythms, oscillates between minor and major thirds and is unable to define a tune, while

the harmony alternates between tonic and subdominant, the former often garnering a flat seventh to broach, but not to consummate, a full flatwards modulation. The flat sevenths, though indeterminate in pitch, forestall any dominant assertiveness. Not until the last clause, after three eights, is there a dominant triad and a change from the pendulum of tonic-subdominant in the bass, which now swings down the scale. In the middle section the melody's vacillating thirds turn into blue false relations, again indefinite in pitch as sung by Dylan, though flat enough to hint at the subdominant of the subdominant. Here the words refer explicitly to the divided self ("I fought with my twin, that enemy within/Till both of us fell by the way"), and add, in the last section, that "if you don't believe there's a price/For this sweet paradise,/Remind me to show you the scars." Because he has come through, the reprise of the original music can grow grander as well as louder, until the splendour of the coda sounds like authentic religious experience in an age of unfaith. There is no deception, no retreat into Zen quietism, let alone into narcotic delusion. There is courage and strength, which may be related to Dylan's confrontation of a crisis in his own life - the failure of a marriage that, on the evidence of previous discs, would seem to have promised so much. But while personal crisis may have nurtured the further maturation of experience in **Street-Legal** the songs are not about that crisis. Dylan, true artist that he is, has rather used his own pain to investigate experience relevant to us all ...

Author: Dowley & Dunnage	First Published: Tunbridge Wells: Midas, 1982
Title: <i>From A Hard Rain To A Slow Train</i>	Out of print

This album concludes with **Where Are You Tonight?**, ominously subtitled "Journey Through Dark Heat". Contained in the first few lines is a reference to a satellite. Technological innovations of this kind are markedly absent from Dylan's work, but this one seems appropriate enough, if quaint and a little dated, in the light of the full-blooded efforts on the part of many pop musicians. And this song constitutes great communication despite all that. "Street-wise" is indelibly marked on the English language. Contained here is an astrological/biblical reference:

*I fought with my twin, that enemy within
Till both of us fell by the way.*

Dylan's astrological sign is Gemini, the twin. But this duality struggle is at the root of much Evangelical Christian teaching, and it is Dylan's first specific reference to anything recognizable as a lead-up to Christian conversion. The Apostle Paul in **Romans 7:15**, had written of himself:

*I cannot understand my own behaviour. I fail to
carry out the things that I want to do, and I find
myself doing the very things that I hate.*

And, again, in **Galatians 5:17**, he writes:

*... since self-indulgence is the opposite of the
spirit, the spirit is totally against such a thing,
and it is precisely because the two are opposed that
you do not always carry out your good intentions.*

... Dylan's song has resulted in the juxtaposing of his God and his ideal woman. More than mere symbolism, this should convince us of the spiritual search that has always been implicit in his work. Evangelical Christians draw too firm a line between the before and after of conversion. The spiritual search here is hand-in-glove with reality, making it possibly more "Christian" than the three albums that follow.

Author: Jonathan Cott	Doubleday; 1984
Title: <i>Dylan</i>	Presumably out of print

In **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)** ... Dylan gives us an amazingly powerful depiction of [the] personal disintegration of a man ineluctably in exile, trying desperately and futilely to hold on in a world where light and dark forces - both in the personality and in the cosmos - which were once partners in a harmonious creation, are now split and polarized and at war with each other ... This song, in fact, reminds me of the last work Van Gogh painted before his suicide, *Crows over the Wheat Field*, with what art critic Meyer Shapiro calls its "rapid convergences and dizzying angularities" - a work "unstable and charged with a tempestuous excitement". And what Shapiro writes about Van Gogh's painting might also be said about Dylan's song: "But the stable, familiar earth, interlocked with the paths, seems to resist perspective control. The artist's will is confused, the world moves towards him, he cannot move toward the world. It is as if he felt himself completely blocked, but also saw an ominous fate approaching".

Author: John Hinchey	First Published: Wanted Man, Manchester; 1983
Title: Bob Dylan's Slow Train	Out of print

[These songs] articulate the voice, respectively, of the demonic angel and the angelic demon who are the twin polarities of what most of us mean when we invoke Dylan's authority to our imagination. These are the modes of his most imaginative and characteristic, if not consistently his best, works. **Precious Angel** is successor to **Gates Of Eden**, **Like A Rolling Stone**, **Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands**, **Tough Mama**, **Idiot Wind**, **Sara** and **Where Are You Tonight?**; **Gonna Change My Way Of Thinking** is successor to **It's Alright Ma, Ballad Of A Thin Man**, **Memphis Blues Again**, **Dirge**, **Buckets Of Rain**, **One More Cup Of Coffee** and **Changing Of The Guards**. Both of these modes stem ultimately from the internalized quest romance, which is to say that they belong to the central tradition of Anglo-American and European poetry for the last two centuries. Dylan has mediated his appropriation of the demonic strain in Romanticism through the Blues tradition and of the angelic strain through a mutation largely of his own invention, though it is an invention to a great extent spawned by *Howl* and *Kaddish* ...

Author: Chris Fleury	Look Back (in No.25)
Title: Abandoned Love: Changes In Dylan's Drug Imagery	

Street-Legal can be seen as picking up the [drug] addict's story where the mid-seventies trilogy of **Planet Waves**, **Blood On The Tracks**, and **Desire** leaves off ... [it] is the story of the newly-recovered addict wrestling with the bittersweet loss of his earlier "love". Now, the recovering addict is assessing the damage done by his drug usage and struggling to make reparations ... The final stanza of **Where Are You Tonight?** summarizes the newly recovering addict's gratefulness for his feelings of rebirth. "I can't believe it, I can't believe I'm alive."

Author: David Murray	Evening Post, 15th July 1978
Title: Street Legal Is Instantly Likeable	(as reprinted in Dave Percival : The Dust Of Rumour (1985))

Street-Legal seems to me more instantly likeable than many of his earlier works, and contains some very commercial songs. But that's not half of it. It also appears to be largely optimistic, and sometimes seems even religious. Dylan certainly seems happy with what he's doing **Where Are You Tonight?** [is] a 6 minute elegiac story with some superb organ chords and a "looking back" feel to Dylan's phrasing which reminds you of some of his earlier songs back in the **Blowin' In The Wind** days ...

Author: Angus Mackinnon	New Musical Express, 24th July 1978
Title: Visions Of Love And Life	

Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat) is more mythology, only personalised, more specific ... Musically, the song's reminiscent of the *Blonde on Blonde* period, thanks mainly to Pasqua's Al Kooperish organ, whilst structurally its middle eight and chorus bear a more than passing resemblance to *Like A Rolling Stone*. An intense, listless declaration of quiet desperation, crackling with sudden rimshot lines: *I fought with my twin, that enemy within, 'til both of us fell by the way/Horseplay and disease are killing me by degrees while the law looks the other way/Your partners in crime hit me up for nickels and dimes/The man you were loving could never get clean ...*

Author: John Bauldie	In Michael Gray And John Bauldie : Across The Telegraph
Title: A Meeting With A.J.Weberman, Summer Of '82	A Bob Dylan Handbook (1987)

... Shelley hadn't heard. "Come on Shelley, we're going back to A.J.'s!"

We walked down Elizabeth Street.

A.J. suddenly turned. "This is where Dylan jumped me!" A strangle light glowed in his eyes. ""Laughter down on Elizabeth Street"! Can't you see these buildings, how they close in? This is the "valley of stone". There was certainly a stream of pure heat. ""It felt out of place, my foot in his face"! Just here, man, near this trashcan. "The book that nobody can write". That's my book!"

Author: Michael Watts	Melody Maker, 24th June 1978
Title: Dylan Finds His Post "Blonde" Sound	

...What is one to make, for instance, of the lines that close the album on **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)**? "I can't believe I've survived", he sings; and then: "If you don't believe there's a price/For this sweet paradise/Just remind me to show you the scars." ...

...The marvellously cinematic tone re-occurs on **Where Are You Tonight?**, whose sub-title gives a better idea of the song's implications. The narrator is on a train, "rolling through the rain", recollecting various adventures that involve gamblers, a gypsy, a "full-blooded Cherokee", and the inevitable girl ("tears on the letter that I write").

Maybe the girl is "sweet Marie." Certainly there are echoes of *Blonde on Blonde* in Alan Pasqua's Al Kooperish organ playing. But the jauntiness of **Absolutely Sweet Marie** is contradicted by the sombre lyrics and the mounting tension of the music as the train rumbles through the night to the song's uneasy denouement.

Nothing is revealed, really; but Dylan's handling of his mystery tale is utterly absorbing, especially as the song appears to disguise moments of autobiography ...

Author: Robert Shelton	First Published: The Dylan Companion, MacMillan, (1990)
Title: Trust Yourself	Edited by : Elizabeth M Thomson and David Gutman

Already by then [1978], in his "Journey through dark heat" on **Street-Legal**, he was hearing his slow train coming ... his religious imagery was even stronger before he became a Jesus follower ...

Author: Agnes Friesen	First Published: Review of Street-Legal, in Broadside No.140, July-December 1978
Title: Not Guilty, Your Honour	

Street-Legal's last cut ... winds the album up nicely. It says what I, and probably a lot of other people, say just about every day in one way or another: "I can't believe it, I can't believe I'm alive - but without you it doesn't seem right". Listen to **Journey Through Dark Heat** four times instead of listening to **Love In Vain**, **True Love, We Better Talk**, and **Stop Crying** [sic] ...

Author: Nick De Somogyi	
Title: Jokermen And Thieves. Bob Dylan And The Ballad Tradition	Wanted Man, 1986

... In 1984 [singing *Tangled Up In Blue* in concert] he stresses the internal split in himself of the sort encountered in *I and I* or the 1978 **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)**;

*I fought with my twin
That enemy within
Till both of us fell by the way.*

The narrative flashes of these songs are indeed "advanced by a series of quick flashes, one distinct scene following another".

Author: Tim Riley	Knopff, 1992
Title: Hard Rain: A Dylan Commentary	

.. **Street-Legal** (1978) contained some unflattering inconsistencies ... His lyrical sensibilities dwindled ... **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)** was so fervent with obsession that he never bothered to let on what makes his lover so desirable ...

Author: Michael Gray	First Published: The Hamlyn Publishing Group, Great Britain, 1981
Title: The Art Of Bob Dylan	Currently unavailable

Street-Legal brings it all together, Dylan the consistent moralist, Dylan the writer who draws heavily on the bible, Dylan caught in the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, Dylan ending his relationship with Sara, Dylan the betrayed victim both of what he sees as Sara's love-in-vain and all of us.

Consummately, Dylan does pull all those strands together on this album, both on its minor songs and its three outstanding major works, **Changing Of The Guards**, **No Time To Think**, and **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)**

...The final journey is the 'journey through dark heat' and out the other side that constitutes the album's final song **Where Are You Tonight?** He has asked her to make the same pilgrimage alongside him; she has declined; he has gone alone.

As the song opens Dylan is on the slow train:

*There's a long-distance train rolling through the rain.
Tears on the letter I write.
There's a woman I long to touch and I'm missing her so much,*
But she's drifting like a satellite.*

The second verse is a glancing reflection back to the old New York days. In 1965 we had that scathing song **Positively 4th Street**; this time it is Greenwich Village's Elizabeth Street that is used to place that past camaraderie - and thus to serve as a precursor for those lines on the **Slow Train Coming** album: *My so-called friends have fallen under a spell*. Here Dylan is anticipating the sneers of his New York world at the news of his desertion to Christ:

*There's a neon light ablaze in a green smokey haze
And laughter down on Elizabeth Street*

- followed at once by this terrific characterisation of New York City as a valley of death in whose shadow he and his lover have walked too long:

*There's a lonesome bell tone in that valley of stone
Where she bathed in a stream of pure heat*

- the effectiveness of which resides partly in the pure beauty of calling New York City a 'valley of stone' and partly in the strange double-take of juxtaposing cold stone and pure heat in one and the same place: the death and hell, the chill and the furnace at once.

Then Dylan's travelling reflections pause to dwell on the divorce, and the inexpressible gulf between the public story and the inner reality of what he feels went down:

*...a woman in a rage....
As she winds back the clock and turns back the page
Of a book that nobody can write.....*

*The truth was obscure, too profound and too pure
To live it you had to explode.*

This leads directly to the recollected split-up and his new embarkation:

*In that last hour of need, we entirely agreed
sacrifice was the code of the road.
I left town at dawn with Marcel and St. John,
strong men belittled by doubt.*

(a great phrase, that) and then come these excellent lines admitting that while he could claim his own agony to be inexpressible, she could still pierce through any aggrandizing mystification he might be putting around himself:

*I couldn't tell her what my private thoughts were
But she had some way of finding them out.*

From there, the song shows Dylan's thoughts ranging through the whole spectrum of the leaving and its whys and wherefores. His irresolution is recollected here:

*I fought with my twin, that enemy within
Till both of us fell by the way.*

Recollected too, and confessed, are the betrayals of each other:

*The man you were lovin' could never get clean
It felt out of place, my foot in his face
But he should have stayed where his money was green*

and

*I bit into the root of forbidden fruit
With the juice runnin' down my leg.*

No wonder Eden is burning.

In the penultimate verse we return to the idea of sacrifice, there is:

*... a pathway that leads up to the stars;
If you don't believe there's a price for this sweet paradise
Just remind me to show you the scars.*

The last verse of the song - and of the album - announces Dylan's final arrival at rebirth. He has made it at last. Yet what is most striking here is the humanity, the generosity of feeling. There is no ending on any note of glee or superiority. There is only a gladness which Dylan admits to, while admitting also that it is lessened by the final loss of love:

*There's a new day at dawn, and I've finally arrived,
If I'm there in the morning, baby, you'll know I've survived
I can't believe it; I can't believe I'm alive.
But without you, it just doesn't seem right.
Oh, Where Are You Tonight?*

CONCLUSION :

I'd like to wind up this **Focus On** with two thoughts/pleas from the heart:

1. **Focus On** would benefit enormously from input from you, gentle reader. What do you think about **Where Are You Tonight?** Any participation will be very gratefully received. The song under examination next will be **It's Alright Ma, (I'm Only Bleeding)** Please think about writing in with your own response to the song (and then do it).

2. Having compiled this one set of selections from the accumulated body of Dylan literature, I would like to express my heartfelt conviction that no book on Dylan, which has any pretensions to being treated seriously as an academic work, should be published without an index. In fact, failing to include an index should be a hanging offence. P.S. I am available for indexing work.

Paula Radice.

You said you would like personal accounts of the significance of the song. Well , get your hankies out!

In 1978 I was living in Surbiton at a college for 'mature' women who wished to return to education. I had just been accepted by Cambridge and was delighted. Added to this Dylan was coming!

Needless to say, (since everyone who attended those concerts knows), Dylan was fantastic. I had attended two shows and was at the third when all of a sudden I had the distinct impression that something was happening AT THAT MOMENT to my brother, Billy, back in Dallas.

I expected the tannoy to page me or an usher to go up and down stairways calling my name - irrational I know, but the feeling that Billy was in trouble was so strong. Then a second idea flashed, he was in trouble with the police! I could see the red lights and hear the sirens. This was less alarming since my brother regularly had run-ins with the cops.

I forced my mind back to the concert which wasn't hard to do - but the minute I stepped through the doors at the end all the previous feelings came back.

One of the girls met me outside my room. 'Come home immediately. Your Dad's been trying to reach you. I phoned and Dad told me 'Billy's dead. He's been killed'

To cut a long and painful story short, Billy had been sleeping in his bed and a man he'd never met entered his bedroom and shot him three times (the last bullet hit the heart) and then proceeded to shoot Dick, Billy's friend,(who, hearing the shots, raced into the room to help) twice. Dick managed, despite serious wounds to tackle the guy. The police (swarms of them called by neighbours who had heard those 5 shots¹) found Dick beating the guy on the front lawn.

The man later claimed he was obsessed with the men in the house - all of them were younger than he was. He had recently separated from his wife and was convinced she was involved with a younger man. He had even heard Billy's name mentioned. (Billy had, in fact, bought her a drink one night.) He is now serving life. The judge was so appalled that he shot someone asleep and therefore totally vulnerable that he gave him life 'or 99 years', i.e. if he comes up for parole the 99 years comes into effect. This is extraordinary for Texas. Normally 'murder one' and you can still be out walking the streets in months.

Anyway, I had bought Dylan's newest album at the time, **Street Legal**. I spent the entire night playing it over and over and over again. As soon as it finished I simply played it again. The song that meant the most was **Journey Through Dark Heat**. The verse:

*There's a new day at dawn and I've finally arrived,
If I'm there in the morning, baby, you'll know I've survived.
But without you it just doesn't seem right
Oh where are you tonight?*

perfectly expressed my thoughts, summed up or focussed my pain.

Ben Fong-Torres, writing a piece for **Rolling Stone**, described having a similar experience. He was attending one of the '74 concerts. The most poignant moment for him came when Dylan sang **It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)**. The verse that deals with people's inability to recognize the fact that they too will die brought back to him his parents refusal to accept his brother's death. (also by murder, see **Knockin' on Dylan's Door**).

Dylan himself, of course, hates hearing what his songs mean to people. Who can blame him? A lot of the stories will be as bleak as those above. And he's right, what's happening to other people, people he doesn't know, not only can never be his responsibility, but in addition, obviously has nothing to do with why he wrote the song. **Journey Through Dark Heat**, most critics agree, refers to his recent divorce (**Street Legal** itself was dubbed 'the divorce album') and the loss of Sara. Many have spoken of divorce as 'like a death'. **Journey Through Dark Heat** seems to make this comparison graphically.

Paul Williams wrote in **Telegraph** 31 that Howard Alk had told him the one factor he missed in his enquiry **What Happened?** into the possible reasons for Dylan's conversion was death. Around the end of the Rolling

¹Plus a sixth, when the man first entered the house he took a shot at a 17 year old Billy had offered a bed for the night, The man saved himself by jumping through a window.

Thunder Tour and divorce were 2 deaths that affected him deeply. Phil Ochs's suicide in April 1976 and Elvis's in 1977.

1979's *Slow Train* portrayed a woman advising: *Boy without a doubt have to quit your mess and straighten out or You could die down here, be just another accident statistic.* 1980's *Saving Grace* supports Alk's suggestion that the conversion was a logical step to cope with his fears,

*I've escaped death so many times, I know I'm living
By the saving grace that's over me,
By this time I'd a thought I would be sleeping,
In a pine box for all eternity.*

Dylan is well aware of the therapeutic value of music, he has said, 'It puts you in tune with your own existence. Sometimes you really don't know how you feel, but really good music can define how you feel. It can make you feel not so much alone. That's what it has always done for me- people like Hank Williams, Bill Monroe, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson..' (Robert Hillburn, 13.6.84 West Berlin.) and, '(music) can get into people's subconscious minds, maybe in a roundabout way, and they make people feel better. They feel that maybe sometimes what they are thinking or feeling, they can hear it articulated in a song and they may think, yeah, I'm not so crazy to feel that way' (*Pulse*: Dylan in conference, *Juke* pg. 4 March 1 1986 Interviewer Murray Engelheart)

This is a hell of an achievement. As Steven Goldberg described in 1970 'Dylan's art is capable of igniting their faith. In any age that is a considerable artistic achievement in the lonely world of the contemporary young it would seem almost a miracle' (pg. 376 *Retrospective*, 1972 edition)

The sociologist Simon Frith has studied the use people make of songs. He found that pop songs do not reflect emotions but give people the romantic terms in which to articulate and so experience their emotions.

Richard Williams felt Dylan's songs were 'the direct communication of experience, the re-definition of emotions, the interplay of conflicting feelings...' (*The Times*, 29 September, 1987). Jonathan Cott, too, found, combining Goldberg and Frith, 'His songs are miracles...In words and music he has re- awakened and thereby altered, our experience of the world.' (*Rolling Stone*, January 26, 1978). I know Dylan's song - paraphrasing Kristofferson - helped me make it through that particular night. And how fitting - for it was Billy who'd turned me on to Dylan. In 1984 at Wembley, when Dylan sang *Leopard-skin Pill-box Hat* I was ecstatic! In 1966 Billy had played this song non-stop, (as I would do 12 years later with another song), as his fiancée Sheryl had just broken off their engagement.

He sat in a rocking chair, played that song to my mother's distraction, and after a few plays he managed a smile. Then a giggle caught him off-guard. After 20 or so plays he was rocking like a fiend and laughing his head off!

Thank you Mr. Dylan. And I thank you.

I went to see one other concert at Earls Court in 1978 after that awful night. When he sang *Forever Young* I fell apart. Billy was being buried that Tuesday and I've been unable to get back to the States for the funeral. But I felt that Dylan provided the better memorial. Billy's spirit was all around me and the song was perfect; dead at just 30, he'd remain forever young.

P.S. I'd like to thank the guy next to me. While I sobbed uncontrollably he offered me his beer. What a sweetie. He must have thought I was some ageing teeny-bopper, hysterical in the presence of my idol. When the beer didn't work he offered me a joint. Ah, yes, the 60s.... there's a lot to be said for the general kindness of Dylan's admirers.

Angelina seemed to be the song of 1992. We had articles by Paul Williams in **The Telegraph** and by Mark Carter and Jim Heppell in **Homer the slut**. Despite this, the most appropriate words on **Angelina** were written way back in 1979 also by Paul Williams, in his wonderful, wonderful book **Dylan - What Happened?** :

Dylan puts together an impressive string of words and images with a catchy, involving arrangement - and also shows that ultimately you can't go far enough, in the end the song doesn't make it because its not really about anything. There is no real woman in the song or behind the song, or at least he doesn't convince me there is.

That's what Williams wrote. Sadly for me he wasn't writing about **Angelina** but about **Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)**. Why sadly? Because these words describe exactly how I feel about **Angelina**, but not at all how I feel about **Where Are You Tonight?** This latter piece has always been my favourite song from **Street Legal**, and what it does or might say to us has been a subject of endless speculation for me, some of which I want to offer in this essay.

Before I do that I ought to just clarify my position on **Angelina**. It is obvious that many fans (No, I don't have a problem with this term either, Andrew - much better than collector, train-spotter or nut!) have a high regard for **Angelina**. Several friends of mine think it's an absolute masterpiece. My reservations about the song must put me in a minority possibly of one?¹ The first time I heard **Angelina** was when some kind trader of tapes stuck it on the end of a concert tape to fill up space for me. My immediate reaction was "Fantastic! Yet another unreleased gem!" But after a very few plays, I began to revise my evaluation downwards. Why? It is a beautiful melody, that is certainly true. And I can't help feeling that maybe it is because of this beauty that people want to find integrity in the song. But for me it is all too facile. The music, the rhymes and the lyrics fit together just that bit too well. Is that a crazy statement? Perhaps I can use an analogy to explain what I mean. When I was young, I would be swept off my feet by a beautiful woman. The more nearly her beauty reached to some ideal of perfection, the more I would fall. Who can I offer as an example? Say Marilyn Monroe or Melanie Griffith. But with advancing years I prefer my beauty a little less standardised even a little flawed, say Debra Winger or Juliet Stephenson. Perhaps what I mean is that the truth is "too profound and too pure" to be carved, shaped and manipulated into the very smooth mould that is **Angelina**. And then there's those rhymes: *Argentina, Hyena, Subpoena, Arena, Concertina*. Aren't they just a little too pat, don't you think? Just a little too contrived? To be honest I would find it awfully hard to write an in-depth critique of **Angelina**, and anyway it wouldn't convince you if you loved the song. You are right from your side and I am right from mine. In the end its "how does it feel?" that matters. To me **Angelina** just doesn't feel the way I want a Dylan masterpiece to feel. Let's get back to the subject in hand.

Street-Legal is often a neglected work, certainly an under-rated one. Even so, a couple of years back when **The Telegraph** held a poll of its readers this album came fourth - ahead of every Dylan album except **Blood On The Tracks**, **Blonde On Blonde** and **Highway 61**. It must have something special to place it ahead of over 30 other albums. It was the sixth in a succession of magical 70's albums following: **Planet Waves**, **Before The Flood**, **Blood On The Tracks**, **Desire** and **Hard Rain**. (You cannot classify **The Basement Tapes** as a 70's album.) Recorded in April 1978, between the eastern and the European legs of "The Alimony Tour" **Street-Legal** is an important album for me (I'd probably give it fourth place as well) and has to be for any student of Dylan's work. It is, after all, the last studio album before his Christian conversion. As I've said elsewhere I've long ago lost count of the number of sixties's people who have told me this was the last Dylan album they bought. Atheists to the person, they just couldn't stomach the thought of a Christian Dylan. This was yet another occasion when he upset the (un)faithful by defying their expectations, and - it has to be said - probably with the most serious long-term consequences for his popularity and record sales of all his many changes in direction.

1978 can be an uncomfortable year for the Dylan watcher. Punk had arrived, bringing a much-needed and creative return to rock basics. In the process it was providing a focus for the type of younger, intelligent audience that in other times had gravitated to Dylan. At the same time Dylan, judging from the crowds that turned out for the World Tour, had returned to a peak of popularity not seen since those heady pre-Woodstock days. But yet again what he offered us defied expectations. Allegations of Dylan in "Las Vegas" were made in some quarters. For me personally, this was a time when I had other things on my mind. The summer of '78 brought redundancy and the search for work was paramount. I certainly had no interest in turning out at Earls Court or Blackbushe - even if it was 'the event of the seventies' (Elizabeth Thompson) or maybe the last great

¹(Nope, make that at least two Bob, as per comments of mine in a previous **Homer**. - ed.)

event of the sixties? I couldn't afford it anyway. I submerged myself in *Blood On The Tracks* and *Desire* and tried to pretend that the World Tour really wasn't my scene. Actually I still find the 1978 tapes among the least interesting of the lot.² But didn't he look great back then? I love the photos from the period from 1978 through to 1980/81, and very much the 1979/80 voice if not the message. And the album cover itself (*Street-Legal* that is - is superb. Maybe there isn't another memorable cover between *Street-Legal* and the bleak but evocative *Under The Red Sky*. I love the way he's dressed and the way he's looking down the street. What is he looking for? That slow train coming? A beautiful woman? Or something worse?

Given that *Street-Legal* is the last pre-conversion work, and given Dylan's propensity for using the last track on an album as a pointer to the themes of its successor, it is only to be expected that critics would look long and hard at *Where Are You Tonight (Journey Through Dark Heat)*. Robert Shelton, in contrast to Paul Williams, describes it as a masterpiece, "a song of anguish and prophecy". Michael Gray sees it as looking back on Dylan's life - Greenwich Village in the early days, the break-up with Sara - and forward to the conversion. I'm sure he's right, but as with many of the songs on *Another Side*, I had another set of interpretations long before I read *The Art Of Bob Dylan*. And after all, Dylan has said that each song "means" what it means to the individual listener. There is no single interpretation. So what follows is what I took from the song. I think I only differ from Michael Gray in that I visualise the song on its own mythic ground. I prefer the metaphor to the reality. Doesn't Dylan? Anyway, I believe Dylan's songs have to be accessible somehow on a universal level. They wouldn't work so well if they were only ever about Dylan and his life (though they are that as well). If only people who knew his biography could make something of them they would be worthless. They have to speak to our own experiences or our own dreams and nightmares.

Where Are You Tonight? seems to me to be operating in a similar territory to *Angelina*. It has that same mixture of apparent desire for a woman and a deeper religiosity: a hope for/fear of God. Its sub-title would seem to allude to Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness* - an author we know Dylan respects. Conrad's story and Dylan's song both take the reader/listener on a journey into the heart of evil and into a menacing landscape. There is an echo of *Isis* (as there is also, I would suggest; in *Angelina*). Dylan has often used a geographical journey to symbolise a spiritual one. It is an effective and very old technique - Bunyan's puritan allegories had their roots in medieval and pre-Christian story-telling. And right from the earliest days our hero has been prone to claim experiences of non-existent hard travellin' simply to tell a better story, to create the right atmosphere, the appropriate background.

It is possible to see this song as a love song: an expression of wistful regret or sexual yearning. Possible, but you have to turn a blind eye to an awful lot of imagery and symbolism in the process. You don't feel comfortable with yourself if you take this approach. But when was listening to Dylan ever about feeling comfortable with yourself? A long, long time ago *Sweet Marie* was being asked *Where Are You Tonight*. That was simpler, raunchier question than the one being posed this time.

*There's a long-distance train
rolling through the rain,
tears on the letter I write.
There's a woman I long to touch
and I'm missing her so much
but she's drifting like a satellite.*

*There's a neon light ablaze
in a green smoky haze,
and laughter down on Elizabeth Street.
There's a lonesome bell tone in that valley of stone
where she bathed in a stream of pure heat.*

*Her father would emphasise
you got to be more than street-wise
but he practiced what he preached from the heart.
A full-blooded Cherokee, he predicted it to me
the time and the place that we'd part.*

² Though that may be because on the tapes I have his voice is so often drowned out by the instrumentation. A friend recently sent me an Earl's Court tape in which Dylan's voice is much more to the fore - and this raised my level of enjoyment significantly.

The song is introduced very atmospherically by solo drums - menacing drums which instantly evoke a sense of unease and threat. But once the rest of the musicians come in you start to feel more at ease with yourself. The hairs on the back of your neck resume their normal position and you think: 'maybe I was mistaken, perhaps all is not darkness after all.' Then, what a wonderful opening line! There is so much you can read into it. -A long-distance train seems to prefigure the Slow Train of religion coming round the bend on the next studio album. 'Rolling through the rain' - was that old-time religion beginning to gnaw at Dylan's soul during his last tour? This line neatly alludes to both Rolling Thunder and the *Hard Rain TV special*. Or is it just a coincidence? Is this just another of his many trains and his continuing use of the weather in his imagery? Maybe it is too easy to make these connections, but they *feel* so right. This album falls chronologically between *Rolling Thunder* and *Slow Train*: how can you not assume there is a deliberate linkage? At the very least it could be Dylan's subconscious, his muse, working through his lyrics to acknowledge a pattern.

Leaving aside for the moment the prophetic/symbolic nature of that first line, the song starts off unthreateningly enough: 'Tears on the letter I write. There's a woman I'm missing her so much.' This is pretty conventional stuff really. She was special to me, but we're apart now. She's off somewhere 'drifting like a satellite' and he's either seeing or imagining some dive just off Elizabeth Street. Nothing unusual thus far.

But the next line changes everything. This is as evocative a line as any Dylan has written. It paints a vivid picture in the mind's eye; one that I can call up and gaze upon at will as easily as if it were hanging on my wall. I always see this same picture: it's a hot afternoon in a Catholic country (the 'lonesome bell tone' conveys the idea of a mission) somewhere in Central or Southern America. The goddess/woman is in a dark, but sunlight dappled forest bathing in a stream in front of a small waterfall (a bit like an advert for *Bounty* or *Sure!*). The 'valley of stone' is what creates the image of the waterfall - waters running out of and over a rocky escarpment, but it is not barren, there are trees and shrubs everywhere. This contrasts with Michael Gray's New York city streets - but reflects my habit of not looking too closely for linkages to Dylan's life. *Where she bathed in a stream of pure heat* is so perfect a use of language; only a master craftsman could use words in this way. And of course, even though all he has said about her is that 'she bathed', it is clear she is some sort of unique being. A flawless beauty, naked of course (but I only admire flawed beauty, remember?), dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin. A woman made for worship. The incarnation of a goddess in her own sylvan paradise. Beauty as deity; mythological and mystical and, yes, very reminiscent of the vision of Sara in the *Desire* song of the same name. But nothing resembling the goodness and truth of Christian theology. Her disciples must be prepared for doubt, uncertainty and possibly decadence and death. But who would care? In the furnace of desire no man seeks safety.

The final two lines of this verse emphasize the supernatural essence of the journey we are undertaking. A 'more than street-wise' Cherokee with the gift of prophecy. Well, 'more than street-wise' is saying that really, isn't it? You can't get by on shrewdness, business-sense or common acumen in the world of the goddess. You need something more. The fact that he is a Cherokee recognizes an almost racist view that primitive man is more sensitive to the spirits and forces of nature and the other world than is modern twentieth-century man. We have lost touch with our primeval souls. We may be more secure in this world, but we are shallower beings and will be cast adrift in the world to come. Incidentally, if you haven't noticed, *Lyrics 1962-85* replaces 'we'd part' with 'the trouble would start' at the end of the 'she predicted it to me' line. On the album and on the live 1978 tapes I have, Dylan always sings 'we'd part'. I don't think the change in the published text improves the sense in any way.

*There's a babe in the arms of a woman in a rage
And a long-time golden-haired stripper on stage
And she winds back the clock and she turns back the page
Of a book that nobody can write.
Oh! where are you tonight?*

For a long time I assumed the 'woman in a rage' was the "you" that is the subject of the song. Of kjcourse. it doesn't have to be that way unless you follow the Michael Gray line. This phrase may be simply suggesting an anger at betrayal or loss. It doesn't have to be that the subject of her anger is Dylan. For me, at this point in the song we are still operating in the sphere of woman as goddess.



This whole verse seems to be using woman as whore/abandoned wife/stripper as a metaphor for woman as goddess. If that sounds perverse or pretentious, I'm sorry. I can see how you might read it like that! Men have always worshipped women but rarely faithfully or truly. Man finds it as hard to be faithful to God (or goddess) as he does to woman. The man could be man, in general or man in particular. In this interpretation it can be man beholden to or protected by the goddess. In her arms in a similar sense to the gospel song 'he's got the whole world in his arms'. The goddess has a right to her holy anger. The 'golden-haired' conjures up a Venus to be worshipped; the 'stripper' a slut to be despised, humiliated. And yet what is a man doing when he watches a

stripper? Worshipping at the shrine of her body, surely? And who is in control in this relationship? The goddess/strippers? Many commentators have noted the contempt in which striptease artistes hold their audiences. At the end of the evening in the smoky haze of the strip joint, who feels guilty? Not the strippers but the man who sneaks out of the door hoping not to meet anyone he knows....

Winding back the clock is a typically wistful statement we all of us make when looking back longingly to a better or happier time - or maybe wishing we'd done things differently. Or, perhaps in this case a woman's wish that she could still be as beautiful on the outside as she was when young. Turning back the page also. But a book that nobody can write? What can possibly be a book that nobody can write? Dylan has said that he doesn't create his songs - they're already there waiting to be written down. Other poets have made a similar point. So if it's already there how come nobody can write it? Is it only that she the mother/stripper could write it but she's not going to or is unable to? Or is it the Bible? Evangelicals hold that the Bible was not written by many different men but only by the inspiration of The Holy Ghost. When Dylan wrote this song he was really only a year away from falling into the arms of an evangelical congregation. Perhaps it is the book of Holy Scripture that a goddess could write if she wished, but that no-one else could write. But then a feminine religion would not repeat the mistakes of masculine Christianity by providing the scripture that strangles the spirit and suffocates the faithful hearts. This last possibility most appeals to me as fitting the 'feel' and spirit of the song. Allow me my dreams!

*The truth was obscure, too profound and too pure,
to live it you had to explode
In that last hour of need, we entirely agreed,
sacrifice was the code of the road.*

*I left town at dawn, with Marcel and St. John,
strong men belittled by doubt.
I couldn't tell her what my private thoughts were
but she had some way of finding them out.*

*He took dead centre aim but he missed just the same,
she was waiting, putting flowers on the shelf.
She could feel my despair as I climbed up her hair
and discovered her invisible self*

This is either a description of a religious conversion or an unconscious and unsettling prophecy of the one that Dylan was about to undergo - I prefer to think it is prophetic - something that has welled-up from deep in his subconscious. In any case 'The truth was obscure, too profound and too pure' is so true and diamond-hard that it would've cut through the fundamentalist glass of the Christianity Dylan was about to embrace. There is nothing I hear in Dylan's 1979 preaching or in what I have read about that time to suggest the truth he was then espousing was in any way profound. Surely religious belief has to be more complex than is dreamt of in the evangelical philosophy? It is sad that seekers after religious truth sometimes find it. They are far more interesting characters during the search. The finding of the Holy Grail seems to bring with it a narrowness and intolerance of outlook. From 1974 to 1978 Dylan was using his art to explore (among other things) the nature and value of religious belief. It was an enthralling journey. In a way it seems to me that he has returned to that path in the last 3 or 4 years, although some way further along the road and not yet with the usual creative results. By the time of **Street Legal** he was on the cusp between the mythology, paganism and magic of **Desire** and the straight Christianity of **Slow Train**. His metamorphosis mirroring what has happened to whole societies and cultures at differing phases of history. But doesn't that typify Dylan and his art? Hasn't his work been both a seismograph, reflecting the tremors of contemporary culture, and, on a personal level, a kaleidoscopic portrayal of many of the experiences common to intelligent humanity in this age?

From recognizing the truth the singer moves on to the consequences of that recognition. "In that last hour of need" expresses something similar to what many have said about the moment of religious conversion: a sudden realization occurs that you have gone beyond the possibility of self-redemption - that this can only now come from God and your acceptance of him. The further consequence is the acceptance of the need for sacrifice. On a Christian level this might involve giving up everything and becoming a disciple of Christ or the desperate struggle to live a sin-free life. The sacrifices required by the goddess of the stream of pure heat are of a wholly other nature....

Why then, if this is a conversion experience, does he find himself in the company of "strong men belittled by doubt"? Perhaps, after all, we are still on the eve of conversion rather than the morning after. Robert Shelton, in his essay **I Can Change, I Swear**, identifies Marcel as Gabriel Marcel, French Christian existentialist. He, apparently, believed that communication between man and his fellow man was the central purpose of life. This would seem to be in contrast to the traditional Christian stress on communion with God. Is this why he is belittled by doubt? Or is it another Marcel? As for St. John, inspired author of the **Book of Revelation**, I simply do not understand how he is categorized as a doubter. And anyway, why is any man belittled by doubt? It is arguable that a man of doubt is a strong character; someone who recognizes reality (the "lies that life is black and white") and doesn't need the prop of unquestioning obedience to organized religion.

The next line is "I couldn't tell her what my private thoughts were but she had some way of finding them out". This, of course, was to be repeated three years on in **Angelina**: "If you can read my mind, why must I speak?" Sounds like the man has been involved with some wonderfully intuitive women! At the level of this song, though, we are yet again back to the goddess, who would know his private thoughts wouldn't she? And she can feel his despair: the despair of not finding any balm for his pain and anguish. And here, at this point, the goddess ultimately fails him - or as Paul Williams says, he learns that there is no redemption for him in womankind.

Despair, of course, is poison to the believer: Bunyan's "Slough of Despond". The faithful do not despair - it is a contradiction in terms. In this context, could it be "There's a lion in the road" is a biblical allusion? **1 Kings 14 v.24** refers to the disobedient prophet who "when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him". It sounds very scriptural, anyway. Again, you can read this two ways. The lion could be the fate of the unfaithful follower of God/goddess(Sara's, or of the unfaithful lover (Dylan?). So you can fit it to Michael Gray's interpretation or to my inferior dreams.

"There's a demon escaped" is what happens when you don't keep the faith and everything goes downhill from hereon in. Even the stripper's beauty has faded before the watcher gets to see her all. Quite simply, woman/goddess is not enough. It is almost poetic that, just as we are coming to the third verse (**Desolation Row** revisited), the writer's faith fails him and he produces the one really weak line of the song: "I won't, but then maybe again I might"

*I fought with my twin, that enemy within
'til both of us fell by the way.
horseplay and disease is killing me by degrees
while the law looks the other way,*

*Your partners in crime hit me up for nickels and dimes,
the man you were lovin' could never get clean.
It felt outta place, my foot in his face,
but he should-a stayed where his money was green.*

*I bit into the root of forbidden fruit
with she juice running down my leg
Then I dealt with your boss, who'd never known about loss,
who always was too proud to beg.*

*There's a white diamond gloom on the dark side of this room
and a pathway that leads up to the stars.
If you don't believe there's a price for this sweet paradise,
just remind me to show you the scars.*

This verse seems to describe some sort of descent into a personal hell - a hell of the singer's own making. The first line has been interpreted as a reference to the duality in Dylan's psyche - the reflection of his Gemini star sign. However you can also find a biblical allusion in there. In **Genesis 32 v24-26**, Jacob wrestles with "a man", but no ordinary man. I am no expositor of the Bible, but this seems to be some sort of angel or messenger from God. A battle is fought between good and evil within Jacob's soul; which makes it a valid comparison with the singer's battle with the "enemy within". Given that Dylan's conversion was imminent, it is highly probable that he was reading the Bible at this time, and that this line was prompted, albeit subconsciously by **Genesis**. You also wonder whether the story of Jacob was of special significance to Dylan and whether this is why he named a son Jacob.

The next few lines symbolise decadence and corruption: the sins of man laid bare. Drink, drugs and sex. Bribery, violence and pride. The everyday experience of humankind - after the fall. Quite clearly Dylan is describing his own agonized, guilt-racked state just before his conversion. Paul Williams captures his state of mind with empathy in **Dylan - What Happened** and I will quote him in a moment. But before we get to the resurrection, just savour this compelling line: "I bit into the root of forbidden fruit with the juice running down my leg". Nick Train (*Isis* No.29 - **Robert Johnson and Street-Legal**) has identified this and several other lines in the song as heavily influenced by Johnson. He could be right, but anyway, isn't this a dextrous amplification of an old and over-used metaphor? And don't we instantly know that it is not fruit juice that he's referring to? And isn't that an intimate and daring revelation that few would risk in this context? Dylan in all his uniqueness.

Moving into the last two lines, we begin the metamorphosis from despair to hope. At first I couldn't latch onto "diamond gloom" at all, but you'll know that it is just saying "the light is beginning to dawn". "Diamond gloom" being yet another Dylanesque juxtaposition of apparent opposites which serves to convey with the utmost precision what the singer really means. However, there's no entry to paradise without pain - another similarity to Bunyan - and in the third and final chorus he finally makes it through the wall....

*There's a new day at dawn And I've finally arrived
If I'm there in the morning, baby, you'll know I've survived.
I can't believe it, I can't believe I'm alive,
But without you it doesn't seem right
Oh, where are you tonight?*

How could we have been so blind, back in '78, not to see what was presaged in these last few lines of this last excruciatingly painful song? But how many, hand on heart, can say that they truly foresaw the next move? Certainly not me.

And yet there is so much pointing the way for us - "a new day at dawn" - so simple, so full of gospelly echoes. Most of all "I can't believe it, I can't believe I'm alive" implies the intervention of some supernatural power. It also foreshadows this line from **Saving Grace**: "By this time I'd've thought that I'd be sleeping, in a pine box for all eternity". I hope Paul Williams won't mind if I quote him here as what he says about Dylan at this point in his life is so right

...coming to Jesus not only saved his soul, it saved his life. And I can believe it, actually. Increasing use of alcohol, increasing loss of self-worth, life on the road and no other home in this world any more....the strongest among us get tired, and what he's saying is he'd lost all sense of what he was doing it for he knew, with a sense of helplessness and defeat that he was going down for the third time. And then some precious angel threw him a line.

(Dylan - What Happened?).

My only fear is that The Never Ending Tour is bringing him back to that same place again - I just hope that this time he doesn't sink.....

I can hardly bear to think about what I've just written in that last line. Pain and anguish, yes, but also sorrow, yearning and wistfulness are expressed in this haunting and affecting masterpiece. And everything is there in the last line of each chorus - those variations on the "Where are you tonight" of the title. In the first two choruses it is sung like hound dogs baying at ships with tattooed sails. It is so ghostly, so heart-rending, "so lonesome I could cry". As for who the singer is yearning for - Sara, the goddess, Christ, all three, - I can't think for you, you'll have to decide. But yet another poetic and visionary gem had been conceived in the artist's pain. As for the third chorus, well, this does present me with a problem. The music and Dylan's voice blend and ascend on a note of increasing triumphalism. Nothing wrong with that - it fits with the conversion prophecy theory just fine. But it fails to balance with the song's final line. It sounds from the way he sings as if he has found whoever it is that he is seeking; and that, of course, does fit the sense of the song; but it is not what he is saying- "Oh, where are you tonight?" I suppose, in the final analysis I just have to accept that this is yet another example of a Dylan song where it is how it feels that matters, not its literalness.

Fortunately for us, conversion did not stifle Dylan's creativity to the degree that marriage did. The next three studio albums contained their fair share of classic songs; most of all though, Dylan was in great, great voice. In the end, my interpretation isn't that much different from that of Michael Gray: it's just that it's mine - and it's longer!

Endpiece One (The finishing End)

What is this daemon driving him endlessly around the world still in 1992 playing concerts in unheard of places, sometimes to half-capacity audiences? It feels as if the man is sinking again. Stories of him breaking down (twice?) in the middle of **Desolation Row** don't exactly suggest an artist at ease with himself. Going on past experience we should be on the brink of an eruption of volcanic creativity, but who dares to hope? I'm too concerned that there may be no redemption this time. What is his religious stance now? Is he leaning to Judaism? The search goes ever on. Rumours of alcohol abuse, if true, deny a burning faith or a God-inspired feeling of salvation. All I hear is a death-haunted and lonesome wind blowin' through the flowers on his tomb. Oh! Bob Dylan, where are you tonight?

Endpiece 2 (The Final End))

I wrote this essay way back in 1992. Since then Dylan has performed six nights at Hammersmith - six nights in which he evidently demonstrated great good humour; six nights in which he appeared utterly at ease with himself. Dylan '93 seems to have undermined my conclusion in the paragraph above. Nonetheless, I have asked Andrew to leave it as it stands; lest I provoke the Goddess of the stream by assuming all is well.

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BOB DYLAN - A PONY RIDE PAST THE GATE

Dylan is an actor;
His songs are plays;
Comedy and tragedy;
Above all the mode of life - real.

Dylan is God;
He is Jesus;
He is woman;
He is man - aren't we all?

Dylan is no prophet;
He is historian supreme;
A searcher of truth
Pain and love universal.

Gospels drained and screwed
In hearts of all ages;
Through forgotten memories;
Through mundane processes - on the street .

It's always there, unaware;
Unnoticed on the wheels of fire;
Thirst cured only by the flood?
Who are we, what is She?

Failing, knowing, being;
Success, reward, seeing.
Oh, for shelter - no limit.
To find it, you've gotta live it.

Which direction?
Listen, crystal gaze reflection.
You can compromise, summarise, sterilize;
You CAN breathe, though fingers are knotted.

Some don 't and some have,
Knowledge to share.
Abuse, drugs and tears of bloody rain
Others are history - this time is in our care.

Guards changing, standing;
Needing our attention.
Dylan needs no understudy;
Dylan is an actor.

Lost on the river of no return - In the valley of the missing link - To the valley below: What's Dylan talking about? If you don't know where my head is in the poem above, then you haven't a chance of knowing where Dylan's head is in his writings. Your just Stranded in the middle of the air - Daydreaming on the side of the road - your 'tracks' clean of blood. Who really cares?, You fail to understand, he says, why must you even try? But we must. It's that important.

TREADING ON THIN ICE OR WALKING ON WATER?

I have been a discerning collector and keen student of Dylan's art form for some 15 years now. When, a few months ago, I heard the rumour that he had supposedly been reborn and had turned to Jesus. I believed it. It was no surprise. I had 'expected it to happen' from way back. I knew it. Dylan knew it. I was just waiting for him to admit it to himself publicly. Now everything is 'revealed'. Dylan's rhetorical structuring of Biblical passages, and power to conjure up projections of the mysteries of existence throughout his work, cannot be dismissed or denied. The helpless blood-donor cynics down on **Maggie's Farm** may well ask: "Was he baptised by Pat Boone?"

I KNOW, THAT YOU KNOW, THAT I KNOW, THAT YOU SHOW SOMETHING:

The uniqueness of Dylan's work is its ability to mould itself into the endless interpretations that take the listener's fancy, in conjunction with their own lives. The serious student's analogies like the Hassidic formulae of Stephen Pickering, for whom I have great respect, or the coded message theory of 'sanitary inspector' A. J. Webberman, are good examples. 'But the truth is far from that.' Though, 'Some people can be part right some of the time...' The questions are endless and the answers infinite. These are some of my answers. As Dylan would say: "you can agree or disagree, but don't criticise me."

Many of Dylan's songs can get the listener to an embarrassing point of similarity to being present at a slide lecture on Greek Mythology and bursting out laughing at a busty Aphrodite followed by the Vatican's Apollo Belvedere in all its 'figgy' glory; thus, splintering the stony-faced silence of the devotees. It's the tightrope walk of when to laugh or not? Though an abundance of humour is still evident in Dylan's parodies, gone are the pre-'65 days, when his shows were solely good time events, laced with social and political comments, greatly enhanced and encouraged by audience participation. He desires a different, deeper thinking type of attention now. In 1964 even **Its Alright Ma, I'm Only Bleeding** received a hilarious response from his fans, to the degree, that, Dylan continued to introduce it sarcastically as "A very funny song". It's a different story here in the seventies. The messages are only too frighteningly clear now.

Did you know that if you play backwards Dylan's slurred vocalisation, *so it may flow and be on* **If Dogs Run Free**, you get him warning us *If Mars invades us?* - If you believe that and believe that Dylan put it there purposely, then you're accepting the absurdities of Webberman and the like. You might as well be basic and say, 'I ain't gonna work on Maggie's Farm' because I voted Labour and call yourself a Dylanologist. Very clever, but Dylan's not trying to shred everyone's brains. The obscurities are there because people will them to be there. Refusal to accept the obvious is the critic's life-force. It's too easy any other way; better to complicate things. I guess Dylan was surprised at the dumfounded reactions to his lyrics, initially, escalating over the years to the degree, where now, you are expected to have letters after your name before you can begin to dissect or connect his language. I also suspect some mild amusement over this on Dylan's part. I firmly believe, unequivocally, that now, more than ever, throughout his multi-faceted career, Dylan is helping us to understand just what he's saying. **Street Legal** is a dead-give-away, but more of that later.

Obscure facts and fantasies? Yes they're all there but fused with an unmistakable truth, like the breeze in **The Garden of Eden**, telling us that we cannot hide from ourselves or our Maker. Dylan is always the captain of his ship on stage, and likewise, on vinyl, he steers us with the thoughts in his 'capitol/skull', which he so often relates to as the 'captain's tower' - see **Seven Days**, an unreleased song which was performed with gusto on the '76 Rolling Thunder Tour. (Available in print) .

This isn't a put-down on all Dylan dissectors, don't get me wrong. Most of what has been written on the man is quite true. Anyone that is interested in Dylan to listen openly and apply logical concordances will agree to accept many of the fundamentals in his poetry. For example; 'rain', referring to wilful or unavoidable violence, angry moods etc., ... 'rivers and water' - another strong 'flow' from the Bible. The 'Eternal Circle' in motion - life itself as no clock can contain it. Also many other such comparatives that occur and recur over again throughout the albums, but 'we've been through all these things twice'.

The simple love songs, irresistible though they are, are not that important to Dylan in a long term sense. The amazing transformation of **If You See Her, Say Hello**, as performed at the opening concert of the Rolling Thunder's South-West tour in Lakeland, Florida, into a couldn't give a damn 'hate' song, would bear this out. The same with many others. **Lay Lady Lay** last heard verging on porn, and the recent tour's version of **The Man In Me** - *I'm lying next to her, but I'm thinking of you*. But you will rarely hear Dylan alter his serious lyrics, only at the expense of musical arrangements, to get across his original intent with maximum audience captivation. He wants us to listen; maybe needs us as much as we, he.

"GOD IS A WOMAN - WE ALL KNOW THAT" (Dylan quote)

Let's examine this current religious upsurge. Is it so current? Not so. Every album has contained strong references to the Gospel morals and Old Testament parables and propheteering, though in many places shrouded in metaphorical veils. Many in songs you perhaps wouldn't suspect without some Biblical knowledge in the background to start with. One most important factor before we continue: Does Dylan believe in God? No doubt on this count. Then how does he see God? On his own admission we hear - "In a flower", but more aptly, "As a woman" - in the sense of the Mother of all creation, beauty and love. Well, what else could God be? Here is the most vital link to a massive section of Dylan's work. This could be best described, from the Dylanologist's point of view, as 'The She Aspect'.

During the '66 World tour, Dylan occasionally introduced **Visions Of Johanna** as "Mother Revisited" - the inescapable confrontation with God at the end of time. Where did Dylan initially get these ideas from? - inherent? or just clear thinking? - most likely, his musical background. His observation of the suffering and injustices as recounted by the old-time blues men, and the 'dust bowl' poverty songs of mentor Woody Guthrie - **Bound For Glory**. A later indication came to light in 1975 with **Blood On The Tracks**. Remembering a quote on Dylan, as him stating that his favourite song composer was Smokey Robinson and that he particularly admired **The Tracks of My Tears** - was this Dylan's intentions on the album? An album bursting with pain, reflection and love. **Blood On The Tracks** in the same sense as the tears of blood during Christ's Passion? Smokey's song is filled with terminology not unlike Dylan's. It's hard to see who modelled on whom? Perhaps just a coincidence of similar insight

Right from the start, when 'Zimmerman' was only just next door, the embryonic Dylan introduced himself with his first statement - the album **Bob Dylan**. No ambiguities, just straight forward views on humour, sadness and an overriding quality of Christian faith. When he dies, we hear, he'll *hate to leave his children crying*, but *relies on Jesus to make up his dying bed*. It matters not, at this point, whether he was the author of the songs or not. It was what he wanted to say and the best way he could say it at the time. He gives us an early reminder that he'll see us on *God's golden shore* - the same 'shore' that time ends at in **Oh Sister**. The only ambiguity in connection with this first offering is, whether the not immediately apparent fact of the cover picture's reversal was intentional or accidental? The trend continued on the following albums with his own compositions serving his purpose mostly on a dual carriage prognosis. Disguised and shrouded amongst his love songs was an equilibrium of personal and universal commitment, that we all experience, but cannot describe nearly so efficiently.

The **Masters Of War** and 'geeks' became the Gentiles and Pharisees of Dylan's world. He also exposed the *heavy load* laid upon the black community in songs like **Oxford Town** and **Hattie Carroll**. All the *under-dogs* were, and are Dylan's concern - *they've got a lot of forks and knives, and they gotta cut something*. On **Just Like A Woman**, in interview, Dylan confessed: "It made sense coming from him" - i.e. the version by Ritchie Havens; *Ain't it clear, that I, just can't fit*.

Dylan continued to strive for truth *They laughed at Jesus too, he said, you're not him*. In **Love Minus Zero - No Limit**; i.e. love lacking in nothing, infinite love, *my love is not a woman but Jesus without ideals or violence*, and with *no success like failure*. The *blue-eyed son* in **Hard Rain** could well be Jesus again reporting to God what he'd seen during his wanderings. *And what'll you do now? - I'll reflect from the mountains so all souls can see it*, - the light of truth; *I'll stand on the ocean, till I start sinking*, - walk on water? **Gates Of Eden**? enough said. The **Chimes Of Freedom** *flashing* - a prayer for all those less fortunate. And so it goes on through Dylan's early career, in songs too numerous to mention here, and in countless unreleased titles, collectors will be only too familiar with.

Dylan's hectic and diverse-opinionated 'folk / rock' changeover recharged his line of thought. On rehearsals for the recent World tour he re-dressed many of his songs from this period to illuminate the interpretations nurtured from Christian symbolism. Like, dropping the final 'flute/cute' verse from **I Want You** giving it a more sanctifying nature laced with a musical backdrop of adoration. (Not as the **Budokan** version) Dylan is despairingly lost in the song, trapped in the *Dark*. *I want you* (God). He wants the *Saviours, who are fast asleep*, for he's stuck with the black *Queen of Spades*, and she knows *where he'd like to be*. And here's us, his audience, asking him *to open up the gate* for us - à la **Eden**. How many songs must a man hear, before he can see the light?

At the Albert Hall back in '66, on that gruelling tour, shouts of 'Judas' were prevalent. We recall Dylan puzzling the fact, some years prior, *whether Judas Iscariot had God on his side*? Undoubtedly, the answer is yes. Everything good and bad must have a purpose, just tiny threads interwoven to complete the five dimensional tapestry of life; one side just outweighing the other to decide it's eventual colour and pattern. In this light, are *diamonds* more precious than *rust* in God's eyes?

Thus, if everything relates, then a broken teacup in Manchester might affect an eye operation in New York. So perhaps there's something after all in the age old theory, that, if all the Chinese jumped up in the air in unison, the Earth would leap out of orbit. *It's alright ma, I'm only joking* - I hope.

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THAT PLOUGH, HOLD ON

After Dylan's rumour-ridden accident, at the slide of the sixties, he returned to the scene with a new clarity, no longer the drugs, no longer the frantic gabble of **Subterranean Homesick Blues**, which I always thought could've been an out-take from Chuck Berry's sessions for **Too Much Monkey Business**, in much the same way Zeppelin apparently 'ripped-off' the Small Faces on their first album, but a new gentleness and perception. The cooling out period spent with the

Band in '67 up in Woodstock and lent itself to an invigoration of cosmic awareness. The pre-**John Wesley Harding** compositions, later released officially, but unfortunately as the incomplete **Basement Tapes** album, had inspired a revisitation to his fundamental moral conscience. The sessions were littered with religious concepts backed with grouses over his record company's incohesions. Standout tracks and most easily associated in this grain were **I Shall Be Released** and the amazing, unreleased, **Sign On The Cross**. *John Wesley* itself was a moral compendium, and generally accepted as such to warrant no further examination here, except for the summarising comment *dont go mistaking Paradise for that home across the road*.

If *Nashville Skyline* and *Self Portrait* were considered as 'Paradise Lost', then *New Morning* was definitely 'Paradise Regained', though, sticking my neck 'in a guillotine', I loved both the former albums. *Portrait* itself is my most frequently played Dylan disc, except for an album that you won't find in any shop, legally, that is, which will remain anonymous. I, at the time couldn't have cared less whether Dylan had written all the material himself or not. It is an extremely enjoyable set from start to finish, and just about the best sound production heard on any of his albums. I'm always in raptures over his renditions of **Let It Be Me** and **Copper Kettle**, and his own melodic prowess is highlighted by the haunting la, la, la's of **Wigwam** and the 'how'm I supposed to get any ridin' done' i.e. writin' in **All The Tired Horses**. You can tell Dylan enjoyed recording the album, and as he said in interview, "Without that album there would've been no *New Morning*. *New Morning* was a progression to a re-birth of fluxing ideas, though somewhat laid-back. It's very autobiographical and religious; about half and half. **Father of Night**, *Father of day - who dwells in our hearts and our memories*. In **Three Angels**, *nobody stops to ask why? / Sign on the street says: you don't own me*. It's Dylan re-affirming his spirit, and he's 'just happy to be alive underneath this sky of blue.'

Moving on we find Dylan's feeling of self resignation and depression in **Knockin' On Heaven's Door** and God's armistice. *Mama, put my guns in the ground*. 'Mama' being, presumably, the same 'She Aspect' as disclosed in other songs like **It's Alright Ma** and **Stuck Inside Of Mobile**.

Onto *Planet Waves* and greater despondency with one of Dylan's most powerful songs; the lyrical 'gem' **Dirge**, which sounds as if it was actually being sung from some dark cellar on **Desolation Row**, or *on a trip down suicide row - that hollow place, where martyrs weep and Angels play with sin - a living Hell*.

Jesus is illustrated *acting out his folly, while his back is being whipped and all for a moment's glory*. Dylan's faith is strained - *that crystal ball - has it shown me nothing yet?* He's still looking, still searching for that answer to it all, and that difficult pathway to righteousness. Dylan talks in prayer form to his Maker in **Something There Is About You**. About God, Dylan says: *He strikes a match in me*. He sums up the fruitlessness of hypocrisy - *I could say that I'd be faithful [etc. ...] but to me that would be death*. We get a beautiful description of the united spark of life and seeded love between God and mankind in the song, **Never Say Goodbye**, - *There's a bouquet of roses hanging down from the Heavens to the ground*. In **Wedding Song** - *You breathed on me [... etc. ...] I was deep in poverty, you taught me how to give.* Another song from the *Planet Waves* sessions, unreleased generally, but extensively and acoustically performed on the '74 tour was **Nobody 'cept you**. This conjures up sweet memories of what was and what could be again, if he could only find the key; - *nothing around here that's sacred 'cept you... everybody's got something to sell 'cept you.. Searching through the faiths for a glimpse of Buddha - found Jacob's ladder - bought a serpent from a passing Angel*: (See liner notes). We are left with the impression that Dylan is on a loser, and the stark reality that *naked truth is still taboo*.

I guess he found his way again; **Blood On The Tracks** brought about new understanding. Dylan's blood, in conscience, is all over these tracks. He's **Tangled Up In Blue**, 'blue' not only signifying a downer in personal contentment, but also relating to a recurring entity through all his work; the 'blue aura' invisibly surrounding the being in connection with purity of soul. This coupled with the word 'baby' revitalised the thought lines on many of his songs. **It's All Over Now, Baby Blue** - *something calls for you*. **Never Say Goodbye** - *baby, baby blue, you've changed your last name too*. On the album in question, the **Simple Twist Of Fate** in Dylan's mind ponders lost hopes, leaving him to 'meditate'. This song includes a dreamy flashback to Christ's birth in makeshift accommodation - *stopped into a renovated hotel*, the guiding star over the scene - *a neon burning bright*. The idea for a 'neon' light in Dylan's writings, is one, I think, borrowed from Paul Simon's **The Sounds Of Silence** itself something of a literary masterpiece.¹ The initial impact of Jesus entering the world full of darkness and sin, conjured from the bowels of Hell, is mentioned: *He felt the heat of the night, hit him... thump, with a simple twist of fate*.

Shelter From The Storm is an imposing analogy on the words and apprehensions of Jesus, on report of his misgivings, suffering and completion of his mission. When *blackness was a virtue he came in from the wilderness*. The ball started rolling *on an uneventful / long forgotten morn*, and ended atop of Calvary, *in a little hill-top village, where they*

¹ Dear, gentle, readers your editor nearly passed away typing this.

bargained for his clothes. He stated his *innocence* but got *repaid* with scorn. The theme of the song is God (She) assuring the sufferer of sanctuary and peace of spirit. So she *took his crown of thorns*, - *Come in, she said, I'll give you shelter from the storm*. The 'storm' being a compression of all the 'rain' life's predators thrive on. Come in boat number 13, your task is done. What is this 'shelter?' Well, *try imagining a place, where it's always safe and warm*. This track is briskly followed and the album aptly concluded with **Buckets Of Rain**. From *Desire* we get the self-examining 'marital commitments' and *high place of darkness and light* in *Isis*. As in many songs, Dylan is searching for his equal and opposite twin to complete his existence. Could he here be taking on the role of Osiris - the alter-ego reflection of moon goddess Isis? There are two directions to take in this quest - 'The dividing line' separating good and bad in his mind; the 'town' He gambles on reward from the post on the right, and continues his journey full circle to his eventual realisation of self contentment.

Dylan journeys again, but this time with the knowledge of guilt, as an outlaw. He rides with the Biblical figure 'Magdalena', in **Romance In Durango**. He assures her that God will *watch over* them as they flee, but deep inside he is aware that *God's face will appear* at the *Fiesta* only with the chilling vision - *with his serpent eyes of Obsidian*, demanding retribution. There is a wealth of material for discussion in this song, but lack of space prevents such.

STREET LEGAL - AN EXERCISE IN MATHEMATICAL EXORCISE

Perhaps we can look at Dylan's most recent offering in some depth, *Street Legal*. Most recent, that is, in the sense that the work has had time to penetrate the recesses of understanding. We could go into it word for word, but that would be like soaking a balding man's head in some magical hair restorer, and every new sprouting another jigsaw piece that requires the edges shaping before it'll fit. So involvement in the general themes is a safer approach.

Dylan as 'Frank' on the liner notes of *John Wesley Harding*, put forward the question: "Just how far would you like to go in?" I find from experience that most serious Dylan freaks would like to go in up to their necks. Many seek intrusion into his private life. I stop there. I respect his ego. Besides it's all there in his poetry. Again we read in the same liner notes: "Faith is the key".

Street Legal is a very intimate album on an I and Thou level, precipitated with good and evil concepts, written in almost transparency over the original heritage on Jesus's passage on Earth. It's an album literally packed with multi themes running alongside one another. Very kaleidoscopic even by Dylan's standards. Present as ever are the links and personal acceptance of truth in the face of all the human frailties, that can be so easily diverted to the over populated left path, leading to destruction in this life and the promised existence. The album takes the format of a book itself, a complete circle, ending with the answers of prophesied salvation to the mysteries diseased by doubt entered upon at the start. Never before on any album has Dylan so thinly disguised the fact that he is talking about Christ. The first thing that has to be agreed on, to make any sense at all, is that, as always, Dylan speaks as himself as second and third person. The switchbacks here, more so than ever, cause some initial confusion. But if you listen and go along with the ebb and flow of the ideas, the problems recede considerably. At times Dylan is like a hidden reporter, in the vein of the Gospel authors themselves, only seemingly whisked back in time to witness and confirm events passed on to our generations.

Any Dylan fan worth his salt will understand the album's title. 'Street' in Dylan symbolism means 'life'. In an interview he stated: "My life is the street where I walk." Likewise 'road' - *How many roads must a man walk down?* If *Blood On The Tracks* was a small step for a man, then *Street Legal's* definitely a giant step for mankind.

CHANGING OF THE GUARDS:

The album begins with an obvious autobiographical reference; *Sixteen years of fighting of falling, of the pain he rises above*. He championed the cause for all *those years* - Medgar Evers, Emmitt Till, Martin Luther King, George Jackson, Rubin Hurricane' Carter.... Now is the time to illustrate why justice must prevail at all costs, even self elimination, in this life at least. Not too high a price to pay? Dylan talks as himself from the standpoint of Jesus and the Father. The good shepherd grieves for humanity lost in desperation for a common purpose. *Falling leaves* - *hounded* by the rapidly approaching Autumn, the ageing process of life leaving little time for redemption. Dylan in the mantle of Jesus 'enters from the shadows' to shine a light on the human jungle in the market. *Merchants and thieves* - *gargling in the rat race* choir ignore his offer of salvation. *She's smelling sweet* perfumed by Magdalena on the night of change in the capital, Jerusalem, where prophesies are fulfilled. At this point Dylan leaps back to the Annunciation, when it all began to happen. God, the *Captain*, lowers his thoughts to his immaculate maid the mother of Jesus, whose initial doubt would be won over by increased faith - *His love will be repaid*.

Dylan next takes a trip to witness the ensuing events. Verse four has him lost in a dream not dissimilar to Jacob's Ladder. He discovers God (Herself) preparing for the great covenant with mankind. The urge to see more is irresistible, so he has to 'follow' the procession back to Heaven, where no longer before the eyes of man *they lifted her veil*. Dylan *stumbles to his feet* - either awakening from his vivid dream or after prostrating himself at the vision allowed him. With urgency he has to tell all, that, he now knows the man among them to be the Son of God. His heart has been freshly instilled with boundless love and awareness, with the *stitches still mending*. On arrival back at the City of David, the double dealing Pharisees - *renegade priests* from the temple and sundrings were turning the love at their disposal into hypocrisy. *The Palace of Mirrors* - the apparent image of the gleaming walls of the temple on immediate approach to Jerusalem. - *Where dog Roman soldiers are reflected*. Too late, the *endless road* to Calvary is in procession, amid the *wailing* - leaving believer's room empty from fear of persecution. A parallel of today's churches, where *Her memory* is *protected* for all time, among the *Angel's voices*...etc.

Forty eight hours later-the scene of the Resurrection. God *wakes him up*, it's a new morning. *Broken chains* - the severed cord between life and death. *Rolling rocks* - mysteriously displaced from the tomb's entrance. A description follows of the meeting of Mary and Jesus on the road and her wonderment of *what measures he now will be taking?*. She clings to him in humility and praise that the prophesies have indeed been fulfilled.

The final act of this very visual drama has Jesus confronting his Apostles prior to his Ascension back to Heaven. He has no further purpose on Earth, he no longer needs their *organisation* - this Sainly right is in their hands now. *I've shined your shoes...* - he's served man and washed their feet clean, and realised the prophets' dreams, so now it's for them to continue his work in return. We are left with a strong warning that *Eden is burning* - the intensity of the surrounding temptation and evil in the grip of man's weaknesses. The choice is put; get ready for *elimination* to be cast into Gehenna, or have the faith for the *changing of the guards* - the restructure of man's mind spirit and soul.

The song ends with a frightening vision of Judgement Day: a verse that would make a suitable epilogue to the original **Visions Of Johanna**. *Peace will come*, we are told, but only to a few, and only with the final *Sword* of his Archangel, destroying all *false idols* and their keepers. Death will be no more in company with evil.

NEW PONY:

This is a confrontation of past weaknesses of Dylan, himself - an abrasion of his soul to slip into temptation. Here, perhaps, the cause is drugs; *Pony* having connections, colloquially, in the States with such packages. He calls it *Lucifer*, a killer of clear thinking and self attainment. He was undoubtedly on drugs in the middle sixties, and, although it proved very productive in a song writing sense - *Take me on a trip, upon your magic swirling ship...* - as with many stars, Hendrix is a good example, it was highly destructive on a personal level. Photographs around this period reflect this personal Hell he was going through, with pressures and work load etc... The nearly disastrous motorcycle accident in one way was a blessing in disguise. It gave Dylan the necessary breathing space to recover. His music changed thereafter and also his life-style, and he was to never *look back*. If he had continued in the manner, not adopted, but forced upon him, he, very likely, would not be around today-just another statistic. Dylan experienced the pain of withdrawal worse than the hidden pain of being on drugs. *I swear it hurt me more than it could ever have hurt her*.

In the song Dylan *wonders* just what Lady Fate, *Miss X* has in store for him around the next corner. *She's got such a sweet disposition* - you can be conned into anything at anytime. Now he tells us *I've got a new pony* in self enlightenment; a new lease of life. He equates it sexually as a fantasy woman or maybe himself. Verse four is most interesting, could Dylan be dreaming again? - or is he experiencing a visitation of self awareness? *It was early life, death and shadow in the door - I know what you come here for*.

The following verse is perhaps a synopsis, uttered by the vision, on the false idols and phoney escapism offered from the direction he was headed. *Oh, baby, that God that you been praying to... is gonna give you back what you been wishing on someone else*. The final verse is over the top, slightly humorous but underneath, very serious. Good and bad have been set out before him, and, despite warnings, the power of the temptation is too great. Just one last try, for now, accepting full responsibilities for his actions. *You're nasty and you're so bad, but I love you, yes I do*. Is there a man living who hasn't experienced that sort of thing at some time?

NO TIME TO THINK

Here Dylan presents us with a sweet lingual cacophony, or in his language *a tapestry of rhyme*, furnished by a delightful lilting melody line. This contains a much deeper intuition into the battle of good and evil; the struggles through life that we all encounter, and the lack of discipline and faith instructing us in the constant pitfalls and the possible rewards *It's so hard to get on and life is so short and there's no time to think* - It's a cosmic version of **Subterranean Homesick Blues**.

In death you face life - your deeds will be recounted, and the family spirit will be re-united. *Dreams into walls* - your expectations and doubts will be corrected and become unavoidable reality, solid. He says, to live a good life you have to be a *soldier of mercy* but, with hypocrisy to deny, the untrustworthy *must fall*. If you do tread this path *alone* with your Maker, you will most certainly be persecuted for your gentleness and *be twisted and fed with worthless foam from the mouth*.

Verse two gives us a picture of Jesus's character in response to the *oppression* and money changers he found in the temple, and his resulting anger, which guiltily surfaced. In fact this could be the very theme for this song that Dylan intended. With Jesus knowing his fate and ordeal in advance, yet powerless to stop it, though, for a short while longer, he would have to endure temptation and ridicule. His confusion with *no time to think*, and eventually *betrayed by a kiss* in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the *Valley of the missing link* Where the truths and answers to all the mysteries lie buried in the *souls of previous times*.

The promises *haunt* you, always there, but so are the *decoys* - life's obstacles. Dylan states his depression over this conjecture. There are no alternatives; *alcohol, duality* it's so easy to be conned like a malignant disease. In verse four, Dylan thinks, *maybe* Jesus, though remaining indifferent during his trial before Pilate, may have had some hidden thoughts of hate - *your conscience betrays* - a trait inherent, perhaps, in his mould as a mortal being. Dylan, himself, confesses to a feeling of personal revenge, had their places been reversed, but he says: *that's just the way that I am*. He sees *Paradise* and *sacrifice*, and *mortality* and *reality* as barriers somewhat to each other. The Devil, he says, is *quicker* to capture man's attention, and he's *blacker than ink*. He gives us a list of the Devil's wares, *anger and jealousy*, and he's not satisfied until he's got command of your soul - *under his thumb*. Brave men *oppose* him and the goodness *throws him* - your only weapon against him. So know when to turn away and bite your tongue *-play deaf and dumb*. Use the *eyes staring clear* at the back of your head, as you get drunk on life's wine.

Warlords of sorrow [... etc] *prayer* - a reminder that martyrs will give all for their goal, but the ordinary man on the street fails to discover *salvation*, most likely doesn't even expect it - it's not to be found *anywhere*. One thing for sure, you'll drown, as *the water gets deeper* if you don't hang onto that lifeline. Dylan is saying when you take the decision to achieve your aims, utmost discipline must follow - *pleasure you now must resist*. Journey and search for that star, first seen by the Magi, in the *East* and you *shall be released*. In your discipline you are now alone, but as one, complete in spirit at last. You look back for a final *glimpse* of the Sodom you're leaving behind with the *Moon* - *bloody and pink* over it's imminent destruction.

The closing verse illustrates that flesh and blood can be stricken with *harm* and prejudice, but not the spirit. Jesus *crawls through the dirt* to his crucifixion - he helped others, but he *cannot receive*, for the example must be set and his mission completed to prepare the way for others to follow

*No time to prepare for the victim that's there,
No time to suffer or blink - and no time to think.*

BABY STOP CRYING:

Here we have a break from the rigours of symbolism. In a lighter vein, this is a love song, not of romantic proportions, but rooted with a brotherly love catalyst, in a Christian sense. Dylan is talking to his woman, a close friend or a lover, or maybe just to himself again. It's like a sketch for James Taylor's *You Need A Friend* (sic). Don't worry you've seen some rough times, but they can only get better - you only need the strength and the confidence that a good friend can supply, with the help and grace from above

The first impressions on the song are, maybe, Dylan's talking about himself. You've been down and hurt, *but you're back on top* - perhaps the cutting reactions he received during the changeover of the '60/'70 decades, from his lack of public function on stage and on vinyl the latter hardly being true, but, judging from much of the media coverage at the time, you might wonder, just how hurt Dylan was? Is he contemplating suicide himself in the song? - *get me my pistol, babe*, or is this just a sarcastic way of telling the person he's singing too, that they're making a mountain out of a mole-hill? Repeatedly he pleads *stop crying* - *the sun will always shine* and it's either giving me a headache, or the pity I'm feeling for you is too much to bear.

Go down to the river - to be baptised? reborn? cleanse away this evil that's causing all this sorrow. *I will pay your fare* - gladly for peace's sake or to save a drowning soul. Dylan states that, he'll always be there when he's needed, but the interesting thing is, he doesn't just say; come and see me; he says; *come and see about me*. The final verse indicates that through her constant suffering, the woman herself, is thinking of suicide - *you've been hurt...* - *I know what your thinking of*. The closing line allows the listener some line of direction to follow on a rehearing - she's *madly in love* -

Dylan cleverly leaves this most important factor to the end, now it all fits. So the correct approach, probably to the song, is that, Dylan is telling a woman to *stop crying*, - a woman he has been constantly rejecting, constantly *burning at stake*. He only wants to treat her as a brother, not a lover - poor girl.

IS YOUR LOVE IN VAIN?

Who is Dylan talking to in this song? Like many of his works there is the dual theme of a woman and God. Only Dylan knows which side of the fence to sit on, or perhaps, he sits there purposely, like the *bird on the fence* in **You're A Big Girl Now**, *singing his song for me* i.e. us. The song in discussion is full of questions, saturated in doubt - *Do you love me?* When times are rough - *Do you need me?* or does *guilt* make you feel obliged to pray and say sorry? He's been through this movie before, a hundred times over, so once more won't matter. *Is your love in vain?* - is your faith phoney or sincere? These would appear to be God's questions to Dylan. We hear of an intrusion of solitude in the song - the omnipotence of God is unwavering, so *why do you intrude?* - How can you alter what is and always will be? - *Do you know my world, do you know my kind?* - God's existence is beyond man's comprehension. The following refrain would seem a blasé answer by Dylan to God's questioning. He says, he's been in quest of God to little avail - *to the mountain - in the wind*, tasted *happiness* and sorrow, but he's still unimpressed. Dylan even says, that, he's been on the precipice of death - perhaps a reference to his '66 accident, or an earlier illness, or drug induced vision - *I've been offered wings*, but still dissatisfied. Here in the previous lines is the smugness and superiority complex of mankind in general. These are unlikely to be Dylan's own feelings now, more probably, setting them in motion for his listeners to realise.

O.K. says Dylan in the last verse, *I'll take a chance* on truth and salvation. If I fail or make a mistake, I won't expect any compromise from you. Then he cleverly reverses the situation, just like the last verse in **Just Like A Woman**, when he alters the context of the song by substituting *you break* in a place of *she breaks...etc.*, by asking God if HE will take a chance on Dylan, the man, open to all frailties? He asks God if he can do the things that mortals can - can in this life - do you know what it's really like? And finally, if God accepts Dylan will HIS love be *in vain?*

SEÑOR [TALES OF YANKEE POWER] :

If you get a print of the famous religious painting 'Light Of The World', a replica by Holman, you will probably come to the conclusion that Dylan could well have been staring at this whilst composing **Señor**. If you don't agree there, well, just use it as visual background to the song - it makes sense.

I believe the 'Señor' is the same figure as Dylan's 'Landlord' from the **John Wesley Harding** collection, who wasn't his manager or anything so base. That '68 song, like this one, took the form of a prayer - *I know you've suffered much - don't put a price on my soul*. That mysterious figure had to be God, and the figure here, Jesus.

Where are we heading on this street, this life of ours? Just further along the road, or to a final *freezing Johanna*? The next line reminds me of Buffalo Springfield's **For What It's Worth** - paranoia strikes deep, into your lives it will creep. Déjà vu strikes Dylan - *...been down this way before* - is it so 'Señor'? Where is the invisible God hiding? *How long* have we to search? How much longer do I have to watch *the door* - the door in the picture? I think so. The door to Paradise, relief and 'comfort' from the misery and toil of this life, heavily bolted and the 'Señor' waiting to open it to any who can find it and knock upon it.

There are *wicked* thoughts still in mankind in *that upper deck* - people's heads - the penthouses of imperfection. And from Christ's side, Dylan describes the 'cross' now as heavy as *iron*, weighted as ever with man's evil, and it pulls on *her neck*, bending the back and lowering the head in anguish. In Dylan's 'vacant lot' mind is a glorious 'marching band' of Heaven's Angels, forever instilled there after an experience or premonition of closeness to God, at some time in the past. *Forget me not* said the vision. Dylan hasn't and now his insight is at a peak - *I can see....* He's so close and impatient for salvation, and the suspense is unbearable. He asks *who to contact* - who can possibly help to assure him of his goal?

Dylan next, somewhat embarrassingly professes his faith - he *stripped and kneeled* in humbleness and respect, fortunate in his own saving grace, but he also remembers the one's unable to make it - a *trainload* of lost sheep, who must have 'thrown their tickets out of the window' - *bogged down* by the gravity of their sins. (No pun intended). Through the assistance of a *gypsy* guide, Dylan receives a flash of spiritual clarity on his existence, and realises it's no longer a *dream* it's *real*. The 'gypsy' could be a nomadic reference to the endless wanderings of Christ in search of souls. Like a blind man who can see again, Dylan is taken aback for a while. He asks for a *minute* to gather his senses - *pick myself up...* Final acceptance dawns as he says 'I'm ready...' - just remove the *cables* and I'll come with you 'Señor'. Tip up the *tables* - make a clean sweep of things, a direct reference to Jesus cleaning the 'den of thieves' in the Temple. Dylan will go willingly now, he can't make any *sense* out of this life anymore - *the confusion I'm feeling ain't no tongue can tell* -

so just show me a sign, a miracle, something and I'll be there. You've set me in the right direction *Señor*, so now, *what're we waiting for?*

TRUE LOVE TENDS TO FORGET:

This song could very possibly be about a personal experience of Dylan's: the waning optimism about trust and love placed in a relationship, here somewhat displaced, but on another level certain key phrases suggest a more universal attitude. It could indeed be communication by Christ spiritually in conversation with God, who set his mission. The cup that is overflowing, and his overpowering burden, lapses him into momentary indecision over his purpose.

He's becoming *weary* - how much longer must he endure this humiliation and torment? Seeing the weakness in his *baby's eyes* i.e. the people's. And when God's backing is there - it's difficult to *recognise*. Truth can only win over and there's no second chance - *no room for regret*. *Come gather round people* you vowed your faith, but every moment you slip into ruin so easily, as if you were playing a game of 'Russian Roulette' with your souls.

Dylan suggests that the spark that carried and strengthened Christ is the same committed spirit that filled the prophets and founders of God's work through all the ages. Like Moses, helpless and without direction, in the *reeds* and lacking *oxygen* In the *wilderness* like John The Baptist, *among the men*, preparing the way for the plan manifest. In the realms disguised from man's comprehension - *into infinity*... The latter probably an allusion to the known gap between Jesus's death and Resurrection.

He is saying: striving to be good can cause much sorrow - *tear-jerking*, but he's captivated in God's *spell*, for he's a *hard worker* - the labour for perfection is continuous. *I know you well* - Christ is only too aware of his origins. The pain of *this weekend in Hell* - his necessary passion is causing him to *sweat* - blood, presumably. A final call to people, that, he needs us as much as in reciprocal. *Don't forsake me* - don't have any doubt, this echoes of Christ's own cry on the cross, in doubt of God, but he won through and so can we. *Don't sell me out* - for cheap imitations; short term happiness only the Devil can offer. Stop *knocking about* and confusing the one true God, split up in incalculable forms throughout the world. *True love* is all. but more often than not, sadly, *tends to forget*.

WE BETTER TALK THIS OVER:

There can be only one suitable interpretation to run parallel with this piece of poetry, and that is to take the aspect of dialogue between Jesus and the blameless traitor Judas. *Blameless?* well, it had to happen, you might say he was the original *pawn in the game*. The back and forth conversing is absolutely fascinating. Pure fabrication on Dylan's part, but so well read, that you get the feeling, that you might be actually overhearing an event that really took place.

It starts with Judas addressing Jesus. He is concerned for Jesus's welfare, as the Scriptures themselves point out, but he would soon become a victim of circumstance. He says: let's talk together, try to see the *situation* from my side, before it becomes any *rougher* *I'm only a man* with limited understanding, but I fail to see why we have to *suffer needlessly?* Christ knew this purpose and that he had to suffer to redeem man's sins, should they want to follow his way. Judas seeing his words fall on stony ground, suggests they part - go their own *separate ways*, for he could not bear to witness the inevitable pain that his gentle friend would endure.

Jesus answers: don't turn your eyes aside, there can be no harm that *time will not erase*. He knew Judas to be the eventual black sheep, but also that he was being instrumented by God. Jesus continues: the confusion in this life is stained, and if it continues - *we'll hang ourselves... tangled rope* - an aside to the fact that Judas actually did, on realisation of his deeds. Concluding the first verse, Jesus, in pity for the man before him, says: *I wish I were a magician* and could reunite the *bond* between them. Preventing this action is the knowledge, that his course is set out for him - if only he could *wave a wand* to change the pattern and regain their friendship.

Verse two seems the confrontation between the two, with Jesus hurt in the knowledge of Judas's *double dealing*. Perhaps a good staging for the scene. would be the moment of arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had put faith in him and *took a chance*, but, blinded in a *trance* of trust and hope, was let down. In compassion for the wrong-doer, Jesus says: *...why you wanna hurt me?*

Amid confusion and in full possession of the consequences of his actions, Judas, says: I'm beyond help now why try? Why try to *convert* me? Bewilderment and guilt is now eating away at him - he's lost in the *haze* of Jesus's *delicate ways* - *I never meant to do you any harm*. The final sentiment on the second verse could take one of two directions: as spoken by Jesus: Judas you're searching for the wrong things, there's no need to be *alone* and lost in life; if you seek you

will find that Paradise you can call *home*. Or as spoken by Judas; Jesus, it's alright for you, you don't have to wander through the dirt as mortals do, if you don't want to, *you don't have to yearn for love* - it's your birthright - your home is Heaven.

The closing analogy is the parting of company. Jesus says: he'll be going *tomorrow* and states his remorse over their diverse fortunes: how good it would be to *laugh together after a day and a half* - when his task is completed and his Resurrection, a state for all to strive for, is realised. But he knows it's *unlikely to happen* - their bond is now destroyed forever - *swept 'neath the bed* - Judas has condemned himself to return to the *dust* from which he was created. Meanwhile *what's lost is lost, we can't regain* - *what went down in the flood*. Don't *fantasize* on what could have been, just be happy for what light you saw, when you did. and *be glad* - rejoice.

WHERE ARE YOU TONIGHT? [JOURNEY THROUGH DARK HEAT]:

Let's get straight into this one, which Dylan purposely chose to close the album. In the first stanza we find the word *train* again - the train and it's passengers *rolling* to salvation; not at any speed, note. Through life's evil blockade - the *rain*. It would appear that Dylan takes the standpoint of one of the Apostles left to spread the word after Christ's Ascension. Perhaps, one of the actual Gospel writers. Amid persecution and trial, he is *missing her* (Jesus). He longs to *touch* him once again, to know he's there. But, as a *satellite* Jesus is floating, invisible, but present somewhere and everywhere in the universe. In the *smoky haze* of his head, there's the fire of the Paraclete - *neon light*. Also the *bell tone* in his memory of the time Jesus was present with him in the flesh, when they wandered together through that *valley of stone*. Where Jesus submerged himself willingly in the sins of the world scorched by the Devil's furnace - *bathed* *pure heat*. *Her father* - God, stressed on Jesus's quest that he would have to be more than *street wise* - to be aware of every folly and temptation that he might confront during his journey on Earth. *But he practised* [... etc...] *heart*.'

Now Dylan, or the author in the song, recounts some visions: *A babe* cradled by a *woman* at Jesus's birth; the same woman in a *rage* at the crucifixion *stripper on stage* - Jesus stripped bare on the cross, the stage of his ultimate performance. With the same *golden hair* we remember from **Changing Of The Guards**. Jesus fulfils the prophecies that were written in the *back pages* by the hand of God. With desolation setting in at these thoughts, the author cries out: *Where are you tonight?* - where are you? - in your sanctuary? - can you see what's happening now? - won't you come back?

The truth was too controversial in relation to man's expectations. To stay right by it would cause you to *explode*. The author says that he understood Jesus's Passion: it was the only code for life eternal, the only path to follow. He classes himself, along with the other disciples, as brave men, occasionally frozen with *doubt*. He knew that Jesus had some divine power to *find out* all men's thoughts, and that, he knew the anxieties his followers were experiencing about his safety, without their own admission of any lax in faith.

The Devil tried *dead center aim* with his blasphemies and trials on Jesus, but got repaid each time with Jesus arranging beauty out of the resulting discord - *putting flowers on the shelf*. The author mentions the time he was allowed audience with Jesus's *invisible self* - as the Son of God, rather than the Son of Man. He admits his *despair* at his own vulnerability, after seeing the magnitude of God. He lists the *demon* obstacles in life - the broken *dreams* and destruction of man's heritage - *landscape being raped*. As the second verse winds up, we are suddenly taken to the scene atop of Calvary. We watch Christ's *beauty fade* and watch him *undrape* for the final humiliations. The writer, himself, is left feeling very uncertain - should he look or turn away? He is stricken with feelings of helplessness and failing the man he loved.

The third verse is a wrangle between good and evil, but this time in the author's own mind, fighting his conscience over the events witnessed just prior. He *fought* with the *enemy within*. He confesses of all the environmental *disease* that's unbearable - the ridicule from non-believers, and the inner pain of self admitted doubt and remorse over the crucifixion. While *the law* condones not condemns. His evil side of his mind tell show [sic] he was conned, and that the person he had loved so deeply *couldn't stay clean*. He, in indignation, exorcises his evil self - *my foot in his face*, most likely in remembrance of his privileged sight of Jesus's Transfiguration, earlier on, thus renewing his faith with an upsurge.

His evil, out of his body and manifest as the Devil himself, replies in the following verse. He describes his beginnings in The Garden of Eden, tempting, with the *forbidden fruit*. (For any sexists studying the ambiguities of the phrase *juice...leg*, you'd be wise to stop at this point and continue dissecting Led Zeppelin's **Lemon Song**). Then he says, how he brought about disorder to God - *your boss*, in an otherwise perfect creation. The Devil continues saying, that, his

son, Jesus, was *too proud to beg* - behind this sarcastic remark lies the actual truth that he was too wise to fall into temptation.

The author's self examination is suddenly interrupted: the scene is the appearance of the reborn Saviour as a *white diamond* lighting the *gloom* and despondency of the apostle's hiding place. He is salvation itself - the only road *to the stars*. The Saviour tells them that there is a *price* for Paradise' and his *scars* tell all - a strong reference to Thomas, ridding his doubt by placing his fingers in Jesus's wounds.

Filled with a blinding insight and fresh optimism, the author, finds it incredible that he's *survived*. He has renewed strength to carry on with God's work unfailingly - it's a new era and he's *alive*, but still, *without HIM it doesn't seem right*.

Controversially, *Street Legal* is Dylan's greatest work to date. Perhaps not his most popular; it hasn't stood the test of time yet, but certainly his most accomplished, idealistically. The recording production work leaves much to be desired but that's splitting hairs. Twenty years ago, *Street Legal* would have been dismissed as rubbish, and maybe, two hundred years in the future will also be classed as drivel, but I doubt it. In this chameleon age, here and now, it's importance is earnest.

Incidentally, the marvellous cover of the album sets the mood of its contents admirably. Taken in 'Frisco, apparently. Dylan is shown in slummy conditions, somewhat bedraggled, alone, lost, bowing despairingly, waiting and watching for something to come his way - the reality of his 'street' far removed from the *poetry of salvation* in his head.

You might be saying by now: all this theory is very well, but what about the many other aspects of Dylan's art? I would agree whole-heartedly. The man's musical colourings for his lyrics, the nuances, his dramatic split-second, *head shaving* and unsurpassed vocal deliveries, his unique breathing techniques and more, more, more besides, for which due appraisal would fill a volume or two. Still, that's another story.

WE'RE ALL GONNA MAKE IT TO THAT MILLION DOLLAR BASH

1978 saw Dylan undertake a massive trek around the world, and by December, he had completed 115 concerts - his 115th dream? Wrapping up what had been one of the most successful years of his career. Like never before, he gave abundant interviews and talked freely to his public from the platforms. He stated his joy that people had come to his shows to listen. For us in these Isles, it was an unforgettable sight to see the matches and candlelights of London turn into blazing torches at Blackbushe / the superimposed carnival atmosphere, which had begun like a circus in the foyer of Earl's Court some four weeks prior. Dylan's ordained and enlarged 'pill-box hat' has fitting, as he appeared as a *naked president* over the town of weary wayfarers, who had found temporary sanctuary on the tarmac and the grass. He had wanted to play all night, but *the National Guard stood behind the door*. By the close everyone had been clothed and fed. The people huddled in a comradeship and hope for the future that Dylan had instilled there. Those beacons will never be extinguished in the memories. Dylan, the group, the superb sound systems, the audiences and the magical force of joy were all at a peak. If God is witness to life then he was surely present.

SLOW TRAIN COMING - A SYNOPTICAL SYNTHESIS: OR SO LONG MOBILE HOWDY MAMA

Banners united over the field - Dylan's songs, his public face, his ensignia are connected in a common direction throughout his years of writing. And now, after suffering a pregnancy of expectancy with bated breath, we have with us a new 'banner', an album which was indeed slow in coming, after the gossip and rumours and that teasing snippet which graced Capital Radio a while back. Before the release of *Slow Train Coming* I would have said that there's not much more that he can really say that he hasn't already done in the past, on the surface at least. Except maybe, create a simpler formula so that a greater response can be sought out in the listeners' minds. I guess I was right, though the mixed receptions of the album are causing me to ponder the long-term effects and the justifications for this move. Underneath it all, from a Christian point of view, it would certainly seem, if you'll excuse the phrasing, that Dylan is on the right rails and is safely clutching a first-class ticket in his hands, which are still as 'clean' as in his *Lay Lady Lay* days. No heavenly harp for him perhaps, but I dare say he wouldn't refuse a pluck on Gabriel's Gibson, to *Lay Down* [-his -] *Weary Tune* upon which *no (mortal) voice can hope to hum*.

At this point of time, it is highly foolish and premature to try to fully disembowel the content of the new album, unless you are prepared to accept unwelcome bitchiness and deprecation from future critics on recourse to the songs. You simply have to live with any serious major new work for at least one year of your life; to go back to it again and again, waiting for the unbalanced weights in the combination lock of comprehension to click into space; to let the material stand up and be time-tested through all your seasonal moods and influences, be they musical, social, personal or

political. Without debarring these factors, then and only then can you perhaps paddle into the deep end of inevitable analogy. But of course there is no harm in allowing yourself the adolescent satisfaction of 'lucky-dipping' and pulling out a few initial, obvious ideas and comparatives to build upon as the work psychologically matures.

The title *Slow Train Coming* immediately throws up many conjectures - impatience for salvation etc.. The link to this work might well be derived from Dylan's Rolling Thunder movie *Renaldo & Clara*, a religious commitment in itself - a beautiful celluloid statement on the ego and truth of geometric creation. In particular, Dylan's moving interpretation of the classic, **People Get Ready**-

*there's a train a coming
you don't need a ticket, you just thank the Lord
there ain't no room for the hopeless sinner
no hiding place from the Kingdom's Throne*

And off film he was quoted as saying "We are of one soul". It remains to be seen.

In a fairly recent interview, Dylan states that "music attracts the Angels of the Universe". I don't know about that, but I do know that the music on this new album attracts me greatly. It's definitely a head-phones album, with superb balancing and mixing, and needless to say, as you know by now, a pure flux of liquid, variable, shifting and insistent, weeping, protesting, exclaiming and happy marching music. In categorisation it's like **Sunshine Of Your Love** meets Johnny Nash on *The Dark Side Of The Moon*.

You might think there's a dearth of metaphorical gestures, irony and understatement, but it's there all right, highlighted and complimented by Dylan's tonal expression and his joyous, suicidal and occasionally light-hearted timings. Throughout his career it's not been just what he's said that's struck the nerves of the brain numb, it's what he's missed out. It's the spaces bursting to get out of the gaps created by his vocals accelerating and decelerating to ride the surf on the waves of his music, and there's rarely ever a 'wipe - out'.

Despite the compactness and preciseness of this not over-produced set, Dylan shines through like a star amongst stars, so much so that he tends to debilitate his excellent support. He declaims his faith throughout the album with little decomposition and no degeneracy in sight. It is another circle in his life completed. His very first experience in a recording studio back in July 1961 was backing Harry Belafonte, on harmonica, on a Gospel number entitled **Midnight Special** - another train, or the same one still chugging away here in '79? This song had a chorus line of 'shine your ever loving light on me'. Not dissimilar to 'shine your light on me' in **Precious Angel**. Interesting. A personal thought is that the aforementioned 'Angel' is not so much the wispy-winged breed as a more solid flesh and bone mammal. Sense suggests it is a 'coloured' girl, lover or acquaintance who was the instigator of Dylan's reformation (if he needed any). He states in the song *both our forefathers were slaves - the blacks and the Jews?*

Dylan's frankness in his personal status is to be admired along with his unashamed profession of faith. In **Gotta Serve Somebody** he refers to himself as 'Zimny'. Never before in any form, record, interview or writing has he ever mentioned 'Zimmerman'. Except for in a paragraph in the original manuscript of his book *Tarantula*, which was edited out of the final released version. The paragraph headlined as **One Leg At A Time** included the line *the Jewish boy, Zimmerman, I seen him walking his spider on the Pan Am building and what are you gonna do about it, creep?* Perhaps the book's title was derived from this line, as it's difficult to connect it to any of the poetry in the released volume.

Back to the song in question, Dylan mentions *you might live in a dome?* Thus erasing the memory of his self-indulgence in trying to create his own *Xanadu*, with his two million dollar mansion, which boasted a copper *dome*, precariously positioned in Malibu, California. It was conceded during his sad divorce proceedings.

In *Slow Train*, not so much in reflection, but still presently evident is his concern for his family. He says, *it sure does bother me, to see my loved ones turned into puppets*. As Sarah, presumably heads into the sunset with some *bad talking boy* on a *suicidal journey through life* - in Dylan's eyes at least. They're just helping to furnish the *Golden Calf* along with many other repetitively mentioned comrades and ex-confidantes.

The deliberate deficiency, lyrically, in **Man Named All The Animals** transforms a nursery type composition into a genealogical jump into the first book of the Bible. It's happy-go-lucky structure is frighteningly contradicted by the fetid conclusion. As if the singer after the halcyon name-game has been frozen in his tracks at the sight of the unmentioned 'snake'. There's the reality that all's not well in the Garden and that the seed of evil is already encroaching the smugly supposed tranquillity. And so the album continues through **I Believe In You**, **Gonna Change My Way Of Thinking**, **Do Right To Me Baby** and **When You Gonna Wake Up?** and balance out ideas, desires, failings, and most of all the

increasing and eternally self-destroying insurrection against the basic laws laid down for humanity. It's a depressing and hostile world to carry a light through on your own, alone in being, but hopefully, and alone in spirit.

The single take **Trouble In Mind**, a mighty marvel of R & Bluesy storm-breaking proportions, fits admirably into the vein of the album sessions, from which it was taken. I would have deemed it worthy of inclusion on the album at any cost, or at least have marketed it as the 'a' side of the release. Dylan's vocal attainments here are likened to a free-fall parachutist who, for a few brief moments, evades and barrier of time [sic], and then catches his breath as his rip-cord jerks. Still you can't teach an old Columbia Records new tricks.

Dylan's intrinsic genius is rendered almost visible, an ectoplasmic climax hovering over your turntable as the final album track **When He Returns** is transmitted to your senses. It's a constellation of all the aspects of his art and his euphuistic manner. (Would it be boring to say, his oils just might have started to dab that longed for 'masterpiece'?) From Beckett's first notes on the piano, like an introit to the whole, to the faded, damped fingerings, we witness Bob Dylan, the composer, artist, true professional and original Dylan creator. 'Nobody sings Dylan like Dylan' said the ads back in '66. What could they say today? God, even atheists must be stirred out of their feigned 'neutral ground' at the sheer conviction of the performance alone here. What poetry. *Surrender your crown, on this blood-stained ground* - The depth of feeling. *How long must I suffer?* . The insight. *...the weakness you conceal.*

The interspersed thoughts of right and wrong projected by the album suddenly inundate and intersect at this point, as Dylan leaves us with the somewhat disdainfully uttered knowledge of man's insignificance, as regards his schemes and plans, and more-over that God, himself, has got *plans of his own, to set up his throne* - (unknown to us) - *when He returns.*

Finally, the album either leaves you feeling intestate, or glad that you've been helping to build the rails for the train, to earn yourself a place like the figures depicted on the cover scene. If you can fall or crawl into the latter category, then you too can cry out with some confidence. 'It's alright Ma, I can make it'. But If you're one that's intoxicated with life and are completely intractable, well ...

In my eyes, the album stands up bravely amongst the new wave and general depravity on gold-plated iconic supports. But will the pillars crumble as *brother Bill* gets his *great thrill*? (**Highway 61**) - Only time will tell. At least *HE can die happily ever after.*

I would hastily point out, that I have only just skimmed the surface here - there are possibly myriads of ideas that require discussion and solution. Either Dylan is a genius for writing these lyrics, infused with 'barbed wire' perceptions, or I and other Dylanologists are geniuses to be able to bend them to satisfy our own personal whims - I think the former argument would win universal vote. Still, you can 'deny, defy' or maybe even 'crucify' - but please don't dismiss my case'.

IF ANYBODY ASKS ME, IS IT EASY TO FORGET?

Dylan came through the 'purple haze' of the sixties. A survivor of ambition, pressure, managers, drugs, critics, fans, fame, wealth and fate. He's been 'Knockin' on Heaven's door' for a long time, but how would we remember him, if he were to leave us tomorrow - his life 'ending at the shore'? How would we keep our eyes 'glued to the door' without him? How would he be remembered apart from his literary legacy?

Maybe his wish would be in the vein of one of his earliest Guthrie-esque renditions, when he moved north [sic] to the bright lights and seedy cellars at the start of the sixties - **Remember Me** - *when the candlelights are gleaming, remember me at the end of a long, long day* As opposed to the *jingle jangle morning*. Perhaps leaving Gypsy Queens to play his grand finale. When that day comes, I will again *awake so alone and terrified, put my fingers up against the glass, bow my head and cry.*

If only *dogs could run free*, but it doesn't seem likely in our lifetime. All we can do is *stare straight ahead and try so hard to stay right*. Lend an ear to the Moody Blues's song **Watching and Waiting**, or if that's not your scene, you weighted 'tin' freaks, then how about Budgie's **In For The Kill**, then go back and re-affirm Dylan's work in a new light, that is, if you've got a few years to spare. We're a long way from Genesis and a long way from Armageddon but then again, it could be tomorrow. And Bobby 'you're so far away from home'.

I'd like to finish with a final quote from the man himself when asked how he saw himself:

"I'D LIKE TO THINK OF MYSELF AS THE ONE WHO CARRIED THE LIGHT-BULB" - 'nuff said.

PORTLAND, 1988

from a colour original by

John Hume



Homer, the slut

Issue Nine

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And that is it for Bits & Bobs for this issue. For new readers, I'd like to point out that there are normally all manner of other little sections beloved by ...well, er, by me anyway. These include references to Dylan in films, books, T.V. and anything else I have come across or someone has sent in. For example, in the middle of May someone wore a Dylan Tour Baseball cap in Eastenders and Dave Ward reported this to me at work the next day. About ten others called/wrote to say that they: 'Didn't normally watch the programme, but last night I just happened to be channel-hopping and.....'

All manner of contributions did, in fact, come in - and my heartfelt thanks to all who chipped in. Many will be included in future issues, I simply ran out of time and space in this one. Jailhouse John deserves a special mention here as he has been reporting Dylan snippets on almost a daily basis for weeks now. His every move seems to bring him across another Dylan reference. This doesn't please him at all - as he likes to 'escape' from Dylan when I'm not around - particularly when even a 'safe haven' like *Now Dig This* throws in a mention or two. (Like the fact that Dion's *Dream On* - just out - includes a "morose" *One Too Many Mornings*.) He does however dutifully report all of them even though the only ones that give him any pleasure are the ones that send me scuttling out to buy a CD.

Keep them coming folks, normal service to be resumed in **Issue Ten**. The next issue will also include an interview with Paul Williams and an in-depth look at his writings on Dylan. (The first in a series of profiles of Dylan critics - Michael Gray has kindly consented to be the next subject.) Bob Forryan has contributed one of his best ever pieces; JRS has picked a brilliant song for *From Behind A Burning Bush*, there will be a fascinating article on *Visions Of Johanna* and a study of Dylan and the feminist critique. Plus *Some Other Kinds Of Songs* returns with an article on Bob Neuwirth! How can you wait? Why not do a friend a favour and get them to subscribe ?

Last word here to Captain Picard:

Villains who twirl their moustaches are easy to spot, those who clothe themselves in good deeds are well camouflaged.



BOB DYLAN
LONDON
HAMMERSMITH
APOLLO

BEING BOB Dylan must be one of creation's more bizarre experiences. You've been prophet, sage, guru, mystic, righter of wrongs and (almost) slayer of dragons. You have, at one time or another, meant something to practically everyone.

Now into your second half-century, you're still traversing the globe with a compulsion that'd better suit the Ancient Mariner, each night playing a minuscule selection of the vast number of songs you've written over the years. Two squillion people turn up to see you, and every single bloody one of them goes home saying, "yeah, it was fantastic, but I wish he'd played 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'".

But sometimes, like on this first evening of the by-now traditional blitz of Hammersmith gigs, Dylan manages to successfully reinvent himself again. Tonight sees him reinterpreting his chosen repertoire in a slick country-rock manner, and an uncharacteristically well-rehearsed band respond enthusiastically to the task. At times (especially during the set's unlikely highpoint, 'I And I') the sound is reminiscent of Green On Red's desolate blues howl, though the closing encore of 'Everything Is Broken' kicks off like the *Batman* TV theme played by The Cramps.

Dylan's acoustic guitar is the dominant factor in a crystal-clear mix, a refreshing change from the last time he played here, when he seemed to think that the thing slung over his shoulder was a toy drum.

His playing, moreover, is so assured that he's able to give a true lead to the other four musicians and assumes complete control. And, even more importantly, he's quite obviously enjoying himself; breaking into frequent grins, lurching and wobbling arrhythmically and even cracking what seem to be jokes.

OK, so his limited vocal range planes the interest off some of the more angular tunes, and the extemporised instrumental passages that double the length of almost every song lean towards the featureless at times. But it's a vibrant, electrifying performance from an artist who looks to be enjoying his craft more than he has done in years.

Right now, it must feel just fine being Bob Dylan.

Angus Batey

ROCK / Bob Dylan
is back. Giles
Smith was at the
Hammersmith Apollo

In the depths

WE'VE all heard the stories about Bob Dylan's cussedness — how he'll stop songs half-way, twist them out of recognisable shape, maybe play nothing you've ever heard. But what's impressive is, he'll never let you down the same way twice. Take the first night of his week-long run in Hammersmith — compellingly awful, resourcefully rubbishy. Just when you're thinking he couldn't care less, he digs down deep and finds some new way not to care.

In the stalls, it was wall-to-wall Dylanologists, block-booked into the best seats. Often depicted as humourlessly in thrall to a set notion of Dylan's greatness, the Bob-spotters are in fact more fun than that; Dylan's moments of 24 carat direness are to be collected and discussed as avidly as those rare nights when he really sparks off. With that in mind, everyone was on their feet when the lights went down and a voice asked us to welcome "Columbia recording artist, Bob Dylan".

The first thing that happened was almost too collectible to be true. For some reason Dylan's microphone stand had only been partially erected and was at waist-height. As the band tumbled into the opening bars of "Maggie's Farm", Dylan sauntered forward and wrestled the stand to a viable singing position. But before he could get a word out, the stand plummeted again, sending an almighty clunk through the PA. Dylan retreated, glowering, while a roadie scampered on and fixed the mess. The familiar Dylan comedy of despair and disdain was already under way, and he hadn't even started singing yet.

When he did, his voice was a bleary honk. He strained his way through "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right", "Tangled Up in Blue", and most of the time, he sounded like someone fooling around in the bath. At the end, you were clapping your memory of the original, or clapping Dylan for writing it — clapping *anything*, frankly, other than the truly horrible rendition which had just gone by.

In the audience, there was some tutting about Dylan's choice of band members. Two of them were wearing cowboy hats (Tony Garnier on bass and Williams Baxter on slide guitar) while the guitarist Johnny Jackson was apeing Eric Clapton in an expensive, flowing suit. It was the lot of

Ian Wallace to drum along with Dylan's unpredictable changes of pace and volume.

Dylan himself played an acoustic until near the concert's end. He seemed to be using a thumb-pick early on (hard to know why; he doesn't usually), and later he abandoned it in favour of his own thumb. Solos were frequent and lengthy, some sweetly tuneful, but most a mess of thumping, plinking and buzzing, often in the wrong keys. Each number dragged on for ages. On at least two occasions, the applause at the end of a song died down and you realised that the number was, in fact, still going on. Dylan did thaw a little, managing a bow before he lurched off behind the amplifiers, hitching up his trousers.

Behind him lay some of songwriting's finest moments, deftly trashed; "The Times They Are A-Changin'" in which the punch line had been sung an octave lower than the rest of the song; "Tambourine Man", wherein the chorus melody went up, instead of down. The audience left bright-eyed and animated. It had been a night to remember.

RODDY FRAME
LONDON
HAMMERSMITH APOLLO

SOME OF us have been a little worried about Roddy of late. His tremendous version of 'Half As Nice' for the *NME*'s 'Ruby Trax' album aside, the '90s have not been kind to Aztec Camera, and the planned re-emergence last summer suffered a setback when the 'Spanish Horses' single fell at the first fence.

So, what are we to make of the solo Roddy opening for Dylan? Well, with only two new numbers on display the jury is still out, but this 40-minute career resumé does much to confirm the boy Frame's status as a national treasure.

When he shuffles through an early B-side like 'Orchid Girl' we're reminded of the precocious talent who, at the ridiculous age of 17, could "judge this world through jaundiced eyes", who could knock out protest ditties like 'Birth Of The True' at will.

We reflect on the New Man-isms of 'How Men Are' (although slipping into the chorus of Curtis Mayfield's 'People Get Ready' doesn't quite work), and the stripped-bare rendition of the Mick Jones collaboration 'Good Morning Britain' minus the BAD (meaning bad) sloganeering proves that it's actually quite a good song after all.

There's no obvious link between Frame and Dylan (although both have had albums produced by Mark Knopfler), but Roddy switches from his own 'Down The Dip' into Bob's 'That's Alright Ma' with consummate ease.

Dylanologists welcome him with open minds, save for one sad little shit who cheers the fact that Roddy has reached his last song. Undaunted, Mr Frame addresses the crowd: "Hope you all enjoy Bob Dylan tonight," he says, and adds with a finger pointed at our rude friend, "but you can f— off!"

Great retort, great voice, great songs. Fingers crossed the great album is just around the corner.

Terry Staunton



Dylan arriving yesterday

The times show no sign of a'changing for Dylan dreamers

AT 51 — for the first time in his life older than the President of the United States — Bob Dylan may look increasingly as if he has stepped out of a major traffic accident, his work may have become increasingly uneven, at times shambolic, yet his capacity to draw the faithful remains undiminished.

The audience for the first of Dylan's six London shows at Hammersmith last night had, on the whole, worn no better than their hero. But if they have receding hairlines and fuller stomachs, they also still have dreams.

For the last five years Dylan has toured with the avidity of a man who doesn't know what else to do with himself. His concerts now seem less like special occasions than cosy family reunions: sometimes the patriarch is benign and effusive, sometimes grumpy and out of sorts; one is expected to forgive him anything.

Increasingly, the patriarch has seemed preoccupied, given to strange whims and last night was no exception. Dressed in black, he edged on stage without acknowledging the audience and launched into a strident *Maggie's Farm*, backed by a stand-up bass and steel guitar which lent the song a distinctly countrified air. The

Mr Tambourine Man played the first of six London concerts last night. **Mick Brown** joined the faithful

voice is not what it was; the nasal whine has lost whatever capacity for purity it once had; cracked and broken it now evinces a different kind of poignancy, of an old prize fighter on the ropes.

In order to make life more interesting for himself, Dylan now approaches performing with an almost careless spontaneity — changing the order, sometimes the arrangements, of songs from night to night. This performance was spotted with signs of misunderstandings between Dylan and his band — *Tangled Up In Blue* had all the faltering looseness of a rehearsal. And yet the effect remains curiously mesmeric.

Whatever his present shortcomings as a performer, the songs' quality stands supreme and it is anyway his accomplishments the fans come to applaud. By the time of *Mr Tambourine Man* — the whining harmonica, the catarrhal groan — the years had rolled away and there was hardly a dry eye in the house.



**BOB
DYLAN**

The mythical status enjoyed by Bob Dylan early on in his career was partly the result of keeping out of the public eye. Most British fans didn't get to see him until the late Seventies, a good 15 years after he had established himself as rock's foremost songwriter. Even then they were obliged to attend vast open air events, hardly the ideal environment for listening to a man as celebrated for his poetry as his music.

Recently, however, the singer has taken to performing at London's Hammersmith Odeon, or Apollo as it is now called. A medium-sized theatre, it offers the kind of intimate atmosphere essential for enjoying a performance by somebody of Dylan's depth.

Most of the audience appeared to

be long-term followers, as familiar with the more obscure material as they were with the old classics. Bob's choice of musicians was also inspiring, two steel guitars and a double bass bringing the best out of the rich catalogue of songs.

They opened with *Maggie's Farm*, that tongue-in-cheek protest tune dating back to the mid-Sixties. Half-way through the set, the singer became more romantically inclined, performing *She Belongs To Me*, and *Tomorrow Night*, and a ballad from his latest LP, *Good As I Been To You*. In between came a selection of vintage album tracks including *All Along The Watchtower* and *Tangled Up In Blue*, Bob's sensational ode to the break up of his marriage.

Much of the playing included shrill

bursts of harmonica, the instrument Dylan almost single-handedly introduced to pop in his early days as a Greenwich Village folk singer. Back then his stage act could be quite whimsical, the high-minded idealist surprising spectators by pretending to fall off a chair Charlie Chaplin style.

Although this behaviour wasn't evident at Hammersmith, Bob Dylan certainly appeared to be enjoying himself. Being a small venue, it was possible to see his reaction every time one of the band hit a wrong note. Sometimes the singer played a few solos himself, notably at the start of *Mr Tambourine Man*, whose elaborate lyrics were recalled word-perfect.

Other highlights included the bitter-sweet *Don't Think Twice, It's Alright*, and the philosophical *Simple Twist Of Fate* both reinterpreted in the staccato style reserved for all his most cherished tunes. He was on his best form for years, so hopefully it won't be too long before Dylan thrills his British fans once again.

Bob Dylan has been performing in London this week. **Michael Gray** joins fans who go every night to watch and worship

FOUR shows down, two to go — tonight and tomorrow at Hammersmith Apollo. These Dylan weeks draw people from throughout the land and beyond. This is a chance for us to step back into the past, to indulge in intense time-warp pleasure.

Contrary to the standard line (in broadsheets and tabloids alike), Dylan fans contain only the same proportion of lunatics as the general population. Before the third concert I eat in an Italian restaurant near the hall. Almost all the diners are on their way to see Bob Dylan — they are discussing the man and his works. It is the one person clearly not concert-bound who sits sweating in a padded ski-jacket, rolling his serial-killer eyes and chewing soup in time to the Muzak.

Twenty per cent of Dylan's audience is the same every night, not because we're barking mad but because the concerts are *not* the same every night. Dylan's performances remain individual, sometimes radically different events — and among those who rearrange their week to attend as many as they can are people who visit art galleries, know about wine and food.

Why not? What are you doing tonight that's so much more important than standing in the same room as one of the few undoubted geniuses of the 20th century? Okay, if you think he can't sing you may as well stay home. But consider this: when he gave two performances in Israel in 1987, his repertoire was wholly different each night. On the early 1990 tour, including the Hammersmith shows that February, he sang 80 different songs in 14 concerts. What other performer would, or could, match this?

Even when the songbag hardly varies from night to night (and this week at the Apollo seems to have worked out that way), the interpretation certainly does. The upshot is that if there are sometimes poor concerts there are also magical ones. This week's first show offered enthralling brilliance, the second was as good as a concert can be, and the third, though it had sublime moments, fell a long way short. You'd get nothing so real from a performer less reliant on intelligent spontaneity.

It's not only real theatre,

The songs they are a-changin'



Bob Dylan and his son after a concert: to fans, the way he moves his left leg is worth more than the complete works of Anthony Burgess

it's real music, like jazz. He breaks all the rules except be true to yourself and live for the moment. His being "past it" is simply media ennui. Just the way he moves his left leg is worth more than the complete works of Anthony Burgess.

We come, we see, we exchange rumours. So what news of Bob? It's rumoured that in Dublin last Friday he had to lie down for 15 minutes before he went on. Seems okay when he does, though... And for the first three London shows he appears with exemplary sobriety and promptness (at 9.03 pm, 9.05, and 9.03).

Not all of us are so calm and well. One fellow *aficionado* and hypochondriac picks up his phone a fortnight ago and says: "My hands are sweating and it hasn't even started yet." Another fan is walking along three days ahead of the shows and sees this black Mercedes rolling along the Strand, numberplate ZIM1. Zimmy! (Dylan's real name is Zimmerman.) This is not exactly Bob's style but it's a heady moment. Then he

realises he's outside Zimbabwe House.

Meanwhile, Glen and Madge Dundas from Thunder Bay, Ontario, are driving 350 miles through snow to catch a flight. They have to leave another Dylan fan behind. "He had a friend die — so he's not coming in until Thursday."

Then there's Larry. Larry insists on having the same seat every night. He gets this not merely by queuing (lots of career heavies happen not to be well enough to go into work the day the tickets go on sale) but by turning up 24 hours ahead of the rest. He not only is the queue but issues numbered cloakroom tickets to those who come later.

This year he gets his favourite seat — for every night except the last. This is part of a block of four allocated to the promoter himself. Larry can't let it go at that. He phones the promoter. He argues, faxes, visits. Finally, Mr Big's secretary admits that he doesn't know exactly which seats he's holding. "Well!" Larry says. "There you go! I've got

four front-row seats myself, so we'll swap them!" And she looks at Larry and *knows* that this is how it has to be.

As a rule there's no such clash of interests at Dylan shows now. Gone are the days when the front rows would be occupied by a parade of models and celebrities. Dylan has abolished these people, insisting that the front rows be sold to the public.

At Tuesday's show, we find Bob Geldof in row R, directly behind Annie Nightingale. Geldof keeps talking away at the man alongside him. At the end Annie N (speaking for all of us who've had to beam out the yabba of others at such events) turns round and asks: "Why did you bother to come?" Geldof's riposte is ruder than it is witty.

After tonight and tomorrow, the *Never-Ending Tour* may come back again next year — or he may stop any day now and never perform live again. It's easy to rubish him. It's a richer experience to be there.

Michael Gray has written books on Bob Dylan and Frank Zappa.

Dylan's a delight as the band tries to stay on the track

PERHAPS it was as a result of having played the previous evening in Dublin in the company of Van Morrison, Bono, Chrissie Hynde and Elvis Costello, but Bob Dylan was in unusually expansive mood last night as he settled in to a two-hour marathon of songs that found him scavenging through the past, committing his customary hara-kiri on more well worn chestnuts while illuminating others with a macabre relish.

Backed by the now familiar figure of stand-up bassist Tony Garnier, an indispensable rock given Dylan's haphazard methodology, and with guitarist John Jackson revving and rocking in the slipstream, a lot of the

Bob Dylan
Hammersmith Odeon

MAX BELL

musical slack was taken up by newcomers Winston Watson Jr on drums and the excellent and versatile Buck Baxter, beaver away gamely on pedal steel, lap and mandolin.

Credit the band for their tenacity in keeping pace with the esteemed Bob during his walkabouts. They played the sea of calm to his beacon of chaos where lesser men would surely have run screaming into the night.

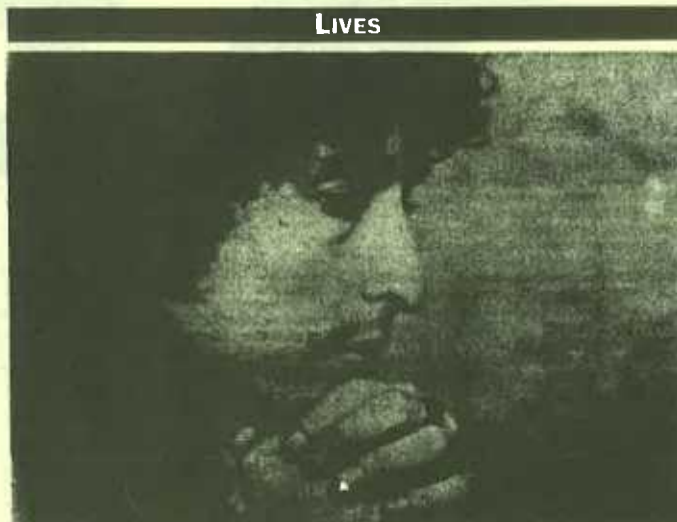
The pattern was set with Dylan holding court centre stage, mumbling the lyrics and strumming his acoustic

in that distracted style reminiscent of Willie Nelson's off-kilter attack, though without the latter's undoubted ability to make the notes. If Bob's time-keeping left a little to be desired his sense of theatre appeared intact when he launched into Maggie's Farm, looking and sounding like a pouched marsupial that had been disturbed during hibernation.

A passionate Lenny Bruce and a sketchy All Along The Watchtower gave way to an early highlight, Tangled Up In Blue, still a novel load of the man at his finest. In contrast Positively 4th Street induced more of a double take. If you didn't know the song you'd swear that Dylan had ripped its guts out altogether. Stuck Inside Of Mobile With The Memphis Blues Again was similarly mauled.

The acoustic interlude prompted Dylan to cast a beady eye at his latest platter, the ironically titled Good As I Been To You. Jim Jones, a blood-curdling tale of convicts being shipped to Oz, was particularly fine though She Belongs To Me and Mr Tambourine Man got the more rousing reception. The general bonhomie reached fever pitch during a near farcical demolition of Don't Think Twice It's Alright when Baxter, as bemused as anyone by now, missed his cue for a mandolin solo. "We rehearsed it a hundred times," Dylan guffawed. "I'll fire him." Cat's In The Hat and I & I set the show back on what passed for an even keel before The Times They Are A-Changing and Highway 61. Just as hippy jam time beckoned, Dylan threw a rock 'n' roll Elvis pose and sneered into Ballad Of A Thin Man, decorating it with a magnificent spaghetti Western harp blast that sounded like Augustus Pablo.

A crunching, electric rockabilly Everything Is Broken brought proceedings to a juddering halt. Dylan smiled, waved a cheery farewell and moseyed off using a different door to his band. He's an artist and he don't look back.



Bob Dylan

HAMMERSMITH APOLLO;
SUN-TUE

If you've 'got Bob Dylan', you've got it bad. It doesn't matter whether he's being good, bad or embarrassingly awful, he's always being Dylan. And for many, that's enough. Not too many years ago his concerts took on a special meaning; people would queue all night for tickets, and debate the latest phase of his errant genius. Nowadays though, ol' shambling, rambling Bob seems to play concerts in Hammersmith more often than he receives long-service awards from his various back-slapping, tuxedo-toting, muso-millionaire buddies. Indeed, having apparently melded the idea of the

rock 'n' roll circus to the Woody Guthrie hobo aesthetic, the guy seems to spend most of his life touring, with, as some sage or prophet put it, no direction home.

This time, as well as the usual crap band, we're promised a large acoustic element to the shows, probably drawing on the traditional folk stylings of his latest album, 'Good As I Been To You' (Sony). Indeed, the accomplished simplicity, and overall coherency of that record, bodes well for these concerts. Who knows, maybe the old dog could even yet roll back the years and turn in a few concerts to confront, confound and confuse, with that typically lazy and engaging Dylan-diffidence of old. Whatever, expect a different set each night, albeit with the same rather depressingly obvious core of worn-out 'favourites'. And don't forget — never mind the quality, it's Bob Dylan. *Ross Fortune*

Erratic ballad of a bored man

Adam Sweeting

ARRIVING with minus-zero expectations, I was surprised to find that Bob's opening night at the renamed but still "legendary" Hammersmith Apollo was rather good in places. Within moments of the scheduled 9pm start, the veteran "voice of a generation" was croaking through Maggie's Farm as his band scraped out a raucous rockabilly beat.

If he seemed to have forgotten both the tune and the words of the ensuing Lenny Bruce, at least he could feel confident that Lenny wasn't going to leap onstage and start berating him.

Nor, for that matter, were the crowd, who seemed grateful simply for the chance to celebrate Bob at relatively close quarters. The strange and inexplicable progress of Bob Dylan has reached the point where the initiates now applaud anything he does, while everybody else has washed their hands of the whole business.

By Bob's standards, he was friendly and outgoing. By about halfway through the two-and-a-quarter hour performance, he was volunteering brief announcements between songs, although he made them while the applause for the previous number was still going strong, and they were therefore incomprehensible. The choice of material, too, was mostly

prime-time Dylan, even if it took me until the second verse to identify a melody-free Positively 4th Street, and even if Tangled Up In Blue was sung in a ranting, whining monotone which would have given a Bob-novice no clue whatsoever about the song's power.

It's impossible to tell what Dylan thinks, or what effect he's trying to achieve. He's obviously a capable guitar player when he wants to be, judging by the recent *Good As I Been To You* album, but his soloing here was sloppy and uninterested, as if he were deliberately throwing an out-of-tune spanner in the works. And having sung the opening salvo of songs like a man with a coil of barbed wire rammed down his gullet, he launched into a folky section and found several new shades of vocal timbre. The historic saga of Jim Jones being deported to Botany Bay could cautiously be described as "tuneful", while Dylan lavished tasteful light and shade on *Mr Tambourine Man* and *Don't Think Twice It's Alright*.

Yet there was rarely any sense that Dylan's attention was more than 50 per cent engaged. While lead guitarist Johnny Jackson or slide-and-mandolin man William Baxter were soloing, Dylan had a disconcerting habit of rolling his eyes upwards in apparent boredom.

In *Tambourine Man*, Bob abruptly stopped playing while he went looking for his harmonica, leaving Tony Garnier plonking out a solitary pattern on his stand-up bass. Something had apparently caused friction between Bob and his musicians.

However, the closing section found the band suddenly reaching a new level of intensity, galvanised by the return of drummer Ian Wallace. Dylan grabbed a black-and-red Stratocaster to help whip up the pounding groove of *Highway 61 Revisited*, while the concluding *Everything Is Broken* roared along like a ghost train from hell. Bob must have enjoyed it too, because he permitted himself a fleeting smile at the end.



**BOB DYLAN/
RODDY FRAME**

THE APOLLO, LONDON
TONIGHT, Bob Dylan is applauded for still being alive.

Tonight, Bob Dylan is applauded for subjecting the assembled brace of middle-management nobodies, salesmen and schoolteachers to a tepid run-through of his greatest hits that approximated to nothing so much as an aged and weatherbeaten marionette playing the songs of Bob Dylan on a kazoo. Tonight, *The Maker's Black Mat Smith*, a ruddy-cheeked 29, is angrily called "a fidgety schoolboy" by some menopausal haridan - probably one of those fine liberals who booed Sinead O'Connor - for the offence of sitting on a seatback. Rock and the other thing, it could be said, are visibly conspicuous by their very absence.

Two years ago, the last time Bob's never-ending tour came through town, it had been fantastic, a hair-raising theatre of the absurd that fully lived up to Allan Jones' memorable comparison of "Waiting For Godot" directed by Sam Peckinpah. Taking delight in playing obscure songs his band clearly didn't know, and making the hits sound like anything but themselves, Dylan had shown some spark, some thrilling maverick fire. Tonight, he just seems like he can't work out why he's doing it any more. Thinking of the monstrous wealth - and, ergo, total freedom - he must by now command, neither can't,

THESE days a Bob Dylan concert suggests the gathering of a lost sect, assembled for rites whose precise purpose has long been forgotten but which the tribe continues to enact.

For his part, Dylan seems as ensnared in the ritual as his loyal fans. Last week's six nights at the Hammersmith Apollo (né Odeon) were the latest instalment of the so-called Neverending Tour which has traversed North America and Europe more or less non-stop since the late Eighties.

Why, at 51, he should feel the need to do so is anybody's guess. Even if his muse hasn't deserted him completely, she has certainly become an old flame who visits only intermittently on record, and the Dylan legend would probably be better served by seclusion and silence than by second-rate

The fact that he'd been danced into the ground by his opening act can't have helped. Roddy Frame, always at his best solo, had been his usual charming bouquet of romantic bravado. The sort of people impressed by that sort of thing marvelled at his often plain astonishing guitar playing. Yet more were struck, once again, by that voice, the siren with a lilt. The rest of us kind of stretched out on the spare seats, listened to songs like "Oblivious", "How Men Are" and "Down The Dip" - a gorgeous new one with something about clocks in the title - reflected ruefully that, for years of trying, we still can't play any of 'em properly and worried for future generations who will have grown up without, at some point, wanting to be that man.

Bob who?

ANDREW MUELLER

A legend lost in the myths of times a-changin'

albums like *Under The Red Sky* and shows which vary between the dismal and the humdrum.

The famous vocal chords, for one thing, have collapsed. What David Bowie once described in song as 'a voice of sand and glue' has been ground down to an almost monotone rasp, not as desperately tuneless as on his last visit a couple of years back, but still severely limited. Dylan's voice never was the loveliest of noises, of course, but in his prime it could crackle and sneer with electric passion, while the later, countrified Dylan crooned convincingly.

Now every song comes out sounding more or less the same. The greatest hits that comprise most of the set have been rearranged once more to accommodate his voice, and there are some lengthy instrumental breaks to help things along. His current five-piece band proved tight and efficient, with lead guitarist Johnny Jackson hammering out purposeful solos, and tasteful curlicues whining from the pedal-steel guitar of William Baxter.

There were few other concessions to showmanship last Monday. Occasionally the tousled head would lift and the piercing blue eyes would roll, but the singer spent most of his two hours onstage either shoe-gazing or frowning at the microphone while he sang. Crowd pleasers like 'Maggie's

Farm' and 'All Along The Watchtower' were dispatched perfunctorily, while 'Tangled Up In Blue' passed in a sham-bolic sprawl that had the band shuffling at each other as they tried to figure out what was happening.

The best moments came with the acoustic interlude, where Dylan highlights some of the folk standards that make up his latest album, *Good As I Been To You*. 'Jim Jones', a prisoner's tale of transportation to Botany Bay, was harrowing and intense, with Dylan reminding us that he is a competent guitar picker. More surprisingly, 'Mr Tambourine Man' tripped and skipped with beguiling lightness, with Dylan's suck-and-blow harmonica playing at its idiosyncratic best.

Just as abruptly, the magic vanished. 'Don't Think Twice It's Alright' was rendered as a Jessie Fuller-style blues, a buzz-saw vocal extinguishing all meaning from the song, and 'Twist of Fate' was slowed into a mawkish country ballad. A pounding finale included clamorous versions of 'Highway 61' and 'Everything's Broken', but a second encore of 'It Ain't Me Babe' was sad and ragged. The faithful cheered wildly, but the lasting impression was of a once inspirational artist trapped inside his own myth, declining slowly into irrelevance.

Neil Spencer

JOKERMAN!

BOB DYLAN (The Point Theatre, Dublin)

"After all the lights were blinking. In the headlines of your thinking While your open eye was winking

At the one or two hard feelings One or two hard feelings One or two hard feelings left behind"

"Morgan The Pirate" - Richard Ferina

SO WHICH Bob Dylan concert did you see? Next day, there was no middleground in the notices. Dylan was either an enthralling trickster, still reinvigorating his music or a self-indulgent charlatan in contempt of his public. Seldom have I read reviews so utterly at odds. One lesson that should have been learned long before Zoo T.V.: There is a very thin and fragile line between the shaman and the conman.

From the technical angle, there is also another simple reason. If you must play a concert with an acoustic double bass, be sure the sound permeates the whole hall. At times, Dylan and his four-man band were playing a sort of miniature chamber country-rock which was not always overpowering at the back of the Point. In consequence, the telling minor details could dissolve and leave you losing the plot.

Thus Dylan played two concerts; offered two experiences. Upfront you could get lured into the games he was playing with his back-catalogue; at the back, you could be distanced and start to wonder why the hell he was purposely inducing himself in the continuing ritual annihilation of his myth.

Yet such confusions make perfect sense, for Dylan is a man of multiple perspectives who still embraces chaos without knowing if it embraces him. Forget the sixties siren of a generation palaver. One constant theme unites all his records and performances: Bob Dylan is an intentional illusionist who most touching instinct is to distrust all surfaces. Take that as shamanic. Bob Dylan will not clarify our confusions, instead he will confuse our clarifications. It may still be all "just a series of dreams".

He stepped off everyone else's generational tramlines long ago. Perhaps it wasn't blindingly obvious in the early seventies, but it was certainly apparent when he released "Slow Train Coming"; if nothing else, Dylan's controversial Christian phase was the artistic watershed, the point when he implicitly announced his determination to diverge from any neatly prescribed generational agenda. But those who lost him then also lost "Jokerman".

And so he constantly remodels even his most

cherished songs, provoking the questions: Is it his music? Or is it our music? Or can or should it even be possessed. Nobody expected Miles Davis to eternally repeat his solo on "My Funny Valentine", so why should anyone command Bob Dylan to only make replicas of his music.

Besides, since this was the first night of his European tour, Dylan was still tinkering, letting the band cast over their lines and then hauling them back to see if he'd netted any new catch in his songs. Obviously Dylan believes that mere reproductions of his own past would be takes; he will not do the impossible and artistically unforgivable and clone time.

So the start was both teasing and tentative. "Maggie's Farm" was a cunning opening statement of intent. It wasn't crammed with scalding guitars. Instead the band found new spaces in the song which pivoted on Tony Garnier's double bass and a drum pattern that was near Latin. If you weren't demanding duplicates, it was a small gem.

Less so "Lenny Bruce Is Dead" and "Positively 4th Street" which were a blur of generic Dylan, with close to impenetrable vocals. In between "All Along The Watchtower" was both intriguing and errant, opening with a nod to Hendrix from John Jackson's guitar while, in a gesture of somewhat weary honesty, Dylan put his most weight into the lines: "Let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late". But then it ran down slowly, Dylan blipping away on his harmonica as if he still hadn't found what he was newly looking for in the song.

Yet this was heartland music as if a slightly tipsy dobro player had tumbled into a Mexican cantina band after travelling all the way from Minnesota to the mouth of the Mississippi before turning westward to the Rio Grande. Thus the musical spell of "Tangled Up In Blue" but you could also feel that Dylan had withdrawn into his song, puzzled that his singing still hadn't quite found the emotional slot.

"Stuck Inside Of Mobile (With The Memphis Blues Again)" began to raise the temperature before the first triumph, "She Belongs To Me". Again a remodelled intro with an infuriatingly familiar guitar riff, choogling just west of New Orleans like a slowed down Creedence. It may be one of his most affectionate early songs but by now, the snake was starting to uncoil on this night of the full moon. "For Halloween buy her a trumpet/And for Christmas give her a drum".

Indeed and Dylan was starting to give flinty voice and finally find the phrasing that makes him unique. He went acoustic with Garnier for "Tomorrow Night" and "Diamond Joe"; the latter with its references to Botany Bay compelling welcoming, identifying cheers from the

audience.

Again "Mister Tambourine Man" received the Dylan switcharound. No longer a song of goofy psychedelic mystique, he hit the line "I'll come following you" and the sport of earlier dreams had been replaced by their later harsher responsibilities.

He was loosening up but he could still toss out tough-minded punchlines like "I have my love and the Lord have mercy on us all" on "Out In The West", but then "The Times They Are A Changing" was almost waltzed before a marvellous "Highway 61 Revisited".

Again a contrary but classic reshaping on the intro, with his nimble band starting out on Bo Diddley and then hitting the harder stuff with a quote from Canned Heat's "On The Road Again". They cruised, Dylan flew, still resurrecting and renewing the American metaphor of the road that goes on forever.

Gradually he had relaxed. First encore was "Bailed Out A Thin Man" a song even more pertinent removed from its original generational context since Mr Jones, who doesn't know what is going on, is now everyone not a mere haplessly and helplessly misunderstanding Time hack from the sixties.

Then "Everything Is Broken", the only song from the undeserved commercial failure of "Oh Mercy", which seemed to act as a complimentary bookend to the opening "Maggie's Farm", as the two songs of economic failure. Yet it didn't end severely but with a shared joke as Dylan sang "It ain't me babe/It ain't me you're looking for, babe" and the audience bellowed back the line in response, telling him he'd finally been twigged.

And so happily ended the latest lesson with a smile.

• Bill Graham

★★★★★★★★

Imagine our elitist incredulity when Dublin, otherwise known as the poor man's Seattle and owned by U2 on a timeshare basis to boot, turned out to be the place to stargaze this weekend. First, **BONO** and **LARRY MULLEN** from (surprise, surprise!) U2 defied pleas and death threats from the easy of hearing public to get up and sing onstage with **JOHNNY CASH**. Then, the next night, all three of them limo-ed down to **VAN MORRISON**'s gig and proceeded to join **BOB DYLAN**, **ELVIS COSTELLO**, **STEVE EARLE**, **STEVE WINWOOD**, **CHRIS HYNDE**, **NANCI GRIFFITH**, **JERRY LEE LEWIS** and **KRIS KRISTOFFERSON** onstage for a rendition of 'Gloria' that can only be described as *The Planet Of The Apes* meets *THE WINNIFRED'S SCHOOL CHOIR*.

Meanwhile, pop lempress turned Extremely Serious Musician Actually **WENDY JAMES** skulked 'intensely' in the wings for a bit before revealing her true colours by asking **SINEAD O'CONNOR** if Johnny Cash was tennis player **PAT CASH**'s dad.

Sinead herself only stayed long enough to down a few Peculiar Brews but was spotted later in the weekend laughing hysterically as she and her companion **BOB DYLAN** were thrown out of one of Dublin's

poshest saloons. It seems that Dylan's attire - snorkel anorak with ratfur trim, petrol attendant overalls and decaying snowboots ingeniously 'repaired' with chowing gum and elastoplasts - did not comply with the restaurant's dress code. Or anybody else's for that matter.

Other Dylan stories include that of him, Cash and Chrissie Hynde demanding a guided tour around Dublin's famed Guinness brewery at 4.30 in the morning; Dylan and Van 'Night Fever' Morrison in ultra-rocky 'thumbs in ball-loops, the lot!' 'frug' sensations on assorted local dancefloors, and Dylan insisting on walking two miles to his gig at The Point with no minder, no directions and 67p in his pocket through parts of Dublin Vietnam Vets and serial killers would think twice about.

Eventually, Dylan arrived only to be told: "F--- off, you old derrick... you're not Dylan" by gig security.

At least Dylan got a good show of support at his Point gig - Elvis Costello, Van Morrison, Johnny Cash, U2 etc, etc. . . What is it with all this insidious mutual back-slapping? Is there some musical freemason organisation we should know about? At his Hammersmith Apollo nights he only managed to attract the likes of **DAVE STEWART** and **ROGER DALTRY**. No wonder Dylan ended each show by throwing his harmonica at the tour manager and storming off into the night.

BONO'S BEANO

BONO and **BOB DYLAN** joined **VAN MORRISON** onstage at the Dublin Point last weekend. It was Bono's first appearance in his hometown for three years. He duetted with Morrison on "Gloria", before being joined by Dylan, Elvis Costello, Chrissie Hynde, Stevie Winwood and Kris Kristofferson for a version of Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue".

The previous evening, Dylan, Morrison and Bono had all dined together at the U2-owned Clarence Hotel where they surprised guests by singing a number of Dylan songs.

Dylan had been rehearsing in a room next to U2 at the Factory Studios much of the week before. At his Dublin Point show, the night before the Morrison gig, he cycled to his own gig with a minder, and then had a flaming row on his tour bus after the show and refused to travel on it.

A couple of nights later, all of U2, minus Adam Clayton, joined Johnny Cash and Kris Kristofferson at the Olympia Theatre for a version of the country classic, "Big River". They later met up with Sinead O'Connor at a Dublin nightclub.



A hard reign for Dylan's son to follow



LIKE FATHER: Jakob at 22



LIKE SON: Bob at 22



BROODING: Jakob Dylan heading his own band

THE similarities are uncanny; the haystack head of hair, brooding eyes and dishevelled clothes.

Surely this is the young Bob Dylan, a time-warped clone of the 51-year-old troubadour who tonight begins his final tour of Britain with a concert in London?

But no. It's Jakob Dylan, his youngest son whose band, The Wallflowers, is building up a critical head of steam both here and in America. A UK tour is planned for the spring — only weeks after Bob Dylan's finale — when the 'Flowers' brand of folk and punk will attempt to woo an entirely new generation.

It is undoubtedly a hard reign 22-year-old Jakob's going to follow: three decades of songs like 'Blowin' In The Wind', 'Tambourine Man', 'Knockin' On Heaven's Door' and 'Forever Young'.

Jakob has the same brooding despondency — and the same loathing of journalists — but he says: 'My dad's music has never really been an influence on me.'

'I grew up listening to British punk. I'm much more influenced by The Clash, The Jam and Elvis Costello.'

Classic

'People always ask if being Bob's son affects the band, but I'm too busy with my own music to worry about what's gone before.'

Jakob wasn't even born when his father was a hippie icon and his mother, Sara

Lowndes, was the name and inspiration of one of the classic love songs of the Seventies. The couple divorced in 1977 when Jakob was seven.

The Wallflowers formed out of a series of jam sessions held at a bar in Los Angeles — and chose a name from an old Dylan song written when Jakob was still in nappies.

'It wasn't intentional,' he says. 'My dad's written a lot of songs. It's hard to find a title he ain't used yet. Obviously my dad has heard our songs, but he doesn't try to give me advice.'

'All this father/son stuff is in other people's minds.'

Refusing to compromise is just another family characteristic.

Jakob Dylan: 'I just want to make it on my own terms'

The son who won't play Dylan's tune

HUNCHED over his microphone, the lead singer of the Wallflowers is trying to work up the audience — a hard task when you are the support group.

There is something naggingly familiar about their sound. It isn't just the Hammond organ but the deep, gruff voice of the young man centre stage. When the spotlight floods the shadowed singer, all is illuminated, rekindling old memories blowing in the wind.

Jakob Dylan, Bob Dylan's youngest child, is 23 and has slightly finer features than his famous father, but they share the same unmistakable profile and piercing blue eyes.

Jakob, however, is not just wary but deliberately avoids comparison with his father, preferring to hide behind the anonymity of The Wallflowers, which frustrates his record company, Virgin America. While Julian Lennon, Wilson Phillips and many others have cashed in on their famous parentage, Jakob refuses to play the Dylan card.

'We worked really hard on this record and we don't want people to come and hear it for the wrong reasons,' he explains, dragging on another cigarette which gives his voice that familiar rough-hewn edge. 'Wilson Phillips I ain't and I'm proud of it. I played a long time before



Bob Dylan and son: A private relationship

by Robin Eggar

anybody gave a damn who I was. I couldn't get a gig at the local club, yet if I'd said who I was I'd have got it right away. Who wants to do that? Others might, but it sounds like a nightmare to me.

'I suppose I could have changed my name, but why should I? I'm proud of it. I just want to make it on my own terms.

'I've been asked what it's like

having a legend for a father ever since I can remember being asked questions. I couldn't imagine him being anyone else so it seems completely natural to me.

'I had a pretty normal upbringing and I'm still being brought up pretty normal.'

His relationship with his father is a private one. He was with Bob on his recent British tour but sat quietly in the back of the limousine.

'I grew up in recording studios, but any echoes of my dad's music you hear are just coincidences, echoes like you hear in many other bands. He likes my songs but doesn't try to give me advice. I have no desire to be

the voice of a generation. There are plenty of good ones out there already. No one wants to hear another peace song. If John Lennon, Bob Marley and my father couldn't get the point across, I don't think I will do any good.'

Jakob couldn't care less that he was born two weeks after his father played the Isle of Wight Festival or that Forever Young was written about his babyhood.

He was eight when his parents divorced. His mother, Sara Lowndes Dylan, left Malibu with her five children and moved into the Hollywood Hills.

'We weren't brought up as spoilt LA brats but I always had a good meal every day. My older brothers and sisters always played music. From the time I wore a nappy there were always instruments around, but the first time it really struck me was an old upright wooden piano up against the wall. I always wanted to know how to play that.'

Jakob demanded his own guitar at 12. 'I realised that I wasn't going to make it in a band just playing so I decided to go onto writing and singing. I didn't write my first decent song until I was 19, which is pretty late, but I have always wanted to make music for a living.'



DYLAN: JUNIOR... A TIGHT LIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK



Picture: DAVID KOPPEL

THERE'S no disguising the family resemblance between Bob Dylan and his son Jakob.

The 51-year-old rock legend has always preferred to let his music do the talking. And arriving at their London hotel

yesterday, Dylan Junior displayed the tattoo charm for which his father is so famous.

The pair, both sporting leather jackets, stayed tight-lipped during a drive through Kensington. Jakob, 22-year-old

leader of up-and-coming American band The Wallflowers, lacked only a pair of dark glasses to complete his picture of dad.

His father, dishevelled as usual, is performing six sell-out shows in what fans

feel will be his final stage appearance in London.

But with an heir already displaying a willingness to take up the mantle, it seems that the times may not be changing that much.

Pop concert Dylan

What drives Bob Dylan on to tour and tour again remains a profound mystery. The never-ending circuits of the world must fulfil some deep psychological need that a more sedentary form of existence could not. For Dylan to stay in seclusion, dispensing the occasional album with the seigneurial flourish befitting a rock legend of his luminosity obviously would not suit him. Yet there is no evidence that he takes any obvious delight in the contact with his fans; for two hours he gives and the audience takes, while not a word is spoken and smiles are strictly rationed.

It is an uncomfortable prospect; there are too many gruesome reports from around the world of an apparently bored Dylan going through the motions oblivious of surroundings while his band does its best to second-guess the next move, to approach any appearance with positive expectations. Tuesday's concert was the third in Dylan's week-long London run. By his standards it was a relaxed and involved affair; at times he seemed almost perky. It was also, in its way, totally spell-binding.

There were plenty of ragged edges (does this man ever rehearse a song from beginning to end, one wonders?), a sprinkling of miscalculations (usually involving the harmonica), but never a hint that he was anything but fully engaged. His current four-piece band has a country-rock feel, leavening its heavyweight guitars and drums with string bass, slide guitar and mandolin; that sound was laid down at the very start of the set, moving from "Maggie's Farm" through "Every Grain of Sand" and "Tangled Up in Blue" (the resilience of this song in particular tested almost to destruction) on to a fierce, unforgiving "All Along the Watchtower" which gradually built in intensity and concentrated Dylan's efforts ever more. The same kind of momentum was generated at the end of the evening, by which point it was possible to adjudge that Dylan was, really, enjoying himself.

Perhaps that is the point. It is the search for the fix that comes from the occasional great performance which keeps him going, so that each concert is an experiment, an attempt to find another means to that end. How else to explain the constant worrying away at the lyrics and the melodic lines? In a treasurable acoustic set halfway through Dylan refurbished something of his most familiar songs from the sixties. There was nothing arbitrary or wilful about it — the tender way in which "Mr Tambourine Man" was recast, shorn of its yearning vocal line and delivered as an introverted chant complete with haunted harmonica coda, or "Don't Think Twice" had its melody completely recast seemed anything but arbitrary. For the fans hearing those songs now may be a precious exercise in nostalgia; for Dylan still, extraordinarily, they carry the potential for renewal and refinement.

Andrew Clements

★ *TIMES* are definitely a-changin'. When silver-haired playwright Tom Stoppard turned out to see his idol Bob Dylan along with us, and a couple of thousand others, he was reduced to buying his precious ticket from a tout.

And all attempts to appear forever young and hip — in a brown bomber jacket — were boosted when a burly security guard frisked him for "cameras and cans."

Time is right for Dylan to hang up his guitar

MUCH AS I always admired Bob Dylan, it was with a sigh of relief that I read he has done his last tour and decided to call it a day.

There is nothing more disappointing to a fan than to see their favourite, ageing singer trying to put the clock back to yesteryear and relive their young and rebellious days.

It is much nicer for people to sit back and listen to old records and remember the past than it is for them to be given a rude reminder of how old they themselves have become.

S Timms, South London

□ *DAILY EXPRESS* writer Frances Hubbard wants to know why Bob Dylan's popularity has endured. Well, like Frank Sinatra, that other crooner whose popularity has never waned, it is the ability to put across his messages of truth in music. The lyrics are good, the voice is still strong and, although Sinatra and Dylan are completely different, they are the masters of a once-proud era of popular music never to be forgotten.

Mrs S Lyons, Wembley, Middlesex

Times are certainly a-changing for Bob Dylan fans

THIS, promises Bob Dylan, will be his last British tour. The man who sung the anthem for an era by telling a generation of Flower Children to Get Stoned is 51 now, and his voice sounds considerably older.

But if you closed your eyes last night at the Hammersmith Odeon and forced your imagination to soar, you could — just — pretend you were sitting in the 20-year-old sunshine of Woodstock while he Knocked On Heaven's Door.

Though the audience then might have been younger, leaner and more subversive than the pony-tail and bomber-jacket crowd at Hammersmith, they could not have loved him more.

If the times have a-changed, Dylan still inspires passionate loyalty from his followers. He is a slightly creaky living legend who triggers a warm flood of nostalgia every time he opens his mouth.

No one could distinguish a word, thanks to the famous adenoidal Dylan diction. They lapped it up anyway.

Power

On first sight, it is hard to know why his popularity has endured. His stage presence is minimal, he makes no attempt to look animated and little pretence of liking all the people out there who paid £21 a ticket to hear him.

His rumped head was bent for most of the evening at right angles to the microphone, in a posture of intense, unsmiling concentration.

The voice, never exactly melodic, has turned into a shorthand version of its old self, with the whines and mumbles grossly exaggerated for easy recognition, and all the bits in between left out.

He sounds like a sozzled amateur impersonator who has stood up to do his Bob Dylan turn at a party.

But I quibble. Dylan has a power beyond mere basics like tunelessness. He is fascinating to watch simply because of his huge importance to modern rock music.

After half an hour or so you can even forgive the swallowed notes and gawky shuffling.

Dylan is to be admired for still doing what he's been doing for the last 30 years. We should remember him with affection.

FRANCES HUBBARD

Has the tambourine man lost his marbles?

FIRST, the good news. On his opening night at the Hammersmith Apollo, Bob Dylan gave a show which consisted almost entirely of old favourites from what is generally regarded as the golden age of his career — the opening decade. *Maggie's Farm*, *Mr Tambourine Man*, *Positively Fourth Street*, *Highway 61 Revisited*: truly, this was a timely reminder of the fact that Dylan was once the finest songwriter of his generation.

Now, the bad news. Few, if any, of these songs as performed on the night bore anything more than the most fleeting of resemblances to the original versions. The arrangements, the instrumentation and in particular

ROCK / David Cheal watches Bob Dylan mangle his own songs

those famous melodies and refrains were subjected to the kind of structural alterations for which planning permission ought to be required.

One verse of *Tangled Up in Blue*, for instance, was delivered almost entirely on one note: *Don't Think Twice* became a mumbled, meandering, throw-away vocal doodle; *Mr Tambourine Man* was a barely recognisable 10-minute whine.

So what's Dylan's game? It's hard to be sure, but the likeliest explanation is that he has become bored with singing *All Along the Watchtower* and *Ballad of a Thin Man* night after night. He has

written plenty of new material over the years, but Dylan himself must know that not much of it is particularly good, and that anyway what his fans want is to hear him singing the songs which made such an important contribution to the soundtrack of the Sixties and Seventies.

So, in the course of the so-called "never-ending tour" on which he is currently engaged, he has applied himself diligently to the task of reconstructing these mini-masterpieces in order both to keep his fans happy and to satisfy his own hunger for change.

All very good in theory, but the reality is that this pro-

cess of reconstruction appears to have been completely arbitrary: different tempi have been introduced, new instruments and keys have been experimented with, always with scant regard for the musical purpose of the originals.

Tangled Up in Blue, for instance, is one of the most poignant moments from that magnificent album commemorating love and loss. *Blood on the Tracks*: in the hands of the wizened Dylan of the Nineties, however, it completely lacks any kind of emotional impact.

What's most dispiriting about all this is that while it is plain to the uncommitted

observer that Dylan has lost his critical marbles, his fans — blinkered by a kind of pathological devotion to this enigmatic character — continue to cheer him to the rafters whatever he does. Doubtless if he were to play *Like a Rolling Stone* on a kazoo they would whoop and yelp with delight.

Frankly, they are kidding themselves (at £21 a seat, who can blame them?): this show was a bitter disappointment, and only the professionalism of his four-piece backing band — who must often have wondered whether they and Dylan were on the same planet, let alone playing the same songs — prevented it from sliding into complete disaster.

An alarmingly clumsy performer, he seemed unable to strap on a harmonica rack or plug in a guitar without getting his lead tangled up or bashing awkwardly into his microphone stand. And how is it possible to play the harmonica, professionally, for 30 years and still show no signs of improvement?

Some of the re-arrangements did throw new light on old songs, notably a sprightly, stripped-down version of "Mr Tambourine Man" sung with just an acoustic guitar and upright bass accompaniment. And there was a good feeling about the show as a whole, as if, for all its shambling imperfections, this was a performance from the heart. But if anyone other than Dylan played a set of 25-year-old songs as ineptly as this they would be laughed out of town.

What becomes a legend least?

Bob Dylan
Hammersmith Apollo

IN THE two years since Bob Dylan last played at this venue, the accolades have continued to pile up. Critics raved over the award-winning boxed-set, *The Bootleg Series*, a collection of previously unavailable material, released in 1991. Tributes flowed thick and fast when he turned 50 the same year. And last October, a galaxy of stars participated in a concert at Madison Square Garden to mark the thirtieth anniversary of his career as a recording artist.

But as a contemporary phenomenon Dylan's stock has never been lower. His core audience is aging and dropping away, and his only new album, the acoustic *Good As I Been To You*, was the latest in a long line of poor-selling, uninspired farragos.

In performance he has therefore been leaning heavily on material from his back pages for many years now, and with only a few exceptions, the choice of songs here made it a virtual Greatest Hits package: "Maggie's Farm", "All Along the Watchtower" (à la Jimi Hendrix), "Tangled Up in Blue", "Positively Fourth Street", "She Belongs to Me", "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and "Highway 61 Revisited" among them.

Which is not to say, given Dylan's famously idiosyncratic readings of his own compositions, that it was an especially predictable event. Most of these otherwise familiar songs were rejigged, and usually there were holes in the new arrangements big enough to drive a bus through.

Guitarist Johnny Jackson and bassist Tony Garnier provided the reliable backbone of his four-piece group, while Bucky Baxter added dapper steel guitar and mandolin colourings. But the drummer, apparently a last-minute replacement for the missing Ian Wallace, was less familiar with the arrangements, and Dylan's method of signalling the endings meant that most of the songs tended to fizzle out rather unconvincingly.

Half the time it looked as though Dylan himself did not know what was going on. He played a lot more guitar than usual, and launched into chaotic, jabbering little solo breaks whenever the mood took him. Disaster struck during an otherwise rather appealing version of "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)", when, accompanied only by upright bass and mandolin, Dylan repeatedly fumbled a section and the song ground to a halt. No one seemed bothered and the adoring crowd gave a mighty roar of approval at this latest evidence of its hero's humanity.

This is surely part of Dylan's problem. In an age of high-gloss, digitalised production values, Dylan's ramshackle manner and all-too-obvious propensity for making mistakes is part of his appeal. The sloppier his playing and the more unsympathetically he mauls the tunes and words of his songs, the louder his audience will applaud. Like the restaurant that never receives any complaints, it is a situation in which standards are likely to decline rather than improve.



Frustratingly unpredictable, ever charismatic, occasionally cantankerous but undeniably unique Bob Dylan was back in London last month to play yet another six shows on the Never-Ending Tour. Adrian Deevooy reports.

SUNDAY

Dylan's first live appearance in Britain for two years and the audience response is one of unequivocal confusion: some say it was memorable, others dismiss it as forgettable and, if pushed, one small Jewish songsmith would probably say it was regrettable.

The four-piece band (lead guitar, lap steel/slide/mandolin, upright/electric bass, drums) are at best approximate, at worst appalling and at all times bewildered. Arrangements are elasticised to allow Dylan to noodle interminably on his acoustic guitar, directionless double-string extemporisations fret-buzzingly strummed with his right thumbnail being the order of the day. It's a shambles but as always with Dylan, a compelling shambles. Your buttocks clench with anxiety so frequently that by the last encore they are positively prehensile. It's like sitting through a Mike Leigh season. But that, it seems, is the lot of a Dylan follower: some shows are a home defeat, others a no-score draw, then out of the blue he pulls off a handsome away win.

Tonight, however, was more of a mid-week training session. Things went badly from the off. As the generously be-stetsoned band kicked into the opener, Maggie's Farm, Dylan's mike-stand telescoped into itself, settling at waist height as if to record the doubtless fascinating reminiscences of the venerable songwriter's genitals.

A derelict rendition of Don't Think Twice, It's Alright has Dylan so embarrassed that he actually speaks to the audience. "He's rehearsed this a hundred times," he wheezes, alluding to his bass player who had inconveniently failed to read Dylan's mind. "Maybe I'll get rid of him." The expression on the bassist's face suggested he was thinking along similar lines.

Overheard audience comment:
"Depressing. Even living legends should rehearse sometimes."

Star rating: ★★

MONDAY

It has become a custom that the more devoted Dylan fans meet in the bar of the Hammersmith Novotel each evening pre-show to discuss events to date and speculate about the coming performances ("The chances of him doing Idiot Wind have got to be 20-1"). They're a decent bunch of people numbering lawyers, librarians and labourers. Only one of them wears his eccentricity on the outside. He is called Lambchop. He resembles Fagin's better looking younger brother and sports a feathered hat which he waves from the front row each evening. Last night he received that rarest of feathers when Dylan – who is notoriously myopic – leant down from the stage and spoke unto him. "I was shouting something at Bob and he said, 'What?' I think it was," recalls Lambchop coolly.

Tonight's show couldn't be further removed from last night's. Dylan's singing – which 24 hours

earlier had veered between a disinterested honk and a protracted catarrh solo – is superb, marinated in pathos and dripping wisdom. He actually plays his guitar rather than just scratching at it and remains engaged throughout, a reassuring contrast to the sleepwalker who performed yesterday.

Overheard audience comment:

"It's just so incredible to be in the same room as Bob Dylan."

Star rating: ★★ ★★

TUESDAY

"No reason to get excited," sings Dylan all on one note as the remoulded All Along The Watchtower chugs into its second verse. "Too fucking right there isn't," laughs Bob Geldof, tonight's companion, who up until the regular four-song acoustic section remains humorously but defiantly underwhelmed. The next line that grabs his attention is *She's a hypnotist collector/You are a walking antique* in *She Belongs To Me*. "God, he sang that with particular emphasis, didn't he?" he notes. Geldof first saw Dylan aged eight years old in Dublin in 1966. He last saw him from the wings of the then Hammersmith Odeon when he was, the big Irish boy recalls, "shite".

Wearing a designer-hostile cousin of the Starsky cardigan, Dylan delivers a superb acoustic set. Tomorrow Night and Jim Jones from Good As I Been To You are delivered with a gripping intensity and are rapturously applauded. For 30 minutes of the two and a quarter hour set the atmosphere transforms into that of a particularly attentive folk club. Dylan obviously appreciates this and summons some of the week's finest individual performances. Mr Tambourine Man and Don't Think Twice are given a slightly skiffish feel with the double bass holding the rhythm and Bucky Baxter's pedal-steel pining lonesomely in the distance. Dave Stewart appears before the encores and prompts Dylan to say, "(Mumble, mumble mumble) Dave Stewart!" By the end, even Geldof is begrudgingly impressed.

Overheard audience comment:

"He isn't so much singing as painting with his voice."

Star rating: ★★ ★★

WEDNESDAY

Day off (for all concerned).

THURSDAY

Dylan has this look. He lowers his head like an aggrieved bullock, hikes up his eyebrows and directs a piercing gaze at an unsuspecting band member. Getting caught in this beam could mean one of many things: a) take a solo, I'll see you at the start of the next verse; b) I'm about to take a solo, I could be some time; c) end the song after this chorus; d) Hebrew is only effective as a number system: discuss; e) hello there!

The band look back at The Commander helplessly, bringing to mind Miles Davis's insightful quote: "If you knew what I was thinking, you'd be me."

The level of concentration in the audience is especially high this evening. The Apollo is almost humming with the stuff. Minute changes to lyrics are clapped and tucked away for future Dylan discussions (the carpenter in Tangled Up In Blue is now a truck driver – a pithy comment on the ravages of recession or the failing of a faulty 51-year-old memory?) The harmonica breaks – the general standard of which have been terrific – are silently scrutinised for the tiniest of similarities to the original recorded version (invariably with no joy whatsoever).

Jim Jones gets such an emotional reaction – the applause dies down then swells up again and then again – that Dylan decides to treat the audience to the classic Zimathon Desolation Row but forgets the words halfway through. No-one minds, they all know them anyway.

He encores with What Good Am I?, Everything Is Broken (on which they sound like David Lynch's house band but slightly weirder) and a sad and poignant It Ain't Me Babe.

Overheard audience comment:

"It wasn't like any other concert I've ever been to. It was more like being in a weird film."

Star rating: ★★ ★★ ★★

FRIDAY

Tickets for tonight are tight. The touts blue-arse about, buying and selling. Every one of the six shows is sold out and business is good. That's a total of 15,000 people coming to watch Dylan savagely revise some of their favourite songs. It's a unique thing. You won't hear anyone else doing it. Eric may do an acoustic Layla and Elton may gospelise Your Song but no-one sets about their back catalogue quite like Dylan. He gets inside the melodies, inverts them, corrupts them, deconstructs and reassembles them. They may have started life as clean-cut sober tunes but tonight they're going home with someone else's trousers on their heads and lipstick on their thighs.

Friday's songs are no exception: Just Like A Woman is reflective, almost mournful; Simple Twist Of Fate, sung in a low cracked caw, brings a couple of people in Row R to tears and I And I, the volcanic centrepiece of each set (which Dylan told Leonard Cohen took him 15 minutes to write and takes almost as long to play) receives its most broodingly powerful reading thus far. This is music steeped in experience. The little girls – and there are a few here – don't have a clue what the old buzzard's on about but, for once, the grown-ups understand.

Overheard audience comment:

"I wasn't crying during Simple Twist Of Fate... I just had something in my eye."

Star rating: ★★ ★★

SATURDAY

Call it last night nerves but there's an argument brewing at the bar of the Novotel. Some people who are proudly boasting that they were out drinking with Dylan's minder until five this morning are unhappy about the guitar noodling (which, it must be argued, has become more and more fascinating).

"He did six songs in 45 minutes," complains a man who is big in double-glazing. "If he cut out all that messing about on his guitar, he could have done 11 or 12."

"My problem," grumbles an American, "is all these 12-bar things. He does Cat's In The Hat, Highway 61 and then Everything's Broken almost in a line."

"I just wish he'd vary the set more," moans a brassy blonde woman.

Could Dylan have overheard? The set starts with a frisky Rainy Day Women which leads into a tremulous Pretty Peggy-O and then a version of Shooting Star which manages, if such a thing were conceivable, to be simultaneously tender and apocalyptic. Later he strolls through It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry, the residency's only true blues.

Tonight Dylan is not so much dressed as swaddled in his bus conductor jeans, a Japanese jacket, a loose black and white shirt, a thick black leather waistcoat, a white sweatshirt and a string vest. Unsurprisingly, perspiration is cascading down his magnificent nose. Dave Stewart reappears for Highway 61 in full rock'n'roll matador garb and despite many attempts to indulge in a spot of onstage bonding with Dylan is pretty well ignored.

Six nights of studying this mesmeric figure on stage – back-lit, shadow-strewn, expression inscrutable – has become like staring at the sea. He begins to mutate into his 20-year-old self, then it's 1965 and he's on stage in Don't Look Back, the next moment he's at Concert For Bangla Desh, then Earl's Court in '78 and there's the same expression he had on the back of Oh Mercy. And he's singing *Take me disappearing through the smoke ruins of my mind/Down the foggy ruins of time*. Crikey! It's no wonder these poor people go mad. More!

Overheard audience comment:

"You hear people talking about charisma but now I understand what it is."

Star rating: ★★ ★★ ★★

Thanks to John Bauldie and Mark Ellen for their help.

His back pages



There are a million stories about Bob Dylan, but let's face it, the best ones must come from fellow legends. So come on down Keith Richards. As the famously dilapidated old Stone tells it, the two of them were in Seville for some recent gung-ho guitar festival. Dylan apparently turned to Keef and observed, "I could do what you do but you could never write *Desolation Row*."

It's not easy to wind up the man who has probably done more for Jack Daniels sales than any other burbon drinker, but then Bobby always was a confrontational old so-and-so. Which is partly why we love him so much... and probably why he happened in the first place.

The Beatles might have brought about teenage revolution, but Dylan laid the foundation stone of rock culture. In words and music he articulated the sentiments vaguely aroused by Brando and Presley. Hailing from a respectable middle class home in the American mid-west, where his shop-keeper parents would display his albums, Dylan was the delin-

tive rebel without a cause.

The early '60s U.S.A. might have been close to the McCarthy witch-hunts, but there were also prosperity. Vietnam had yet to become a big issue and the only kindered spirits our Bob could find when he hit Greenwich Village were a bunch of superannuated protest singers. Pete Seeger and the ailing Woody Guthrie might have been cult figures on the folk scene but they were soon made aware of imminent eclipse.

After begging and borrowing and kipping on floors, Dylan got himself gigs at the appropriate venues. He also secured a record deal by performing live in an A&R man's office. The first three albums fall into the category of acoustic/protest; classic love songs like *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right* acting as an antidote to the historic *Blowin' In The Wind* and the vitriolic *Masters of War*.

The third LP, *The Times They Are A-Changin'* is a social conscience job, the title track and *With God On Our Side* giving way to serious tales of injustice (*Ballad Of Hollis Brown*, *Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll*). The subsequent *Another Side Of* told a more personal tale (*My Back Pages*, the

The recent 30th anniversary tribute showed a very rough looking Bob Dylan; his voice cracked and dry, his playing lazy. He wasn't always like this, y'know. As **Mike Nicholls** recalls, there was a time when the Great Zim was helping to shape the future of modern rock music

monumental *It Ain't Me Babe*) and then the fun really began.

It was said by literary academics (wake up at the back there!) that if Shakespeare had only written *King Lear*, he would still be regarded as the finest poet in the English language. Now get this. If Dylan had only recorded *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited* he could still rightly claim to be the king of rock 'n' roll.

At the start of his career, he declared his ambition was to be "bigger than Elvis". With these records this was something the singer-songwriter (as opposed to singer-bodyshaker) achieved. Lyrically, Dylan could be found completely out there, presumably a tribute to the substances being introduced to his spindly frame. Astonishingly both albums appeared within five months of one another in 1965, a remarkable feat in view of the verbal density of tracks like *Mr Tambourine Man*, *Gates Of Eden* and *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)* all of which comprised most part of one side of the first of these LPs.

Their intense metaphors ("Take me disappearing through the smoke rings of your mind/Down the foggy ruins of time" and "With his candle lit into the sun: Though its glow is waxed in black) contrast dramatically with exquisite ballads like *She Belongs To Me* and *Love Minus Zero/No Limit* ("She knows too much to argue or to judge").

Highway 61 is probably Dylan's first full-blown rock record. It opens with Al Kooper's Hammond Organ intro to *Like A Rolling Stone*, the first single daring to clock in at around seven minutes. *Ballad of A Thin Man*, *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues* and *Desolation Row* reprise the previous album's excursion into the realms of the surreal ("Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot/Fighting in the captain's tower"), overshadowing the next album *Blonde On Blonde*.

As if cutting six startling albums

in three years wasn't enough, the mid-60s also saw Dylan getting up to various other tricks. A controversial trip to Britain was captured on the hugely entertaining Pennnebaker documentary, *Don't Look Back*, and there was even an anthology of poetry, *Tarantula*. Meanwhile, he was forever touring the States: on one particular outing stopping off at each post office to collect packs of goodies dispatched from his office.

Naturally, this punishing pace had to stop. It did so via a 'motorbike accident' in 1967, when his only release was a greatest hits collection. Other interpretations of this mystery seclusion include putting in some months at a drying out clinic, but hopefully the truth will never be known. Less mythical is the fact that with the exception of 1975's *Blood On The Tracks*, Bob never regained his mid-60s stride.

'68's *John Wesley Harding* had a certain monochrome char, while *Nashville Skyline* ('69) and *Planet Waves* ('74) both contained pleasant songs. The following year's *Rolling Thunder Revue* tour (featuring ex-Spider From Mars Mick Ronson and former Byrd Roger McGuinn, who apparently went off with Bob's wife) was good low key fun, much better than his Earls Court and Blackbushe dates in the summer of '78. As his UK tours became more frequent, so did the mediocrity of his output, with most of the '80s albums like *Empire Burlesque* and *Dylan & The Dead* scarcely being fit to grace his name. Still you want genius, you take whatever comes with it. Last time he played Hammersmith ('91), I had to walk out.

Some say that in a perfect world Bob Dylan would have died in that motorcycle accident. But then there would have been no *Blood On The Tracks*, just a very contrary corpse. **Bob Dylan plays the Hammersmith Apollo on February 7-9, 11-13.**

Nearly everything is working perfectly

Bob Dylan
Hammersmith Apollo, London

When Bob Dylan is good, he is surprisingly good — such is the resigned expectation, even among the zealots in his audience, that he will do little more than stand on public display like the Ancient Icon who refuses to crumble gracefully.

Night One of his latest week-long London residency, therefore, was something of an astonishment. Dylan re-introduced into his work a few qualities which have been missing too often in the last decade: enthusiasm, for a start, also exuberance, not to mention an ability to remember some of his own best-known lyrics.

From the opening *Maggie's Farm* to the closing encore *Everything Is Broken*, he delivered more than two hours-worth of spirited selections ranging from 60s classics to his latest acoustic blues re-workings.

Chaos always threatened of course. There was the occasional misplaced

harmonica, and the frequent lost chord, but then every vintage Dylan show has been a narrow tightrope walk between confusion and brilliance. Backed by a tightly effective bar-room band, Dylan himself concentrated much time on his own guitar playing, a skill which seemed to have been long-lost during the years when he chose simply to stand up and strum.

His choice of playlist was less than adventurous, but on the night three landmark songs from different eras — *She Belongs To Me*, *Tangled Up In Blue* and *I And I* — reached standards that compared with any known versions in the past, on stage or on record.

According to uncorroborated rumour, this tour is Dylan's farewell to live performance. If it were so, then it would be a pity; the best might already have been, but on this evidence there is still a great deal of excellence to come.

□ Until Saturday. Tickets: £21.

Dennis Ellam



Spirited performer: Bob Dylan.

Rock

ROCK

Bringing it all back home

By Don Carnell

Bob Dylan's gigs are legendary for their disregard of the rules of rock; not for him the well organised, immaculately crafted show that passes for a concert these days. And indeed, on Sunday night at the Hammersmith Apollo, the chaos theory was borne out once more.

Songs were reworked and reshaped, played at different tempos with different arrangements, and seemed to come as much of a surprise to the backing band — drums, electric lead, upright double-bass, and a pedal steel guitarist doubling up on bottleneck and mandolin — as they did to the audience.

The stab at "Don't Think Twice,"

for example, came to a meandering stop halfway through.

But out of this apparent wreckage, drawn by the acoustic-wielding pirate captain himself, comes the magic.

The night's, acoustic, version of "Positively 4th Street" was mesmeric. Slowed down to half-speed, it had Dylan spitting out the words with a venom of which I thought he was no longer capable.

This was followed by a jazz-tinged "Memphis Blues Again" with the pedal steel guitar taking the organ part and then, before we knew it, we were carried into a sad, country version of "Love Minus Zero."

An hour passed before we heard anything from the latest recording, "Good As I Been To You." This came in the shape of an indifferent "Tomorrow Night" and a crackling "Jim Jones," the latter prefaced by his first words of the evening: "Hello everybody."

Next came the crowd-pleasing "Mr Tambourine Man," revamped to such an extent that I found myself actually *listening* to — and approving of — the song, as if for the first time.

By now, the night was more than a wallow in nostalgia, it was a great night of music. To crown it all, out came the harmonica for a lengthy solo.

Having begun with the song that normally concludes his concerts —

"Maggie's Farm" — followed by a Hendrix-inspired "All Along the Watchtower" and a plaintive "Lenny Bruce," Dylan treated us to a relatively unusual excursion through his back catalogue — "Cats in the Well" and "I and I" making rare appearances — before waltzing back to a country-style "The Times They Are A-Changin'."

Predictably unpredictable, Bob switched to electric guitar for the closing number, a scorching "Highway 61," fuelled by a pedal steel "police siren."

The encore was inevitable, its content wasn't: a doomy "Ballad of a Thin Man" and a ragged "Everything is Broken." Two hours-plus of fresh and vigorous performance — quite a feat for a 51-year-old man, five years into the "Never Ending Tour."

Why does he carry on? Even hardcore devotees admit the voice has gone. He has nothing left to prove — he quite simply changed the face of modern popular music for ever and that's an act that can't be repeated.

But there he stands, legs astride and guitar strapped high on his chest, motored by whatever demons drive him, centre-stage, night after night, like some ageing, paunchy prizefighter, singing songs that his followers know better than he does.

Maybe we should just be thankful that the only thing he knows how to do is to keep on keepin' on.

Don't call him a legend

For Bob Dylan, what's important isn't the legend, but the art, the work: "If you try to act a legend, it's nothing but hype."

JAY KIRSCHENMANN
Herald Staff Writer

Sparking controversy and setting trends for more than 30 years, the singing poet Bob Dylan is on the road.

Actually, he never left the road. He's still on what Dylan-watchers call the "Never Ending Tour," a several-year, ongoing road show that is climbing toward 500 performances seen by millions of fans around the world.

Dylan, famous for songs like *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, *Blowin' In The Wind*, *Just Like A Woman* and *Lay Lady Lay*, plays small halls. Tickets for his show Monday at Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, Sarasota, sold out in three hours.

Local musician John Prestia said he never camped out for tickets for any artist, but he did for the Dylan show.

"I played that night until 2 or 3 a.m., then went straight to Van Wezel and plopped down on the sidewalk with some other folks, playing Scrabble and talking all night," Prestia said. "He's a legend. I just had to get tickets to that show."

Dylan is a modest, subdued man, according to the few interviews he granted during the past few years.

"Nostalgia is death," he sharply told Robert Hilburn of the *Los Angeles Times* in a February interview. (Hilburn has interviewed Dylan several times during the past few years.)

"It wasn't me who called myself a legend," Dylan said. "It was thrown at me by editors in the media who wanted to play around with me or have something new to tell their readers. But it stuck. It was important for me to come to the bottom of this legend thing, which has no reality at all. What's important isn't the legend, but the art, the work . . . If you try to act a legend, it's nothing but hype."

He dismissed many of Hilburn's questions about the '60s as "ancient history." When someone on his tour bus gave him a copy of the 278-page *Tangled Up In Tapes* book, a chronicle of the last half

Music makers:
Who: Bob Dylan
Where: Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall,
777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota
When: 8:15 p.m. Monday
Tickets: Sold out
Information: 953-3366

of Dylan's 32-year career, he briefly looked at it and then gave it back.

The book includes the places, dates and song titles he sang at various concerts. When Dylan handed the book back, he said, "Now, I've already been all those places and done all those things," Hilburn wrote. "Now if you ever find a book out there that's going to tell me where I'm going, I might be interested."

Dylan, 51, was born Robert Allen Zimmerman in the mining town of Hibbing, Minn. He changed his name (honoring poet Dylan Thomas) in the late '50s while performing solo at coffeehouses and attending the University of Minnesota (he legally changed his name in 1962).

He moved to New York in 1961 and soon was discovered by Columbia Records executive John Hammond, who heard Dylan play by accident during a rehearsal session of folk singer Carolyn Hester — Dylan was playing harmonica for Hester. Hammond set up Dylan's first recording session, according to *The Encyclopedia of Pop, Rock & Soul*.

Even though his first three albums were popular, remaining on best-seller lists for many weeks, Columbia almost missed the boat on his later classics when company executives talked about dropping the artist because they felt his style didn't fit the firm's roster, according to the *Encyclopedia*.

Much later in his career, Dylan eventually embraced, then renounced Christianity. During his "born again" period, 1979-82 or so, his concert tour was met with empty seats and, on some occasions, even boos. However, during that time he released the albums *Saved*, *Shot of Love* and *Slow Train Coming*, which rose to No. 3 on the charts and earned him a Grammy for one of the songs, *You Gotta Serve Somebody*.

From his early roots of simple folk songs accompanied only by his voice and harmonica, to drastic style swings, from full

rock bands to various styles of music, Dylan has continued to evolve and change despite what the fans said.

Last month, at Madison Square Garden, a stunning lineup of musicians joined Dylan for a four-hour, \$5 million tribute to Dylan and his music.

From George Harrison and Eric Clapton to the Clancy Brothers and Johnny Cash, the night proved why Dylan has been so influential and his music so important: He has transcended all the barriers. Lots of people say, "Good music is good music." Dylan, who sings Garthwick-Woody Guthrie, the Ink Spots and Stephen Foster, proves it.

"He absorbed everything," Liam Clancy, whose family was part of the rich Greenwich Village music scene Dylan joined in the early '60s, said in a recent Associated Press story. "When he started writing songs, it was shocking and frightening. It was as if he could tap into your mind."

On his latest single, *Good As I Been to You*, released Tuesday, Dylan turns back to basics, telling his musical tales with only his voice, guitar and harmonica. The album collects 13 old folk and blues songs, all apparently of significance to Dylan.

"What's almost entirely absent is polish, and some of the vocals are raw even by Dylan standards, giving the songs the one-lake feel he obviously wanted. The record doesn't even have a producer," David Hinckley, *New York Daily News* writer, said in his recent album review.

On the new album Dylan starts with the American folk classic *Frankie and Albert* and ends with the old-country fave *Fraggie Went a-Courtin'*. Among the cuts between are less-familiar tunes, such as *Arthur McBride* and *Canadee-I-O*.

Dylan dips into the blues for several standards, including *Tomorrow Night*, which for many years was Lonnie Johnson's theme, and *Step It Up and Go*, popularized by Blind Boy Fuller in the '30s, Hinckley wrote.

In an 8-year-old interview, again by Hilburn of the *Los Angeles Times*, Dylan sheds some light on his feeling about his style and the old tunes:

"When I started, I combined other people's styles unconsciously . . . I crossed Sonny Terry with the Stanley Brothers with Roscoe Holcombe with Big Bill Broonzy with Woody Guthrie . . . all the stuff that was dear to me.

"Everybody else tried to do an exact replica of what they heard," Dylan said. "I was doing it my own way because I wasn't as good as, say, Erik Darling or Tom Paley. So I had to take the songs and make them mine in a different way."

A Dylan chronology

John Bauldie wrote a chronology of Bob Dylan's career for Columbia Records. Here are the highlights:

1941 — Born May 24, Robert Allen Zimmerman in Hibbing, Minn.

1946 — First public performance, age 1, Bobby sings *Accentuate The Positive* for his grandmother, Anna.

1951 — Bob writes a poem for his mother, at age 10 — his first creative literary work.

1955 — Bob gets his first guitar. Hears Johnny Ray, Hank Williams and Little Richard. Plays in high school rock bands the following year: The Satin Tones and Elston Gunn & The Rock Boppers.

1960 — Gets first gigs after playing rock music for a year. Plays at Kinkytown coffeehouse called The 10 O'Clock Scholar.

1961 — Moves to New York, plays *Cafe Wha?* in Greenwich Village. First professional recording, playing harmonica behind Harry Belafonte on *Midnight Special*. Signed to Columbia Records and begins recording his first album, *Bob Dylan*, in November.

1962 — *Bob Dylan* released in March

Writes *Blowin' In The Wind*, which he records in July. Legally changes name to Bob Dylan in August.

1963 — Releases second LP, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, in May. Plays first major solo concert at New York Town Hall in April, then walks out on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, having been forbidden to sing *Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues*. Sings *Blowin' In The Wind* at the Newport Folk Festival in July — Dylan becomes a star.

1964 — Releases *Times They Are A-Changin'* and a new album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. Disappoints folk-music fans at Newport



Dylan in '63: He wrote 237 songs in three years.

Folk Festival in July, playing new, personal, non-protest songs. Meets The Beatles Aug. 25.

1965 — Releases *Like A Rolling Stone*, a song critics say is his greatest and most important song. Releases *Bringing It All Back Home* using electric backing musicians for the first time. Appears at the Newport Folk Festival when he is backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. Releases *Highway 61 Revisited*.

1966 — Releases *Blonde On Blonde* in Nashville. Plays with The Band, falls off motorcycle in Woodstock, N.Y., damages neck.

1968 — Performs three songs at the Woody Guthrie Memorial Concert, his first appearance since his accident. Had spent the past year making music with The Band in the basement of their house, Big Pink. Signed a five-year contract with Columbia in August '67. Records *Nashville Skyline* in '69.

1970 — Awarded honorary doctorate of music by Princeton University, releases *New Morning*.

1971 — Appears at the Concert for Bangladesh, organized by George Harrison, at Madison Square Garden.

1972-75 — Plays the outlaw Dylan in the film *Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid*; the film sound track and album Dylan released in '73; album *Planet Waves* and live LP *Before the Flood* released in '74; *Back on the Tracks* and

The Basement Tapes released in '75; records *Desire*, released in '76.

1976-78 — *Hard Rain* released in '76; Bob and Sara Dylan divorced in '77; Dylan's four-hour film *Renald & Clara* released in '78 to mixed reception. Begins huge world tour in the Far East in '78, the same year he released *Don't Stop Believin' At Budokan*.

1979-82 — Dylan is converted to Christianity in '79; *Slow Train Coming* is released. Wins 1980 Grammy Award for Best Male Rock Vocal Performance for *Gotta Serve Somebody*; *Saved* is released. *Shot of Love* released in '81; admitted to Songwriters' Hall of Fame in '82.

1983-85 — *Infinite* released in '83; *Real Love* released in '84; sings on *We Are the World*; *Empire Burlesque* and 53-track retrospective box set *Biograph* is released in '85.

1986-88 — Tours with Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, attracts audiences of more than one million, releases *Knocked Out Loaded* in '86; inducted into Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame and forms The Travelling Wilburys in his garage, releasing the Wilburys' first album in '88.

1989-91 — *Oh Mercy*, recorded in New Orleans, and *Dylan & The Dead* released in '89; *Under The Red Sky* and second Wilburys album released in '90; accepts Lifetime Achievement award at the Grammy Awards '91. Celebrated 50th birthday May 24, 1991.

Still live: Bob Zimmerman!

THROUGH the flaring lights it was possible to see the double chins waver as the famously doleful face bent to the microphone.

Now you would not think it to look at him

*But he was famous long ago
For playing the electric violin
On Desolation Row*

Behind me a woman stared through binoculars. "You can see all the wrinkles," she said. "Well, I suppose we've all got them now."

At the bar before Thursday's performance there had been much discussion as to why, at 51, Bob Dylan still puts himself through live shows. There is certainly no flicker on that lined countenance to suggest that he enjoys them. The critics have been less than enthusiastic for some time. This week the *Times* critic asked: "How is it possible to play the harmonica professionally for 30 years and still show no signs of improvement?" Last year a *Washington Post* correspondent went so far as to suggest, at the time of Dylan's Madison Square Garden concert, euthanasia.

Even his devout followers — and the Hammersmith Apollo has been packed out all week with them — admit that their hero, seen live, has some flaws. "He can be halfway through your favourite song until you realise which one it is," said Marcos September, a 21-year-old convert, a statement which was confirmed halfway through that night's concert when two Dylan devotees gave me two different titles for the song he was then singing.

Michael Stanhope, a teacher in higher education, said he had been listening to Dylan since he was a student at Newcastle University in 1966. He has all his albums, bar one, including the recent releases. "There's usually two or three great tracks on each album," he said. "I just love him." But even he, when I said I hoped he would enjoy the evening, said sadly: "I probably won't. I haven't enjoyed him for ages."

Still, when the singer appeared, the whole audience in the front stalls rose to its feet and began to sway to and fro to Dylan's lugubrious notes like so many snakes before a charmer.

It is possible, of course, that this charm partly resides in a kind of mutual masochism: that Dylan enjoys singing "such depressing songs... they're nothin' but the unwinding of my happiness" (as he wrote in *11 Outlined Epitaphs*) and that the audience enjoys hearing him suffer.

"I think he's a poet," said Paul Curinarski, 29, standing in the lobby, wearing, with his Levis, a mock 18th-century sailor's hat and



SANDRA BARWICK

a single ear-ring. "I've read William Blake and the beat poets, but Dylan's more relevant. I feel the pain in his songs." If his hero were to feel some more pain, he thought, he might regain his creative spark. He was talking to Sue Austin, 26, who appeared to confirm a masochist trend among the Dylanites.

"I had a friend who was a dope smoker who ended in a lunatic asylum," she said. "He used to play *Highway 61* all the time. At first I thought, 'Get this whining off!' But when he left I went and bought the album."

On Sunday night, depression, if not pain, had seemed to be evident. Not until half way through did Dylan begin to sing with any emotion. Watching him picking up his harmonica, to a roar from the crowd, I felt a surge of pity for him, as he were an ageing circus ele-

phant, condemned for ever to play old demeaning tricks to please the crowd. How must it feel to know that most people believe your best creative period was more than 20 years ago? The loudest applause, of course, came for the Sixties songs. When he sang:

*Your old road is
Rapidly again'
Please get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'*

it seemed sadly apposite, particularly when, on "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)", he stumbled and stopped altogether. "Go on, Bob! Go on!" men in the crowd cried, raucous and mournful, like geese on the wing, as though Bob needed the sympathy and support of the masses below to keep going. But by Thursday his mood seemed to have changed. He sang from the start with much more conviction, and kept the pace going, bowing as uproar greeted the end of each song.

For the times may be changing in his favour. There were many teenagers in the audience, drawn, they said, more by the music than the current Sixties revival.

"Music now," said Patrick Harte, 18, "is drivel. There's no soul in it."

"Yeah, my Dad listened to Dylan," said his friend Haley Ottaway, also 18. "But it doesn't put me off."

Marionne Juanette, 25, was wearing a floppy mock Sixties hat and pink fur coat. "I didn't like him at first," she said. "All that whingeing. Then you hear the lyrics. They're brilliant. I can dig where he's coming from."

By the bar two members of the Sixties generation were contemplating the revival of Dylan's music among the young of the Nineties with something approaching complacency. "I tell you, it makes your generation's taste in music valid," said one of them, a dental surgeon. "When I first heard it, wham! It's the most amazing thing I'd ever come across — just poetry. And



now, your kids listen to Bob Dylan and say, 'We agree with you'."

It is the poetry and the emotion behind it that make Dylan so beloved. The words are so muffled and droned in his live performances that the songs are almost as incomprehensible as opera in a strange language. It does not matter to his audiences, who have the words inside them: they are visibly in mystical communication with Bob, on his bad days or his good ones. What do the critics matter? Who cares for journalists? Not the man on the stage. As he wrote in *11 Outlined Epitaphs*:

*No, I shall not co-operate with
reporters' whims...
who have no way of knowin'
that I 'expose' myself
every time I step out
on the stage.*

Nic McAndrew, a busker, had come to hear him play. "He's a genius," he said. "People like Wordsworth, you're force fed and you don't understand. This guy says it plain. If you think about it, he's a busker of genius who got lucky."

Expensive rehearsal

DYLAN is never the same twice, varies a lot from year to year, and has good nights, bad nights and great nights. He was solid in 1989, magnificent in 1990 and mediocre in 1991, but Sunday night's low-energy, low-volume 130-minute set was the biggest anti-climax since Mick Jagger's new solo album last week.

Stand-up bass man Tony Garnier and pedal steel player William Baxter came on in set-

sons, never a good sign. Drummer Winston Watson Jr was tight and busy, but far too light. Lanky lead guitarist John Jackson looked vaguely familiar from '91.

After two tame, anaemic numbers I thought: "Well, they can't play *All Along The Watchtower* with this band!" but that was the very next song — barely recognisable, lacking the drama that Neil Young gave it at the recent televised tribute from Madison Square Gardens.

Many songs were sloppy, with vague jams fizzling out incoherently. After an hour one gradually got used to the tame sound and feeble playing, and

Dylan's singing improved. A tinny harmonica solo on *Mr Tambourine Man* was quite touching, but when a semi-acoustic *Don't Think Twice, It's Alright* collapsed in chaos, Dylan grinned and said: "This has been rehearsed 100 times, it's just crazy."

The first night audience, younger than any Dylan crowd I have seen, stood throughout, applauding every song generously, apparently happy to have paid £21 to watch a rehearsal.

Myles Palmer

Pass Notes

No 82: Bob Dylan

Age: Could be anything between 40 and 83, but believed to be 51.

Appearance: Bag-person with mystical pretensions. Weird waxwork complexion, inexpertly applied dollops of eye make-up and taciturn manner suggest that Bob has been released into the community before completing course of treatment.

Early life: Born Robert Allan Zimmerman in Duluth, Minnesota, but busied himself systematically erasing his past. Visited dying Woody Guthrie in New York in 1960, a gesture which established his connection to American folk-mythology. By 1965, had had enough of folk music, Civil Rights and being followed everywhere by Joan Baez, and was credited with inventing "folk-rock" on Bringing It All Back Home album.

Original purpose of: To turn sixties pop from brainless, gormless din into adult medium exploding with social, political and psychological content. Even the all-conquering Beatles felt it necessary to follow Dylan's lead into psyche-probing imagery.

Purpose of Dylan in the nineties: To demonstrate that a living legend can "sing" like a sea-lion with emphysema and still draw full houses. To demonstrate that even a living legend could use a holiday. To provide living proof of all the horrible things Norman Tebbit says about the sixties. To keep biographers, book publishers and concert promoters in work.

Great things about Dylan: Unimpeachable coolness, circa 1965-66. Hilarious press conferences with woefully "square" reporters yet to be obliterated by the "New Journalism". Hired The Band (then called The Hawks) as backing musicians. Made several of the finest albums in rock history — Highway 61 Revisited, Blonde On Blonde, John Wesley Harding, Blood On The Tracks. Even managed classic "religious" album, Slow Train Coming.

Things we can blame Dylan for: Donovan. John Cooper Clarke. Dylanologists. Renaldo And Clara, the original unwatchable movie. Ruining careers of several artists hailed as "the new Dylan". The Traveling Wilburys. Farm Aid, invented after Bob's classic un-performance at Live Aid.

Famous catch-phrases: "To live outside the law you must be honest." "Even the President of the United States must sometimes have to stand naked." "The Times They Are A-Changin'." "The ghost of electricity howls in the bones of her face."

Worst line: "Wiggle wiggle wiggle like a bowl of soup".

Bitchiest remark: (to Keith Richards) "I could have written Satisfaction but you couldn't have written Desolation Row."

Bob's problem is: He's been Bob Dylan for so long that they won't let him be anybody else.

Least likely to do: Marry a nice Jewish girl and open a bagel factory.

Least likely to say: Anything, especially "I love you London, you're a beautiful audience."



A witness of the end

IT WAS a tough decision to miss the regular pilgrimage to London to see Bob Dylan last week. After all, I've seen him every time he's toured Britain since '66.

I kept telling myself that if you could have seen Elvis in '56 would you have really wanted to go along every time he played Vegas in the 70s?

While the decline in Dylan performances is not in the Presley league, it's undeniable that, over the past decade, many of his concerts have been lacklustre.

By Sunday I was registered with Dylanholics Anonymous and had made the decision — I wasn't going to go.

Quite how I wound up in Hammersmith on Monday night with a collection of sad old Dylan bores was beyond me. Probably something to do with having to complete the set. I've seen the other tours, could I really miss this one.

Anyway, Bob made some sort of effort, his guitar playing was remarkably good and the voice a cut above the tuneless rasp that it has descended to since Live Aid. Even the song selection was better than I might have hoped.

I enjoyed it, he remains a hero, yet it would be untrue if I didn't admit that Dylan has wilfully destroyed his own legend so much that I don't feel excited by his stage presence any more. Before the muse deserted him he was the most important figure in rock, now he's just another performer.

A few days later I went to see the lady on whom the muse has currently settled. Tanya Donnelly and her band, Belly, are stunningly good yet the only Belly most Dylan freaks understand is their own expanding girth.



DIEHARD fans of Bob Dylan were intrigued when, during his London concert last weekend, the idiosyncratic fiftysomething folkie, usually so taciturn between songs (not to say forgetful of their lyrics), dedicated "Mr Tambourine Man" to "Nick, the chef". It's common knowledge that many veteran rock stars long ago gave up sex and drugs in favour of food and drink — Dave Gilmour of Pink Floyd appeared as the guest restaurant critic in the *Times* recently — but who is this chef, so close to Dylan's stomach?

Anxious to discover the dark dietary secrets of the man who wrote "Talkin' Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues", the Gastropod called backstage, only to be told by Debbie, of the Popcorn catering company: "Dylan often says that onstage these days, but nobody knows what it means."

Could Bob have been referring to Nick Nosh, of the Nosh Brothers, self-styled "hooligan gourmands" who have just graduated from catering rock'n'roll receptions to running their own restaurant in London's Fulham Road? When the Gastropod put this question to him, Nick became evasive, admitting that he has met Bob Dylan, but denying he'd ever cooked for the great man. Then he added, "Forget about it, man, It's just a ragged clown behind, I wouldn't pay it any mind. It's just a shadow that you're Seein' that he's chasing."

Six days before Bob Dylan's Point concert, four longtime listeners tell Brian Boyd if the times have changed yet



Dick Spring: 'Bob Dylan could see through leaders'. Photograph: Eric Luke

How many roads must a man . . .

S EVEN years ago, I was asked to write an article on Bob Dylan for *In Dublin* magazine. Ever since then, every now and again I read learned commentators suggesting that I have no political philosophy other than what I picked up from Dylan's songs when I was in my impressionable 20s.

So here I am, doing it again. Watch out for the learned commentators — they're about to have another field day!

Back when I wrote that last article, I did something almost equally dangerous — I wore a leather jacket for the photographs that accompanied the piece. I'm astonished, even to this day, by the number of people who remember the leather jacket — and who were either horrified that a *Tánaiste* could wear such a thing, or delighted that the leader of the Labour Party could smile.

Seven years later, and even though "the times they are a changin'" your Bob Dylan fan is still leader of the Labour Party, back to being *Tánaiste* again, and still trying to smile. And if you'd been studying the budgetary arithmetic, and trying to reconcile it with the commitments we've made, you'd give credit for any attempts to smile.

Let's look at Bob Dylan in terms of a political philosophy, just for the sake of the learned commentators. It might owe a lot more to gut feeling than to lots and lots of bloodless erudition, but it's not half bad — nothing that makes you stop and think can be half bad.

For example, if you listen carefully to a song like *Masters of War* from 1963, it's hard to miss the sense of revulsion from much of the killing and slaughter that goes

hand in hand with military adventure: "You fasten the triggers, for the others to fire. / Then set back and watch while the death count gets higher / You hide in your mansion as young people's blood / Flows out of their bodies and into the mud."

Bob Dylan's images were the images of many of the folk-singers before him, especially people like his own hero, Woody Guthrie. But it was his voice that captured a world-wide audience for those images, and it was his images that informed and influenced change — changes in attitudes to authority, to democracy, and especially, later in the 1960s, to war.

There were other images in the songs too, even grimmer, more painful images, like in the *Ballad of Hollis Brown* about a hungry man who shot his wife and five children in a fit of despair. ("He looked for work and money and he walked a rugged mile — your children are so hungry that they don't know how to smile.")

AND THEN of course there were the "antheims" — *Blowin' in the Wind* and *The Times They Are a-Changin'*. In a sense, they were the two songs which best encapsulated both the freedom and the idealism of the 1960s — my 1960s anyway. They both spoke volumes to young people and to their worried parents — far more volumes than the more overtly rebellious forms of music.

Hand in hand with idealism went cynicism. The generation of change lost its respect for leaders. Partly that was because of the behaviour of the leaders (of course!) and partly it was because people like Bob Dylan could see through them.

Dylan wasn't just a cynic, of course, even though that's one of the qualities that makes all protest

meaningful. He was also intensely idiosyncratic, and could write songs that had to come only from some deep inner experience, shared by nobody else. It's one of the mysteries of those songs that someone like me couldn't possibly identify with them — but I do, every time I hear them, even more than 20 years later:

"Take me on a trip upon your magic swirling ship.
My tentacles have been stripped.
My hands can't feel to grip
My feet too numb to step, wait
only for my boot heels
To be wandering."

I've noticed, looking back over this, that I tend to use the past tense when talking about Bob Dylan, even though he's very much alive and kicking, as anyone who watched President Clinton's inauguration can testify. I suppose I have to admit that I tend to think of the past tense because Bob Dylan and I parted company when he discovered electric rock music (and I suppose around the same time I discovered politics).

But that shouldn't be taken to mean that I want to disavow the sense of identity I feel with Dylan and his music — far from it. Only recently, while I was still in opposition, and looking with a highly jaundiced eye at some of the things the last Government did, the following few lyrics came to mind:

"Johnny's in the basement
mixing up the medicine,
I'm on the pavement thinking
'bout the Government. . .
Get born, keep warm, short
pants, romance, learn to dance
Get dressed, get blessed, try to
be a success."

Who does it remind you of — and is Bob Dylan a prophet or what?

Dick Spring

Changed times, but the legend endures

"I THOUGHT he was dead until I heard he was coming to play here," said a late convert to the still living legend at the Bob Dylan concert in Dublin last night.

Spiky-haired 20-year-old Claudia Hocke from Dunnybrook normally listens to contemporary bands like Emotional Flat, but went along to the Point last night to see the man they say is now back in fashion.

"He's coming back — all the old stars from the sixties and seventies are," she said.

Judging by the average age of the crowd, the times are a-changing indeed for the old troubadour, who up until recently was regarded as as good as dead by many young people.

It seemed appropriate that Galway's The Slunning, with their punk-influenced rock and roll, were brought along as a support act to get the students and New Age hippy fans going before Dylan arrived.

Old age hippy fans, following him since the sixties and seventies, did not need a support act. As fortysomething fan Mike Hannon from Malahide observed, "This is my fifth time to see him. He's usually bad, but I keep coming back to see if he will do the business. He's still an enigma. He's still relevant."

Dublin solicitor Phil McEnroe added: "Dylan has always meant something to me, even if he keeps coming on late and being unpredictable. He now seems to mean

Dylan magic bridges the generations

By BARRY O'KELLY

something to every generation since the sixties."

The great bard's cross-over appeal was also notable in the backstage attendance. There to enjoy the gig in the VIP area were U2's Bono and The Edge, Elvis Costello, Kris Kristofferson — who took a break to appear on the *Late Late Show* — and the Hothouse Flowers' Liam O Maolala and Fiachna O Braonáin.

Out front, the capacity crowd of 7,000 were tapping their feet, swaying and bopping — depending on age.

But the 7,000 did not include photographers. The star's management ordered that no press photographers be allowed into the Point, before or during the concert.

Dylan himself acknowledged the recent comments on his renewed appeal, especially among the young, with a rare stage rendition of one of his sixties compositions, *My Back Pages*.

"Oh but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now," he sang.

Anne Doyle Newsreader

Dylan was God to me. I was a young teenager when *The Times They Are a-Changin'* came out and to people like me who thought we were really grown up and on the brink of a revolution we thought it was brilliant. My favourite ever Dylan song though is *Lay Lady Lay* and that came out just as I was starting college but I wouldn't read any significance into that.

I remember all the songs and when they came out — like *Maggie's Farm* was the summer of '66 — and I can place all the songs with different times in my life. The really important thing about Dylan is that he gave a voice to one's thoughts. I admit I gave up the ghost a bit during the '70s and the whole born-again thing but I went back and listened to them later.

To anybody from that era he is one of our own and I feel sorry for those who didn't grow up with them. I suppose we thought we could change the world, we didn't change much but we tried. Nobody now seems to be interested in that anymore. Everyone is concerned with self-advancement — but then it's much more cut-throat jobs these days. I still love it when he sings *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* . . . the flame of love still burns.

Kevin McAleer Comedian

I love *Blonde on Blonde* and *Highway 61 Revisited*; they are two of my favourite albums of all time. I'm not really the right age for Dylan — I came to him 10 years late. I started listening to him when I was 16 and wouldn't

have had that much appreciation of the lyrics at that stage but I liked the music.

I think he's still one of the lynchpins of rock music and he has influenced a lot of people who came after him. I didn't buy any of the albums he released in the '70s but you would always hear him being played and kept track of where he was at. I suppose I missed out a bit on all the protest song aspect to his songs because that wasn't really my generation. Some of his lines keep coming back to you. I like the one about "I started off on Bourbon but soon hit the harder stuff."

Dave Couse Singer with A House:

I'd been in the pub for about two hours and I found myself in conversation about music with a bloke who was singing the praises of Bob Dylan. I laughed and he asked me why, which was a good question, so I collected my thoughts. He gave me the usual potted history — arriving on the folk scene like a comet, soaring above the stratosphere on an electric guitar, the motorbike crash and the slow return to what my friend at the bar recognised as his top form.

It was time for the truth: Dylan arrived on a scene dominated by sanitised pop groups as a breath of scruffy fresh air with a beat-up acoustic guitar, harnessed his folk songs to the power of rock, became assimilated into the rock mainstream and disappeared. In 1966, forever.

Bands disappear all the time but rock was young and it held onto its heretics a little tighter than it does today. The person who learned the least from his early triumphs was Dylan himself.

Hey Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me . . .



● Bob Dylan fans in happy mood as they arrived for his concert at the Point Depot last night, from left, Amanda Connolly, Merrion Square, Dublin, Gary Heaford, Kilkenny, Jackie Connolly, Merrion Square and David McGiffen, Kilkenny.

Picture by Kenneth O'Halloran

New wave of Dylan fans at Point

THIRTY years ago in Murrays' record shop on the Quays I bought the first copy in Ireland of an LP by a then unknown American folk singer called Bob Dylan.

Because it was an import it cost 23 shillings — a huge sum in those days — but only a fraction of what each of the 5,000 plus fans paid to hear Dylan in The Point last night.

More than three quarters of them, I would guess hadn't even been a twinkle in their parents' eyes when Dylan was in his heyday. Teens and twenties everywhere, jeans and sweat-shirts but not a sign of beads, headbands or flower power.

A few balding pates

Bringing it all back to life

Review

By TONY O'BRIEN

HE'S 52 next May, has grizzled looks which would win him a part in *Dracula*, a voice which would have him booed off the stage in any pub, and his manner varies between weird and downright rude.

But then he's Bob Dylan and he wooed a jam-packed Point in Dublin last night with a stunning two-hour performance which had the fans gasping for more and the critics eating their words.

Too often dismissed as well past

his best, Dylan refuses to play the game and, just like he did when he strapped on an electric guitar all those years ago, he continually confounds and confuses.

Last night the great man decided to treat the fans to some of the jewels from his bulky treasure chest.

He opened with a dishevelled but identifiable *Maggie's Farm* and worked his way through everything

Strumming an acoustic guitar Dylan hunched over his microphone and delivered the musical landmarks.

It was the first night of his European tour, and he was obviously enjoying himself and the crowd's warm reaction. He even managed a few words of thanks.

McWEENEY'S PEOPLE



reflected the lights on the stage but last night's concert audience was very different from those who thronged to Frank Sinatra last year in their Armani suits and fur coats or the fortysomething hippies who brought their children and picnic baskets, to Simon and Garfunkle at the RDS a few years ago.

Among the unrepentant early Dylan fans there was RTE's head of music Kevin Healy, who told me that he had come because

he'd heard that this may be Dylan's last ever European tour.

"I went to see him in Slane a few years back but I could hardly see him we were so far away. At least here in The Point he will be close to the audience," Kevin said.

RTE newsman, Colm Connolly, no stranger himself to a rock and roll stage, couldn't get over the youthful audience. "I am glad to see another wrin-

kled rocker," he greeted me undiplomatically. "I was beginning to feel like a baby sitter."

So no captains of industry or senior politicians attempting to recapture their youth. But the real celebrities bided their time before arriving, and just before Dylan took the stage Bono and The Edge from U2 slipped into the Point barely noticed.

They joined veteran British rock and roller Steve Winwood, virtually a contemporary of Dylan's but wearing his years rather better. Also arriving just before the off were Liam O'Maonlaoi and his fellow Hot House Flowers and British singer songwriter Elvis Costello.



● Dylan . . . Rumour this could be his last ever European tour

Typical Dylan, ironic, enigmatic

Bob Dylan
The Point
Dave Fanning

REGARDLESS of how far you're prepared to bend the rules for Dylan, this "deconstruction" business eventually becomes a pain in the neck. He's been reinterpreting those 60s classics for over 20 years now, publicly executing the life, breath and soul out of each and every one of them.

I realise that in presentation, his one-dimensional approach is sometimes winningly perverse especially to some of the older diehards who'll take any ambiguity they can get, but the revisionist slayings he farms out to old meanings and moments is eventually quite wearing.

The opening on Friday night, *Maggie's Farm*, signalled a sigh of "same old Bob". *All Along The Watchtower* began like Hendrix and eventually expired undignified with an excruciating burst of harmonica. At the heart of *Tangled Up In Blue* is the poignant perspective placed on a time irrevocably gone; last night's version sadly proved this.

Positively 4th Street was positively unrecognisable. It was a shambles. *Stuck Inside Of Mobile* came to life in stages while *She Belongs To Me*, complete with pedal steel guitar solo, occasionally threatened to provide the sell-out crowd with a singalong chorus.

In the battle-scarred love songs, this was not the voice of a survivor hopefully headed for less traumatic times because Dylan isn't making any sense out of his back catalogue; he's just making money. If all of this seems churlish or sacrilegious, then so be it. Dylan undoubtedly defines 60s rock, but gigs like this are dull.

Musically, the leaden tempos that so often bypassed the flattened melodies were devoid of humour and light — unfortunately Dylan's idea of a tricky arrangement is to slur a few lines off-mike. When he took the spotlight with just a double bass as accompaniment, it was clear that understated care and an easy beat suited his casual middle-aged approach.

Jim Jones, from his current album, was the highlight here, while *Mr Tambourine Man* never got off the ground. *Don't Think Twice, It's Alright*, *The Times They Are A-Changing* and *Highway 61* found him cantering down the home stretch. *It Ain't Me Babe* finished the night on a high note.

One man's ceiling is another man's floor. Maybe the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are unworthy. For many, this gig was typical Dylan, ironic and enigmatic. I've had enough of those. I love Bob Dylan. I don't like his concerts too much.

THE BIG question being asked by many rock fans this weekend is: "Will Bob Dylan and Van Morrison jam together on stage in Dublin?" Being the myth-sustaining, cantankerous isolationists each can be, my suspicion is that they won't — though Bono just may make amends for his non-appearance at last year's Dylan tribute gig. In any case, the real question is: "When will song-poets such as Dylan and Morrison be set down together on a page — or, better still, an audio tape and studied in Irish schools and colleges as key figures in the cultural landscape of the 20th century?"

This is not to suggest that the academisation of such writers should be seen as synonymous with "legitimate" acceptance of their work. On the contrary, recognition of the art produced by pop icons such as Dylan and Morrison — and, equally, interpretative artists such as Elvis Presley — would legitimise literary and cultural studies for the broader possible base of people in Ireland. Indeed, such a step is an imperative in relation to the long-promised democratisation of the educational system in this country.

In this context the 30-year-old argument "Are Dylan's songs poetry?" is as outdated as both the divide between "high" and "low" culture it invariably signifies, and the reductive tendency to evaluate the arts outside their social setting. In an article on Dylan's poetics, published in *Esquire* magazine in May 1972, the literary critic Frank Kermode accurately identified the importance of feeding Dylan's work. "Since he writes the words with virtuoso performance in mind, they can't, on a page, be more than reminders, hints or shadows," he claimed. "His poems have to be open, empty, inviting collusion. To write this is to practise a very modern art."

In his Dylan biography, *No Direction Home*, Robert Shelton also notes that "as Dylan, a poet of the electronic age, entered millions of homes, poetry again became a democratic, social art." It was returned to its oral roots among the masses rather than preserved for academics and "the literary elite" — a fact acknowledged by Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who chose Dylan to represent the US at the Moscow International Poetry Festival in 1985.

As such, Dylan undoubtedly deserves his title as the most influential song-poet in the history of rock'n'roll. Arguably, as to whether he is its finest true poet faded in the light of such achievements. Far more importantly, by blending artistic influences from the French Symbolist poets, the Surrealists and Beats like Allen Ginsberg to Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie and Elvis, Dylan almost singlehandedly pushed rock music beyond the confines of Tin Pan Alley and into the post-modernist age. Likewise, with an attitude that was part Brando, part Dean but mostly that generation "him", he re-

defined the role of the rock star for the Sixties — and its audience.

Working from a blues-Brechtian base, Dylan similarly altered the art of singing, bringing rock songs closer to the rhythms of speech and poetry, and making self-expression more important than producing merely "beautiful sounds". Using guitar and harmonica in a similar manner, he also brought the means of production within reach of the countless Dylan clones that followed — and, as with his songs, dragged the look of rock hair/fans from the stage to the street, making proletarian denim the fabric of the decade.

Dylan's greatest achievement, however, was that he politicised rock in the broadest sense by becoming, according to Justin Weir's *Masters of Modern Culture*, "a focus first for radical dissent, then for psychic revolution", with albums like *The Times They Are A-Changing* and *Blonde On Blonde*. This view was echoed by Dick Spring recently in *The Irish Times*, and implied by Dylan's appearance at Bill Clinton's inaugural celebrations singing *Chimes of Freedom*.

Clinton, like Spring, would probably argue that his political idealism is rooted in a philosophy which was crystallised by Dylan when he tapped into the mood for change in the early 1960s.

But radical dissent among rock history revisionists, such as Harry Shapiro, in his book on drugs and popular music, *Waiting For The Man*, suggest that the route Dylan took to "psychic revolution" finally left him, and many of his more impressionable followers, "politically impotent" at that time. "Dylan went through some profound drug experiences during 1964-1965," Shapiro writes. "He turned his back on politics as marijuana and acid turned him in on himself. Within a few months the hard-nosed political reality of *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll* gave way to expressions of drug experiences like *Chimes of Freedom* and *Mr Tambourine Man*."

The singer and political activist — and Dylan's ex-lover — Joan Baez also claims they parted company "professionally" because "the message that comes through from Dylan in 1965/66 is 'let's all go home and smoke pot, because there's nothing else to do'." And yet such statements must be viewed in the context of her continuing anger at Dylan because he rarely, if ever, appeared at civil rights demonstrations or anti-Vietnam war rallies during the mid to late Sixties.

When attacked by folk-singer Phil Ochs for "turning his back on protest", Dylan reportedly retorted "politics is bullshit... the only thing that's real is inside you."

The Marxist critic Dave Barker also suggests that Dylan "sold out" when, with the release of *Nashville Skyline* in 1969, his lyrics began to "sentimentalise the family and legitimate sex and the home in ways totally supportive of the dominant ideology." Some feminists also described such songs as "propaganda" and dismissed at least one of his earlier

compositions, *Just Like A Woman* as "a catalogue of sexist slurs."

Further damaging his reputation with liberals, the Dylanologist A. J. Wechsman also claimed in 1971, that Dylan, the one-time author of the anti-militaristic *Masters of War*, and a man born Robert Zimmerman, "supports the racist and counter-revolutionary organisation, the Jewish Defence League... a militant organisation whose aim is to attack anyone they consider to be anti-Jewish."

Three years later Dylan's old friend Mimi Farrow responded to rumours that he was planning to donate part of the proceeds from his 1974 tour "to Israel", by publicly proclaiming that "richest purchasers have the right to know that they were contributing to a nation at war."

Others saw the song *Neighbourhood Bullets* from his 1984 album *Injuncts* as a defence of Zionism, which prompted Dylan to again declare "politics corrupts... politics kills people... politics is an instrument of the devil." The latter viewpoint, clearly a hangover from his exploration of right-wing Christian fun-



Van Morrison: "the best of his songs echo from a moment frozen just before the impending apocalypse"

damentalism, is reflected on 1970s albums such as *Saved*.

The rock critic Jon Landau argues that "Dylan always was acting as a religious mystic and never entered the political arena." While the second half of this claim may seem ludicrous in the light of his masterful exploration of sexual politics on 1974's *Blood on the Tracks*, few would dispute Landau's assertion that, in essence, Dylan has probably been "acting out a religious allegory on the political landscape of contemporary America" and that his concerns were primarily moral, "and moral in a religious Jewish, Christian sense."

Some Jews may argue that Dylan betrayed his race by never publicly declaring his Jewishness, or more directly drawing from "the prayer book and 5,000 years of prophets and pogroms" which Robert Shelton reports "stood behind him as he delivered the Hebrew scriptures in a form of chanting known as cantillation" during his bar mitzvah when he was 13. However, in reply to such critics Dylan says "I am a Jew. I touch my poetry, my life in ways

that I can't describe. Why should I declare something that should be so obvious?"

IT IS at this pivotal point, rather than through the more superficial stylistic similarities between their music, that Bob Dylan and Van Morrison may be better known as "Born-again Christians." But Morrison was born and raised a Jehovah's Witness, and the best of his songs, as with Dylan's, echo from a moment frozen just before the impending apocalypse, and resonate all the way back through his formative years in Belfast to his racial roots as a Celt.

Where they differ is that Dylan sings as if accepting the inevitability of those flames; Morrison more often sings as if trying to sail right through them, back to that Edenic space known as Caledonia, "Cyprus Avenue" or "Coney Island." Nowhere is his longing for transcendence more tangible, or more perfectly realised, than on his first solo album *Astral Weeks*, which set in place the channels through which all his subsequent work would flow and evolve right up to the equally awful *Antar Sunset*.

It is this craving at the core of Morrison's work which makes a mockery of claims that he has "sold out" politically by never directly addressing the subject of "the troubles" in Northern Ireland in his work. When Bill Flanagan, in his book *Written In My Soul*, quoted the lines from *Celtic Ray*: "Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales/I can hear the mothers' voices calling 'Children, children' and asked if this was a comment on the British Isles being 'so divided', Morrison replied 'I wouldn't want to get into that territory... it's just basically a Celtic invocation. There's nothing political about it.' Despite his disclaimer Van Morrison clearly writes from "that territory."

Likewise Dylan could be exonerated, to a degree, from similar accusations. Following the Kennedy assassination and the acceleration of the Vietnam War, his work quite accurately reflected a modern-day Dante's Inferno, or *Desolation Row*, rather than the relatively infantile "hippie dream"; though that, of course, is not the part of the Sixties that people now choose to recall.

Van Morrison's major achievements in relation to Ireland is that by identifying those points at which Celtic invocation, music and poetry by the likes of Robert Burns and Yeats met Afro-American forces such as Ray Charles, Leadbelly and as with Dylan — Robert Johnson and Woody Guthrie, he gave Irish rock its original identity.

In this sense the work he has produced on albums and, maybe more importantly, during concerts, when he binds together his audience with those Celtic chants, will probably never be equalled, or surpassed. And no matter how each may feel about it, they belong together on a stage and in the pages of song/poetry anthologies, cultural studies and history books.

Dylan recruits Dub band for London gig

ROCK legend Bob Dylan was so impressed by a young Dublin band, The Frames, when he heard them rehearsing in a city studio this week, he invited them to support him at a show in London tonight.

Golden oldie Dylan, who performed in Dublin on Friday night, was surprised to discover that the lead singer of The Frames, Glen Hansard was one of the stars of the Commitments movie.

The Frames will take the



• Bob Dylan.

stage before him at London's Hammersmith Apollo.

Bob's back pages

Steinerranean Homesick Blues



BOB DYLAN As Good As I Been To You (Columbia)

Twenty five years after his eponymous debut, Dylan returns to his roots with a largely misguided attempt to do it all again. Which is to say this is an acoustic album of traditional folk numbers in the Guthrie/Leadbelly moanin'

folk-blues vein. Now it does have some good moments, most notably 'Tomorrow Night' and a version of 'Hard Times' but much of it just sounds old, tired and pained as Bobby slurs the words back up his nose and punctuates things with rasping harmonica. Too often it sounds like someone's parodying him. And the choice of material isn't anything like as inspired as that angry debut. It opens with a

version of 'Frankie and Johnny', inexplicably restyled as 'Frankie and Albert' and closes with a painful, interminable hash of nonsense folk tune 'Froggy Went A' Courtin'. By the time he ends with, "if you want anymore you can sing it for yourself", it'll be only the most ardent devotee who won't find themselves wishing they had.

Mike Davies

BOB DYLAN LIVE AND DANGEROUS

PETER DOGGETT WATCHES BOB DYLAN'S LATEST ATTEMPT TO TURN TIGHTROPE WALKING INTO A SPECTATOR SPORT AT LONDON'S HAMMERSMITH APOLLO



It's Sunday February 8th 1993, and gathered at the renamed Hammersmith Apollo are the members of the Dylan In February club. A thousand or so strong, though subdivided into scores of cliques and camps, these diehards don't associate the second month of the year with snowdrops or Valentine's Day. No, February brings A Week With Bob Dylan — six nights on a rollercoaster ride through paradise, hell and most points between, in search of that elusive and probably impossible fantasy: the perfect Dylan show.

The club last met in 1991, when snowdrifts and an appallingly under-rehearsed band didn't prevent them attending eight ramshackle, lacklustre shows — or cheering them to the rafters. What dragged them into the chill night air in 1991, and once more in 1993, were their inaugural meetings in 1990 — six shows, when night after night Dylan surpassed himself by breathing new life into his songs, culminating in an electric final night which might just have been his finest show in a decade.

This February, the omens are mixed. Reports from Dublin, two nights before, suggest that Dylan was tired, and probably a little emotional. Still, this is England — home of Dylan's most excessive supporters. If the ghost of Hammersmith '90 still howls in Dylan's memory, then he'll turn it on for the club members, one more night.

MEANDER

Or perhaps not. As the loose chords of the never-absent "Maggie's Farm" ring round the theatre, so do the cheers of the diehards. Only one thing is missing: Dylan's voice. The band meander through two, maybe three verses, before Bob wanders towards the front of the stage and starts muttering. A line or so later, he comes into mike range — and there we should perhaps draw a discreet veil over the proceedings.

There are some stark truths to confront. For my money, Dylan is one of a handful of truly remarkable interpretative singers — I'd single out Sinatra and Willie Nelson as his only rivals outside soul music. That doesn't mean that he always hits the notes, simply that (at his best) he always feels them.

But his vocal instrument, memorably described elsewhere as "a cross between Popeye and Donald Duck", is failing. He takes several songs to warm into each performance (which is why his cameo appearances on TV are so often disastrous); and his range, which once allowed him to swoop from a whisper to a roar in a matter of milli-seconds, has been drastically reduced by the ravages of age. All too often, Dylan on stage in 1993 is a husk of the performer he was even in 1990, his voice a monotone croak, apparently incapable of inflection or emotion.

That's the way it was on February 8th, at least, a performance made more memorable, if not exactly better, by Dylan's complete inability to sync up with his band. The first three years of the Never-Ending Tour — 1988 to 1990 — found guitarist G.E. Smith exercising his will to keep the show on the rails. Since his departure, after the Beacon Theater gigs in New York in September 1990, nothing has been the same. "The Beacon in 1989 was the peak," reckons Dylan's biographer, Clinton Heylin, "but Hammersmith and Paris in 1990 weren't far behind. Since G.E. left, though, there hasn't been a single performance that comes close to the best of the '88-'90 shows. For the first year after Jackson took over, the shows became weaker and weaker. The nadir was Europe in the summer of '91: there's an eight-minute version of 'New Morning' from Stuttgart, and I swear that not one word of the song is recognisable. That's the only time I can remember an entire retinue of attendant Bobcats turning to each other after a song and saying, 'What the hell was that?'"

Students in interpersonal dynamics lapped up the latest Hammersmith shows, as lead guitarist John Jackson desperately searched for a nod, even a glance of encouragement from his boss, only for Dylan to refuse to catch his eye. It took the irrepressible last-minute choice of percussionist, Winston Watson Jr., to capture Dylan's attention, with the result that Bob spent a significant proportion of each show with his back to the audience, throwing ragged guitar solos into Watson's bass drum.

That was scarcely the half of it. Dylan's capabilities as a guitar-player, miraculously renewed on his latest album, seemed to have deserted him on Hammersmith Sunday Night. Every song was extended beyond the boundaries of tolerance, with Dylan taking acoustic solo after acoustic solo, apparently determined to keep racking his guitar until the notes finally fell into the right order. On "Tangled Up In Blue", the mid-song interlude was so lengthy that it was a wonder Dylan could remember which number they were playing. Out in the cheap seats, people were sat head-in-hands, wondering why they were paying. And a few of the Dylan In February club roared as if it was the Second Coming.

Strangely, there were moments when it was — not on the four-chord "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right", which disintegrated beyond chaos into a total standstill, and drew one of Dylan's rare public smiles, but on acoustic renditions of "Tomorrow Night" and "Jim Jones" from the new album, and on a heartrending "I And I", which Dylan sang like a harbinger from hell. After that, even the predictable "Ballad Of A Thin Man" and "Highway 61 Revisited" carried some weight.

SHAMBOLIC

The week improved thereafter; it could hardly have been more shambolic. Monday night was greeted by some club members as a classic; Tuesday was stickier (by Dylan's standards) but not quite as inspired, though it had its moments. Dave Stewart spurred Dylan into a brief show of enthusiasm by supplying guitar on "Highway 61", and there was an entertaining "Mr Tambourine Man", where Dylan sang the same verse twice, and had embarked well into a third rendition before some distant alarm-bell reminded him why those words sounded strangely familiar.

Every show had its highlights, usually the same songs — "Tangled Up In Blue", the four-song acoustic set, and particularly "I And I". "Watching The River Flow" and "Every Grain Of Sand" were welcome additions to Tuesday's repertoire.

And then there was Thursday — not a patch on Monday, some said, though only after hearing I'd missed the earlier show. It was good enough for me, though. From the second Dylan arrived on stage, you could tell he was focused on the task ahead, and even "Maggie's Farm" was performed with some enthusiasm. Bob revamped the acoustic set for the only time that week, attempting to remember some of the words for "Desolation Row", and then

letting slip an angelic performance of "Girl From The North Country".

The best was yet to come, though — not just another staggering "I And I", but a version of "Simple Twist Of Fate" in which Dylan momentarily recaptured the emotion he felt when he wrote the song. He howled the final verse as if his lover had just abandoned him on the steps of the stage — a naked display of emotion that it was worth the week's ticket money to hear. When he replaced "Thin Man" with an anguished "What Good Am I", you could have transported me to heaven on the next District Line train.

Friday, by contrast, was a disappointment; Saturday began encouragingly enough, with a complete revamp of the opening electric set, taking in fine renditions of "It Takes A Lot To Laugh" and "Shooting Star", but then settled for safe options thereafter. That night, "I And I" and "Simple Twist" were only mildly brilliant.

Six shows, then; six very different experiences. But there were two common factors. Every night, whether Dylan had demolished his heritage or reinvented it, I heard casual punters leaving the theatre, vowing never to see a Dylan show again. And every night, most of the February Club were celebrating a triumph, even if it only existed in their heads.

I'm not pointing any fingers: for four nights at Hammersmith, I was a fully paid-up February Club member myself. And in retrospect, I wish I'd seen all six, and I'd go again tonight, if you could get me a ticket and the transatlantic airfare. But those extreme reactions — one, echoed in most press reviews, utterly dismissive of everything Dylan stands for, the other convinced that his artistry has survived, even if his voice is dying — intrigued me. What can we say about a performer who can sell out six solid nights at a 4,000-seater venue, and yet leave (at a guess) 50% of his audience unsatisfied?

ENTERTAINMENT

Well, the first thing you have to do is throw some preconceptions out the window. One thing Dylan is *not* — and I can't think of anyone else in popular music this applies to — is an entertainer. That doesn't mean his shows aren't entertaining, whether he's abandoning his band midway through "Don't Think Twice" or forcing "I And I" through his lips like molten fire. But entertainment, in the show-business "is everybody having a good time tonight?" sense, has nothing to do with Bob Dylan concerts in the 1990s.

That's tough on people who've come for entertainment — the ones who wanted to see Dylan the same way they saw McCartney or the Stones or Dire Straits, but who'd no sooner buy his latest album than they would a harmonica-rack. What you get with Beatie Paul, Knopfler and the rest, is a bottom-line of professionalism and competence. On a good night, you'll also get varying degrees of inspiration and musical brilliance. But at the very least, a McCartney or Dire Straits show will contain recognisable hit material, performed in a commercially acceptable style. And that is still what most people want from a night out with a rock band.

Not Bob Dylan — and not, therefore, Bob Dylan diehards either. What Dylan requires from a live show is communication — not with his audience, who can go a whole tour without so much as a 'hello', but with his own music and (sorry) 'art'. Dylan's live performances are as much a quest for inspiration for him as they are for his audience. We want him to achieve it; he wants to achieve it. But like anything that rests on being inspired, rather than manufactured, sometimes it just doesn't appear — or else it turns up for a second, allowing Dylan to invest one line of a song with incredible emotion, and then dissolves into the air.

"There are still moments in his shows that no-one else can touch," Clinton Heylin reckons. "That first 'I And I' was chilling — and to get moments like that makes every-

thing else worthwhile. But there are fewer of them these days than there used to be. His voice is going — the band is not up to scratch, either, but that's a secondary problem. It's fascinating to see him having to deal with the restrictions imposed upon him by his age, and by his failing physical powers. In many ways, his vocal problems make his command of phrasing more miraculous than it was when he was at his peak. But the price you pay is consistency."

After thirty years or more as a live performer, Dylan is no longer interested in competence: he needs magic. And at times, in even the direst show, he finds it. But to drag that gold sovereign from the well, there are nights when he has to dig around through layers of waste products that most performers would rather leave unstirred. Dylan is one of the few people prepared to dirty his hands in search of the moment which transcends everything; and he expects his audience to share the dirt if they want to share the reward.

That may make Dylan a genius or a confidence-man, but what it doesn't make him is predictable. It's been that way since the Never-Ending Tour began in 1988. It wasn't apparent at first, but by stripping away the big bands he'd been using for over a decade on the road, he also rejected any need to choreograph his shows. Put twelve musicians on a stage, and each one has to know what the rest are about to do. With three or four, they can bask it — and Dylan makes sure they do. Maybe that's why Dylan tolerates John Jackson's well-meaning but ineffectual guitar playing; it's one less opinion to clash with his own.

"I suspect the way ahead is to mute the band," Clinton Heylin believes. "Even with a four-piece line-up, the toll of performing in front of an electric band is becoming too much. There were times in his recent shows when he was struggling to make himself heard."

Play the tapes of even the finest Dylan shows since 1988, and something else becomes clear. The hit-and-frequently-miss nature of his current tour would be impossible to document on an official album. For a start, you need the visuals — Dylan rolling his eyes as one of his band begins a solo, sometimes smirking like a naughty toddler when some particularly outrageous guitar lick comes off, more often frowning and tossing his head as he hits a succession of clinkers, or finds himself marooned at the microphone with the wrong harmonica. Most importantly, you need to be there, to experience the battle between disaster and triumph that makes up every Dylan show. Stick that on CD, and all you hear, from even the strongest shows, is confusion. Sony can't sell an album of Dylan searching for his muse; though bootleggers can.

UNREPRESENTED

So Dylan's most intensive period of touring is completely unrepresented on official vinyl. And without exception, all Dylan's official live albums document his least interesting tours — least interesting but most acceptable to the general public. In 1974, 1978, 1984 — well, maybe not the 1987 shows with the Grateful Dead — Dylan, his band and his audience knew exactly what was happening. Reduce that to vinyl, and you have a handy souvenir of the shows, and little else. But the tours when Dylan was taking his life in his hands night after night — 1966, 1975, 1979, 1980, and every year since 1988 — they won't fit onto a record, or at least one that Sony think they can sell. (1976 is the exception that proves my rule, thank you very much.)

That's why the definitive Bob Dylan live collection isn't the catalogue of official releases listed elsewhere in this issue, or even the rows of unofficial tapes that fill the walls of the Dylan In February Club, but in the memory of those who've seen him perform — and maybe tonight, for a handful of minutes, on another stop of the Never-Ending Tour.

Thanks to Clinton Heylin and Johnny Rogan.

Don't look back it's the anorak brigade

BOB DYLAN has been making records for more than 30 years and somewhere at the Hammersmith Apollo there has to be someone who was there at the start.

It's probably got grey hair, but that doesn't narrow it down, not even if you assume he might also have a beard. In the foyer for the first of Dylan's six nights in London, there is grey hair everywhere. It comes in all sorts of unfashionable styles, with bushy sideburns, with walrus moustaches and above all with beards, wispy, bushy and everything in between.

The Original Dylan Fan is probably a little thicker around the middle than he used to be but many of these bearded

by Tim Cooper

pen pals and meet up whenever Bob is in town. Perhaps they are the people who arrive in the coaches that come from places like Middlesbrough, offering an evening with a living legend and, perhaps, a night at a central London hotel with some shopping thrown in. But the main attraction is Dylan, aged 61 and still going strong.

A glance around the foyer shows why: there are student types in their twenties wearing the sort of clothes that Dylan might remember from his early days. There are nice respectable couples in their thirties dressed in jumpers and jeans. But most of all there are men in their forties with not much hair on top, wearing woolies and

anoraks. Living legend he may be, but even his most ardent fans would have to admit that Dylan has made some quite awful records and given positively dreadful performances in the past. It takes a special talent, after all, to be the low point of your own tribute show, as Bob managed in New York recently.

Like football fans, Dylan fans keep coming back for more — "He's put me under stress at times but I'll always be there," says one older fan in the foyer. But why?

Rosanne Cleydon, 41, has come up from Bournemouth to see Bob two nights running. It's the Dylan voice that draws her, "that old gravelly voice. And the way he says nothing at all to the audience — you wait for the one word he might say."

She's accompanied by her fiancé, Adam Sinclair, who's 27 and just as fanatical about Dylan. "If he came on and spat on the stage, then walked off again, I'd still love it," he confessed. Luckily, the living legend provides better value for a £21 ticket than that.

For someone getting their first glimpse after three

decades, Dylan's arrival on stage is a bit of an anticlimax. His entrance with a four-piece band is greeted with enthusiasm but without the sort of hysteria one associates with a living legend.

It's several minutes before you realise you know the song they are playing. Then it's a shock to hear the strange squawk that emanates from him. You already know Dylan's voice was a nasal whine, but if they made him sound like this on Spitting Image you'd think they were being too cruel. Dylan, thank goodness, is not the sort of man to plug his latest LP, so we are treated instead to a band that likes to rock and roll its way through the old favourites, subject of course to Bob's rearranged interpretations.

Part of the pleasure, it would appear from the audience reaction, is in guessing which song he's playing before he starts singing. But once he starts, at least most of the songs are familiar enough for it not to be a problem that we can't understand a word he's singing.

There are whoops and yells when Dylan picks up a mouth organ in the middle of one song and there are chuckles when playful old Bob turns out to be teasing. About an hour later he has another go and this time it's for real, right in the middle of an acoustic Mr Tambourine Man.

It's not exactly the most tuneful sound on earth, but it is the sort of stuff from which living legends are made, the sort of thing you can tell your grandchildren about.

Bob Dylan (in disguise) greets Jack Bruce, during the

eighteenth annual Rock & Roll Hall of Fame dinner and ceremonies.



BOB DYLAN Hammersmith Apollo 7/2/93

By the looks of it, we were the same audience that had turned up previously at the Isle of Wight and then Blackbushe, clapping some of the same songs. Any subsequent generation was heavily outnumbered; Bob Dylan has not attracted new adherents in the same way that his Sixties contemporaries like the Stones or Neil Young have. We view each other from below receding grey-streaked hairlines (for the true Bob Dylan fan scorns Grecian 2000) wondering about people we used to know, and if this was the avenue on which we were destined to meet again some day.

Dylan himself was manifested in the guise of a born-again guitarist with a Harpo Marx hairdo and at once set about declaring his aversion to working on Maggie's Farm, the drill-like voice cutting through decades.

The best of a Dylan show is the tension between what he does to the song and what you know it ought to sound like. Paul McCartney, referring to his own new material recently said 'when we play it on stage it sounds exactly like the record'. He said it with a completely straight face and you really couldn't tell whether he was



Bob: still muddling through

taking the piss

Musically, the Apollo performance was true to form, all laced through with harmonies and jazzy guitar breaks, although the lyrics were done straight. The songs are a trawl through the opus — no chronology and no theme. Lenny Bruce, All Along The Watchtower, Tangled Up In Blue, The Memphis Blues Again, Tomorrow Night, Botany Bay, Mr Tambourine Man, Don't Think Twice. You think

each time — why particularly that one? Why now? Even the *Times They Are Changing* fits in somewhere. He plays it without self-parody and without a blush (maybe, he's a Clinton fan). It's a musical affair too, not your mere 'backing band'. Drums, string bass (occasionally electric), occasional Mandolin and pedal steel, and Dylan taking a high profile trading guitar licks and solos. The technique is there but he's not Pat Metheny nor yet Ry Cooder. In fact on *Mr Tambourine*

Man the tricky stuff between

Dylan's acoustic and his mandolin player falls apart entirely. The maestro explains that we'd really like it if they could only manage to play it through ('this has been rehearsed about 100 times!'). But it just doesn't happen. Cue for short break and inaudible exchanges between Dylan and band members. But the nature of Dylan's appeal is that, like Keith Richards, the things he does wrong get more

applause than the things he does right. The audience responds because, as always, Dylan is stretching himself. The songs are not just played, they are re-incarnated. Also, it's no 'plug the new album' tour. *Botany Bay* is the only track from *Good As I've Been To You*. For the rest, it's all the classics re-interpreted by the new Bob Dylan Jazz ensemble. Probably we would have applauded a rendition of *Home On The Range* for voice, xylophone and Andean nose flute. The key is the event, not the music. To reach Hammersmith, Dylan had come through wind, fire, revolution, revelation, the holy spirit, Jerry Garcia, Mark Knopfler, and Dave Stewart and acoustic folk. He does not give up and he does not play the nostalgia card as so easily he could.

Over the years a lot of kids have taken pot shots at him in order to make a name for themselves, but he has persisted in keeping on. On Sunday night, dispersing in the rainy streets of Hammersmith, there's a feeling that we got full measure. It isn't Dylan at his most inspirational, but you kind of think the ideas will keep coming, and there will be more *Desires*, and more *Blood On The Tracks*, and more *Street Legals*, in times to come.

Paul Ashford



Fervent fan Larry the Lamb surrounded by his Dylan collection. He has seen all his idol's British concerts since 1978

● When Bob Dylan took to the stage last night, he might have noticed a familiar face in the audience.

Sitting in the front row, seat A18, was Larry the Lamb. Larry has occupied seat A18 — about the closest it is possible to get to Bob

without perching on the microphone — every time Dylan has performed at Hammersmith.

When tickets go on sale, Larry is first in the queue and has now seen all 79 concerts Dylan has played in

Britain since 1978. "I have to go when he's playing," says Larry, who has 900 Bob tapes. "And I have to get close. You can read a lot in the face."

■ The best short film we've seen recently is sadly ineligible for the above Challenge. A poignant and amusingly framed portrait, **Bob Dylan Belfast '93** was the enterprising idea of some bright spark at Ulster Television. The living legend flew into Belfast Airport for a hastily arranged gig at the end of his recent European tour and the camera crew caught a nonplussed Dylan gazing vacantly and bemusedly at a very edgy fan following him through the terminal, keen but nervously asking Bob to autograph his album.

Despite Dylan's evident desire to be left alone — he gazes through the fan like he's a ghost, a sheet of glass or merely mad, then walks right past his chauffeur to stand in the taxi queue — the camera crew stick with him for some time. As he queues, the fan still hovers seemingly unable to believe that this really is Dylan, scuffling his feet, waiting for a Belfast taxi. The film fades out to the sound of Bob's recent wry recording of "Sitting On Top Of The World" and a woman moving away from the strange shambolic figure. Potently at its finest.

Pseud's Corner

Just the way he [Bob Dylan] moves his left leg is worth more than the complete works of Anthony Burgess.

MICHAEL GRAY
Daily Telegraph

MARION

Bob Dylan *Good As I Been to You*

Columbia Records

The temptation is strong to shrug off Bob Dylan's latest release. There are no Dylan originals here; this is a collection of traditionals and songs in the public domain. The first time you hear him singing, "Frog Went a' Courtin'," visions of Burl Ives may swim before your eyes. It's just Bob, his guitar and harmonica, so there's no session musician intrigue either. The title — *Good As I Been to You* — could be interpreted as a message to Columbia Records. As in, "Good as I been to you, you could just release this LP without complaint."

Yet there's a subtle strength to this work that grows with each listening. The more I listened, the more I was drawn to it. It's as if Dylan decided to pull a Ry Cooder, tipping his hat to those who went before him. But the sparseness of the arrangements allows Dylan to come through in these songs in a way that Cooder often does not, surrounded as he usually is by his latest sidekicks.

I was first struck by how accomplished Dylan has become as a blues guitarist. He's never going to patent any licks, but after 30 years of practice, he's got most of the basic ones down pretty well. Then there's his voice. It's perfect for this collection — from "Frankie and Albert" (AKA Johnnie) to "Black Jack Davey" to "Hard Times" and "You're Gonna Quit Me." Unlike his first couple LPs, where he did similar material and tried to sound world weary, this time we can hear he really is.

As the songs spun effortlessly by, I also began to hear some of the influences people love to bring up whenever two or more are gathered to discuss Dylan. "Tomorrow Night" could have easily served as the template for "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight;" I also seemed to hear the melody from "If You See Her Say Hello" on "Canadee-I-O."

Good As I Been To You won't be a big seller. It doesn't break any new ground (when was the last time Dylan did?). But longtime Dylan fans will want to pick it up for the above-mentioned reasons. And so will anyone else who enjoys well-honed folk blues songs. It's Dylan paying homage to songs and bluesmen who've played influential roles in his life, and he does them proud.

— Dan Cook

★★★ *Good As I Been To You*, Bob Dylan (Columbia). Not just an album of folk songs, but an album of obscure folk songs, this isn't likely to win Dylan many new fans. Strangely, while Dylan opted for tragic themes ("In My Time of Dyin'," "Man of Constant Sorrow," "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean") while selecting folk songs for his 1962 debut album — his most traditional folk album before this one — *Good As I Been To You* is dominated by story songs about double-crossing and/or rakish characters such as "Blackjack Davey," "Frankie & Albert" and "Diamond Joe," and ends with the children's rhyme, "Froggie Went A-Courtin'."

The album as a whole, though, has plenty of emotional depth and "Hard Times" and "Sittin' On Top of the World" in particular are infused with a deep sense of suffering. Throughout, Dylan sounds emotionally engaged in the material (though his strained, nasal voice does not make for easy listening) and his acoustic guitar playing demonstrates surprisingly intricate technique (given that Dylan has been content to strum an electric guitar throughout most of the '70s and '80s).

There are no revelations here, but as a tip of the hat to Dylan's folk influences as well as an engaging effort in its own right, this album does its job.

Meanwhile, the former voice of that same generation, Bob Dylan, is now a man so out of joint with the times that it hurts. *Good As I Been To You* (Columbia 472710 2) is, incredibly, the first since *Bob Dylan*, his 1962 debut, to feature the master's voice accompanied by nothing other than his own acoustic guitar and harmonica.

The 13 titles — all traditional folk

songs, such as "Frankie and Albert" and "Little Maggie" — are given the one-take, rambling, shambling, gotta-clothes-peg-on-muh-nose treatment that will surely prompt an involuntary wince from even the most diehard of fans. A chance hearing of "She Belongs To Me" on the radio the other day was a timely reminder both of the magnitude of Dylan's former brilliance and of the depths to which he has sunk with this embarrassing farrago.

Bob Dylan *Acoustic/Good As I Been To You*

★★★ (out of five)

As with all things Dylan, this collection of 13 traditional folk songs (out Tuesday) will mean radically different things to different people.

It's a sequel to his first album. It's a statement about the lack of merit in today's music. It's another way to let the air out of his own myth.

The cynical marketing angle — Dylan returning to his roots by recording everything in one take, with only his guitar and harmonica for accompaniment — can be dismissed pretty quickly.

While *Acoustic* has the same bare-bones sound as *Bob Dylan*, it leans more toward folk than the latter, which sounds surprisingly bluesy 30 years on.

There's also a lightheartedness here that's miles away from the first album's preoccupation with death. (Think of *In My Time Of Dyin'*, *Fixin' To Die* and the album's closer, *See That My Grave Is Kept Clean*. The closing song on the new album is *Froggie Went A Courtin'*.)

Acoustic's highlights include a raspy version of Stephen Foster's *Hard Times*, tackled recently by everyone from Emmylou Harris to Syd Straw, who recorded a stunning version in the late-'80s.

Step It Up And Go is slowed down dramatically from the almost frantic treatment it got from Leon Redbone a decade ago. *Sittin' On Top Of The World* sounds positively buoyant compared to the 35-year-old Howlin' Wolf version, while *Tomorrow Night* has the same feel as the slow, moody cover Elvis Presley laid down during the Sun sessions.

Maybe it's time to start taking Dylan at face value. If you do that, *Acoustic* is nothing more than a lovely collection of folk music. And nothing less.



By JOHN
SAKAMOTO



BOB DYLAN
"AS GOOD AS I'VE BEEN TO YOU"
COLUMBIA

As Dylan enters the third decade of his career, his latest effort finds the legend once again reinventing himself. *As Good As I've Been to You* is an album of traditional folk songs. Gone are the guest stars and electric guitars. Dylan cut the stripped-down album alone, with only his sparse acoustic guitar and harmonica accompanying his ballads.

Instead of the cheesy slow songs that metal bands claim are "ballads," Dylan reminds us of the traditional meaning of ballads - songs that tell a story. The lyrics here are all folktales, from the tragedy of "Frankie and Albert" to the children's verse of "Froggie Went A' Courtin'." Only three of the thirteen songs are Dylan originals, as they blend in well with the chestnuts he introduces to a new audience. His "You're Gonna Quit Me" sounds as if it could be an old Leadbelly song.

But Dylan's voice has slipped into self-parody. His nasal whine sounds more like Buckwheat from the Little Rascals. Still, he is Bob Dylan. And on songs such as the bluesy "Sittin' on Top of the World" and the great "Little Maggie," his style pays tribute to his original influence Woody Guthrie. On *As Good As I've Been to You*, Dylan gives his audience yet another chapter from a long tale and shows he has not forgotten from which he came.

-David Fenigsohn

BOB DYLAN: "Oh Mercy"	
(Columbia 465800 2)	(39.01)
BOB DYLAN: "Under The Red Sky"	
(Columbia 467188 2)	(35.33)

After a series of albums best described as erratic (from "Empire Burlesque" through to "Down To The Groove"), the release of "Oh Mercy" in 1989 prompted the usual flurry of 'comeback' stories in the press. The album coincided with the start of the 'Never-Ending Tour', though of course Dylan kept away from anything as obvious as using his tour band in the studio. Instead, Daniel Lanois provided a rich, occasionally obtrusive soundscape that reeked of ambient 'atmosphere', and the sharp focus of the production seems to have concentrated Dylan's mind on his songwriting. "Oh Mercy", now reduced to the 'Nice Price' ranks in time for the upcoming U.K. tour, was certainly Bob's most consistent album since "Slow Train Coming", and at its best — the heartbreaking "Most Of The Time" and "What Good Am I?", the apocalyptic "Ring Them Bells", the sly "Man In The Long Black Coat" — it neared classic status. It was also the most listener-friendly Dylan album since "Infidels", useful for playing to those who complained that Dylan hadn't been the same since 1965/1966/1975/1978 (highlight the tour of your choice).

12/21/92
 Dear Dave;
 At latest count Dylan is
 entering the fourth, not
 third, decade of his career.
 But then, what's a
 legend without the missing
 years.

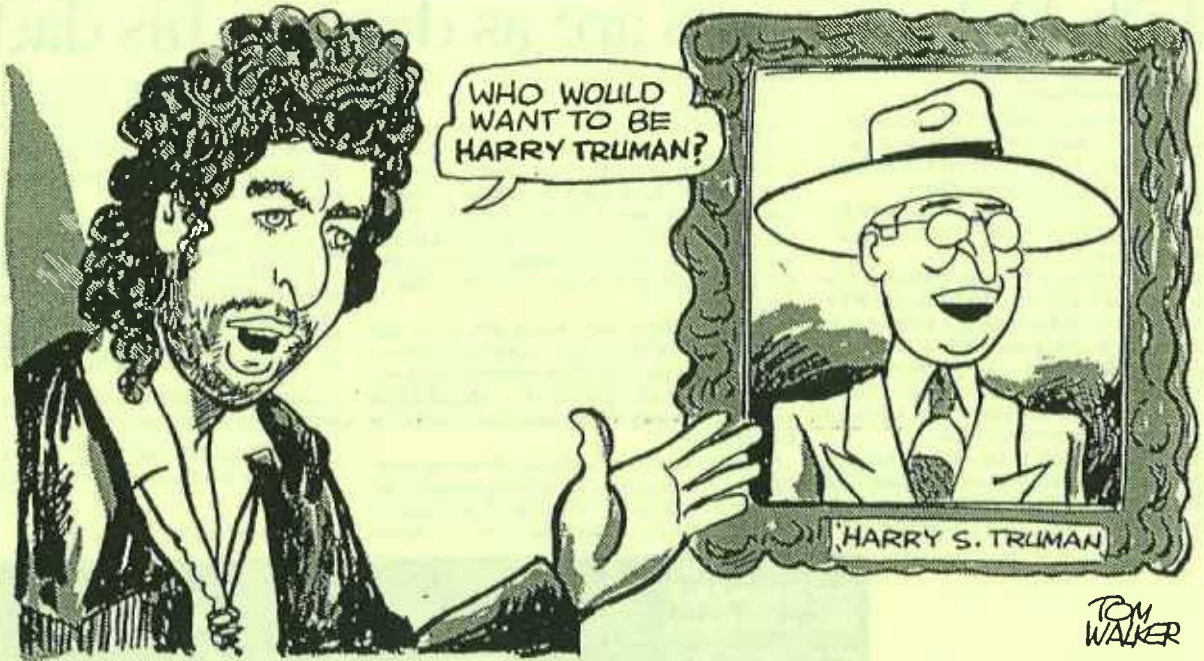
Tracy O'Connell
 Arlington, MA

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 P263

David Fenigsohn 96
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 02146-7302

"Under The Red Sky" in 1990 polarised opinion like no Dylan album since (afraid so) "Slow Train Coming". This time it wasn't his beliefs that were called into question, merely his sanity. Avoiding the temptation of a soundalike successor to "Oh Mercy", Dylan recruited the Was 'brothers' and a host of superstar guests, all of whom were allowed at least two minutes to familiarise themselves with the material before the tapes began rolling. And the songs — quotes from nursery rhymes? "Wiggle Wiggle"? Which deep end had Dylan fallen off this time?

Nothing, as ever with Dylan, was that simple. The song didn't merely refer to nursery rhymes — they completely undermined them. "10,000 Men", "2 X 2", "Cat's In The Well" and "Under The Red Sky" took the strict logic of children's tales and shook it to pieces. Like the "Basement Tapes", the album was full of songs that were disarmingly simple on first hearing, but which ultimately revealed nothing but enigmas. And the music was equally strange — one moment directly plagiarising Bob's own work (as on the wonderful "Handy Dandy"), and at another taking turns as unexpected as the words. A great album? It's still too early to say. But while "Oh Mercy" gave up most of its pleasures easily, "Under The Red Sky" asked the listener to tease them out him/herself. The fact that you'd even want to try suggests that "Red Sky" will last longer than its detractors might prefer. (PD)



'Passing the buck' to Harry Truman

DEAR EDITOR:

While President George Bush and Gov. Bill Clinton try to portray themselves as the new Harry Truman, I am reminded that some people—including one of the biggest rock stars of the '60s—did not necessarily find the 33d president to be an appealing

role model.

Asked if he had wanted to be president of the United States when he was 6, Bob Dylan replied:

"No, when I was 6, Harry Truman was president. Who would want to be Harry Truman?"

Steve Maginnis,
West Caldwell



Naked City

Absolutely Fourth Achilles

SPY Presents the Dylan-o-matic

Bob Dylan has just celebrated the 30th anniversary of his Columbia recording career, and as our own special tribute we've devised the Dylan-o-matic. Now you too can write the words to a Dylan song: Simply combine the items in the columns below as randomly as you'd like. Don't read straight across, though—those combinations are from actual Dylan lyrics!

—Paul Iorio

A	B	C	D
The drunken	politician	leaps	upon the street
That big dumb	blonde	with a wheel	in the gorge
The heart-attack	machine	is	strapped across their shoulders
The leading	actor	hurried by	in the costume of a monk
The savage	soldier	sticks his head	in sand
The rain	man	leaves	in the wolfman's disguise
The poor little	chauffeur	was	back in bed
My patron	saint	is a-fightin,	with a ghost
The cowboy	angel	rides	with his candle lit
The shoeless	hunter	remains	upon the beach
The one-eyed	undertaker	blows	a futile horn
The neon	madman	climbs	on Grand Street
The wildest	cat	passes	by in a flash
Some old	whore	advances	on your spirit
Nature's	beast	fears	as they come
The fisherman's	daughter	floats	into my room

Jakob Dylan's roots are as deep as his dad's

By Gary Graff
KNIGHT RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

The term "a Young Dylan" is one of the most dreaded and overused descriptions in rock 'n' roll phraseology. It's an albatross that holds weighty and unfulfillable expectations.

But when your name happens to be Jakob Dylan and you are indeed the son of Bob Dylan, it's a tough tag to avoid.

So it's Jakob Dylan's lot that eyebrows rose when he emerged with his own band, the Wallflowers. He knows his lineage is a great way to woo attention to the group, but at 23, Dylan knows he's not his father — even if much of the music on the Wallflowers' debut album sounds like it came out of the Big Pink house where his father once recorded with the Band.

"It's natural for people to be curious," says Dylan, who was the inspiration for his father's hit "Forever Young." "But it doesn't do anybody any good to dwell on it. . . . If I thought about it

too much, I may as well just pack it in and go away."

According to Tobi Miller, the Wallflowers' lead guitarist and Dylan's boyhood pal, whatever struggle goes on within his friend is generally kept private. "Back when we became friends, it was the regular world of moms and dads. There was no distinguishing between a famous parent and somebody who wasn't famous. The only time it really comes up is in this type of situation, an interview."

Dylan and Miller met during fifth grade and shared a love of British new wave bands such as the Clash and the Jam. They started playing music together in the eighth grade — though Dylan didn't start writing his own songs in earnest until four years ago.

Raised in Southern California, Dylan has songs that are accomplished and varied, ranging from energetic explosions ("Somebody Else's Money," "Ashes to Ashes") to winding, drawn-out narra-

tives such as "Hollywood" and "Sugarfoot."

It's in the latter that the Wallflowers most recall Dylan's dad, with their vivid imagery, biting commentary and dense interplay between Dylan and Miller's guitars and Rami Jaffe's rich organ and piano fills.

"We used to be a lot more of a guitar band," says Dylan, whose tousled hair also makes it easy to peg his ancestry. "We didn't have as much space in it. The organ was something I really wanted. I would write songs that had that sound in my head. It's a way of executing a lot more ideas. . . . to get a really loose flow in the sound."

Hmmm . . . sounds a lot like you-know-who's approach to making music.

"Yeah, (Dad) likes the record," Dylan says with a sigh. "But he's real busy. He's on his never-ending tour."

"He does his work, and I do mine."

► Sixties icons Stephen Stills and Bob Dylan joined Dylan's old backup group the Band for his classic "I Shall Be Released" at the Bluejeans Bash.



MIAMI VICE actor Don Johnson found himself at Washington's Blue Jean Trash concert strumming alongside the pallid warbler Bob Dylan last week. They were singing different songs. Don's tune was There's a Ghost in My House . . . Bob was Knocking on Heaven's Door.

Picture: REX FEATURES



THROUGH THE WIND & RAIN
PO BOX 23 BOOTLE
MERSEYSIDE L30 2SA

PLUGATHON

A couple of mentions for two great 'artefacts'. I've had nice mentions before, but never in a Bob Dylan fanzine! *HOMER, the slut* (great title) is run by Andrew Muir, and it's more like a book than a mag. If you have to read every last word on Zimmerman, save yourself the trouble buying all the papers on the off chance, and subscribe to 'Hts'. A 4 issue sub costs £14 (it's worth it. It's huge), but if you send £4 I'm sure you'd get a copy to see for yourself. PO Box 1494, Fulham SW6 6NT. Great stuff.

Is heavy academic jargon the right way to tackle a pop performer such as Bob Dylan?
As the dons' favourite bard returns to London, Liz Thomson criticises his critics

Fighting in the captain's tower

Delegates to the 1993 conference of the Royal Musical Association listened last month to a young music graduate deliver a paper analysing the melodic structures underpinning the oeuvre of Abba. The very idea surprises, not least because most of us regard Sweden's major export as purveyors of mere muzak. Twenty years ago, Wilfrid Mellers, then professor of music at York University, published a study of the Beatles, *Twilight of the Gods*; a post-Leavisite musicological squib that still strikes sparks. At the time—a decade after William Mann's *Times* leader discussion of Lennon-McCartney's "pandiatonic clusters"—it caused more than a few wrinkled noses in music departments across the land.

Despite such recent initiatives as Liverpool University's Institute of Popular Music, the Beatles and their like even now get fairly short shrift in academe. But, subjected to the analytical disciplines of lit crit rather than musicology, Bob Dylan seems to have fared rather better: perhaps because, as everyone acknowledged, Homer too had been a busker. Indeed, as Frank Kermode noted in *Esquire* (1972) when he and Stephen Spender debated the merits of Dylan: "There's quite a lot of good poetry which started life in a similar way—Greek tragedy, medieval ballad."

While British critics such as Philip Larkin and Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (thinly disguised as Francis Newton and writing in a 1964 issue of the *New Statesman*) were quick to recognise Dylan's poetic gift, the critical impetus came naturally enough from the US. In 1965, with only a handful of albums to examine—the folk-protest of *Freewheelin'* and *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, the introspection of *Another Side*, the folk-rock of *Bringing It All Back Home*—newspapers and magazines gushed to judgment.

In a now famous *Books* vox pop, critic Jerome Agel drew parallels with Yevgeny Yevtushenko, while for novelist John Clellon Holmes, Dylan passed as a poet: "Of course, though I think we do him a disservice, as a serious artist, if we separate his words from the music he intended to be their proper setting . . . not since Allen Ginsberg has an American poet insisted on telling so much truth, so uniquely and with such reckless honesty. More than anyone else, I suppose, Dylan reminds me of an American Brecht—the Brecht whose poems were meant to be sung. There is the same cold humour, the same ironic warmth, the same violent and splintered energy, the same urgent, idiomatic involvement in the way things actually are. Another Dylan returned song to poetry; Bob Dylan has returned poetry to song."

Writing in the *Village Voice* two years later, after the catalytic albums *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*, Jack Newfield saw Dylan as the "Brecht of the jukebox", "poet of the electric guitar". Even the staid old *New York Times* pronounced him the heir to Faulkner and Hemingway, while poet and translator Kenneth Rexroth stated his firm belief that: "The most important event in recent poetry is Bob Dylan . . . he is the American beginning of a tradition as old as civilization in France."

In the years since, Professor Christopher Ricks has regularly addressed Cambridge

undergraduates on such subjects as Dylan's use of cliché and Christianity, while in a ground-breaking book, *Song and Dance Man* (1973), Michael Gray treated Dylan as part of the poetic continuum, drawing comparisons with Blake and Tennyson, Eliot and Yeats.

More than any other contemporary artist, Dylan has been the focus of undergraduate dissertations, graduate theses and academic papers. David Monaghan, for example, analysed Dylan and "The Waste Land tradition" (*English Quarterly*, 1973), Greg Campbell "Bob Dylan and the pastoral apocalypse" (*Journal of Popular Culture*, 1975); and Charles Benjamin Hersch studied the 1960s synergy of art and politics in "Liberating forms: politics and the arts from the New York intellectuals to the counterculture" (University of California, 1987).

In *Performed Literature* (1982), which began life as a thesis, Betsy Bowden tackled one of the essential problems facing critics of popular music as she scrutinised the precise relationship between poetry as written and poetry as sung. She argued, in the course of 250 arid pages, that the most vital aspect of Dylan's art is the reinterpretation that occurs at every performance with its inevitable textual changes. Mellers, equally scrupulous in ignoring such alternative versions, offered a musicological analysis in a disappointing study, *A Darker Shade of Pale* (1984).

Dylan's last genuinely important album was *Blood on the Tracks* (1974). So, despite sporadic flashes of brilliance since (*Street Legal* in 1978, *Oh Mercy* in 1989), it seems unlikely that critics will spend serious time on Dylan's more recent offerings. But sheer longevity dictates that he be taken seriously. Or does it?

In his famous *Late Show* interview, the playwright David Hare created a lot of noise by demanding a return to "real" critical values which acknowledged that Keats is better than Dylan. Hare suggested it was time we learned to differentiate between art and commerce, and called for a revival of more strenuous judgments.

The very fact that the debate came down to Keats v Dylan indicates the extent to which Dylan has been accepted into the literary canon. But it also missed the point, for it is surely not a question of who's better, who's best. Ricks, whose enthusiasm for Bob the Bard falls short of claiming him as a poet *per se*, is fond of saying that Dylan is "only as good as Shakespeare". Meaning, presumably, that Shakespeare, too, wrote some 'duff' rhymes. It may also be an acknowledgment that Shakespeare's relationship with society was dialectical: that, like Dylan, his work both shaped and reflected society's values.

Inevitably uneven but always stimulating, Dylan—like the Beatles—helped fracture barriers between art and entertainment. We need new critical criteria by which to judge his work, a new critical language in which to discuss it. The problem is that we are all locked in to our specialist ologies and isms and have little time to learn about complementary methods. Over the past quarter-century, discussion of popular culture in all its myriad manifestations has been dominated

by sociologists whose terms of reference too often result in an uncritical acceptance of much that is artistically unremarkable.

The jargon used by musicologists, sociologists, semiologists or psychologists perpetuates insularity and exclusivity. If we are to conduct an intelligible and intelligent discussion about popular culture, we must find an interface—even Professor Simon Frith has come around to that idea and we must rid ourselves of the notion that something that is popular cannot also be good.

But we must be rigorous and guard against the sort of fan's-eye subjectivity that disturbed Clive James. In a 1974 article for *Creem*, he noted that analytical procedures—for Dylan in particular and rock in general—were "damagingly tilted towards the descriptive" and that much so-called criticism rarely got beyond liking some songs more than others.

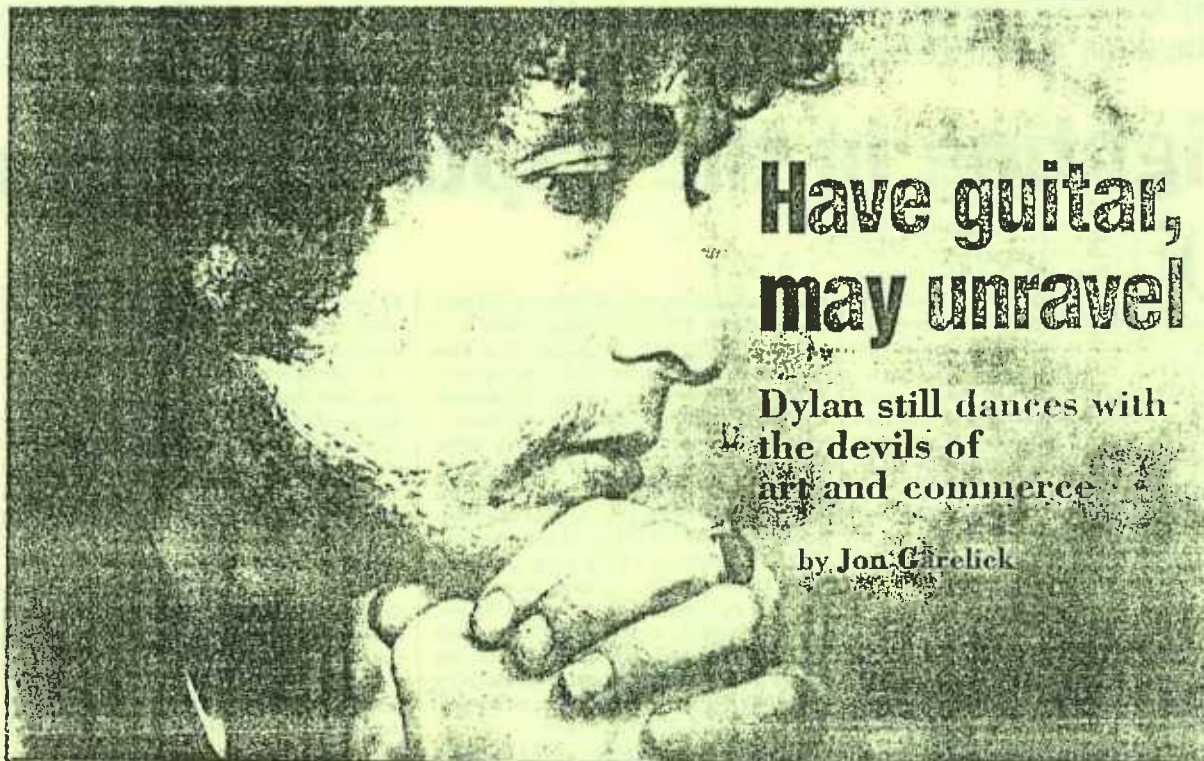
Eschewing the comparative approach of Ricks or Gray, James judged Dylan on his own terms, praising "the freedom of his linguistic invention" but worrying that Dylan "can't distinguish, in his own work, between the idea that is resonant and the idea that postures towards significance, the image that is highly charged and the image that is merely portentous". He concluded with the central paradox of Dylan's work, pointing out how much of our enjoyment lay in "following his clear architectural outline and emotionally solidifying it with an imaginative content it hasn't really got . . . never has so much arbitrary stressing met so much melodic angularity in so many awkward marriages . . . Yet when all is sung and done, it can't be denied that the total effect is on a huge scale: he dreams great buildings, even if the walls remain untimbered and the roofs are open to the sky."

Twenty years on, James' analysis, made in plain language, remains as good an explanation as any for our continuing interest in Dylan, or rather in Dylan's recorded work. For it does not account for the regular pilgrimage to see him live, to watch him desecrate so many great songs, demolish so many "great buildings".

"Anyone who did not live through the 1960s simply cannot realize how important his albums seemed then," *New York Times* critic John Rockwell has written. "They defined a community." What Dylan's concerts offer now, besides the occasional flash of brilliance, is a chance to commune once more.

That is why, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial where 30 years ago Martin Luther King dreamed his great dream, Dylan's shambling "Chimes of freedom" gave William Jefferson Clinton and his wife Hillary such obvious delight while 12-year-old Chelsea looked frankly perplexed. The times have changed: Dylan's presence among us is now mostly symbolic. Like Clinton before Arlington's eternal flame, we go this week to pay homage.

Bob Dylan plays at Hammersmith Odeon on 7-9 and 11-13 February. Liz Thomson co-edited *The Dylan Companion* (Macmillan).



Have guitar, may unravel

Dylan still dances with
the devils of
art and commerce

by Jon Garelick

SPELLBINDING: whatever slips he might make, Dylan is always expressive, giving passionate yet dignified readings.

I have to admit that at this late stage of the game, my love of Bob Dylan has become something of a guilty pleasure. Dylan is down to his last eighth-of-an-inch of voice; the nasal whine that has earned him derisive parody since the beginning of his career is now nothing but a scratchy kazoo. His live performances are erratic, his albums hit or miss, his recent television appearances often unqualified disasters. And yet for me, his concert last week at Beverly's Endicott College and his new album, the solo acoustic *Good As I Been to You* (Columbia), only confirm his continued status as one of the few pop stars who really matter.

I'm not sure how much of this has to do with music, but that's the nature of pop, where the musical and the extramusical play an equal hand. Consider Elvis's first 45s and his hip-shaking TV appearances, Pete Townshend smashing his guitar, John Lydon's rotten teeth, Madonna's indelible hit singles — you name it. And such fripperies aren't limited to rock. Sonny Rollins once recalled, as a youthful inspiration, sitting in the audience at the Apollo Theatre and savoring the shine of Buddy Tate's shoes.

Dylan embodies these art-versus-image contradictions as surely as he denies them. "A lot of people were coming out to see the legend," he says of one period of his touring, "and I was trying to just get on stage and play music." But he's aware of, and proud of, his place in pop history. So his flight from his own fame is part of the game of following him.

For nearly as long as he's been making records, Dylan has been fighting his image as well as enjoying it — trying to reconcile stardom and his own undisguised ambition with the desire to be an artist, to forge an uncompromisable personal vision and still be a hit-maker with popular appeal. Rather than undercutting his achievements, that tension has contributed to his continued vitality.

Take his current *modus operandi*, "the never-ending tour," which amounts to as many as 120 dates a year and yet takes place virtually in secret — at colleges and in small halls. The tour has been going on since 1988, regardless of whether Dylan has a new album to plug.

At Endicott, he performed in a tent. Cars were parked up and down the windy, narrow Route 127 that runs through Beverly. The promoters, in a decision that bordered on criminally inept, tried to handle the hundreds of out-of-town credit-

card purchases with one guy manning a shoebox at a bridge table. Ushers tried to uphold the no-re-entrance rule for patrons who left the tent. In the middle of Melissa Ferriek's opening set, a woman in the audience had what appeared to be an epileptic seizure and had to be removed by security and paramedics, adding to the confusion as the standing-room-only crowd filed in.

At first a major star in such an unlikely context seemed incongruous. But eventually the pieces fit: the country setting, the fried-dough stands, the amateurish production. It was a county fair, and Bob Dylan just happened to be the "entertainment."

This is as close as Dylan can come to anonymity, to being nothing more than local talent, which seems his goal. Consider his recent "50th Anniversary" pay-per-view tribute concert at Madison Square Garden, where Sinéad O'Connor's appearance made more news than his did. Although that concert re-established the authority of his original body of work, Dylan, true to his ornery form, has followed it with the release of *Good As I Been to You*, a collection of songs whose writer credits are only "traditional/public domain."

And yet his futile pursuit of anonymity reaps unexpected rewards on the new recording, and it paid off at Endicott. Unlike recent tours and TV appearances, this one found him hatless, in a brown jacket and plaid shirt, and if you were at the back of the tent it was eerie how much he looked like his old self — slim rather than overstuffed. Even that bush of brown hair cut a 1965 profile.

The band lit into the pessimistic world view of "Trouble" (from 1981's *Shot of Love*) as a sprightly country two-step. This was not the lean guitar-rock band of last year's Grammy appearance but an adaptable two-drummer unit who could shift from country/bluegrass arrangements with pedal or lap-steel guitar, upright bass, and Dylan on acoustic (strumming "She Belongs to Me"), to a roaring three-electric-guitar front line ("Highway 61 Revisited"). There was even solo acoustic Dylan at mid set ("Mama, You Been on My Mind," "Boots of Spanish Leather") and in the encore ("It Ain't Me, Babe").

Dylan and the band zigzagged through his career in the 18-song, two-hour performance, from "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" (1963) to "Unbelievable" (1990), from "Maggie's Farm" (1965) to

"What Good Am I?" (1989). Through it all, Dylan plucked muscular acoustic leads, led the band on hazardous turns through extended mid-song instrumentals and semi-improvised codas, and (surprise of surprises) articulated lyrics cleanly and with passion, making you forget that croak of a kazoo when he bore down on a word ("We never did too much talkin' anyway") or rushed ahead of the beat ("When you wake up in the mornin', baby, look inside your mirror/You know I won't be next to you, you know I won't be near").

It's the nature of the current Dylan watch that when you react to a performance with delight, it's difficult to know whether you're responding out of honest pleasure or simply out of relief. ("He's not senile! He can still do it!") But at Endicott, Dylan showed a combination of assurance and offhandedness that was — there's no other way to put it — swinging. It was swing not merely as a rhythmic concept (though it was that, too) but as part of the music's disciplined spontaneity. You could hear it in the gentle lode of "She Belongs to Me" or in the winding journey of "Mr. Tambourine Man," in the rising intensity of each verse and of Dylan's harp solo, and in the attention to dynamics throughout.

If swing does anything, it focuses your attention on the moment, and in these performances all else melted away. Nothing mattered but the song and each unfolding event it contained. That's what *Good As I Been to You* is about, with Dylan the only musician, singing and accompanying himself on acoustic guitar and harmonica.

The songs on the album will be unfamiliar to most listeners, except perhaps for the blues standard "Sittin' on Top of the World" and the children's folk song "Froggie Went a-Courtin'." (!). There's a song of lovers' betrayal in the Old West ("Frankie and Albert"), a rocked-out boogie ("Step It Up and Go") and a mean blues ("You're Gonna Quit Me"), a "Goodnight Irene"-style dancehall lament ("Tomorrow Night"), and Depression-era folk ("Hard Times").

But the dominant mood is set by the ancient romantic ballads of love and violence: "Arthur McBride," about 18th-century Irish draft dodgers; "Canadee-I-O," about a young female ship stowaway; "Jim Jones," about a convict ship; "Blackjack Davie," who's the secret lover who lives on in a wayward wife's imagination; and even the story of a "Lack of Hearts"-style

con man named "Diamond Joe."

These songs are from the tradition of British and Celtic romantic balladry. It's the same tradition you can hear in the high-school classic "The Highwayman" by Alfred Noyes, in Dylan's rendition of "House Carpenter" (from last year's *Bootleg Series* box), or on much of John Wesley Harding.

Dylan's musicianship is technically uneven. His diction goes in and out of focus, his guitar playing, though forceful and rich in detail, hits its share of clinkers. But the performance is spellbinding. Whatever the slips, Dylan is always expressive, giving passionate yet dignified readings, the repeated melodies and choruses following each character to his or her inexorable fate. He plays "Froggie Went a-Courtin'" straight, and his reading brings out the creepiness inherent in so much children's traditional folk music.

What all these songs have in common is their tale-like quality, their existence, before their moral or social implications or didactic purpose, as good stories. They're told by the traveling storyteller, the troubadour. In other words, they're the songs Mr. Tambourine Man might sing.

The record and the Endicott appearance, as well as Dylan's comments to Richard Hilburn in the *Los Angeles Times* early this year, help bring his bedeviled career into focus. In the Hilburn piece, he often makes comparisons to troupers like B.B. King and Willie Nelson. When he compares himself to Hank Williams, it's not to position himself in the pantheon. (He's already there.) What he's been doing, Dylan says, might not be "great," but it's his own. Hank had a particular way with sad songs, Willie has a way with bitter songs, and Dylan has his thing with rhyme and "the forming of lines."

Perceived that way, Dylan is just another craftsman plying his trade, putting out albums with seasonal regularity, good or bad, year after year. Or touring, not as intensely as B.B. and Willie but more often than the U2 or Guns N' Roses juggernauts. The performances, the albums, become not special events but stages in the evolution of a body of work.

Such an attitude guarantees that, good or bad, sloppy or secure, Dylan's work will always be vital. Dissect the legend when I'm gone, he's saying. In the meantime, he'll do his ornery damndest to make sure nothing — not life, not legend, not pay-per-view — gets between the audience, or himself, and his songs. □

Richard Williams's *Dylan: A man called Atlas* is a survey of Dylan's career lavishly illustrated with photographs. The book is expressly – and refreshingly – not an attempt to speak of Dylan's life apart from the public domain. What is also refreshing about the history is its sobriety of tone. It is this restraint which contrasts so well with previous works of a similar kind. In 1984, for example, Jonathan Cott saturated his illustrated *Dylan* with a range of allusions from Baudelaire to Kierkegaard, as if the constant importing of famous (and some rather less famous) names would somehow legitimize Dylan as a serious subject.

Williams is less desperate and much less starry-eyed: "There have been mediocre records and worse gigs and a terrible movie, and . . . some regrettable behaviour too". But admiration of Dylan's work, while not blindly and embarrassingly paraded, is implicit throughout the book. It is not Williams's purpose to give close readings of those kinds of Dylan lyric that demand such reading. But we are taken steadily through the many phases of Dylan's public life. Williams recreates the atmosphere of Cold War anxiety and Civil Rights anger that was articulated in Dylan's earlier

Richard Williams

DYLAN

A man called Alias
192pp. Bloomsbury. £18.99.
07475 10849

songs. He follows the singer's shift into a more complex lyric manner in the mid-1960s through to the Christian lyrics of the late 70s. He ends by noting Dylan's characteristic willingness to alienate his audiences. At a 1991 concert, Dylan, just like so many times before, refused to play his old songs as expected: "reducing a fine melody and an incomparable lyric to an indecipherable racket".

Dylan has always liked rackets. Williams recounts a performance given by Dylan and a band while still at school when the noise they made was so excruciating that "the principal ran backstage and told the janitor to cut the electricity". That was, of course, in the 1950s, and something of the quality of those times, and of Dylan's reaction to that quality, is conveyed by the photographs in this book.

There is a 1959 high-school photograph of the young Dylan here, round-faced, with neatly cropped hair and an upright, conformist gaze in his eyes. It is a picture which emblemizes the narrow, mainstream ideology of the times and which contrasts vividly with the subsequent weird guises adopted by the man, from the black-clothed acid-freak of 1966 to the haggard gypsy look of recent years. It is as though Dylan is in permanent exile from the clean-cut kid imaged in the 1959 photograph.

That stance of exile has lost some of the force it had in the 1960s and 70s. Many (by no means all) of the things which Dylan and others like him had to fight for are now simply taken for granted by many people. In some areas of the political sphere Dylan has been superseded. When he was protesting at racism against black Americans and singing at Martin Luther King rallies in the 1960s, he was protesting as a white. Now we hear the black voice more directly in the aggression of, say, rap music. But Dylan helped to clear the ground, and there are, in any case, many Dylan lyrics about the condition of exile which do not date in the same way.

AIDAN DAY

HARD RAIN: A DYLAN COMMENTARY

by Tim Riley

Knopf, hardcover, \$23.00

With *Hard Rain*, Boston-area writer and radio commentator Tim Riley does for Bob Dylan what he did with his previous book, *Tell Me Why*, for the Beatles. That is, Riley offers an extensive, even exhaustive, in-depth account/analysis of Dylan's career, focusing mainly on the singer/songwriter's most important and lasting legacy, his songs. The foci of various other Dylan books, such as "Dylan the Person," "folk singer/rock star," "celebrity," etc., all but completely give way in this volume to the single focus of "Dylan the Artist."

In *Tell Me Why*, Riley offered a song-by-song, piece-by-piece analysis of the Beatles' career and work that was more than penetrating – dissecting would be the best overall description. The book drew mixed reviews, some praising Riley's detailed knowledge and elemental understanding of the Beatles and their music, others characterizing the author's account as "dry" and "self-indulgent."

In *Hard Rain*, Riley's overall approach is more effective, perhaps because the nature of Dylan from the beginning as a more topically-oriented singer/songwriter (than any of the Beatles in their individual songwriting efforts) is more conducive to such a deeply analytical dissertation. Throughout the book, the author covers nearly every possible base in describing not only virtually every Dylan song available on record – from singles and album tracks to compilation-set cuts and appearances on other artists' recordings – but also film and TV projects and appearances, book projects, etc., virtually everything ever offered for public/media consumption from Dylan in his career. It's nothing less than an all-out feat for Dylan fans, sort of like "Everything you've always wanted to read about Bob Dylan and his music and more," though much like in *Tell Me Why*, Riley's no-stone-unturned approach tends to leave little or nothing to

the reader's own imagination.

Still, Riley's display of writing skill, exhaustive research, insightful analysis and reverence for his subject is amazing. The book is perhaps at its strongest in the various accounts of Dylan's songs, where the author describes when and under what conditions they were composed and what they're saying (to Riley and other music critics).

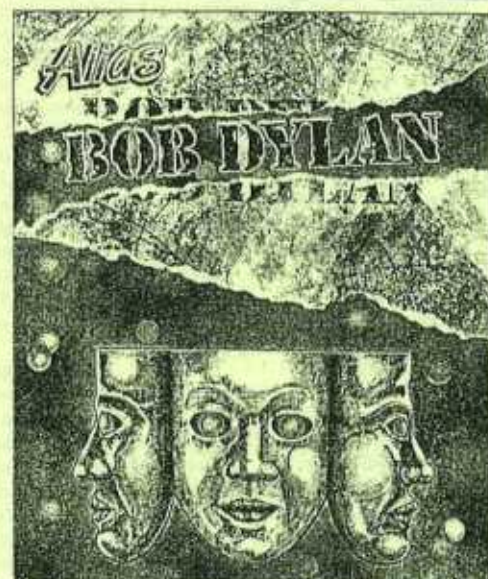
In the elaborate context of the book, memorable quotes are many. Some of the most notable include Riley's description of Dylan's "development from a political polemicist to a minstrel mystic," and the author's description of one of Dylan's legendary first-take studio sessions as "gut-charged music-making without a net." In a particularly strong portion of the book's third chapter, Riley calls the landmark *Blonde On Blonde* album "a sprawling abstraction of eccentric blues revisionism," then offers perhaps one of the more insightful and well-stated accounts/analyses of the album to date.

Riley covers Dylan's work and career chronologically, but consistently cross-references individual songs, albums, appearances, etc., back and forth and thus avoids the dryness of a typical chronology-bio piece. The author is clearly in admiration of his subject's artistry and overall career, but is not afraid to scorn critically when necessary, slamming albums such as 1970's *Self-Portrait* and '80's *Saved*, for instance. Riley also offers ample space to discussing not only the subtle differences between alternate versions of Dylan's own recordings, but also the similarities between his writing and that of David Bowie, Van Morrison and, of course, Lennon and McCartney, among others.

In all, Riley's treatment of Dylan and his music can get both devoted and casual fans of the singer to appreciate him anew. Typically enough, however, even at the end of a book such as this, Dylan still remains rather enigmatic.

Matt Whorf

STEPHEN SCOBIE: "Alias Bob Dylan" (Red Deer College Press, £9.95; distributed in U.K. by Book Systems Plus Ltd., The Warehouse, Old Mead Road, Elsenham, Bishop's Stortford, Herts CM22 6JN)



Post-modernist criticism finally reaches Bob Dylan via this entertaining, often enlightening tome by a Canadian academic. His theme is Dylan's use of dual identities in his writing – beginning with his adoption of an alternative name at the start of his career, and then tackling his deliberately erratic use of personal pronouns in his 'love' songs, his confusion between God and a lover in his 'born again' songs, his cunning slide between role-playing and autobiography in the weighty 'Renaldo And Clara' movie, and his (as usual) subversion of every literary and musical cliché on offer.

Scobie succeeds where most critics fail by making his post-modernist critique readable; equally importantly, he only rarely seems to twist the material to suit his theories. His analysis of 'Renaldo And Clara' is particularly striking, but that's far from the book's only strength, and Scobie's treatment of the duality theme in the entire corpus of Dylan's work is far more convincing than Aidan Day's efforts in the same area in "Jokerman". Only the attempts to make literal, narrative sense out of such tangled tales as "Lily, Rosemary And The Jack Of Hearts" and "Brownsville Girl" strain the imagination. Some stories are better left half-told. (PD)

BOB DYLAN: "Saved"
(Columbia CD 32742)

(43.01)

On November 1st 1979, the re-born Bob Dylan began a U.S. tour at the Fox Warfield Theatre in San Francisco. Performing not a single song from his pre-'79 catalogue, he appalled the critics: the 'San Francisco Chronicle' reckoned the show was "banal, uninspired and inventionless".

The problem? Dylan was touring evangelical Christianity, which for the diehard liberals in his audience was one piece of free-thinking too many. The irony? Dylan was singing better than he ever had before. The tour continued until February, broke off for six weeks, and then resumed in Toronto in April, when Dylan delivered the most impassioned performances of his entire career. Forget the Albert Hall in '66 — those are the shows every Dylan fan should wish he had seen.

The strangest twist of a bizarre episode was that Dylan used the first week of his mid-tour lay-off to record "Saved" — universally greeted as the worst album of his career. From its dreadful cover art to its depressingly flat production, the LP convinced those who hadn't been at the Fox Warfield or in Toronto that Christianity had sapped Dylan's creative spirit.

Looking back with distant hindsight, "Saved" includes some great Dylan songs — notably "Saving Grace", "In The Garden" and "Covenant Woman" — but few great vocal performances. There are moments, like the "pinebox" line on "Saving Grace", where Bob nears the emotional depths of the Toronto shows; mostly, though, his singing is as deadpan as the production. The mixture of joy and terror that fires the Toronto renditions of "When He Returns" or "Covenant Woman" is never matched on this album. Small surprise that critic Paul Williams felt so disturbed by the gulf between the live "Saved" and its studio counterpart that he devoted a booklet to the subject, aptly titled 'Dylan — What Happened?'. (PD)

BOB DYLAN: "Knocked Out Loaded"
(CBS 467040 2)

(35.36)

Another Dylan album, another enigma. "Knocked Out Loaded" is dominated by the epic "Brownsville Girl", a two-hour arthouse movie scripted by Dylan and Sam Shepard and compressed into eleven remarkable minutes. It's a song about identity, mistaken and lost; about the mysteries of fame; and about this movie Dylan saw one time starring Gregory Peck. Dylan hadn't cut anything as powerful or mysterious in years.

To reach "Brownsville Girl", though, you have to sit through some leaden R&B, a sickly remake of Kris Kristofferson's "They Killed Him", and a ham-fisted arrangement of Dylan's own "Driftin' Too Far From Shore". Sounding for all the world like a contract-filler, nailed together from scraps of firewood, "Knocked Out Loaded" has no internal unity, and even its most enjoyable moments, like "Under Your Spell" (co-written with, of all people, Carole Bayer Sager), are tarnished by what's gone before. Shame CBS didn't make a CD single out of "Brownsville Girl" and leave the rest of this album in the vaults where it belongs. (PD)

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Outlaw Blues Volume Two:
A Tribute To Bob Dylan
(IMAGINARY 111CD 040)

Each Imaginary tribute carries the same highs and lows: some wonderful cuts, some absolutely dire ones, some by artists you've never heard of. Outlaw Blues Volume Two is no exception. Green On Red's Chuck Prophet proves his recent solo success was no fluke with a sensitive reading of Abandoned Love; Calamity Jane obviously have never heard Ballad

Of A Thin Man before; Henry Kaiser imitates actor Walter Brennan on Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues (which the cover lists as Tombstone Blues, oh dear); Moose perform a strangely warm Positively Fourth Street and ditto for Strangelove on Motorpsycho Nightmare. For terminal indie rockers and hardcore Dylanologists only. ★★ Sid Griffin

**BOB DYLAN: "Greatest Hits 2"**
(Columbia 471243 2)

(57.06)

As its track listing confirms — nothing later than 1966 — "Greatest Hits 2" was a hurried follow-up to the first volume, designed by Dutch CBS to cover for Dylan's post-motorbike crash silence. It didn't appear in Britain or America, where CBS waited until 1971 to compile the double-LP "More Greatest Hits" (already out on mid-price CD). Its relevance in Dylan's history is pretty minimal, but casual buyers will enjoy its mix of "Blonde On Blonde" cuts and '63-'65 acoustic tracks, while true obsessives will salivate over the pair of '66 live photos in the booklet. (PD)

BOB DYLAN
Greatest Hits Volume 2
(Sony lba)

An Italian release from 1967, which may account for the cheap, bootleg-like cover and the incorrect 'Absolute Sweet Mary' (sic) on the sleeve. The end of his angry young Bob phase is captured with an incongruous 'Masters Of War' and 'Chimes Of Freedom'; elsewhere, his electric hipster allusiveness and fermented invecitive is paraded in a fine mix of *Blonde On Blonde* and *Highway 61 Revisited* material.

It's a snapshot of one of rock'n'roll's artistic paragons, embracing the fluid sting of 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues', the deranged swagger of 'Rainy Day Women' and the searing farewell of 'One Of Us Must Know'. Bob himself has seldom bettered these songs.

With such formidable compilations as *Biograph* and the *Bootleg* series on the market, true fans will consider this small beer. But for anyone who has only heard him mangle these classics in a recent live show and wonders what all the fuss is about, *Greatest Hits Volume 2* is a good primer, but better to go directly to the albums it draws on. ● B Gavin Martin



BOB DYLAN: BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

COVER STAR:
SALLY GROSSMAN

"Everyone loves me for that cover," Sally Grossman laughs

with just a hint of reservation. "I used to tease Bob about it because people just referred to me in relation to the photo, and for a while, I thought, Will this be the only thing in my life that happens? It doesn't disturb me any more, but it was overwhelming at the time."

The sleeve photograph was shot at the house of Sally and her husband, Albert, Dylan's manager at the time. She recalls CBS wanted a female on the cover, and Dylan, who was staying with the couple, asked her, "I was handy, I guess. The chaise we were sitting on was a present from Mary Travers, and the array of things around us was just stuff Bob assembled, things he liked, including our Persian cat. We just sat there for hours while the photographer snapped. Bob was pretty easy going — he was into the symbolism of all those gathered objects. It was pretty comfortable at the time. We were in our living room, after all."

The sleeve became something of a *cause célèbre* for years after: "I remember being in London, standing in a crowd, and overhearing a conversation where someone was saying that the photo was Bob Dylan in drag. I think we both had sharp angles to our faces. But that particular rumour went everywhere."

Sally Grossman's affection for the record goes deeper than her pictorial involvement with it.

"Yeah, that's always been a favourite album of

mine. There are a lot of great songs on there but I love the fact that Mr Tambourine Man was on it. That song was pretty significant to me, enough to take me on a trip when I hear it."

Everywhere Albert went, so did Sally: "I didn't officially work but I was always there." Having split with Dylan after the motorcycle accident of 1966, Grossman continued to manage Peter, Paul & Mary, adding The Band, Janis Joplin and Todd Rundgren to his roster, but gradually got out of management to start Bearsville Records and Studio, in 1970 in Woodstock, New York State. When Grossman died in 1976, Sally thought she should "try and continue what he'd started, to take advantage of it. We've been lucky — we've had the best of clients."

In recent years, R.E.M., The B-52's, Living Colour, Cher, Metallica and Suzanne Vega, among others, have signed the books. The label ceased activity in 1984 but five years later, Sally opened The Bearsville Theatre which her husband had designed. "Bill Graham said not to do it, because it was only a 300-seater, which was economically impossible, but it's so interesting," she enthuses. "It's designed in such a way that you can sit in the bar and watch and talk, but not disturb the audience. An Equity theatre uses it for most of the summer, but we have music shows. Lindsay Buckingham is coming up, and we've had Donald Fagen and Phoebe Snow recently."

"I feel good about it. I like to do something



where I live, something musical and positive. Music is a way to reach a lot of people, after all. Camille Paglia said the US should reward rock'n'roll, because where it goes, democracy follows. I'm not sure about that, but I do believe in music, and that's why I'm still working with it."

Dylan: unofficial live

"Sony can't sell an album of Bob Dylan searching for his muse," we wrote last month as a prelude to our survey of Dylan's official live releases, "but bootleggers can." No sooner had those words been sent to the printers than there arrived on my desk two bootleg Dylan CDs which prove the point perfectly.

The first was "Golden Vanity", an 18-track collection of "traditional" songs taken from the Never-Ending Tour. Originally announced (yes, bootleggers have press releases too) as "Bob Dylan Sings Trad", the CD concentrates on the acoustic performances which have been a consistent delight in Dylan's live shows over the last six years.

Not all the songs are, in truth, traditional — "That Lucky Ol' Sun", for one — and the quality

of the sound, as well as the performances, varies, but "Golden Vanity" is still more listenable than any Dylan live set CBS have issued over the last decade.

Then there's "Solid Rock" — a two-CD set recorded in Toronto in 1980. As mentioned last month, the Toronto shows were recorded and filmed for possible live release, but CBS turned down a seven-track LP offered to them by Dylan. Whoever made that decision must have had hearing problems, as the Toronto performance is simply the most magnificent live Dylan recording I've ever heard. If the concept of religious passion baffles you, then listen to "When He Returns", the unreleased "Ain't Gonna Go To Hell" and "Slow Train". Assuming CBS still have the original tapes, they should forget the 1966 boxed set and plump for Toronto instead. And an official release for the video of the show wouldn't go amiss either. (PD)

Nanci Griffith



JT: How did you get Bob Dylan to play on *Boots Of Spanish Leather*? Did you know him?

NG: I met him last year — I was asked to come and sing harmony for him for a David

Letterman 10th Anniversary TV Special, *Like A Rolling Stone*, and I met him and was really shocked to find out that he was an admirer of my songs and was very nice. So when I recorded *Boots Of Spanish Leather*, I sent it off to him and told him what we were doing with this album and he went away for a vacation for three weeks and came back and called and asked if we would maybe like some harmonica on it, and we were thrilled because I would have never thought of asking him. Everyone else I knew I asked, but Bob Dylan's sort of an icon that you don't think of asking to do anything. Also he didn't put harmonica on his original version of the song, so it was quite nice to have that difference, to have him put harmonica on.

ICONS Converts



Bob Dylan To folkies he has been Judas since he went electric, but discovering Jesus disgusted even your average godless fan. In 1978 he became a fundamentalist Christian after Our Lord appeared in his sitting room. An evangelical — and awful — album followed, as did religious rethinks. But one belief stays consistent: Apocalypse Soon. "It's all in the Book of Revelations."

Dylan and Wexler in 1972 during



a Doug Sahm session. In 1979,

Dylan and Wexler made

'Slow Train Coming.'

me better than anybody," he said. Still, doing Dylan was tricky. He came to me because he wanted the sonority he'd heard in Aretha and Otis as opposed to those hard-scrambling, Woody Guthrie, guitar-on-your-back, out-of-tune, see-you-down-the-line, thirteen-and-a-half-measure, out-of-time phrases. I have always believed that Dylan's "mistakes," his imperfections, were part of his peculiar gift, his naturalness of expression. Slick, seamless Dylan wouldn't have been any good, satisfying neither him nor the demands of his singular voice.

Bob began playing and singing along with the musicians. We were in the first stages of building rhythm arrangements; it was too soon for him to sing, but he sang on every take anyway. I finally persuaded him to hold off on the vocals until later, when the arrangements were in shape and the players could place their licks around — not against — Bob.

In Muscle Shoals, Bob was uncomfortable wearing headphones, and I could see that the thing still hadn't come together.

"Everyone get together on the floor," I suggested, moving the musicians out of their isolation booths. "Pull up chairs and face each other."

There was tons of leakage — a killer detriment to decent recording — but I knew I needed them to be clustered to find the groove. I had Steve Melton, the engineer, roll the quarter-inch tape, and when he bitched about the leakage, I had no time to explain because now the boys were jamming. I'd asked Mark Knopfler to play like Albert King, not Mark Knopfler, and the pickers were cooking. Now I had them hurry back to their booths, put on phones and play along to the rough tape. Soon they locked into the groove, and we turned off the quarter-inch. I had them stop for four or five silent beats, then Barry counted off, and kinetic memory kicked in. Now we had the groove — with the right separation and definition. From then on, we burned. In a week's time, using this method, we finished the rhythm tracks and Bob completed his vocals.

Bob called the record *Slow Train Coming*. It was a hit, the single "Gotta Serve Somebody." It also got Bob his first Grammy — for Best Male Rock Vocal Performance. When he wondered what to wear to the awards, I said, "Why don't you all get the latest tuxedos and look fine?" When the curtain went up on Bob Dylan and his ragamuffins in their formal wear, the Dorothy Chandler erupted. ■

From the book *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music*, by Jerry Wexler and David Ritz. Copyright © 1993 by Jerry Wexler and David Ritz. To be published by Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

I'VE ALWAYS ARGUED THAT A PRODUCER must serve the artist and the artist's project, so when Bob Dylan said he wanted me to produce his new album, I wasn't troubled that he was primarily folk rock, whereas I was R&B. He'd gone through his acoustic trip, his electric trip, his Nashville Skyline trip, and now was interested in keyboards, background vocals, horns and big textures — the polished R&B sound. He had the songs ready and needed only the right musical context.

When Dylan walked into the control room at Cherokee Studio, everyone backed off, forming a *cordon sanitaire* around him. No one spoke until he did, so powerful was his aura.

That afternoon in Cherokee, Bob told me he'd been writing on the piano. Since Dylan famously composed on guitar, I was intrigued. He walked over to the piano and played a series of chord progressions with the enthusiasm of a child. I thought it was great. Then, back in New York a few weeks later, Bob asked me to produce his next album. I alerted my man, coproducer Barry Beckett. Naturally, I wanted to do the album in Muscle Shoals — as Bob did — but we decided to prep it in L.A., where Bob lived. That's when I learned what the songs were about: born-again Christians in the old corral.

I was surprised. But I'd produce Bob Dylan singing the Yellow Pages if that's what he wanted. Besides, I liked the irony of Bob coming to me, the Wandering Jew, to get the Jesus feel. Once he saw his sermonizing had no effect on this dyed-in-the-wool atheist, everything was cool.

Beckett and I had just come off a successful production for Dire Straits, whose album *Communique* was getting rave reviews. Mark Knopfler was still very much on my mind when I started rehearsing with Dylan. I thought Mark and his drummer, Pick Withers, would be perfect supplements to Bob's sound, new elements both to stimulate and complement. Mark's vocal phrasing is deeply influenced by Dylan, and his subtle guitar mastery, I was certain, would inspire and push Bob in a couple of different directions. Bob dug the idea. "Mark does

EDITOR'S HI-FI CRAP...

A review of Bob Dylan's *Good As I Been To You* album in your December issue has just been brought to my attention. Abuse has a strong tradition in the arts; Beethoven once called a critic "Asshole, you double-barrelled asshole", a sentiment which one might think your reviewer in this instance might appreciate. Such abuse as this review contained merely undermines the force of any argument being presented.

You, sir, have performed a disservice to your readers by publishing such a diatribe. The album is full of the most sensitive and lyrical artistry and although one might question aspects of taste in Dylan's selection, surely any fair-minded person would recognise it to be homage to his predecessors.

Perhaps I might offer a small piece of advice? It seems to me the reviewer's comments on the sound of Dylan's voice and the difficulty of understanding his pronunciation might be solved if better high-fidelity equipment were to be employed than that which I suspect was available. I suggest for vinyl LP a Linn Sondek and for compact disc a machine from Naim Audio might elucidate Dylan's admittedly dense Minnesota and tobacco polluted accent.

With best wishes for your publication.

Mark Knight, Professor of Violin, Viola and Chamber Music, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London

OR JUST THE EDITOR?

When I first read Ian Anderson's review of the new Bob Dylan album, I wondered whether the man had been on drugs at the time of reviewing!

However, it now seems to me that he belongs to those backwoodsmen of the Folk and Blues tradition — the same attitudes which exasperated Dylan in 1965.

All the songs on the new album, with two exceptions, are traditional and therefore Public Domain: no need in my book to acknowledge sources — most versions of *Frankie and Albert* follow the Mississippi John Hurt version, but I don't recollect any acknowledgement — but if Anderson is seriously expecting Dylan to provide info or liner notes, he must be expecting miracles: Dylan hasn't done that since 1963, and that was through a third person.

Although I am a Dylan aficionado, I have been critical of some poor material e.g. *Down In The Groove*, *Knocked Out*, *Loaded* and *Self Portrait* spring readily to mind. Yet I find this new one the best for years, including *Oh Mercy*, and he should have done an acoustic album a long time ago. Don't forget Mr Anderson, these were first takes, no rehearsals, and although there are flaws in his tuning, the guitar work is worthy of praise.

I am a great supporter of English folk music, and Nic Jones and Martin Carthy particularly, but it's not up to Dylan to provide them with means of income, whatever their fortunes: Dylan's legacy surpasses most contemporary artists; I think he's paid his dues.

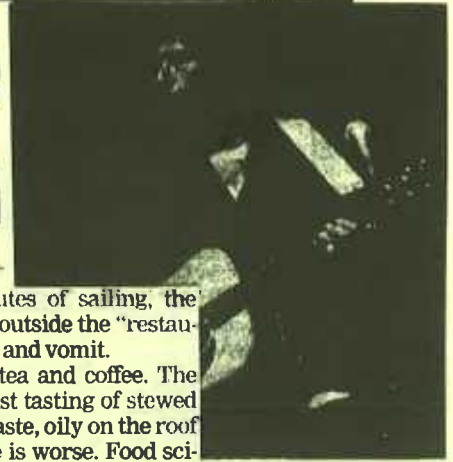
You say Dylan is a fucked-up, washed-out talent, a has-been — well Mr. Anderson, release an album of yours against one of Dylan's and I believe the result would be conclusive — Mr. Never-were. Pratt!!

Dave James, Bristol

Eulogising about unrehearsed, out of tune, first takes? Must say something for your taste, or your gullibility. Another resounding success for the Marketing Department? B.W.

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Going where the music takes you



RICHARD YOUNG

A city break won't cost the earth if you go via one of the concert tour packages for rock fans. **Michael Gray** hits the road with the Dylan army

THREE YEARS ago I flew from Gatwick to catch Bob Dylan in Paris, courtesy of Mead-Gold; they threw in three nights' hotel in the Moulin Rouge red-light district. In 1991 I flew from Manchester to see Sinatra in Antwerp, care of Live! In Europe — this included two nights' hotel on the motorway's edge near Ghent, plus a Bruges day-trip. Now, with London Calling Music, it's Paris again, Dylan again, but travelling (gulp) by coach. Leaving (oh God) at midnight.

Still, the omens are good. The leaflet suggests a thought-out itinerary which recognises that people want time for Paris as well as for their concert:

"We depart on the Sunday evening . . . arriving mid-morning, the whole of Monday is free . . . Tuesday is again free, and in the evening we take you to the concert . . . The following morning . . . etc." As civilised a schedule as any coach trip could command. The price is £139 plus £15 insurance; documents, detailed itinerary and a Paris map should arrive eight days before departure.

Sure enough, this comes on time, again devoid of brochurespeak but venturing on a style of its own, plus genuinely useful information: "We advise you to change your money at your local Thomas Cook, although you can change money at an inferior rate in Dover, on the ferry or in Paris . . . Within walking distance of the hotel is a charming street little known by tourists . . . the restaurants here take their names from a famous French anarchist poem, and we recommend Le Temps de Cerises (a workers co-operative restaurant) . . . for those interested we have a night-time tour of Paris. If you were to go on an official guided tour it would currently cost you about £18. Because we sometimes mispronounce things we're only charging £3 . . . Oh, and just to save our courier answering the same question 50 times, Jim Morrison is buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery!"

So, midnight at Victoria, the double-decker "executive coach" is there, and we leave on time. A lo-fi Dylan concert bootleg plays repeatedly. Guy, the courier, obviously wrote the brochure (and runs the company). As we wait for the boat at Dover he says, "They've found a hole. They're just welding it now."

Sealink must save its oldest, nastiest boat for these night-crossings: facilities are very

basic. Within five minutes of sailing, the wash-basin in the gents outside the "restaurant" is brimful of water and vomit.

We try the on-board tea and coffee. The (instant) tea starts off just tasting of stewed tea; then comes a back-taste, oily on the roof of the mouth. The coffee is worse. Food scientists get paid to create these chemically sophisticated emetics.

Mike, the driver, was so timid at junctions in south London we wondered how he'd handle Paris. Now we find his policy is to avoid it. At 9.30am the city is 26 kilometres away; at 10.05, after touring industrial northern France, we're 9kms nearer. Eventually we find the inner ring-road and, in time, the Hotel Althea Place d'Italie, which turns out to be modern, clean and bright: staff helpful, lift efficient, bed comfortable. Of course, if you were paying the advertised room rate, 650 francs, you could enjoy a much nicer individual hotel, but these probably don't take block-bookings of English rock-fans.

Paris is, as ever, a great city. We try the workers' co-op restaurant and it proves worth the recommendation. Bob Dylan's concert is pretty good too. He's at the 500-capacity Zenith Theatre, one of a complex of halls on a purpose-built site up at La Villette, in the city's north-east corner. A funfair at the entrance puts an extra zing in the air. The hall has raised seats if you want them (if you're just sightseeing Dylan, ticking off a legend: Stones? Yep. Presley? Missed him, unfortunately. Dylan? Yep, doing him tonight) but there's also a big standing area in front of the stage. People around me have come up from Marseille and across from Germany and Holland for the concert. It's a strikingly young audience too.

Then the atmosphere is electric and suddenly Bob is on, looking calm-centred and thoroughly pleased to be here. Afterwards, as the crowd files out, they behave like a New York audience and unlike a London one; that is, they discuss the show avidly.

All too soon, it's Wednesday morning and we're back on the bus outside the hotel. Four people are missing. We wait a long time.

"Right. We've found the missing people. Apparently they're in bed. But they're going to be here in three minutes."

Groggy people stagger on apologising, and we leave. The driver knocks half an hour off the journey out of Paris. Guy says we'll make a hypermarket stop at Calais. Had we been told this earlier it would have saved an early-morning search for greengrocers and permitted a leisurely last bar-tabac coffee instead. In the event, we park at a Spar-sized supermarket. The wine is still a bargain.

So is the trip. Do it individually and the hotel alone will cost you more than the package. Pity they don't yet offer air excursions. **G**



BBC2: 8.30 pm Arena – Tales of Rock 'n' Roll.

A nostalgic trip down Highway 61

CRITIC'S CHOICE

★ Arena – Tales of Rock 'n' Roll

BBC2: 8.30 - 9.30 pm

The fourth and last in James Marsh's series about the origins of classic rock songs and the people who made them into hits features Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* from the 1960s. The road, long and undoubtedly dusty in places, runs from New Orleans to Thunder Bay on Lake Superior and passes Dylan's home town of Hibbing in northern Minnesota — Al Z'Don, editor of the *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, says, 'If you wanted to go to the bright lights and the big city, you had to go down Highway 61. It was the main route from Hibbing to where you wanted to go...'

John Bucklen, a teenage companion who drove down the highway with Dylan to Minneapolis and played in his first band, has some interesting memories of the middle-class musician Bob Zimmerman before he changed his name and entered the legendary sphere as a protest singer complete with guitar, harmonica and scowl and the ability to write songs like *Blowin' in the Wind*, *Mr Tambourine Man* and *Masters of War*, sung in a voice that wasn't beautiful but suited the material perfectly.

We hear Dylan singing *Highway 61 Revisited* ('Abe says, where do you want this killin' done? God says, out on Highway 61') and see clips of him in action, including one from 1965 where he's telling admirers that he just writes songs and isn't concerned about messages. That will never stop critics and university dons probing for inner meanings. **RB**

CHOICE

Tales of Rock 'n' Roll: Highway 61 Revisited BBC2, 8.30pm

Highway 61 runs north-south through the United States from the Canadian border to New Orleans. It was famously celebrated in song by Bob Dylan, who was born in one Highway 61 town and grew up in another. The road yields many other musical stories. Elvis Presley lived on the highway for four years, the great blues singer Bessie Smith died on it. A discursive, inconsequential film pulls in all these elements, as well as recalling that Martin Luther King was assassinated near where Highway 61 passes through Memphis. The emphasis, however, is on the young Dylan. If the potted biography of his early years contains nothing new, it contributes to a pleasing ramble through American popular music.

BRIEFING

Bringing it all back home

Two teenage voices wail tunelessly on a crackly tape. "That'll sell just like that," says one, "10 million in a week." This recording of the frolics of a youthful Bob Dylan and his childhood friend John Bucklen forms the spine of "Highway 61 Revisited", the final part of **TALES OF ROCK 'N' ROLL** (8.30pm: BBC2). They discuss the thrill of R'n'B music and dismiss C&W. As has been the case throughout this series, the song acts as a springboard for a wider examination of the singer and his background. The theme of this documentary is escape — as embodied by driving on Highway 61, which runs from Canada to New Orleans. Jazz and blues practitioners came up it from the Deep South, while Bob Dylan went down it —

fleeing the drabness of Hibbing, Minnesota, a town previously known only as the birthplace of the Greyhound Bus. His middle-class father desperately wanted young Bob to follow him into the appliances trade, selling cookers and fridges to the good burghers of Hibbing. But Dylan (or Zimmerman as he then was) couldn't wait to get away. Once he had made it big in New York — and named himself after the fashionable poet, Dylan Thomas — he made no secret of his disdain for small-town Minnesota. Bucklen, who makes an admirable guide, strikes a note of regret at the end: "I never really got to know Bob Dylan... However, I still have fond memories of Bob Zimmerman".

JAMES RAMPTON

Watching Brief

Arena: Tales of Rock 'n' Roll — Highway 61 Revisited. (BBC 2, 8.30pm) US Highway 61 travels down the length of America, from Canada to New Orleans, passing by the bleak and isolated town of Hibbing, Minnesota. It's the route taken by any adventurous citizen who wants to get away from Hibbing, and it's the road later celebrated in song by one who did. This last programme in Arena's entertaining series explores Bob Dylan's home town in the company of his old high school friend and first musical collaborator, and takes a musical and historical journey down the great highway itself.

SANDY SMITHIES

PICK OF THE DAY

★ **TALES OF ROCK 'N' ROLL** (BBC2, 8.30pm): Continuing the series of documentaries revealing the inspiration behind the lyrics of classic rock 'n' roll numbers, *Highway 61 Revisited* concentrates on Bob Dylan's famous album and song. The highway in question passed by Dylan's hometown of Hibbing in Northern Minnesota as it stretched from Canada to New Orleans.

John Bucklen, a high-school friend and early collaborator of Dylan's guides us round Hibbing and provides some new insights into the singer's earliest musical experiments.

BOB DYLAN AT HAMMERSMITH 1993 - A REVIEW OF THE REVIEWS

[I refer to reviews in the press starting with Andrew Mueller in *Melody Maker* [Bits & Bobs pp 7 and others in *The Guardian*, [pp 7] *The Independent*, [pp 3] *The Times*, [pp 12] *The Daily Telegraph*, [pp 12]

What a wonderfully provocative piece of writing! How true, how untrue! This is a young man's review: Andrew Mueller is obviously young enough to suppose that wealth is freedom - when it seems more likely that the gusts of the idiot wind sooner or later make you realize that freedom is finally to have been "double crossed for the very last time".

Andrew Mueller compares Roddy Frame with Dylan - oh, odious, ludicrous comparison. On the night I saw him Roddy Frame himself enjoined us to "Enjoy Bob Dylan" - sound advice. Mueller however got the impression that Dylan "can't work out why he's doing it anymore" and the weakness of his review is betrayed in his statement "Neither can I". Those of us who have been following the ins and outs of Bob Dylan's career may recall what Bob himself has said on the subject in interview, though some of us seem reluctant to accept it.).

But this is obviously a young man's review written for a young man's music paper - and there is nothing wrong with that but I just suppose that (mercifully) Dylan does not really fit in with all that, the "contemporary music scene". The contrast Mueller draws between the "fidgety schoolboy" (in truth the venerable 29 year old "The Maker's Black Mat Smith") and the "menopausal harridan" is well observed. Even if fictional, it is more relevant than the inaccurate and incomplete phrase "assembled brace of middle-management nobodies, salesmen and school-teachers" intended to characterize Dylan's natural audience; I know at least two people in the Hammersmith audience who do not fit that description. And do we need reminding that Dylan has at times been booed by liberals (and the feeling has been mutual)?¹

I now believe in the existence of generation gaps but I hope that I have never believed that Bob Dylan is or ever was any sort of spokesman for "youth culture" (whatever that may be) or for any particular "generation". There are bigger gaps between different individuals; generation is about time; the poet wants to escape time; there can be differences between poets and politicians. You don't have to be old to appreciate Bob Dylan but it has been a long strange trip growing up with him!

But even if this reviewer comes with pre-conditioned attitudes of the "contemporary music scene" at least he seems to show some evidence of approaching the show with an open mind, contrasting - strangely to readers of *The (Wanted Man) Telegraph* - this 1993 performance unfavourably with the 1991 vintage; "strangely" since the accepted wisdom seems to be that the 1991 shows reached the "absolute nadir" of Dylan's performing. Of course the applicable rule of thumb is to distrust the accepted wisdom always, and that view of the John Jackson / Tony Garnier band (unfavourable) against the GE Smith / Kenny Aaronson band (favourable) has not gone completely unchallenged (and I mean no disrespect to the importance of drummers by excluding their names).

A Digression on Backing

To state my opinion, while acknowledging the undisputed talents of GE, I think that John Jackson has provided a subtle and sympathetic presence; the versatility of Garnier on the stand-up bass, even with so deft and delicate a touch as using a bow at times, has added a novel range to the group. This range has been limited by the decision to do without keyboards for all but the rarest - if occasionally most impressive - of times, until the inspired stroke of introducing the multi-stringed Bucky Baxter. The steel guitar has always been likely to suit Dylan's voice, as suggested by *Nashville Skyline* and proven absolutely by the *Biograph* *You're A Big Girl Now*; further confirmation has been supplied by the more generous use in the current five piece band. It does not seem to me unfair to suggest that in what is frankly a backing band for Bob Dylan, rather than a "group" in the sense of say the Grateful Dead, the centre of gravity is Dylan himself and what he chooses to do with vocals, harmonica, song selection and arrangement; (in fact I recall that Dylan himself has said as much on the attitude to the personnel of "his group"); whatever may be your view of the co-incidental advocacy by Lou Reed in 1988 of the four piece combo. The times when Dylan's own acoustic guitar has been in the forefront have often been highlights along the Never Ending Tour; and I get the impression that more recently Dylan has been directly leading the band rather than delegating responsibility

¹(Whether this is true of Sinéad O'Connor or not).

to GE (whose organising talents were demonstrated again at the Madison Square Garden Tribute). Dylan's tendency to step back and leave it to his musicians to make what they will of the openings he leaves them has been well documented, and he has been known to cut them off in full flight. But the instinct for musical masterworks seems to go under-appreciated - the *Blood On The Tracks* If You See Her, Say Hello guitar and mandolin (which Spitz suggests is directly attributable to Dylan) and the under-rated eighties masterpiece *Silvio* with the interplay of uncredited strings and (?) organ and inventive backing vocals serve as examples. Also from *Down In The Groove*, is not the *Shenandoah* electric / acoustic guitar, mandolin interplay mightily impressive, indeed the whole arrangement? Numerous examples of brilliant performances of terrific songs can be found throughout any half decent Dylan tape collection.

As far as the NET is concerned it seems obvious to me from what we know about rehearsals and from the most cursory consideration of different shows that it is not a question of "rehearsal", it is a question of Dylan's "mood", and what he feels like doing. . I want to say that I find the extended instrumental breaks and endings most effective and most enjoyable, with the three "lead" instruments "on top of" the bass and drums "rhythm" section; (also the two drummers technique - as practised by the Dead and the Allmans - can work really well). [Technical note: I am not a musician (you may have noticed) but the same has been said about Bob Dylan by, no offence intended, Jerry Garcia; I cannot agree but I can see what he means!] It is sometimes apparent that the band are not sure what Dylan is going to do and when, but spontaneity is (at least a part of) what (some) live music is about.

But (reverting to Hammersmith '93) I find Mueller's comment (no doubt he was fore-armed with Tom Petty's much quoted comment on Dylan's song selection in 1987) on "obscure songs his band clearly didn't know" almost as far from the truth as his judgement of "tepid run through of his greatest hits". I agree that Bob must have put some effort into finding a combination between the unexpected and the expected, it is the "obscure" and the "tepid" I object to. Maybe I was at different shows in 1991 (7/2) and 1993 (9/2 and 13/2) - more likely I was on a different plane - or planet - but for the record I found the shows excellent, no less than I could hope for from Bob Dylan in the nineties - and my expectations were not low. Fortunately I am not professionally obliged to listen to "contemporary music" or attend concerts with a copy deadline in mind; but so you can see where I am coming from I agree with Mueller's implication about the "spare seats" and I probably enjoyed Roddy Frame more than Graham Parker.

"Aged and weather-beaten marionette"? .. well, none of us are getting any younger you know; but "marionette"? - you have to be joking (it reminds me of the Grateful Dead's *Touch Of Grey* video - you must have seen it - when at the end the skeletons are pulling the strings). To me the shows were not "tepid" but hot and often reached boiling point - I could go on about particular songs but suffice to comment on the *Tuesday Highway 61 Revisited* - in contrast to which the Saturday version seemed relatively restrained in spite of Dave Stewart's re-appearance - where it was Rock and Roll that seemed conspicuously present. "Greatest hits" is a phrase that sits ill with Bob Dylan; it hardly applies to *Tomorrow Night* for example but, okay, I agree it should be; let's say it is - I imagine it would go down with the Top of the Pops punters like a lead balloon. I am assured that the *Thursday Girl From the North Country* was anything but tepid - comparable to the sadly mislaid epitaph to the Madison Square Gardens tribute. As for *She Belongs To Me* - sorry, I said that I would not go on about the songs.

The young man's remark in conclusion about growing up "wanting to be that man" again shows to me how the review fails to hit the mark; maybe you do want to be someone else until you realize that it is hard enough to be yourself.

Several images of Bob Dylan abide in my memory (along with the lyrics and the songs) - for example, from the Arena TV programme a 1986 "Hearts of Fire" Canada street chance meeting with a couple of fans where Dylan responded with obvious warmth; and most appositely in this connection where the "industry view" of Dylan is being considered, the stunning Grammy appearance where, when most pop-stars would be patting each other on the back, we get a powerful *Masters Of War* and Bob Dylan "joking" (?) about being defiled! These are now joined by the picture from Hammersmith '93, of Dylan wandering off stage slowly, taking repeated bows, seeming to acknowledge and take an interest in the applause.

Mueller suggests that this applause was merely for being alive, and *The Independent On Sunday* preview predicted a homage paying exercise, but at least allowing the possibility of something more. This is a theme

that the reviews (in each case) pick up. It is this view that I find objectionable and inappropriate. It seems to be that the "finest songwriter of his generation" (that word crops up again) becomes an irrelevance if he does not produce any new songs of his own which the critics find comparable to the "classics". This thesis is allied with the theories about what the reviewers think Dylan's audience want, or what the reviewer thinks that Dylan thinks his audience wants. Adam Sweeting suggests that it is impossible to tell what Dylan thinks or what effect he is trying to achieve. They seem to make life more complicated than it is; certainly Dylan has expressed his ideas on this quite clearly in interview; it is not his style to repeat himself too often, or at present to chat to his audience; (when he had a lot to say he got criticized for that by some, too, you may recall!).

So what else did we get in the serious press? Giles Smith refers to "finest moments" (i.e. Dylan songs) "deftly trashed", seeming to want "recognizable shape" and "memory of the originals" - well you could stay at home and listen to your albums, or Barbara Dickson's **Don't Think Twice, It's Alright**. Recognizability is cited by Sweeting, but at least his complaint is based on what he finds to be a lack of melody and power in performance as compared with the original versions. Opinions on the quality of the band's playing - not to mention knowledge about who is and has been playing what - and of Dylan's singing and playing are no less variable than the recommendations of seven wise economists on the state of the nation. The artist once lauded for a Chaplinesque stage presence is now berated for being clumsy - (strange how the times change!!) - but I find this unworthy even of the British press!

The anonymous² reviewer with the best title ("What becomes a legend least?") identifies a novel "problem". He finds Dylan's "stock as a contemporary phenomenon never lower" and dismisses (how many?) albums as a "long line of poor selling, uninspired farragos"; continuing the business metaphor he draws a comparison with a "restaurant which receives no complaints" so "standards are likely to decline"; he acknowledges a contrast between "high gloss digitalized production values" and Dylan's "humanity"; and traces of grudging approval are almost visible before he concludes that anyone else playing "a set of 25 year old songs so ineptly" would be "laughed out of town". This idea refers to the thesis mentioned above that the audience turns up "grateful for the chance to celebrate Bob at relatively close quarters" and the idea that the audience are "kidding themselves" if they think they are enjoying the show. Well, even reviewers are entitled to opinions, but, as often, Dylan himself has already anticipated and put forward the sensible response, in his comments from the stage in 1986 about the "so called critics": nobody needs a journalist to formulate rather than inform their own judgement. For my part I gratefully admit that I went to Hammersmith to, as it were, pay my respects but I am happy to report that I respect, admire and yes, really enjoy what Bob Dylan is doing now.

It would be reasonable for the reviews to reflect the scope for differences in taste and that there is more subjectivity than objective matter of fact in what we enjoy in music. But "inept" is just plain wrong as a description of Dylan's playing; and the human face of a performer prepared to countenance variation, variety and spontaneity is infinitely preferable to my taste to any amount of slick reproduction of studio recordings.

The comment on harmonica playing is no less appalling: the harp playing that impressed John Hammond Snr in 1962 was not all that bad, so even if we were to allow that there has been no improvement, even that it has deteriorated, it would still be pretty good; the comment is contradicted by John Preston who at least enjoyed the harp on *It Ain't Me, Babe*. One of the reviews refers reverentially to **Blood On The Tracks** - no argument one of the great albums, but I think these versions of **Tangled Up In Blue** are great too - which suggests that it is blood (on the lips) that these guys want: to get into the room where critics go "you gotta be an important person ... you gotta play your harp until your lips bleed".

As for people in the audience providing anecdote and headlines, the guy standing next to me, his head was exploding ... sorry, that was another time and place, the guy standing next to me sighed in audible disappointment when Bob launched into **Mr. Tambourine Man**; at **Don't Think Twice, It's Alright** he sat down in disgust, not to rise to his feet again. Maybe he was a six-nighter hoping for something different - which just goes to show that you can't please all the people all the time, even "block booked Dylanologists"?!

Giles Smith makes a good point about the applause - Bob has been working on his endings and the thoughtless yahoos are doing their best to spoil the tapes by starting to applaud too soon! John Preston contradicts Andrew Mueller's comparison with 1991 and suggests that the voice is "shot to pieces". Oh

² David Sinclair -Pedantic Ed.

dear, and I thought I was listening to the greatest exponent of tonal breath control since Caruso; let's hope Joan Baez can still sing as beautifully as she used to, and that Pavarotti will do **Like A Rolling Stone**. (Please forgive me lapsing into sarcasm, but I have had and said enough!)

I conclude by quoting a comment from a somewhat different context which happens to apply to my feelings:

"Was it worth it?"

Doubts were soon banished by the excitement of performance and the approval of the audiences ...
It was worth it then, and it seems even more so now."

(Rosemary Burton, on performance of Greek Tragedies in a college garden, from the viewpoint of the performers.)

POSTSCRIPT

Since writing the above I have seen the **Q [Bits & Bobs pp13]** review of the Hammersmith shows, a more creditable effort with some excellent (but strangely uncredited?) contemporary photos. It does amaze me that a one time Boomtown Rat can come up with remarks like that! The quoting of Dylan's comment at the end of the Sunday **Don't Think Twice, It's Alright** illuminates my remarks about spontaneity and rehearsal; the "Collected Wit and Wisdom of Bob Dylan" is a book worth publishing, but what sometimes seems to be missed is a certain predilection for irony, the point of which is a certain relationship with the truth, the savour of which is contemplating just exactly what that relationship is, the piquancy of which is feeling that sense of superiority over those who cannot recognize the irony. This is the man who eventually gave even **Subterranean Homesick Blues** a new arrangement!

If you are looking to the reviews for some reassurance that you are not "kidding yourself" you enjoy the show then Adrian Deevo's final paragraph and final sentence is the one worth waiting for

CRAWDADDY!

Is Back !!!

Winter 1993 saw the appearance of the first issue of the new series of **Crawdaddy!** It is \$4:00 per issue or \$12:00 for a year's subscription (4 issues). Add \$1:00 per issue if non-USA and wishing air-mail service.

The editorial address includes the following paragraph:

This new incarnation is a newsletter; the editor will write much but not all of each issue. The purpose as it was in 1966 is to use our common enthusiasm for and interest in new music as a basis for intimate and honest communication. "Our means editor, writer, readers. This publication is dedicated to serving the spirit of music, that which rewards and inspires us as we listen. It is not meant to serve the music business, and will accept no advertising.

The first issue of the new series - some 27 years after the original **Crawdaddy!** - contained an excellent, in-depth review of **Good As I Been To You**. Issue Two should be out by the time you read this.

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BOB DYLAN AT HAMMERSMITH 1993 - A REVIEW OF THE REVIEWS

During February, Dylan received more press coverage in the British press than at any time since 1984. 'We are talking almost saturation coverage in some newspapers, though the music press was predictably leaner. The **NME** was surprisingly positive, offering a well-balanced review, as they had done earlier for the MSG Tribute and **Good As I Been To You**. Perversely, the **Melody Maker**, who I expected to send Allan Jones along for his customary thoughtful - yet ultimately favourably biased - appraisal of Dylan (as he had done in 1987, 89, 90, 91 and 92), remained cynical and unimpressed.

Why the sudden interest in Dylan from the "popular" media? Could it have something to do with the "last British visit" rumour that was to gain a full head of steam during Dylan's week-long residency? There was very little build-up; a photo of Dylan arriving at Heathrow en route to Ireland in the **Daily Mail** on February 3rd seemed to be the only real mention. It was here that a fairly healthy looking Dylan - clad in jackets and coats but, surprisingly, no hoods - responded to the dumb question of whether this was to be his last UK appearance with the typically enigmatic "Who knows? You can never really tell about these things". This was probably an off-the-cuff remark (almost long enough to be considered as a Dylan interview these days) from a man who was merely trying to get to his limo without being bombarded with idiotic questions from a bunch of hacks who would rather have been greeting Elizabeth Taylor, yet the ball really started to roll within a press corps who considers Dylan's infatuation with Raquel Welch to be worthy of full-page attention.

By February 7 - the day of Dylan's first Hammersmith show, **The Mail On Sunday** was interviewing Jakob Dylan and announcing that he was over here accompanying his father on "his final tour of Britain". Mercifully we were spared the usual career retrospectives from the British press, though Liz Thompson was dredged up for an unreadable article in the **New Statesman** during which she criticised his critics for taking him too seriously, obviously forgetting some of her own past efforts.

By February 8 the first-night reviews were rolling in. Max Bell, in the London **Evening Standard**, was particularly positive, accompanying his article with a photo of Dylan in the back of a limo in shades and with a quietly confident smile on his face. Mick Brown in the **Daily Telegraph** also found Dylan's first night cause to celebrate - albeit cautiously - and set the trend for several of the week's reviews by concentrating as much on the audience as on Dylan. Even Lambchop got a look in, somewhat understating the obvious by revealing that "I have to get close". But there he is, surrounded by much of his Dylan paraphernalia, a loveable eccentric - unless you happen to be sitting right behind him at a Dylan gig, that is.¹

By Tuesday the 9th, the photo of Dylan in the limo began to appear everywhere, now less cropped than in the **Evening Standard** to reveal Jakob beside him. Cue lots of "like father, like son" quips and more of the "his fans fear this will be his last British tour crap." Actually, at the time, my biggest fear was that I'd bankrupt myself buying all those bloody newspapers every day. Tuesday's reviews leaned decidedly toward the negative. "Has the tambourine man lost his marbles?" asked David Cleal in the **Daily Telegraph** (before concluding that the answer was a definite "yes", and so had his fans if they had forked out 20 quid to see the sorry spectacle that Cleal witnessed), David Sinclair in **The Times** found Dylan to be as riveting as a third-rate busker with pronounced bronchial troubles and Adam Sweeting titled his piece in **The Guardian** "Erratic ballad of a bored man". Only Giles Smith in **The Independent** found the opening gig to be "a night to remember", though he seemed to glean as much enjoyment from watching the audience as he did from the man who has come to be known as "His Bobness" by people who buy Phil Collins records, glossy magazines with free CDs on the cover and who have had their sense of humour removed on the National Health.

By Thursday **The Financial Times** had turned in it's politely positive review and **The Independent** was giving eternal warm-up man Roddy Frame a better write-up than they had afforded Bob. Friday brought probably the best article of them all; Michael Gray's review in **The Daily Telegraph** (where else?²). Gray, who had turned in a sulky review in 1991 because Dylan didn't play what he wanted him to, far surpassed other reviewers - however positive - because he truly understood. He understood that Dylan is still likely to turn in the performance of a lifetime when you least expect, or when you're not looking, and he understood that that was only part of the attraction. The reason why people are drawn to him not just for one gig but for as many as they can afford can only be truly understood if you're smitten by the same religious fervour

¹I wouldn't mind stepping back a row, Mark, after all it would be slightly more central.

²Here, for a start - Ed.

yourself. To see it eloquently written up by the (usually) reliable Mr. Gray makes it all seem to make sense? And when he concludes "...it's easy to rubbish him, it's a richer experience to be there", you find yourself nodding your head vigorously in agreement and looking for the nearest unbeliever so you can shove the article under his nose and say; "Look, I told you I was right. This is exactly how I feel!"

Sandra Barwick got a late review in Saturday's Independent, once again concentrating on the audience and why they were there, though with very little of the panache of Michael Gray. Neil Spencer tried to have the last word in Sunday's **Observer**, though perhaps words like "an artist declining slowly into irrelevance" would have been best left unspoken. The world needs another put-down of Dylan about as desperately as it needs a new Tina Turner album.

Even Spanish newspaper Diario reviewed the gigs, or, at least, it reviewed the British newspapers reviewing the gigs, while the Irish coverage of Dylan's Point Depot show was extremely positive, especially Bill Graham's wordy but worthy piece in **Hot Press**. It was left to the increasingly juvenile **Q** to provide the most balanced and thorough review of the entire residency. Adrian Deevoy's two-page article was written from a similar standpoint as Michael Gray; a critic who understood the game, and the fact that the goal posts kept shifting. The colour photos were the icing on the cake, and, at last, Dylan's residency had been given the respect and attention that it deserved.

If 1993 brought in a far more accessible Dylan than that of 1991, then this was reflected in some of the reviews. Some of them were far more intelligent than we had any right to expect from a press that spends much of it's time at gutter level at best. Overall, the casual reader would have formed the impression that we had been visited by an ex-genius trading in on former glories, though there were grudging admissions that the man was not yet ready to be written off scattered throughout many of the reviews. Collecting articles can be a frustrating and annoying business, reading so much bullshit, misinformation and downright lies, and February 1993 certainly had it's moments of that, though not as depressing as last October when Sinéad O'Connor stole Dylan's thunder in New York by acting like a spoiled brat and being hailed as a modern Joan Of Arc instead of a modern day Silly Cow. Having said that, the media blitz on a man supposedly unimportant and irrelevant to the 1990s tends to suggest that his very presence on our shores is still a cause for celebration.

"Someone's got it in for me," Dylan wrote in 1974, "they're planting stories in the press". Nineteen years later, and it's still true. But he's still drawing those critics to him to try and decipher the mystique and he will be in years to come, long after Chris Rea is nothing more than a faded memory in a **Q**-reader's scrapbook. God willing.

MARK "have you got any copies of yesterday's **Daily Telegraph** left? There was an article in it that I'd like to get" CARTER.



"Bad news Bob - they're protesting at us, not with us!"

*This section begins with three letters from Bill Laing, who was justifiably annoyed when his letter for the last issue was accidentally omitted at the printing stage. Apologies again to him and to any others who may have suffered likewise. I'd like to remind long term readers - and point out to new ones - that **Homer**, the slut will consider any letters sent in for publication unless it is clearly stated otherwise. (And provided that I don't mess things up at printing time!)*

BILL LAING: LETTER FOR ISSUE EIGHT

I write this just after reading **Homer, the slut 7**. With regard to a 'select band': I am a betting office manager, what odds would you give me about Mark Carter and Jim Heppell both having long letters printed in issue 8? Probably 5-1 ON! Perhaps you could ask them to give us a rest for one issue, and print all or any of this letter.

As for seeing Bob Dylan live, I've only ever seen Bob in London - 20 odd times since 1978. I missed 1965/66 because I was only 12, and started Dylan around 1967 when I was 14. I've thoroughly enjoyed every show I've been to, including all 8 shows at Hammersmith in February 1991. My favourites were the first one I went to at Earl's Court, obviously, June 15th 1978, also June 26th 81, Wembley 84, the Hammersmith shows of Feb 3rd and 8th and 12th Feb '91.

At this last show I was with a friend who had seen Dylan twice before - in 81 and 90. My friend has been to see just about everybody bar Elvis and Hendrix and, as we made our way to the pub for the last ten minutes, he told me it was the best concert he had ever seen in his life. I was going to do him a tape of this concert but on hearing the tape myself decided not to. He's better off with his memories, when you listen to the actual tape it is nowhere near as good as you remember it to be. (Whereas the tape I've got from 3/2/90 is even better than I remembered! Also **You Angel You** from the 8th is one of my all time favourites.) From our seat in the balcony, when Dylan strolled out for **Tangled Up In Blue** I thought at the time that it was the greatest thing that I'd ever seen and it was - but even with the great beginning, Dylan misses the first few words of the song and also the beginning of the next - **Lay Lady Lay** - and the next **All Along The Watchtower**.

I think that it is pretty normal when he actually forgets the words, or starts singing the wrong verse and then covers up. There are numerous occasions on officially released records of him doing this, let alone live performances.

As to "shouts" from the audience, how about Sit down you prat! after **Stuck Inside Of Mobile (With The Memphis Blues Again)** and before **Pretty Peggy-O** on 3/2/90?

The other main difference to me personally between 1990 & 1991 was this: In 1990 I could sit downstairs and watch the show. There was only one particular chap causing people to stand briefly -you know who he was. In 1991 - although I had good seats downstairs for most nights - the people with the best seats right at the front stood up, forcing everybody else to do the same. When you are carrying arthritic knees and hips as a legacy of playing football it's not a lot of fun leaning on the chair for an hour and a half. Please don't do this to people in 1993. THEY DON'T DESERVE IT!

Although I find myself collecting and playing more and more tapes from **The Never Ending Tour**, I don't think you would call many of them great shows by any standards. There have been some great performances in my opinion. **Little Moses**, **Golden Vanity**, **She Belongs To Me**, and a 12-minute **Desolation Row** among many in '92. But why for instance does Dylan bother with **Hazy Shade Of Winter** when he hardly knows any of the words?

Finally, can I ask a question? [Think you just did, Bill!] Are there any 'Bob Dylan fans' among your readers who are aware of this obvious fact:

Bob Dylan's best three albums in order of release - but triple dead-heat in merit - are as follows:
Bringing It All Back Home, **Highway 61 Revisited**, **Blonde On Blonde**

closely followed by **John Wesley Harding** and **Shot Of Love**. Then perm any three from: **The Times They Are A Changin'**, **Freewheelin'**, **Blood On The Tracks**, **The Basement Tapes** and **Infidels**....followed by anything you want, they are all brilliant. Some of the records touted in your pages as Dylan's best, make me laugh.

Please feel free to edit and print any or all of this, if your normal contributors don't mind.

Original Reply

Bill, you seem to be under a bit of a delusion as to how I select the letters that I print - basically I print all the letters that do not specify "not for publication". (I get the impression from your letter that you feel I choose certain letters out of many - 'fraid not!) Personally I hope Jim and Mark never stop writing with their responses to **Homer**, the slut - it is from the enthusiasm and support of people like this that **Homer** finds the energy to keep going. However, it seems that they might be psychic in regard to your letter because neither of them have sent their normal letters yet! {I know which bookie I'll be looking for odds from next season!!}

Many of your favourite shows are mine too. I'd love to say that the first show in 1978 is my favourite - and, in many ways it is - but after the sheer excitement of seeing him arrive on-stage I can't remember too much about it. I do, though, have a very clear memory of 'phoning home just before I went in (hours early) just so that I could tell someone that I was actually there, outside where Dylan would soon be playing (I was on my own and felt that this historic fact needed a witness). My mother answered and tried to remind me that "he is only human...don't be disappointed if...etc." He certainly seemed more than human that night but I'm afraid I can't recall it all that clearly. So I suppose I'd plump for the second or the last night in 1978, though the 3rd and 8th 1990 in London are, as you suggest, hard to put in second place to anything.

As to the Tuesday in '91, that was the night I had my best seat and I really thought that it was going to be a stormer. I don't really think, though, that its early promise was fulfilled.

The point you make about people standing is a good and, it seems to me, a valid one - but it only tells a little of the story. I sympathise with your knees etc. and have often had great difficulty in seeing concerts even when I'm very close - being 5'6" has definite drawbacks when it comes to Dylan concerts. However there are lots of other points that run counter to the argument that those at the front should remain seated, the main ones that spring to mind are:

1. I don't think Dylan likes it! Witness his exhortations to audiences to get up and dance - and to come down the front to do so. It is, after all a rock 'n' roll gig, albeit with an acoustic slot, not a classical performance.
2. You can be anywhere in the hall and have the person in front of you stand up/dance etc. regardless of what the front few rows are doing.
3. Surely lots of the performances are deliberately designed to make you get up from your seat? I, for one, would find it difficult to remain seated all through a Dylan concert.

Why Dylan bothers with Paul Simon songs I do not know. I wish he'd stop it. Nevertheless, since he does do them I at least think he should be given credit for forgetting most of the words.

The three albums you mention as being Bob Dylan's best three records would certainly always figure in my personal top four - I refuse to go to the Desert Island With Electricity without **Blood On The Tracks** - but I wouldn't equate my opinion to "obvious fact" and suspect you have done so to stir up a bit of controversy. Let's hope it transpires!

BILL LAING ON READING ISSUE EIGHT WITH THE ABOVE ACCIDENTALLY OMITTED

I rushed home in my lunch hour as I was expecting a few Dylan items in the post...I tore straight into **Homer** as you had indicated that you'd print my letter, I was really disappointed when you hadn't...I just thought that you might be able to allow me a little bit of space. Perhaps you could squeeze something in if you left out the constant references to Souness, Dalglish, Houghton, Staunton, Shankly, Yeats, Lawrence, Lawler, Byrne, Mum, Dad, Auntie, Cousin etc - and concentrated on Bob Dylan.

Or perhaps I could write about the time that Liverpool were awarded a penalty at Anfield straight from the kick off because a member of the opposition bumped into Roger Hunt in Woolworth's the day before.

He didn't so much "bump into Hunt" as physically assault him; he's lucky he's not playing nowadays as you can get sent off for that kind of professional shopping bump. (Nevertheless, a conciliatory letter was despatched during the Hammersmith residence and...)

BILL LAING (CONTINUED!)

Thanks very much for your very nice letter. You must have still been on a high from the previous nights proceedings!

If I mentioned the best shows I've been to in the last letter, you'd better insert Monday 8th February 1993 at number one, with the 11th right up there as well.

I was lucky enough to be in row A on the 8th, and though I'm getting a bit old for leaning on the front of the stage shouting, there I was. I thought **Pretty Peggy-O** was brilliant, also **She Belongs To Me**, **Highway 61**, **Tambourine Man** - well all of them really. Also, **I and I**, not one of my favourites on record, was great every night.

The other thing I enjoyed, unexpectedly, was **Tomorrow Night** and **Jim Jones**. In fact **Tomorrow Night** is the least played track by me on the new album. I've been playing **Froggie**, **Black Jack Davey** and **Canadee-I-O** a lot but not much of the others. So after hearing Dylan perform these 2 and talking to people at Hammersmith I've found myself playing the whole album through time and time again. It's amazing how many people there are naming two or three tracks from this album that are their favourites. It always seems to differ.

Apart from the shows on the 8th and 11th I thought the 9th and 12th were also great with the first and last shows not as good as the other 4 but still very good. I was a little disappointed on the last night. I took my wife along and after telling her how great Dylan was all the week I wanted her to see just as good a show as the previous ones. Although I was pleased to hear **It Takes A Lot To Laugh** I was hoping for another **She Belongs To Me**.

My only other regret was that I would have liked to hear a lot more different songs. But there were over thirty different so I don't suppose you can complain too much. I think we were all spoilt in 1990. Particularly the same 4 'acoustic' songs every night bar **Desolation Row** and **Girl From The North Country** once each was a bit strong. Although I must say **Tambourine Man** and **Don't Think Twice** were brilliant on occasions, especially the harmonica playing.



I suppose on the other hand it's better to hear the same songs every night played properly than a rush through of 20 different songs. The only thing is Bob will now go off to another venue and perform **Little Moses**, **Golden Vanity**, **Trail of the Buffalo** and **The Banks of the Royal Canal**! The song I would really like to hear in concert is **John Wesley Harding**. Anyway it feels a bit flat now it's all over. I'll just have to look forward and hope it's all on again next February. I'd like to go to Paris or even America to see Dylan but it's an expensive hobby/obsession. My wife never moans about it but with two sons there are more important things in my life than listening to Bob. I'll just have to try harder on the pools coupon, then I can start following the Never Ending Tour and also buy a couple of hundred bootleg CDs, I've only got about 15 at the moment.

Anyway, to get back to **Homer**. I am sorry if I've got off on the wrong foot with you, I just get a bit carried away at times. I too love football. I played professionally (at Crystal Palace) and Ramsgate (Southern League) for 5 years, but I don't think a Bob Dylan fanzine should include any references to football, especially Liverpool and Cowdenbeath! *{Are you sure we're still talking football here, Bill? - Ed}* I thoroughly enjoy 90% of **Homer**. I can do without the cartoons and I find certain items a bit 'too clever' for me.

All the rest I enjoy, particularly the press clippings. I've enclosed a couple for you. I expect you've seen them but you might not have. I also enjoy reading the letters, which is why I have written to you before on occasions. It would be really nice to see a letter of mine in a Bob Dylan mag. What was winding me up was the number of letters that seemed to be printed from casual observers who 'just happened' upon your mag.

While I appreciate that you can't print them all, I just thought that as a long time fan and collector and subscriber you might afford me a bit of space. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but I'm flabbergasted by some of them. Particularly the bloke whose chart has **Blonde On Blonde** at No. 5, **Highway 61** at No. 7 and, horror of horrors, **Bringing It All Back Home** at No. 14. This is the most ridiculous comment/opinion I have ever heard.

As you know I place these three way out on their own. After this I tend to think differently at different times. I can't even remember the ones I mentioned in my last letter, although I'm also fond of **Shot Of Love** and **John Wesley Harding**. However, by picking out my outstanding ones doesn't mean I don't like the others. I love them all. Since collecting most of them on CD I find myself playing them a lot more because obviously you can pick and choose the tracks you want. **Blood On The Tracks** is, of course, one of Bobs best. Perhaps being a happily married man since 1973 I'm not into all the painful songs in the same way as a lot of others. I love **Simple Twist Of Fate**, **Shelter from the Storm** and **Tangled** but I've got what I consider at least two better versions of **Tangled**. One on the much maligned **Real Live**. Also the exclusion of **Up To Me** is baffling. The last verse is among my very favourite Dylan lines of all time.

Even the Dylan albums that are most criticized have at least one great song on, most have a lot more. Even **Dylan** has **Lily Of The West** which I like. **Self Portrait** and **Down In The Groove** also have some great songs. I was as baffled as everybody else when **Self Portrait** came out but as the years go by I like it more and more. In 10 years time **Good As I Been To You** will probably be my favourite!

My most played song of all time, even with a 15 year start for my favourite albums is probably **Every Grain of Sand**. If I was stuck on a desert island with a copy of this song the first thing I would do when I got home is play it again. Andrew, I'd better wind this letter up before you fall asleep. Thanks once again for your kind letter. I was frightened to open it as I was expecting a bit of a blast. Just allow me one more chance to get along with you!! I often wonder if the letter was actually about the time the door knob broke, or if it arrived as the door knob broke. Things like this keep me awake at night.

P.P.S. I walked past Inglethorpe St. on the way to the shows. You're certainly in the right place at the right time.

OK - The football references will not be allowed to over-proliferate, they started as a joke and I was amazed at how much response they evoked - and how interesting those responses were. Take yourself, for example, it must've been great to move to Ramsgate after playing for Crystal Palace, though it must have been tough adjusting to a team that actually tried to play football!

*I certainly agree with you re **Every Grain of Sand**, I still feel that **Blood On The Tracks**, though, deserves to be thought of as at least the equal of the trilogy of greats you mention. (And I'm happily married too!)*

I always felt that the doorknob/letter reference was about two things happening at almost the same time, but you may be relieved to know that you are not alone in losing sleep over this. One of Homer's best known subscribers once got a middle-of-the-night enquiry about this very subject.

Finally, yes I'm in the right place for Hammersmith right enough. Guess when I moved here - go on, I don't think you'll be far wrong!

LUCAS STENSLAND COMMENTS ON HOMER #7

Issue number seven was one of the greatest reading experiences that has occurred in my life. Although, it was the first issue of my paid subscription. You Mr. Muir (if that's also you who gives feedback to the letters) are an awesome individual! I too, like Rob Breeze am very fond of **Self Portrait**. Though it's not in my top ten Dylan albums, probably down in the thirties.

I am damn fond of Dylan's newest albums, **Good As I Been To You**, **under the red sky** and most of all **Oh Mercy**. You're probably going to call me a fool and stop reading here, but I say **Oh Mercy** is the second best Dylan album (of course **Blood On The Tracks** is number one), which then means that **Oh Mercy** is the second best album ever! I could write about it for hours, talk about it for days. Do you think **Man In The Long Black Coat** is a partial tribute to the man of black himself, Johnny Cash? Maybe I just suck at Dylanology.

I was at Dylan's opening night performance at the Historic Orpheum Theatre in St. Paul Aug 29th. I ran up to the stage during a superb rendition of **Silvio**, if I remember right. I got about fifteen feet from him. This isn't a big deal to you, you've probably been closer. For me it was an orgasm and a half.

Danny Lob should be shot. Okay, I'm being mean. We shouldn't spend so much time causing others hurt, especially if he has no idea what he is writing about. Did I mention Dylan is playing his greatest song ever (**Tangled Up In Blue**) the best it has ever been performed. I have some great clippings that weren't in #7 about St Paul's Orpheum performance, if you ever want them I'll give them to ya right away, "hang my head in shame". I'll await the coming issues with much tension. Thanks for giving my life some meaning.

*Hi, Lucas, your letter just missed the last issue but I'd still like to reply to some points in it. Firstly, I've never been called "awesome" before; a lot of my friends start to say it but their minds become full of another description pretty rapidly! As to **Oh Mercy**, well, it may cheer you to know that Mark Carter rates it even higher than your good self - i.e. at number one. Much as I love the album, I'll never agree with either of you - but I've just lent over and put it on as I type. Agreement on any "pecking order" would be a strange thing amongst Dylan fans, though, wouldn't it? Just wait 'till you read the reaction to the London gigs in the next few pages!*

Fifteen and a half feet still counts as an orgasm and a half for me too, but let's not follow that one up in any detail. As to Danny Lob, fear not, your initial reaction was not over venomous; I've known the thing behind that pseudonym since 1981 - and shooting is, if anything, too good for him.

Finally, life has no meaning so I can't have given you any - but I'm glad I'm the best illusion of one you found!

LUCAS STENSLAND

Talkin' TV Bob

Why have all of Dylan's TV appearances been so dreadful? The answer is because he doesn't warm up his throat. He doesn't do vocal warm ups to get rid of his drinking, smoking, flemy throat. Just look at the MSG tribute concert, each song he sang gradually got better, from Song To Woody to the heart breaking Girl From the North Country. Many people only have these TV appearances to judge him by, and they say that he's just the walking dead, he's over, he's busy dying. But when I see his Bobness in concert, by the time he hits the fourth number it's time for 'great Dylan revisited.' I'd give anything to hear again Pretty Peggy-O from his Minnesota homecoming last summer in St. Paul. But it's impossible to get a recording due to hired thugs who search us at the door.

Propaganda all is phony

Homer, the *slut* to me is the central meeting ground for Dylan fans. I read it to remind myself that Bob is still the greatest, even if he has made some bad moves in his career. So why do you print all those terrible reviews (Bits & Bobs) of Dylan albums and concerts. Sure, there are two sides to everything, but to print somebody calling Bob, "talent fucked" is a little offensive. I don't like spending my money to be offended. In fact to me that couldn't be more offensive. Some of those reviewers are pretty bad writers, too. Even some of the positive ones. One critic thought the best song on *Good As I Been To You* was Step It Up And Go because it was knee slapping fun? What the hell?! Please, Mr. Muir be biased! The Rolling Stone review was damn near poetic, just like your own Coming Straight From the Heart. Those are the kind of things I want to read, not to open up Homer and read "Bob went a mumblin'" (I'm thinking of buying some of Dylan's music critic peers some hearing aids.)

We just heard it from a different point of view. Without a doubt in my mind, the last line to Foot of Pride is, "feel the hot iron glow erase the shade." The other line is, "eat your coconut bread, spiced buns in bed, if you don't mind sleepin' with your head face down in the plate."

Don't wanna be judged

Issue Eight was great! You said we could get issues 2,4,6 and the First Special Subscriber issue for 12:50, but how much for us folks in the states? Is this offer open to us? If so how much? Please, take my money. P.S. Isn't **Heartland** a swell tune! And what did you think of the inaugural performance?

Hi again! This time I'll start near the end of your letter, much as I'd like to take your money, **Rolling Tomes** have to take it first! Those fine people are responsible for all Homer, the slut's USA sales. They have to charge higher than I do in the UK simply due to the postage and (minimal charge this) administration. (See Ads if you don't have their details.)

I like both **Heartland** and the inaugural performance very much. (I'm going to the doctor's about my lumbago next week!)

The inclusion of cuttings that might be found offensive - remembering that I don't exactly like reading this stuff either - is not done lightly. However, as explained in a previous issue, I don't see the point in me "censoring" these to my taste. The purpose is surely to give an overall view of current press coverage and to provide a handy reference point for others writing about Dylan. The most vitriolic and ill-informed article may be of more use to some researcher than any other.

Thanks very much for your letters and cuttings, I hope you like this issue as much as the last one. Oh, and the **Pretty Peggy-O** you mention was sensational (allegedly).

CARL EWENS THE FUTURE FOR DYLAN

In terms of inscrutability, Bob Dylan must rank as highly as Charlie Chan! He has never seemed to enjoy being in the company of critics or journalists, and has seldom allowed us much of a glimpse behind his jester's guise. But there was one time when, caught off guard, perhaps, by someone on his tourbus handing him one of his discographies which had recently been published, he let slip one remark which interested me a great deal. It was this: that if someone really wanted to write something that he would be interested in reading they should try to tell him what he would do in the future.

Hence this attempt to do just that. Last time I wrote a rather insulting, and, I admit, somewhat extreme letter in which I complained about the deteriorating quality of Dylan's voice. I said that his voice was 'finished' (did I really say that!?). (yes - Ed.) The reason I felt it necessary to be so extreme is that I feel there is a massive gulf opening up between what we Dylan fans find acceptable and what is palatable to the general public's ear - even when we make excuses like his age, his (real or imagined) use of drugs/alcohol and his need to be wilfully perverse there is still the problem that, while his voice has always been odd, it has now taken on an extra dimension of what one can only term 'silliness' (re; the recent Hugh Laurie skit on **Comic Relief**).

OK, so what has all this got to do with Bob Dylan's future? It's just that the first step in Dylan's return to absolute pre-eminence (or his continued tenure there, as you prefer) has got to be his own realisation that his voice really does have limitations now. Since his awareness of this fact will allow him to write songs (and sing them) in keys where his range is not strained to the limit all the time (as in **Arthur McBride**). On his two most recent albums of original material I had admired the way he had achieved this, most notably on **Oh Mercy**, but still to some degree on **under the red sky** too, he very seldom seems to be struggling to sing when he has a full band sound and time to do 'drop-ins' (that's of course presuming that he ever re-does vocals).

His future depends on the way he approaches future projects. There is nothing inherently wrong, for instance, with him wanting to play entirely acoustically, if he takes account of the aforementioned vocal problems. It is not impossible that he will next produce an album of originals done in this style. But this time, instead of going into the studio and quite obviously recording sans-producer, warts and all, etc he should maybe get some other musicians (Richard Thompson, REM spring to mind) to fill out the sound a little with acoustic instruments, as in Dylan's own solo spots in recent years on tour.

And if he chooses to 'go electric' all over again why not stick with the same producer for a while? Daniel Lanois and Don & David Was have done commendably, so why not use them again? This tactic worked well in Dylan's heyday. Again there are plenty of musicians whom Dylan would gain by working with - Neil Young, Dinosaur Jr, Prince, REM, etc.; the list is endless.

Thanks, Carl I must say I'd like Dylan to stay with the production team from **under the red sky**, whom I thought did a superb job, the Lanois piece I see as a on-off, however as Dylan has (nearly) always told us "Don't Look Back". It is a pleasant diversion to think of what Dylan and REM would come up with - though I think the perfect time for that particular combination would have been a few years ago. (REM being such a fully developed unit themselves, now.) Aw, hell, I'm just gonna roll with whatever Bob does as are we all by this time, surely? I do hope that he takes care of his voice though - see previous Homer's - it is just about the most precious thing in existence, after all.

MIKE CAREY

Many thanks for Issue 8 of *Homer* which I have enjoyed reading very much. I have followed Dylan for the thirty years he's been performing. I have had the pleasure of seeing him live many times since the heady days of the I.O.W. concert and have never enjoyed a concert more than last Monday the 8th's effort, a great raw no frills powerful performance. Truly Bob is in a league of his own. Best wishes.

Ta Mike, see below the next two letters as to why I'm getting confused re the relative worth of the concerts. All I can definitely agree with is that he is, most certainly, in a league of his own.

PHIL RIGBY

Just finished reading another very interesting issue of the magazine, attended the Dylan concert on Friday, the Villa go top of the league on Saturday, I'm a contented bloke, right? Well no actually, and I'll bend your ear about my view from row W, rear stalls 12.2.93 if I may.

The truth is that Bob Dylan really is my last hero but the hard evidence that I received through my eyes and ears on Friday confirms my belief that his performing light just doesn't shine so bright these days. Of course I still enjoy all of his records, finding merit in just about every twist and turn of his recording career I guess. And long may he continue to delight this fan. My young daughter, who accompanied me to the concert, was impressed though, (letter included) so I was genuinely pleased that I had this last opportunity for us both to see him perform.

GRACE RIGBY (AGED 10)

When I got inside the Odeon I had the impression it was going to be interesting. Soon when we were all seated Dylan came on, it was getting boring at first because everybody was standing up and so it spoilt it a bit. I like the style of the music and the rhythm. I recognized most of the songs which I enjoyed. I thought Dylan looked tired but he sounded OK. I thought the band was good but in the last half hour they seemed to get quieter. I expected the music to be blasting but it was just nice. I was pleased the way it worked out. Dylan mumbled the words in some of the songs but otherwise it was interesting.

Thank you very much for your letters,

Grace -> I'm very glad that you enjoyed the show and it was very good of you to write. The design at the top of your letter was delightful!

*Phil -> I know what you mean about the loss of the "mythic" status. I wonder, though, if that is simply because we are seeing him so often? Here we go another **Homer**, another visit to Britain! I felt that the old charisma was there on the Monday and maybe the Thursday (I wasn't well enough to be sure). In fact of the shows I was at (London & Utrecht), I thought that the Monday London show was the best and Thursday the next best. I felt that the London residency ended a bit disappointingly but overall was very good. He seemed "clear focused all around" and to be enjoying himself. I'd agree that the Friday was a relatively poor show - I think that his efforts to make Thursday as good as Monday had tired him out.*

I opened your letter immediately after reading one from Mike Carey who said that Monday night's Hammersmith show was the best he'd ever seen! He's being going since '69. I think you've both slightly over-reacted but I have a great deal of sympathy/agreement with both your views!

*I still go back to my thoughts in Issue 7 re our expectations. I didn't honestly think that these shows - or any for years - constituted earth-shattering artistic triumphs. It is not that I didn't enjoy them, or think them light-years ahead of what any other "popular music" performer might offer - it is just that I sometimes feel we go along expecting cathartic 1966 type experiences and can read too much into certain performances. I also feel that I've (we've) become so concentrated on one artist that it is a little embarrassing at times. I wouldn't feel that if we were talking about an early-late sixties or middle-seventies Dylan. On the other hand, to listen to, for example, **I & I** from the much maligned Sunday show is easily enough for me to rescind all the above comments and say it was an artistic triumph. I sometimes feel it is more to do with they-who-perceive than those-who-perform. Maybe the more letters I answer, the more confused I become!*

GUY BORG

Some comments on Hammersmith '93, which left me feeling, strangely, neither elated nor dejected, but rather concerned. Dylan, for me, has lost his magnetic quality, his stage presence, and, more worryingly, his sense of theatre. Where was the edge, the tension, the live-the-moment creativity which has pervaded even the direst shows in previous years of the N.E.T.?

Sure, the shows were more polished this time around, but the arrangements of songs were flat, predictable, utterly uniform, and unsuitably lengthy - a worrying tip of the hat to the Grateful Dead. Surrounded by such directionless uniformity and with so few changes to the set lists, it is little wonder that there were precious few moments where you thought the shows were going to take off, that Bob was ready to take a chance and give that little bit more. Indeed, at times the shows seemed to have little more than curiosity value for Dylan - an excuse to try to perfect a new riff on his guitar, even if **Tangled Up In Blue** (which lost all its poignancy, for me, at Hammersmith) was into its fifteenth verse. He simply wasn't communicating or interacting with the band. This is not solely his fault - both Jackson and Garnier seemed either unwilling or incapable of getting Bob to make up a gear (I'll resist the obvious G.E. reference) [*Cheat! You didn't - Ed*] and frequently Bob would ignore them and turn to the excellent Winston Watson.

I'm a great fan of the Never Ending Tour and have always been supportive of it being just that. Now, however, I'm convinced the time has come for Bob to take a break. He's lost a focus for his live work and needs to step back and re-think. Personally, I'd like to see him go back to a 3-piece line-up, which would enable him to increase his repertoire once again, and to fully engage himself as a member of the band. The best moments of the Never Ending Tour have been when Dylan's allowed himself the chance to rock out and revel in leading a basic rock'n'roll band (just think back to the last night at Hammersmith '90). Such moments were both inspired and inspiring, yet I fear we won't see any with the current crew.

What also worries me is that Dylan seems to recently have been turning more and more into a parody of himself, scratching away at an acoustic guitar and twanging an extra-nasal voice. Can it be that he is worried about waning public interest, or has he simply lost his sense of artistic direction? (He's not exactly enjoying his most creative period at present, is he?)

The shows this year were certainly more diplomatic than those of '91. Incidentally, I enjoyed Hammersmith '91; partly, I'm sure, because it was the first time I'd seen Dylan live, but I just loved the sense of anarchy and surprise, the glee with which Dylan was confounding critics and audience alike. Those shows seemed to me to be much more in the spirit of Bob Dylan. Challenging, full of mystique, refusing to conform or play safe. I think it's a shame that they've been dismissed so categorically, along with disparaging references to alcohol. Perhaps this is an exaggeration, but it seems that some people declare as a "great show" one in which Dylan has stayed sober and is standing up straight. Maybe I'm wrong.

For all the gripes, there were plus points about the concerts: firstly, Dylan did sing superbly on the majority of songs, although I fear he may have to pitch his voice lower in future, if only to preserve and protect it. Consistent stand-outs were **I & I**, **Jim Jones**, **Simple Twist Of Fate** and **It Ain't Me, Babe**. The last of which I think was quite beautiful and a perfect end to the shows. Thursday's show was wonderful from start to finish, this time Dylan did seem to have found the inspiration (which is maybe why Friday suffered so much). Sunday, too, was enjoyable for the rare spontaneity and quirkiness. Finally, of course, going to a Dylan show is a great night out, no matter what happens on stage.

As concerts, those shows were neither wonderful nor terrible; I just hope that Bob doesn't let himself or the band drift onto auto-pilot as the tour progresses. If he does, the weaker shows will become less of a tense, infuriating, yet knife-edged spectacle, and more of a test of endurance, which is what Friday's show very nearly was.

Congratulations on **Homer 8** - Bob Forryan's article was particularly enjoyable. His writing always encourages me to go back and rediscover songs, albums and concerts.

I realize this has been something of a rambling letter, so with all the deftness, grace, and speed of Gary Blisset in full flight, allow me to do what the manager of a certain red-shirted team from Merseyside perhaps should do - sign off.

Guy, I nearly typed "red-faced" rather than "red-shirted" - still you're a one to talk, eh? When you first wrote to me you were thinking of Brentford at Anfield next season - instead you can come and see me on your way to Craven Cottage.

I couldn't help feeling that once you started to write about the concerts you seemed to find a lot of good to say about them and that your earlier concerns were, therefore more theoretical than practical. However, you'll have gathered by now that I'm not exactly a model of consistency myself.

MIKE GERFIN

Many thanks for **Homer, the slut 8**. Your fear of having forgotten to include a letter by myself was not necessary: I have to admit that I didn't write in response to **Homer 7**. There are several reasons for this, but only two are related to Homer: first, I was stunned by both quantity and quality of **Homer 7** so that I was not able to comment for a while. Second, I was taking a Dylan break from December until February, as you suggested we all should do from time to time. When I went back to Dylan I found out that when you don't listen to him for a while and then put on a disk or tape you realize how great this man really is! Anyway, because of this break I haven't read much in **Homer 8** yet but it looks very promising (especially the compilation of Dylan-related parts from different books).

Most of the things I wanted to tell you about **issue 7** have already been said as I can gather from the letters section. For me the best things were your editorial and Bob Forryan's piece on the Rolling Thunder 1976. And I whole-heartedly agree with Carol on her comment about the cuttings - great job, which you obviously continued in **issue 8**! I can't add much to Bob's piece except taking up his suggestion of finding definite versions of songs: I want to point out two songs where I think the original album version is the definite version: **Desolation Row** and **Stuck Inside of Mobile**. They both have a hypnotic quality on these recordings which they somehow lack on their live interpretations, although only by a narrow margin in the case of **Desolation Row** in 1966. During the Never Ending Tour they were both pretty awful most of the time.

Your editorial was a very thoughtful response to John Bauldie's doubts about the current Bob Dylan concerts. When I received **Homer 7** I had just sent off a letter to John in which I also said that it's mostly a matter of expectation and comparison: compared to Summer 1991 the concerts in 1992 were great, but not compared to other years. My impression now is that there are hardly any 1992 concerts that are great throughout. This is in contrast to my initial impression of these concerts when I first heard them (all based just on about 20 tapes). Sure, most of them have some great moments, but I guess that they won't survive as well as the June/July 1988 or the Fall 1991 concerts which I still rate very highly. In 1992 there is too much dead-wood in most concerts. Leave the thrashing to Neil Young, or get him as your lead guitarist! But maybe this is a little too harsh and I just listened to one too many tapes in the last couple of days. Ask me again next month. Just to complete this rant: I don't think that any of the great moments of 1992 reach the great moments of the Temples in Flames tour 1987, with the possible exception of **Idiot Wind** on some occasions. But then again, they beat everybody else who's playing concerts right now, except Neil Young of course. Neil is playing the kind of concerts right now I would love to see Bob playing - and the other way round.

But on the other hand, I guess it's not that important after all, and maybe we shouldn't pay that much attention to the current shows. As you might have guessed by now, I am pretty confused about what to think of Bob Dylan's recent shows, and that's the reason why I took the break (well, it just happened, it wasn't a conscious decision).

That's it for today. I'll let you know to which conclusion my current confusion will develop.

Thanks you, Mike, and I suspect that, living in Berne, you'll be somewhat looking forward to the "Garten festival" on July 17th.. It is good to read too of someone getting almost as confused as myself when trying to sum up one's response to the latest leg of The Never ending Tour in a short space.

*I also feel that **Desolation Row** is not particularly suited to the live arena (except, of course, in 1966); I'd say the same for **Visions of Johanna** and one or two others also. (I'm not going to list them, though, because Bob would probably prove me wrong sooner rather than later!)*

I'm afraid you completely lost me at one point, though - what in creation is a 'Dylan break'?

BRYAN GRAY

Regarding **It's All Been Written In The Book** - great idea, I'm sure many of us have books and pamphlets with brief, anecdotal mentions and obviously a great deal of them slip through our fingers. It goes without saying therefore that I'm a firm supporter of such an idea, and look forward to its continuation and possible expansion. Should there be particular articles/books that you are aware of and don't have access to, or, indeed, if you require articles for future publication, I'd be pleased to hear from you (although I suspect your scope and range is larger than my own.)

I'll not bore you, or indeed anyone else, further with my musings on the shows, suffice to say that the more you see, the less overall you retain, hence with the break of 10 days to the show in Paris, I can't help but feel it was yet another notch higher than even Monday or Thursday in London. Once again however it left me marvelling at what exactly foreign audiences make of it - in fact a friend was convinced at times he was singing in French - poor sod!

*Thanks, Bryan both for your letter and your offer of help for **It's All Been Written In The Book**. This section proved very popular indeed - so I dropped it! Only temporarily, of course, and I'd like to take this opportunity to both thank those who've sent something in and encourage others, like yourself, to do so. There are indeed so many books that refer to Dylan that even if I did have a "larger scope and range" - which I doubt due to "gaps" that developed when I was living abroad at various times - I still would lack so many important pieces. I have many pieces to be going on with but I would like to be able to group them into "themes" - so the message is, the more the merrier!*

NICK WEST

I'd been hoping to run into you at the Lamb one of these months but I'm not too regular in turning up so maybe we just keep missing each other. Anyway it would be nice to have a chinwag one evening though I can understand you're well snowed under - and presumably having to do a proper job as well.

It's certainly been a grand year thus far - and lots more to come. What with the Fleadh (what chance a few of the old Irish ballads Bob and the Clancys were doing after MSG?) and the European dates. All this and Neil Young too. It's only April!!!

Did anyone give you a report of Rick Danko's show at the Borderline. It was quite superb: the old boy's got most of his voice still intact and did a brilliant set of Band songs, covers etc. including **Blind Willie McTell** on which he encouraged audience participation. By the by - Barney Hoskyns book on the Band is well worth reading and has a lot of interesting Dylan material - it's very sympathetic, very understanding, though finally profoundly sad.

Thumbs up too for the Willie Nelson album but my favourite song of the moment has to be **The French Girl** in both the '67 and '87 versions. There's something almost mystically beautiful about it which no end of playing takes away. I'm now trying to hunt out Gene Clark's version of it.

Anyway, hope to see you somewhere along the line. Keep up the good work, it's a grand job you do and a good service the warmline provides.

Thanks, Nick - yes quite a year so far. I'm afraid that the fault for not meeting at The Lamb for the London Club is mainly my fault. Sunday evenings are far from the easiest of times for me and the last one of the month always seems to be hectic. If this issue is finished in time - highly doubtful! - I hope to be at the one in May. Maybe I'll have seen you by the time you read this!

*The report on the Danko concert was news to me and, just as I was typing it, I replayed my ansaphone messages and Steve Hussey informs me that he saw Nanci Griffiths last night and she was joined on stage by Carolyn Hester for **Boots Of Spanish Leather**. With Brooce and Baez to play soon the number of Dylan references/covers will probably not abate yet!*

***The French Girl** is truly staggering, a gem I'll never tire of; as you say repeated listens diminish it not one jot - sometimes they seem to have the opposite effect.*

R.G. BREEZE

SHE BELONGS TO ME II - THE REVENGE

An extremely belated response to *Focus On Love Minus Zero / No Limit*, Homer 6, after thinking about Christopher Ricks' comments on the wilful injury inflicted on the raven.

In *She Belongs To Me* the main character ("you" - which seems to mean people in general, including you and I, rather than a specific person) "starts out standing" in admiration or infatuation, but "winds up . . . down upon his knees", reduced to obsessive subservience, as in Jim Steinman's great *Total Eclipse of the Heart*. The title is ironic - the song is clearly saying "I belong to her", even to the extent of slaving on *Maggie's Farm* immediately afterwards.

This situation is quickly addressed from another angle in *Love Minus Zero* (squeeze in four more songs and we've got half a concept album). The narrator, this time in the more direct first person, starts off in a similar tone of admiration, but he's not going to fall into the same trap. He declares his independence, and her dependence on him, by hitting her with "this sodding great hammer". Now she really does belong to him, she's in his power.

Looked at this way, these songs show human possessiveness from the victim's point of view and also from "the side that's winning". It's difficult to hear them as the tender love songs I'd always thought they were, but at least the hammer seems to be a necessary instrument of defence (or revenge), rather than a gratuitously violent image.

Hi, good to hear from you again. I'm not sure if making the violence any less gratuitous really cheers me up, nor am I completely happy with either your or Professor Ricks's conclusions. Though there is a lot to what you both say....over to my new readers (yes, you two) who missed this debate the first time round.

PAUL WILLIAMS

Thanks, as always, for the new Homer (#8)....Thanks for mentioning *Volume II*--I look forward to the in-depth look if it happens. Basically I wrote *Vol. I* so I could get to *Vol II*--and above all my effort was to be honest about my own responses to the music, for better or worse. As for *Vol. III*, sure, I want to do it. I'm sure I will, if I live long enough and all that. But I do want to give Bob a few years to get ahead of me, and give myself a few years off from the process.

I stopped in '86 for a number of reasons--partly the book was just getting too long--but mostly because I came to believe that the 1987 performances are more like a lead-in to the Never-Ending Tour than they are a continuation of the Petty/HBs tour of 86. So I chose to go for what I consider continuity in Dylan's sense of himself and what he's up to as a performer, rather than the more obvious and usual division based on who's in his touring band.

One of the things I love about '87 is that Dylan in a sense acts as though he doesn't notice his band has changed (from the Dead to the HBs)--he carries on with the same Jerry-Garcia-based arrangements and the same songlist, and just expects the HBs to pick up on what he's doing. But then I like the wild gonzo creative chaos periods, spring 76, fall 87... (*let's take a chance, who really cares?*).

*Thanks to you, too, Paul and good luck with **Crawdaddy!** mark II. {See ads elsewhere}. Bob certainly is going about giving you material for **volume III** in no uncertain manner. I fully intend to combine an in-depth look at your books on Dylan for the next issue - I'd better hurry as all your thoughts will be going into **Crawdaddy!** and, a little birdie tells me, a new Dylan 'zine from **Rolling Tomes!***

STEVE MICHEL

Thanks for the kind words about my *Concordance* in Issue 7. As one who is normally accustomed to writing reviews, it is a little strange to be on the receiving end of them for a change.

But what the heck, I figure I should address the points you made in the review. Let's face it, as you say, what I as much as anyone would like is a concordance that showed all words in context. The decision to adopt the present form was not strictly to keep the costs down, however. As the Krogsgaard book has proven, 1000 page books are feasible.

Instead, we had to go the present route because of copyright reasons. There is simply no way that Dylan or his copyright office would have allowed us to print, in effect, all Bob's song lyrics in this book. And a little reflection would show that to show key words in context would result in printing *all* the lyrics not just once, but several times. Clinton Heylin may not have been sued for printing, without permission or acknowledgement, a number of lyrics in *Behind the Shades*, but there's no way we could have gotten away with printing all the lyrics. To insist on doing it this way would have been to insist on not doing the book at all.

By way of illustration, I'll offer an anecdote. The science fiction writer George Alec Effinger in the late 80s published a trilogy of novels. Their titles are *When Gravity Fails*, *A Fire in the Sun*, and *The Exile Kiss*. The sources of the first two titles are obvious, the third is from Shakespeare. I asked Effinger why he had not used a Dylan title for the third book in the series, and he told me that Dylan had denied him permission to do so. (Unfortunately, I neglected to ask what he had wanted as the title; incidentally, these are very fine novels.) If Dylan's office can prevent a well-known science fiction author, and his publisher, Doubleday, from using less than half a dozen words, the chances that *Rolling Tomes* & I could use them all are for all practical purposes nil.

The decision to stay with *Lyrics*, then, follows. As I stated in the introduction, we were pretty much stuck with this book. I'm no happier about that than anyone else. But since I couldn't print the lyrics myself, it would do little good for most readers to see words that appear in alternate versions sung once or twice. There's also the problem of gathering together and collating all the alternate versions of songs--if anyone wants to send me those alternate versions, I'll keep them on hand for future possibilities. This is a lamentable situation, but that's the way it is.

Finally, as to updates for the book. When Bob writes new songs, we do plan to issue small booklets that add those words to the present volume, and probably issue new editions of this book as well (depending, of course, on sales). Since the economics of book publishing are much different than those of software sales, it is very difficult to offer upgrades to the book that constitute new books at incremental prices (no book publishers do this with new editions). But we'll try to do right by purchasers of this book.

On another front, for *Makes You Wanna Stop and Read a Book*, check out *Mating*, by Norman Rush. There are some mentions of Bob throughout, but here's a part of a paragraph that's fun:

"...He liked to sing a parody of *The Impossible Dream*, in which he ate the inedible meal and drank the unpotable beverage, and so on... For some reason he continued to think it was funny to pretend that I liked the music of Bob Dylan, when in fact all I had admitted at an earlier point was that I liked *It Ain't Me Babe*. He would murmur-sing *How many times must the cannon balls fly Before they're forever banned*, and then shout Wuxtry! Wuxtry! Historic Agreement! UN Bans Cannonballs Forever! Flintlocks Next! And of course out of my supposed adoration of Dylan came our long-running match on why the band can't play...He was not really ever going to evolve much beyond a strumpet stealing the trumpet or Jean Arp stealing the harp..." (pp 386-387, Vintage paperback edition)

This latter portion refers to an earlier point in the book where the two main characters were making fun of the last lines of *Subterranean Homesick Blues*. All in all, I didn't care much for the book, by the way; unlike you I liked Lodge's *Small World*, but like you am an admirer of Philip K. Dick.

So, I've most assuredly gone on too long. I do thank you for the positive comments you made about the book. Note that *Rolling Tomes* has a money-back guarantee on the book so the gamble for prospective buyers is lessened. *Homer's* a fine magazine--but for the life of me I don't understand your page numbering, and would like a more stable binding scheme!

All the best!

*And to you too, Steve, and thanks for filling us in on the details behind the book. That seems to well and truly answer my questions and quibbles! I'm glad there's another PKD aficionado amongst us and will look for the Effinger novels as well as **Mating**. I've included that part of your letter here rather than in **Bits & Bobs** because it, as you'll see, is bereft of such entries this time. (Due to pressures of time and space rather than lack of contributions.)*

JAY O'CONNELL

How's things going? Judging from the last couple of **Homers**, looks like you've been pretty busy. I've been meaning to respond to your last letter for some time now, but it seems like I've lost my energy level lately, and once again I have fallen behind in my correspondences. So, before I get to matters of Dylan, please accept my apologies for not responding to your letter of last November until now. It was quite a pleasant surprise, and knowing that running a magazine must be quite a time-consuming nightmare, I want to let you know I appreciate it very much, and my lack of response till now is only due to my incredible, but inexhaustible, inability to manage my own time.

Thanks, too, for the tape you sent along. You hit it right on the head! I didn't have either...I had just then been reading about them, wondering how I could get to hear them, and there they were! Great stuff too. It's amazing how much stuff just keeps coming out. Who ever would have guessed...

I just yesterday received **Homer #8**. Haven't really had a chance yet to go thru it, but I did see, and I want to thank you, for the kind remarks you wrote about me. The wife was very impressed. She thinks I'm loony tunes with this Dylan thing. She's never actually said that, but I know she's thinking it. Glad to see the news articles were of help. I wasn't sure how much of this stuff you get from other people. I thought **Homer #7** was great. **Idiot Wind** was a great choice for discussion. After reading that section, I went right to the music box and listened to all the different versions a few times over. Also enjoyed the **Bits & Bobs**. It's incredible how the mainstream press views this Dylan creature, and what's just as incredible is that it seems to extend world-wide (*The Joker?* Sounds like their regular music critic must have been on vacation...). That's something I wouldn't have realized without **Homer**. Anyways, looking forward to diving into #8.

Here's the latest batch of articles I've collected....There's also something in there that came from my sister, who lives in Boston. It's not newsworthy at all, but I thought you might get a kick out of it. She's not really a Dylan fan, but she did spend many years of her life getting bombarded with the stuff, so I think she's developed a respect for his music. She picked up this weekly entertainment newspaper called the *Improper Bostonian*, and read the review of the new LP, and felt compelled enough to fire off a postcard to the author of said review, and sent me a copy. It's good to know that, especially with these occasional tv appearances, there's still people out there willing to stick up for us as we battle the legions of negative naysayers and non-believers.

The computer gods were with me, so I've included a copy of my list. I imagine that you have most, if not all, of this stuff, but I thought you might like to see it anyways. Please take it with a large grain of salt, those pesky ratings are always tough to call. Also, somewhere in this mess should be a small picture of Dylan that I thought you might like. I pick them up occasionally from the record conventions around here. Looks like it might be from around the fall of '89 (which I've always thought was a great leg of the NET).

I just called the **Rolling Tones** hotline to see what was new. Not too much, but then I realized they all must be out in Seattle for the convention. I would have liked to have gone, but I just couldn't have swung for the expense right now. Looks like they've firmed up some dates for the southern US. Did you get to see some shows these last few months? I hope the Old Boy did us all proud.

Well that's about it for now. Glad to see that **Homer** has been able to find it's own identity amid all this other nonsense that seems to go on. You're on solid rock, and I hope you're able to continue. Thanks again, and take care,

*You too, Jay. Thanks for all the cuttings and the photograph - are these fairly common at record conventions? (live shots, in focus ?) You were one of the last to receive tapes properly from me. Since then I've only been able to do them patchily - as Sandy Hamblett and Jim Heppell could testify! As an inducement to keep your family defending Bob's honour (and your sanity) I've included your sister's card in **Bits & Bobs** pp 28. I hope she likes it! As to the last European concerts- every view imaginable contained in these very pages!*

ELAINE OWEN

'Twas the night of 9 February, and the air was heavy with anticipation. You will doubtless realize that I was at the Apollo Theatre awaiting the appearance of my first and last hero. But just before Dylan appeared, Bob arrived (Forryan) and he handed me a spare copy of Homer. 'Not ~~another~~ Dylan magazine', I thought. After the euphoria of the concert, I forgot about Homer for a few days. But when I finally opened it and began to read, I realised that this could be the start of something, if not big, interesting at least. By the time I'd finally read everything, despite telling myself initially that I couldn't afford to subscribe to another magazine, I was a convert. So here's my £21. And I hope you run forever. And I hope that Dylan does, too. With love and best wishes from South-West France. Yours in exile

Judging by your address it is the kind of "exile" I'd like to be banished to anytime! Thanks for your letter, it is always good to hear from new subscribers and I'm glad issue 8 won you over after initial scepticism. (I knew it was brilliant all along, so I didn't experience this!)

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*And there I must call an end to this, even as another batch of letters arrives - thanks for the cartoon Tony Shackleton, that will appear soon! - I shall incorporate the letters re **The Second Subscriber Special Issue** in **Homer 10**. Apologies to any I've missed this time around and thanks to all who sent letters in. Please keep sending them, my remarks in the Special were not meant to be a deterrent - the large mailbox mentioned was due to a combination of unusual circumstances. I thought I'd read every possible angle on the Hammersmith shows, but lo and behold along comes another perspective! I leave you with:*

G. A. WILKINSON

FEB.'93 ASHTABULA

BUYING & SELLING (OR: DON'T GO HOME WITH YOUR ODEON)

Drinking & laughing
Distillers' Army rally
Campaign honours to compare
Belated onward sally

Buying & selling
Stone predatory welcome
Really Nothing to Declare
Proceed to inner sanctum

Watching & keeping
Watch: this annual crusade
Big Jim's vigilantes
Versus silent clap brigade

Crashing & exploding
Scorching cymbals full ablaze
Winston Junior smiling
'Neath Jimmy's kindly gaze

Strumming & enthralling
Pulsating high and high
Shedding gifts for everyone
Lone naked Samurai

Saluting & conducting
Zealous front row trilby
Feathers shoot out into space
In full orgasmic fury

Waving & bowing
The troubadour's adieu
Breaking out of Mobile
Still enigma fails to blur

Buying & selling
Queen Caroline's frozen echo
Name board's glory now dissolved
Leaving private thoughts aglow

Homer, the slut

Issue Nine

Here writes someone who has spent many hours remonstrating with our esteemed, if diminutive, editor, that however articulate she may appear in the spoken word, and however critical she may be about other people's written word, that she herself is no reviewer, and therefore will not be found writing articles for Homer. So...?!? everyone is allowed to change the habits of a lifetime... and, during lent, this habit is much easier to give up than smoking! I am driven to this attempt, by the triple realization that (a) this was the first time Dylan has played in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (of which more, presently), (b) there were fewer of the "weel kent" faces at this show than at most and (c) the event, if not the show was certainly worth writing about.

What follows is as much a review of the location and the audience, both of which played a remarkable role in what might have been tedium incarnate, as of a show with outstanding highlights: so, if it's a complete run-down of performance you're after, my apologies - but if an account of a one-off and somewhat personal and anecdotal view on an amusing interlude in the Never-Ending Tour, then read on. It will also help if you are familiar with the basic set-lists and performances of the early '93 European leg, as I assume that they are covered more competently than I can manage, elsewhere in this tome.

Let me set the scene: the Luxembourg entry to a catalogue of hackit *{find a Scot to explain this to you}* stereotypes has to cover the lack of any well known citizen, the lack of much in the way of cultural interest and the prevalence of Geneva-like banking population (indeed the term "Luxembourg banker" took on the proportions of a new piece of Cockney rhyming slang over the weekend of the concert). Luxembourg does boast, however, a rather worrying tendency to produce startling results in the Eurovision Song Contest. I must say that the 40 square miles or so of Luxembourg are remarkable by their very blandness and as much as can be said for any of those miles, is that it is never more than 20 away from something far more interesting. I know for a fact that those who did follow the tour to Pétange (an unremarkable 22.5 km from Luxembourg city), were exceptionally underwhelmed by what they found in cultural novelty.

In my immediate company were two Danish friends to whom I extend my heart-felt gratitude for their hospitality, sense of humour, outstanding patience in the face of adversity, and achievement in procuring tickets numbered 1 to 4, (neither of them had possessed a Dylan recording prior to my arrival on their doorstep on that occasion, much less been to a show) and the indomitable Mr. Hume (who seems to have spent much of the tour in question suffering from fatigue and hangovers of demonic proportions).

On the local Dylan appreciation front, Luxembourg boded badly from the outset, if the offerings from the national rock-radio stations were anything to go by: tracks of the sixties and seventies that haven't reared their ugly heads since I used to go to the youth club on a Friday evening (well, The Sutherland Brothers and Quiver belting out **The Arms of Mary?** - I ask you!)

On the weather front, Dylan yet again, managed to ensure that only the most determined would overcome the hazardous conditions to see him: a rather ominous attempt at snow throughout the day heralded a positively lethal freezing fog as dusk fell.

On the venue front: the epitome of mediocrity - standing in an undisguised gymnasium in a sports centre in the barren outskirts of a small town. Those of us who took the opportunity of staking an early claim to a spot on the floor, which would promise a reasonable view of Dylan later on, (important as the legendary what's his name, the photographer was rumoured to have remembered his equipment) and who therefore felt the onslaught of backache during the unnamed and eminently forgettable support act (*1), did actually feel grateful for the distraction of the athletic equipment which adorned the 'concert hall'. I was authoritatively informed somewhere along the line, that this was indeed the first occasion that the Pétange Centre Sportif had opened its doors to the concert-going public: a big night for both Bobby and Pétange!

So the scene is set, and what did we get? First of all, a slightly later start than most of the previous shows: 9.30 pm and a kick off with the now familiar **Folsom Prison Blues**: much as it pains me to say it, this was a mechanical rendition lacking in soul, but at least it wasn't **Maggie's Farm** again, and novelty won the day over performance. Throughout it, the sound engineers were valiantly struggling to create some semblance of acceptable acoustics, and, predictably, were frustrated in their attempts by Bobby overlooking the necessity to use the mike on occasions. My rising fears for the evening vanished however, as the show progressed... the sound got better, and the culture-hungry audience who, as became evident in the course of the evening, had been deprived of anything produced by Dylan in the past 20 years warmed in direct measure with Dylan himself.

Dylan was competence personified through **If Not For You**, **All Along The Watchtower** and **Tangled up in Blue**. My Blue Peter Badge for irony of the evening, went to a spirited **Shelter from the Storm** (I fear that the irony was lost on most of those around however). Give them their due, they really got into the raunchy rendition of **Memphis**

Blues which followed. A downright excellent performance of **It Takes a Lot To Laugh** was beginning to reassure me that the trip was well worthwhile. Despite the fact that I have heard **Tomorrow Night** so often on this tour, it is an inclusion that I don't tire of, and it was as enthusiastic and melodic as any seen at Hammersmith. What followed, now familiar to those who have followed the current tour, warrants a paragraph in it's own right...

Jim Jones was spectacular.

And there was even a surprise in store... Half way through, a few people in my immediate vicinity scratched heads (the way one does in a "spot the difference" competition when 19 out of the 20 differences have already been spotted, and you're wondering if that freckle is a difference or really a printing mistake). Then a veritable Mexican wave of enlightenment went round the cognoscenti, as Baxter could be distinguished through the on-stage gloom, playing an accordion. Inspiration which was instigated in Luxembourg and was still there in Belfast.

The concert-going equivalent of orgasm, having passed over those of us who had realized that there had in fact been a difference, and "the result of the Luxembourg jury came in" (to coin the phrase of some wit nearby), as the opening chords of **Tambourine Man** were recognised by two thousand would-be backing singers for the Byrds. It was, granted, a reasonable performance. Enthusiasm mellowed to profound appreciation with a heart-rending **Baby Blue**. It then metamorphosed into what I think was perplexity among most of the 'has - he - released - an - album - since - *Desire?* - then - fans', as Dylan walloped through **Cat's in the Well**. For my part I stood in bliss before yet another stirring performance of **I and I** - a number which I found disappointing on *Infidels* but which has been one of the highlights of every show I've seen this year: just give me a pint of whatever the drummer's having...

What followed was a remarkable table-turning exercise. You will now have the measure of the audience: they like what they know - an unfortunate shortcoming, given the last they heard! I think even The Man himself was taken aback by the fervour of the audience participation for **Knockin' on Heaven's Door**: for several minutes he gave every indication of handing over to the audience for the chorus, while he sang harmony and backing vocals. I further maintain that, when he eventually managed to head towards the end of the song, and began to slow down the pace, he wondered if the audience would build up a slower chant of their earlier performance... they didn't.

Highway 61 (competent again, and welcomed once more by the audience) was followed by **What Good Am I?**. By now, being at one as you are with the audience, it will surprise you not a jot, that they adored the penultimate offering: an energetic rendition of **Rainy Day Women**. This preceded a performance to end most recent performances of **It Ain't Me Babe** - the voice was superb - I distinctly heard a growl in there somewhere which made my knees buckle.

The lights dimmed, and it was all over.

So, dear reader, what should you take from all of this? Well, while I appreciate well presented and supported interpretations of his writing and performances, and have sometimes been known to come out with my own, I do not feature in the Who's Who of great Dylanologists. Indeed, I come out in an unsightly rash when exposed to the lengths some fans attain in intellectual masturbation on Dylan. But I do like a good show - and this, in my books, was a good show.

Against a background of competence (and basketball nets), genius emerged in the last number, beauty (and more than a little irony) in **Shelter from the Storm**, inspiration and innovation in **Jim Jones**, unadulterated enthusiasm (yet again) in **I and I** and playful audience dangling in **Knockin' on Heaven's Door**. What more could a girl ask for?

I fear that Luxembourg will have to wait a long time for such a spectacle again, but I extend my heartfelt appreciation for the sheer novelty of the whole experience - I decided very early after the dates were announced to go to this show, if, for no other reason than because it was His first time somewhere. As I skidded from the venue, I was tormented by eager anticipation of the last European show in Belfast hoping that the novelty factor would hold out: The Belfast venue was announced - a sports hall!!

Incidentally, if anyone is looking for a new career opportunity abroad, you could do worse than to go to Luxembourg and open a record shop.

*1 the support entered into the Luxembourg hall of notoriety towards the end of their contribution to the evening's proceedings, by asking the (disappointingly, but predictably) receptive audience, what language was spoken in Luxembourg, insulting them by suggesting French or German and then achieving distinction in their complete lack of acceptance that the language was also called Luxembourg (or Letzeburgesch as the purists responded). They finally ensured a one way ticket from the nearest window (which was fairly distant in the gym hall concerned), by ignoring the answer to their own question "how do you say 'lies' in that then?".)

At a time when Bob Dylan is openly revisiting the blues and folk repertoire that he has always drawn on but sometimes kept hid below the surface of his own work, it's instructive to look back at old copies of the magazine *Sing Out!*, which tried to monitor, month by month, what contributor Paul Nelson called "the urban folk scene" of the 1960s.

Take Volume 15, no. 2, the issue for May 1965 - a time immediately after the release of *Bringing It All Back Home* and very soon before Dylan's "electric" debut at Newport Folk Festival in July - and a time by which we think of Dylan as already light-years from the "folk scene".

What *Sing Out!* shows is something different. On the one hand Dylan is clearly still regarded as part of that world. His name recurs throughout its pages, and he's the main topic exercising letter-writing readers. The electric controversy isn't there yet, despite *Subterranean Homesick Blues* and the like, but he's still in trouble for writing and singing the kind of personal song exhibited on *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*. This is not, however, his only transgression:

"Dear Editor, For crying out loud! What is your little magazine coming to? First Bob Dylan and now Pete Seeger - just thrown against the wall... Sincerely yours, Judith A. Cerny, Cleveland Heights, Ohio."

"Dear Editor, Help! Can anyone give me some advice on how to convert my parents to the Dylan camp? They hate him almost as much as I love him. Besides ranking his voice and songs low, they call him a Communist and a sex maniac... Kathy Ivans, Whitestone, NY."

"Dear Editor...I appreciate your publishing the pictures of Bob Dennon and John Lylan on page 99 of the March issue. I've always wondered what they looked like. Sincerely, Bob Laughlin, Oakland, CA."

"Dear Editor: John Lennon and Bob Dylan cannot be one in the same [sic] for a very simple reason. JOHN CAN SING!!!!... Yours, Jeanne Davidson and Judy Nauman, Lancaster, Ohio."

"Dear Editor, now that we've solved the Dylan-Lennon question, what about finding out if Jack Elliott is really The Man From Uncle? Sincerely, 006½."

"...We have Dylan when we want to think and the Beatles when we want to have fun. They're completely compatible. Nancy Snell, Tucson, Arizona."

"Dear Editor, Anyone who says 'I don't like Bob Dylan because he sounds like a cow' should be cut off your subscription list. Give a cow a pen, guitar and harmonica, and see what he [sic] can do. Sincerely, Dennis Peame, Peninsula, Ohio."

"Dear Editor: What's with it? Afta years a searchin' aroun' for people who'd write an' sing an' play topical songs, ya finally got your guy - Dylan. An' what happens? He strays away from the line, starts gettin' personal, an' all of a sudden, you're jumpin' on his back. I dig the People, but what about the Person. So he doesn't write about hard rain all the time. So what? Who does? Introspection - that's people's music. Yeah, criticize him. Tell him he should write more topical songs or fix his timin' or change his underwear or get back his ol' guitar. But don't put him in a strait jacket. Adam Simms, Flushing, NY."

"Dear Editor: I am an aspiring blues harmonica-player... Last year, I started learning, and went mostly by the records of Bob Dylan, Hammie Nixon, Sonny Terry etc.... Christopher Brow, Poughkeepsie, NY."

At the same time, Paul Nelson is declaring the breakdown of the old folk-scene snobberies: "...Perhaps the most fascinating result of the crash 15 the Death of the Insider. Such an animal has now become extinct... Who could have predicted, for instance, that the Beatles would be as in as the Carter Family in certain folk circles? Who indeed. Such is life on the urban folk scene in the mid-60s..."(Tell that to the Newport crowd.)

Nelson also reports that "Another small magazine, *Backside*, has now become *Comment*, with a subtitle of *The Broadside of Washington D.C.*" and that "*Comment* #2, available for twenty-five cents from Stuart Crump Jnr., Box 544, Brown, Providence, Rhode Island, contains... an interview with Bob Dylan."

More interesting in retrospect is the extent to which the artists featured, the songs listed and or reprinted in the rest of the issue, and those cropping up on the records being released, are awash with what we can now see as Dylan connections as well as with his own "classic" work.

The front cover features Johnny Cash, Muddy Waters and "Students at Berkeley" The inside reprints a song from a Berkeley demo, "spearheaded by the Free Speech Movement", called **There's A Man Taking Names** - the chorus of which begins "There's a man goin' round takin' names / There's a man goin' round taking names..." The back cover lists the issue's featured songs, which include **Links In The Chain**, **Get Up & Go**, **The Hell-Bound Train**, Len Chandler's **Beans In My Ears** and **Long Black Veil**. This last is stated to be "By Danny Hill & Marijohn Wilkins, © 1959 Cedarwood Publishing Co. Inc." and comes with this introduction:

"Here's a song that was written just a few years ago - has an awful good folk flavor, say the Country Gentlemen in their intro' to the tune. And they must be right. The song has been taken up by trad' country musicians (The Lilly Brothers), Bluegrass bands (The Country Gentlemen), c-&-w performers (Lefty Frizzell) and city singers (Joan Baez) alike. This version is from **The Country Gentlemen On The Road**, (Folkways FA 2409)."

There's a profile of "'Ireland's Greatest Singing Clan': the McPeake Family of Belfast, by Peter Kennedy" and one of Johnny Cash - by Pete La Farge. In this, Cash says that he had wanted to break into using folk material by doing a song his friend Gene Ferguson has played him down the telephone: **Ira Hayes**; and that having made it into a "national hillbilly hit", he then performed it at Newport and "didn't have to change a note to make it fit"; (he "bridged the gap," Robert Shelton wrote in the *New York Times*); that he then made the LP **Bitter Tears**, made up of "Indian protest songs", and then cut **It Ain't Me Babe**. The profile concludes that Cash "may be expected to stick pretty close to the minstrel set from now on."

Poets Of Today (an anthology edited by Walter Lowenfels, International Publishers, New York), is reviewed by Moses Asch (who ran Folkways Records), who notes that it includes Pete LaFarge and Bob Dylan, "our controversialist".

Alongside Len Chandler's song **Beans In My Ears**, Chandler comments that the song was inspired by a Carl Sandburg song, adding "I'm just saying that people don't listen. I've said it before in **Keep On Keeping On**..."

Very usefully, there's a table of contents of the books **Reprints From Sing Out! Volumes 1-7**. Volume 1 includes **Gypsy Davey**, **This Land Is My Land**, and a song called **Tomorrow Is A Highway**. Volume 2 includes **Eight Hundred Miles**, **House Of The Rising Sun**, **I Ain't Got No Home In This World Anymore**, **I Can't Feel At Home In This World Anymore**, **Pastures Of Plenty**, **Poor Lazarus** and a song called **Wo Riley**. Vol. 3 includes **Alberta**, **Done Laid Around**, **East Virginia**, **1913 Massacre**, **Roll On Columbia**, **St. James Hospital** (from which Dylan quotes in **Where Teardrops Fall** and which is a variant of **The Unfortunate Rake** and **St. James Infirmary Blues**, which as I've suggested elsewhere, relate in specific ways to **Blind Willie McTell's The Dyin' Crapshooter's Blues** and to **Blind Willie McTell**), and **The Water Is Wide**. Volume 4 includes **Jesse James**, **900 Miles**, **Poor Lazarus** again and the song **Blood On The Saddle**. Vol. 5 includes **Black Is The Color**, **Brennan On The Moor**, **Pretty Saro** and **Railroad Bill**. Volume 6 - the first to recognise Dylan's songwriting - includes **Blowin In The Wind**, **Bowling Green**, **A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall**, **He Was A Friend Of Mine**, **Peggy-O**, **Rock About My Saro Jane** and **Will Ye Go Lassie, Go?**. Volume 7 offered, among others, **Ira Hayes**, **Lily Of The West**, **Man Of Constant Sorrow**, **Masters Of War**, **San Francisco Bay Blues** and **With God On Our Side**. These reprints are all pushed as still available.

(So, the editor notes, is this bargain: "Child's 'The English & Scottish Popular Ballads'... complete collection, 1000 versions of 305 ballads, is available in a three-volume bound set of 2,638 pages... \$40.00 from Cooper Square Publishing, 59 4th Avenue, NYC 10003.")

Then there's an opinion piece (on many subjects) by Irwin Silber, titled 'Fan The Flames', in which he speaks up for rock'n'roll (It's "sexual, upPuritan, free in expression, and outside the main idiom of white middle-class and upper-class America... a threat to established patterns and values"); condemns US action in Vietnam and supports the Viet Cong; reports the death (at 34, of cancer) of Lorraine Hansberry, playwright and ex-**Sing Out!** subscriptions editor, who had also organised their annual Carnegie Hall Hootenannies; and reports on current McCarthyism:

"The most recent inanity appeared in the pages of **The Folk Scene**, the Chicago folk music newsletter, where writer 'Lovable Ole Doc Stanley' picked up on my recent Open Letter to Bob Dylan and found a communist plot brewing..."

The page after that has an Elektra ad for the LP *Spider Blues* by 'Spider' John Koerner, which it lists as including **Corrine Corrina** and a song called **Need A Woman**. A few pages later there's a double-page Vanguard Records ad, pushing *Many A Mile* by Buffy St. Marie, which it says includes **Fixin' To Die** and **Lazarus**; *Today Is The Highway* by Eric Andersen, who includes **Plains Of Nebrasky-O** and **Baby Please Don't Go**; and the LP *Doc Watson & Son*, which features **Rising Sun Blues** and **Little Sadie**. There's also a Columbia ad for the LP *Orange Blossom Special* by Johnny Cash, who is described as a "folk singer", and an ad for the current issue of Paul Nelson's *Little Sandy Review* which stresses that it has album reviews, including a Dylan LP review.

Sing Out! itself reviews, somewhat sceptically, the LP *The Dillards Live!*, on Elektra EKL-265, mentioning the inclusion of Dylan's **Walking Down The Line**. There's a London Records ad for the Julie Felix album *Julie Felix* (LL 3395 mono / PS395 stereo) which says that among the tracks are **Masters Of War**, **Don't Think Twice, It's All Right** [sic], **Pastures Of Plenty** and (the folksong) **Buttermilk Hill**.

Then there's another Elektra ad, for two Judy Collins albums - *Judy Collins #3*, which is said to include **Masters Of War**, **Deportee** and **Turn Turn Turn**, and *The Judy Collins Concert*, giving a tracklist that includes **The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll**.

Oh, and there's a very good piece on 'R&B' - by Tony Glover.

© Michael Gray, 1993.

Bob Dylan: "One winter's day I called Bobby and asked if I could take some pictures of him. It was 1971 and damn cold, but I put a camera with a wide angle lens in his hands and we ended up on the Lower East Side, which revealed an offbeat, mischievous talent."



"IT USED TO BE LIKE THAT"

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WAKING UP TO A NEW MORNING

(And linking arms in the Universal Brotherhood)

Youth of delight, come hither,
 And see the opening Morn,
 Image of truth new born.
 Doubt is fled, & clouds of reason,
 Dark disputes and artful teasing.

The Voice of the Ancient Bard
 A Song of Experience by William Blake

When that most keenly sighted of Dylan observers, Clinton Heylin, was rolling his own thing with *The Telegraph Supplement* back in the late 80's, he carried out a survey of our loves and hates Dylan-wise. The results were published in the penultimate RTS of all time, i.e. number 22, which accompanied the Spring 1990 Edition of *The Telegraph* and which opened with a splendid Clintonesque introduction that carried the bad news: "I'll be too busy to continue with my RTS duties beyond RTS 23, so apologies to all who like the RTS, and sod off and subscribe to *Isis* to all those who do not." Alas, I was one of the former and although I've been warned over the years that it's bad for my health, I have always been an ardent admirer of Clinton Heylin's work.

"Two words", as Denis Leary, the 90's re-incarnation of Lenny Bruce would say: "Clinton Heylin - two words, man: diligence and accuracy". And it is that very commitment to diligence and accuracy that has been the foundation stone for Clinton's pillars of wisdom. Some of my favourite Dylan books are monuments to his style; from the revolutionary *Rain Unravelled Tales* in it's various formats to the revelatory sessionography in the paperback version of *Behind the Shades*; through various other projects: *Stolen Moments*, the book that I always turn to first when it's time for research; those excellent articles in *Telegraphs* 28-30 on the Christianity period; the little postage stamp booklet on the Gospel speeches; the directory of tapes worth listening to; and many further informed articles that have appeared in all kinds of publications during the last decade. It was probably also Clinton Heylin who was the main brains behind the Oracle answers in those much loved early *Telegraphs*.

I am sure that Clinton's work on Dylan emanated, not from a sense of ego or profit, but from a true love and belief in Dylan's own work. No doubt such love has gathered the dust of ego and profit over the years but surely it's the labour of love that has

prevailed above all first, last and foremost. Indeed it must have been a true labour of love for Clinton to have to wade through all those replies to *The Telegraph* Questionnaire and then compile the most authoritative survey of opinions shared by Dylan fans to date.

Of course, some of the survey's findings were inevitable and I suppose it was no surprise that, in the Best Album category, *Blood on the Tracks* was favourite with 260 votes and *Blonde on Blonde* was runner up with 174 votes. Now although these two albums may always be thus placed back to back in the hearts and minds of the majority of Dylan aficionados, they couldn't have been more different in conception or content.

Blonde on Blonde witnessed Dylan at the very peak of a rock-based mountain, taking in great gulps of that wild mercurial air, his creative juices gushing like a mountain stream straight onto vinyl. The majority of the masterpiece *Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* was rumoured to have been written on the crest of the moment in the recording studio whilst the session musicians sat around playing cards, and a number of other songs on *Blonde on Blonde* were cut in straight takes.

The final cuts for some of the songs on *Blood on the Tracks* however had been re-recorded after the initial attempts were discarded. If *Blonde on Blonde* saw Dylan at the mountain top then certain songs from *Blood on the Tracks* discovered him at the depths of the deepest dark ocean. He spoke about these tracks during an interview with Mary Travers in March 1985 for the radio programme *Mary Travers and Friends*. When the interviewer remarked how much she loved the album Dylan retorted that he just wasn't able to relate to how people could enjoy hearing that type of pain. And he wasn't talking about the type of pain you get with a sore throat!

It is interesting to compare two of the longer songs from each album namely **Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands** from **Blonde on Blonde** and **Idiot Wind** from **Blood on the Tracks**. On Dylan's own admission the first song concerned his, then, new wife Sara and it has been suggested by many Dylan commentators that **Idiot Wind** was also written about Sara but obviously from a completely different perspective. If indeed Dylan wrote these two songs about his former wife then, in the course of all those words, he certainly scaled the heights and plumbed the depths of that particular relationship which must have played see-saw with his emotions.

But a see-saw must have a pivotal point, a place where the landscape becomes level and energy can be directed towards growth instead of chaos. The tracks for **Blonde on Blonde** were recorded in 1966 and those for **Blood on the Tracks** in 1974; an inclusive nine year difference between these high and low emotional points. If you took an exact mid-line between these two points you find yourself in the year 1970 being four years on from 1966 and four years before 1974. The album that was released in 1970 was indeed a pivotal, transitional album and, as a subtle emphasis to this it will be noted that the album **New Morning** which was recorded and released in 1970, was Dylan's last number one album in the U.K. to date; the songs from that album are the final songs in **Writings and Drawings**, Dylan's first, and for some quite considerable time, only officially published book of lyrics; and the period between the release of **New Morning** and Dylan's next studio album (excluding a **Greatest Hits** package) **Pat Garrett and Billy The Kid** is the longest period in Dylan's career to date that his fans have had to endure without the release of a new studio album. After **New Morning**, things took a different turn and it probably wasn't only gravity that ultimately pulled the see-saw down, perhaps destiny played a hand in there too.

It is however the uncomplicated landscape of 1970 that captures my mind for **New Morning**, from that period of stability and growth, was the record that got my vote as being my favourite Dylan album in Clinton's poll for **RTS**.

But why, on earth, **New Morning**? Well, for a start, from a basic instinct point of view, it was one of those "saving grace" incidents for me. You're lucky if you get one of those "saving grace" incidents in your lifetime; you're even luckier if you realise that it's happened!

I know that grown men shouldn't really talk about such things but some time ago a young child who was very special and dear to me died in somewhat tragic circumstances. For weeks and months I

stumbled around under a dark burdening cloud of grief. I desperately tried to haul things back into perspective but in reality I was searching for answers where no answers could be found and thus I ended each night with a head full of doubt. Then one fine day.... no, actually it wasn't like a Damascus discovery trip at all; but just a minor something that caused me to raise my eyebrows and twist the corners of my mouth into a smile. And believe me, a smile was a lot of money in those days.

The circumstances of my re-awakening I remember quite clearly. I was redecorating my lounge, steam stripping off the paper that had gone out of fashion and exposing the plaster cracks of wear and tear. To ease the downright tedium of D.I.Y. I shoved a tape into my cassette player; any tape would do; it just happened to be a Dylan tape; it just happened to be **New Morning**. And then he kicked me....

You see, although I had listened to the title track from **New Morning** hundreds of times since the album's release some fifteen years before that mysterious day, I had never really heard the song properly. Dylan sang with the voice of a true survivor, someone who was still standing to confront those who argued that it would have been a better career move for him to have remained prostrate and lifeless on Woodstock's Striebel road that fateful Friday afternoon in July 1966. Perhaps Dylan was reminding me that I was still standing too, but, whatever, the song took me unawares and caused something of an impact. But don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that merely listening to any particular song can wipe away the anger, bitterness and guilt that so readily befriend grief; what I did that day was take just a small footstep of light in the soot of life, nothing more; but once you've learned how to walk, giant leaps soon become possible. It was a faint calling to come hither, just as William Blake calls in the extract from his **Song of Experience** "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" I have quoted above and below:

*Youth of delight, come hither,
And see the opening Morn,
Image of truth new born.
Doubt is fled, & clouds of reason,
Dark disputes and artful teasing.*

The title track of the **New Morning** album having thus dawned upon me in this new way, I subsequently re-opened the pages and the text of the collections core songs. And therein lies the twist because if my spontaneous response to the song **New Morning** was like a faint calling from William Blake, this Ancient Bard was soon positively shouting at me from the further songs on the album. This is then the other main sway of the album for

me: It is so William Blake. When I listen to it now, potent leakages from Blake's poetry and philosophy seep into my mind and as I happen to think that William Blake is the most important Englishman that has ever lived, I am always willing to succumb overwhelmingly to anything that has a touch of him about it. When I listen to the majority of *New Morning* I feel more than just a touch of Blake, I get pushed and shoved forcefully towards his direction for the feel, sound, sentiment and very simpleness of the album belong to him.

Before I endeavour to explain exactly what I mean though, and knowing that the carriage of mere words on printed page will probably never arrive safely at your station of true understanding, and yet further with apologies to those who already know the story so well, a few words about the Ancient Bard himself.

William Blake was, by occupation, an engraver of illustrations and designs for books. For all but three of his seventy years, he lived in London where he was born, the son of a hosier, in 1757. Although Blake never had any formal education, he attended a drawing school at the age of ten whereafter he became apprenticed to an engraver and at the age of twenty-one he became a student at the Royal Academy. Blake was never particularly well off, during his working life he achieved a meagre income from commissions for his engravings and was barely able to support himself and his wife. He had no children and he died in somewhat humble circumstances and surroundings in 1827.

It was not for his engravings, or even his paintings, that Blake subsequently became hailed as a genius however. It was for his poetry whereby Blake was able to express in words his unique vision and thus create his own philosophy and mythology.

From about the age of four years, Blake experienced visions of angels, prophets, demons, saints and historical personages. Even the spirit of his dead brother was said to have appeared to him on many occasions. These experiences continued throughout his life and caused Blake to look at his surroundings in a less humanistic way. As an expression of this view he wrote the lines, in the poem **Auguries of Innocence**:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

Now although, on the one hand, Blake was ridiculed and treated as a madman when he recounted the stories of his transcendental sightings, on the other hand these visions were the primary source of his

poems. Thus part of Blake's philosophy, as expounded in his poetry, was that life should be experienced and not merely observed; that human beings should not trust what is actually seen by the eye, but learn to look further in order to experience a spiritual perception of what is laid before them. Blake therefore treated the eyes as merely doors or windows to a wider world of the imagination. In **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell**, he writes:

*If the doors of perception were cleansed,
Everything would appear to man as it is: Infinite.*

And in **The Everlasting Gospel**:

*This Life's dim Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see with not thro' the Eye.*

What made Blake's idea of "true vision" even more controversial was that he was living in the Age of Reason where important changes were occurring through scientific discoveries and based upon mathematical calculations. The laws of the universe were being re-written by Isaac Newton with his theories on gravitation and motion, and by Francis Bacon who was the founder of experimental science. The theory was that everything, from the orbit of the planets to the fall of an apple, could be explained scientifically and mathematically, that mechanical instruments, which could measure and weigh, should be substituted for human perception which was untrustworthy if you wanted to find the right answer.

Blake kicked hard against this wall of reason and contended that excluding man from the process of knowledge would result in a world where man could no longer re-discover his true self. Blake therefore became a revolutionary of his time but his revolutionary ideas were not confined to the issue of imagination over reason. He also caught in his net the matter of religion for he disputed the authority of organised, conventional religions. Again he was opposed to the religious doctrines propounded by Newton, Bacon and others who placed God "above" and separate from man. Blake regarded the human imagination as the essential divine quality by which God manifests Himself in man and this was another part of his philosophy which he fought hard to establish, writing in the poem **Jerusalem**:

*I rest not from the great task!....
To open the eternal worlds, to open the immortal
Eyes
Of man inwards into the worlds of thought - into
Eternity
Ever expanding in the bosom of God,
The human imagination.*

Fortunately Blake never rested from his great task and he wrote hundreds of lines of poetry whereby he extended his philosophy using on occasions complex symbolism to underline the main thread of his argument that creative energy, inspired by an unfettered imagination, will always win out over a rational, materialistic approach to life.

Not only philosopher, poet, revolutionary, printer and engraver then but Blake is now hailed as a prophet because certain of his arguments formed the basis of Carl Jung's treatment of psychology and his line of thought has also been taken up by certain New Age thinkers who consider that the limited, materialistic outlook on life is still prevalent today and the only way of breaking free from the chaos and stress of materialism is to re-discover one's self through imaginative thought. Writing about the use of Blake's approach to life in the twentieth century, the Blakean scholar Kathleen Raine considers that our logical, one dimensional mode of thinking moves us:

To confess ourselves to be mere parts in a lifeless mechanism, to define life itself in mechanistic terms, our sensations as mere devices directed towards survival, definable only in terms of function and usefulness within a system of physical cause and effect, spare parts within a mindless mechanism, our consciousness a function of the brain, which can be replaced, for all practical purposes, by the computer.

Another Blakean scholar, Bernard Nesfield-Cookson, compares this materialistic ideology to Blake's philosophy:

In his argument against mechanistic science and the philosophy of the five senses Blake writes: "As the true method of knowledge is experiment, the true faculty of knowledge must be the faculty which experiences". It is this faculty with which Blake is concerned and he affirms that the Human Imagination "The Poetic Genius is the true man".

It is this very mindless, mechanised system that Dylan himself kicks against in many songs on **New Morning**. In **The Man In Me** he confesses:

*The man in me will hide sometimes to keep from being seen,
but that's just because he doesn't want
to turn into some machine.*

The real Man in him is the true man of imagination; the opposite to the Newtonian, Baconian man, the materialistic logical man who sees only with, not through, his eyes. And Oh! What a wonderful

feeling when Dylan finds that real Man. Just listen to the opening bars of the song, **The Man In Me**. Have you ever heard Dylan so happy on any other recording?

On the track **New Morning** itself, Dylan really does see and hear things anew. An example of experiencing life in a different light:

Can't you hear that rooster crowin'?
Can't you feel that sun a-shinin'?

he asks; because he can truly hear and feel. And although he has seen the sky so many times before, on this day of awareness he is:

*So happy just to be alive
Underneath the sky of blue.*

In another homage to this new vision Dylan sings on **Winterlude**:

*Oh, I see by the angel beside me
that love has a reason to shine.*

So, just like Blake, he is sitting with angels, basking in the light of true experience. And there is so much light on the album:

*If not for you,
Babe, I'd lay awake all night,
Wait for the mornin' light
To shine in through,
But it would not be new,
If not for you.*

(If Not For You)

*But the next time I looked
there was light in the room*

(Day of the locusts)

Time passes slowly up here in the daylight.

(Time Passes Slowly)

The moonlight reflects from the window.

(Winterlude)

And the expressions of the fleeting night to render daylight:

The night passed away so quickly.

(New Morning)

We'll fly the night away.

(One More Weekend)

Father who taketh the darkness away.

(Father of Night)

In the song **Day of the Locusts** Dylan sings about his attendance at Princeton University on the 9th June 1970 to accept an honorary doctorate in music. It is interesting here to firstly understand Blake's views of schools and universities and the following is taken from the book **William Blake - Prophet of Universal Brotherhood**:

*In commenting on **The Schools and Universities**, seeing those impregnated with the rationalism of Locke and Newton, Blake again draws our attention to the fact that the freedom of the imagination is eradicated, is enslaved by a world conception relying entirely on the limitation of the five physical senses. Blake has already touched on this in his poem **The School Boy** who asks:*

*How can the bird that is born for joy
Sit in a cage and sing?
How can a child, when fears annoy,
But drop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful spring?*

Like Blake, Dylan was clearly not enamoured by the orderly process of learning and he also places into juxtaposition the restraint of the university against the freedom of the locusts in song. In the second verse of this song, he sings: *I glanced into the chamber where the judges were talking, Darkness was everywhere, it's smelled like a tomb.*

Yet, whilst that was going on inside the building, Dylan heard the following song of freedom:

*And the locusts sang off in the distance,
Yeah, the locusts sang such a sweet melody.
Oh, the locusts sang off in the distance,
Yeah, the locusts sang and they were singing for me.*

Then, he sums it all up in the final verse:

*I put down my robe, picked up my diploma,
Took hold of my sweetheart and away we did drive
Straight for the hills, the black hills of Dakota,
Sure was glad to get out of there alive.*

Another of the songs from the album where Dylan again draws attention to the world of limited mindless mechanism and where people live under rules governed by materialistic needs without having regard to spiritual perception is **Three Angels**. In this song Dylan tells the story of three angels who are blowing their horns above a busy street. Dylan focuses his attention on all the people in the street, mindlessly rushing backwards and forwards in their daily routines: "One U Haul trailer, the Tenth Avenue bus going west, a man with a badge, three fellas crawlin' on their way back to

work, the bakery truck" etc. He pictures the scene as "A concrete world full of souls", no-one really seeing or hearing with Blake's true vision, not seeing through but merely with their eyes, and being content at that. Dylan concludes the song:

*The angels play on their horns all day,
The whole earth in progression seems to pass by.
But does anyone hear the music they play,
Does anyone even try?*

Dylan has himself recorded some of Blake's works as, together with the beat poet Allen Ginsberg, he entered a New York recording studio in November 1971 and committed two of Blake's poems namely **Nurses Song** and **The Tyger** to disc. It was probably Ginsberg that, in fact, introduced Dylan to Blake as Ginsberg was something of a Guru to Dylan's sponge-like intellect from about the mid-60's. In turn, William Blake had a major influence on Ginsberg's very life, as is explained by the following extract from Ginsberg - **A Biography** written by Barry Miles. The incident described in this extract occurred in 1948 when Ginsberg was twenty two years old.

*The summer heat was on. Allen lay on his bed by the open window, reading William Blake. The book was open to the poem **Ah! Sunflower** from **Songs of Innocence and Songs and Experience**. Allen had his pants open and was absentmindedly masturbating while he read; he had just come, when he heard a deep, ancient voice, reading the poem aloud. He immediately knew, without thinking, that it was the voice of Blake himself, coming to him across the vault of time. The voice was prophetic, tender. It didn't seem to be coming from his head; in fact, it seemed to be in the room, but no-one was there. He described it: "The peculiar quality of the voice was something unforgettable because it was like god had a human voice, with all the infinite tenderness and mortal gravity of a living Creator speaking to his son."*

*Ah, sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done;*

*Where the youth pined away with desire,
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves and aspire
Where my Sunflower wishes to go!*

He suddenly had a deep understanding of the meaning of the poem and realised that he was the sunflower. Simultaneous with the auditory vision came a heightened visual perception: The

afternoon sunlight through the window took on an extraordinary clarity. The sky was ancient, the gateway to infinity, the same deep blue universe seen by Blake himself, and Allen knew this was the "sweet golden clime" itself. He was already in it. "I suddenly realised that this existence was it!", he said. "This was the moment I was born for. This initiation, this consciousness of being alive unto myself. The spirit of the universe was what I was born to realise."

In a footnote to his famous poem **Howl** which was written in 1955-1956, Ginsberg endeavours to explain his vision in words:

*Everything is holy!
Everybody's holy!
Everywhere is holy!
Everyday is in eternity!
Everyman's an angel!*

Ginsberg is in fact re-iterating Blake's own philosophy as expressed in **A Song of Liberty** from **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell** which concludes:

*Let the Priests of the Raven of dawn no longer,
in deadly black, with hoarse note curse the sons
of joy. Nor his accepted brethren, whom, tyrant,
he calls free, lay the bound or build the roof. Nor
pale religious lechery call that Virginity that
wishes but acts not! For everything that lives is
holy.*

In Blake's **Song of Liberty** the emphasis is on lives for the living, or sensually aware, man with his divine and creative imagination is equated with god.

It is this ubiquitous holiness that is the foundation for another song from **New Morning** namely: **Father of Night**, where Dylan sees everything from rainbows up in the sky to the rivers and streams as being touched by a holy presence.

The philosophy as put forward in the poem/thesis **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell** may also contain answers, for any who wish to pose questions, as to why we Dylan folk marvel at Dylan's work. What is there in Dylan's songs that strike a chord in us? What is there in Dylan the performer that excites us? What makes us relate to him when others can't stand the sound of his voice or the sight of his ageing features?

In **A Memorable Fancy** from **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell** Blake writes:

*The worship of God is: Honouring his gifts in other
men, each according to his genius, and loving the*

*greatest men best. Those who envy or calumniate
great men hate God, for there is no other God.*

By "greatest men" Blake doesn't mean rich or powerful men but rather those exhibiting creative energy. Just think about the feeling you get when you witness a truly great performance by a committed artist or even watch a skilful athlete excelling at his sport. It's nothing you can really explain in words but it causes an abstract stirring of the soul. Whatever that is.

But here again, Blake identifies God with man and furthers his contention that the human imagination is the essential divine quality by which God manifests Himself in man. It is not a matter of "hero worship" but a recognition and joining together of a divine essence, thus forging a Universal Brotherhood: Dylan becomes as we are and we become, through a fusion of imagination, as he is. On this subject Bernard Nesfield-Cookson writes:

Blake insists that behind the characteristics of each individual man and woman there exist the lineaments of the "eternal man" which are most nearly apprehended when we see our fellow man radiant with his own creative imagination freely exercised, and acting from immediate inspiration, from the direct perception of truth... all men and women, united by the bond of spiritual freedom, enjoy their own individualities without let or hindrance - and also "adore" the humanity in each other. Blake is the courageous champion of spiritual freedom. Such freedom involves a more complete transformation of things as we find them today than any political programme can ever bring about.

Perhaps it would be applicable here to put the songs from **New Morning** into an historical context Dylan-wise. The majority of the songs were not, as would naturally be assumed, written during Dylan's sojourn with his young family in Woodstock. Dylan had in fact returned to New York City in September 1969 and the core **New Morning** songs are thought to have been written during the summer of 1970. So again it was a transitional period - from the Innocence of the simple country life to the Experience of life back in the city; from the pleasures of the personal freedom that existed in the early Woodstock days to the pressures that must have presented themselves to Dylan as he returned to life as a full time rock star being seen around town and no doubt being cajoled by a city attitude from male and female alike.

The track from **New Morning** that portrays, in a somewhat surrealistic manner, this struggle

between Innocence and Experience is my favourite Dylan song of all time, namely, **If Dogs Run Free**.

William Blake used to draw pictures to illustrate his poetry and, in a like manner, Dylan provides a sketch to accompany this song in **Writings and Drawings**. It is a sketch of a dog, with a human face, and wearing a choke chain. If you've ever watched a dog bounding around without a collar you'll sense the sort of freedom the animal feels, and if you've ever sensed that freedom, that innocence, you'll understand Dylan's sketch straight away.

For me, the only way to interpret this song is by way of a three act play. However this interpretation will mean absolutely nothing to those who have not listened to the song **If Dogs Run Free** since the release of the **New Morning** album in November 1970. Although I have reproduced the lyrics below, a knowledge of the musical accompaniment is equally as important in understanding my interpretation. Without such knowledge, the task of following my thoughts will be somewhat difficult. It is one of those songs where the music, the voice and the lyrics form a Holy Trinity. But not Holy as in church - rather Holy as in William Blake. I am therefore asking for audience participation. If you play the track and listen to it for me, I'll endeavour to tweak your imagination. For those who know the song so well that they have no need whatsoever to remind themselves of the words and music, you already have your ticket and can take your seat forthwith in the auditorium.



Prologue to the Performance

*If dogs run free, then why not we
Across the swooping plain?
My ears hear a symphony
Of two mules, trains and rain.
The best is always yet to come,
That's what they explain to me
Just do your thing, you'll be the king,
If dogs run free.*

*If dogs run free, why not me
Across the swamp of time?
My mind weaves a symphony
And tapestry of rhyme.
Oh, winds which rush my tale to thee
So it may flow and be,
To each his own, it's all unknown,
If dogs run free.*

*If dogs run free, then what must be,
Must be, and that's all.
True love can make a blade of grass
Stand up straight and tall.
In harmony with the cosmic sea,
True love needs no company,
It can cure the soul,
It can make it whole,
If dogs run free.*

A Musical Prelude:

A lone pianist sits in the orchestra pit, playing a rippling stream on the high notes of his piano. The ripples widen and flow until they cascade into a waterfall where a hidden acoustic guitar is being played thoughtfully. The guitar and piano meander along together searching for a purposeful co-existence.....

ACT ONE

Curtain. Spotlight on the artist centre stage sitting on a picnic chair, trying to catch his reflection in the whirlpool before him. He strums his guitar gently and sings: 'Dear Landlord, please don't put a price on my soul.'

Above his head hangs a wooden sign, the kind that would be found hanging outside a bakery store in Old Woodstock. On it are the words 'The Prisoner.'

Two smartly dressed men enter from stage left, they are in deep discussion. One is leading a dog called Free on a tight choke, chain, the other carries a briefcase. Both are wearing pantomime donkey heads.

The two men take up kneeling positions on either side of the artist. They remove their donkey heads and place them on the ground. The man with the briefcase wears a badge which reads 'Record Company Executive', the man with the dog wears a badge which reads 'Artists Manager'.

The Record Company Executive commences speaking directly into the artists left ear repeating continuously in a loud robotic manner: 'Performance, product, payment. Performance, product, payment. Performance, product, payment.....'

The Artist's manager speaks directly into the artists right ear. He talks in softer more reasoning tones:

'You know you can do it. You know you can give them what they want. It's so easy for you. You don't even have to try. Let me bring some old buddies down here, liven you up a bit. That's what you need. Show them, show them that you're still on top. Do it just like you used to. It's a waste of all your talent just sitting there. You know you can do it'.

The artist continues to strum his guitar, gazing into the whirlpool and trying not to notice the Manager and the Executive. The dog called Free sits obediently at his masters side, a prisoner of the tight choke-chain.

Spotlight 2 on a pretty dancing girl as she enters from the back of the stage. She wears nothing but seven chiffon veils and she dances seductively, singing sweetly. She moves to the front of the stage and as she passes the group by the whirlpool she removes a veil and lets it drift slowly to the floor. She stops singing, points at the artist and says sarcastically 'Oh my'.

The artist immediately looks up and recognizes her. He moves swiftly from his chair and snatches the dogs choke-chain from the Managers hands. The pretty dancing girl walks off stage right hand in hand with the artist who is leading the dog on it's tight choke-chain. The Record Company Executive and the Manager fall into the whirlpool and disappear.

Curtain

A Musical Interlude:

The piano and guitar continue to meander along together, still searching but not yet finding. In the distance a female voice calls to them, it floats after them on the air, catches and then overtakes them.

ACT TWO

Curtain. Spotlight on the artist sitting on lush green grass at the foot of a steep mountain. The dog called Free sits loyally on it's tight choke-chain by the artists side. Above the artists head hangs a wooden sign, the kind that would be found hanging in a State room at an embassy in England or France. On it are the words 'The Pilgrim.'

A stranger dressed in a long white robe is seen descending the mountain. The strangers face is hidden by the hood of the robe, it looks as though he has no face at all.

As the Stranger approaches, the artist gets up and bows low. He takes a small bottle of pure olive oil from his pocket which he pours over the Strangers bare feet. The artist and the Stranger sit together on the green grass and commence a conversation:

Stranger: 'Tell me about this trouble'.

Artist: 'There is no trouble.'

Stranger: 'But I have heard that you require assistance.'

Artist: 'No, no. I'm fine.'

Stranger: 'And your creative Spirit?'

Artist: 'I weave tapestries in my mind, beautiful tapestries.'

Stranger: 'But they said you have nothing for them.'

Artist: 'They are right.'

Stranger: 'Have you anything for me?'

Artist: 'Take all there is. Let me sing for you.'

Stranger: 'Not for me, take your song to Him who lives on the mountain top. Tell Him I sent you.'

The artist and the dog called Free set off on their journey. A little way along the mountain track they are halted suddenly at the sight of the pretty dancing girl appearing from behind a burning bush.

She removes another veil saying 'Wow!' dramatically and loudly. The artist is entranced by her beauty and he follows her into a log cabin on the mountainside. The dog called Free is tied tightly to the wooden door post and remains there patiently.

The lights fade. Night falls.

Curtain

A Musical Interlude:

The piano and acoustic guitar continue their meandering affair but they become clumsy and drift apart. The floating female voice laughs at them hysterically, almost in triumph.

ACT THREE

Curtain. Spotlight 1 on the artist standing on a wooden box at the front of the stage, he is speaking loudly and directly to the audience, his arms in the air. Above his head hangs a wooden sign, the kind that would be found hanging in the foyer of the Chelsea Hotel. On it are the words 'The Philosopher'.

The artist is making a speech about a true love he has found: 'It has cured my soul, it has made me whole', he preaches.

Spotlight 2 on the pretty dancing girl as she enters stage left leading the dog called Free on a tight choke-chain. She sees the artist speaking to the audience, she listens to his words and she appears worried.

Moving closer, she commences singing her sweet seductive songs but the artist fails to notice or hear her. She leads the dog off stage and returns to dance around the artist more seductively than before. Coloured spot lights follow her and enhance her performance.

She slowly starts to remove the remainder of her veils and drops each one at the artists feet. When she tries to remove the last veil it becomes caught tight around her neck and it starts to choke her. She becomes faint but just in time the artist hears her choking. He sees her nakedness, steps down from the wooden box and fastens his coat around her. She kisses him, he nods and she sings delightfully.

Spotlight 3 on the side, stage right, as the artist's Manager and the Record Company Executive re-appear and wheel onto the stage a wind machine. They turn the handle and an idiot wind starts to howl. The artist and the pretty dancing girl look round and hear the wind. He immediately commands her 'Hit it, baby' and they start to run before the wind catches them. Saved, for this time from the idiot wind.

Curtain.

FINALE

Curtain. Spotlight on the artist sitting centre stage and gently rocking to and fro on an old rocking chair. He is now an old man, wrinkled and grey. Above his head a lucky old sun rolls around the heavens.

From stage left all the characters walk past him in procession - the pretty dancing girl, the artists Manager, the Record Company Executive and the

Stranger in white leading the dog called Free on a tight choke chain. The artist nods to each character as they pass him by.

Then he is again left on his own, with only his shadow and his echo. A voice from the crowd calls 'Is it easy to forget?'

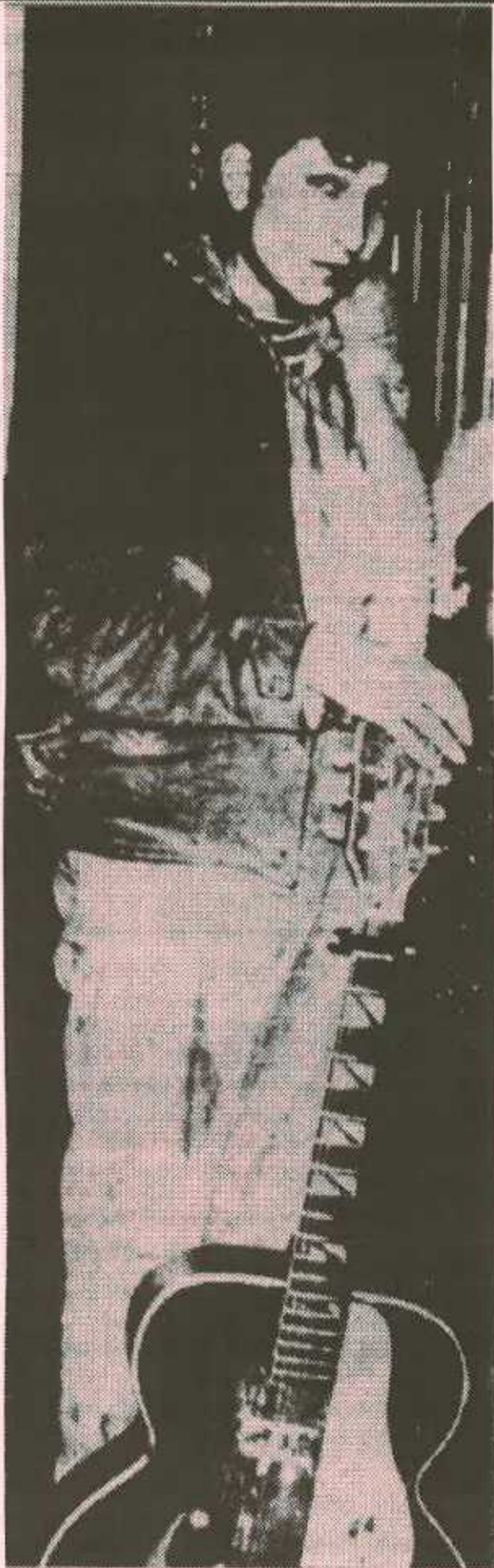
He replies, in a slight laughing manner, 'God knows there's enough to remember.'

The artist then enters a death scene. He gasps 'Free' and the dog returns trailing the tight choke-chain behind him. In his last action the artist removes the choke-chain and then dies. The dog runs free, bounding around the stage with renewed energy, yelping with delight.

FINAL CURTAIN

So that is how I see my favourite Dylan song, the one I voted for as being Dylan's best song in Clinton Heylin's survey for the **Rolling Telegraph Supplement**. Mind you, I don't know what Clinton would make of all this because, if I dare to quote from his biography **Behind The Shades**, Clinton has the following to say about certain songs on **New Morning**:

*At the time songs like **Three Angels**, **If Dogs Run Free** and **Father of Night** were seen as an audacious attempt to work in new forms. Hindsight suggests there is little on **Self Portrait** as excruciatingly bad as these three songs.*



It's all a matter of opinion really, and that is what is so marvellous about this Dylan thing: whatever your particular preference of song, whatever other music turns you on, whether you are male, female, black, white, yellow or brown; whatever your political persuasions, whatever football team you support, whether you are gay, straight, blind or lame; whatever age you are, whether you are gainfully employed or looking for work, whatever side you dress on, there is one place where we all meet, a common denominator that joins us all together: an appreciation of the art of Bob Dylan. Let others mock on relentlessly - for what we have is special, a place in the Universal Brotherhood of understanding. An eternal triangle with all points unified between Dylan, you and me: Us. For what we search for in Dylan's songs we can find in ourselves and where we relate to each other on that level of imagination we have been inspired by Dylan's work. Of course we may disagree on all manner of things but, somewhere over the rainbow, a particular instinct in all of us was fired in the same furnace and hammered on the same anvil. The last word in all this must be from William Blake. A poem that reminds me of my first smile on that new morning and also, in a wider sense perhaps, the smile that you smiled when you first heard Dylan sing a song that you knew had been written especially for you:

THE SMILE

*There is a Smile of Love,
And there is a Smile of Deceit,
And there is a Smile of Smiles
In which these two Smiles meet.*

*And there is a Frown of Hate,
And there is a Frown of Disdain,
And there is a Frown of Frowns
Which you strive to forget in vain,*

*For it sticks in the Heart's deep Core
And it sticks in the deep Backbone;
And no Smile that was ever smil'd,
But only one Smile alone,*

*That betwixt the Cradle & Grave
It only once Smil'd can be;
But, when it once is Smil'd,
There's an end to all Misery.*

=====

A BOOK THAT NOBODY CAN WRITE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BOB DYLAN

..... WHILE IN MIDDLETOWN HOSPITAL, DYLAN QUICKLY RECOVERS FROM HIS MOTORBIKE CRASH INJURIES. HIS RECOVERY FROM DRUG AND WORK INDUCED INJURIES, BOTH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL, WILL TAKE LONGER.....



..... WHILE DYLAN SLOWLY RECUPERATES, HIS LATEST ALBUM, THE MAGNIFICENT 'BLONDE ON BLONDE', STORMS THE CHARTS IN EUROPE AND THE STATES. IT WAS RELEASED DURING MAY 1966 AND IS REGARDED BY MANY AS DYLAN'S FINEST ALBUM. IT IS ROCK'S FIRST SERIOUS DOUBLE ALBUM, AND CONTAINS THE FIFTEEN-MINUTE 'SAD EYED LADY OF THE LOWLANDS'.....



..... FOR THE REMAINDER OF 1966, DYLAN SPENDS HIS TIME IN SECLUSION IN WOODSTOCK. HE IS NOT SEEN PUBLICLY AT ALL, AND REFUSES ALL REQUESTS FOR INTERVIEWS. RUMOURS BEGIN TO SPREAD ABOUT HIM - HE'S DEAD, THE ACCIDENT HAS LEFT HIM A BRAIN-DAMAGED VEGETABLE, HE WAS THE VICTIM OF A PLOT BY THE C. I. A. TO SILENCE HIM, HE'S NOW A TOTAL RECLUSE WHO WILL NEVER APPEAR PUBLICLY AGAIN..... DYLAN DOES NOTHING TO REFUTE ANY OF THE OUT-LANDISH CLAIMS.....



..... IF ANY INQUISITIVE OR JOURNALISTIC SOUL DOES MAKE IT TO THE HALLOWED GROUNDS OF CASTLE DYLAN, THEY FIND DYLAN AS ELUSIVE AS EVER.....



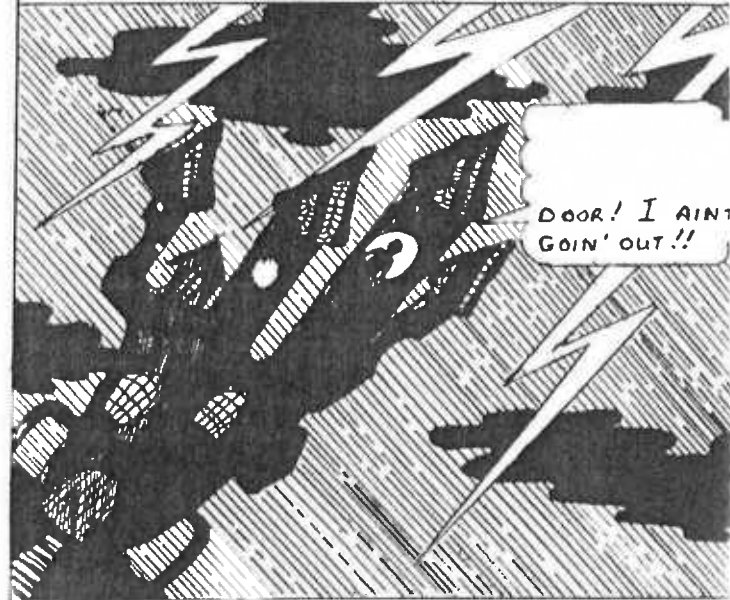
.... ANY SNOOPER OR
REPORTER CAUGHT AROUND
CASTLE DYLAN IS USUALLY
CHASED OFF BY DYLAN'S
DOGS OR AN IRATE SARA....

O-KAY, LADY, O-KAY!
I'M GOIN'! JEEZ!!

GO AWAY!!



.... HIS 1966 DRAWS TO A CLOSE, THERE'S STILL NO
SIGN OF DYLAN. HIS INFLUENCE ON ROCK MUSIC
HEARD EVERYWHERE, BUT HE'S NO LONGER AN ACTI
PART OF IT. HE'S A FATHER NOW AND A FAMILY I
AND HIS METEORIC CAREER HAS BEEN LEFT SIMM
ON THE BACK BURNER. THE 1966 T.V. SPECIAL I
FAILED TO APPEAR SINCE DYLAN NEVER COMPLETED
EDITING, "TARANTULA" HAS ALSO BEEN INDEFINATE
DELETED. ALL CONCERTS, INTERVIEWS AND PUBLIC
APPEARANCES HAVE BEEN CANCELLED. THE EARL
MONTHS OF 1967 SEE DYLAN STILL IN TOTAL SECL
BEHIND THE WALLS OF CASTLE DYLAN IN WOODSTOCK.



DOOR! I AIN'T
GOIN' OUT!!

DURING LATE 1966-EARLY 1967, DYLAN AND THE
BAND BEGIN TO RECORD SEVERAL NEW SONGS THAT DYLAN HAS
WRITTEN SINCE HIS ACCIDENT. ROUGHLY RECORDED ON HOME
EQUIPMENT, THE SONGS ARE EITHER INTENDED TO BE USED AS
DEMOS OR ARE RECORDED JUST FOR FUN... OR BOTH.
RECORDED OVER A SERIES OF MONTHS IN THE
LOFT OF 170 E. DYLAN, THE... WILL LATER BE
KNOWN AS THE "THE BRAMBLE TAPES".



BOB!! DINNER'S
READY!!

O-KAY! WE'LL
BE UP SOON!!

BASEMENT
KEEP OUT

.... IT IS CLEAR THAT DYLAN WAS STILL PROLIFICALLY
WRITING SONGS—MANY OF WHICH, BUT NOT ALL, HE LA
DOWN AS THE "BASEMENT TAPES". MEANWHILE, A
LONG LINE OF FRIENDS CALL ON THE STILL RECLINING
DYLAN. THE BAND ARE WITH HIM, OF COURSE, A
GROSSMAN VISITS AS DOES GINSBERG, WHO BR
HIM SOME POETRY....



BANG!
BANG!

OH, SHIT!!
NOT ANOTHER
BATCH OF BORING
BOOKS, ALLEN!!

GAT
FLAP

SOUND



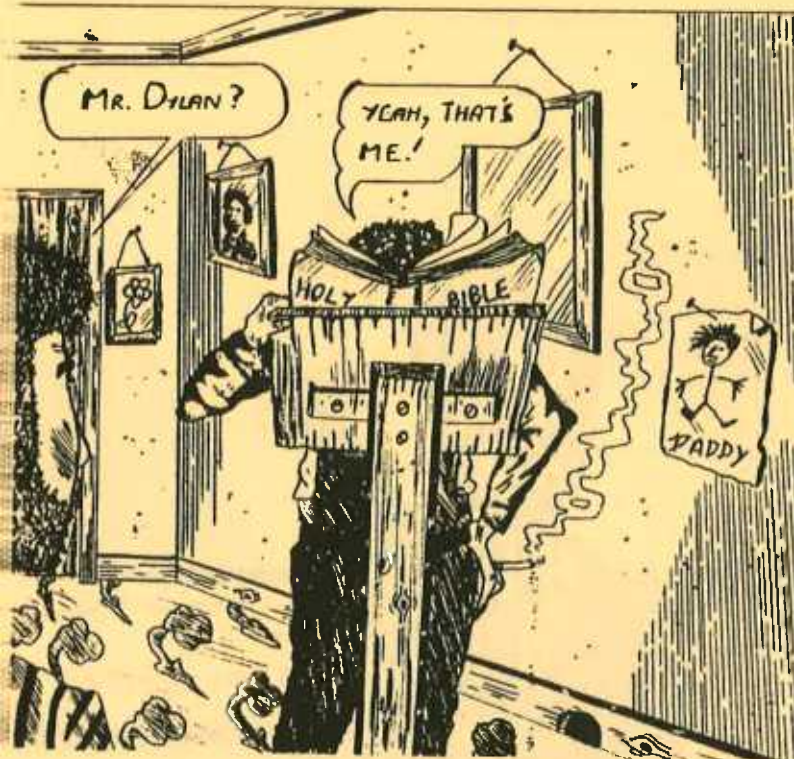
..... IN EARLY 1967, PANICKED BY DYLAN'S TOTAL DISAPPEARANCE AND AN ABSENCE OF ANY NEW PRODUCT, C.B.S. RELEASE AN ALBUM OF DYLAN'S GREATEST HITS. IT'S AN IMMEDIATE SUCCESS AND SPENDS OVER A YEAR ON THE ALBUM CHARTS. BY SPRINGTIME, DYLAN IS BEGINNING TO VENTURE OUT BEYOND THE WALLS OF CASTLE DYLAN.....



..... ON MAY 7TH, A REPORTER, MICHAEL IACHETTA OF THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, VENTURES UP TO CASTLE DYLAN. SURPRISINGLY ENOUGH, HE IS NOT CHASED AWAY, AND HE DARES TO TELL SARA THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK WITH DYLAN.....

..... THE DYLAN HOUSEHOLD BEHIND THE WALLS OF CASTLE DYLAN IS NOTHING MORE THAN AN ORDINARY HOUSEHOLD; CHILDREN PLAYING, SARA COOKING, DYLAN REGULARLY STUDYING A LARGE OPEN BIBLE ON A STAND, A COUPLE OF DOGS RUNNING AROUND, FAMILY PHOTOS ON THE WALLS AND MANTLEPIECE. A WARM, COMFORTABLE AMERICAN FAMILY HOME. THIS IS NOT THE HOME OF THE MAN WHO ONCE SAID 'I ACCEPT CHAOS, I WONDER IF IT ACCEPTS ME'.....

..... DYLAN HAD CHANGED-HE HAD TO CHANGE. HE HAD SLOWED DOWN, PURGED HIMSELF OF MOST, BUT PROBABLY NOT ALL, OF THE DRUGS THAT SHAPED HIS LIFE AND CAREER OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS. DYLAN APPEARED TO IACHETTA AS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MAN- HE'D SHORTENED HIS HAIR, SPORTED A SCRAGGLY BEARD, WORE SIMPLE DUNGAREES AND READING GLASSES. HE APPEARED SHY AND SOFT-SPOKEN, OBVIOUSLY STILL RECUPERATING FROM THE DAMAGE HE HAD INFLICTED UPON HIMSELF THROUGHOUT THE YEARS.....





..... DYLAN IS HAFY TO TALK, EVEN THOUGH HE GIVES LITTLE AWAY. HE BRIEFLY MENTIONS HIS ACCIDENT - PASSING IT OFF AS FAR LESS IMPORTANT THAN IT ACTUALLY WAS. HE ADMITS TO WRITING SEVERAL NEW SONGS, BUT HAS NO DEFINATE PLANS TO DO ANYTHING JUST YET....

..... DURING OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER DYLAN RETURNS TO THE STUDIO TO LAY DOWN THE TRACKS FOR JOHN WELCH HARDING. USING ONLY SPARSE INSTRUMENTAL BACKING, IT IS RECORDED BY MAYBE ONE OF HIS SECRETARY GIRLS. BOB DYLAN WOULD RETURN TO THE STUDIO SEVERAL MORE TIMES BY THE 1967 COUNTRY OF THE



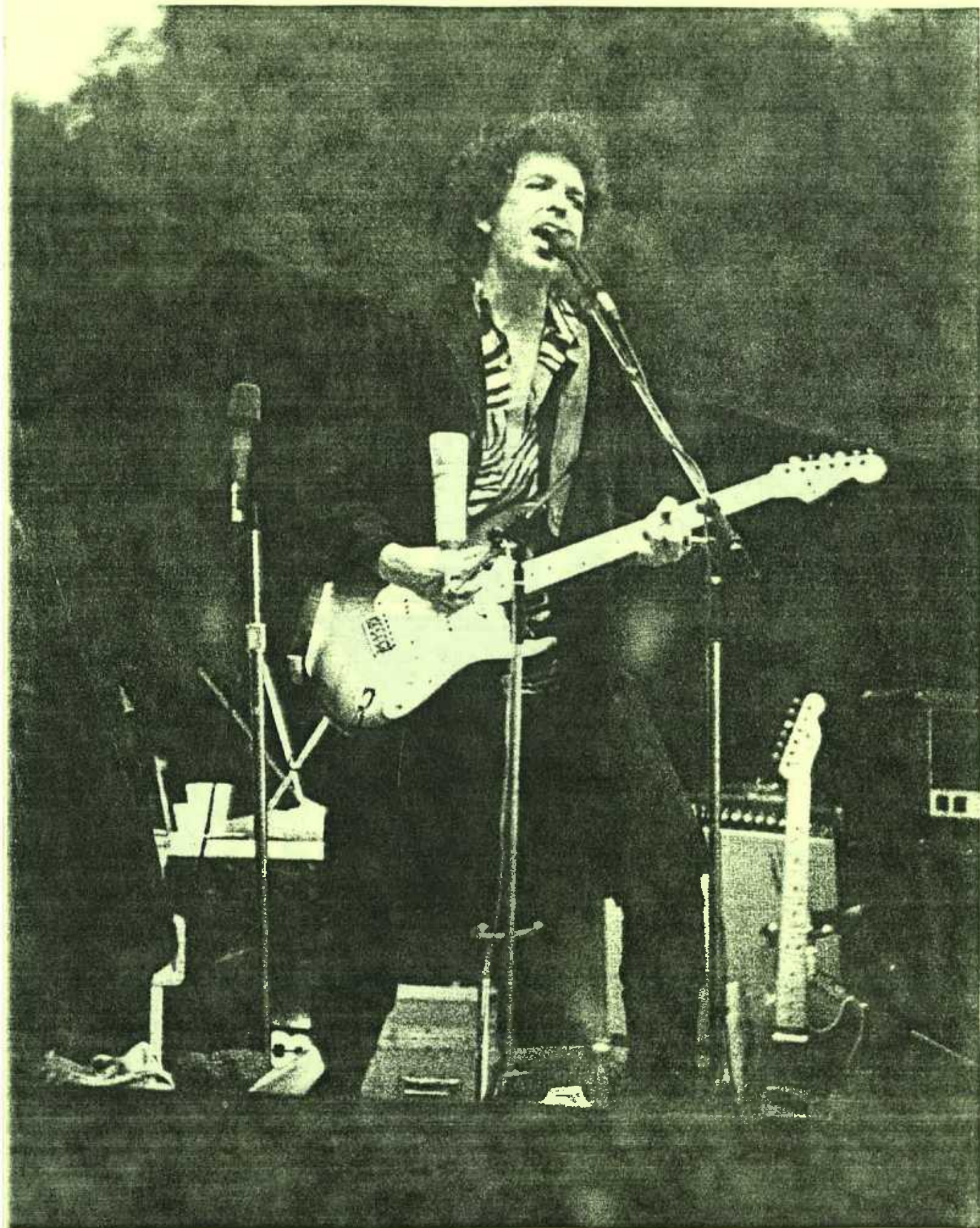
..... MID-67 SEES THE BIRTH OF DYLAN'S DAUGHTER ANNA, BUT THERE'S SADNESS ON OCTOBER 3RD WHEN WOODY GUTHRIE DIES IN HOSPITAL OF HUNTINGDON CHOREA AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS OF SUFFERING. THE WORLD IS ALWAYS A LITTLE EMPTIER AFTER LOSING SOMEONE LIKE GUTHRIE, BUT MAYBE DYLAN'S WORLD SEEMS A LITTLE EMPTIER THAN MOST....

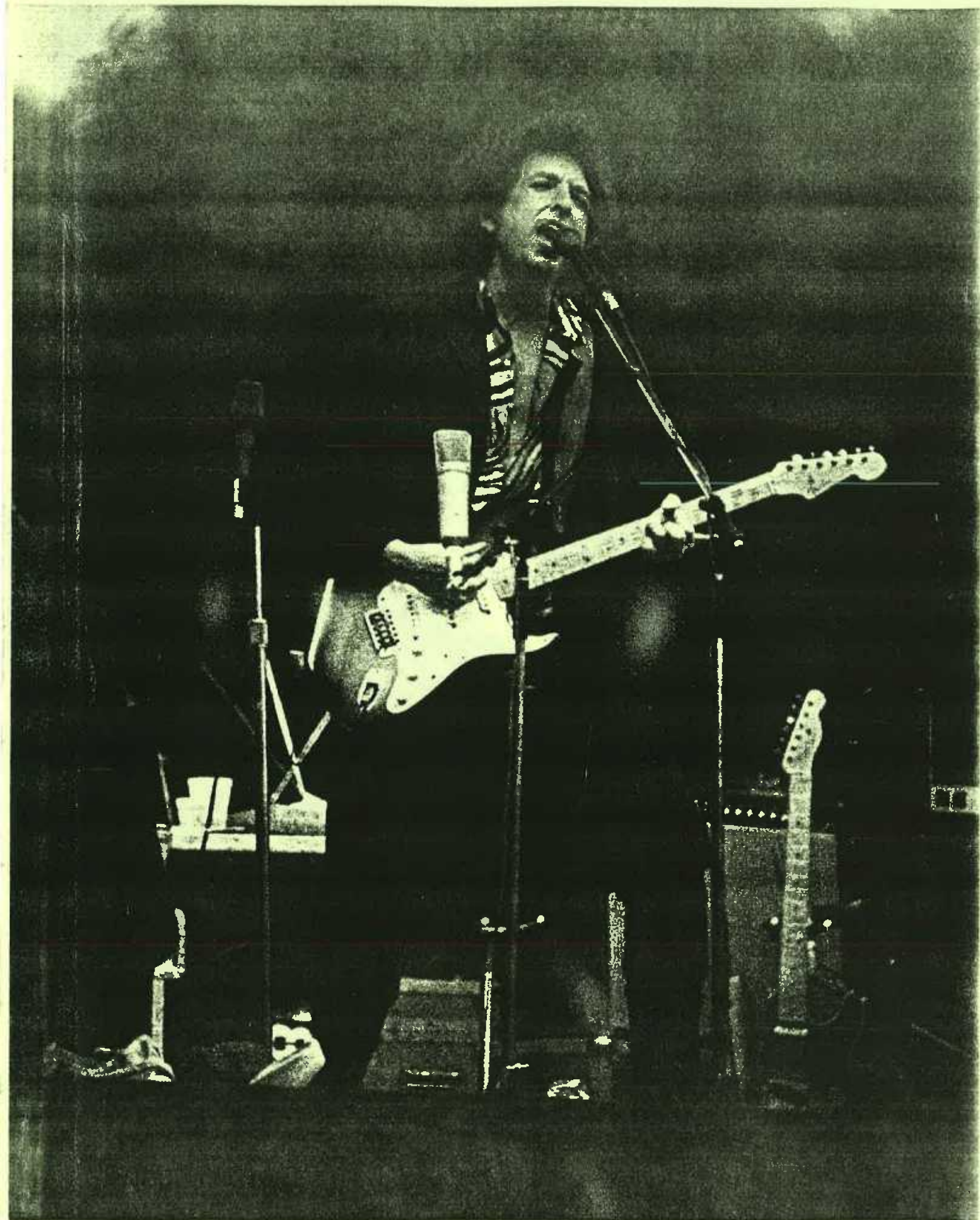


ON JANUARY 20th 1968, DYLAN PERFORMS AT TWO TRIBUTES TO WOODY GUTHRIE. THERE WAS AN AFTERNOON SHOW AND HE WAS ALSO APPEARING ON THE BILL WITH JOE SCARF, THE BAND AND WOODY. DYLAN HAD EARLIER TOLD SOME OF HIS FRIENDS HE WAS HIDING ANY PLANNED TRIBUTE. HE WAS A NICE NATURE DYLAN, READY TO PAY HIS DEBTS

..... HE REHEARSES WITH THE BAND AND DECIDES TO PLAY ELECTRIC









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